

WORLD HERITAGE LIST

Qadisha (Lebanon)

No 850

Identification

<i>Nomination</i>	Ouadi Qadisha (the Holy Valley) and the Forest of the Cedars of God (Horsh Arz el-Rab)
<i>Location</i>	Northern Region, Qadisha Valley and Bécharré District
<i>State Party</i>	Lebanon
<i>Date</i>	22 January 1997

Justification by State Party

- *The Qadisha Valley*

The Qadisha Valley represents the combined work of nature and humankind. Over the centuries monks and hermits have found in this austere valley a suitable place for the development of the eremitic life. It bears unique witness to the centre of Maronite eremitism.

Its natural caves, carved into the hillsides - almost inaccessible, scattered, irregular, and comfortless - provide the material environment that is indispensable to contemplation and the life of mortification. In this way a specific spiritual relationship can be built up between this rugged landscape and the spiritual needs of hermits.

Caves laid out as hermitages or chapels and monasteries, with interiors covered with frescoes and facades added, flights of stairs cut into the rock, and hillsides transformed into terraced fields are techniques specific to the practical use of the Qadisha Valley by these hermits.

Here is to be found the largest concentration of hillside hermitages and monasteries, going back to the very origins of Christianity. It is here also that the Holy River, Nahr Qadisha, flows, its source being in a sacred mountain celebrated in the Scriptures. The Qadisha Valley therefore has an outstanding universal value as great as that of northern Syria, the Egyptian Desert, or Mount Athos.

- *The Cedar Forest*

The ancient text known as the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, found in central Mesopotamia, makes reference to this forest and describes the Cedars of Lebanon as sacred trees.

The forest contains 3000-year-old trees, the last witnesses to Biblical times. They are mentioned 103 times in the Bible, and the Prophet Ezekiel said of the Cedars of Lebanon "God planted them, and it is He who waters them." These giant trees, contemporary with the kings Hiram of Tyre and Solomon of Jerusalem, know the history of humankind and are worthy of international protection.

Pilgrims have been coming since the 17th century from all over the world to admire this forest, which is unique for the beauty both of its location and its vegetation.

The cedar is so much the symbol of the devotion of the Lebanese people to their land and to their country that it has been adopted as the emblem on the national flag.

Cultural criteria iii and vi

Notes

1. The property is also nominated under natural criteria ii, iii, and iv. However, in discussion with the ICOMOS/IUCN mission, the Lebanese authorities drew attention to the title of their nomination document, "Proposal for the Inscription of the Cultural Landscape ... of the Qadisha Valley and the Forest of Cedars, and said that they wished the nomination to be considered as a *cultural landscape*. IUCN's comments are therefore included in this technical evaluation.
2. The 646ha forest reserve within the current nomination was proposed by the State Party in 1991 for its natural values and was the subject of a field mission by IUCN in April 1993. IUCN recommended that the nomination as a natural site be deferred with the suggestion that the State Party consider either the revision of the nomination to include other key but separate areas with significant stands of cedars or the recasting of the nomination as part of a cultural landscape nomination of the Qadisha Valley as a whole. At its 17th Session in Cartagena (Colombia) on 6-11 December 1993 the World Heritage Committee decided not to inscribe the property on the World Heritage List, with the following observation: "The Committee recognized the sacred importance of the Cedars of Lebanon. However, the nominated site is too small to retain its integrity and therefore the Committee was of the view that it did not meet natural World Heritage criteria. The Delegate of Lebanon informed the Committee that steps were being undertaken for the preparation of a future nomination of a cultural landscape being considered for the Qadisha Valley, including one grove of the Lebanese Cedars." This nomination is the outcome of this.]

Category of property

In terms of the categories of cultural property set out in the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is a *site*.

History and Description

History

Many of the caves in the Qadisha occupied by the Christian anchorites had been used in earlier as shelters and for burials, back as far as the Palaeolithic period.

Since the early centuries of Christianity the Holy Valley served as a refuge for those in search of solitude. Syrian Maronites fled there from religious persecution from the late 7th century onwards, and this movement intensified in the 10th century following the destruction of the Monastery of St Marun. The Maronite monks established their new centre at Qannubin, in the heart of the Qadisha, and monasteries that combined eremitism with community life quickly spread over the surrounding hills.

At the end of the Crusades the Qadisha caves witnessed dramatic actions against their supporters, the Maronites. The Mameluk Sultans Baibars and Qalaoun led campaigns in 1268 and 1283 respectively against these fortress-caves and the surrounding villages. Despite these attacks, the Deir Qannubin monastery was to become the seat of the Maronite Patriarch in the 15th century and to remain so for five hundred years. In the 17th century the Maronite monks' reputation for piety was such that many European poets, historians, geographers, politicians, and clergy visited and even settled in the Qadisha.

The Holy Valley was, however, not merely the centre of the Maronites. Its rocky cliffs gave shelter to other Christian communities over the centuries - Jacobites (Syrian Orthodox), Melchites (Greek Orthodox), Nestorians, Armenians, even Ethiopians.

The cedar (*Cedrus libani*) is described in ancient works on botany as the oldest tree in the world. It was admired by the Israelites, who brought it to their land to build the First and Second Temples in Jerusalem. Historical sources report that the famous cedar forests were beginning to disappear at the time of Justinian in the 6th century AD.

Description

The long, deep Qadisha (Holy) Valley is located at the foot of Mount al-Makmal in northern Lebanon. Through it the Holy River, Nahr Qadisha, runs for 35km, from its source in a cave a little way below the sacred cedars. The slopes of the valley form natural ramparts, and their steep cliffs contain many caves, often at more than 1000m and all difficult of access. Around them there are the terraces made by the hermits for growing grain, grapes, and olives. The hermitages, consisting of small cells no more than the height of a man and sometimes with walls closing them off, take advantage of irregularities in the rock, which explains their uneven distribution. Some have wall paintings still surviving.

There are four main monastic complexes. The *Qannubin Monastery* is on the north-east side of the Qadisha. It is the oldest of the Maronite monasteries; although its foundation is often attributed to the Emperor Theodosius the Great in 375, it is more likely that it was established by a disciple of St Theodosius the Cenobite. For the most part it is cut into the living rock - monastic cells, church, cloister, and accommodation for travellers.

The *Monastery of St Anthony of Quzhayya* is on the opposite flank of the Qadisha. Tradition has its foundation in the 4th century by St Hilarion, in honour of the Egyptian anchorite, St Anthony the Great, though the

earliest documentary records date back only to around 1000. It was destroyed in the 16th century but quickly restored: it comprises a corridor, meeting room, and chapel, with a mill and a number of hermitages, cut into the rock, nearby.

The *Monastery of Our Lady of Hauqqa* (*Saydet Hauqqa*) is situated at an altitude of 1150m between Qannubin and Quzhayya, at the base of an enormous cave. The hermitage appears to have been located on a wide platform at mid-level, where there is a water reservoir fed by channels. The upper level, only accessible by ladder, is a cave some 47m long, where the wealth of medieval pottery and arrowheads that have been found suggest its use as a refuge. It was founded in the late 13th century by villagers from Hauqqa.

Traces of fortifications have also been found in the Aassi Hauqqa (cave) at 1170m altitude. Archaeological finds show that this cave was in use in Palaeolithic, Roman, and medieval times.

The *Monastery of Mar Lichaa* (*Mar Lisa or St Elisha*), mentioned first in the 14th century, is shared by two communities, a Maronite solitary order and the Barefoot Carmelite order. It consists of three or four small cells, a refectory, and some offices; the communal church includes four chapels cut into the rock-face.

Other monastic establishments in the Qadisha are the Monastery of Mar Girgis, with the Chapel of Mar Salita, the Monastery of Mar Yuhanna, and the Monastery of Mar Abun, with the Hermitage of Mar Sarkis.

There is another group of monasteries in the adjoining Hadshit Valley (Ouadi Houlat). These were founded by Ethiopian Monophysite monks expelled from the neighbouring town of Ehden and occupied by them before their communities scattered elsewhere. They include the hermitage-monastery complexes of Deir es-Salib, Mar Antonios, Mar Semaane, and Mar Assia, along with the isolated chapels of Mar Bohna and Mar Chmouna.

A 646ha forest reserve contains what remains of the great cedar forest concentrated in the Forest of Bécharré extending over no more than 2ha. It is said to contain 375 individual trees, two claimed to be over 3000 years old, ten over 1000 years, and the remainder at least centuries-old.

Management and Protection

Legal status

The whole group of buildings and other constructions in the Qadisha Valley is protected by having been entered on the General Register of Historic Monuments on 22 March 1995 by Decree. The Cedar Forest is classified under the provisions of the 1993 Law on Natural Sites and Views. It is also a classified forest reserve.

Both forms of designation impose constraints on interventions of all kinds without authorization.

Management

The structures in the Qadisha Valley come under the definition of *waqf* (religious property) and are con-

trolled by the relevant church authorities: the Maronite Patriarchate, the Maronite Ouardi Esshaya Order, and the Lebanese Mariamite Order. Professional supervision is the responsibility of the General Directorate of Antiquities, Ministry of Culture (*Direction Générale des Antiquités, Ministère de la Culture*)

The Cedar Forest is the property of the Maronite Patriarchate. It is managed in collaboration with the Municipality of Bécharré and the Ministries of the Environment and Tourism. Associated with the official bodies are two non-governmental organizations, the *Association des Amis de la Forêt des Cèdres* and the *Comité International de Sauvegarde du Cèdre du Liban*.

The nomination dossier gives no indication of any form of management plan for the Qadisha Valley. For the Cedar Forest details are given of a planting and fencing programme carried out by the *Association des Amis*. There is also brief mention of a project of the local branch of the *Comité International* to create a natural park around the site.

Conservation and Authenticity

Conservation history

There would appear to have been no conservation in the Qadisha Valley beyond maintenance on currently operating monasteries. Mention is made of natural degradation of walls, wall-paintings, etc observed in a number of the caves by a Lebanese underground research group (*Groupe d'Études et de Recherches Souterraines du Liban*).

The situation of the Cedar Forest is that there have been relatively recent efforts to protect the remaining trees and to undertake replanting.

Authenticity

The authenticity of the religious structures within the Qadisha Valley is high, not least because they have been relatively isolated for a long time, with caves difficult of access, and so have not been subject to unsympathetic or inappropriate conservation or restoration work.

Evaluation

Action by Advisory Bodies

A joint ICOMOS-IUCN mission visited the property in April 1998.

Qualities

The Qadisha Valley and the remnant Cedar Forest on the western flank of Mount Lebanon form a cultural landscape of outstanding universal value. The steep-walled valley has long been a place of meditation and refuge and it contains an exceptional number of Christian eremitic and cenobitic monastic foundations, some of them from a very early phase of the expansion of Christianity. Traditional land-use in the form of dramatic terraces continues. The valley's cultural values are complemented by its Jurassic origin, including caves with limestone features, and the valley supports a

wide range of flora and fauna, contributing to biological diversity. The trees in the Cedar Forest are the survivors of a great forest that was renowned in antiquity.

Comparative analysis

Other regions of early monasticism include the Sinai peninsula, the Egyptian desert, and Ethiopia. The Qadisha group is probably the most extensive and most densely distributed. The cedars are, of course, unique because of their significance as a cultural feature rather than as a natural one, as there are other stands of *Cedrus libani* elsewhere in Lebanon (eg the Al-Shouf cedar reserve), and especially in Turkey in the Olympus Beydaglari National Park.

Comments by Advisory Bodies

In their report, the members of the joint ICOMOS-IUCN expert mission commented that the monastic sites in the Qadisha Valley and the cedar grove at its head are undoubtedly of outstanding cultural importance. They are, however, not covered by any form of management plan or conservation programme.

The mission recommended that the management plan for this property should take account of the cultural values and also of the natural values, clearly identifying the indigenous flora and fauna and addressing, *inter alia*, their conservation, the approach to visitor use in the Valley, especially in relation to vehicle use, visitor access within the cedar grove, and plans to establish an expanded area of *Cedrus libani* in as near a natural manner as possible. Because of the vulnerability of the natural elements and the visual impact of buildings on the Valley rim, it was essential that there should be an effective buffer zone around the nominated area.

In view of the multiple ownership of the components of the nominated property, it was essential that some form of commission should be set up, composed of representatives of the key government agencies, local government, and the owners, with adequate scientific and technical backup, to coordinate and oversee planning and management of the property.

At its meeting in June 1998 the Bureau referred the nomination back to the State Party, requesting details of an overall management and conservation plan for the monastic sites and monuments of the Qadisha Valley and for the Cedar Forest (including the establishment of a commission to coordinate the activities of the different owners and agencies involved and the definition of an effective buffer zone).

The State Party supplied a document containing the guidelines for the preparation of a management plan. This took into account all the points made by the expert mission with the exception of the delineation of the buffer zone, which is the subject of a special study by the Lebanese General Directorate of Planning.

Brief description

The Qadisha Valley is one of the most important early Christian monastic settlements in the world, and its monasteries, many of great age, are set dramatically in a rugged landscape. Nearby are the remains of the great forest of the Cedars of Lebanon, which were highly

prized for the construction of great religious buildings in the ancient world.

Recommendation

That this property be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of *criteria iii and iv*:

Criterion iii: The Qadisha Valley has been the site of monastic communities continuously since the earliest years of Christianity. The trees in the Cedar Forest are survivors of a sacred forest and of one of the most highly prized building materials of the ancient world.

Criterion iv: The monasteries of the Qadisha Valley are the most significant surviving examples of this fundamental demonstration of Christian faith.

ICOMOS and IUCN, October 1998