

with the Holy from such places were believed to be more direct and certain. Times such as the month of Ramadan, the night of the Divine Decree (laylat el-qadr) the night journey and ascent (isra'), prayer times, and Thursday night, have all been designated as sacred times. As in the case of sacred places, at sacred times man was closest to God and the holy saints. Such rituals enabled the villagers to act out responses and feelings involved in this relationship. Many of the rituals and ceremonies must be performed in particular places, at set times and often with the help of pious men such as saints (awlia), learned men ('ulama) or sheikhs.

Sacred places, sacred times, and ceremonies -- were all elements forming the peasant's sacred environment. These elements formed a kind of socio-religious grid that played an important role in regulating social relations.

Although the three elements were equally crucial in the formation of the sacred environment of Deir Ghassaneh, the focus of our discussion will be mainly on space and spatial organisation.

The division into sacred, neutral, and profane spaces is not always clear and is seemingly arbitrary. Although certain places were built for spiritual purposes, such as the holy shrines and the mosque, they also had "mundane" social functions (as was the case when the mosque was used as a guest house on days other than Fridays). The same was true of "profane" spaces which often had symbolic or cosmic aspects. Some "profane" locations became temporarily sacred. This was the case whenever a religious ceremony took place. For example, any locality where a villager prayed became temporarily sacred. Such activities as the construction of a new house, agricultural activities, marriages, and deaths, all had transitory symbolic or sacred aspects attached to them. Certain elements of buildings such as the entrance door, thresholds, and dark corners, also embodied spiritual aspects.

THE VILLAGE MOSQUE: "The House of God" (Beit Allah)

Deir Ghassaneh's only mosque, believed by its inhabitants to have