

individual was considered the unit of taxation by the state. The community had patriarchal households; the extended family acting as the main unit of production and consumption. Labour was divided along clear gender lines.

Like most other villages in the central highlands, Deir Ghassaneh enjoyed a relative independence from the Ottoman central government. Its sheikh (who was also the sheikhdom's tax farmer) enjoyed extensive political powers. Political alliances within the village, and outside of it, were vertical and factional i.e., based on clan identity as opposed to class (Tamari, 1982). Kinship played a major role both in political alliances and economic organisation. The village's religious and ritual practices were an integral part of the community's everyday life. The village religion was centered on local saints and cosmology rather than on national Islamic institutions. The "unconscious" or "unthinking" acceptance of an inherited belief system could be retained as long as the community was isolated from the world around it, and as long as the penetration of 'external' ideas were contained within the existing structure.

DISRUPTIVE CHANGE

By the turn of this century, the community of Deir Ghassaneh was increasingly faced with pressures caused primarily by its exposure to external forces, namely Ottoman land reforms, British colonial policies, and later Zionist colonisation. These foreign forces challenged the traditional patterns of the community.

The criticality of change depended on the nature and intensity of the challenge. If pressures allowed, new patterns appeared while traditional patterns were still maintained. However, in any community there will always be limits as to the degree and kind of cultural changes which can be absorbed within the old fabric. After a hypothetical "breaking point", the pressures caused by the nature and rapidity of changes result in the collapse of traditional patterns, without the assimilation of the new in the old structure.