

CHAPTER FIVE

THE VILLAGE COMMUNAL PLAZA AND GUEST-HOUSE: The Central Arena for Reinforcing Inter-Village Relations



Fig. 5.1: The village plaza (saha) and guest-house

Separation and unity, or the tension between what we might call, following Norberg-Schulz (1971: 46) "centripetal" and "centrifugal" forces constituted the essence of the village spatial organisation. At the level of the living quarters (harat), kinship acted as a "centrifugal" force which gave legitimacy to the breaking up of the village into its different clanship-based quarters. However, at the village level, the different kin groups halted their division to express a strong village identity; a centripetal force giving expression to the village as a whole. As discussed earlier, this village identity was enhanced by a shared cultural and religious heritage, shared common interests and similar external threats, e.g. the communal burdens of tax imposition. Spatially, such village identity took two forms which pertained to different environmental levels: 1. The spatial unity of the village vis-a-vis other villages (see chapter three). 2. The creation of communal centers of activities (nodes), within the village shared space, which cut partially or totally across kinship lines. Undoubtedly, the village communal plaza (es-saha el-'amumieh) and the village guest-house (el-