

Rashaya el-Wadi

Mount Hermon (or Jabal el-Sheikh)

Rashaya el-Wadi covers an area of 76 square km facing Mount Hermon (Jabal-el-Sheikh) at an altitude which varies between 850 and 1.650 meters. An essential feature of the locality is its diversity, both cultural and ecological.

Rashaya el-Wadi is the administrative center of the caza of Rashaya. The town's population is about 8500, and its municipality was incorporated in 1860.

In the Syriac language, "Rashaya" means a summit; and Al-Wadi (the Valley) refers to the surrounding area known as Wadi Al-Taym.

The origin of the name Rashaya may also be Aramean, where "Rish-aya" stands for "Aya's head". Aya was the god of rain and storms, and the Babylonians probably celebrated his cult on Mount Hermon.



General view of the village

Hermon or Haramoun means the sacred place of the only god. Mount Hermon is the highest peak of the Anti-Lebanon range, bordering three countries: Lebanon, Syria and Palestine. From its summit you can see also Syria, Palestine, parts of Jordan and Cyprus, in addition to Lebanon.

The Phoenicians called Mount Hermon "Siron" (the glittering), but the Amorites called it "Senir" or "Shenir". For the Arameans it was "Tourda Talja" and for the Arabs, "Jabal al-Sheikh".

The Cananeans found it so magnificent that they made a god of it, whom they named "Baal Haramoun" and they built several temples on its heights.

The French archaeologist, Clermont Ganneau, and researcher Louis Lortier, state that a sacred area does exist at the summit of Mount Hermon where the remains of an oval perimeter wall and inscriptions in greek on a stone in the wall were discovered.

In his conference on Mount Hermon, the histori- an Youssef el-Hourani affirmed that this stone had been described in 1870 by Sir Charles Warren as being 4 feet long, 18 inches high and 12 inches wide. The inscriptions, as translated by Clermont Ganneau read : "By order of the sacred all-powerful god all votives should pass here". Those were the orders given to the pilgrims to make them walk around the "Holy of Holies" lying behind the wall.

The Snows of Hermon

All along the course of history, the snows of Mount Hermon provided water for the kings of Tyre, Sidon, Damascus and Palestine. Some of this "white gold" was transported by land and sea over 500 km to ensure the needs in water of the Pharaohs.

The Hill of the Transfiguration

Located at an altitude of 1650m, this pleasantly wooded hill could be the site where Christ's Transfiguration occurred. It overlooks "Monk's Valley" south of Mount Hermon and "Sammoukha" (the Monk's Hermitage), the names of which seem to be inspired by this holy place.

Brief Recent History

Rashaya was occupied by the Romans and the Crusaders. In 1172, having overcome the Crusaders, the Emirs Chehab settled in Wadi Al-Taym and governed the region from Hasbaya and Rashaya for seven centuries until 1860. Rashaya is the birthplace of Emir Basheer Chehab I who succeeded his uncle, Emir Ahmad Maan (who died leaving no male descendant)



Rashaya and Hermon

in governing Mount Lebanon. And, given the political, military and family alliances between the Chehabs, lords of Wadi Al-Taym, and the Maans, lords of Mount Lebanon, Rashaya acquired a particular importance during the reign of Emir Fakhreddine II.

In the 19th century, during the expedition to Syria, Rashaya was the centre of the rebellion against the Egyptian army of Ibrahim Pasha.

The Independence Citadel

The citadel was built during the 11th century by the Crusaders who wished, on the one hand, to protect merchant convoys between Syria and Palestine, and on the other, to acquire an observation post from which they could oversee the convoys of pilgrims and travellers going to Jerusalem.

Since the conquest of Wadi Al-Taym by the Emirs Chehab in 1172, the Citadel became their residence until 1860.

In 1943, the French mandatory forces held behind bars in this Citadel and for eleven days, six Lebanese political leaders who were claiming independence for their country: Bechara El-Khoury, Riad El-Solh, Selim Takla, Adel Osseriane, Camille Chamoun, and Abdel-Hamid Karame.

November 22nd - the day they were freed - is Independence Day in Lebanon, which is celebrated every year, and Rashaya's citadel is also referred-to as Independence Citadel.

Perched atop a hill and with a view of Mount Hermon, the Citadel of Rashaya is built with thick walls and comprises four distinct parts:

First, **Roman period**, identifiable by an underground passage 1500m long ending in Ain-Mry, used for moving fighters, and in periods of siege, to bring in supplies.

Second, **Crusader period**, includes the wells drilled in the rock, one of which can be seen till this day and is still in use. The lower level passages date also



Independence Citadel

to this period, as do both a warehouse in the North-East side, and the tower which is the highest point of the Citadel.

Third, built by the **Emirs Chehab** : in 1370, Emir Abou Bakr built a residence within the Citadel, where he could live, together with his family and followers, during his hunting parties. The entrance to the Citadel, the wall and arcades on the south-east side, were also built by Chehab Emirs.

Fourth, built by the **French**, early 20th century, the East wall used the stones from the old houses which had been built around the Citadel.

In October 1925, the Citadel became the garrison for the French mandatory forces, who were attacked on 21 November of the same year, by the Druze, who had revolted and were led by Sultan Pasha el-Attrash.

After the French mandatory forces departed in 1946, the Lebanese gendarmerie took over the Citadel, later handing it over to the Lebanese army who occupy it to this day.

The Old Souk of Rashaya

Located in the centre of the town, the old Souk goes back to the 17th century and 36 old houses line it.

A 250m long road crosses the Souk; it is paved with

stones artistically laid out by master-paver Chucri Abdel Ahad, upon the initiative of the French authorities.

In 1997, the old souk was restored and illuminated by the Lebanese Ministry of Tourism.

Places of Worship

There are four churches in Rashaya. Saint Nicholas and Notre-Dame are Greek-Orthodox. The Greek-Catholic Church of Notre-Dame was built in 1883. The Church of Mar Moussa el Habashi (Syriac) is the oldest church in Rashaya. Boat-shaped, it was built in the 17th century when the Syriacs of Syria, Iraq, Anatolia, Cilicia and Urfa, settled in Lebanon. An exact replica of the historical church of "Kalaat Jendel" in Syria, it still possesses the icon of its patron saint, Moussa el-Habashi (Moses the Ethiopian, one of the great preachers in Egypt) which is over 500 years old. Only two other copies exist, one at Saint Jacob's convent for nuns, the other at the convent of Mar Gerges el Harf.



Souk of Rashaya



Mar Moussa el Habashi Church

At nearby Ain-Ata, Makam el-Sheikh Fadel (Sanctuary of Sheikh Fadel) bears the name of one of the great sages of the Druze community. Not far is an archeological site where the entrance is littered with frescoes and fragments of stone carved with roman inscriptions and an eagle readying for flight.

Traditional Homes

The traditional architecture of Rashaya el-Wadi is reflected in its old homes built of cut stones, roofed with red tiles, most of which have "mansards" (rooms under the roof).

Stone arches embellish the facades and two windows are on each side of the main door.

Balconies are supported by columns in stone (20 X 30 cm) or iron, and have pretty iron-work balustrades. The interiors of these dwellings, with ceilings at 4m height, is divided into four, six, seven eight rooms, all giving unto a large interior salon, the "liwan".

The Environment

Its proximity to Mount Hermon confers upon Rashaya many ecological advantages. The valleys as well as the villages of El-Moloul, El-Nossoub and Chrabi are covered by dense forests and a varied vegetation. Louis Lortier lists in one of his books, the numerous wild plants that he discovered by chance on the flanks of Mount Hermon: "Corydale" with its purple flowers, "Alyssum" and many other plants of medicinal value such as "Hysope" and "Ferula Hermonis".

Arts and Crafts

Rashaya el-Wadi is well known for its silversmiths. This craft began in the 17th century, thanks to the Emirs Chehab whose wives and daughters liked to adorn themselves with all sorts of jewelry: earrings, rings, bracelets, necklaces, belts and pendants. In parallel, other craftsmen specialized in putting ornaments on saddles. These crafts are still active today.

Rashaya el-Wadi is also known for its wood and kerosene heaters, called "sobia".



Silverwork



Grape of Rashaya

Grape and Honey

Many grape varieties are grown in Rashaya, of which the famous "Chammouti" mainly used in the preparation of "debs enab" (grape molasses), rich in calcium and iron. The grape juice is cooked at high temperature to become "debs". Grapes have formed Rashaya's main agricultural product for the several centuries. Today you can still find old grape-presses lying among the vineyards.

Visitors never fail to buy currants, raisins, or "debs" during their stay in Rashaya.

The same goes for honey. The absence of pollution and the abundant flora of Mount Hermon both favour having bees and obtaining high quality honey with delicious flavours. "Royal Jelly", with its remarkable medicinal value, is also produced.



The surroundings of Rashaya

- Roman Temple of **AIN-HARCHA** (10 km from Rashaya) built in 114 BC is in good condition with sarcophagi of same period. On the walls, sculptures represent sun-god "Helios" and moon-goddess "Celan"

- Roman Citadel at **AIHA**: only the foundations are still visible. It over-looks the Aiha plain, where fragments of statues and inscriptions on stone are found.

- From AIHA to **KFARKOUK** (nearby) ruins of a temple dedicated to Pan, near the village fountain. Even today, the local shepherds believe that this temple protects their animals from sickness.

- towards **BEKKA**, houses built on ruins of temple of Adonis, then

- towards **YANTA**, near its North Entrance, sanctuary of god Ilon.

- On hills at **HELOUEH**, ruins of 3 temples justifying the detour, then on to **DEIR-EL-ACHAIR**, visit impressive roman temple over-looking the valley of WADI-AL-KARN which separates Lebanon from Syria.

Leisure and Commodities

At the entrance to Rashaya, a **PUBLIC GARDEN** offers a pleasant place to rest in.

For **EATING**, a number of restaurants offer delicious Lebanese dishes, among which: "Al Rabieh" and "Al Wadi".

In summer, during August and September, festivals are organised for the joy of visitors, the most important being those of popular poetry and Independence Citadel.

Furthermore, on August 6 of each year, and to commemorate Christ's Transfiguration, The Rashaya municipality organizes a guided night march lasting

two hours, from Al Jernaya until the top of Mount Hermon, from which point the participants observe a magnificent sunrise.

Also, Rashaya has an intense cultural life. Painting ateliers and many other artistic activities are regularly available to all visitors.



The temple of Ain Harcha

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Rashaya

el-Wadi

