

PALMYRA

the Lost Paradise

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The media are spreading images of a country in chaos, of violence and war, but with this photo story, DESERT HERITAGE MAGAZINE would like to remind every one of us of the civilian population and of their culture, of the fact that the country is not all broken columns and destroyed museums, but is its people first of all, is young people in Tadmor (Palmyra), is the Anaceh Tribes with their children, their camels and their horses, and is the desert landscape that was still unscathed then. These pictures, taken in more happy times, are meant to help us understand and look ahead.

The important thing now is not what is lost, but to support what still is!





Where is it, the outcry of the West when Palmyra is faced with being destroyed by the IS? The town was a metropolis of the multicultural history of Syria once, a symbol for the peaceful coexistence of up to 20 different cultures and religions, a multifaceted heritage that will be lost for the global community as soon as Palmyra falls into the Islamist's hands. 20 sarcophagi, busts, and statues have been carried to safety to Damascus, but the people had to stay. Allegedly, the first executions have taken place in the antique theater. „Negotiations between the IS and the black market dealers are still going on, as they are haggling who may plunder which archeological sites and sell the artifacts – they will go to Europe, the US, and the rich gulf states.



The IS gets 50% of the money, while the rest of the pillage goes to the black market dealers. Then, bulldozers will tear and plough all across the ground, and for a few dollars, the locals will be allowed to search the soil for antiques. Our only hope is the influence that the Bedouin tribes of the region may have", says Maamoun Abdulkarim, the head of the Syrian General Directorate of Antiquities and Museums. However, the risk is not only for this unique World Cultural Heritage site, which we may lose forever. We may also lose the civilian population, the people living there: the Anazeh Bedouins of the surrounding desert areas, the Sibaa and Fadaan clans and all the inhabitants of the countryside who had found employment in local tourism, as this is the industry that makes for up to 80% of peoples' incomes in an oasis town such as Tadmor (Palmyra). All of these people, the people who received us so hospitably in 2007, presenting their horses and camels to the more than a hundred horse breeders and WAHO guests from all over the world, slaughtering a hundred lambs for us to be able to treat us to a proper feast – where are they today? Did they survive the war so far? Are they going to survive it?



The Valley of Tombs with the Towers of Yemliko, premises which were used about 2000 years ago. The dead were put to rest in the tower niches. Are they going to be allowed to rest in peace some more?





These women and children are members of the Sibaa and Fadaan Clans of the Anazeh Bedouin Tribe in the area of Tadmor, which the WAHO guests met during their visit in 2007. The women love tattooing their faces according to tribal tradition. The Bedouin woman is the lady of the tent and most of the great burden of daily work rests with her. It's the women who make the tents with the wool of the sheep, make cheese from the milk of the camels and sheep, cure leather, sew clothing and get water - and of course, raise the children.



The Anazeh Bedouin tribe is one of the most ancient and powerful tribes, living in an area covering Syria and Iraq as far as Saudi Arabia. They are just as proud of their own pure (asil) pedigrees as of those of their horses and camels. And in the close-knit society of Clans and families, kinship and friendship ties are of great importance, traditionally almost as important as religious issues. The men care for the animals. They turn the camels, sheep, and horses out to pasture, often spending several days in a row away from the village or camp. Camels, just like sheep, provide the Bedouins with meat, milk, and wool, and in addition, camels are excellent beasts of burden. Animal dung is used for the cooking fires, a very necessary asset in the desert where wood is scarce. The men also see to breeding the animals and milking the females – and they brew, in the traditional men's tent, the coffee that every guest is greeted with.



The steppes and deserts of Syria are alive, and the Bedouins know that they can only live along with them, not against them. They adapt to the harsh conditions, taking their animals to follow the constant climatic changes of the desert. They live off their herds of sheep, horses, and camels, keeping just the amount of animals which nature can support.



Horse races are a much-loved activity that serves to keep horse performance capacity a top priority in breeding. Riding is usually done without a saddle and with most horses wearing no more tack than a kind of halter. The typical distance is 10 -15 km, the stretch between one village and the next, and the only gait is usually canter – on the homestretch, it may be fast gallop. The Arabian horses we saw easily enabled their supply sitting riders to keep their balance – even at high speed.



The children are involved in every aspect of tribal life as a matter of fact – and we hope they still have a future there. After all, children are the future not only for the tribe, but for the whole country. It depends on their development, on their chances in life, whether the country will be able to find peace.

