

madafah) constituted the most important centre for collective male activities.

THE VILLAGE PLAZA AND GUEST-HOUSE

Up to 1923, when different clans established their own guest-houses, the village plaza (es-saha el-amumieh) constituted the centre of the village. This exclusively male-dominated place not only physically "gathered" the different parts of the village around it, but also gathered a multiplicity of meanings. "The meaning of any object consists in its relationship to other objects, that is, it consists in what the object "gathers" (Norberg-Schulz, 1979: 166). The saha gathered around it the village's most distinct and meaningful structures: the village guest-house, the village mosque and the sheikh's compound. This gave the saha its important social, ritual and political meanings.

The saha was in this case, geographically on top of the most elevated area in the village. Its location in the middle of the Barghouthi quarter not only made it the centre of this quarter, but also the centre of the village as a whole. Thus the hegemony of the Barghouthis was reflected in the centrality of the saha as a unifying arena for the other village clans under Barghouthi patronage. The physical distance between the saha and each subclan's living quarters corresponded with a social distance.

The saha could be seen as a stage on which an important part of the village social and political life was played out. In the saha, the village came closest to acting as one social and political unit. It represented the symbol of prestige for Deir Ghassaneh as a whole in relation to other villages. It was the framework of both political rivalry and social differentiation. It varied its function according to need. Together the saha and the guest-house, located to the east, fulfilled a combination of social functions: as the communal place for social interactions, as an enclosure where religious rituals, weddings, and other public celebrations took place. It also acted as a coffee-house, and as an entertainment