

Magical Mystery Tour - Adonis route - Friday 10 July 2020

Video of the tour: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fCs7wtktZtU>



On Friday, 10th of July, APJM team invited experts and partners on a *Magical Mystery Tour* to explore less-known heritage sites in the legendary Adonis Valley and Jabal Moussa Biosphere Reserve, protected by the General Directorate of Antiquities (DGA).

The get-together was an opportunity to bring together people from different backgrounds and institutions, to contribute to the institution of the “Adonis Tour”, under development with the support of CROSSDEV Project (<http://www.enicbcmed.eu/projects/crossdev>).

The tour started in the town of Mchati, where the first High Mountain Phoenician center is to be established. While today an unfinished building, the group went on a “virtual” tour in the center, where the Adonis myth and the link with the Rotta dei Fenici will be described (<https://fenici.net/en/the-phoenicians-route-lebanon/2656/>), and a central kitchen will be established, where local women can meet and produce local “mouneh” (preserved agro-food), to be suggested to visitors.



Figure 1 - Stephen McPhillips, Landscape archaeologist, explaining about the recent discoveries and findings at Qornet el Deir site

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Nazih, a local guard, proudly greeted the visitors in a local shop, and offered the visitors mulberry juice and cake, made by his wife. He was hoping this tour would attract more visitors to his town, and to their guesthouse.

Table 1 - List of Participants

Name	Title
Sarkis Khoury	General Directorate of Antiquities (DGA) of the Ministry of Culture - Director General
Tania Zaven	General Directorate of Antiquities (DGA) of the Ministry of Culture - Regional Director of Mount Lebanon
Petra Obeid	Ministry of Tourism - Head of Youth and Local Bodies Department
Rachid Chamoun	President of Rotta dei Fenici - Director of LAU Louis Cardahi Foundation
Isabelle Doumet Skaf	Archaeological conservator
Stephen McPhillips	Landscape Archaeologist
Pascal Abdallah	Responsible Tourism Development Expert and Consultant
Dory Reno	Business Events Management and Tourism Consultant
Myrna Semaan	Naturalist and Conservationist
Wissam Khalil	Archaeologist
Mark Khoury	Com Fu - Managing Partner
Julien Hakim	Com Fu - Creative Director
Ralph Dargham	Com Fu - Photography and Videography
Simone Abou Jaoude	CISP Lebanon - Country Representative
Mirdza Abele	CISP Lebanon - Project Manager
Pierre Doumet	APJM - President
Tania Ballane	APJM - Ecotourism and Customer Experience Coordinator
Joelle Barakat	APJM - Conservation Manager
Beatrice Doumet	APJM - Member
Lama Sawma	APJM - Communication Officer
Elie Khalil	APJM - Ecotourism and Awareness Coordinator

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The bus then headed off to the town of Ghineh, on a beautiful winding road, offering a full view on Jabal Moussa from its western verdoyant side, and the steep cliffs of the Valley of Adonis on its northern side.



Figure 2 - View on Jabal Moussa Biosphere Reserve from the bus

The first stop was in Ghineh, where Wissam Khalil guided the group through the site. Perhaps the most stunning piece of the site was a floor decorated with a mosaic, unfortunately not well preserved. The mosaic is part of a Byzantine church, built on the remains of a Roman temple, but Wissam drew the attention of the group to the surrounding walls, explaining that they are ruins of a more ancient settlement.

Following a brief walk in a woodland, the next stop was an imposing bas-relief on a high rock, the “Adonis rock”, portraying two scenes: a hunter (or Adonis) fighting a wild animal, and a weeping woman.



Figure 3 - Byzantine church - Ghineh



Figure 4 - Adonis rock in Ghineh

In the town of Yahchouch, the group visited Jabal Moussa's plant nurseries, where wild, native plants are grown from seeds collected from the Biosphere Reserve. On the terrace of a newly restored house, under an old carob tree, a break awaited: traditional manakich (dough with wild herbs) provided from a local bakery.

Inside the house, visitors went through two exhibits: "The Budding Botanist", a work in progress botanical exhibit, in collaboration with the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund, and "Life on the mountain", a cultural exhibit in collaboration with the Swedish Institute.

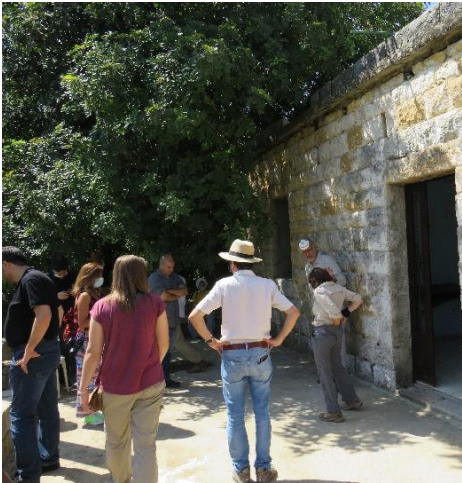


Figure 5 - Break under the carob tree



Figure 6 - "Life on the mountain" exhibit



Figure 7 - "The Budding Botanist" center - drawings by Beatrice Doumet, inspired by "Le Petit Prince"

Crossing over Adonis river through an old bridge, the bus stopped in front of the archeological site in the town of Machnaqa. Mashnaka isn't only a historical archeological destination, but also a natural destination, offering a view on Jabal Moussa from the other side of Adonis river.

Led by Wissam Khalil, the group entered the sacred precinct, surrounding an altar in the form of a tower. The size of the temple was unexpectedly large, compared to the small town. Historically, it must have welcomed many visitors, probably pilgrims on their way to Afqa. Today, the magnificent site is barely known, rarely visited.

A brief walk led to several rock tombs and three "bas-reliefs", very similar to the "Adonis rock" in Ghineh.



Figure 8 - Jabal Moussa seen from Machnaqa



Figure 9 - The altar in Machnaqa

About half way between Machnaqa and Afqa grotto, the bus stopped at the archaeological site of “Yanouh”. Today known as the church of “Mar Gergis el Azraq” (Saint George the blue), due to the bluish limestone of the central temple. The site hosts several worship sites from many periods: Roman temple, hellenistic building, medieval church, Byzantine basilica.



Figure 10 - Group photo in front of "Saint George the Blue"

Myth of Adonis and Astarte

The myth of Adonis and Astarte was celebrated, in the Phoenician Period, in the sacred Valley of Adonis. According to the myth, the god of beauty and youth, Adonis is attacked by a wild boar at the falls of Adonis River, and dies in the arms of his lover Astarte. His blood flows in the river and on the soil.

The people of Byblos commemorated this event with religious rituals during a period of great grieving, and walked along a pilgrimage along the valley to reach the source of the river, Afqa, then celebrated the return to life of Adonis.

The time of the mourning is announced by the coloring of the river in red, an event that still occurs today due to the erosion of the red soil.

On the way to Afqa, the link with the myth of Adonis and Astarte was explained: the river would turn red every year, signaling to the people of Byblos the death of their god Adonis, and the start of the pilgrimage that would go through Machnaqa, Yanouh, before arriving to the source of the river in Afqa, where a temple is dedicated to Aphrodite (Astarte), today collapsed.

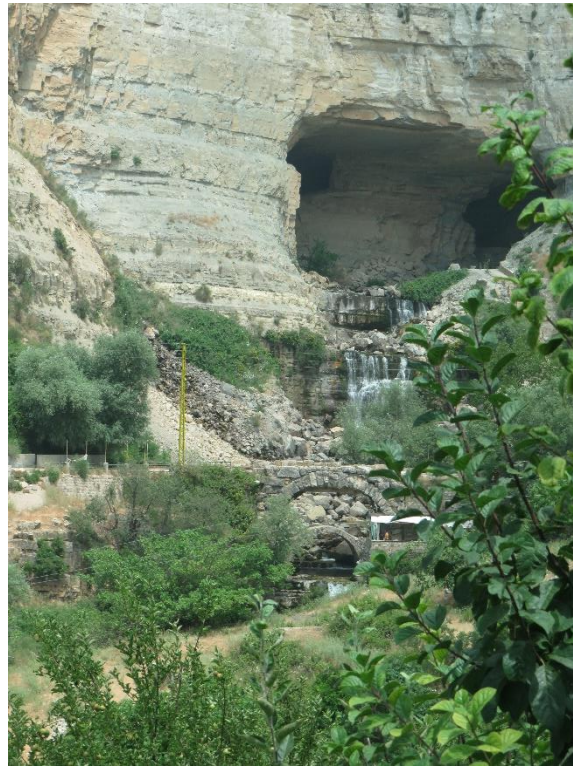


Figure 11 - Afqa ruins, described by Ernest Renan as “the most beautiful site in the world” in his book “Mission de Phénicie”

Back in the town of Mchati, the group enjoyed a traditional Lebanese lunch, at Hoda’s guesthouse, and discussed the importance of reviving the myth of Adonis and Astarte, through the “Adonis Route”.



Figure 12 - Mezza and Arak at Hoda's guesthouse in the town of Mchati

“It was a day to remember!” Tania Zaven, (General Directorate of Antiquities (DGA) of the Ministry of Culture - Regional Director of Mount Lebanon)

“The explanations you gave show how deep and passionate you are towards the project!”
Petra Obeid, (Head of Youth and Local Bodies Department at the Ministry of Tourism)

For information or inquiries:
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