

tilled the land and owned little, as opposed to the Barghouthis who, by association and in the public image, were seen as the higher status group.

The Barghouthi-dominated villages were all in the western Bani Zaid sheikhdom, with the exception of the village of Qarawat Bani Zaid. Thus the inhabitants of these eight villages were socially as well as spatially divided into two distinct groups: Barghouthi and fallaheen. For the Barghouthis, these eight villages were seen as the pool for eligible marriages, and the different Barghouthi clans residing in these villages married within the lineage. Barghouthi marriages were only extended to the notable families in Kur and Majdal Sadik villages, both located outside the Bani Zaid area (Fig. 3.4). For the fallaheen clans, inter-village marriages were not restricted to the Bani Zaid area either, but extended to other fallaheen clans outside this sheikhdom. The physical proximity of the Bani Zaid villages, particularly the physical proximity and overlap of their fields, resulted in frequent contacts amongst their inhabitants. But again this was also true of non-Bani Zaid neighbouring villages such as Sinjil and el-Mizra'a. What is of main concern to us here is to investigate whether the peasants living in the Bani Zaid villages, saw this sheikhdom as a social and spatial unit or if it remained as a purely administrative and political one.

In contrast to individual villages which were conceived by their inhabitants as distinct spatial units, the Bani Zaid sheikhdom was perceived as a political-administrative unit. It was a unit of taxation and a potential unit for army mobilisation rather than a social, economic or spatial unit, particularly for the fallaheen.

In general the vast majority of Bani Zaid villages - as well as villages in other sheikhdoms - had very similar life styles. Land was the basis of their economy; kinship was the basis for social and economic organisation; and division of labour along gender lines was similar in most villages (with the exception of the Barghouthi women, particularly in the chief town of Deir Ghassaneh). The different village communities also had similar beliefs and similar ethical