





# A Journey into the Wilderness

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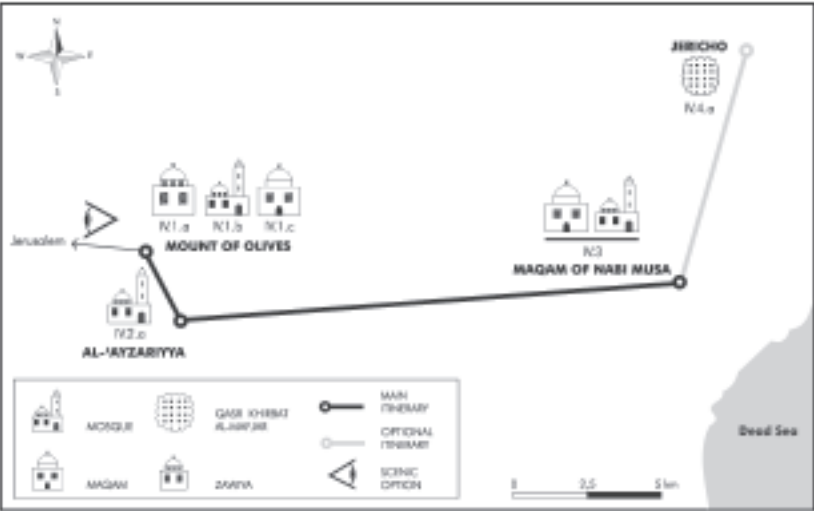
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Mawsim of Nabi Musa  
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The Dead Sea from the heights of 'Ayn Gedi, near the Monastery of Saint Saba, lithograph by D. Roberts (© Victoria & Albert Museum, London).



The journey from Jerusalem to Jericho is special from both a geographical and historical perspective. Captivating views of mountains and valleys, semi-desert scenery, historic sites, Islamic sanctuaries and Christian monasteries lie along the route. The winding road from the top of Jerusalem's Mountains (800 m. above sea level) descends towards the Jordan Valley and the Dead Sea (the lowest point on earth at 400 m. below sea level) and finally reaches Jericho (the lowest city on earth at 250 m. below sea level).

The visitor will start the journey from the observatory of the Mount of Olives at al-Tur Village. To the west, north and south there unfolds a panoramic view of the Old City of Jerusalem, its surrounding mountains and valleys, and the western slopes of the Mount of Olives that are rich in archaeological sites and historic monuments. To the east is the bewitching sight of vast desert, the Dead Sea and the Jordan Valley; on a clear day, one can see as far as the mountains of Jordan. Heading north for about half a kilometre, one will arrive at a crossroads where the visitor can stop to see the first of three sites in this itinerary: the Zawiya al-As'adiyya, the Mosque of the Dome of Ascension and the Maqam of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya. Heading towards the south-eastern slopes of the Mount of Olives, one will arrive at the village of al-'Ayzariyya and visit the Mosque of al-'Uzayr that lies to the east of the Franciscan Church of Saint Lazarus (whom Christ raised from the dead). From here the visitor continues east towards the Jordan Valley on a new tarmac road that has replaced the narrow and winding path between Jerusalem and

Jericho. Then the scenery changes, for while covered in green and colourful flowers that are numerous during the spring, the mountains and valleys look barren throughout the summer. Bedouin encampments scatter the area that has attracted early Christian monks since the Byzantine period (5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries). Some of the monasteries associated with these monks still survive today, including St George's Monastery (Deir al-Qilt), which lies in the Wadi Qilt north of the Jerusalem–Jericho road.

Eighteen kilometres from Jerusalem, the visitor should turn off the main road and continue southwards for about half a kilometre until reaching a huge architectural complex covered by white domes. This is the Maqam of Nabi Musa (the Shrine of the Prophet Moses), which was built in the Mamluk period and is considered to be one of the most important commemorative shrines in the Jerusalem area. Some additions were made to it in the Ottoman period.

Having visited the *maqam*, the visitor should return to the Jerusalem–Jericho road and continue east until s/he reaches the Jordan Valley. This valley is considered part of the Syrian-African rift that stretches from the north of Syria to East Africa. The road continues east towards the Dead Sea and the River Jordan, which flows into it. The Dead Sea is a unique phenomenon; the Romans called it the Asphalt Sea, while Arab historians called it the Sea of Lut or the Sea of Sodom (after the stories in the Old Testament) and the Stinking Lake, because of the smell of sulphur. It was the Crusaders who named it the Dead Sea because it lacks any signs of life.





Another road turns north towards Jericho. This city lies in the middle of an oasis that is rich in water springs, palm and fruit trees, and contains various historic sites that date back to different periods. Among them is the Qasr Khirbat al-Mafjar (Hisham's Palace) that dates back to the Umayyad period.

M.H.

## SCENIC OPTION

### Panoramic View of the Old City of Jerusalem

*Located on the south-west side of the Mount of Olives, in front of the al-Aqwas al-Sab'a*

*(Seven Arches Hotel), where a mirador is found that offers magnificent panoramic views of the Old Town of Jerusalem.*

From this point, the visitor can enjoy breathtaking panoramic views of the Old City of Jerusalem. The beauty of its layout and architecture and the solidity of its walls become clearer from this vantage point. The boundaries of the Haram al-Sharif – which were designed by the Umayyad Caliph 'Abd al-Malik Ibn Marwan at the end of the 1<sup>st</sup>/7<sup>th</sup> century – with its various edifices, domes and magnificent minarets can be seen clearly. In the centre lies the Dome of the Rock with its golden dome, while to the south is the Aqsa Mosque covered by its grey, lead dome. The historic

*Jerusalem, panoramic view from the Mount of Olives.*





It is no wonder this view bewitched Mujir al-Din al-Hanbali (c. 901/1496), the famous historian of Mamluk Jerusalem, who wrote: “*Seeing Jerusalem from afar is a wonder in its luminosity and beauty especially when seen from the east, from the Mount of Olives or from the direction of the qibla*”.

M.H.

## IV.1 MOUNT OF OLIVES

### IV.1.a Zawiya al-As‘adiyya

*Lies on the eastern part of the Mount of Olives adjacent to the Mosque of Qubbat al-Su‘ud and many important churches connected with Jesus Christ. The courtyard is open during the day except during prayer times. Permission to visit the site is required from the supervisor.*

This *zawiya*, sometimes called *khanqa*, is named after its founder Shaykh Abu Sa‘id As‘ad Efendi, the Supreme Mufti in Constantinople (Istanbul), who also conferred a *waqf* upon it. Parts of the *zawiya*, the mosque in particular, were built in 1023/1614-1615 as the inscription plaque above the entrance certifies. In 1033/1623, As‘ad Efendi bestowed a generous *waqf* on it through his legal deputy Muhammad Pasha, the Governor of Jerusalem at the time. He stipulated that the annual revenue of the *waqf* – which included many buildings, some land and a bakery in the village of al-Tur – should be spent on maintaining the *zawiya* and covering its expenses, includ-

*The Dome of the Rock, panoramic view from the Mount of Olives.*

buildings are concentrated in the north and west borders of the Haram. The eastern and western walls of the Old City and their gates can also be identified, most notably the double Golden Gate (Bab al-Rahma and Bab al-Tawba), and Bab al-Asbat (Gate of the Lions). The Citadel and its lofty, impenetrable towers can be seen to the west, while the towers and domes of the churches bestow unrivalled glamour and beauty upon the city.



*Zawiya al-As'adiyya,  
general view, Mount of  
Olives, Jerusalem.*

ing those of its followers, visitors and employees (inspector, *imam*, *muezzin*, porter, servant and money collector). Shaykh Shams al-Din Muhammad al-'Alami, one of Jerusalem's *sufi* leaders in the first half of 10<sup>th</sup>/16<sup>th</sup> century, was appointed as the inspector of the *waqf* and the *shaykh* of the *zawiya*.

The inscriptions on the walls of the central courtyard, together with the architectural features of the building, indicate that it was built over several periods. Two inscription plaques are found in addition to the one mentioned earlier. One is dated 1143/1730–1731 and refers to the crypt leading to the Shaykh al-'Alami's tomb, while the second (1323/1905–1906) indicates the date when the vestibule was built.

The building consists of many units that can be accessed via a staircase that starts at street level at the end of which two entrance portals are found. The eastern portal leads to the Mosque Qubbat al-Su'ud (Dome of the Ascension), while the southern portal leads to the courtyard of the *zawiya*. The courtyard is rectangular with a modern stone-tiled floor. To the west of the entrance is a door on the northern wall that leads to stairs down to the crypt where Shaykh 'Alami and some members of his family are buried. Facing the north door, another door in the centre of the courtyard's southern wall, leads into the mosque of the *zawiya*.

The mosque is rectangular (10 × 6.5 m.) and has several windows on its west wall that allow in plenty of light. A concave *mihrab* lies in its southern wall. A pointed arch divides the ceiling into two sec-



tions: the southern part is square and covered by a shallow dome, while the northern one is covered by a cross vault. A third door on the west wall of the courtyard leads to another open courtyard, which is irregular in shape

*Zawiya al-As'adiyya,  
entrance, Mount of  
Olives, Jerusalem.*



**Mount of Olives**

*Zawiya al-As'adiyya,  
foundation inscriptions,  
Mount of Olives,  
Jerusalem.*



and on a lower level than the indoor courtyard. Toilet facilities have been built in the northern area, while the southern part has many tombs. The eastern area of the *zawiya* is a residential area where 'Alami's descendants live; this can be reached through a fourth door on the south-eastern border of the courtyard.

Y.N.

#### **IV.1.b Mosque of Qubbat al-Su'ud (Dome of Ascension)**

*Open daily 08.00–16.00. The admission fee is nominal.*

This site is one of the most distinguished in Jerusalem. It commemorates the Ascension of Jesus to heaven after his Resurrection according to the Christian tra-

dition. It is mentioned in the Book of Luke, and although no precise location is mentioned, it is widely believed that this place is the site of the Ascension.

Before the spread of Christianity, Christians used to celebrate the Ascension secretly inside a cave in the Mount of Olives. The first church to commemorate the Ascension was built during the Byzantine period, before 392, although it has not survived. Many attempts have been made to reconstruct it, relying on descriptions by Byzantine travellers and archaeological research. The earlier circular plan was replaced in the Crusader period by an octagonal structure and was encircled by a fortified monastery. During this period the validity of the Ascension was firmly established.

After Saladin's conquest of Jerusalem the site was converted into a mosque. Since then it has become an Islamic *waqf*. Now the Administration of Waqfs and Islamic Affairs manages it as any other holy place, and access is guaranteed to all Christian communities. Both the mosque and courtyard around it have been recently renovated.

During the renovations carried out at the time of Saladin and his successors, many elements of the Crusader architecture survived, in particular the marble columns and their capitals. A *mihrab* was added to the southern part of the octagon, the spaces between the columns were blocked, and the floor tiles were restored.

The current mosque is octagonal in plan. Marble columns are seen on the corners of the octagon and their capitals are dec-



orated with animal and vegetal ornaments.

The visitor can enter the site from a door on the western side. The floor is covered in small stone tiles. A rectangular stone frame encircles the area where supposedly the footprints of Christ lie. In the circular external courtyard, many altars are found that belong to different sects. On the walls are a number of iron rings, which were used to tie tents or parasols during the annual celebration commemorating the Ascension.

Y.N.

#### IV.1.c Maqam of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya

*The maqam lies on the Mount of Olives next to the Zawiya al-As'adiyya. Visitors should make contact with the attendant prior to their visit.*

Architectural examinations and excavations carried out in 1995 reveal that the *maqam* is a composite of different periods. The earliest finds date back to the Byzantine period, as the discovery of some ceramic fragments testify. On the west wall, there is a Greek inscription. It reads: "*Courage Dometilla. None is immortal*". Even though some believe the site was built to honour Saint Pilagia, it was probably used as a burial place. A *kufic* inscription has also been found dating to the early Islamic period; although it has never been deciphered it may have religious significance since many stories have circulated since the 6<sup>th</sup>/12<sup>th</sup> century that refer to Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya's

*Qubbat al-Su'ud  
Mosque, general view,  
Mount of Olives,  
Jerusalem.*

*Maqam Rabi'a  
al-'Adawiyya,  
staircase, Mount of  
Olives, Jerusalem.*







*Ibn Abu al-Hawari's wife but another Rabi'a whose history time has erased but whose name it has kept".*

The Shrine has a simple rectangular entrance. On top of it is a stone lintel, and above it a window. The entrance was originally an arch that was blocked up at a later stage. Its interior consists of two parts one of which, to the west, is a square room covered by a barrel vault. On its southern wall is a *mihrab*, which indicates that the area was used for prayer. Stairs, approximately 5 m. in length, separate the western from the eastern part. The floor of the eastern section drops below the level of the western part, which has a cement floor, an indication that it was built in modern times. This room is rectangular (5.6 × 3.4 m.) and is also covered by a barrel-vault. A cenotaph lies in the centre of the room.

Y.N.

## IV.2 AL-‘AYZARIYYA

### IV.2.a Mosque of al-‘Uzayr

*The Mosque is located in the town of al-‘Ayzariyya, which lies on the eastern slopes of the Mount of Olives on the road that links Jerusalem with Jericho. Visiting the exterior courtyard is allowed but only outside prayer times and with the imam's permission.*

*The mosque can be reached from the main Jerusalem–Jericho road by turning left onto a tarmac side-road, which lies a few meters to the north-east of the front square of the Church of St Lazarus.*

*Maqam Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya, interior of the funeral chamber, Mount of Olives, Jerusalem.*

place of burial. Furthermore, the ceramic material that has been uncovered here dates to both the Ayyubid and Mamluk periods, not to mention a wall that dates back to the 7<sup>th</sup>/13<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup>/14<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The site is named today after Rabi'a al-‘Adawiyya. The Islamic historical sources refer to more than one person with the same name. The most famous was Um al-Khayr Rabi'a al-‘Adawiyya al-Basriyya, the famous *sufi*, who died in 185/801 in Basra, Iraq. Another is the wife of Rabi'a, Ahmad Ibn Abu al-Hawari, who is probably buried at this site. ‘Abd Allah al-Mukhlis commented on this in the 1930s, saying: “It might well be that the Rabi'a buried here on the Mount of Olives and below the Zawiya al-As'adiyya is neither al-‘Adawiyya nor Ahmad



In Roman and Medieval times, as well as in recent times, al-‘Ayzariyya was the final station before entering Jerusalem from the east, as it was for Christ when he came to Jerusalem from Galilee and was welcomed into the house of Mary, Martha and Lazarus in al-‘Ayzariyya. According to the New Testament, it is the place where Christ performed the miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead. It is thanks to this event, along with the location of the tomb of Lazarus that a town first began to grow, it was further developed during the Byzantine period, and then continued to flourish in medieval times. Its Arabic name was derived from Greek (*Lazarion*) meaning the place of the Lazarus.

Architectural evidence and a number of historical references indicate that in the Byzantine period two churches and a monastery were built on this site (one church was ruined by an earthquake in 390 and a second was built in the 6<sup>th</sup> century). Parts of these edifices were probably reused and renovated during the Crusader period. However, when Saladin conquered Jerusalem in 583/1187, the buildings were in a dilapidated condition. Believing that Christ is a messenger from God, and also in his miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead, the Muslims built a mosque on top of the earlier remains and called it the Mosque of al-‘Uzayr.

There is no exact date given for when the mosque was built. Its architectural fabric, however, shows that it is a composite of many styles that developed in different periods, the last of which was the Ottoman period. The records of the Tri-

bunal Court of Jerusalem show the mosque was renovated in the 10<sup>th</sup>/16<sup>th</sup> century, and then again in the following centuries, the last of which has been documented by a commemorative inscription found above the entrance. The inscription is written in three lines of Ottoman script and is set within an ornamental frame. It states that the mosque was renovated during the reign of Sultan ‘Abd al Hamid II (1293/1876–1327/1909).

The simple door of the mosque leads to a stairway that descends into an open courtyard below street level. The courtyard is rectangular and surrounded by

*Al-‘Uzayr Mosque, entrance with commemorative inscription, al-‘Ayzariyya.*





**Maqam of Nabi Musa**

walls, the stones of which date to different periods as indicated by their sizes, shapes and styles. A modern, simple and concave stone *mihrab* has been built into the southern wall, and a rectangular door leads into the prayer hall of the Mosque, on top of which lies the Ottoman inscription mentioned previously. The prayer hall is rectangular in shape and the floor is covered in carpets. A huge pillar standing inside the entrance supports the barrel-vault ceiling. To the east, is an Ottoman-like rectangular cenotaph, which is attributed to the Prophet al-'Uzayr (St Lazarus). On the southern wall is a *mihrab* covered in typical Ottoman-style ceramic tiles, while at the far end is a rectangular opening that is currently blocked off, but which previously would have led to the tomb of Lazarus. Today, the tomb can be reached

from an entrance to the west of the mosque's entrance.

Y.N.

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**IV.3 MAQAM OF NABI MUSA**


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*Lies 28 km. east of Jerusalem. Look out for the signpost on the main Jerusalem–Jericho road. It is open all day, but visitors to the interior are allowed in only outside prayer times.*

The Maqam of Nabi Musa lies in a remote desert area amidst sand dunes, and overlooks the Dead Sea area. Its serene and quiet surroundings encourage meditation and contemplation, and provide a similar environment to that in which the three monotheist religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) developed.

The *maqam* was built for many reasons. Firstly, Islam and the Qur'an both acknowledge Moses as one of the prophets of God. Secondly, Muslims consider their creed as an amendment and a conclusion to the other two preceding religions (Judaism and Christianity). The Qur'an says: "The prophet believes in all that God has asked him to do. The believers are all those who believe in God, His angels, books and prophets without exception. For all have followed God's way." Thirdly, constructing a vast *maqam* in this area could be seen as stemming from a desire to strike a balance with other monasteries that had been built there since the Byzantine period. Encouraging a large crowd to assemble on specific occasions served many purposes: it diverted the public's attention away from their daily worries, it

*Al-'Uzayr Mosque,  
tomb of the prophet  
al-'Uzayr,  
al-'Ayzariyya.*







*Maqam Nabi Musa,  
general view.*

served as a social occasion where economic transactions were made, and it also sent a message of solidarity to their enemies.

Various historical references mention that the Festival (*Mawsim*) of the Nabi Musa started in the Ayyubid period, but no architectural remains from this period survive. The earliest remains date back to the time of the Mamluk Sultan Baybars, who ordered the building of the *maqam* in 668/1269-1270. Baybars was one of the founders of the Mamluk Dynasty, a firm warrior administrator, who was renowned for his patronage of architectural activities in various parts of the Mamluk Empire; Jerusalem, Palestine, and especially in Cairo. From Baybars' time until the British Mandate (1917-1948), many ren-



*Maqam Nabi Musa,  
minaret of the mosque.*



## Jericho



*Maqam Nabi Musa, interior view with the minaret of the mosque.*

ovations and extensions took place on the site, particularly during the Ottoman period; often undertaken by people who wanted to remain anonymous. Among those who took care of the *maqam* in the Ottoman period was Efendi Husam al-Din (1013/1604–1605), Shaykh Muhammad al-Khalili (1139/1726–1727) and Muhammad Tahir al-Hussayni, the Mufti of Jerusalem (1303/1885–1886).

Architecturally, the Maqam of Nabi Musa is the second largest religious site in Palestine after the Haram al-Sharif. It covers an area of approximately five hectares and is surrounded by walls. It consists of three

storeys; on the western façade is a portal that leads into an open, central courtyard via a corridor where there is a mosque of five aisles, a *maqam*, and, at the centre, several water cisterns. More than 100 rooms and halls of different sizes surround the courtyard. The complex has an underground stable, porticoes, and stores, two bakeries and two kitchens on the ground floor. It also has a minaret of medium height and from the *muezzin's* gallery one has a fantastic view over the mountain range of Jordan. From the west, the complex is preceded by a large square where various shows and activities take place during the festival high season, but which is used as a car park ordinarily. A large cemetery that is still used to bury those who wish to be blessed by the *maqam* lies to the east and the north of the complex. In addition to the festival season that draws huge crowds, the complex attracts many local visitors, but also large groups of Moslems and non-Moslems from India, South-East Asia and Europe throughout the year.

Y.N.

#### IV.4 JERICHO

##### IV.4.a Qasr Khirbat al-Mafjar (Hisham's Palace) (option)

*Situated 2 km. north of Jericho. Open: 08.00–17.00. There is an admission fee.*

Excavations carried out in the 1930s and 1940s by Richard Hamilton and Demetris Baramki uncovered a large palace that



dates back to the Umayyad period. It has been attributed to the Umayyad Caliph Hisham Ibn ‘Abd al-Malik, but now it is thought more likely that his successor, al-Walid Ibn Yazid, built the Palace because of its lavish appearance and splendour, which accords more with the latter’s decadent lifestyle. Although it took 20 years to build, it did not survive for long, as an earthquake struck it only four years after it was completed in 129/747.

Hisham’s Palace in Jericho is the greatest and most beautiful of the many palaces and settlements built in the southern area of the Syrian Desert, namely the Jordanian Desert, revealed in the stucco wall decorations, some of which are exhibited in the Palestine (Rockefeller) Archaeo-

logical Museum in Jerusalem, and mostly by way of the stunning and perfect mosaic floor, which nothing rivals in beauty except for the Dome of the Rock. The area was a favourite winter residence for the Caliph, due probably to the desert topography of Jericho and its climate, but also to the proximity of an abundant water supply from the springs of ‘Ayn al-Dyouk, which permitted the construction of an 8 km.-long aqueduct to transport water to the palace, and which transformed the region into a green oasis.

Due to the significance of Hisham’s Palace in the history of Islamic art and architecture, and its vitality and importance in attracting tourism to the Jericho area, the palace underwent many renovations. The

*Encampment near Jericho, general view, lithograph by D. Roberts (© Victoria & Albert Museum, London).*





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Jericho

latest was carried out in 1994 as a result of a grant from the Italian Government to the Palestinian Department of Antiquities. It was carried out by a joint Palestinian-Italian team and under the supervision of UNESCO.

The archaeological excavation and renovation projects revealed the following parts of the palace: the external entrance, where the ticket office is located, leads into an open courtyard where some surviving architectural remains of the earthquake are exhibited. North of this courtyard is a pool that has a mosaic floor, and to the west lies the entrance to the palace. This leads to a vast courtyard in the centre of which is a decorated window.

Rooms and halls on two levels surround it from the south and west. In the centre of the southern corridor is a small mosque. The base of the minaret is next to it. This was the Caliph's private mosque. The public mosque lies to the north of the eastern portico. The niche of the *mihrab*, which points towards Mecca, is seen on the southern wall. A corridor leads to the splendid palace *hammam*. A pool lies in front of it, and many rooms lie to the north of it. One room may have been used as a reception hall; covered as it is by a remarkable mosaic floor considered to be the most beautiful in the country. A hot-room and toilets were also found.

Y.N.



There was rigorous religious, social and economic activity in Palestine particularly during the Ayyubid period when the whole population, including the governors, began to visit different Palestinian religious shrines. This phenomenon, known as *mawasim* (plural of *mawsim*) or festivals, which was firmly established in the Mamluk period, continued throughout the Ottoman period, and still continues today; it was only suspended during times of political unrest. Among the *maqams* that have been associated with annual religious festivals are: the Maqam of 'Ali Ibn 'Alim Ibn in Arsuf; the Maqam of Nabi Rubin, South of Jaffa; the Maqam of Nabi Salih in Ramla; the Maqam of al-Hussayn in Asqalon; the Maqam of al-Darum near Gaza and the Maqam of Nabi Musa.

The greatest and most famous of these festivals is that of Nabi Musa (the Prophet Moses) which starts on the Friday preceding the Greek Orthodox Good Friday, between 22 March and 25 April. It lasts for one week.

Its procession was documented at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup>-early 20<sup>th</sup> century, as follows: *"The inhabitants of Jerusalem and the inspectors of the maqam's waqf gather in the courtyard of the Aqsa Mosque. The procession will head towards Jericho via Tariq al-Mujahidin, Bab al-Asbat and then to Ra's al-'Amud. The inhabitants of Nablus, Hebron and other cities follow them in a procession carrying flags and banners decorated by Qur'anic verses and cal-*

*igraphy, which refer to the Orthodox Caliphs and the leaders of Sufism. Folk dancing and music accompanies the procession. Some people rode on horses to the site. When the crowds arrive at the site, especially different Sufi Orders their zeal is reflected in the fast rhythm of their drums and the beating of their tambourines. Their spectacular dancing, swinging with a stick and their skilful fencing mix with women's joyful shrills and the cheers of the crowds."*

Prayers took place in the *maqam*, where the Qur'an was also read. The crowds amounted to thousands, so tents were erected around the shrine to accommodate them. The newcomers took the place of those leaving. This festival, like others, was an opportunity for many to honour their vows, to circumcise their boys and have their hair cut for the first time. Free food was offered to a large number of people in the crowds, sponsored by a generous *waqf* allocated for visitors to the site. Many goods were available to satisfy the different needs of visitors. A special kind of sweet was made specifically for the occasion, called the Sweet of Nabi Musa. The celebration lasted for a week, the crowds returning on a Thursday in procession to the Aqsa Mosque. Three flags were carried in the procession, that of the Nabi Musa, the Nabi Dawud (the Prophet David) and the Aqsa Mosque. On arrival, the flags were put in store at the mosque until the following year.



During the Byzantine period, a new phenomenon began in Palestine whereby urban monks would retire to the Jerusalem Desert. The phenomenon originated in southern Egypt and then spread to Palestine. An archaeological survey has uncovered more than 80 such monastic sites in the Jerusalem Desert, in an area that stretches 80 km. × 20 km. Among these sites are the Monastery of Mar Saba near the village of al-‘Ubaydiyya in the Bethlehem area; the Monastery of St George of Koziba in Wadi al-Qilt on the Jerusalem-Jericho road; the Monastery of Hajla close to the River Jordan and Monastery of the Temptation (Qarantal) in Jericho.

The monastic phenomenon has been associated with three figures, each influencing his successor. The first was the monk Chariton, who established the first monastic community (*laura*) in 330, then Euthymius (376–473) who attracted thousands of followers, and finally Sabas (439–532); the greatest organiser of this movement.

This Monastic order had two ways of life: the first was called *coenobium* while the second was known as *laura*. According to the *coenobium* way of life, a group of hermits would live together in a monastery and co-operate with each other. Each member would carry out a certain task in addition to worship, meditation, prayer and reading. They would usually have one group prayer and one individual prayer each day. However, they ate together and shared their daily social activities. This kind of

Order required a complex surrounded by walls and different utilities such as a church, an assembly hall, a dining hall, a close-by water supply, a garden for planting and some retreats. The *laura* way of life, on the other hand, was characterised by the solitary living of a group of monks in a specific environment. Each would live in a cave or a retreat, eat alone and worship God alone for five days a week, then meet up on a Saturday and Sunday with his colleagues in the public prayer area, take some food and return to his retreat.

Whatever way of life was chosen, shared or solitary, it was characterised by simplicity and abstinence. The monks basically ate bread, and the vegetables and fruits that the harsh surrounding environment provided. Occasionally they would carry out some simple activity such as reclaiming land for agriculture, or weaving baskets and ropes to exchange for other products from the neighbouring villages. Large monasteries usually imported wheat from Jordan. Their seclusion and retreat from the tumults of city life gave many monks the opportunity to polish their poetic, literary and theological talents – hence the cultural life of Christianity was greatly enriched.

The Monastery of St George of Koziba in Wadi al-Qilt provides a good example of this phenomenon. It can be reached either from Jerusalem by turning north at the entrance to Jericho Observatory, or from Jericho by taking the first right after leaving the city. The visitor will enjoy a wonderful view of



the desert just before reaching the site. The monastery can be visited between 09.00 and 15.00, but is closed at noon for one hour. Coffee and cold water awaits the visitor following the hardship

of descending the valley, and then climbing up to the monastery, by following the course of the Roman aqueduct that, incidentally, has been repeatedly renovated.