

feared natural objects which were endowed with supernatural powers. Many trees, stones, water sources, springs, cisterns, caves, buildings and other particular landmarks were believed to possess mysterious qualities, primarily because they were conceived of as places of refuge for evil powers. They were believed to be the abode of demons who had their residence at certain fixed spots. Isolation, darkness, and abandonment seemed to be the qualities which attracted demons. It was a common belief that demons came from the "lower world" and hence were found in places which were closer to the interior of the earth, e.g., springs, caves, cracks, and trees (since their roots went deep into the earth). Sacrifices were brought to the demons in order to please them and stop them from injuring humans.

God, saints and demons were all conceived as part of the supernatural universe. However, the relationship among them was not independent of the natural environment, and man could communicate with them through the help of certain material objects. Man's relationship to God, saints and demons was regulated by the designation of sacred places. The sacredness of such spaces and the boundaries of such areas and other "dangerous" spots were all influenced by religious beliefs and practices which had their impact on the villagers' movements and behaviour.

THE SACRED ENVIRONMENT: Place, Time and Ceremony

While agricultural activities have changed the natural landscape by the process of parcelling, terracing and planting the land (chapter 3), religion has transformed "neutral" spaces into places invested with religious reverence. The attribution of sacredness has taken place with a minimum transformation of the natural landscape and hence is usually less physically apparent than changes caused by agricultural activities.

In regulating their relations towards God, the saints and the demons, the villagers of Deir Ghassaneh have made sacred certain places, such as the holy shrines, and some natural landscape features. Contacts