

## CHAPTER SIX

### THE SACRED ENVIRONMENT OF DEIR GHASSANEH

#### INTRODUCTION

"The ancient, like the modern savages, saw man always as part of society, and society as imbedded in nature and dependent upon cosmic forces. For them, nature and man did not stand in opposition and did not, therefore, have to be apprehended by different modes of cognition .... The fundamental difference between the attitudes of modern and ancient man as regards the surrounding world is this: for modern, scientific man the phenomenal world is primarily an "It"; for ancient - and also for primitive - man it is a "Thou" (Frankfort, et al, 1949: 12).

This chapter discusses the impact of religion on the peasant's ordering of his spatial world in the village of Deir Ghassaneh at the turn of this century.

Religion permeated most aspects of the fallah's life and hence it was difficult to isolate the impact of religion from other social, cultural, and economic factors. However, for the purpose of this analysis, religion is dealt with as a more or less separate force.

The sacred environment, defined here as the totality of sacred places, times and ceremonies, acted as an egalitarian force, most immediately for the unity of the village community, ultimately, for the unity of the cosmos. Islamic beliefs reinforced the village collective identity, not only by transcending kinship boundaries but also by relating the village community to a larger world, that of the supranational community of the faithful (ummat-al-muslimin).

In the context of this work, the sacred places located within and outside of Deir Ghassaneh are seen as foci linked together by rituals and forming a meaningful network. The different elements which formed a kind of spatial-religious grid varied widely in their scale and in the significance of their role. The elements of the sacred environment (mosques, holy sanctuaries, saints' tombs, and landscape features) did not form a separate environmental level of their own,