

# Baadaran, Moukhtara and Miha

## Al-Moukhtara

Moukhtara is located about 50km south-east of Beirut Lebanon's capital, 29 Km from the coastal city of **Damour** and 10 kilometers southwest of **Beiteddine**. Lying about 850m above sea level. Its spring and summer seasons are very mild, while its autumns and winters cause no hardship. With a yearly rainfall of 1170 mm, Moukhtara is very rich in water, for the two rivers **Birket al Arous** and **Bir el Blat** born at a spring in **Barouk** and **Wadi-el-Maa's** meet in the village valley. Situated at the cross-road of many other villages of the upper **Chouf** area, its strategic location makes it a necessary passage from the Chouf to the Bekaa valley, or to the south. Since the beginning of the 17th century, it has been the stronghold of the Druze **Joumblatt** family.

Moukhtara itself, is a pleasant and authentic

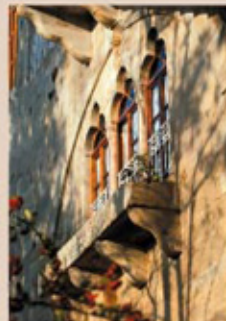


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Joumblatt Palace, Moukhtara



Joumblatt Palace, Moukhtara



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Lebanese village to visit, with old and narrow streets. The houses are of stones, and some are separated by open-air stairways which include a channel for running water. **Walid Joumblatt** and the Municipality have launched a major facelift, now underway, to make of Moukhtara, an exemplary village, respecting Lebanese features and traditions.

**Etymology:** In Arabic, "Al-Moukhtara" means "the chosen". Some people claim that it was attributed around the year 1000 by the Fatimides who added "al" to every town or village name. Others claim that the name was attributed during the time of the Crusades, after a Baron Moohtar had resided there. It is also said that the present Joumblatt Palace was built on the remains of a Crusader castle.

**The Moukhtara Palace:** in this important Chouf locality that has preserved its heritage, the most prestigious item of which is the seigniorial domain of the Lebanese leader Walid Joumblatt.

**Cheikh Bachir Joumblatt** built it over a 200 years old structure, providing it with water from the Barouk river. It remained the most beautiful

palace in that area, until the Beiteddine Palace was completed. It combines oriental and italian influences, and the most recent changes were made in the 19th century. During the battles with Emir Bachir II Chéhab, in 1825, the palace was damaged but was rebuilt soon thereafter. Visitors will enjoy its beauty and architecture and its pleasant gardens and fountains. It also has remarkable carvings on stone, sometimes on more than one side. In his book "Two Years in the Levant", the French ambassador, Gabriel Puaux describes the palace as a fortified castle capable of holding out in a long lasting siege, and that the beautiful carpets he saw in the colonnaded room resembled those described in "Thousand and One Nights".

This palace remains the most visited site in Moukhtara and is popularly known as "**Dar al Moukhtara**", due to the open-door policy of the Joumblatt family, who welcome all visitors, with a warm cup of Arabic coffee, in the true Lebanese tradition.

**The Joumblatt's :** originally "Janboulad" (heart of steel).

The ancestor, Ibn Arabou (1530-1580), governed Aleppo and Maaret-Al- Naaman (in Syria) where he



Joumblatt Palace, Moukhtara

© Raymond Yazbeck

brought stability and prosperity, and bore the title of "Emir of the Emirs". In 1607 after attempts at rebellion, his descendants were pursued by the Ottomans and spread out to several areas. In 1630, Janboulad Ibn Said Ibn Mustafa Ibn Hussein Bacha Ibn Janboulad and his son Rabah, took refuge in Lebanon, where Emir **Fakhreddine II Maan** installed them in the Chouf under his protection, and granted them the governance of **Chkif-Arnoun**. They gained in preeminence, were adopted by the Druze feudal lords to the extent that, after 1697, when the Maan lineage became extinct, they governed the Chouf.

**Cheikh Ali Joumblatt**, the real founder of the family in Lebanon, governed the Chouf from 1712 until 1778. Immensely rich after his marriage to the sole heiress of the Kadi family, his political powers gained strength. He treated the other communities without discrimination and offered them gifts of land. For instance, the Monastery of the Holy Savior near Joun, was built on an area that he had gifted to the Melkite community.

**Cheikh Bachir Joumblatt** regularly paid his dues to the Emir of Lebanon.

**Bachir II Chéhab**, so that the latter may satisfy the cupidity of the Ottoman Pachas. The doors of his Moukhtara palace were open to all who sought his help or advice. His hospitality was legendary, and his receptions were sumptuous, both gaining him the nick-name "**Amoud-Al-Sama**" i.e "Pillar of Heaven". He treated all communities with benevolence and extended financial assistance to the catholic Christians which led **Pope Pius VII** to thank him. His political ambitions were his un-doing. He became the rival of Emir Bachir II. When his rebellion was put down, in 1825, by the Emir's troop, Cheikh Bachir fled to Damascus where he was arrested, then taken to Acre where he was put to death together with his ally Cheikh Amine Imad.

**Fouad Joumblatt** took up the function of Caimacam at the beginning of the French mandate. He was assassinated in 1925. His wife "**Sit Nazira**", who until then had cared primarily about the education of her



*The entrance of the Spring 1835*



*Hussein Abdel Samad residence - Amatur*

two children, Kamal and Linda, succeeded her husband as head of the clan. As the French ambassador relates, she proved to be an astute and dynamic leader, discharging with intelligence and diplomacy the heavy burden which befell her.

Her son **Kamal Joumblatt** (1917-1977) a great politician and thinker, founded the Lebanese Socialist Progressive Party which he headed until his demise, and was many times member of Parliament and Minister. He authored many publications of which "This is my Testament" published in Arabic, English and French.

His sister **Linda Joumblatt** married **Hassan El-Attrache the Emir of Djebel Druze**.

## Amatur

A pretty village close to Moukhtara with houses typical of the traditional architecture found in the Lebanese mountains. An ancient "khalwa"- for the Druze, a place



*Maqam El Nabi Ayoub, Niha*

where the initiated meet to pray and meditate- is located on the heights of Amatur.

## Niha-Chouf

Is located under Mount Niha at 1050m altitude. Its blankets made of goat wool are well-known, as well as two sites: **Makam-El-Nabi-Ayoub** and **Chkiff-Tyron**.

**1-Makam El Nabi Ayoub** -"the Shrine of the Prophet Job"- sits on the flank of Mount Niha and is a pilgrimage destination of great value to all Druze. Rebuilt several times, it was recently provided with new pavilions and rooms that can accommodate thousands of pilgrims.

### 2-Chkiff -Tyron

At an altitude of 1100m lies an impressive fortress which appears to be hewn in the mountain rocks. It overlooks the confluence of the Barouk river and the springs of Wadi-Jezzine which become the Awali river that ends in the Mediterranean sea near Saida.

This site was the "Tyron Grotto" to the Crusaders and it commended the access to their Barony of Sagette (Saida). It was known as Chkiff-Tyron to the Arabs, and



*Serail Sheikh Ali Joumblatt entrance*

to-day, it is referred-to as "Kalaat-Niha (Niha fortress) or Tyron-Niha.

Comparable to the **Al-Habis** grotto in Tiberias (Palestine), the site combines, on several levels, a series of natural grottos as well as a man-made ones and water-cisterns.

It is not known for sure whether, in 1663, **Emir Fakhreddine the Great** took refuge in this grotto or the one in Jezzine, when he was fleeing before the Ottomans led by Ahmad Pacha Kichk. The Ottomans were bent on snuffing out the revolt of those Lebanese fighting to unify Mount-Lebanon and render it autonomous.

The Emir finally surrendered to the Ottomans who exiled him to Istanbul before executing him and his three sons. His father, the Emir **Korkmaz**, had also taken refuge in this grotto where he died.

## Baadaran

59 km from Beirut and at an altitude of 1100m sits Baadaran, a pretty example of a Lebanese village. Its monuments, dating to the feudal period, bear witness to a

prestigious past: here are found the palace of Ali Pacha Joumblatt- Fakhreddin II's ally- and other rich abodes continuously inhabited to this day.

Its climate is temperate and healthy in both spring and summer which draws in vacationers and tourists. Autumn and winter are rainy, the yearly rainfall averaging 1000mm. It snows often in winter, some drifts reaching a depth of one meter.

Baadaran is surrounded by a privileged natural environment: forests of oak and pine, vineyards as far as the eye can see, fruit trees galore in addition to a multitude of sweet smelling herbs and plants. Three forests, where can be enjoyed camping, walking and watching birds and animals are: Al-Dabche, La Pinede and Aïn-el-Safiie. Several fountains supply the village with drinking water: Aïn-Mrah, Aï-Kabou and the oldest Aïn-el-Safiie, at the bottom of the forest, bearing the same name. At the entrance to the village, a huge rock with a strangely inclined -Abou-Mankoud- bids welcome to all visitors and Al-Kawayer, a large area of rocks exposed to sun and rain, provides an impressive picture of the result of natural erosion on stone and rocks.

**Etymology:** Baadaran, in Syriac, means "stop-over" or "halt". Indeed, this site was an ideal stop-over point for all persons travelling between North Sinai or Palestine and Mount Lebanon or Damascus.

### Historical and Cultural Heritage:

**-The Joumblatt Palace:** some historians claim that this palace was built on the ruins of a roman citadel. Today's palace was built by Cheikh Ali Joumblatt (1712 to 1778).

**-The portal of Taj-Eddine Palace:** bears witness to the Taj-Eddine family's prestige. The palace was built by **Cheikh Rabah Ibn-Taj-Eddine** in 1676, and its portal was recently restored by the Directorate General of Antiquities.

**-Khalwat-Al-Kataleb and the Church:** both bear witness to a Druzo-Christian co-existence, both cultural and religious.

**-The old cemeteries:** of which that of the Joumblatts. Also, ancient sarcophagi.

**-The ruins of Khrayeb: which faces Baadaran.**

**-The old presses for wine and olive oil.**

### Handicraft and other activities:

Baadaran has maintained certain ancient crafts that had brought it some renown: weaving on the "Nol", stone cutting, food preserves, handicrafts and the manufacture of articles made of straw.

Every year, meetings, festivals and fairs are organized in order to promote handicrafts, sport competitions and scouting.

Amateurs of parapente can practice their sport over **Ras-al-Mankoud** which overlooks **Amatour**. Also a superb plot of land of 25.000m<sup>2</sup> in which can be found an important gathering of birds and animals, notably gazelles and partridge, (both protected by the National Hunting Council) is especially favoured by persons loving to fly kites.

## Maasser-El-Chouf

At an altitude of 1250m, the houses of this picturesque village have all kept their traditional red tiled roofs. Both the church and monastery Saint Michel are located at the center of the village.

**"Maasser"** means millstone or press, and many can be found in the village. Its sharp and healthy climate attracts a great number of summer tourists.

## Chouf Natural Reserve

With an area of 15600 ha this is the largest natural reserve in Lebanon. Some of its trees are over two thou-





*Maasser el-Chouf*

sand years old. It is home for medium-sized animals like wolves and foxes as well as a large variety of birds and wild plants. It is an ideal destination for amateurs of mountain climbing, jogging and walking, as well as for those who love animals. Its mountain-top stands at 1940m and allows a panoramic view eastward over the village of **Barouk**, the lake of **Karaoun** and the Bekaa valley, and westward, the coastline and the Mediterranean sea.

## Barouk

Lies on the flank of a mountain which bears the same name, some 1170m above sea level. An ideal holiday center, due to its tonic weather, and its pure water springs, its cascades and restaurants amid the cedars of Lebanon.

## Baakline

Located 4km south-east of Beiteddine, Baakline became in 1120 the first capital of the **Maan Emirs**, after the Ottoman Sultan, Sélim I, granted Fakhreddin I Maan the governorate of Chouf and precedence over the other feudal lords of the Lebanese mountains. His grand-son Fakhreddin II The Great, founded Greater



*Hamadeh Palace, Baakline - 1591*

Lebanon, and became famous for his unceasing fight for Lebanon's independence. He also built close links with Tuscany and pushed Lebanon on the road to modernization.

At Baakline, an ancient "serail" has been converted into an impressive public library, and old homes give the town an aristocratic and elegant appearance. Its handicrafts are famous for crochet work, embroidery, and other manual works, but its main cottage industry is the weaving of carpets with designs comparable to those of Persian carpets.

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