

CHAPTER SEVEN

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS OF PART ONE

In part one I discussed the different environmental levels in the spatial ecology of nineteenth century Palestine in a descending order: from the settlement level to that of households objects. I attempted to show how each one of these levels (settlements, sheikhdom, village, living quarters and dwellings) was organized by different rules that determined their boundaries. These boundaries were well marked and protected by homogeneous groups that occupied the different levels.

The rules that determined the boundaries of these levels of the spatial order were closely associated with the existing social forms. This is only expected in a society characterized by relative social stability, autarky and the prevalence of traditional behavioural patterns.

At the settlements level, the relationship among the three communities: town dwellers, village dwellers and Bedouin was crucial in the demarcation of the three spheres of control. The scarcity of fertile lands and other ecological factors (aridity, altitudes, locations) also influenced patterns of settlement dispersion.

In the central highlands, the heartland of Palestinian peasantry, the divisions between the two rural peasant factions, Qais and Yemen, and the political and the economic powers of the potentates of the central highlands (shuyoukh el-nawahi) divided the area into power domains (sheikhdoms). Each sheikhdom included a number of villages with its own throne village (kariet kursi) symbolizing the power and the prestige of the sheikhdom as a whole. Hence defence was a crucial factor in the siting of most throne villages.

Each village in the sheikhdom was more or less self-contained. Agricultural fields separated the different villages from one another, creating an isolated and dispersed pattern of settlements.