

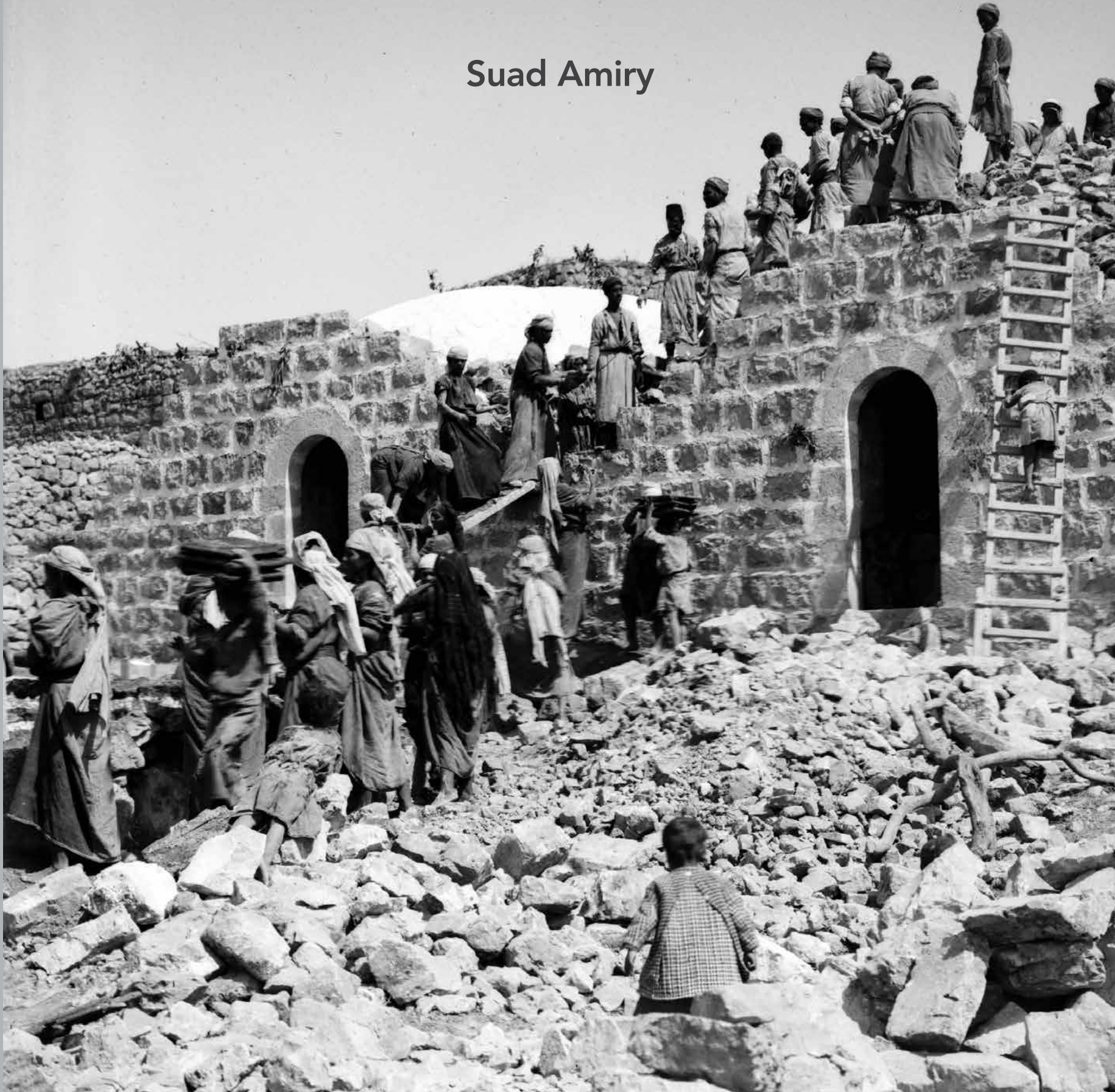
Suad Amiry

# Peasant Architecture in Palestine

Space, Kinship and Gender

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Peasant Architecture in Palestine



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Dome and sky, photo by Khaldun Bshara

## Preface

This book builds on my 1987 thesis addressing the spatial organization of the different environmental levels in late nineteenth century rural Palestine. A descending spatial order of analysis from the settlement level to that of the furniture level is adopted. The built space of Deir Ghassaneh, a Palestinian village located in the central highlands – the West Bank today – is the focus of this work. In order to understand the close correspondence between this built space and the social organisation of the peasant community that produced it, it was necessary to reconstruct life in Deir Ghassaneh at the turn of 20th century, at a time when space and society together constituted a single socio-spatial whole, and when the village was a relatively autarkic, subsistencebased agrarian community in which traditional modes, including architecture, still prevailed.

Throughout the book, analysis of the different elements that constituted the village built space is interpreted in light of the overarching conceptual framework of separation and unity. It is argued that these two countervailing notions governed the nature of interaction between the dominant Barghuthi clans and the subordinate *fallahin* (peasant) clans. It also governed the spatial ordering of each element and the ordering of the environment as a whole. Kinship and gender are seen as the two main determinants along which village social life and spatial order were organised.

The second part of the book examines the nature of change that took place in the built space of Deir Ghassaneh in light of the dramatic social transformations from 1916 to 1986. It is argued that architectural systems, i.e. new methods of construction, the use of new building materials and the adoption of new building forms, would not be accepted by traditional peasant society unless this society was exposed to external forces that operated to undermine the conditions of its existence at both symbolic-cultural and material levels. In the case of Deir Ghassaneh, changes in the architectural forms and the spatial organisation reflected changes that took place first in the socio-economic structure, and were then reflected either in the partial continuity or in the complete disruption of traditional architectural processes.

Saleh Palace courtyard



## Acknowledgments

The basic theme of this book builds on my PhD thesis, written at the school of architecture, Edinburgh University. It originated several years earlier with the stimulating discussions I had with my friends and colleagues Jan Cejka and Bilal Hammad about indigenous architecture. The trips we took together around the Middle East and Europe shaped my interest in the subject. In September 1981, I crossed the River Jordan to visit a number of villages in the occupied West Bank. I was overwhelmed by the architectural qualities I found, and I decided then to spend six months in the area so as to study the architecture of the Palestinian village. In 1987, I realized that what was written here was just the beginning.

It would not be possible to adequately thank the people of the village of Deir Ghassaneh who spared long hours of their time talking to me about their history, way of life, and the uses of their spaces, subjects about which I knew very little. I particularly want to thank the elders of Deir Ghassaneh, most notably to Abu Hani al-'Alem, for their patience with my endless questions; and the women of Deir Ghassaneh who tolerated my snooping into their private and personal lives. I will always remember with fondness their hospitality and curiosity. Without them the work would not have been possible.

The late Professor C.B. Wilson supervised my thesis. To him I owe a great deal. His guidance, critical and constructive criticism and his unfailing support throughout the different stages of the research and writing were invaluable.

As for the actual writing of thesis, it would not have been completed without the support of Salim Tamari who patiently listened to my ideas and helped me put them in perspective. Penny Johnson read through and helped edit the thesis with diligence and good humor. Ata Kuttab was a tireless source of encouragement and enthusiasm, and Samia Husein-Tamimi typed and retyped the thesis drafts. During the fieldwork and surveying of houses, I was assisted by a number of colleagues and students. Special thanks are due to my colleagues, Nadia Habash, and my former students, Rami Bader and Sawsan Asbah. I also thank all the friends and colleagues who had given me advice and assistance: Judy Blanc, Issa Alami, Steve Skelly, Kamal Abdulfattah, Albert Glock, Vera Tamari and Ramzi Sansour. My gratitude goes to all of them.

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## Glossary of Arabic Terms

'Abaieh: a thick cloak

A'djam: saints who shared attributes with demons

'Ahwash (sing. hosh): courtyards

'Ain: spring

'Alali (sing. 'illiyeh): elevated room used by wealthier peasants for sleeping and for receiving guests

'Aqd: roof

Arkan: pillars

'Aruse: bride

'Atabeh (pl. 'atabat): threshold

'Awlia: saints

Badd: olive press made out of stone

Balad: village or town

Bafteh: white cloth

Banat (sing. bint): girls

Banna (pl. bannaieh): builder

Barakeh: blessing

Beit (pl. buyut): house

Beit esh-sha'r: goat hair tents (bedouin)

Biader (sing. baydar): threshing floor

Bir: cistern

Bur: uncultivable land

Dar (pl. dur): house or sub-clan

Daqqaq (pl. daqqaqin): stone dressers

Diwan (pl. dawawin): men's reception room

Djabish: rubble stone

Djinn: supernatural spirits

'Eid: feast

Fallah (pl. fallahin): peasant; in this book refers to non-barghuthi peasants

Farah: lit. Joyful occasion; wedding

Gharib (pl. ghuraba): strangers or outside the lineage

Ghazu (pl. ghazwat): nomadic raids

HADITH: traditions of the prophet Muhammad  
HADJAR: stone  
HAJJ: pilgrimage, also a person who makes the pilgrimage  
HALAL: permissible by religion  
HAQ AL-SHUF'A: right of neighbourhood (in land purchase)  
HARAH (pl. harat): living quarter  
HARAM: forbidden by religion (see also hurmah)  
HASAD: evil  
HAWAKIR: empty lots between houses used for gardening  
HILAL (pl. hlalat): lit. crescent; small window  
HOSH (pl. ahwash): courtyard  
Hurmah: sacred or holy; also a woman or wife

ILTIZAM (see also multazim): tax-farming; prebendalism  
IMAM: sheikh; community leader in prayer  
Isra': night journey and ascent (of the prophet Muhammad)

Jaha: marriage deputation  
JAMA'A: group of people; gathering  
JANNA: lit. reaper; breadwinner  
JARRAH: jug

KHABIEH (pl. khawabi): mud bins for food storage  
KHADEM: male servant  
KHAMIREH: yeast  
KHAN: inn for lodging travellers  
KHARAZEH (pl. KHARAZ): bead  
KHATIB: preacher  
KHIRBEH (pl. khirab): abandoned cite or abandoned ancient settlement  
KHUWWEH (also KHAWAH): protection money  
KHULWAH (pl. khulwat): hermitage  
KISHK: bay window or projected window  
KUTTAB: elementary school run by a sheikh

LAILAT IL-QADR: the night of the divine decree in Ramadan

MADAFEH: guesthouse

MA'DDOUD: tax collected for the expenses of the guesthouse  
MAJIDIEH: Ottoman currency; equiv. to one pound sterling  
MAKSALEH: seats on sides of entry  
MALAK (pl. malaikeh): angels  
M'ALLEM: master builder, master craftsman or teacher  
MANATIR: see qsur  
MAQAM (pl. maqamat): shrine  
MARA: woman; wife; see mahram  
MASHA': communal property  
MASTABEH: an elevated platform used as a multi-purpose space  
MARIS (pl. mawaris): strip of land (usually in communal land)  
MAWSIM (pl. mawasim): seasons; festive occasion  
MAWQID: fireplace  
MAZAR: shrine; see also maqam  
MEHBASH: mortar made from wood  
MIHRAB: prayer niche in mosque marking the direction of Mecca  
MIKHMAS: iron spoon  
MUATHEN: caller to prayer  
MUKHTAR: village headman  
MULK: freehold (private) property  
MULTAZIM: tax-farmer  
MUNEH: stored food for house consumption  
MUSHAHHAR: striped pink and white stone courses (urban Ottoman architecture)  
MUSLIMIN: Muslims  
MUZARA'A: land acquisition through reclaiming uncultivated land

NABI: prophet  
NARI: lightweight stone  
NATOUR: guard; caretaker  
NAWAR: gypsies  
NIDR: vow  
NQUT: gift given on the occasion of a wedding or house construction

'ONEH: communal help in house construction or harvesting

QA' EL BEIT: lower part of the house, used for lodging animals  
QABR (pl. Qbur): tombs; graves

QANATIR: miniature pillars  
 QARIET KURSI: throne village  
 Qos: arch; large niche in a wall for storing mattresses  
 QSUR (sing. qaser): lit. palace or field huts, storage  
 QUBBEH: dome  
 QURA IL-KARASI: throne villages  
 QUSSAH: section of the frontyard where herds are kept

RAWYEH: the upper part of a peasant house where food was stored

SAHA: village plaza  
 SALAH: prayer  
 SHABBEH: alum  
 SHAJARAH (SAJARAH): tree, as in shajarat al-haya ("tree of life")  
 SHAWAHID: stone tokens left by visitors on saints' tombs  
 SHAYTAN: Satan  
 SIDREH: zizyphus tree  
 SUNNAH: practices of the prophet (Muhammad)

TABUN (pl. tawabin): baking oven

ULAMA: learned men  
 UMAH: Muslim community  
 'UMUMIEH: communal; public

WALI/WILI (pl. awlia): saint  
 WAQF: religious endowment  
 Wijaq: fireplace

ZAJAL: improvised songs  
 ZARQA: blue  
 ZEER: big jug

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## INTERVIEWS

Abu-Adnan, (1984-1986), a prominent member of the Barghouthi clan, from the Dawood sub-clan, aged 75.

Abu-Hani, (1984-1986), the son of the village school (kuttab) sheikh, from the 'Alem family, aged 77.

Abu-Nada, (1984-1986), a prominent member of the Shu'aibi clan, aged 85.

Abu-Nayef, (1985) the mukhtar of the village from the lower quarter, aged 65.

Abu-Ziad, (1985) the oldest informant in Deir Ghassaneh, from the Shu'aibi clan, aged 96.

Abu-Zuhair, (1984), son of the last sheikh of Deir Ghassaneh, aged 90.

Muyysar, (1985-1986), a woman from the Shu'aibi clan, aged 48.

Um-Ezzat, (1985), an elderly woman originally from village of Majdal Sadiq, married to a Barghouthi, aged 84.

Um-Nada, (1985), an elderly woman from the Shu'aibi clan, aged 80.

Um-Nu'man, (1985), an elderly woman from the Dawood sub-clan, aged 60.