



Husan



By Wael Hamamra

The central Old Village of Husan was built on a plateau and surrounded by valleys on all but the southern side. The traditional buildings and their architecture date back to the Ottoman period. Its houses are compact, as in most other Palestinian villages, as one of the security requirements in that period demanded narrow streets and narrow connecting alleys that led to *sahat*, courtyards that were used for gatherings and meetings. Among its most prominent landmarks is Maqam es-Sheikh Mahmoud, named after a sheikh who probably lived in the village in the early Islamic period during the era of Caliph Umar Ibn Al-Khattab, or who might have been one of the military leaders who fought with Salah Al-Din Al-Ayyubi.

Another landmark is Al-Zawiah, an old mosque that belongs to the Sufi order. The Old Village was built on archaeological ruins from the Roman, Byzantine, and Islamic periods, and the remains include walls, remnants of mosaic floors, water collection cisterns, and grottoes.

The mountainous nature of Husan contributed to the abundance of water springs (24) that have sustained its inhabitants throughout the village's history. Some of these springs and the village's agricultural terraces were inscribed in 2014 on the World Heritage List under the file Palestine: Land of Olives and Vines – Cultural Landscape of Southern Jerusalem, Battir. This area is considered an

The town of Husan is located about 8 kilometers to the west of Bethlehem in a mountainous area whose elevation ranges from 750 to 900 meters above sea level. It provides a stunning, panoramic view to the west and the Palestinian coastal plain. Husan is currently inhabited by about 8,000 people.

The name Husan comes from the Arabic word *ihsan*, which means charity, reflecting the generosity and hospitality of its inhabitants in receiving guests who in the past were traveling between the city of Jerusalem and the area extending from the coastal plain to the west. Others associate the name with the beauty of the nature that surrounds the town and the women who live there. Some researchers attribute it to the presence of Deir Hassan, a monastery that once existed in the village, or to the occurrence of a limited military battle that took place here in ancient times.

The oldest archaeological evidence in Husan dates back to the Iron Age and 1200 BC, followed by remains from the Persian period (538–332 BC), the Hellenistic period (332–64 BC), the Roman and Byzantine periods, the Early Islamic period, and the Ottoman era. The most important archaeological sites are its Old Village, Khirbet Umm al-Qalaa (Khirbet Hamouda), Khirbet Umm al-Shaqf, Khirbet Qedis (Khirbet Sabbour), Khirbet al-Kanisa, Khirbet al-Jarayesh, and Khirbet al-Khamsah.



Agricultural terraces near Ain al-Hawiya.



Ain al-Hawiya.

exemplary and essential landmark of the cultural landscape in the mountains of central Palestine that extend from the city of Nablus in the north to Hebron in the south.

The cultural landscape in Husan includes a series of agricultural valleys and stone terraces that date back to the Canaanite period and were maintained throughout the Roman and Islamic eras up to the present time. The stone terraces can be divided into irrigated terraces that have been used for green food production and

dry terraces that are planted with olive trees and grapevines that depend on winter rainfall. Terraces are built to adapt the mountainous environment for cultivation and to conserve the soil from erosion. Palestinians have built the agricultural irrigated terraces near water sources and supported them through a network of water channels that irrigate the cultivated plots of land.

The water is divided among the owners of the lands adjacent to each spring according to an inherited and agreed-upon system known as *fasel*. The water is distributed among the

farmers for 12 hours every day . The amount of water used for irrigation is determined according to the area of land owned by each farmer.

The most famous springs are those that are found in Ain al-Hawiya, which contains a cave with two chambers. One of the water sources descends from its interior ceiling and has created stalagmites and stalactites of various shapes. The visitor can enter the cave through a tunnel that is approximately 18 meters long. At the entrance of the spring, there is a big pool that is used to collect water and for swimming.

Other springs in the area are in Wadi al-Ayoun (the Spring Valley), where visitors can find Ain al-Balad (Spring of the Town, also called Ain al-Amoud, Spring of the Column). It once was one of the most important sources that supplied the residents with water that they carried to their homes. On a rocky cliff, there is a series of springs located close to each other, including Ain Sokhona, Ain al-'Erek, Ain al-Namous, Ain Khadra, Ain al-'Arous, Ain 'Atia, among others.

A touristic, cultural, and environmental trail passes through Wadi al-Ayoun. Visitors can enjoy and identify the eleven springs in the area and then continue towards Ain Jameh', located in Battir. You can always observe farmers working on their land during your visit to the springs. Walking on this trail introduces you to the farming system that has been practiced since the early stages of human discovery of irrigated agriculture until today. In addition, you can purchase fresh, organic, green crops from the farmers.

Dr. Wael Hamamra is the Director of Excavation and Survey at the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities.

SCAN
TO SHARE



Wadi Al-Ayoun (the Spring Valley) and Ain al-Hawiya.

