

different clans (mostly among the Barghouthis), men in opposition to the Daher clan would boycott the main guest-house and retreat to their own private reception rooms. Thus, by not using the main guest-house, men expressed their anger and dissatisfaction. They normally refused to go back until problems were resolved. Their presence was crucial in strengthening the sheikh's power, as well as the relations between men of the different clans, whereas their absence made the coordination of the village affairs very difficult and undermined the sheikh's power.

The Multiplicity of Functions Served by the Guest-House

The functions of the guest-house differed according to the time of the day, or the nature of the village ceremonies. During the day, it functioned more or less as an administrative office where the village council of elders - composed of four to five elders from each clan - met with the village sheikh. In the early mornings, elderly men would come to the guest-house, carrying with them a small amount of coffee (called a "handful of coffee"), a few sticks for the fire, and their breakfast (a piece of bread and a few olives). Each elder put the coffee in a bag hung on the wall and seated himself. He was then offered some hot coffee by the guest-house guardian, and he would drink it while having a conversation with the other men sitting near him. Then those who were still young enough to work would leave for their fields, while the older men stayed behind to discuss village affairs and matters of common interest. The sheikh and his council of elders would spend most of the day in the guest-house receiving official guests and taking care of their visitors.

The guest-house also functioned as the village courthouse. Disputes between the villagers of Deir Ghassaneh were presented before the sheikh. In other villages sheikhs from neighbouring villages could be asked to settle disputes in the village. Since the sheikh of Deir Ghassaneh was the district sheikh, this was not the practice in this village. The sheikh and his council of elders had the power to force any villager to appear before the court. Each person would stand in front of the judge and state his case, then sit