

The Khawwas was especially honoured by a festive event, the annual spring celebration called mawṣim el-banat (the season of girls). [The month of April (nisan) was referred to as the month of Thursdays (shahr el-khamis), since all Thursdays of this month were celebrated. On the third Thursday of every April, while the men of Deir Ghassaneh joined neighbouring villagers in celebrating the famous regional mawṣim of Nabi Saleh (a holy shrine located in the neighbouring village of Nabi Saleh), the women of Deir Ghassaneh, accompanied by their children dressed in their best clothes, would carry the food they had been preparing for the last few days and walk in groups to assemble around the makam. As they sat on the platform in front of the makam, shaded by the surrounding olive trees, some chatted, and others sang and danced, while the little boys played the shabbabeh (wooden flutes). In a random way, women would go in and out of the makam, praying, lighting olive lamps, burning incense and tying white rags and cloths onto nearby olive trees. This would go on until early evening when the women would leave in a festive spirit, not only because they had honoured the Khawwas and gained his blessings, but also because this was one of the very few occasions when the women of Deir Ghassaneh, particularly the Barghouthi women, were able to leave the restrictive boundaries of their homes and escape their daily routine and its drudgery.

SACRED LANDSCAPE FEATURES AND ARTIFACTS:

In Deir Ghassaneh, as in other Palestinian villages, many natural landscape features and artifacts were seen as possessing deep spiritual meanings. Particular trees, springs, caves, stone heaps, and certain localities were perceived as the place of supernatural powers and hence were both respected and feared.

A number of trees in Deir Ghassaneh derived sanctity from the saint to which they were dedicated. The olive grove around al-khawwas and the oak trees next to al-Majdoub and al-Rifa'i shrines, gained sanctity just by their proximity to the holy shrines.

The most honoured and revered tree in Deir Ghassaneh, the tree of