



EUROMED IV: Mutual Heritage

**Re-Walk Heritage:
Ramallah Highlands Trail**

A HERITAGE GUIDE

RIWAQ



Re-Walk Heritage Guidebook Series 1

Re-Walk Heritage: Ramallah Highlands Trail

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Farhat Muhawi and Sahar Qawasmi

A Note on Site Names

Site names for cities, villages, archaeological sites, and natural sites (mountains, valleys, springs) were designated during the British Mandate Period in Palestine. As is the case when writing Arabic names in English, many spelling variations could be considered, and there is so one standard spelling of most site names in English. We use the British spelling, except for in the case organizations that use an alternate spelling in their official name, such as Birzeit University (rather than the British Bir Zeit) and Taybeh brewery (rather than et-Taibiya).

The symbol ‘ represents the Arabic letter Ein, a guttural vowel sound that does not exist in English.

RE-WALK HERITAGE: RAMALLAH HIGHLANDS TRAIL



INTRODUCTION

This guide is produced as part of the Mutual Heritage project, a 3-year initiative (March 2009-February 2012) that examines and promotes recent heritage in the Euro-Mediterranean region. The project is implemented in partnership between several Mediterranean countries: France, Italy, Morocco, Palestine, and Tunisia, and is part of the Euromed Heritage IV program funded by the EU. The project aspires to consolidate the understanding of recent mutual heritage spread in Europe and the Mediterranean region and to foster the integration of cultural heritage into current active life both socially and economically.

The main objective of the project's component in Palestine, under the management of Riwaq, is to set up a number of tourist walking trails highlighting 19th and 20th century architectural heritage, surrounding cultural landscape, archaeological sites and cultural activities. The selected trail is known as the Ramallah Highlands Trail, which connects 10 towns, villages, and refugee camps spread over an area of approximately 100 square kilometres. The trail passes through Qalandiya, Ramallah and el-Bira, Ras Karkar, Bir Zeit, Jifna, Jalazone Refugee Camp, 'Ein Siniya, Dura el-Qar', Silwad, and et-Taiyiba. The trail represents the mutual heritage of the 10 sites within a wider scheme of the 50 most architecturally significant villages selected by Riwaq.¹

This heritage guide appeals to both local and international tourists by providing alternative cultural and natural tourist trails with the goal of promoting global awareness of rural Palestine and improving

1. Completed between 1994 and 2003, Riwaq Register of Historic Buildings in Palestine includes data on 50,320 historic buildings located inside and outside the historic centres of 422 towns and villages. A list of the most significant 50 villages has been identified by Riwaq as a national priority. Rehabilitating those historic centres will ultimately lead to the protection of almost 50% of the historic buildings in rural Palestine.

tourism to support the rehabilitation of historic centres within the trail area and the 50 villages. This trail can be utilized thematically to focus on issues such as historic village centres and buildings, watchtowers, refugee camps, cultural and natural landscapes, and archaeology.

The architecture of the 19th and 20th centuries highlighted in this guide reflects elements from different historical periods and are presented within the context of the following historical landscape:

1. Late Ottoman: historic buildings, village centres and watchtowers.
2. British Mandate: single historic buildings and monuments.
3. Creation of the State of Israel in 1948 and the expulsion of Palestinian communities: establishment of refugee camps.
4. Jordanian rule over the West Bank 1948-1967: architecture of the 50s and 60s.
5. Israeli occupation since 1967: military watch towers, the wall, Israeli settlements and new building patterns in Palestinian towns.

RIWAQ: 20 YEARS (1991-2011)

Suad Amiry

Re-Walk Heritage: Ramallah Highlands Trail, A Heritage Guide, marks an important contribution towards the protection and the development of cultural and natural heritage in Palestine. Including cultural and natural sites in an alternative tourism guide not only contributes towards developing the tourism sector in Palestine but also helps in making the cultural and natural heritage an important tool for economic and social development.

The first few years in Riwaq (1991-1996) were characterized by the documentation of the architectural heritage in Palestine. This brought about an important resource centre: Riwaq Register of Historic Buildings in Palestine, Photo Archive, and publication series.

The second phase of Riwaq (1997-2005) was characterized by conservation projects, along with “job creation through conservation,” which succeeded in creating more than 100 community and cultural centers as well as providing thousands of job opportunities.

The third phase at Riwaq (2005 to present), the revitalization of historic centers, concentrated on bringing life back into historic centers and the encouraging re-use of restored buildings. Revitalizing deserted village centers requires the concerted efforts of all sectors of the society, and entails improving the living conditions and standards in the dilapidated historic centres.

Last but certainly not least, Riwaq has contributed towards creating the appropriate legal framework—the cultural and natural heritage law, statement of importance and classification of buildings, protection plans and zoning regulation without which the protection of heritage becomes impossible.

Riwaq 2012-2032

Riwaq’s dream for coming 20 years is to integrate the cultural and natural heritage in the economic cycle in such a way that the cultural heritage becomes a main resource for economic, social and cultural development in Palestine. Riwaq has set the goal of rehabilitating 50 villages. By designating those 50 historic centers in rural Palestine, half of the historic building in the area will be protected.

WALKING IN PALESTINE

Raja Shehadeh Author of *Palestinian Walks: Notes on a Vanishing Landscape*

It is no exaggeration to say that Palestine is a walker’s paradise. It is especially pleasurable to walk around the hills of Ramallah where the trail described in this book is located. There is no doubt that the best way to get to know a place is to walk it. The pleasant weather helps. In the West Bank, it tends to be temperate most of the year and the landscape has much to offer.

Every season provides its own special pleasures. Autumn, with its moderate weather when the clouds shield the sun, provides ideal conditions for taking a walk. Winter is the time when the dust of summer has been washed away and the air has become fresh and clear, and the time when the almond trees blossom and the grass begins to cover the hills. Spring is lush and green, the time when the hills are covered by a great variety of wildflowers and flowering shrubs. Summer provides the opportunity to enjoy the starkness of the arid landscape with its large variety of limestone rocks with their contrasting hues.

Not too long ago, Palestinian villagers moved from village to village using dirt tracks along the hills and in the wadis. Some of these ancient trails go back many hundreds of years, marked on old British Mandate-era ordnance maps. With the changes that have occurred in the region, few of these have survived. Most of what remains are tracks created by shepherds. The evocative sight of flocks of goats and sheep grazing on West Bank hills is not uncommon. It is often accompanied by another encounter with the beautiful sound of the *ney* (flute) music played by the shepherds, reverberating in the hills.

Ramallah was established some five hundred years ago by seven clans. Its inhabitants depended for their livelihood mainly on the cultivation of the surrounding hills. The hilly land surrounding it is varied but without large open areas. It is part of the Central Highlands that dominate most of the center of the West Bank. The valleys closer to town are narrow. The hills are steep, sometime precipitous. There are no mountains anywhere in sight, only hills.

The further west you walk, the lower and rounder the hills become as the land descends gently down to the coastal plain. Standing in the midst of this land, all you would see are hills and more hills, like being in a choppy sea with high waves, the unbroken swells only becoming in evidence as the land descends westward. These structures, we are told, were formed due to the force of tremendous pressure exerted by the tectonic forces pushing the land towards

the east. It was as though the land had been scooped by a mighty hand and crunched, the pressure eventually resulting in the great fault that created the Jordan Rift Valley through which runs the River Jordan. The land seems never to have relaxed into plains and glens with easy flowing rivers but has been constantly twisted and pressured to the point of cracking. Its surface is not unlike that of a walnut with deeper crevices.

It was on the fertile plain of Marj Ibn Amr (Jezreel Valley), which stretches below the Carmel Mountains to Jenin in the West Bank and the breathtaking hills of the Galilee, that most of the historical battles were fought and where the ruins of the fortifications and castles of the various invaders can still be seen. This was also the route of traders and pilgrims. No invaders or pilgrims passed through the hills close to Ramallah. The prized holy city of Jerusalem, 10 miles to the south of the Ramallah, could be reached from the narrow coastal plain through a corridor between the hills that bypass Ramallah by a few miles going past the high village of Beit Ur to the south east. The people in Ramallah lived protected by their hills. No heavy armament could be sent over the cracked terrain surrounding them. Nor was there much to entice conquerors. Only in 1901 was the first asphalted road opened between Ramallah and Jerusalem.

The land had a strong effect on the character of the original inhabitants of Ramallah. The narrow slithers of land on the slopes of the hills were fertile but difficult to cultivate. They had to depend on the unpredictable rains and springs. They were hardy, taciturn, closed-natured, suspicious and provincial.

The reclaiming of this hilly land was the work of generations of Palestinians over many centuries. It took hard work to clear a small plot from stones, which were then used to build the terrace walls to protect the soil from eroding and the hills from being denuded. These were built in the traditional way, from interlocking stones, which were carefully selected in terms of shape, texture and weight to stay securely in place within a self-supporting structure. The hill

people of Palestine were experts at building these retaining walls that stood the test of time, strong wind, and flooding. They were able to turn the steep hills and valleys around Ramallah into terraced slopes where cultivation became possible.

Amongst Palestinians there is no tradition of hill walking as a form of leisure. There was, however, the practice of going on a *sarha*. When I was growing up in Ramallah I used to hear about these ventures, mainly undertaken by young men. They would take a few provisions and go to the open hills, disappear for the whole day, sometimes for weeks and months. They didn't seem to have a particular destination. To go on a *sarha* was to roam freely, at will, without restraint, in order to feed own's soul and rejuvenate oneself. But not any excursion would qualify as a *sarha*. Going on a *sarha* implies letting go.

Much of the landscape in the West Bank is rapidly being destroyed by road works, expansion of existing cities and the unprecedented increase in the Jewish Israeli settlements being established there in violation of international law. As a result, many areas of outstanding beauty have been destroyed by the hastily built Jewish Israeli settlements that stand out as artificial impositions on the delicate features and contours of this ancient land.

Yet despite the massive devastation that has blighted this land, there still remain areas that have been untouched by the effect of recent developments. Some of these possess a unique beauty that cannot be found anywhere else in the world. They can be visited by following the trail described in this book. Walking along these hiking tracks will surely be an inspiring and rewarding experience.

Summary

Re-Walk Heritage: Ramallah Highlands Trail is a part of the project Mutual Heritage: from historical integration to contemporary active participation, a project on the recent architectural and urban heritage in the Mediterranean area funded by the European Union within the Euromed Heritage IV programme. Mutual Heritage aims to identify, document, and promote the recent heritage of the 19th and 20th centuries fostering the integration of cultural heritage into present-day life, both on social and economical fields.

Mutual and recent heritage needs to be recognized and preserved as a main feature of the multi-faceted Mediterranean identity. Due to its recent — and often imported and imposed — origin, this heritage is neglected and suffers from a lack of interest. The potential value of the last two centuries' architectural and urban heritage needs to be enhanced and requires a better valorization to play a proactive role in the development strategies.

The Mutual Heritage consortium (www.mutualheritage.net) is coordinated by Romeo Carabelli (carabelli@univ-tours.fr) and it is composed by Citeres (UMR 6173 Université François Rabelais et CNRS – Tours, France), Casamémoire and the École Nationale d'Architecture (Casablanca and Rabat, Morocco), the Association pour la Sauvegarde de la Medina (Tunis, Tunisia) and Riwaq (Ramallah, Palestine). It associates the Universities of Ferrara and Florence, Tizi-Ouzou and Vienna (Italy, Algeria and Austria), the Instituto de Cultura Mediterránea (Spain) and the associations Heriscape and Patrimoines Partagés (Italy and France).

Glossary:

Bronze Age: 3200-1200 BCE

Iron Age: 1200-332 BCE

Greek: 332- 63 BCE

Roman: 63 BCE - 325 CE

Byzantine: 325-638

Umayyad: 638-750

Crusader: 1099-1187

Ayyubid: 1187-1250

Mamluk: 1291-1516

Early Ottoman: 1516-1850

Late Ottoman: 1850-1917

Badd: an olive mill and press which were built from stone in the Roman times and until the late Ottoman times. Later mechanical olive mills and presses made with iron were introduced during the British Mandate period.

Burj: tower.

Caravansarai/khan: a roadside inn, usually square or rectangular, with an open courtyard for animals surrounded by rooms for sleeping and shops.

Diwan: an extended family (*hamula*) meeting space and guesthouse for the family visitors. Mostly used by men.

Dunum: 1000 square metres.

Qa' el-Bayt: the lower part of a peasant house used for livestock and storing farming equipment.

Qantara: arched passageway.

Qusur (sing. Qasr): literally means palace. In the text, it refers to agricultural peasant watchtowers.

Quttain: sun-dried figs.

Habalat (Habala): a plot of land outlined by dry stacked stone walls in the mountains creating stone terraces.

Hamayel (sing. Hamula): an extended family.

Hijri: lunar Muslim calendar.

Hilala: a small window.

Hoash: a courtyard; an enclosed area, a space enclosed by a building or a number of buildings. In the towns it refers to a house complex of an extended family.

'Illiyeh: attic, or the higher room in a historic building usually reserved to the most important person in a family or clan.

Iwan: originally Persian, it refers to arched space open from one side to the courtyard of a house.

Khawabi: grain storage bins in a peasant house.

Khirbat (or Khirba): a ruin. In modern Arabic, it also refers to a secondary or satellite village where villagers stay intermittently.

Lattoun: a pit in the ground used for cooking limestone to produce lime.

Liwan: a central part of a house that other rooms in the house open to.

Madafat (sing. Madafah): guesthouses. Traditionally a guesthouse

is where the men of one village or one family gathered and received visitors.

Maqamat (sing. Maqam): a domed shrine with various typologies and sizes, bearing mostly names of holy men and women. Most of the maqams are connected with supernatural power and connected with mawsem (religious festivals).

Manateer (sing. Mintar): watchtowers in the agricultural fields.

Mastabeh: the upper level of a peasant house where the family lived and slept.

Matabba: Spalling-hammer.

Mawasem (sing. Mawsem): seasons, could refer to agricultural seasons or religious holidays and mostly it refers to both.

Mihrab: a semicircular praying niche in the wall of a mosque that indicates the qibla; that is, the direction of the Ka'aba in Mecca and hence the direction that Muslims should face when praying.

Msamsam: well-dressed stone.

Nabi: prophet or holy man.

'Oyun (sing. 'Ein): natural water springs.

Tabun: usually refers to a tabun oven which is a clay oven, shaped like a truncated cone, with an opening at the bottom from which to stoke the fire. Built and used in all through history as the family, neighbourhood, or village oven.

Tell: an archaeological mound containing artefacts from different time periods in layers.

Tubza: dressed stone from all the sides except the face, which is left undressed.

Rawiyeh: a food storage space in the upper part of a peasant house.

Rujman (sing. Rujum): huge quantities of field rough stones collected by farmers from their fields.

Saqouf: the horizontal stone on top of a door.

Sarha: to wander aimlessly in the landscape.

Sufi: a practitioner of the Sufism tradition (Sufism is defined as the inner mystical dimension of Islam founded during the Umayyad period 661-750).

Syrah: a small unroofed room built of rough stone. Mostly roofed with tree branches.

Wadi: valley.

Wali: an administrative title that means magistrate.

Zafer: extruding stone.