

tenure,²⁵¹ a land-equalizing institution,²⁵² and re-partitional agricultural holdings shared by the whole village community²⁵³ Likewise debated have been its origins, its geographical inclusiveness, and the reasons it persisted.

The last of these questions has been the easiest to attempt to answer. Questions of origin and scope have been addressed, but these discussions suffer from the absence of a substantial body of evidence on which to draw. Accepted wisdom regarding *musha* is that it entailed (1) only large field lands found in the plains, (2) only grain and cereal production, and (3) frequent, periodic redistribution, every one to two years. In the second edition of the *Encyclopedia of Islam* (1993), we find the following discussion within the entry on *mushā'*:

Another important and difficult question is exactly where, geographically, did the *mushā'* institution exist? In the past it was usually held that practically the entire Middle East was governed by it. As research increases, the area of *mushā'* tends to diminish. Thus documents from the Judaeen mountains in the early 20th century indicate that *mushā'* did not exist there for a long time, if ever at all. In fact, the technicalities of the system raises [sic] some doubts whether *mushā'* had ever been very widespread in mountainous areas (periodical division necessitated blocks of flat land, while hilly agriculture in the traditional Middle East was mainly terrace-based). We are better informed on the disappearance of the *mushā'* system. This took place in association with the 19th-century Ottoman reform, starting mainly with the

²⁵¹ Roger Owen (1984), 35; Scott Atran, "Hamula Organisation and Masha'a Tenure in Palesitne", *Man*, New Series, 21/2 (June 1986): 271-295.

²⁵² Ya'akov Firestone, "The land-equalizing *mushā'* village: a reassessment" in Gad Gilbar, ed., *Ottoman Palestine 1800-1914: studies in economic and social history* (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 91-130.

²⁵³ Ruth Kark and David Grossman, "The communal (*musha'*) village of the Middle East and North Africa", in Walter Leimgruber, Roser Majoral and Cul-Woo Lee, eds., *Policies and Strategies in Marginal Regions: summary and evaluations* (Hants, England and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003), 20-34.