

and, at the same time reflected the nature of village internal relations. Such relations were characterised by strong social ties and a strong village affiliation which in turn produced a situation in which the different clans of the same village interacted with one another both inside the boundaries of the village built-up area and out in the fields. Such an interaction took place in isolation from other villages and even in isolation from related clans residing in neighbouring villages.

The self-contained and bounded conceptualization, which the villagers of Deir Ghassaneh had of their own village, also reflected 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, utilized to assign lands, to organize military conscription and most importantly, to impose taxes.

THE VILLAGE AS TAX-FARMING UNIT

The system of taxation employed by the Ottoman Empire, can be seen as one factor which also enhanced the sense of a "village community". The village was used by the state as a unit of assessment for taxation. The village community as a whole was made collectively responsible for the payment of taxes. The sheikh of Deir Ghassaneh, who was also the sheikh of Bani Zaid (sheikh-el-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-el-balad), with the help of his council of elders, was responsible for the payment of the sum required from his village. The sheikh and his council of elders were to settle issues related to the amount required from each family. Amnon Cohen describes this process:

"Thus within the village itself, the distribution of the tax burden among the inhabitants was left to the shaykh-al-balad, who would determine how much each individual villager had to contribute towards the sum owed by his particular village." (1973: 197).