

ABSTRACT

Space, Kinship and Gender: The Social Dimension of Peasant Architecture in Palestine

This thesis addresses itself to the spatial organisation of the different environmental levels in late nineteenth century rural Palestine. A descending spatial order of analysis from the settlement level to that of the furniture level is adopted. The built space of Deir Ghassaneh, a Palestinian village located in the central highlands--the West Bank today--is the focus of this work. In order to understand the close correspondence between this built space and the social organisation of the peasant community that produced it, it was necessary to reconstruct life in Deir Ghassaneh at the turn of this century, at a time when space and society together constituted a single socio-spatial whole, and when the village was a relatively autarkic, subsistence-based agrarian community in which traditional modes -including architecture- still prevailed.

Throughout the thesis, the analysis of the different elements which constituted the village built space is interpreted in the light of the overarching conceptual framework of separation and unity. It is argued that these two countervailing notions governed the nature of interaction between the dominant Barghouthi clans and the subordinate fallaheen (peasant) clans. It also governed the spatial ordering of each element and the ordering of the environment as a whole. Kinship and gender are seen as two main determinants along which village social life and spatial order was organised.

Part two of this thesis examines the nature of change that took place in the built space of Deir Ghassaneh in the light of the dramatic social transformations during the last seventy years (1916-1986). It is argued that architectural systems, i.e., new methods of construction, the use of new building materials, and the adoption of new building forms, would not be accepted by traditional peasant society unless this society was exposed to external forces that operated to undermine the conditions of its existence both at the symbolic-cultural and material levels. In the case of Deir Ghassaneh,