

II. The Vanishing Centre

The village centre (containing the plaza, guest-house, the mosque, and the sheikh's dwellings) has gradually lost its important function as the focus of village unity. Since the 1920s this focal point, which at one point gathered the different physical and social constituents of the village, cut across all kinship lines, and was the main domain for male activities, started to lose the basis for its predominant role.

The death of Sheikh Mahmoud in 1919 marked the end of power for village sheikhs in general. Consequently, the Barghouthis' position - particularly that of the Saleh family - started to decline, while the powers of the village makhatir (clan representatives during the British Mandate) started to rise. In the same year, the colonial government appointed four makhatir, all from the Barghouthi sub-clans, hence decentralizing the traditional powers of the village sheikh.

After the death of Sheikh Mahmoud, the Saleh dwelling (discussed at length in chapter 4) lost its role and ceased to be the symbol of power and prestige for the throne village of Deir Ghassaneh. Today the Saleh dwelling is almost deserted except for 'Adli, the grandson of sheikh Mahmoud, and his widowed mother.

In 1920 the communal guest-house also lost its functional role and prestigious status. The building was transformed into a village school. Later on, in 1930, the guest-house was replaced by four clan-based guest-houses (dawawin) (Fig. II.6). The Daher, the Dawood, the Rabi and the Shu'aibi, each had its own separate guest-house located in its own quarter. Hence the one unifying centre of activities was replaced by four secondary centres of activities. Today only the Dawood guest-house is still serving its former function. The rest ceased to exist in the 1970s.

The old mosque continued to be in use up till 1982, when it was replaced by the new village mosque built outside the Barghouthi quarter, hence symbolizing the demise of their power. The new