

# Kfardebian

## Fakra

Located between 900 and 2800 m above sea level, in the district of Keserwan, Kfardebian, the highest village in the region, covers a vast surface of 40 km<sup>2</sup>; thus making it one of the biggest villages in Lebanon. Its population is estimated at 12 thousand inhabitants. It is located at as far as 44 km from Beirut, and 27 km from Jounieh.

The village is inhabited in winter as well as in summer, considering the activities of the ski resorts in Fakra and Ouyoun es-Simane. In summer, the region is turned into a resort and leisure center accessed by the coastline inhabitants.

Renown for its agricultural produces, and its fragrant honey, Kfardebian is rich in water, knowing that two essential springs supply the village; **Neba el-Laban and Neba el-Assal**.

To access the village, take Beirut-Jounieh highway, and turn right past Nahr el-Kaleb, in the direction of Keserwan mountains, where Kfardebian is located.

## Historical Outline

The origin of Kfardebian is Semitic; it probably derives from Syriac and means the village of the deers. The history of Kfardebian goes back to an ancient age till now obscure, in the absence of all archeological and historical prospecting. The village played an important role during modern history. It became the center of the rural county during the epoch of provincial ruling (1860-1914). Its first municipality was found in 1900 and is considered to be a pioneer in Mount Keserwan. The vestiges of old traditional Lebanese houses, oil-mills, mills and a bridge in Wadi es-Salib (the Valley of



*The great tour and the altar*

the Cross) bear witness to the importance of the village and its deep-rooted history.

The village, at present, includes 3600 houses, 15 churches and convents, built for most between the 16th and the 20th century, two schools, private and public, 6 clubs among which a health center (opens daily from 9 am till 3 pm; phone number: 09-710163), two pharmacies, a post office and a police station.

## The Ruines of Fakra

The ruins of Fakra are located in Kfardebian at 1600m above sea level. They are on top of a small plateau, which towers above a deep valley where flows the springs of el-Laban and el-Assal. The breathtaking natural site is enhanced by the surrounding dolomitic rocks erected as a stela forest.

As early as the 19th century Fakra attracted western explorers awed by its remarkable structure. It is the greatest ruins

in Mount-Lebanon", declared **Ernest Renan** in his book "A Journey to Phoenicia". Although Fakra was the object of several archeological and historical studies, it was never excavated.

### The Construction of the Site

Three legendary texts date back the construction of the site to different epochs, starting from the reign of Salomon (10th century B.C.), including the Ptolemy dynasty (2nd century B.C.) or even to obscure indefinite epochs.

On the other hand, two Greek inscriptions, the first one carved on the lintel of the main entrance of the great tower and the second one carved on a corner stone to the right of the said building, indicate that the monument was erected in 43 A.D. Knowing that other Greek inscriptions, founded in the temple of Atargatis, reveal that the monument was built in 49 A.D. As to the great temple, no circumstantial evidence was found as to when it was constructed.

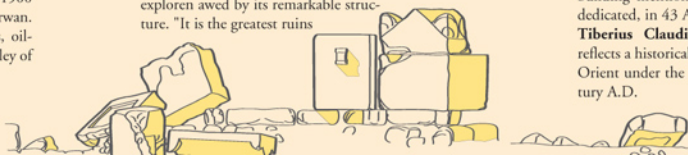
### The Site

Fakra currently includes a series of monuments, most religious. These vestiges are the following:

### The Great Tower

The squared tower has two floors, and its pyramid-like roof is only hypothetical. We access it by several steps, which lead us to the main entrance. This entrance was firmly closed by a double door the trace of which is still visible on the entrance stones. We enter the tower using stairs that separate into two and meet again in the first floor. Inside we come across a room closed by a sliding door. Lateral opening from all sides were used for the surveillance of the site.

Two Greek inscriptions were carved onto the building mentioning that the local inhabitants have dedicated, in 43 A.D., this monument to the emperor **Tiberius Claudius**. In fact, this dedication date reflects a historical conflictual context witnessed by the Orient under the Roman Empire during the first century A.D.



Therefore, we do not know if Fakra came under the rule of Agrippa, or was part of the country of Byblos or Beirut, or even stayed under the direct rule of Tiberius Claudius himself as part of the imperial territories. It is in historical context, that the inhabitants of Fakra as well as the high priest built the great tower, using their resources and the great temple's income. Thus, the monument dedicated to the emperor Claudius, was held back from the conflicts of the Orient province. Therefore, it escaped the looting and destruction.

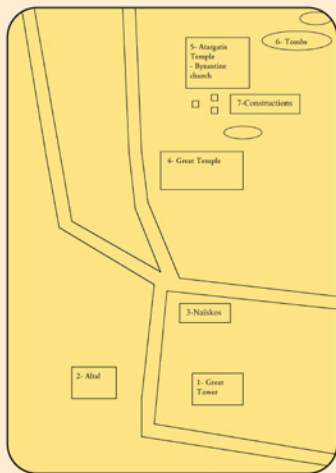
Due to its location as well as its architecture, the great tower of Fakra played, since its construction, a double role of an observation post, and of a safe, holding the fortunes of the religious temples. (pl.n° 1)

### The Altar

The great altar is located right in front of the main entrance of the great tower. The square-like altar (side = 5.75m) was restored in the 1940s. The influence of the Egyptian and oriental art is visible in the architecture of the stone frieze. As to when this altar was built, it remains an obscure matter. It is, however, probable that it might be contemporary of the great tower (pl.n° 2)



The baptistry



The Site Plan

### The Shrine

It was constructed on a squared base (side = 2.5 m) topped by a twelve-column portico surrounding a big stone, upon which is built a slightly rounded roof. A crescent and other currently unidentified shapes are carved on the east side stones. It appears that this shrill has an Egyptian flute, which style dates back to a tradition anterior to the influence of the Hellenism on the Orient. (Pl. n° 3).

### The Great Temple

Located to the south of the previously mentioned monuments, the great rectangular temple (34 x 14 m) is pointing from the east to the west. It is the most pre-

served temple of the subsidiary sites in Lebanon. Nevertheless, this temple was badly restored. A portico of many Corinthian columns precedes the main entrance, this religious monument is made of three parts: an interior court surrounded by a portico topped by two cherubus inside which an altar is erected, in addition to few step that allow us access to the holy of holies. The two latter parts were supposed to have been probably covered with wood. The great temple possesses one main door and two lateral ones on the northern side. Parts of the walls are carved in the stone. The great temple was built according to an ancient Semitic architectural plan well known in other archaeological sites in Lebanon as well as in other region in Middle East. This monument has given away many Greek inscriptions, mostly unpublished, though they did not reveal the date of its construction. Moreover, this problem is still unsolved considering the current situation of our sources. By comparing the architecture of the great temple with the other monuments in Fakra, we are led to think that its construction was conducted in many epochs.

In fact, already published Greek inscriptions have



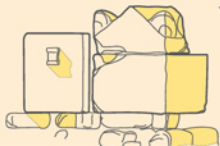


*The Great Temple*

mentioned the god of the temple under the name of **Bel Galassos**. Thus, this leads us to believe that the temple is steeped in an Ituraean-Aramaic influence, as it is clearly indicated in the temple of Atargatis, or in the historical context of the construction of the tower. The name of the god of the temple, Galassos, reflects a local deity, who is in fact Baal (god) the Phoenician, revered in the mountains following an ancient tradition. Therefore, the existence of a center of cult is probable in Fakra, before the construction of the temple under the Greek-Roman influence in the East, following the Canaanite-Phoenician tradition. (Pl. n° 4).

### The Temple of Atargatis

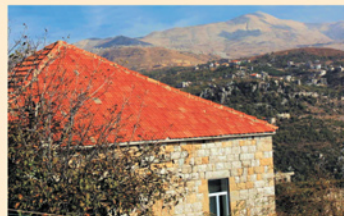
This temple has a unique architectural pattern. It is composed of two rooms and has no portico. Pointing from the east to the west, this building does not follow an even level plan. The interior chamber includes several niches adjoining the opposing walls. Its function is still unknown. The temple was subdued to architectural changes,



and namely the interior chamber. The latter was transformed, during the Byzantine epoch, into the baptistry of a church built outside the temple and which remained in use till the 7th century.

A Greek inscription found on the temple determined the date of its construction. The high priest and the locals built this temple and dedicated it to the offspring of Agrippa I: Julius Marcus Agrippa II and his sister Berenice, who was the spouse of king Herod of Khalkis, Lebanon, from 41 to 48 A.D.

In fact, the kingdom of Khalkis, founded by the Ituraean in the second century B.C., soon became great power. After the conquest of Pompeii in 63 A.D., the Romans reorganized Khalkis, Lebanon and divided it in 36 A.D. Nevertheless, the emperor Claudius granted Herod of Khalkis, the grandson of the great Herod, with the region of Khalkis in Lebanon. Then, after his death, in 49 - 50 AD., he gave this territory to his nephew, Agrippa II. The latter did not marry. He lived with his widow sister Berenice. It is during this period that Fakra was part of the territory of Khalkis, and was dedicated to the two sons of Agrippa I, by mentioning the goddess Atargatis as the Arab. This proves the direct influence of the Ituraean on Fakra; and therefore, leads us to believe that this monument must have existed during their epoch, and must have been under their domination. Thus, it is natural, under the Agrippa II, to see the inhabitants of Fakra dedicate



this monument to the new prince, who ruled along side his sister the territory of Khalkis, (Pl.n° 5).

### The Tombs

Scattered along side the temple of Atargatis, especially on its southeastern side. They are constructed according to three types, which are namely, rock tombs, sarcophagus carved in stone, and funeral vaults divided from the inside in many cells. Byzantine crosses carved on the entrances of some tombs of the third type prove that they were used during the Christian epoch. (Pl. n° 6).

Finally, it is worth noting the presence of several types of construction, namely along side the temple of Atargatis, that remain unexplained due to a lack of historical and archeological sources. It is very likely, that these constructions, of poor architectural type, could go back to the Middle Ages (Pl. n° 7).

In deed, the site of Fakra was probably erected and expanded in different periods; although, we are unable to determine exactly the date or dates of the construction of all the monuments, despite the goddess statue, of local type which is dated back to the 7th century B.C, uncovered at the late 19th century and is now on display at the Louvre Museum. It is the only material testimony of the oldness of Fakra.



An urgent and necessary excavation of this remarkable site will no doubt resolve these historical and archeological problems, thus saving an irreversibly endangered heritage.

#### The Natural Bridge

At almost 3,5 km from Fakra, you stop and you head left in order to ponder over the fabulous work of mother nature, the **Jisr el-Hajar**, i.e. the natural bridge. It is an arch, which degree of opening is 38 m, and which height is equivalent to 58 m. Under this bridge, the water of **Neba el-Laban** flows in torrents, and streams down a waterfall into a breathtaking valley.

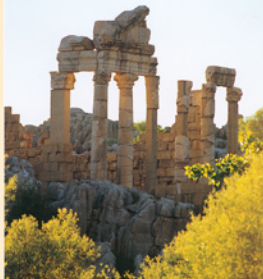
At night, the play of light enhances this waterfall transforming it in a splendid view, which deserves a nocturnal visit. Many fossilized stones of salty water origins are scattered under and surrounding the bridge.

#### THE SKI RESORT OF OUYOUN ES-SIMAN-KFARDEBIAN

The first ski resort under the name of Mzaar was founded in 1957, and equipped with several chairlifts. The second resort under the name of Warde was created in the year 2000. All Ouyoun es-Siman resorts are open to the public. Thanks to its qualified staff, well-organized luxurious hotels and restaurants, which are closely controlled. This winter sport resort, becomes, along side its competitions, a local, regional and international attraction. You can easily access Baalbeck from Ouyoun es-Siman. The eastern road crosses the mountain chain and up in the Beqaa plain.

#### THE SKI RESORT OF FAQRA CLUB

FOUNDED in 1973, on the eastern hill facing the ruins of Fakra, the resort of Faqra club ski is a private center. It is fit up with a ski resort, luxurious hotels, and many restaurants with varied culinary arts. This club attracts a privileged local, regional and international class.



#### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Surely, you appreciate the Lebanese or Western culinary art in Kfardebian. The restaurants are abundant in the village itself, as well as in the valley, in which flows Neba el-Laban. Traditional mezes and trout are served with varied spirits.

For more information or help, the municipality of Kfardebian created a tourist center, which is in the service of the tourists.



The center is accessible everyday from 8 am till 2 pm.

Tel.: 09/710160 - 09 / 711030 - 03-769 254;

Fax: 09 / 71 11 60.

Website: [www.kfardebian.com](http://www.kfardebian.com)

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