

Hermel

had called "Paradeissos" or "Triparadeissos" and were considered an excellent bridge of geographical reference able to mark state borders.

We find the traces of these "gardens" or "paradisies" above el-Qaa' at the place called "al-Bassateen" which is an Arabic translation of the Greek word "paradeissos".

These gardens were irrigated from channels, the most spectacular of which is "Qanat-el-Beida" or the white channel, a large underground conduct, stacked out with ventilations shafts, arranged at regular intervals. The underground channels departed from ancient dams near the surface channels of which are still in use today.

The Orontis (489km)

The name of the **Orontis** is very old; it is mentioned in the Mesopotamian texts of the first millennium B.C. and by classic authors under the hellenized form "**Orontes**".

The Arabs sources knew certainly of the term **Nahr-el-Oront**, but, as it flows South-Northward they had preferred to call it **Nahr el-Maghloub** [the reversed river], and **Nahr-el-Assi** (the rebel river) because it could not be irrigated unless it is tamed by the Norias. However the etymology of the Arabian name Assi comes from **Axios**, the name that was given by the Macedonians since **Alexander the Great**, as it reminded them of their Axios, which is now known as the Vardar River.

Hermel and the forests of Lebanon

In spite of its venerable past, Hermel does not appear in the texts until the middle of the second millennium

in the 15th century B.C. in the annals of Thoutmosis III under the name of **A-r-n-m-** or **H-r-n-m** (Arnab or Harnam). In the 14th century B.C its king or cheikh, Danel the Harnamite or Danel of Harnam, is mentioned in the "**Legend of Danel**" or "**Aqhat**" discovered in Ras-Shamra (Ugarit) which has taught us that this king had the reputation of a just devout and Wiseman who was worried about widows and orphans. His memory remained so vivacious in the region that, one thousand years later, the prophet **Ezekiel** alludes to his justice and wisdom. In the 13th century B.C. the site is mentioned again regarding the Qadesh battle, in the annals of **Ramses II**.

After the upheavals of the end of the second millennium B.C., the first millennium sees Assyrian power imposing itself over all the Near-East. As they approached Lebanon from the East and Hermel being in its natural passage and because of the Assyrian increasing request of cedar wood from the Phoenician cities, Hermel had a role to play in the exploitation of the forest. The Assyrian kings boast in their annals about having brought back to Assyria the cedar trunks, cut from the Lebanese forest and it is very likely that these facts were related on the steles of Nahr el-Kalb (dog-river); however due to the state of these steles the contents can not be read, though the one of

Located at the feet of the oriental buttresses of the northern Lebanon, 5km from the spring of the Orontis River and in the middle of a grassy ghouta, Hermel consists of an archeological "tell" at the foot of which mills, drums and capitals of columns are lying, attesting the antiquity of the site. Its proximity to the source of the Orontis and the most forested part of Lebanon, have, since the ancient times, destined it and its surrounding area to be a border land, a zone of waters distribution and a path approaching one of the most covered forests of the oriental empires.

The Sources of the Orontis

The Hermel sources are the most beautiful of the three groups of the Orontis springs that are located in the north of the Beqaa; since the antiquity they have constituted the center of the vast gardens that the ancient texts



Cascade El Dardara



Ain ez-Zarqa El-Assi



Hermel forest

Nabuchodonazar with replicas in the **Djebel Akroum** Valley and Qammou'a above Hermel can still be studied.

In **Wadi Brissa**, **Nabuchodonazar** had left 2 steles: the first one shows him stabbing a lion raised on the rear paws while the second represents him standing before a tree. The cuneiform inscriptions on it mention the Lebanese forest where the King had with his bare hands cut the enormous pines that he then transported to Babylon. The steles of **Wadi es-Sabe'**, to the west of Akroum, one represents Nabuchodonazar as in Brissa stabbing a lion, the other shows him standing in prayer in front of divine symbols with a third located in the mountain between Akroum and Hermel.

During the grey era (6th. 4th c.B.C.) the Lebanese forest became a "**Firdaos**" ("**paradise**", "**paradeisos**" in Greek), a reserve of the King of the kings, left to the care of the royal officials. This seizure on the forest would have affected the tacit understanding between the Persians and Phoenicians and has probably initiated the revolt of Tyre, Sidon and Arwad, which had gathered in a federation at Tripoli; Sidon took the initiative in the revolt of 351B.C. drawing the wood out of the King's paradise castigating it and burning the necessary for navy building.

By right of conquest the forest passes from **Persian** to **Alexander the Great**. Then to his successors the Lagides and the Seleucids as "**chóra baziliki**" or "**royal land**".

During the reign of the roman emperors, it became a private imperial property, run by indigenous princes. In order to protect it, the Roman Emperor Hadrien bounded it by inscriptions forbidding deforestation.

The monuments of Hermel and its region

The prehistoric origins of Hermel are still unknown, the Bronze and the Iron Age have to be sought-after, in the Tell which dominates it, and that still unfortunately unexcavated. The only visible lefts are the megalithic dolmens from the end of the 4th and the beginning of the 3rd millennium B.C. found at the northeast of Hermel confirm the antiquity of the site.

The most famous monument of the greco-roman period is indisputably "**Qamou' el-Hermel**", it is a 26m high tower standing on a prince tomb of the 1st



Neo-babylonian inscription



El-Hermel Pyramid

or 2nd century B.C. at the top of a rocky hill at 2km from the city, restored in 1931, the monument is composed of a lower floor decorated with hunting scenes, and a higher one decorated with pilasters topped by ionic capitals and a pyramidal cover:

Reliefs of Hunting scenes are visible:

- *On the East side* we can see a boar pierced by three spears and attacked by two watchdogs, over the dogs one sees cylinders surrounded by ropes or a set of disks.

These reliefs were surmounted by a frame that had once enclosed an inscription that has since disappeared.

- *The north side* shows two deers one in front of the other, standing on a board under which two crossed spears seem surmounted by a trap, under each of the deers is placed a cylinder.

- *The west side* shows a large bull attacked by two wolves behind which we see spears and ropes.

- *The south side* is almost completely worn away, but we see an animal probably a bear and some accessories.

Over the higher registers which are decorated with four pilasters, raises, a square pyramid roughly 3 meters in height.



El-Jourd

Other but less spectacular remains scatter the area and are dotted between **el-Qa'**, **Khirbet Bsaibes** and **Tell el-Far**. One famous example is the "**Egyptian wall**", situated, according to the ancient authors, close to the source of the Orontis river. Until 200 B.C. this had marked the borders between Seleucids and Lagidis, then between the roman colonies of Heliopolis and Emesès.

The **forest inscriptions** are also noticeable in **Marjihine and the Termin (VS) "boundary-mark"** or "limit" engraved on a rock, overhanging the Orontis in order to mark the borders of the Beryte colony that had in the year 14 B.C. reached the source of the Orontis. These vestiges are added with two rupestrian boundary-marks, the first in the North-Northwest of Hermel, close to the Zeghreen road. The second also in the North but Northeast of the city, in a place called "**Mahallat al-Bawwabeh**". These boundaries are worded:

"IMP(eratoris) TRAJA NOR CAES(aris) AVG(usti) F(undus)" "*Property of the emperor Cesar August Trajan*"

attests that the land's status depends directly from the sovereign himself, which had been the case since

Hellenistic times. In order to save it and to protect the forest from the tremendous deforestation that was rapidly occurring, **Hadrian** demarcated it as protected land, thus to his time go back the numerous forests inscriptions of which thirty have been found in Marjhin region to the west of Hermel. The most complete inscriptions are worded as:

IMP(eratoris) HAD(riani) AVG(usti) D(e)F(initio) S(ilvarum) N ARB(orvm) GEN(era) IV CETERA PRIVATA

"*Delimitation of the forest of the Emperor Hadrian August, number...*

Four species of trees (reserved), the others free"

The Roman had the Orontis as the meeting point of Emesès to Heliopolis, it had been set from Saquiet-Mou'aissra and Joussiyeh on the left side of the Orontis till Jissr el-'Assi near Hermel. **Milestones'** boundaries, dating from the time of Septimus Severus, **Caracalla, Macrin, the Tetrarchy and Constantine**, either at the end of the 2nd or the middle of the 4th century A.D., had allowed fixed border between the territories of these two colonies. A little bit northward to the Northeast of Hermel, in a place called al-Bawwabah, was the border post.

Very few ancient monuments have been found in Hermel. Two dating back to the roman time are known:



Deir-Mar Maroun

a greek inscription attesting the cult of **Athena**, that has to be identified to **Allat** the Arabian preislamic goddess, and the second a small altar representing a triad whose great god and son god had borrowed from Jupiter and Mercury of Heliopolis their clothing and attributes, and a great goddess **Atargatis** the Syrian goddess; this altar is today exhibited at the national museum.

Christianity in Hermel and around the springs of the Orontis:

Hermel had for a long time stayed faithful to its gods and Triad. Through the good will of a certain Abrahames, monk of the area of Cyrrhus, Christianity had made inroads towards the end of the 4th century A.D. Between the 5th and the 6th century the new religion appears well established in that region where many convents, churches and hermits cells dug in the cliffs of the Orontis valley are visible. The city then named Ermeneia or Ermeleia, was a bishopric seat depending of the metropolis of Emesès.

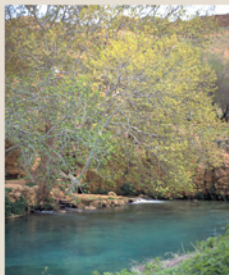
Among the more noticeable of that time, there is **Deir el-Rih** (5th 6th c.) near by Ras-Baalbek railway. **Deir Mar Maroun** close to the sources of the Orontis, its 3 floors are entirely built in the rock and dated (6th-7th c.); the ruins of a convent and several churches from the second half of the 6th century in the village of Brissa; the ruined **church of Marjhin** that had yielded in 1958-59 from the 6th- 7th c., golden, silver and bronze items including procession crosses, chalices, patens, censers and lamps, of which 16 are exhibited at the national museum.

Hermel since the advent of the Islam till the modern times.

Under the **Umayyad**, the **Abbasids**, and the **Fatimides**, Hermel had apparently known a period of tranquility and peace, favored by its well sheltered geographical situation, close to the cities of Baalbek, Emesed and Damascus, consequently commanding vital communication's ways.

Considerable changes began with the **Ayyubides** and the **Mamluks** who, in their struggles against the Franks, sought the support of the kurdish, turcoman and iranian war tribes, thus settling them in the Beqaa and on the coast, in order to be warned of the pending invasions of the crusaders, gathered on the island of Cyprus.

This feudal organization had been confirmed and intensified since the Ottoman occupation in the 16th c. the **Hamadeh** that had received from the pashas of Tripoli the districts of Jbeil, Batroun, Bcharre and Koura had exerted an extremely violent and an oppressive authority on the indigenous. In the 18th and 19th c. they are constrained to leave them and to fold back definitely, with other Shiite tribes in the north Beqaa' and its mountains. The demographical and political importance of Hermel grew up, and in 1943 after the independence of Lebanon it became the administrative center of the district. One of its sons, Sabri Hamadeh, had been for a long period the speaker of the Lebanese parliament.



Yammouneh

The region still rich in human and natural resources. Its mountains, counted among the most beautiful in Lebanon, the source and the superior course of the Orontis and its archaeological remains constitute an excellent tourist attraction point.

A Dam project is under course in order to develop the agricultural fields in the area, besides several sporty activities are practiced over there. The abundance of the Orontis waters and its northward course make this river an ideal place to practice the "canoeing".

Also in an exceptional natural frame, preserved and varied, the **el-Jord** project has arranged a welcome and discovery space respectful of the land and the inhabitants; el-Jord is a relaxing place presenting an ecologizing where sport and outdoor activities satisfy the amateurs.

Lebanon - Ministry of Tourism
550, Central Bank of Lebanon St., BP: 11/5344, Beirut - Lebanon
Tel: 961-1-340940 - 1 - 2 - 3 - 4, Fax: 961-1-340945 - Hotline: 1735
Web site: www.destinationlebanon.gov.lb
E-Mail: mot@lebanon-tourism.gov.lb
© All rights reserved

Text : Dr Shaker Ghadban and Dr Hassan Salameh Sarkis
Description of the Pyramid: Françoise Hbeyska
Translated by Françoise Hbeyska

Free Copy

