

In the case of Deir Ghassaneh, the critical point of disruption in the traditional structure was reached when three factors came into play, namely the declining powers of the village sheikh, changes in the land tenure and taxation systems, and changes in the occupational structure. These three factors worked together to produce and transform the built environment of the village community.

### I. The Declining Powers of the Sheikh

The Ottoman land reforms discussed below had the direct consequence of undermining the powers which the sheikh of Deir Ghassaneh - together with other highlands sheikhs - enjoyed for centuries. The Ottoman government, and later the British Mandate, started to shift their alliance from the village sheikh to powerful urban notables. The sheikhs' private armies were slowly dissolved; their judicial powers passed from them to newly appointed village notables, the makhatir. These makhatir (sing. mukhtar) were appointed by the British government to represent the village, more specifically the different clans within the village. Now the village may have two or three makhatir representing it, all lacking the political and the economic power that the village sheikh once had (Baer, 1980:103). The sheikhs were also stripped of their powers as tax-farmers, as these powers were given to urban notables, usually on an auction basis. As a result, the villagers no longer depended on the protection of their sheikh and his private army, but were dependent on absentee landlords, primarily urban leaders whose power reached out from their towns to a whole network of villages.

Consequently, the sheikhdom lost its status as a relatively independent entity. Villagers started to belong to a larger unit, and were eventually tied with centres of powers located outside the scope of their own sheikhdom. The village entered new relations with townships around them. These relations eventually involved the village in national politics as opposed to traditional local politics. The role played by Deir Ghassaneh as a throne village of Bani Zaid sheikhdom declined and consequently the power and status of the dominant Barghouthi clans waned.