One is often impressed by the neatness with which historians encapsulate the flow of Egyptian history. It is customary to distinguish the Pharaonic, the Greco-Roman, the Byzantine, the Arab, the Mamluk, and the Ottoman periods, whereas modern Egyptian history is usually taken as starting with the rule of Muhammad 'Ali. Yet running through all these different periods one can perceive certain threads that help to explain the present situation in the twentieth century. To understand the attitudes of the Egyptian peasant toward the government, it is useful to trace the evolution of the political culture of the Nile Valley, including the factors that have shaped the peasant's concept of authority. During the Pharaonic period, the ruler was considered God. His word was generally obeyed without question; where it was not, the officials of the state resorted to the stick and the whip. The vivid pictorial records in the Tombs of the Kings leave no doubt that flogging and beatings were common forms of discipline. In describing the Pharaonic era, Karl Wittfogel noted:

> The excesses of autocratic and bureaucratic terror are an extreme manifestation of human behavior under total power. Institutionally, however, they are probably less important than the innumerable acts of terror that were perpetrated as a matter of routine and within the flexible frame of despotic law. It is this routine terror in managerial, fiscal, and judicial procedures that caused certain observers to designate the government of hydraulic despotism as "government by flogging."[2]

The links between ancient Pharaonic Egypt and the modern Egyptians are admittedly tenuous, yet a description by Lord Cromer of late nineteenth-century Egypt with its forced labor (corvée) and its use of corporal punishment (*kurbaj*) closely parallels what we know of life in ancient Egypt.[3] Systems of land tenure, taxation, and administration with a certain continuity are apparent in the social, political, and economic processes inherent in the life-style of the Egyptian peasant. Agriculture clearly has been the chief support of Egyptians and the main source of revenues to its government for more than four thousand years. Through a wide variety of regimes, some highly centralized and dynamic, others disconnected and enfeebled, the fellahin have constantly endured exploitation, famine, disease, and poverty—their stoic air belying an underlying sense of frustration, projected sometimes as rebellion and other times as apathy.[4]

Egypt's Agrarian Relations Prior to 1952: The *'Izba* System

Probably the most common system of agricultural exploitation before World War II was the infamous *'izba* system,[5] based on the use of *tamaliyya* laborers, who were usually hired by the year and received both money wages and payment in kind, including the use of a small plot of land (3 to 5 *qarats*, or one-sixth of an acre) for subsistence purposes. The landlord-tenant relationship under the *'izba*

system varied—sometimes the farmer paid a reduced rent, at other times merely the land tax—but the key characteristic of the system was that the peasant received a piece of land for the subsistence of his family and the landlord received labor for the cultivation of his estate.[6] The time spent working for the landlord may have amounted to as much as twenty-five days per month, generally in cotton cultivation.[7] Although the *tamaliyya* farmer received a wage rate considerably lower than that of the ordinary day laborer (*tarahil*), he had the security of a place to live and land to provide for his family and year-round employment. In a society of innumerable landless farm wage earners, perhaps as many as 1 million by 1940, steady employment was sufficient to ensure *tamaliyya* loyalty to the patron and this dependency was further reinforced by the common practice of advancing the *tamaliyya* farmer various inputs for his subsistence plot, perhaps seed or fertilizers. As such loans accumulated, much of the cash wage paid to the peasant for his work was retained by the landlord in payment of past debts. Gradually, the peasant became completely tied to the landlord, deeply in debt, and unable, regardless of how hard he might work, to free himself from the landlord's demands.

The *tarahil* laborers, the "poorest of the poor" in rural Egypt, were usually brought in from Upper Egypt during the slack periods of basin agriculture to help prepare the land prior to planting. Although paid a slightly higher wage than the *tamaliyya* workers under the *'izba* system, their situation was nevertheless more precarious. Forced to move from job site to job site at their own expense, denied access to housing or even a subsistence plot of land, they were totally dependent on the labor contractor, who often cheated them out of their full wage earnings.[8]

The basic features of the prevalent system in the pre-1952 period are well described by Robert Springborg:

> A cadastral survey map of Sharqiya Province for the first half of this century would reveal it as having been carved into three types of farming units. The first type constituted the few large estates of 5,000 to 10,000 feddans, owned by the royal family but managed by agricultural supervisors, and serving not as homes for their owners but as sources of income. The second type of units, and those covering the largest total area in the province, were *'ezab* (singular *'ezbah*) of the non-aristocratic but wealthy landowners, who numbered some 2,000 families in Egypt and around 100 families in Sharqiya. The typical *'ezba* consisted of several hundred feddan on which were frequently situated the family home and one or more villages of peasant retainers. Remaining land in Sharqiya was owned by peasants in small plots, some of which were insufficient to provide their owners a livable income. Such poor landowning peasants and those completely landless, worked on the estates of the royal family or on the *'ezab* of the wealthy landowners.[9]

An especially important point in the comparison of the peasants' conditions under the monarchy and under the republic is the degree of close supervision experienced under both systems. There is a close parallelism in this matter between the pre-1952 patron-client form of agriculture with the post-1952 centralized ad-

ministrative system of agriculture. Under the pre-1952 *'izba* system, the landlord and/or his agents were deeply involved in the actual agricultural production process. All questions of land preparation, crop rotation, insect control, irrigation, and drainage were closely supervised. Joseph Nahas, describing the *'izba* system as an example of modern production, claimed that "the patron determined the exact number of workers and the number of days necessary for the execution of each type of agricultural function."[10] The key point about the *'izba* system was indeed the complete lack of independence, initiative, or local autonomy allowed to the peasant cultivators. No system of incentives was developed to encourage greater productivity or creativity in the solution of production problems. All that was required of the peasant was his obedience and effort in mindless attention to rules and demands.

The origins of this close supervision system can be traced back to the introduction of cotton into the rural areas of Egypt, which produced an immense transformation in the life of the Egyptian peasantry. Prior to the establishment of perennial irrigation and the cultivation of cash crops, agriculture in Egypt was a simple activity. Each peasant would generally cultivate a single main crop, though sometimes water would be lifted by hand from the Nile or from shallow wells dug in the basinlands to permit cultivation of a summer crop. The introduction of perennial irrigation and the growing of cotton required much more care from the peasantry than they had been accustomed to and much more precise knowledge. Great skill was required for preparing the land, planting the cotton seeds, and preventing damage by cotton pests. A whole new set of problems had to be dealt with including crop rotation, fertilizing, irrigation, and drainage. Hence, under the *'izba* system, the large landowners or their managers imposed strict controls and a system of close supervision.[11]

This strict supervision intensified the problems of peasants' depending on their landlords, described by Alan Richards in the following terms:

> *'Izba* workers were often in debt to their landlords, were supervised with the *kurbaj,* and lived in fear of losing their jobs, thus sinking into the even worse condition of the daily-wage laborers. They consequently affected an attitude of reverential awe, servility and mistrust towards their overlords, occasionally negating both this deference and their dependent status with acts of violent resistance. The Pashas believed that peasants could "be driven only with the lash," and acted accordingly.[12]

From 1915 until the end of World War II, agricultural output per worker dropped consistently. Whereas some large estates did introduce various forms of modern farm equipment, the vast majority of agricultural land was divided into small farming plots for which individual farmers, utilizing the traditional hoe and plough, were required to engage in the back-breaking work of land preparation, planting, weeding, and harvesting. There was little in the *'izba* system to encourage increased production.

Land fragmentation was a disaster for the small farmer between 1900 and 1940, with the size of the average smallholding dropping from 1.4 feddans to 0.8 feddans (one feddan being roughly equal to one acre). "If a peasant held less than three feddans, he could not support his family, and had to enter either the market for land by trying to rent a parcel, or for labor by hiring himself out. In either case, he entered into relations of dependency and lost a degree of decision-making power over his work."[13]

Land ownership records for different tenure systems were not available until the First Agricultural Census was published in 1929. At that time it appeared that at least 75 percent of all cultivated lands were being farmed within the *'izba* system. Less than one-fourth of all lands were actually leased out for rent or organized through a sharecropping system.

In the census of 1917 some 18 percent of all farmers (506,181 persons) had been listed as tenant farmers, cultivating leased land. By 1929 the proportion had dropped to 6.6 percent (234,687 persons), and by 1937 to 4.9 percent. By the early 1940s most landless farmers were forced to seek employment as daily wage earners or to become part of the local landlord's *'izba* system.[14] By 1950 the landless were at least 1.5 million fellahin and the near landless alone were 1.75 million. Perhaps more relevant to this discussion is that on the eve of the 1952 revolution probably three-fourths of the rural population had no land or less than the 2 to 3 feddans that were needed for self-sufficiency.

The rise of nationalism gradually stimulated increased political awareness in urban and rural areas. In the late 1940s agricultural conditions were widely reported in the press, but a series of proposals for social and economic reform were defeated in a landlord-dominated Parliament. About all that the pashas and *'izba* owners were willing to concede was the need to provide better social services, working conditions, and housing for their tenant farmers.[15]

The Rural Agricultural Cooperatives in the Pre-1952 Era

In the late nineteenth century, few people were concerned about the plight of the fellahin, and most agricultural development projects were structured to benefit the landed elites. However, as more Egyptians began to be educated in Europe they were often appalled at the poverty, disease, illiteracy, and exploitation of the landless and near landless peasants. Thus, Tawfiq al-Mar'ashli, describing the shock of his visit to the villages of Egypt in the early 1920s, characterized the peasants as miserably exploited. He described their housing as "filthy and totally inadequate," their food as "disgusting and never enough," and the peasants themselves as vulnerable to a wide variety of diseases and all types of calamities.[16]

A first attempt to better the lot of the peasants was the Agricultural Association founded in 1898 by Prince Husayn Kamal (Sultan Husayn) with the declared aim of improving the agricultural sector and the status of the fellahin. His support of