

Transcript of the Video

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In a previous video we discussed the world network of Biosphere Reserves, as well as the Mediterranean Network of Biosphere Reserves, of which Jabal Moussa is a very proud co-founder. And today we will discuss the Lebanese biosphere reserves of which one is currently inactive. It's called Jabal Rehaan and two are very active: Shouf Biosphere Reserve, four hundred and forty square kilometers, 22 villages, over 100'000 visitors a year; and Jabal Moussa Biosphere Reserve: sixty-five square kilometers, seven villages and over thirty-five thousand visitors a year.

What is particularly interesting to note and emphasize is the mythological dimension of both these Lebanese Reserves, not just historical or cultural, but mythological. So Shouf is associated with the Epic of Gilgamesh out of Mesopotamia. It is said that King Gilgamesh and his alter ego Enkidu, came to Mount Lebanon from Mesopotamia to fell the large cedars there and bring them home.

But there was a giant, the fierce giant called Humbaba who was there watching the forest. Unfortunately, or fortunately, depends how you see it - Humbaba gets tricked by Gilgamesh and Enkidu, and they are able to fell the large cedars and just before they take them home Enkidu talks Gilgamesh into killing the giant Humbaba. Now, that was an unnecessary act because they could they took the cedars and they could have gone home, but unfortunately, they do slay giant Humbaba.

So, what you have here is the mother of all protection, since this is a four-thousand-year-old story, presumably, and you also have the mother of all non-sustainable behavior since they go out and kill the giant, whatever you do remember, do not slay Humbaba. So that's the Shouf story... Now I will discuss Jabal Moussa. Jabal Moussa is bordering Adonis valley is associated with the myth of God Adonis out of Phoenician and Greek mythology, itself related with the ancient Egyptian myth of Isis and Osiris. Adonis is an exceptionally handsome young man, loved by many goddesses in the Olympus, in particular by Astarte, goddess of love and fertility, and Persephone, the goddess of the underworld. These two are fighting for his favours, but basically, he's favoring both a little bit equally. Part here, part there, until he decides that he's madly in love with Astarte and he starts being with her more than Persephone. So, she gets mad. And one day as he's hunting in the Adonis valley bearing his name by the river, he gets attacked and mauled by a mysterious wild boar, presumably sent by Persephone. And his blood flows in the river and he dies right there.

Well, Astarte is able to convince Zeus to let him come back to life three days every year. That's the legend and the mythology. And so, from Byblos, there was a yearly procession of the king and princes going up the river to the Astarte Temple. And they used to have there in Afaka or Afka three days of revelry and feasting for the return of Adonis. This is all, of course, mythology. But the places continue to exist today. And one of the great joys of a biosphere reserve such as ours is to contribute to the protection and knowledge of such extraordinary sites. There are three pillars in any Man and Biosphere program, and we have the same. These three are, number one, conservation of nature and culture.

We have seven hundred and twenty-six species of plants of which six are endemic to the sole Jabal Moussa.

A wonderful deciduous forest that is presumably a remnant from the Ice Age, a global important bird area. Many wonderful things that are worth conserving. What does research do? That's the second pillar. One is conservation. Two is research. Research allows us to find out about more and more things that are worth conserving. For example, local universities have found that we have all kinds of interesting mammals like hyenas and wolves that can be seen in plain daylight. And that is quite extraordinary. 50 kilometers from the capital, Beirut. Foreign University, for example, in the case of Helsinki University, they found insects, new insects or insects new to science that they actually called Jabal Mussa. Archaeology. There is a recent documentary that explains this, that we can that you can watch, that we'd like you to watch. Basically, what we have is remnants, archaeological remnants from the Kananae and Bronze Age, which is 2500 years before Christ, going all through Roman and Bizantine up to the Ottoman period. So, this is through research. We unearth these extraordinary things that we can then conserve and show people. Third pillar is the social economic aspect of sustainable development to encourage local people to protect their heritage. This is really very important because that's the philosophy of the man and biosphere concept, human beings at the heart of conservation. So here again, we have three pillars, important pillars of our socio-economic action. One is ecotourism. We have local guards and guides, all of them local. We have guest houses where people have lunch when they come. The 35000 people that came so far, a large number wants to take something to stay at guesthouses or bed and breakfast. And then we have also the traditional food products and handi-crafts. So, these ecotourists, they want to take something home. And so, we have a central kitchen where the local ladies are able to make some wonderful products that people then at the entrances can take home. In particular, we have honey and oregano that are the most cherished products at this stage. A third activity we have that's been quite successful is our native tree nurseries, where we plant up to 40000 seedlings every year coming from our wonderful seeds in our forest and we propagate those. So, we are replanting large parts of Lebanon with these local native seedlings as opposed to importing stuff from outside. So, these activities are bringing something socioeconomically to the homes of the mountain of the biosphere reserve, and that makes the whole difference. Now, you can imagine that there are many constituents in the Man and Biosphere Reserve. We have the landscapes that are part of it. We have the forest, the birds, the bees, the mammals and of course, the people, as we just discussed with their invariably rich culture and traditions, how to balance the often-conflicting interests of all these constituents. That is a difficult balancing act. What we try is to respond to grassroots concerns by all constituents, of course, particularly the people, by giving them work, tested universal answers with support from international knowledge providers and donors. We call this the helicopter approach to biosphere reserve management hovering between intensely local grassroots issues and internationally tried and tested responses.

Does it work? So far, so good. Thank you for your attention.