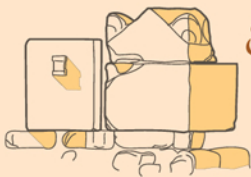


Hasbaya



The Hasbaya Citadel of the Chehabs and Wadi Taym

Wadi Taym is a long fertile valley running parallel to the western foot of Mount Hermon. Watered by the Hasbani River, the low hills of Wadi Taym are covered with rows of silver-green olive trees, its most important source of income. Villagers also produce honey, grapes, figs, prickly pears, pine nuts and other fruit.

Mount Hermon, 2,745 meters high, is a unifying presence throughout Wadi Taym. This imposing mountain held great religious significance for the Canaanites and Phoenicians, who called it the seat of the All High. The Romans, recognizing it as a holy site, built many temples on its slopes. The Old Testament refers to it as "Baal-Hermon", while in the New Testament the mountain is the site of the transfiguration of Jesus.

A Historic Site

Hasbaya, the capital of the Wadi Taym, is an attractive town full of history. A good deal of this history transpired at the huge citadel that is today Hasbaya's chief claim to fame. Owned by the Chehab emirs, the citadel forms the major part of a



View of the Chehabi compound

Chehabi compound—a group of buildings surrounding a central square of 150 meters long and 100 meters wide. Several medieval houses and a mosque make up the rest of the compound, which covers a total of 20,000 square meters. The citadel is situated on a hill overlooking a river which encircles it from the north. A site steeped in mystery, the citadel is so old its origins are uncertain and so big that even today no one is sure how many rooms it contains. The known history of the structure begins with the Crusaders, but it may go back even earlier to an Arab fortification or a Roman building. Won by the Chehabs from the Crusaders in 1170, the fortress was rebuilt by its new owners. Since then it has been burned many times in battle and was often the scene of bloody conflict. Most recently, it was struck by rockets during the Israeli occupation of south Lebanon (1978-2000). Amazingly, for almost all of the eight centuries since it fell to the Chehabs, the citadel has been occupied by members of this same family. Today

actual ownership is shared by some fifty branches of the family, some of whom live there permanently.

A number of attempts have been made to repair the old castle, which has deteriorated over the centuries. Unfortunately, the Lebanese war and the Israeli occupation have prevented serious restoration from going ahead. Today, however, the citadel is the object of a concerted campaign to preserve and restore it.

Although privately owned, the citadel is listed as a Historic Site by the Lebanese General Directorate of Antiquities, which is responsible for its maintenance.

Visiting the Citadel

The building consists of three floors above the ground and three subterranean floors. Constructed in stages, often damaged and rebuilt, today the sprawling structure incorporates a mix of styles, building techniques and states of repair.

The tower in the southwest corner and the eastern wall — both visible from the third floor — are easily identifiable as Crusader. Other medieval elements are arrow slit windows and machicolations — small openings through which hot oil or missiles were dropped on the enemy. Despite its primary function as a fortress, the castle also possesses many graceful architectural features such as slender columns and arched windows.

Entrance and first courtyard

Wide steps lead to the main entrance, where the original Crusader door still swings smoothly on 800-year-old hinges. Four meters wide and three meters high, the passage allowed horsemen to enter the castle without dismounting.





View of first floor balcony

Stone lions, a heraldic emblem of the Chehab family, decorate the wall on either side of the arched portal. Two large lions are depicted in chains, each beside a weak, unchained rabbit. A set of smaller lions appears within the arch above the doorway and just below that is a plaque in Arabic commemorating an

addition to the castle made in the year 1009 Hejira by Emir Ali Chehab-some 400 years ago. Once through the portal, you enter a huge stone-paved courtyard surrounded by castle walls 1.5 meters thick. In addition to the attractive windows, old balconies and staircases, the courtyard has four main points of interest: a limited view of the dungeons, two important arched entrances and a wing once occupied by Ibrahim Pasha of Egypt.

In a corner to the right the main entry gate is the only glimpse the modern visitor will get of the dungeons. Through a break in the wall one can look down on the room where the ruler of the citadel, once sheltered. If necessary, he could escape from here through special tunnels: one leading to the Abu Djaj River



The main entrance

north of the castle, and the other to the mosque.

Now closed off by the Lebanese Directorate General of Antiquities, the three subterranean floors possess their own dark history. Crusaders buried their dead here and prisoners were kept in its dungeons. During the citadel's heyday the lower floors were also used to store water and other supplies, as well as to house animals.

At the far end of the courtyard is a wide arched opening set in a wall of alternating black and white stone. This was the entrance of the "diwan" or salon of Sitt Chams, wife of Bechir Chehab II, governor of Mount Lebanon between 1788 and 1840. To the left of the diwan is the wing occupied by Ibrahim Pasha of Egypt during his campaign against the Ottomans in 1838. Another, higher entrance, in a wall of yellow and white stone, once gave onto a Crusader church, which was long ago destroyed.

The rooms surrounding the lower courtyard including what was once the stables are now used for storage.

The Second floor

Stairs lead to the second floor and a courtyard with a small, tiled pool at its center.



Second floor courtyard

A splendid room just off the courtyard is interesting for its painted walls decorated with delicate carvings. Although faded with age, it is possible to make out the fleur de lys and star. This floor, as well as the third, contains apartments of the families who still live on the premises.

The Third floor

The third floor, added by the Chehabs in the 19th century, also features a courtyard and pool. Typical Mamluke and Ottoman style squinches or honeycomb decorations, are set above the entrance, and below that is a seal with an inscription praising additions made by Emir Mohammed to the citadel. One wall features elegant stonework, some of which was removed from the lower floors. Two of the Italianate marble columns are reportedly hollow, a device used to detect the sound of approaching enemy cavalry.



Souk el Khan

From this level you can enter the Crusader tower, and if you dare, climb its very narrow winding staircase. This is also a good place to view the town around the citadel, including some of the contemporary buildings of the Chehabi compound. Of these, the mosque is the most important. Dating to the 12th century, its hexagonal minaret is decorated with colored stones. A modern addition stands beside the old mosque.

The Chehabs, Hasbaya and Wadi Taym

The Chehabs, who trace their lineage back to Qoraish tribe of the Prophet Mohammad, were made princes by the first caliph, Abu Bakr al-Saddiq, in the year 636 A.D. Since then, their lands and titles have passed on from father to son. Their ancestor, Malik, of the Makhzoum clan, fought in the battle of Yarmouk that gave Syria to the Arabs. The Chehabs also fought victoriously in the battles in Damascus against the forces of the Byzantine Empire in 633 A.D.

The clan remained in Syria's Hauran district for some 600 years until 1170. In that year they moved into Wadi Taym to fight against the Crusaders in Rashaya as part of a 20,000-strong army headed by the Chehabi Emir Mounkez. The campaign was a success. The Crusaders were driven from Rashaya to their fortress in Hasbaya where the besieging army continued its attack. Within ten days the Chehabi forces had taken the castle, a victory that marked the entrance of the family into Lebanon and Wadi Taym.

The victors repaired and rebuilt the former crusader citadel to suit their needs,

and for the next 700 years the Chehabs used it as a base to rule the area. In the process, they formed political and military alliances with the Maani princes, who were the Druze rulers of Mount Lebanon. This long-term association laid the foundations for the creation of an independent and unified Lebanon.



The Hasbani River

The Chehabs and the forces of Maani Prince Fakhreddine fought together in 1623 during the battle of Anjar to defeat the Ottomans and their Yemeni allies. Some ten years later the Ottomans banished the Chehabs to Aleppo where they spent six years in exile. They returned back and in 1697 became the rulers of Mount Lebanon after the death of Ahmed Maan. The Chehabs remained in power for nearly 150 years until abolition of the monarchy in 1841. Bechir Chehab II, who became governor in 1788, was the greatest of the Chehabi rulers and it was he who constructed the palace of Beiteddine.

Social Life

Given the history of the citadel it is not surprising that its residents spent a lot of time planning military campaigns and ensuring the defense of their towns and lands. Even the main entertainments of those times, equestrian tournaments and hunting, were related to the military life. Every Friday equestrian, jousting, archery and fencing competitions took place in the big square near the castle. Parts of this popular

spectacle were the emir's magnificent horses, which on special occasions were adorned with lavish caparisons and other decorations. Hunting took place in the rural areas around Hasbaya, especially Chouwayya in the foothills of Mount Hermon. Each hunter had his own black hawk and an attendant to prepare the hawk's food and see to its well-being. When the chase was over, participants were often invited to one of the emir's hunting lodges for a meal and a rest.

Around Hasbaya

In the environs of Hasbaya is *Khalwat el-Bayada*, the principle sanctuary of the Druzes. It consists of some 40 hermitages or *khalwat* where thousands of initiates come each Thursday on spiritual retreats. As a courtesy, visitors should request permission from the resident sheikh before venturing around the site. Women are asked to cover their heads with scarves.

Souk El Khan

Recently restored, the ruins of a caravansary or "khan" built in 1350 by Emir Abou Bakr Chehab stand to the left, on the road to Hebbariyyeh. This is where Ali, son of Fakhreddine Maan, is said to have been killed. Nearly of this once busy caravansary a popular open market known as the "Souk el Khan" is held every Tuesday.

Roman Temple at Hebbariyyeh

In Hebbariyyeh village look for a Roman temple on the left of the main road. The temple originally had two columns supporting the pediment, but today only the bases remain. Some of the walls are preserved to a height of 8 meters and an ionic corner pilaster and the cornice of the south wall still survive.





Roman Temple at Hebbariyyeh

Inside are two statuary niches with an inverted seashell motif. Above the upper niche is a six-line dedicatory inscription in Greek.

Rachaya El Foukhar

Rachaya el Foukhar is a pretty village on the slopes of Mount Hermon. Its name means "Rashaya of the Pottery" and today two workshops are still operating here. Kilns are only busy in the summer months, but the pottery is available for sale throughout the year. Among the designs on offer are "douaks" or spouted water jars with geometric designs, which are used to assure a ready supply of cool water. Another popular item is the "magic pitcher". Water is poured in from a hole in the bottom and in the opening at the top, but only comes out from the spout.



Spouted water jug

Sheb'aa

Sheb'aa lies in a valley at the foot of the Mount Hermon at an altitude of 1400 meters above the sea level. Its many springs of sweet water -the most important is "Ain-el-Joz"- as well as its many grottoes and forests, make it an ideal Lebanese summer resort.



Khalvat El-Bayada

There are seven 500 years old water-mills in the valley of Naher el Mghara, that until recently, were still being used by the people of Rachaya, Kfeir, and Ain Kinia, for grinding wheat and cereals and crushing olives. One of them has been rehabilitated to function again after years of interruption and another one refurbished as a specimen in the water-mill museum, the first one of its kind in the middle-East region.

Amenities: A pleasant hotel with a swimming pool is located in Ibel Saqi near Hasbaya. Several restaurants on the picturesque Hasbani River serve good Lebanese food including fresh fish.

Lebanon - Ministry of Tourism

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