

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 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.

Architectural Value

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

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 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 Said Beik, Sitt Badr, Sitt Nazira, Kamal Beik and today Walid Beik and his son Taymour Beik.

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 house the 'Kamal Joumblatt Museum' in addition to the private library which contains thousands of books.

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 were 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.

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 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

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

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.

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.

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.

Third Building “al –Madrassa” The school:

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 have 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 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 tiles. Its external double masonry walls include trefoil mandaloun windows.

Fourth Building (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.