

a spatial and conceptual unit larger than that of their own village.

As Appendix I shows, out of the nineteen sites, seven were said to be those of holy saints (awlia). Not all the awlia of Deir Ghassaneh were honoured or feared in the same way. The saints al-Khawwas al-Rifa'i and al-Majdoub were considered as major awlia (i.e. regional saints revered by neighbouring villages as well as by villagers of Deir Ghassaneh). The other four awlia were considered as minor or local saints. Minor saints were known to practice their authority and influence only at the place where their followers lived. (Cana'an, 1934: 74). Local awlia were honoured by members of Deir Ghassaneh, but to a lesser extent than major awlia.

With no exception, the seven makamat of Deir Ghassaneh were built on top of high places. Cana'an writes that the concept of sacredness of mountains was adopted by the inhabitants of Palestine from ancient times (Cana'an, 1927: 6). It was also believed that high places being closer to the skies, were therefore closer to Allah.

In general, the holy shrines (makamat) were small buildings, square or rectangular in plan and built out of rubble stones. Like other makamat they were often roofed with one or two white-washed domes (fig. 6.5). Domes were only used either for religious buildings or for other significant non-religious buildings such as the elevated rooms ('alali) (see chapter 4). The area and often the trees around the makamat, which were normally owned by the religious endowment (waqf), were also considered sacred. One way of honouring these holy saints, whether regional or local, was to help in the construction or repairs of their holy shrines.

Before discussing the role and the ceremonies which took place in the most honoured shrine in Deir Ghassaneh, al-Khawwas, it is important to notice the popularly-held beliefs about the descents of these awlia and their spatial and social relationship to the village as a whole and to the different clans of Deir Ghassaneh. As Appendix I shows, the most revered and most honoured of the saints were the two regional saints, al-Khawwas and al-Rifa'i. The shrines are both located outside the village built-up area. Both saints were believed