

A Visit to Kherbet Shadi

2011 (?)

On Saturday we went to visit the ancient ruins of Kherbet Shadi, built on one of the mountains that ring the Wadi Qana valley (one of the few mountains that illegal Israeli settlements have taken over). The village was once home to many of the residents of Deir Istiya, the village IWPS now resides in. Deir Istiya's mayor was born in Kherbet Shadi, as was our guide for the hike up the mountain. The village sits atop a mountain peak from which you can see the city of Tel Aviv and beyond that the Mediterranean Sea. The Mayor and Sahmii remember waking up and peeking out the small windows of the stone houses that are now little more than remnants of Israeli bombing campaigns.



The villagers of Kherbet Shadi grew wheat, vegetables, figs and olives, as well they had herds of sheep and goats from which they had milk and made cheese. Natural springs abounded (most of them are now dried up because the aquifer has been depleted the by the illegal settlements) and the hillsides and valley were abundant with wild edible greens, berries and herbs. They threshed wheat with the stone wheels driven by donkey power.

Nobody is sure how long the village has been there, except that it existed during the Roman occupation, so it is at least 1500 years old. The ruins attest to this... the ancient threshing wheels as well as the decorative stone works help to date the village.

There was once an accessible road that linked Deir Istiya to the foot of the mountain and travel between the two villages was common. The road has been closed for a number of years by the Israeli Occupation Forces (IOF) and more recently, settlers have placed temporary living structures (trailers) across the road. Now it takes about 1.5 hours to reach the foot of the mountain and another hour or more to hike up the mountain.

It is very difficult to describe what this village and its lands mean to the people of Deir Istiya. Apart from small independent farmers, few Americans have the type of connection with the land that Palestinians do. We are born in the impersonal facility of a hospital, it isn't common for us to live within extended family compounds, and our food comes not from our own land but from a supermarket that imports the food from far away.



This is not so for the villagers of Palestine. The visit to the place of their birth and childhood was precious Abu Nuwab and Sahmii. They were eager to tell us who lived in each (remnant) of the homes what was kept where, what kind of furniture was in each room, etc... As well they knew every tree, they knew where all the herbs were growing wild. After spending some time in the ruins we sat under a large carob tree and shared around food we had all brought. Sahmii made tea with miramia (sage) that he had gathered on the way up the mountain, and we all smoked from the hookah he had brought along. Some shepherds joined us for a time as well, so it was a bit of a party!

On our way back down the mountain we stopped numerous times to gather wild sage, mint, lettuce and spinach while our hosts sang songs about the land. Abu Nuwab said his children would ask him what he had brought them when he returned and he would show them the gathered food. I asked him if they would be happy with that and he said, "yes, they will be very happy." Everyone is sure the wild herbs from the mountain are better than what is cultivated around the village.

We also encountered some older teenagers once off the mountain. At first we thought they were settlers but as they drew nearer we recognized some of them being from Deir Istiya. The others were from one of the settlements. They had met up along the road and were walking together... a great sign of hope for me. Racism and hatred is taught, and these teenagers had not been indoctrinated to hate one another and it was natural for them to walk together.

Once we were near the main road, and surrounded by Palestinian citrus groves, we took a rest and had partook of the delicious oranges (a couple had been left in a sitting area for the hungry passerby. That is the Palestinian way.