

08. Ghar el Melh Lake - Bohayrit Al Milih, Tunisia



On its southern and western side it is bordered by marshland, on its eastern side it communicates with the sea, while in the north it borders with the Djebel Nadour region. A 6 km long sandbar separates Ghar el Melh from the Mediterranean Sea, whereas draining channels were constructed on its west side.

The region has a lengthy history. It was first inhabited by the Phoenicians. The area, being strategically important, was later conquered by the Romans who were followed by many others such as the Vandals, Byzantines, Arabs, Ottomans and the French.

The presence of the ancient port indicates the significance of its strategic position throughout the centuries. In the village of Ghar el Melh, the very well-preserved 15th century Spanish fort is a magnificent example of its past, along with the other forts of the same period, as well as the Turkish fortresses, the old bath-houses and the 17th-18th century prisons.

Fishing has always been important for the locals, who have developed several fishing techniques, tools and boats to serve their needs. Now, the old port of the village has been almost abandoned, used by only a few fishermen. The traditional boats have, to some extent, been replaced by motor-boats and aquaculture is being developed.

Land cultivation of the lake shores strongly depends on the level of humidity of each place and on the quantity of soil brought by the floods. The way fields are cultivated in this region (pieces of land nearly floating above the lake) has allowed many families to inhabit the shores all around

the wetland. A draining system is used agricultural purposes on the banks and in the marshes. The banks were also used for pasturing and the entire area around the wetland for hunting.

An important religious practice for the people of Ghar el Melh village is the visit to their spiritual leader, the Marabout Sidi Ali el Mekki, whose home overlooks the entire wetland.

The unique landscape of the lake has inspired many artists. In the past few years, a photography festival takes place in the area and every year attracts more and more photographers. After the recent restoration of the forts and all the monuments of the site, movement of visitors to the lagoon was facilitated for exploration of this area, rich in both traditions and biodiversity..