suited the needs of the time. The thousands of dunams of land and olive trees registered *en bloc* to "the people" of many of the villages, as discussed in Chapter 3, supports this argument that assigning tax liability was sufficient for the commission at this early juncture, as long as it was agreeable to the people from whom taxes were to be collected.

One may detect elements of the conventional narrative in this assessment. Until today, most historians of Palestine argue that at this stage, due to peasant fright or misunderstanding mukhtars, tribal chiefs, urban notables and businessmen stepped in to register villagers' agricultural lands. The case of the Hebron district leaves us no choice but to re-examine this narrative regarding other districts of Palestine, and to search out documentary sources that can answer these questions.

We can venture to say that the registration of properties in the tapu and tax registers was not initially understood among villagers to replace or nullify understandings of ownership that were already recognized locally, some expressed only orally and others documented on paper, either informally or in the sharia court. In the same breath, however, we must qualify this statement with the observation that, actually, they *did not* replace or nullify such claims. As this case and the Bayt Kāḥili's case to be examined in the following section make clear, these claims to ownership continued to be substantiated in the sharia court when the need arose.

Although the 1895 tax-survey registers they examined were composed differently than the Hebron-district one analyzed here (see Mundy and Smith, 117-118 and 138-139),