



Maghdousheh



The Tour of Our Lady of Maghdousheh

Located at 50 km from Beirut, in the district of Sidon, South Lebanon, on a hill about 200m above sea level, Maghdousheh has a special charm and commands scenic views of Sidon and the Mediterranean Sea to the West; Mount Lebanon to the East, and a bird's eye view along the coast to the towns and villages studded with carob, citrus, loquat and banana grooves to the North.

The etymology of Maghdoucheh, according to Anis Freiha in his nomenclature "The Toponymy of Lebanese Villages", is of Syriac origin. "Kaddassa" which means to accumulate refers to the accumulation of wheat during the harvest.

It can be also related to the roots "Quds"; the deformation of "Q" in "GH" and of "S" in "SH" meaning holy place or holiness.

History

Chronicles and evidence suggest that this site has been populated since ancient times. The troglodyte caves, of which five have been found,

are the earliest form of known shelter there; the largest and most significant is known as the grotto of "Saydet al-Mantara" (see below). The second grotto, "Mougharet el Maqdura", encloses a roughly sculpted woman's figure and is located some hundred meters to the southeast near the village of Maghdousheh.

In its earliest phase, Maghdousheh was populated by the Canaanites known as Phoenicians by the Greek and who settled between the Mount Carmel to the south and Ougarit to the North. Later on during the Middle Ages the area witnessed the arrival of the Ghassanides, an Arabic tribe from the Yemen who pitched her tents bordering Syria and Hijaz. They had embraced Christianity and around

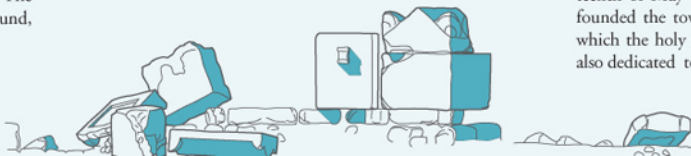
500A.D, they won battles which gave them authority over Syria, Mount Lebanon and Palestine.

Maghdousheh flourished during the reign of Emir Fakhreddine II. Since 1683, the area has been repopulated on the demand of Aftimos Saifi, Bishop of Sidon and Tyre who had come earlier from the Hauran, with people, seeking a place to settle.

"Saydet-al-Mantara" or "The Waiting Lady": According to tradition, because it was forbidden for Jewish women to enter pagan cities, the Holy Virgin had waited on, here, for Jesus when He preached and performed miracles in Sidon. The Gospels tell us that Jesus came to Sidon and Tyre (Matthew 15, 21-28 & Mark 7, 24-31...).

Some scholars believe that Jesus had crossed Maghdousheh on his way from Sidon to Galilee via Marjayoun and Baniyas, this road being shorter than the coastal road. In syriac Darb means way, and the closest village to Maghdousheh is named "Darb-el-Seem" which, in syriac means Levant road or "Darb-el-Seem", which in Latin means the road leading to the summit.

In 324A.D, Saint Helen the mother of the Byzantine Emperor Constantine the Great, requested him to build a tower dedicated to the Virgin Mary and at the same place, on the sixteenth of May 1963, Bishop Basilius Khoury founded the tower that can be seen today on which the holy statue was placed. Saint Helen also dedicated to the Virgin an icon, one of the



four that were referred to by the evangelist Saint Luke.

During the eighth century, and due to persecution of the population, the grotto was disguised and abandoned. It was rediscovered accidentally, in the seventeenth century, by a shepherd who was attempting to save a goat that had fallen into a hole, when he found an altar-like structure with a wooden framed icon of the holy Virgin.

Fascinated by the beauty of the site studded with pine trees, olive groves and vineyards, it is said that goddess Astarte lived in one of its grottoes. (Maybe in Saydet el Mantara's one). Worshippers, used to meet at "Tabloun" caves in "Ain-el-Helwe" to start the religious processions, carrying to the grotto ex-votos and offerings to the goddess.



The Sanctuary

Nowadays "Saydet el Mantara" is a pilgrimage venue that encloses:

The Grotto: Where the Holy Virgin waited for Jesus. It is used as a chapel, 15m long, 7m wide, fronted by a three-arched portico topped by a cross and erected in 1868 by the British consul of Sidon, Jack Abela, who dedicated it to the Virgin Mary for curing him of epilepsy fits..

A Tower: 40m high, crowned by a monumental statue of the holy Virgin carrying Jesus as a child. It encloses a chapel endowed with a great wall painting depicting the history of the cave and Jesus healing the Canaanite's daughter in Sidon.

The Road to the Sanctuary: twelve bas-reliefs have been sculpted in the rock, representing the events, related in the scriptures that took place in Lebanon.

The Basilica: Built in order to accommodate and meet the requirements of the faithful, who converge in large numbers during May, the month of the Holy Virgin.

The Castle of Franche-garde: At the north side of the hill, is located the remains of a crusader castle that overlooked the valleys and the plain of Sidon. Only the water tanks of the castle exist today.

The Village

The "Sayde" Church: is 100 years old and is built according to the Crusader style. It was restored in 1994. Next to it, is located - tradition says - the Putiphar's wife grave, who is supposed



The Basilica

to marry Joseph (the son of Jacob) at the end of time. (Putiphar was an eunuch and major in the Pharaoh's guard).

Maghdousheh houses a large number of elementary and high schools. In each family, it is said, there is a budding musician.

Agriculture and farming constitute a main source of subsistence. An important and outstanding quality of orange blossom water, used in pastry and as a medicine remedy to soothe the nerves and ensure a good digestion and a good night asleep, is produced. Old olive presses and wheat mills are scattered around the village also renowned for the outstanding quality of its "sun grapes" and wine.

Maghdousheh is also famous for home industry. She has skilful tailors, craftsmen, iron smiths, carpenters, builders... The first hospital in Sidon was built thanks to the people of Maghdousheh who gave Lebanon prominent scientists.



The interior of the Grotto

The Nativity of the Holy Virgin: Celebrated on the 8th of September is the village feast day. Villagers and visitors participate in church services and festivities like the traditional "dabke" dance, horse racing, bell tolling competitions...

Close to the site are a number of restaurants which serve lebanese food

The Road to the Sanctuary

12 steles on this road represent Biblical and Christian stations recalling events that had occurred in Lebanon.

1st station: The cedars of Lebanon in the Solomon Temple (I Kings V, 19, 20). On the request of Solomon who wished to build the House of the Lord, Hiram, king of Tyre sent him cedars from the Barouk mountains as well as builders.

2nd station: The Prophet Elias (Elijah) at Sarepta: (I kings XVII, 1, 8-16). In 875 AD the rivers dried up because of lack of rain; so the Lord sent the Prophet Elias to a widow in Sarepta who supplied him with the very little she had. Thereupon she was saved with her son. Since then, her jar of meal has not been spent and her jug of oil has not been emptied.

3rd station: The Prophet Jonah at Jiyeh (Jonah I-4). God entrusted Jonah with the mission of calling on the inhabitants of Niniveh to repent, but Jonah preferred to run away on a ship. The God unleashed a violent wind on the sea and Jonah recognized that this was due to his disobedience. Upon his request, he was



The entrance of the grotto with the statue of the Waiting Lady

thrown to the sea; but a whale sent by the Lord swallowed him saving him from drowning. After three nights and three days, the whale vomited him onto the shore which, according to tradition, is the shore of Jiyeh.

4th station: The marriage of Cana (John II, 1-11). As the wine ran out and on the request of his mother, Jesus performed his first miracle turning water into wine.

5th station: Christ and the Canaanite woman at Sidon (Matthew XV, 21-28). As Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon, a Canaanite woman who had a daughter tormented by the devil, came and begged Him to save her. Jesus answered her "Woman you have a great faith, let your wish be granted".

6th station: Our Lady of Mantara or the Waiting Lady. Jesus used to visit Sidon accompanied by his mother and the holy women who used to wait for Him in this grotto.

7th station: Jesus at Banias (Matthew XVI, 13-19). When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philipi (now called Marjayoun) He asked his disciples: "Who do people say the Son of man is?" and Peter answered "You are the Christ the Son God" and Jesus appointed him to build His church " You are the rock and on this rock I will build my church".

8th station: The Transfiguration on Hermon Mountain (Matthew XVII, 1-5). Jesus went up a high mountain as did before him Moses and Elias, who appeared during the





The Road of the Sanctuary scenes (4th and 7th stations)

transfiguration. He was transfigured in the presence of Peter, John and James who saw His face shining like the sun and His clothes becoming white as the light.

9th station: The Apostle St Thomas preaching in Tyre (John XIV, 5-6). Thomas, called the Twin, went to Tyre to proclaim the word of God. Later on a Cathedral was built and named for him.

10th station: St Paul at Sidon (Acts of the Apostles XXVII, 3) St Paul, guarded by the centurion Julius, was sailing to Rome in order to appear before the emperor. A storm stopped them in Sidon and Julius allowed St Paul to be entertained by his friends in Sidon.

11th station: Lebanon is a Holy Land who gave the Church: St Charbel, St Rafqa, St Neemet Allah al Hardini, the venerated Father

Jacques the Capucin, and Father Beshara Abou-Mrad.

12th station: Pope John Paul II declared at Compostella in 1989: "Lebanon is more than a country, it is a message."



Maghdoushch General View

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
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Text: Françoise Hbeika and Archbishopric of Sidon

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