

ZAHLE, CITY OF GASTRONOMY

UNESCO Creative Cities Network



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Eng. Joseph Kreidi

Research & Content
Chérine Yazbeck

Photography
© **Chérine Yazbeck**

Design
Chantal Coroller

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RAIDY

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1. MANAGEMENT TEAM

The idea of Zahle joining the 'Creative Cities Network' came up naturally formulated by Joseph Kreidi, Programme Officer for Culture at UNESCO-Beirut Office. Mr. Kreidi appointed Chérine Yazbeck, a local food culture specialist to fulfil the task. Zahle has been committed for over a century to the spread and recognition of traditional Lebanese food. As a long-time gastronomy leader in the region, Zahle intends to develop the cultural food heritage with ambitious projects. With its assets, Zahle aims to attract even more visitors into the region by supporting the creative local food community.

As the person responsible for the project, I have contacted the main actors of the food industry working hand in hand with the Municipality of Zahle and at its head, Mr. Joseph Maalouf. I met a substantial number of farmers, small-scale producers, foodies, restaurant owners, pastry shop owners, bakeries

owners, industrials, politicians, entrepreneurs, cultural main figures and tourism experts who expressed a great interest in joining the 'Creative Cities Network' that would put Zahle on the map and encourage the city to acquire a regional and international status of gastronomic city. The two main zahliots that helped me fulfil this project are Khalil Geha, a prominent figure of Zahle and Irène Alouf, owner of an eco-friendly organic boutique hotel in Zahle. This achievement would also connect Zahle to other cities that are already part of the global network.

The Team that will work on the follow-up of this project is composed of committed locals.

> Point Person

Chérine Yazbeck: Project Coordinator
chessyaz@gmail.com
Lebanese food expert, food writer, journalist and photographer.
Author of 'The rural taste of Lebanon – a food heritage trail', 'Le Liban Gourmand' (a foodie guide), 'Le Liban Autrement' (ecotourism guide), 'A Complete Insiders Guide to Lebanon' and the 'Shouf Cedars Reserve' guidebook.

> **From the Municipality of Zahle**
President of the Municipality: Joseph Maalouf (president@zahle.gov.lb)
Elise Estephan Tamer, lawyer and teacher at Law University. Chairwoman of Zahle Municipality. (tamerelise@hotmail.com)
Youssef Skaf, municipality counsellor
Youssef Kerouni, lawyer and co-owner of a press group.
Samir Mallo, dentist, member of the Municipality.
Michel Ballech, lawyer & counsellor.
Elias Chamoun, counsellor.

> Administration & culture of Zahle

Said Gédeon, executive at Bekaa Chambre of Commerce and Agriculture. (said@cciaz.org.lb)
Khalil Geha, CEO of Geha company, and specialist of the history of Zahle. (khalilggeha@yahoo.com)
Feyrouz Chamoun, founder of Zahle Historic Museum.

> Food experts & hospitality

Irène Alouf, owner of an organic guesthouse in Zahle. (irene@beitelkroum.com)
Johayna Dawalibe, nutritionist in Zahle

Aziz Wardy, owner of winery Wardy, Zahle. (aziz@domainewardy.com)
Jean-Paul Khoury, owner of winery Château Khoury, Zahle.
Sébastien Khoury, wine expert and owner of Domaine de Baal, Zahle. (sebastien@domainedebaal.com)
Michel Mhanna, food specialist, owner of oldest Berdawni restaurant, Mhanna, Zahle.
Jean Arabi, mezze expert, owner of Casino Arabi, Berdawni, Zahle.
Pascal Nmeir, owner of Casino Nmeir, Berdawni, Zahle.
Elie Ghattas, chef and owner of restaurants in Zahle.
Clément Tannouri, Zahle photographer, writer. (info@clementtannouri.com)
Rosine Zahlaoui, founder of Artisan guild, Zahle.
Kamil Skaff, owner of Skaff Farm.
Barbara Abdeni Massaad, food writer, author of 'Mouneh'.
Nicolas abou Fayssal, owner of Gardenia Grain d'Or, food company, Zahle.
Walid Mouzannar, member of L'Académie Internationale de la Gastronomie, Lebanon.
Kamal Mouzawak, founder of the Farmer market, Souk el Tayeb.



2. VISION

In the scheme of designing the project application to integrate Zahle into 'Creative Cities Network', we would like to establish the legacy of Zahle as the heritage city for regional food. Unesco confidence and focus on the city would certainly initiate a general interest into the

story and culture of the city that lies at the crossroad of many routes. Gastronomy and Zahle are strongly connected since decades. Located in the midst of the agricultural region of the Middle East, Zahle enjoys an ideal place whereby regional cultures mingle and interact. 'Creative Cities Network' would empower the strengths of the local communities to join and improve

fair trade, exchange, know-how and diversity. Harvests, the land, the attachment to local produces, the respect of Mother Nature, the connexion to the region are elements that have been driving Zahle for centuries. Natural resources are essential assets to the city and they all end up designing a unique cultural profile. Zahle has a strong will to come

together with cities across the world to share its story and connect with many cultures as it has always proven to do throughout the centuries.

It is even more significant now that the Middle East is going through turmoil and major changes in the scope of the Arab Spring. Zahle finds itself in the middle of this (re) evolutionary process.

The aim of this application is to enable the city to push forward new diversification projects by attracting new contributors in many fields and mainly in the food sector.

Zahle wishes to encourage and unite creative small-scale farmers, artisans and producers in order to acquire the local economy based on good and fair food alongside a sustainable and reliable farming.

Residents of Zahle and to a certain extent the Bekaa residents have always been keen on safeguarding their traditions through handicrafts and the transmission of food heritage. They feel a certain pride in the preservation of this expertise.

In the event of integrating Zahle to 'Creative Cities Network', the city would boost gastronomic programs focused on the tradition linked to modern techniques. The incentive would draw the path of a renewed yet active region whereby locally produced food would be highly represented and promoted giving a serious push to local economies.



3. MISSION

Zahle wishes to apply to 'Creative Cities Network' in order to boost the local economy driven mainly by its gastronomic assets.

The city is already a main actor in the region when it comes to food heritage culture and would like to generate a global interest on the regional wealth, food.

The city would enhance food related projects as well as investments in the sustainable food production. Indeed, the city intends to develop interests in fair and organic food processes that would draw a better future to the food industry alongside a healthier and environment driven agricultural economy.

Zahle is a city with a strong rural identity. It is located at the heart of the Bekaa Plateau in a sparsely populated region. Zahle boasts a long-lasting culinary tradition with a stunning gastronomic culture based on locally produced sustainable food.

The objective of being part of 'Creative Cities Network Unesco' is to place Zahle on the global map and to raise interest in preserving its regional input.

4. GEOGRAPHY

A blessed geographical location

Zahle is 50 kilometers far from Beirut, in the heart of the country at an equal distance between the north, the south, the east and the west. Hence, it enjoys a strategic location in the most renowned fertile land. Zahle is built upon a series of

foothills of the mountain, at the Western edge of the Bekaa plateau, with Mount Sannine 2,628 metres towering above it. It is on the brow of a mountain of which there are sublime views of the extensive vale bounded on each side by lofty mountains. Zahle is built in an inlet of the mountain, on a steep ascent, surrounded with vineyards. The river Berdawni issues from a narrow

valley into the plain and waters the gardens of Zahle. Zahle has a delightful prospect of the fertile plain – once referred to as “the grain warehouse of Rome” and the surrounding outlook enhances its serene atmosphere. The hills form a narrow valley, an extension of a ravine to the northwest (“Wadi el Arayesh” or Valley of Vines). Due to its unique topography, Zahle

outskirts spread vertically on steep hill slopes, and the town features an elevation difference of more than 200 metres in a narrow geographical area. The Berdawni was at a time the town’s source of drinking water and its most prized natural emblem. The river winds through the valley, fringed with masses of foliage, in which tall and stately poplars predominate the rich vineyards clothing the whole slopes of the mountains and wild glens that furrow their sides.

Climate

Zahle enjoys a Mediterranean climate characterized by hot and dry summers and cold and chilly winters, where most of the precipitation is concentrated. However, due to its high altitude and inland location, in the rain shadow of the Lebanon mountains, its climate features some continental characteristics: summers are hotter than coastal areas, with peaks of 38°C in summer together with low humidity. Temperatures fall below 20°C at night, which makes summer particularly pleasant compared to coastal cities. On the other hand, winters are cold. The north wind in the valley is so freezing that residents refer to it as a “break nails”. In the valley, temperatures can easily plummet below -10°C.





5. COMMUNITY

Zahle is after Beirut and Tripoli in terms of size but also with respect to economic, cultural, and political influence, the third most influential city in Lebanon.

The population of about 150,000 residents is spread into 34 villages.

It is third largest city in magnitude and importance to Lebanon. Nevertheless, it has a village feel. Dwellers lie somewhere between rural and urban world. They are strongly attached to values; yet, despite this strongly rooted personality, they have developed their city in the most modern way.

together in order to celebrate a Saint, a holy feast or simply to party.

Tucked away from Lebanon's busy coastal centers, the people of Zahle have developed their own brand of individualism and way of doing things. The city's reputation for intellectual dynamism comes from a long line of writers, thinkers and poets who have contributed to Lebanon's cultural and political scene. Zahle is renowned in Lebanon for its high educational level. Many celebrities in poetry, arts, culture, literature all hail from this village-city. Among the most famous, Said Akl, Khalil Farhat, Michel Tard, Riyad Maalouf or Joseph Abitaan.

Families in Zahle own a 'karake' – a homemade arak distil. They distil arak thanks to a know-how passed down on to generations. Arak is sometimes referred to as 'arak zahlaoui' and the 'zahliot' (of Zahle) expression is well known: 'Zahle, Zahle - Zahletna wa churbe el arak adetna, wa l Berdawni mayetna' (Zahle, Zahle, our Zahle – and arak drinking is our custom, and the Berdawni is our water). This hymn drafted by Rachid el Safadi dates back to 1857. At that time, the people of Zahle had proclaimed their city an autonomous republic. The manufacturing of arak spread throughout the country, yet the Bekaa remains the region of vine growing.



6. STORY OF THE CITY

at a glance...

Zahle is the capital and largest city of the Bekaa Governorate. Lebanon was given the epithet “Switzerland of the East” by travellers that have applied to it ever since the 19th century. Zahle is located 55 km east of the capital Beirut, on the crossroads of the Beirut-Damascus junction. Over the last decades, it has sprung

up into considerable importance. Zahle lies in the Bekaa plateau, in-between Mount and Anti Lebanon. It is known as the “Bride of the Bekaa” and famed for its festivals and feasts.

The City of Wine and Poetry or ‘City of khamra and Poetry Khamra including Arak and Wine’ is celebrated throughout the region for its pleasant climate, abundant riverside restaurants and local arak. It is romantically situated on the edge of a deep ravine with the most exhilarating scenery of the far stretching verdure of the Bekaa. This



flourishing town upon the verge of the plain of the Bekaa is renowned for the utmost kindness and hospitality of its native hosts.

Zahle was founded in the early 18th century but lies in the middle of an ancient environment that goes back to five millennia. In 1622, the great Fakhreddine el-Maan set the region of el-Karak on fire at the time when Zahle surroundings used to be a large wild forest. Zahle was referred to as the Valley of the Tigers due to a huge number of tigers wandering in its whereabouts. Leopards, bears,

deer would roam freely before the 18th century.

In 1810, Zahle was part of the territory of the Druzes under the authority of Emir Bachir based in Deir el-Qamar. The inhabitants gained their subsistence partly by the cultivation of their vineyards and a few mulberry plantations and partly by their shops through the commerce of sheep and their manufacture. Many dyeing houses used indigo only to dye cloths. Cotton was bought from Nablous. They would likewise fabricate abbayas or woollen mantles. The various manufactured articles were sold to the peasantry who flock in from the mountains.

Zahle was burnt three times, in 1777, 1791, and in 1860 during a memorable conflict that opposed Christians Druzes. Zahle was a large town chiefly inhabited by Christians who paid tribute to the Emir of the Druzes. The last total destruction of the city left it miserable and in despair; nevertheless in the aftermath of this demolition, during the Mutasarafiyyah era, Zahle was rebuilt and thriving again. The construction of the railroad line between Beirut and Damascus in 1885 put Zahle on the map while conveying prosperity to the city as it became a freight hub on the trade route between Lebanon, Syria and Iraq. It resumed its role as a regional agricultural centre.

A hospitable city

In the 18th century, the caravanserai was a roadside inn where travelers rest and recover from the day's journey. Caravanserais supported the flow of commerce of traders of trade routes along the Silk Road. Zahle was a main intersection whereby merchants would stop over, have a meal, feed their horses and spend the night over in order to take the road the next day. One of the most popular caravanserai has been recently renovated by the Wardy family. It is composed of a stable for horses and several rooms where merchants would sleep in. Traditionally, Zahle has always been a city where travellers would meet and interact while sharing food over travel stories. At the turn of the 19th century, Zahle started establishing hotels to

accommodate tourists flocking from all over the region. In 1878, Hotel el-Soha was the first establishment to welcome tourists. Unfortunately, it didn't survive the devastating 1975-1989 war and is closed since 1981. Hotel America, Hotel Akl and Hotel Kadri played a significant role in the lodging activity of the city. Akl and Kadri are still operating now. Guesthouse such as Garda Hotel, Al Fadi Center and Saint Joseph's home cater for backpackers. Hotel Traboulsi (1913), Hotel Arabi (1978) and Monte Alberto (1990) added to the prestigious offers already operating in the city. Monte Alberto is a landmark hotel overlooking the city.

*Nowadays, a new era in hospitality has been achieved with the opening of a modern spirited auberge such as the most recent guesthouse: **Beit el***



Kroum. *Beit el Kroum ran by Irene Alouf is a family hotel serving genuine organic Zahle food. With its signature mouneh (preserved food), the owner offers homemade produce for in-house meals. Among specialties, Beit el Kroum prepares kishk (fermented yogurt) with a special torpedo-shaped kebbe dipped in Kishk soup, stuffed vine leaves, goat labne in olive oil and leyali Zahle. The latter is a milk pudding with different layers. The first layer is composed of a milk pudding, banana bites, achta (milk cream) topped with honey. Beit el Kroum boutique hotel offers charming bedrooms with a great view of the Bekaa valley and the Sannine peek. Each bedroom has its own theme, reflected in its unique furniture, colors, textures, lighting and aromas to suit one's mood.*

*Run by motivated and active Nada Hraoui, **Tanbakji** is a restaurant that perpetuates old village recipes. The setting is made of old furniture designed as a tribute to old Lebanese houses of the Bekaa plateau. The owner's aim is to safeguard old family recipes sharing them with travellers and locals. The chef in charge hails from the Bekaa and has an accurate idea about food growing and high quality produce. Most of the food is bought from neighbouring farmers and producers.*

In the region, several high-end hotels such as Park Hotel or Massabki in Chtoura offer excellent facilities together with local food.

A flag, an anthem, a feel of autonomy...

Zahle was the first independent state in the region in the 19th century, when it declared its autonomy to the Ottoman regime and had its own flag and anthem.

In 1820, during the battle of Maze, the people of Zahle created a red and green flag symbolizing the city. Red, for blood, green for life, survival and fertility atop a cross for victory.

Late 19th century, Zahle had totally recovered from several battles and conflicts and enjoys since the turn of the century a prosperous industry and economy.

Zahle is home to lofty edifices and contiguous structures, gardens and plantations, fruits and flowers, with a limpid river passing through it. Zahle offers the most bewildering mass of color, patches and strips of green and brown, dashes of red, blotches of burnt-umber and sienna.

In 1914, Jamal Pacha the Turk invaded the city and turned Hotel Kadry into a hospital for its army. He then seized grain warehouses and sheep to force the inhabitants to resilience. Zahle and the Mount Lebanon Mutassarifiyya were part of the Ottoman Empire.

In 1916, Sykes Picot convention appoints France as the mandate authority of the region. In the



aftermath of WWI after the defeat of Turkey allied to the Germans, in September 1920, General Gouraud declared Bekaa, Baalbek, Hasbaya and Rashaya official lands of the Greater Lebanon.

During the French mandate, the city prospered and developed its

commercial activities. Natives zahliots such as Chebel Dammous and Moussa Nammour contributed to the draft of the Lebanese Constitution in 1926.

In 1930, Zahle became a caza consequently the capital of the

province of the Bekaa. In 1943, Lebanon was independent and Zahle, a flourishing city. From 1975 till 1989, Zahle suffered from the consequences of the War. At the end of the war, Elias el-Hrawi, a zahliot was elected President of the Republic.

Zahle, a word, three explanations...

Zahle might have been named after “zahila” referring to its great land movements. Another option would be a tribute to Zahlan, the prince of the Hilal family based in Zahle in the 7th century during Arab invasion. A more mystical explanation would be in reference to Zuhal or Saturn as Romans worshiped the God of Fertility incarnated by the planet Saturn.

William H. Rau (1903)
Zahleh of Lebanon, a prosperous Christian village of Syria.

“Zahleh is the largest village of Lebanon, containing 15,000 inhabitants. It owes its prosperity mainly to the labours of missionaries from England and the United States who have made it a center of education and Christian influence. It has numerous churches, mission schools of a high grade and manufactories of various kinds. The town has an air of comfort, cleanliness, intelligence and thrift very rare in Palestine. Here one sees women without the distinctive dress of the Mohammedan women, women of more beauty, intelligence and character, with hope in their faces and joy in their lives. The place is more western than oriental. Miles of vineyards are seen and there are many thriving manufactories”





7. RESOURCES

Lebanon is a country with a unique geographical position. However, agriculture based mainly in the Bekaa is still an artisan industry. Farmers in rural areas need capacity-building to improve their farming methods thus increasing their productivity and competitiveness. This would

contribute to the development of a more environmental friendly agricultural sector. In 2002, agriculture in Lebanon represented 6% of the GDP, and 7% of the active population, while in 1970 its contribution to the GDP was around 9% with 19% of the active population. Agricultural production has decreased by 12% between 1970 and 2008 mainly due

to the effects of the post-war (1975-1990) economical crisis, and to the economical policies favouring the tertiary sector (services) over the primary and secondary sectors. The natural advantages of the country in terms of water resources, number of sunny days, geomorphology and climate diversity would allow the development of an efficient

agricultural sector, if other socio-economic and geo-political constraints are overcome. At the household level, agriculture is mainly a part time activity, complementing other production, or service activities. Commercial agriculture is not very frequent, and when it occurs it must be complemented by other economical inputs. (T)

Table 4. Area (ha) under different crops (Source: FAOSTAT)

Crops	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Wheat	40 000	43 600	43 500	45 808	46 620	49 500	52 900	52 800	49 900	50 000
Barley	8 700	7 000	11 500	13 911	12 590	14 500	15 900	15 750	14 500	16 000
Chick pea	2 600	2 000	2 921	1 989	1 810	1 900	2 030	1 800	1 900	2 000
Maize	900	879	846	930	550	900	1 050	900	900	1 000
Pulses	9 447	8 738	11 165	9 814	8 503	8 839	9 096	8 527	8 913	7 439
Vegetables	28 487	26 632	28 705	27 298	27 301	26 553	26 401	25 737	27 222	27 213
Fruit	70 661	70 981	69 868	71 900	71 571	69 733	70 605	70 800	71 780	73 886
Citrus Fruits	15 205	15 292	15 155	16 426	16 890	16 500	17 113	16 763	16 810	17 091
Root Crops	12 945	11 942	16 940	19 201	19 564	19 738	19 934	20 132	20 136	20 535
Vetches	4 400	4 500	4 400	4 350	4 400	4 574	4 601	4 300	4 496	3 014
Sorghum	900	750	700	600	591	642	691	687	646	645
Sugar Beet	7 027	270	0	0	1 156	1 100	500	430	700	700
Coarse Grain	10 850	8 929	13 296	15 713	13 999	16 333	17 954	17 648	16 338	17 954
Olives	55 646	56 834	57 570	57 564	58 531	58 524	59 100	58 600	56 000	57 000

Fragmentation and small sizes of farms are characteristic of the mountains and the South while they are a little larger in the Bekaa. Only 5% of holdings are larger than 4 ha, with 49% of the total Utilized Agricultural Area (UAA), while 30% of the UAA are larger than 10 ha and concentrated in the Bekaa. The legal status and land tenures of the holdings are distributed as follows:

92% of agricultural holders are single holdings operating their lands individually
 7% of agricultural holders are operating their lands in a partnership with others
 83% of holders own their lands (corresponding to 68% of total UAA)
 8% of holders are still in a transitory (heritage) process (corresponding to 7% of total UAA)
 6% lands are operated through rental (corresponding to 18% of total UAA)

The Bekaa plain offers large areas of arable lands planted mainly with cereals and sugar beet. Grape growing is very important in the central Bekaa, thanks to the contribution of large investments and the application of modern production, transformation and marketing techniques allowing the development of an important wine industry. Olive production is very important in Koura, in South Lebanon and in Hasbaya. While apricots are one of the main specialties of northern Bekaa; fruit trees (apples, cherries, peaches) are concentrated on the western slopes of the Mount-Lebanon chain.

Animal production is mainly concentrated in the Bekaa Plateau and concerns ovine and caprine livelihood. Sheep production is almost exclusive to the Bekaa, historical birthplace of the local "Awassi" breed. Goats are found almost everywhere, feeding in



the woodlands and high altitude formations. Ovine production is not well developed, although some investors are trying to put a milk value-chain into operation.

The production of ruminants is secondary in Lebanese agriculture, with less than one agricultural holding in 8 being involved in animal husbandry. Cattle are mainly raised for milk production with the majority of the stock in large farms of the Holstein breed. Sheep and goats have always been an integral part of the rural mosaic in Lebanon. Sheep are mainly of the regional Awassi breed with local characteristics, and goats are mainly of the local Baladi breed, and the Damascus or Shami breed. Both sheep and goats are managed under nomadic and semi-nomadic systems, feeding on native pastures, woodland species and crop residues. They are distributed all over Lebanon with a high concentration in the Bekaa Valley. The economic and heritage importance of these breeds, both at the community and national levels contribute to their conservation, and reduce the risk of losing them through breeding or replacement programs. The wild goat that used to roam in the Lebanese mountains has disappeared and is thought to be extinct.

Changes in land use practices, the shifting from rural to urban

livelihoods and the severe fragmentation that woodlands, rangelands and pasture lands are witnessing because of the urban sprawl, has seen herds (goats and sheep) decrease in number and pastoralism is no longer an important part of the rural mosaic. In some parts of the country, mismanagement practices and overgrazing have led to the deterioration of pastures and woodlands.

In 2003, dairy cattle, sheep and goat milk production represented 7.2% of the total value of the agricultural production; while meat production did not exceed 3.9%. Despite this production being secondary, it remains very important, mainly when it comes to goats and sheep largely because of their strong ability to utilize pasture and fallow lands within the holdings or at the landscape level.

The local production of sheep and goat meat suits the requirements of the traditional Lebanese diet. However, despite the important contribution to the Lebanese diet and cuisine, the demand on sheep and goat meat has been decreasing during the past few decades, mainly because of the development of malls and supermarkets and the availability of cheaper imported meat. The demand has witnessed a slight increase again (particularly

for goat meat) after the global crisis related to the mad cow disease and the new trends in food habits favouring local and organic products.

Some large investments have been put into the dairy products value chain level. Some are private with several new dairy plants delivering fresh and UHT milk to the Lebanese market. Other investments are public, mainly through the IFAD project on the rehabilitation of the small livestock producers in the Bekaa. After the 2006 war, the dairy sector has suffered important losses, but the private sector has managed to recover and rehabilitate the affected plants. Nowadays, in integrated circuits, milk is commercialized through three main channels: independent milk-men (the hallabas), milk-men appointed by the dairy plants and collection centres, both public, currently facing financial and technical problems while private plants are functioning well.

Cattle meat production remains very limited, with livestock imported from different countries (mainly EU) and slaughtered in Lebanon. Such production provided around 60% of the bovine meat in 2002. High quality meat is mainly imported chilled or frozen. The number of sheep is estimated 330,000 in 2009 and the number of goats reached 450,000 in 2009.

Goat production suffers from imports even though the demand for goat meat and milk products remains large and some 10,000 families have this production as their major source of income.

All the sheep and/or goat farmers in the regions surveyed are transhumant, sharing their time between high mountain zones in spring and summer (from April-May till October-November) looking for good quality pastures. The nomadic system allows the children to join schools during winter, when the families move the herds to lower altitudes. During the spring and summer, at the end of the school years, sons and daughters help their parents in the different tasks related to their herds and small farms. Even teenagers and young adults stay with their families and frequently inherit the job from their parents. The nomadic way of living and the freedom of the wilderness run in the blood and cannot be easily changed into a sedentary way of living. The provision of the bare necessities and a slight improvement in the quality of livelihoods would certainly preserve this family structure and this traditional system.



8. CULTURE & TRADITION

The city's culture has long revolved around its signature crop, the grape, and its products, wine and arak. Arak, in particular, has traditionally been served in cafés any time of the day. Together with the town's gorgeous natural settings, it might have provided with inspiration many of the fifty poets and writers who were born Zahle over the past century, leading to its reputation as "the City of Wine and Poetry". A graceful personification of this nickname stands at the town's entrance: a statue of Erato, the Muse of love poetry, holding a bunch of grapes.

Artisans: handicrafts gems



Rosine Zahlaoui has been struggling for decades to compile a list of local artisans pursuing an artwork that is authentic and rooted in the region. Among the many artists that have their workshop in the city, Murano glass artisans and weavers make their way through collective exhibitions and fairs. Nadim & Bianca Tahtouh are Murano glass specialists. The tradition of Murano glass making is a heritage from Italy. Indeed, in Fakhr ad Din II times, Mount Lebanon had strong ties with Italy explaining in some ways the.

Fakhr ad Din II enhanced Lebanon's military and economic development with the objective of liberating the country. He was remarkably tolerant and tried to amalgamate the different religious groups into a united Lebanese community. For the sake of independence, he concluded a secret agreement with Ferdinand I, Duke of Tuscany in Italy, with the two parties pledging to support each other against the Ottomans. Fakhr ad Din II initiated many strategies to modernize the country by inviting architects, irrigation engineers and agricultural experts from Italy to work in Lebanon.

Murano glass artisans refined technologies such as crystalline glass, enameled glass (smalto), glass with threads of gold (aventurine), multicolored glass (millefiori),

milk glass (lattimo), and imitation gemstones made of glass. Murano Island has been a commercial port as far back as the 7th century. Over the decades, Murano glassblowers and artisans have moved and setup shop elsewhere, such as Zahle that boasts a local production.



Silk mills...

As the number of silk mills in the region increased up through 1885, Lebanon began to gain half of its gross national product from the silk trade and was therefore able to purchase two-thirds of the bulgur, flour, dried legumes, and dairy products its peasants consumed from Syria, Turkey, and even North African countries. All this required the planting of large areas of mulberry trees, thereby displacing

the traditional food farming systems, with the result that wheat and other foods had to be imported and were sold to the very farmers who had once grown them as staples.

With both the Ottoman War and World War I taking their tolls, the silk-for-food trade network came unravelled. The resulting tragedy of food insecurity is the reason that some fifteen million people of Lebanese descent now live beyond Lebanon's borders, and only five million Lebanese remain in their native land.

In November 1914, the Ottoman Empire participated in World War I alongside with Germany, disrupting the trade of silk to France and leading the Ottomans to mandate that every Lebanese farmer who could carry a gun join the army. Hundreds of thousands of Lebanese men and boys were forced to leave the mulberry groves and remnant grain fields, though roughly a fifth of them deserted their compulsory military service and fled the country. The shortage of silk leaf harvesters alone would have thrown the country into an economic crisis, but blockades also prevented the women who worked in the silk factories from getting their products to high-end French markets, and the silk trade collapsed. With a locust plague devastating the remaining cereal fields in the summer of 1915 and no

money to purchase staple foods from Syria or Africa, the food security of the Lebanese peasantry evaporated before their eyes. They were left with only locust-damaged mulberry leaves, which silkworms can eat but humans cannot. The mulberries themselves had little market, and their food value did not sustain many local families.

Lebanon has a long tradition of silk weaving. In Zahle, artisans work specific designs that are passed down for generations. Artisan Weavers is the revival of that family tradition, infusing it with new life, new designs and modern manufacturing techniques.

Around 4000 BC, the Canaanites lived in Lebanon. The Greeks named the Phoenicians “red” referring to the purple dye extracted from murex seashells, a hallmark of the Phoenicians. The Phoenicians were skilled people who developed the first phonetic alphabet. They were accomplished sailors who travelled widely, trading local goods such as cedar timber and murex with Egypt and other Mediterranean countries, including those of Europe. The Phoenicians established strong ties with Egypt where tribute in the form of precious cedar wood was paid to the Pharaohs. The Phoenicians dominated the Mediterranean Sea trade for over 500 years excelling in the production of textiles, carved

ivory, glass, jewelry and metal work. Tyre was a flourishing commercial center famed for its purple dye extracted from the mollusc murex, a marine snail still living along Tyre’s shores. Tyre produced also rich silken garments that were exported throughout the Mediterranean Basin.

Painting Zahle for decades

Georgette Zaatar just like many local painters is found of her city that she depicts so beautifully in her artwork.



Old houses, red rooftops, stone mansions, green hills overlooking Berdwani river, all architectural elements of the city are enhanced in her stunning paintings. Georgette works also ‘for the memory of my city and to pass down to generations our cultural and architectural heritage so it doesn’t get lost’.

The traditional rural Lebanese house consists of three rooms: a dar (living-room), the khazneh or beyt el mouneh (food stocking chamber)

and a cowshed below or adjoined to the house, the animals’ shelter.

Georgette Zaatar’s goal is to pay tribute to the rural house that is built with a mixture of clay and straw. The wet mixture is poured into a mould to obtain a sun-dried brick. The earth serves as a mortar sealing. The latter is used as the first filler to walls. The second filler is made of marl and straw. A coat of lime with salt and oil fixes the color and removes insects.

Heritage Museum – Feyrouz Chamoun

In the outskirts, a family run museum gathers a collection of traditional objects and elements of Zahle's lifestyle. This museum located on the ground floor of a private house, is open to the public and the grandson of the owner tours visitors and students explaining them the purpose of the museum as well the significance of the objects exhibited. Chamoun's father was a famous Zahle painter. The family has dedicated generations to arts and opened up this private museum in order to display food utensils from Lebanese heritage, Ottoman arms, old paintings depicting the story of the region as well as rare manuscripts gathered through the generations.

Noah's Tomb

The tomb of Noah is a long structure seemingly part of an aqueduct. It extends about sixty feet the stature of Noah according to Oriental tradition.

It consists of a tombstone. At the time of the ottomans, Turks pretended that Noah is really buried there. Nebbi-Noah is the sepulchre of the great patriarch.

In the Old Testament, Genesis 9, there is a clear reference to wine. Noah's tomb established in Zahle

is in perfect harmony with its environment, vineyards and a green plateau.

'20. Noah, a man of the soil, proceeded to plant a vineyard. 21. When he drank some of its wine, he became drunk and lay uncovered inside his tent. 22. Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his father naked and told his two brothers outside. 23. But Shem and Japheth took a garment and laid it across their shoulders; then they walked in backward and covered their father's naked body. Their faces were turned the other way so that they would not see their father naked.' (Genesis 9, Old Testament).

The most impressive Acropolis in the world: Baalbek Temples

Perched atop a high point in the fertile Bekaa valley with an expansive view over the plateau, the temple complex of Baalbek is arguably the most enigmatic holy place of ancient times. The sprawling complex is a profusion of temples and platforms filled with a stunning line of fallen columns and sculptures, and stone dimensions that puzzle archaeologists and engineers even today. The Phoenician temple of Baalbek dates back to 2000 B.C. and is dedicated to Sun-God Shamash-Baal-Haddad later known as Helios and Jupiter (Aramean deity of lightning and thunder). It was an important city at the time at the crossroads of the

Silk Road. There are several temples to visit within the complex: The Temple of Baal/Jupiter situated upon the massive stone blocks known as the Trilithon, the Temple of Bacchus and the circular temple of Venus. On a nearby hill, lies a fourth temple dedicated to Mercury. The golden age of Roman building at Baalbek began in 15 B.C. when Octavianus Augustus (27 B.C-14 A.D) settled a legion. The sloping terrain involved the construction of retaining walls that are built with monoliths of 400 tons. The western, tallest retaining wall has a second course of monoliths with the famous "trilithon"; a row of three stones each weighing 1000 tons, the largest cut-

stones from the ancient world. As the vast temple complex expanded throughout Roman times, the Temple of Bacchus (Dionysus for the Greeks), the God of wine and a patron deity of agriculture and theater, was constructed in the middle of the 2nd century BC. The 2484 square meter temple is the world's best-preserved Roman temple. The Arabs changed the name of the fortified city to al-Qala' (the fort) before a second bloody sack took place in 748. In 1759, the city was badly shaken by an earthquake that led to the irreversible destruction of parts of the Roman complex.



Anjar, a commercial city at crossroads of the Silk Road...

Anjar is one of the most recent archaeological sites in Lebanon and covers one period of the country's history: The Umayyad. Anjar was an important commercial center under, the Umayyads, one of the most important Muslim dynasties, who ruled between 660 and 750 A.D. Their reign was short lived (pushed by the Abbasids, they relocated to Spain) yet they left in Anjar some impressive ruins, only recently discovered.

Aside for its commercial status, the vicinity of spurting springs, coming



from the Litani river have made Anjar and its surroundings, the most fertile place in the country, The sources are also what gave the city its name. "Anjar", comes from "Ain Gerrha," "the source of Gerrha", the name of an ancient city founded during Hellenistic times.

The site features two palaces, a mosque and a standard designed public bath consisting of a square-hall vestibule supported by two arcades made of three arches each, and three separate rooms for steam baths.

Anjar is a perfect example of the typical Umayyad architecture consisting of a triple arcade window on the upper façade and masonry with alternating layer of stone and brick-tile. The mosque's design indicates that the Caliph had his own private access while two distinct entrances are public. A second palace is composed of a square courtyard and five rooms.

In 744 A.D, the city was destroyed by Marwan II after defeating Ibrahim, Al-Walid's son. Anjar was sacked and fell into oblivion. Later on, the area was covered by vast swamps and it was not until the country's Independence that the General Direction of Antiquities decided to restore and unveil its forgotten treasures. Lebanon recovered a significant part of its history and a masterpiece of Umayyad architecture.



Terbol Museum, showcasing traditional Lebanese architecture

Terbol museum is located in the Bekaa Plateau, 20 kilometers away from Zahle. The museum is an old traditional farmer house transformed into a museum in order to explain the lifestyle of the Lebanese during the 19th and early 20th century. During the Ottoman occupation (1516-1918), starting with Sultan

Selim the 1st, villagers had the ingenious idea to build a double partition with a hole at the top to hide grain. The Ottoman troops extorted the harvest causing hunger among the rural population. To survive, farmers also hid cereals in the hole that they retrieved, according to their necessities, by virtues of a hole dug at the base. Soldiers took grains of silos without suspecting that the harvest was in fact hidden within walls. Grains

were distributed to the family and neighbours. That way people endured this unfair arbitrary tax while preventing themselves from starvation. The Terbol Museum reconstitutes this cereal hole. It can be visited during summer (terbol@fnp.org.lb). In the Lebanese traditional house, the inhabitants dug in the walls 'yuk' to store furniture. The 'yuk' is a niche for mattresses, used as a bed. Other niches served for storing

objects, food and other useful elements. The 'khrestane' is a framed cupboard dug in the wall with two wooden doors.

Niha, the ancient Phoenician Temple

At 10 kms from Zahle, Niha hosts an ancient Phoenician Temple for the God Hadaraniss as well as a smaller worship for the Goddess of Water.





9. ECONOMY

Zahle gastronomy identity is strongly related to the agricultural environment of the city. Located in the middle of the Bekaa valley, Zahle has forged within decades a strong identity and has benefited from the favourable surrounding that facilitates the use of a large amount of different crops.

The dominant elements in the identity and success of Zahle's gastronomy include geography

and climate, which in turn impact agricultural products that are available. Identifiable gastronomic characteristics of Zahle condense the multiple influences of the region at the crossroads of many countries. During the 20th Century, artisan producers with traditional techniques grew fast in a demanding market. Until now and due to the resurgence in demand for quality products made by time-honoured methods, Zahle farmers have been able to maintain their culinary heritage.



Wheat...

Lebanon was the Breadbasket of the Roman Empire. Today, wheat production does not even meet the country's local demand. The salamouni (*Triticum aestivum* L. var. Salamouni) is tender wheat, the perfect flour for bread-making. The three indigenous wheat are perfect for burgul making: haramuni, salamouni and breiji. This wheat might have been cultivated for over 5000 years in Lebanon. It is the base of burgul, flour, semolina and freeke. The crop is concentrated in the Bekaa Valley and is harvested in June and July. At the end of the summer season, rooftops of Zahle are lined up with white sheets where burgul and kishk is prepared in the city for centuries. The wheat is boiled in large pots, dried in the sun and milled. Before milling process, dried seeds are moistened again and rubbed to remove the outer bran layer. The process allows transfer of vitamins and minerals from outer bran layer into the seed. The initial boiling provides biological stability to milled product allowing safe storage for long periods and shorter cooking time.

The burgul, stewed and drained wheat, then sun-dried, cleaned and crushed, is a staple ingredient of Lebanese dishes. The fine wheat is used in the preparation of two national dishes: kebbe and tabboule.

The process of burgul lasts several days.

According to a study by Slow Food Foundation for Biodiversity, Burgul might have been introduced to Lebanon by Kurdish tribes in the 12th century.

The grading of the wheat is made with a sieve to obtain coarse burgul (jachich - khichin), fine (burgul) and very fine (sraysira). It is ground to produce flour (bssise). Semolinas, named smid (coarse) and firkha (fine) made of wheat are key ingredients in the preparation of cake shops such the maamoul. The burghul does not appear in the famous writings of the Baghdadi gastronome Ibn Sayyar al-Warraq. Al-Warraq wrote in the 10th century the first known Arab cookbook 'The book of dishes' (El Kitab El Tabikh). It is only in the 11th century, that the Turkish or Persian term starts appearing in recipes. It was commonly used throughout the Ottoman Empire. In Lebanon, housewives would make it in-house. They crushed the wheat in the jaroush (two piled stones) operated by a wooden pestle.

The freeke is a green picked wheat roasted in straw fire. The term originates from 'faraka', or moving referring to the fact that grains are removed from sheaves of wheat. The wheat picked before maturity is sun-dried, mixed in the straw of barley and burnt on the ground.



The harvest depends on regions but usually takes place at the beginning of May.

Beginning in the 1860s, when Napoleon III had landed six thousand troops on the Lebanese coast to intervene in sectarian disputes on the side of Christians. The French encouraged Maronite Christians of highlands and valleys to abandon their subsistence crops in favour of growing mulberry trees for silk production. Spurred on by their own merchant class, the small shareholders in the Mount Lebanon highlands and the Bekaa Valley had planted nearly half of all their arable lands in mulberry trees, forsaking the wheat grains that had offered them bulgur for tabboule

and chickpeas from which they had made hummus over countless centuries.

The Bekaa covers an area of 428,000 hectares, 42% of Lebanon's total area. Its arable land is important for the country as mountains make up most of the country.

The Berdawni has always been of central interest for mills that would install by the river in order to ground their wheat. Indeed, thanks to water mills would produce huge amounts of flour and burgul. Nowadays, bakeries represent a large percentage of the local industry. It is strongly related to local mills that are quite influent in the city. Mills for grains, flour, burgul are a solid asset for the city.

The particularity of Zahle's economy is that it relies essentially on small businesses employing a few employees. Artisan producers, food processing family-owned companies directly benefit from locally grown products. In the region, Zahle is a major trade center with strong retail turnover. The tourism industry counting on food heritage culture and beautiful sceneries is a strong income to the city. As a main tourism and hospitable hub, Zahle supports contemporary accommodation such as artisan guesthouses and *auberges* that fit modern demand. Gastronomy is one of the elements

incorporated in a new concept of cultural heritage and cultural tourism, driven by growing trends of a well-being lifestyle, authenticity, environmental protection and the need to have a high-quality experience. Tourists that flock to Zahle have a strong desire for foods that emphasise the heritage and culture of the city stimulating the preservation of traditional forms of agriculture and cultural heritage. During Lent, Christians eat meatless dishes and at Barbara, they eat a variety of wheat-based dishes. Gastronomy, as a tourist resource, generates rural development by increasing rural revenue sources and improves income levels and employment of local labour.

Figures of Agriculture surface and revenues from agriculture

The total agriculture surface in Lebanon is 248 000 Hectares out of which 42 % are generated in the valley - 104 160 Hectares. Farming in the Bekka Valley is a lifestyle for many families and agricultural products generate considerable revenues for many.

Exports from the Bekaa Valley

Agriculture exports from Bekaa valley during 2011 is around USD 192 000 000 according to CCIASZ - Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture of Zahle and Bekaa

- statistics. The most exported commodity was potato (USD 46 000 000) followed by apple (USD 41 000 000), orange (USD 27 000 000), banana (USD 23 000 000) and grapes (USD 11 000 000). Citrus and bananas are not grown in the Bekaa, yet the main exporters work in the Bekaa region.

Agriculture revenues in total city income

Bekaa valley is Lebanon's most important farming region around 40% of households run small family farms (Global eye, 2006).

Food industries

The main concentration of food industries are located in Zahle encompassing wineries, Bakeries, dairy, poultry and meat and agro-food processing companies.

Schools, training, technical schools, universities

There are several schools and universities with a special 'food related' curriculum. At A.U.L in Chtoura, Mr Itab Awass is the head professor for the food section. In Zahle, the Catholic School of Dar El Sadaka has a food section. Université la Sagesse has a partnership with the University of Lausanne, famed for its hospitality section.

Table: type of Industries registered at the CCIASZ Zahle (2010)

Segment	Number of companies	Volume
Packaging	19	8%
Printing Press	9	4%
Bakeries	53	23%
Vegetables and Fruits conservation	9	4%
SME's	23	10%
Dairy products	34	15%
Olive oil Production	18	8%
Roasters	24	10%
Eggs and poultry	6	3%
Alcohol drinks	29	13%
Water	6	3%
TOTAL	230	100%