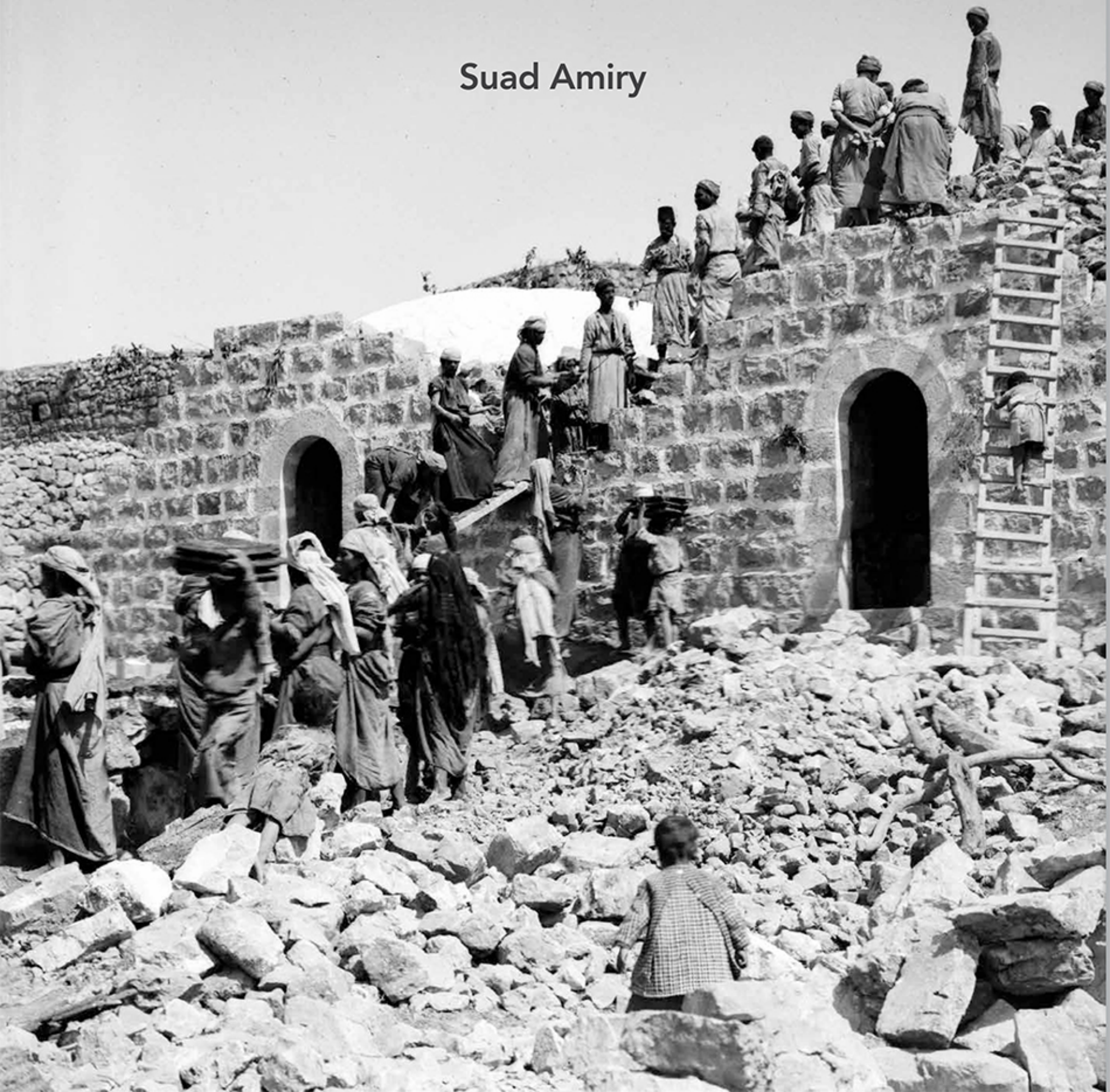


Peasant Architecture in Palestine

Space, Kinship and Gender

Suad Amiry



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Peasant Architecture in Palestine

Suad Amiry

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Fig. 3.1: Fruit orchards (*hawakir*) separated the village built-up areas from its agricultural fields

Chapter Three

THE VILLAGE AS A SPATIAL UNIT

The village of Deir Ghassaneh consisted of an agglomeration of social, economic and political groupings. These groupings, whether at the level of nuclear families, extended families or clans, interacted both in harmony and in conflict. In studying a situation where clan ties and clan identity were as strong as those prevailing in Deir Ghassaneh, it is crucial to examine the forces that bound the villagers together and contributed to the formation of a village community with a strong village identity and solidarity.

At the village level, we see the opposition of various parts and their ultimate unity. The different clans of Deir Ghassaneh, who lived in separate quarters (*harat*), were able to enact their spatial separateness while giving expression to their place in the whole. The different parts of the village were subordinated to the whole: clan identity to village identity. This chapter discusses the factors that made the village of Deir Ghassaneh an identifiable spatial unit with defined boundaries separating it from neighbouring villages.

As in other villages in Palestine, Deir Ghassaneh was spatially separated from other surrounding villages (Fig. 3.1). Both the village built-up area and its fields had clearly demarcated boundaries. Until the 1920s, the built-up area was a compact, nucleated cluster of houses (Fig. 3.2a), as opposed to a scattered pattern, with each house surrounded by its own landed property (Fig. 3.2b).

Fig. 3.2a: Deir Ghassaneh: location map.

Fig. 3.2b: Scattered pattern of houses.

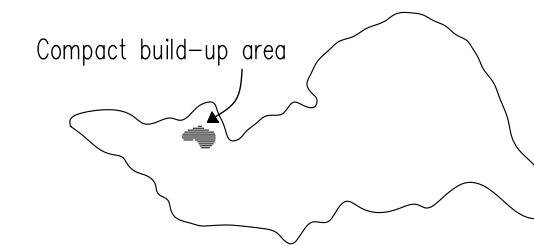


Fig. 3.2a

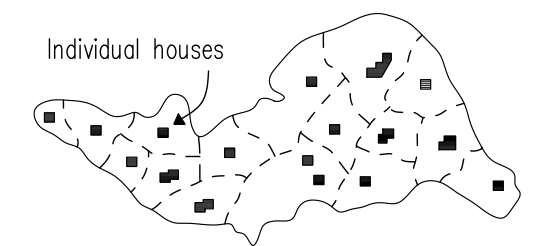


Fig. 3.2b

Around this crowded settlement, a belt of privately owned gardens called *hawakir* separated the built-up area from its cultivated fields, which in turn isolated Deir Ghassaneh from neighbouring villages (Fig.3.3).

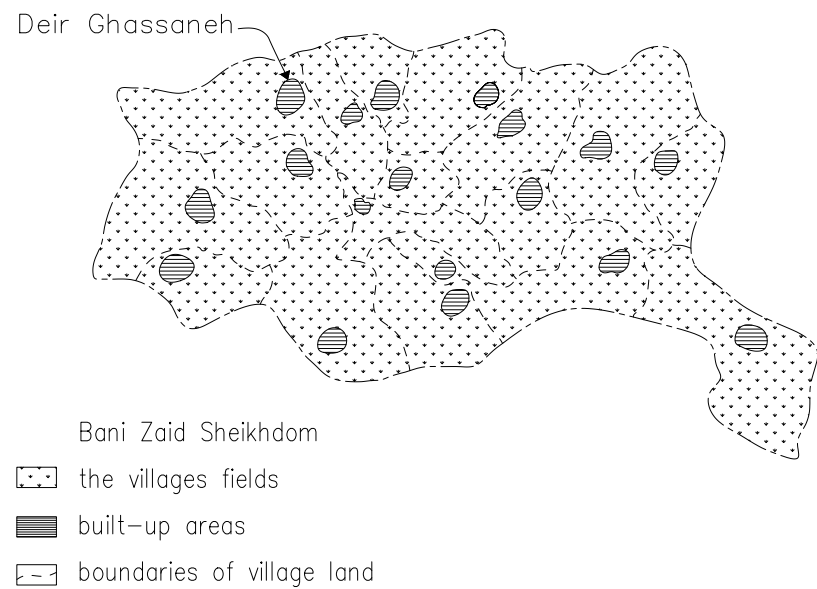


Fig. 3.3: Built up areas of different villages separated by village fields

In general, villages were spatial clustering of communities consisting of a number of different descent groups. Deir Ghassaneh was inhabited by seven groups of different descent: the Barghuthi, ish-Shu'aibi, ir-Rabi, Nasir, 'Adi, Misshel and Halabi (see Chapter2). Each of these clans had its own subclans living in neighbouring villages. Figure 3.4 illustrates the distribution of the Barghuthi sub-clans in neighbouring villages, both within and outside the Bani Zaid sheikhdом. Even though the same clan in this case the Barghuthi - lived in different villages, their lands were part of the village in which they resided and were not consolidated as Barghuthi land (as illustrated in the hypothetical Figure 3.5b). In other words, the village lands belonged to the inhabitants of the different clans in the one village (Fig. 3.5a) rather than to the same sub-clans residing in different villages.

Land was the basis of livelihood and the source of wealth for the villagers; the size of village lands was the basis for power and prestige of the village as a whole vis-à-vis other villages.

The protection of the natural resources of the village (cultivated fields, water resources, woodland) was not only the responsibility of its owners but of the village as a whole.

Fig. 3.4: Barghuthi villages within the Bani Zaid sheikhdом

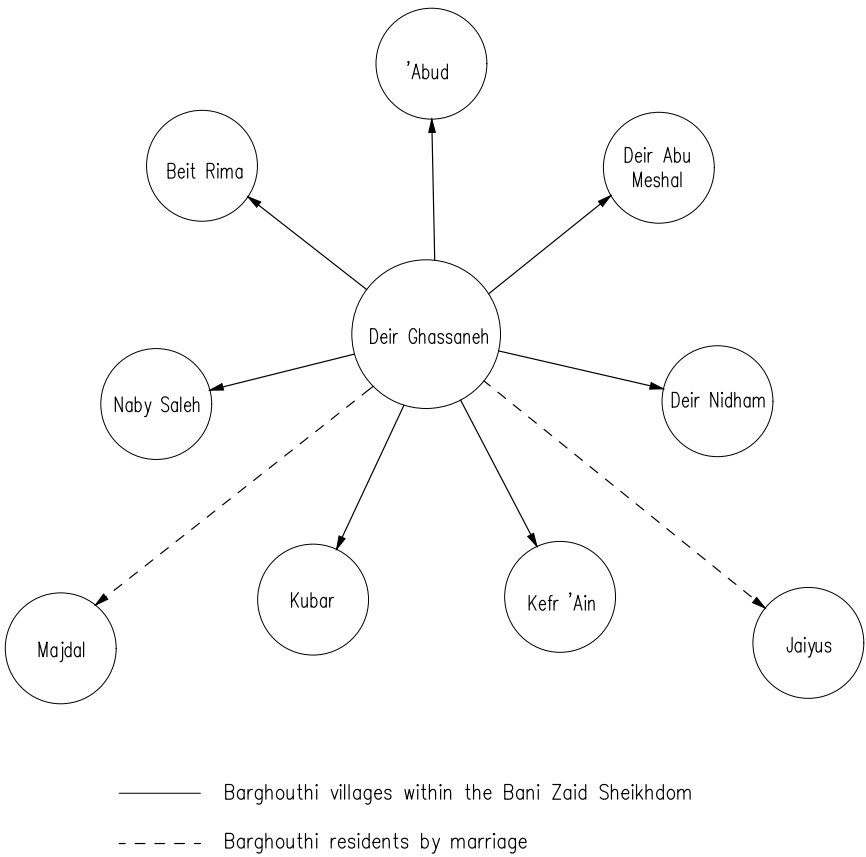
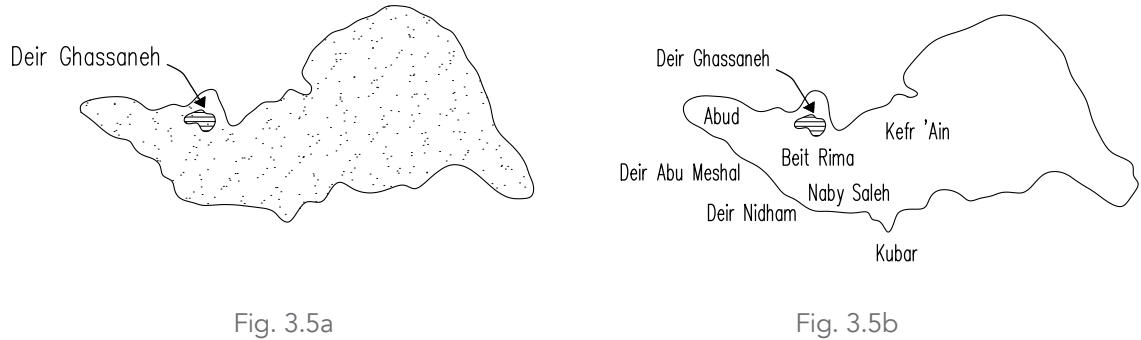


Fig. 3.5a,b: Deir Ghassaneh lands.



Whether land was communally owned (*musha'*) or individually owned (*mulk*), the village had the right to object if some of the village land was alienated from the village. This was the case with regard to land belonging to the 'Abid clan, which was driven out of Deir Ghassaneh after a dispute with the Barghuthi clan. After leaving the village to reside elsewhere, the 'Abid family tried to sell its land in Deir Ghassaneh to villagers

from a neighbouring village. The inhabitants of Deir Ghassaneh mobilised against this act of alienating village land in favour of ‘strangers’ and the transaction was stopped. Normally, the owner of the adjacent land had the privilege or right to buy it before the sale was offered either to others in the village or, after that, to strangers. This right was called *haq ish-shuf’ah* (the right of the neighbourhood). Indirectly, the village community was considered the corporate owner of the village as a whole.

This may explain the relative consolidation of village land, i.e. the village land surrounding the built-up core. However, due to complex reasons discussed below, every village had a share of its land, referred to as detached areas, located within land belonging to other villages. According to Granot, “The exact meaning of detached areas is that within the boundaries of one village are to be found stretches belonging to owners who reside in another village.”³⁷

As Figure 3.6 illustrates, Deir Ghassaneh owned several detached pieces of land in Kufr id-Dik, Brokin, Kufr ‘In and Beit Rima. It also owned land in Khirbet Mismar, Deir Ballut and on the coastal plain. The only village that held land within the land of Deir Ghassaneh, was the neighbouring village of Beit Rima.

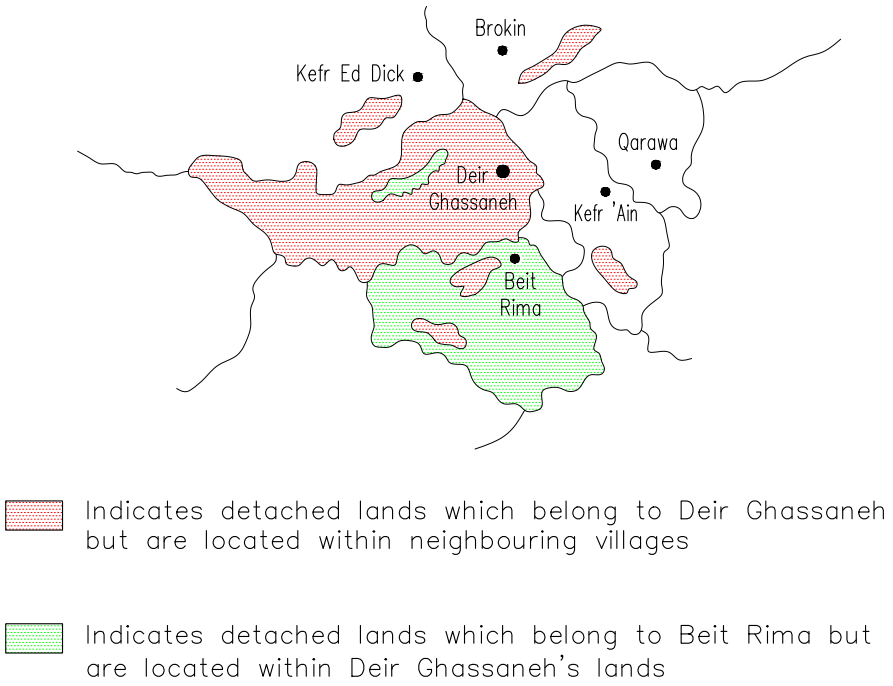


Fig. 3.6: Deir Ghassaneh and Beit Rima

37. Granot, 1952:166.

In The Land System in Palestine, Granot writes:

A number of causes have led to this scattering of land ownership. The chief of them was changes in the family, such as marriages between the inhabitants of one village and those of another, or the bequeathing of property rights to heirs who do not live in the place where it is situated. Another cause was the ordinary transfer of immovable property by sale and purchase.³⁸

The scarcity of fertile arable land was an important influence in the compact pattern of habitations within settlements. Under the prevailing land tenure, no private or public buildings, except for holy shrines and field storage structures (*qsur* or *'amarat*), were allowed to be constructed out in the fields outside the village built-up area. As this no longer applies, village houses and public buildings have spread out, causing neighbouring villages to reach each other and no longer form a separate spatial unit.

Deir Ghassaneh and its neighbouring villages all had similar agricultural produce: olives, figs, grapes, almonds, wheat, barley, etc. Their lack of reliance on a single crop meant the villagers could meet their subsistence needs within their own area. This physical reality obviously contributed to the extremely bounded, self-contained conceptualisation the villagers had of their own village.

Non-physical factors were also crucial in the motivation for concentrated, highly clustered settlement. Just as the individual was part of a tightly knit group, so was the individual house part of a tightly knit settlement. The same cultural system that made the individual and his clan act as a unit, made the house and the settlement a whole and formed the setting for a communal life. The individual's attitudes towards his group, his personal relationship with his land, his attitude towards nature in general, his family and clan structure, all contributed to the formation of a concentrated village. This pattern satisfied the basic human need of belonging to a group and gave psychological, social and economic security. As the individual in the village had little place outside the clan context, so a separate house had little place or sense beyond the setting and context of the village as a whole. As C. Norberg-Schulz put it, “Density thus seems motivated also from within. In general it corresponds to what is usually known as human scale.”³⁹

Thus, these settlement patterns were to a large extent caused by, and at the same time reflected in, the nature of internal village relations. These relations were characterised by strong social ties and a strong village affiliation which, in turn, produced a close

38. Granot, 1952:166.

39. NorbergSchulz, 1971:30.

interaction between the different clans of the same village, both within the built-up area and out in the fields. This interaction took place in isolation from other villages, and even from related clans residing in neighbouring villages.

The self-contained and bounded conceptualisation which the villagers of Deir Ghassaneh had of their own village was reflected by the fact that the village, and not any other social unit, constituted the basic administrative unit which the state, through the mediation of the sheikh and the council of elders, utilised to assign lands, organise military conscription and, most importantly, impose taxes.

The system of taxation used throughout the Ottoman Empire whereby the village was the unit of assessment and its inhabitants were held collectively responsible for its payment, reinforced the sense of a village community. The sheikh of Deir Ghassaneh, who was also the sheikh of Bani Zaid (*sheikh-in-nahiyeh*), served officially as a tax farmer (*multazim*). He was held responsible for collecting a predetermined sum from the Bani Zaid villages. Each local sheikh (*sheikh-il-balad*) was responsible for the payment of the sum required from his village and, with the help of his council of elders, settled issues related to the amount required from each family.⁴⁰

Such a system of collective responsibility enhanced coordination and solidarity between the villagers. Not only did the villagers share the crushing burdens of tax impositions, but they often shared the collective punishment of military harassment and plunder in the event of failure to make payments in full.⁴¹

The Village Fields: Differentiated and Structured Space

The village of Deir Ghassaneh is surrounded by a continuous and extending mountainous rocky landscape. Barring the extensive terracing of olive groves, the fields appear to the external observer as undifferentiated and unstructured; no physical boundaries separate Deir Ghassaneh’s agricultural fields from those of neighbouring villages, no physical boundaries separate the village built-up area from its fields, no boundaries differentiate the various lineage groups’ landholdings and no boundaries exist to mark where one *fallah's* property starts or ends.

For the *fallah*, however, this apparently amorphous landscape was spatially differentiated and structured. For those who spent the long hours of daily work within the boundaries of the village fields, the natural landscape was transformed into a “cultural landscape”

40. Cohen, 1973:197.

41. Firestone, 1978:827.



Fig. 3.7: Fields seperating villages

through their own intervention. The *fallah* had a cognitive map of spatial divisions that stressed a multiplicity of differentiating criteria, each dividing the land on one basis and uniting it on another. These differentiating criteria, overlapping and constituting a complex network, were clearly established in the peasant’s frame of reference: cardinal points, localities, landmarks, kinship domains, ecological domains and seasonal agricultural cycles.

Abu Ziyad, who was ninety-eight years old at the time of doing the research for this book, explained to the author the different elements that constituted a comprehensive

system of identification and orientation. The following, confirmed by other elderly men in the village, is based on his remarks.

In addition to geographic areas such as mountains, valleys, wadis, gorges, etc., cardinal points were an important point of reference to ‘map’ village lands. The village land was divided into four cardinal parts, each referred to as a ‘face’ (*wijj*). The four cardinal parts in turn were sub-divided into a number (42) of smaller basins, each referred to by a specific name.

Another system of notation referred to landmarks of a communal, mostly spiritual nature: the holy shrines (Sheikh il-Rifa’i, il-Khawwas, and Rijal Sufa), haunted springs (‘ein Bunayyak, ‘ein ij-Jdideh and ‘ein Hajjar), and the holy trees (Sheikh Birri and il-Majdub) (Fig. 6.11). Secondary landmarks belonging to the different clans, such as threshing floors and water wells, also functioned as objects for the *fallah*’s orientation.

The division of the fields into a number of lineage blocks, and the further sub-division of these blocks into smaller parcels belonging to the different fellahin, also served to break the fields into distinct and meaningful areas. Rocks, trees and piles of stones marked the boundaries between the different landholdings, each of which was connected into a familiar whole by a network of narrow footpaths.

Land was divided into different categories of land fertility: fertile land, mostly in the valleys; irrigated fields around the village springs; rain-fed land including arbour terraces; and arid, uncultivable land. This fertility-based differentiation of land was very closely associated with the division of land into crop zones: summer crop fields of wheat, barley and lentils were located in the valleys and winter crops, mainly olive, on mountain slopes. These crop zones dictated the seasonal movements of the *fallahin*.

As well as differentiating the cropping zones, the rhythms of the agricultural cycle united all clan domains into time zones. Hence geographical configurations, cardinal points, sacred places, patterns of land possession along kinship lines, categories of land fertility, crop zones and most importantly, cyclical agricultural activities, constituted the basis for spatial structuring and differentiation of the village fields.

As far as the creation of a common village identity is concerned, the multiplicity of layers defining the cognitive map of the peasant’s spatial conception of village lands belonged to a hierarchy of significance. Within this hierarchy two factors were paramount: the

cyclical agricultural activities and the prevailing patterns of ownership which entailed particular cropping arrangements. As the break-up of field space into separate lineage domains was superseded by cropping arrangements which cut across lineage lines and domains, the shared rhythms of the agricultural cycle made the village fields an arena that, in contrast to the strong clan identity spatially expressed in the existence of clan-based living quarters, enhanced village identity and solidarity. These two factors will now be discussed in detail.

The Agricultural Cycle: Time/Space/Activity

The Deir Ghassaneh villagers’ concepts of time and space were largely determined by their close relation to the environment. The dependence of the villagers on rain-fed agriculture meant their calendar was anchored in ecological changes that regulated the succession of their agricultural activities. “Ecological time” as defined by Evans-Pritchard (1940) refers to the succession of activities both in time and place. The agricultural cycle determined factors of time and space, in other words where the *fallah* must be at what time of the day or of the year. The *fallah*’s situation in space could always be told by his situation in time and so, it follows that his system of time-reckoning was very closely associated with space. The cyclical nature of agricultural activities dictated a rhythmic pattern of daily and seasonal movements. Since all the *fallahin* in Deir Ghassaneh were more or less involved in the same activities, time had a similar meaning for everyone within the community.

In discussions with the author, the *fallahin* often referred to some activity in process in order to indicate the time of an event. For example harvest time, the olive-picking season, and the days of figs and grapes were all points of reference in time. They also selected events of outstanding significance as common points of reference: the years of beating the drums (*sant daq it-tabil*) referred to 1914 when all men between the ages of 15 to 60 were conscripted into the Turkish army, the year of the big snow to 1919, and the year of the migration (*sant il-hijrah*) to 1916 when the villagers of Deir Ghassaneh fled the nearby fighting between the Turks and the British. As these events themselves symbolised markers of time, it was not easy for the *fallah* to date them with specific years.⁴²

The ecological cycle not only created a pattern of similar activities and movements for the *fallahin*, but also gave the community a distinct common history. Unlike the neighbouring Christian peasants who used the same year for setting both agricultural

42. Abu Nada, interview: 1985.

and religious events, the Muslim *fallahin* in Deir Ghassaneh relied on the Muslim *Hijri* lunar year to set religious events and the Julian (taken from the Syrian) calendar for agricultural events because, unlike the *Hijri* calendar, it is anchored in the cyclical ecological changes. The *fallah's* calendar was, and to great extent still is, a relationship between a conceptual cycle of 12 months and a cycle of six seasons, each associated with particular activities. His system of time-reckoning was more meaningful as a sequence of agricultural activities -from planting to harvest- than as the conceptual division of the year into 12 months, and his rough division of the year into winter and summer corresponded to spatial divisions of indoor and outdoor (Fig. 3.8a). This spatial division is clearly reflected in the saying of the Christian *fallahin*: "Celebrate Easter and live outside, celebrate the Elevation of the Holy Cross and live inside".

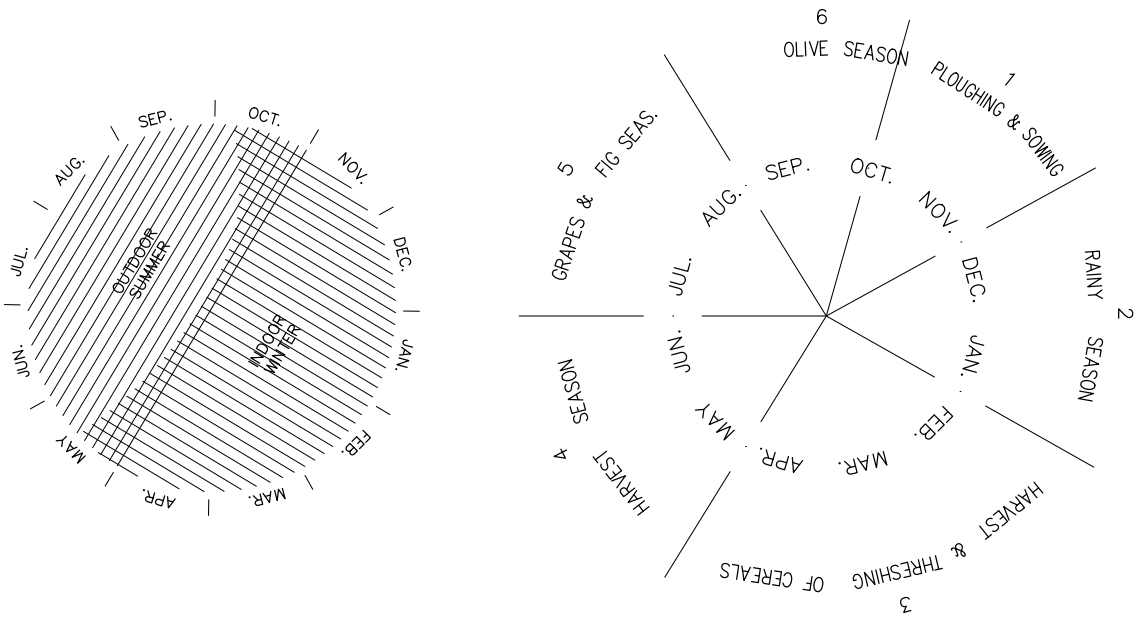


Fig. 3.8a

Fig. 3.8b

The two main seasons were themselves divided into six 'sub-seasons'.⁴³ These six seasons are best understood as a sequence of agricultural activities through time and space (Fig, 3.8b).

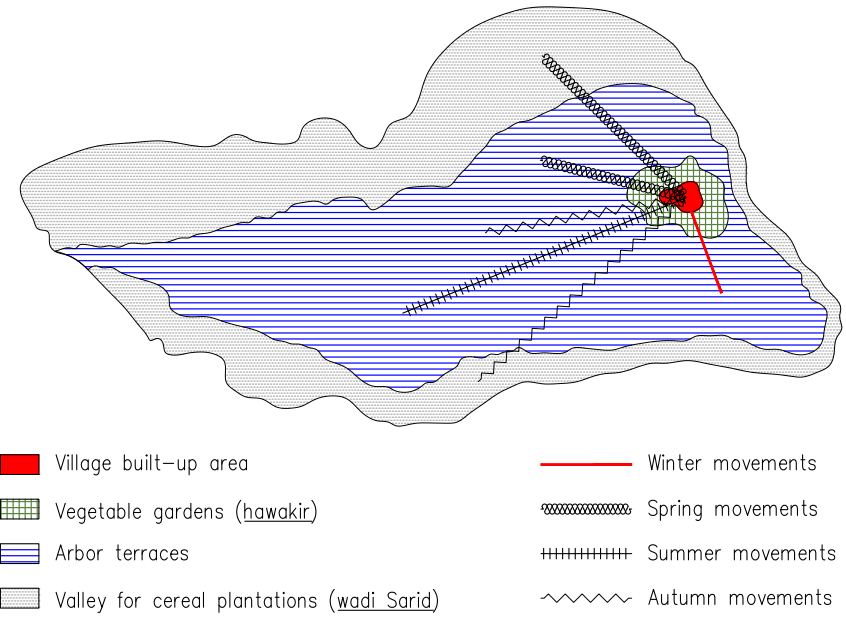
Anchored to the six seasons was a rhythmic movement through the different areas of the village fields. Spatially, the village was divided into various areas that were closely

43. Nasir, 1975:70; Abu Nada and Abu Adnan, interviews: 1985.

related to the *fallah's* seasonal activities. Thus the sequence of agricultural seasons from ploughing to harvest was not only a sequence in time, but also a sequence of movement in space. As Figure 3.9 illustrates, the village was spatially divided into the village built-up area, the vegetable gardens, the arbour terraces, and the valley for cereal plantations. Figure 3.10 illustrates the *fallahin's* movement through the year and the close association between activity, time and space.

The *fallahin* spent most of the ploughing season (October-November) in the valley and the rainy season (December-February) in the village. The rainy season was referred to as the barren months (*il-jurd*). On clear winter days the *fallahin* repaired terraces and planted.

Fig. 3.9: Association between activity/ time/space



The *fallahin* were most active during the grain harvest and threshing season between March and May, during which they would spend consecutive days in the valleys. The first two months were spent on ploughing arbour terraces and pruning trees. "In May take your sickle and cut with vigour" is the *fallahin* saying. Also during this season, vineyards were covered, fruit picked and vegetable gardens tended. During the wheat

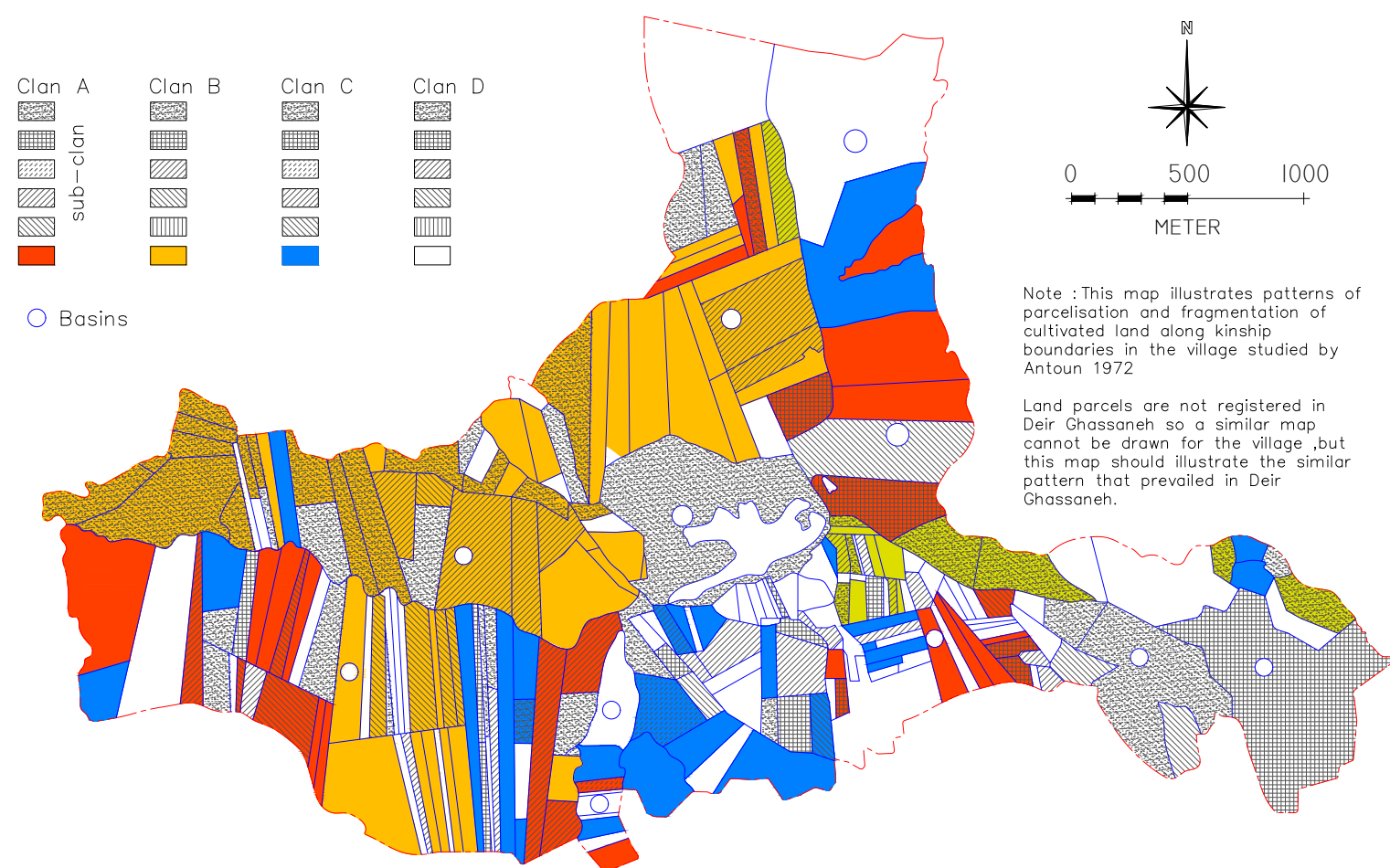


Fig. 3.10: Kinship and pattern of land distribution

and barley season, June-July, the same pattern was followed, i.e. spending most time in the valley while visiting the arbour terraces.

August and September were spent almost entirely on the terraces to keep up with the hard work of picking figs and grapes. The moving out to live in the terrace houses called “*ta’zib*” was fairly limited in Deir Ghassaneh. Unlike other villages where the whole family left temporarily to live in the fields, in Deir Ghassaneh only men moved out, and only for a few days.

During the festive season of olive-picking, the end of the agricultural cycle, the *fallah*, accompanied by all his male relatives, unmarried daughters, elderly women and sometimes hired labour from other villages, divided his time between olive terraces and the village.

This cycle of agricultural activities gave all members of the village community a shared concept of time, a similar rhythmic pattern of movement in space and, most importantly, close contact and coordination which powerfully enhanced village identity.

Patterns of Land Ownership: Lineage Divisions Superseded by Strong Village Cooperation

The division of village fields into domains belonging to the different lineage groups, as described earlier, was the most crucial mode of orientation and identification of field space.

As Figure 3.10 illustrates, there was a clear correlation between land distribution and lineage; landholdings were grouped in a number of blocks owned by members of the same lineage. For example, most of the fields located in the southwest were owned by the Rabi clan, while fields located in the northeast were mostly owned by the Shu’aibi clan. In most cases, the holdings of the same lineage were not solidified in one large continuous parcel but consisted of a number of parcels spread out in different places in the village. The breakup of lineage blocks was fairly common. The same applied to the holdings of the individual *fallah*. Figure 3.10 illustrates the holdings of one *fallah* from the hypothetical clan B. The holdings of this *fallah* -like the majority of other *fallahin*- were made up of several parcels, sometimes some distance apart. It was very rare that the holdings of one *fallah* formed one single continuous parcel. The causes of such a pattern were explained by Granot:

The fundamental cause of the fragmentation of holdings in the Arab village lies in the fact that the *fallah* aspires to include in his holdings land of all the categories – as regards quality of the soil, which are found in that village.⁴⁴

He adds:

...hence, the demands to have his share in all the categories of land and in all the sections of the village, so that his parcels should include both fertile land and poor land, land on which winter crops are grown and land good for summer crops.⁴⁵

44. Granot, 1952: 205-206.

45. Ibid.

The fragmentation and scattering of the lineage and individual holdings were encouraged by the nature of Muslim laws of inheritance whereby landed property was divided among all the deceased's sons and daughters, even though the latter were traditionally discouraged from asking for their share:

When the division comes, the heirs are not anxious to receive their portion in one piece. On the contrary, they seek to obtain a holding equal in every respect to those of their fellow-heirs, and insist on being assigned portions in all the categories of land contained in the inheritance. This straining after equality inevitably leads to the further division of each separate parcel within the total inheritance. The result of all this is more and more fragmentation of the holdings.⁴⁶

Several other factors caused further fragmentation and intermingling of landed property. Firstly, inheritances of two villages or two lineages were combined when, in cases of inter-village or cross-clan marriages, the son demanded his share of land that had, until then, been worked jointly with his father. Secondly, land parcels were often sold or exchanged, a process forcibly intensified by the expulsion of a number of clans from Deir Ghassaneh as a result of clan disputes. This left the expellees with no option but to sell their property shares to those who remained in the village. Thirdly, there was the system of *il-muzara'ah* whereby landless peasants who reclaimed the uncultivated land of a major landlord, usually involving the labouring of poor land over a number of years, were granted a portion, normally half, of the land and trees. Finally, the scattering of the *fallah's* holdings may be a remnant of a pre-existing system of *musha'* allocation.⁴⁷

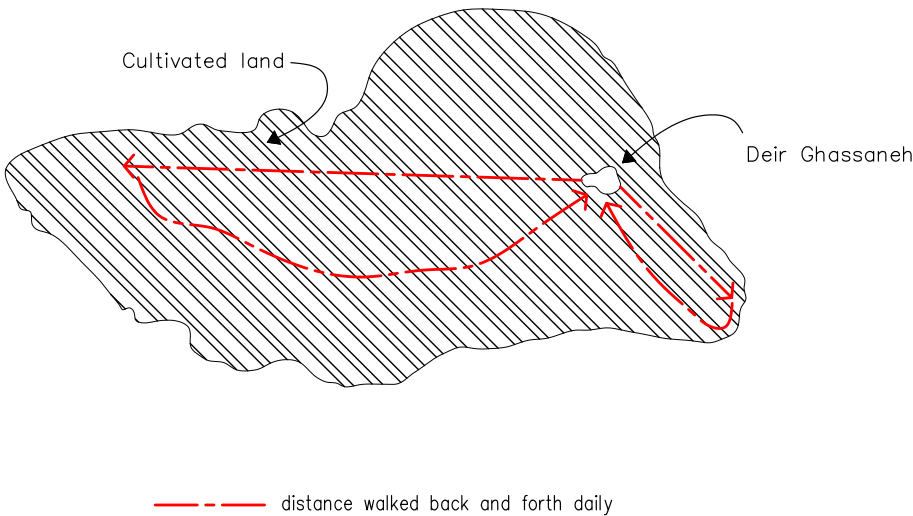
This scattering of landholdings meant that for the periodic demands of the land to be met on time, the need for cooperation became absolute: any neglect or lack of cooperation between neighbouring parcels risked reduced or maybe ruined crops. In Deir Ghassaneh, the area of cultivated land was vast and accessibility to distant areas difficult, especially because most of the village fields were located to the west of the village and the village built-up area was not centrally located (Fig. 3.11).

The uneven pattern of land distribution and the often considerable distance between an individual's landholdings necessitated far greater interaction between the villagers than would otherwise have been the case. Because blocks were subdivided into long and narrow strips, access to one parcel was frequently only possible through others and footpaths were cut across the different holdings. This entailed extensive criss-crossing by the tiller over neighbouring plots. No one could forbid others from passing through

46. Granot, 1952: 205-206.

47. Rosenfeld, 1970.

Fig. 3.11: Cultivated land in Deir Ghassaneh



his 'property'. In fact there were never 'public' footpaths as such and demarcations between properties were usually limited to one or two stones or trees.

This pattern of land distribution demanded cooperation during ploughing, planting and harvesting. Unlike other villages, Deir Ghassaneh did not have fixed dates for planting and harvesting set by the village council of elders.⁴⁸

The prevailing land tenure pattern and resultant 'elbow-brushing' involved in the course of day-to-day activities were not the only factors encouraging extensive interaction and cooperation between villagers; complex cropping arrangements also cut across family and clan lines. Private plots (or more accurately, plots to which the peasants had inherited rights) in Palestine were normally worked by the extended family. However, the differential status of landholdings in Deir Ghassaneh was quite distinct. Almost all wealthy families such as the Saleh and 'Ashwah owned or had access to land in excess of their ability to crop directly through their own family labour or using supervised hired hands. This land was leased or farmed out. It was common for landless or poor peasants with small plots to contract themselves out through share-tenancy or wage labour to richer clans with access to surplus land.

The share contract usually stipulated the provision by the landlord of seed stock, land and water against the labour of the share-tenant, who received between a quarter and a half of the harvest. A complex variety of contracts (mostly oral) prevailed depending on the crop and the strength of kinship ties bonding the landlord to the share-tenant.⁴⁹

48. Antoun, 1972:21.

49. Firestone, 1978.



Deir Ghassaneh olive groves, photo by Khaldun Bshara

Not all forms of cropping arrangements were vertical and contractual. Family allocation of labour to other farmers often took the form of mutual aid in a system known as *’oneh* which was extended to farmers in need of extra help because of seasonal demand and whereby villagers would usually volunteer one day of work. Wilson notes:

...people will also not infrequently help friends and neighbours to get in their harvest. Especially is this the case if one has finished before another, or if anything delays the threshing. Sometimes a dozen of more men and women may thus be seen in line reaping, and it is astonishing to note the rate at which they will clear the ground.⁵⁰

He adds:

In the case of friendly help from neighbours, the *Fallah*, on the conclusion of the threshing, makes a feast to which he invites all who have given him any assistance in getting his crops. The feast is called Jeerah.⁵¹

The same basis of mutual aid was applied to the building of a new house (see Chapter4). It should be noted, however, that both vertical and exploitative and horizontal and mutual cropping arrangements, especially the former, cut across family and clan ties and created close patterns of interaction which were reinforced by the cyclical activities of agricultural production.

50. Wilson, 1906:217.

51. Ibid.