

Throughout the thesis, the analysis of the different elements which constituted the village built environment is interpreted in the light of the overarching conceptual framework of separation and unity. It is argued that these two countervailing laws governed the spatial order of each element and also the relationships amongst the elements, i.e., the ordering of the environment as a whole. Kinship and gender are seen as two main determinants along which the village social life and spatial order was organized. Kinship played a determining role in dividing up the village area into clan-based domains and the division of the village fields into clan-based blocks. Segregation between men and women resulted in the creation of separate male and female domains. Spaces such as the house, the courtyard, the spring, the holy shrines and the tawabin (baking ovens) were all associated with women, while others such as the village fields, the saha (plaza), the village guest-house, and the village mosque were associated with men.

In contrast to kinship-based separation, certain special elements such as the village mosque, plaza and spring cut across partially or totally all kinship lines, while gender segregation was an all-pervasive element in spatial segmentation at the village level. The concepts of separation and unity dictated the choice of spatial units analysed in the following chapters .

ORGANISATION

The organisation of the thesis reflects a descending spatial order of analysis from the settlements level to that of furniture. Chapter one begins with an overview of patterns of settlements in nineteenth century Palestine. It compares the discontinuity and fluctuation in area and population of the lowland settlements with the stability and continuity which characterised the highland settlements. Scarcity of arable land, peasant-nomad conflicts, and topographical factors are seen as determinant factors influencing the dispersion of rural settlements in the period under consideration.

Chapter two places the village of Deir Ghassaneh in the context of