

Moukhtara Palace

Guidebook



Moukhtara Around 1880



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Thanks to everyone who participated in this work. (the names are mentioned on our website).

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MOUKHTARA PALACE

Moukhtara

Moukhtara “The Chosen” is one of the main towns of the higher Shouf in Mount Lebanon, located at 850 meters above sea level at a distance of 50 km from the capital Beirut with a population of 1700 inhabitants. The town sits on a hill covered by oak, pine, and poplar trees, bordered by the Barouk River in the northwest and overlooks the verdant Bisri valley in the south. It is considered an ideal tourism site since it combines a captivating natural landscape with archaeological and historical sites. From Moukhtara, the visitor can go east to Maasser al-Shouf which is one of the entrances to the al-Shouf Cedar Reserve where the road continues on to the fertile Bekaa valley. The visitor may also go south from Moukhtara to Jezzine.

The Moukhtara Palace or Al-Dar

The Palace of Moukhtara is located in the main square of the village, where the visitor can see the recently built “Emir Shakib Arslan” mosque at the entrance. The imposing palace embodies the long history of the Joumblatt family. As prominent sheikhs, landowners, politicians and intellectuals, the Joumblatts have throughout history played an important role in determining the political structure and governance of Lebanon. Subsequently, Moukhtara Palace was and remains central to historical and political events in the country, hosting dignitaries, heads of states, spiritual leaders as well as Arab and foreign politicians, and welcoming citizens from all walks of life.

History of the Joumblatt Family

The Joumblatt family is a deep-rooted Druze family, who came from Aleppo and Kilis in Syria. One of their first illustrious personalities was Ali Basha Joumblatt who, as governor of Aleppo in the 17th century, rebelled against the authority of the Ottoman Empire, allying himself to Emir Fakhreddin al-Maani ruler of Mount Lebanon. In the aftermath of the uprising the family moved to Lebanon and established their main residence in the Shouf under the protection of Fakhreddine, who granted them asylum and key positions within the community.



Joumblatt Family Flag

The Beginning of the 17th Century

Sheikh Joumblatt Joumblatt and his son Rabah were the first to arrive to the village of Mazra'et al-Shouf around 1630.

The Beginning of the 18th Century

The family moved to the villages of Baadarane and Moukhtara under Sheikh Ali Rabah Joumblatt.

The phases of construction of the palace

The construction of the palace passed through many phases starting from the period of Sheikh Ali Jumblatt.(Many members of the family contributed to the construction works as follows):

1st phase

Sheikh Ali Joumblatt (1690- 1778)

Sheikh Ali's title was "**Sheikh of Sheikhs**" and he established the family's prominent political and economic influence in Mount Lebanon and built the palaces of Baadarane and Moukhtara. He married the daughter of Sheikh Qablan al-Qadi al- Tanoukhi and had six sons. He died in 1778.

Over the years, the Joumblatt family faced numerous challenges, not the least was the devastation and destruction of parts of their home in the villages of Moukhtara and Baadarane by Emir Youssef al Shehabi and his ally the governor of Acre (1781). The palaces were rebuilt by the sons of Sheikh Ali Joumblatt, Qasim and Najm.

2nd Phase

Sheikh Bashir Joumblatt (1775-1825)

In 1793, Sheikh Bashir, son of Qasim and grandson of Ali Joumblatt, became the most powerful leader of the Druze community and was given the title of “Pillar of the Sky” as his political, economic and military influence extended over most of the Mount Lebanon region. He married Sitt Khawla Amin Eddine from the Tanoukh family, Abey, and had five sons.



The Summer Iwan of Sheikh Bashir Joumblatt

Sheikh Bashir Joumblatt channeled water to palace and established many suites in Dar Al Mokhtara.

1807 Channeled water from the Barouk River to Moukhtara palace and village

1808 Expanded the ‘Majlis’ or ‘Religious Retreat’ and established an olive press and a flour mill

1809 Built the summer ‘Iwan’ (the open-air reception hall), and the Tomb

1810 Built the ‘Dar al-Harim’ or ‘Upper House’

1813 Built the ‘Dar al-Jadeedah’ or ‘The New House’

1814 Constructed the mosque in Moukhtara

1820 Constructed the Maronite church in Moukhtara

Water has changed peoples' lives in and around the palace.



Dar Al-Birka

In 1825, many of the palace’s wings and buildings were again sacked and demolished by Emir Bashir al-Shehabi (who benefited the protection of the Ottoman governor Abdullah Basha) in an effort to put an end to the mounting political power of the Joumblatts. Imprisoned in St Jean d’Acre, Sheikh Bashir Joumblatt was executed there. Two of his five sons later died in prison; the other three: Naaman, Said, and Ismail survived.

3rd Phase

Said Beik Joumblatt (1813-1861)



The son of Sheikh Bashir Joumblatt. He was the first to carry the title of “**Beik**” which has remained in use in the family since. He tried hard preventing the sectarian conflict in Mount Lebanon in 1860. So as his sister “Sitt Naifa Bachir Joumblatt” did in Hasbaya-Bekaa region after the death of her husband Sheikh Khalil Shams, one of the influencing leaders. Around 1840, Said Beik rebuilt the devastated sections of the palace, and the majority of the main building which is still in use today. In 1849, he built the first school in Moukhtara, later known as “Sitt Badr School” in honor of his wife Sitt Badr Amin Eddine from Abey. He had two sons: Nassib and Najib, he died in 1861.



The First Building, (at the entrance of the palace) around 1930

4th Phase

Sitt Badr Amin Eddine Joumblatt

After the death of her husband Said Beik, Sitt Badr bore the responsibility of raising and educating her two sons, Najib and Nassib, and devoted herself to maintaining the social and political position of the Joumblatt family.

In 1875, Sitt Badr added a major section to the third building ‘The School’.



The Third Building Entrance

Nassib Said Joumblatt (1855-1922)



Served as the District Administrator of the Shouf and built the top floor of the second building (above the library) in 1885.



The Second Building entrance, nearly in 1930

Najib Said Joumblatt (1859-1893)

He became the director of the Upper Shouf District after his brother Nassib Beik moved to Bramiah- Saida, and then to Beirut. The ownership of the Palace of Moukhtara went to Najib Beik Joumblatt who died in 1893, leaving two sons: Ali and Fouad.

Ali Najib Joumblatt (1880-1943)

The Director of the two Shouf areas before he retired from political life. He died in 1943 leaving three sons: Hikmat, Najib, and Said.

Hikmat Ali Joumblatt (1905-1943)

Born in Moukhtara, he was the first Joumblatt to become a member of parliament serving from 1934 to 1937, and holding several ministerial positions. He lived in the palace after his marriage to his cousin Sitt Linda, daughter of his uncle Fouad. He died prematurely in 1943.

5th Phase

Since the beginning of the 20th century, the palace has witnessed limited additions to its main buildings, however ongoing restoration and maintenance works were carried out successively by Fouad Beik Joumblatt, his son Kamal Beik and currently Walid Beik Joumblatt.

Fouad Najib Joumblatt (1885-1922)



Son of Najib Said Joumblatt he was appointed as District Administrator over the two Shouf areas. During the French mandate he succeeded in preventing sectarian conflict between the communities in the Shouf Mountains. He was assassinated at an early age in 1922, leaving two children Kamal and Linda.

Sitt Nazira Fares Joumblatt (1891-1951)



The granddaughter of Sitt Badr and the first Druze woman to enter the political arena in Lebanon. She took over the duties of her husband, Fouad Joumblatt, who had been the District Administrator along with his political obligations. She proved to be an outstanding political leader for more than 25 years.

Sitt Linda Fouad Joumblatt (1919-1976)

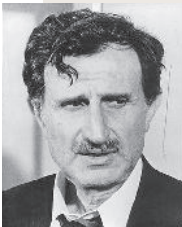


The daughter of Fouad Beik and sister of Kamal, Sitt Linda lived on the first floor of the second building. She married Hikmat Beik Joumblatt, and after his early demise, she married Emir Hassan Al Atrash and they had five daughters: Najwa, Noha, Ghada, Nazira, Samar. She was assassinated in 1976 in Beirut.



The First Building, around 1930

Kamal Fouad Joumblatt (1917-1977)



Kamal Beik who founded the Progressive Socialist Party in 1949 was a distinguished philosopher, an ascetic sufi and a member of parliament who held numerous ministerial positions. Kamal Beik is considered the father of the Lebanese Left and became well-known worldwide for his progressive, humanistic and political ideas. He championed the Palestinian cause for a national homeland, is a Lenin Peace Prize recipient and has published extensively, with numerous books and publications to his credit. Kamal Joumblatt was assassinated in 1977.

Sitt May Arslan Joumblatt (1928-2014)



Wife of Kamal Jumblatt, the daughter of the gracious Prince, Shakib Arslan with “Al Tannoukh” ancestry.

Prince Chakib «Prince of the Bayan» and his brothers, Princes Adel and Nassib, were influential thinkers, writers and political defenders of Arab and Islamic nation and its unity everywhere, and they held important political and administrative positions in Lebanon.

From this ancient house Sitt May set out with her striking personality and captivating social and political presence; she played a significant and influential role in the modern history of the Joumblatts family, and was, throughout her life, a strong supporter to her only son, Walid.

Walid Kamal Joumblatt (1949-)



Walid Beik, a parliamentarian and a former minister, is one of the most influential political leaders in Lebanon today. He is the President of the Progressive Socialist Party and an active member of the “Internationale Socialiste”.

He is well known for having been instrumental in preserving the Shouf’s outstanding environment and heritage. Together, with his wife Sitt Nora al-Sharabati -who chairs the Beiteddine International Festival- they have

been active in developing countless cultural, humanitarian, and social projects.

Walid Beik initiated the complete restoration of the Moukhtara Palace, renovating and consolidating all three main buildings. He has recently built the ‘Emir Shakib Arslan’ Mosque in the main square of Moukhtara.

Walid Beik Joumblatt has three children from his former wife Sitt Gervette Joumblatt: Taymour, Aslan, and Dalia.

Taymour Walid Joumblatt (1982-)



Taymour Beik entered the political arena and was elected to the Lebanese Parliament as deputy for the Shouf region, in May 2018, and heads a group of nine MPs. He is married to Dr. Diana Zeaiter and have two children, Sabine and Fouad. Today, the young parliamentarian and his family, Supported by his brother Aslan Beik and his sister Sitt Dalia, follow their ancestors’ path, thus, preserve the family’s historical and political legacy.

Importance of the Moukhtara Palace

The palace has many cultural and historical values

Archaeological Value

According to pottery studies, some of the buildings were constructed over earlier vestiges as early as the 9th, 10th, and 13th centuries AD and up to the Mamluk and Ottoman periods. In 1973, the Lebanese Ministry of Culture acknowledged the historical and architectural value of the palace, listing it as a historical monument to be preserved.

Urban Value

The palace was the core around which the village of Moukhtara grew and developed by following the water canals that subsequently defined the districts, roads, and buildings of the town today.

Artistic Value

The palace contains many ornate designs and art pieces, traditional decorations, rare archaeological artifacts, mural paintings and original furniture making it a living museum.



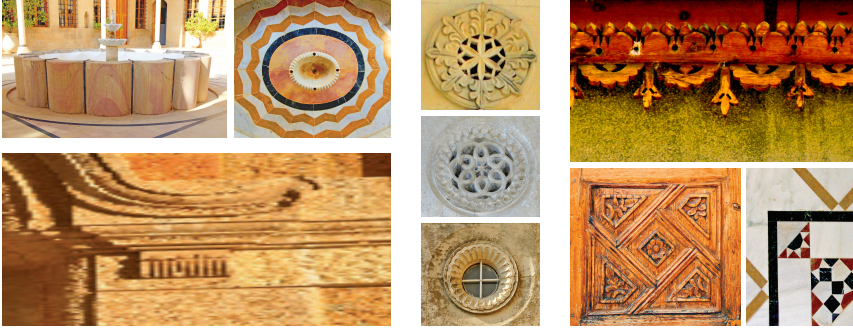
Mural paintings, First Building

Architectural Value

This value is characterized by the historical additions to the palace buildings and the different architectural styles that clearly appear on its facades with Mamluk, Ottoman and Venetian features which co-exist in harmony with more traditional local elements.



First Building



Second Building



Third Building



Architectural elements, decorations and inscriptions at the Moukhtara Palace

Social Value

For the past two centuries one of the most important traditions of the Joumblatt family was to allocate a day of the week to public audiences for consultation on public and personal affairs (currently every Saturday).

Throughout its long history the palace was a vital civic center for the entire region. It was visited for its religious 'majlis', its flowing water canals, its olive press and village bakery, which are still in use today.

During the 20th century, a number of its buildings were used as a public school, a clinic, a telephone exchange post, a blacksmith's shop and a sawmill. In the mid-20th century these functions were relocated to nearby sites. This solid relationship between Moukhtara Palace and its urban surroundings earned its reputation as the **'house of the people'**.

Political Value

The palace buildings witnessed numerous important historical and political events that influenced the course of history in Lebanon, under the leadership of Sheikh Ali, Sheikh Bashir, his son Saïd Beik, Sitt Badr, Sitt Nazira, Kamal Beik and today Walid Beik and his son Taymour Beik.



Southern Reception Hall



Northern Reception Hall



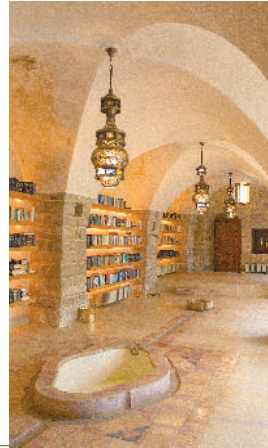
Reception Hall

Spiritual Value

Since its construction by Sheikh Ali Joumblatt (referred to as the 'Sheikh of Sheikhs' a position now held by the 'Sheikh al-Akl' of the Druze community) the palace has been the spiritual focus for the Druze community. The addition by Sheikh Bashir of the Majlis or 'Religious Retreat' on the palace grounds has provided the Druze with a reference point for their spiritual beliefs and practices.

Intellectual Value

Moukhtara Palace embodies important intellectual and educational values contributed by a number of family members, among them Said Beik Joumblatt and his wife (founders of the Moukhtara School, Third Building 1849), and the 'master/teacher' Kamal Joumblatt. The palace houses the 'Kamal Joumblatt Museum' in addition to the private library which contains thousands of books.



Library Hall, Second Building

Touristic and Economic Value

Based on the mentioned values, and due to its geographical location in the town of Moukhtara, at the foot of the Barouk Mountain and near the Shouf Cedar Reserve, Moukhtara Palace is at the heart of the touristic and economic plan of the Shouf region.

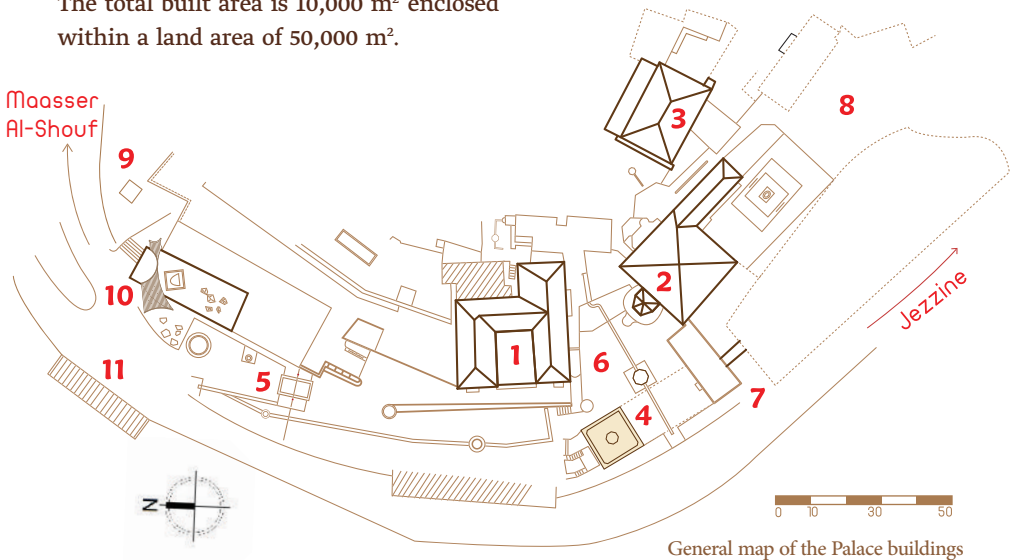
All of these values underline the importance of this palace as one of the most significant heritage sites in Lebanon and hence the need to maintain its authenticity and preserve it for future generations. For over forty years the owners of the palace have been actively restoring the buildings with the help of specialists who adhered to international standards for the restoration and conservation of historical monuments.

The palace buildings

From the main entrance of the palace, one may walk through a 50 m pathway up to the main courtyard or 'Dar al-Birka' named after the canal of fresh running water and the small pond surrounded by imposing cypress trees.

The palace buildings which serve as private living quarters, public reception areas and service buildings surround the courtyard. The most ancient of these buildings was erected on ruins dating back to the 16th century, while the most recent ones were built at the mid of the 19th century.

The total built area is 10,000 m² enclosed within a land area of 50,000 m².



- | | | |
|-------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|
| 1 First Building | 5 Main Entrance | 9 Cemeteries and shrines |
| 2 Second Building | 6 Dar Al-Birka | 10 Mosque |
| 3 Third Building | 7 Watermill | 11 The Square |
| 4 Fourth Building | 8 Al Midan | |

First Building (Main building)



The first building consists of three and a half floors and was built over several generations. According to archaeological research its oldest part dates back to the 17th century. It is used as private living quarters as well as for public and private receptions. The structure of the basement and first floor have barrel and cross vaulted ceilings.



The north and west facades of the first building



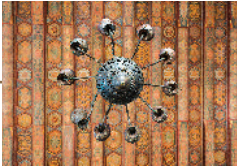
The north facade

The second floor and its mezzanine date back to the 19th century and are composed of an arched gallery surrounding the inner courtyard “Dar al-ka’at” embellished at its center by an exquisite water fountain. The courtyard opens west on to the valley of Moukhtara.



Dar Al-Ka'at

It exemplifies traditional Lebanese architecture with the double masonry of the external walls, wooden ceilings, Mandaloun windows and the 19th century red tiled pyramidal roof combined with European/Ottoman features such as the decorative stone kiosks.



Public reception hall with its cross vaulted ceiling, on the ground floor



Al Fistoukkyia (Floor Water Fountain) first floor



Northern reception hall

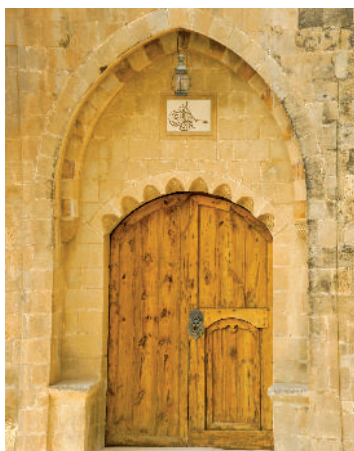
A distinguished feature of the building is the remarkable external double staircase suspended high on the western façade. According to legend it was strong enough to withstand the weight of horse and rider.



Suspended Stair



Entrance to the main building,
modified during the twentieth century



The door of the «Fesdquia» floor



A painting representing the end of World War II, Marshal Zhukov, Red Square - Moscow.



The emblem of the Ottoman Empire



Public Reception Hall



A mural Painting in the reception hall illustrates the Mutessarifiyah era, 1861



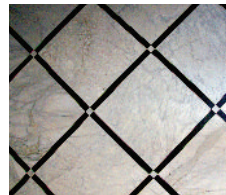
Water Canal



The door of the Northern Reception Hall



Dar Al-Ka'at Fountain





Authentic pieces



Ancient weapon collection

Kamal Joumblatt's Room

Kamal Joumblatt's life was characterized by simplicity and austerity, as demonstrated by his own room.



Kamal Joumblatt's Room, middle floor

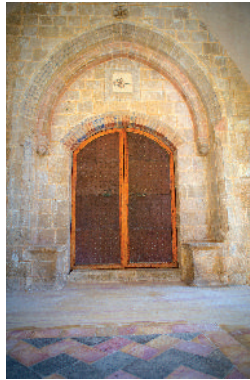
Second Building (Library and residence)



The three floors of this building were built over a number of phases. The basement and ground floor date back to the 17th and 18th centuries. They follow the traditional structure of barrel and cross vaulted ceilings with the Library Hall on the ground level.



A coupled window (mandaloun)



The Library Hall Entrance



Library Hall with its cross vaulted ceiling on the ground floor

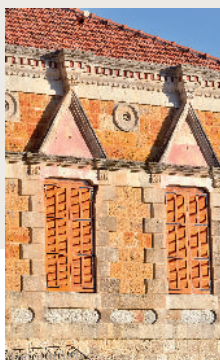
Built at the end of the 19th century, the first floor follows the traditional central hall type with exterior double masonry walls, while the facade reflects a combination of Lebanese and western architecture. These styles appear mostly in the arched openings of the southeast facade and the pediments, quoins and circular staircase at the building entrance on the northwest facade. The building is covered with a red-tiled roof.



First floor Southeast facade



First floor entrance



First floor Northwest facade with its triangular pediment design and the stone quoins decorating the windows sides.



Southeast facade



The indoor reception hall



Entrance to the first floor



Third Building "al-Madrassa" The School.



Western facade



Mural paintings, first floor

Consists of three floors built over several periods. The oldest parts date back to the 16th century whereas the newest section was built by Said Beik Joumblatt in 1849 and completed by his wife Sitt Badr Amin Eddine in 1875. Some Fragments of pottery and glass vessels have been found at the foundation of the building dating back to the Abbasid (9th century), Fatimid (11th century) and Mamluk (14th century) periods.



The inner courtyard



An inscription, showing the date of construction

«This building was constructed by lady Badr, the wife of Said Beik Joumblatt at her own expence in 1296 H.»

The ground floor with its cross vaulted ceilings contains distinctive wall paintings and the top floor reflects the traditional Lebanese architecture of the 'Central Hall House', characterized by its remarkable large hall and adorned with artistic drawings on its wooden ceilings and walls. The building's pyramidal roof is covered with red tiles. Its external double masonry walls include trefoil mandaloun windows.



The Mandaloun (coupled windows with trefoil arches)

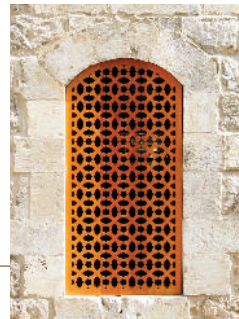


Entrance to the first floor

Fourth Building (Museum)



The fourth building from the street, with the water tower



Entrance to Kamal Joumblatt Museum Hall



Kamal Joumblatt Museum

Composed of two floors with barrel and cross vaulted ceilings located on the main street of Moukhtara, dating back to the 16th century. The first floor has an olive press and a mill while the second floor houses the 'Kamal Joumblatt Museum'. Above the second floor, at the level of 'Dar al Birkah' is the recently discovered summer reception hall 'Iwan' of Sheikh Bashir Joumblatt.



The summer iwan of Sheikh Bashir Joumblatt



Ancient watermill and olive press



The Olive press (Al Matruf) and the watermill, working on water, in the fourth building, 1808

Tombs of the Joumblatt family in Moukhtara



The tomb of Kamal Joumblatt and his wife Sitt May

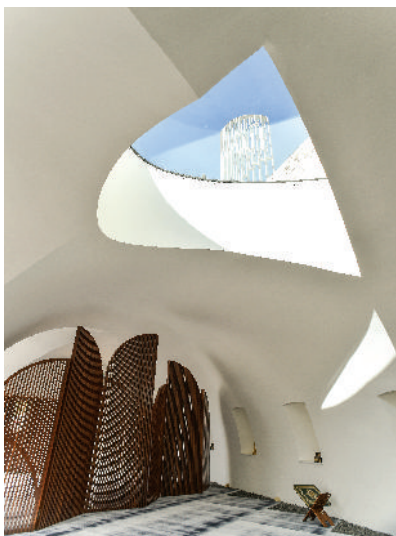


The Tomb of Said Beik Joumblatt



The tomb of Sitt Nazira and Sitt Linda Joumblatt

The Mosque



Mosque of Emir Shakib Arslan

