



MUSEUM REVIEW

Samaritans Museum

Located on top of Mt. Gerizim in Nablus City, the Samaritans Museum was established in 1997 by Priest Husni Al-Samiri. The museum tells of the strife and hardships of the Samaritans throughout the ages. The Samaritans arrived in the land of Palestine 3,652 years ago, and they are the smallest religious sect in the world.

The Samaritans Museum houses precious collectibles, including religious scripts, antiques, artefacts, Hebrew books, Samaritan hymns, and expressive photos. In spite of its small but rare collections, the museum was met with widespread attention and was renovated in 2010 by the Palestinian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities with financial support from UNESCO as well as donations from members of the Samaritan sect. Some of the renovation works were also funded by the family of Priest Al-Samiri.

The museum contains what is considered the most important item for the Samaritans, namely, the oldest written copy of the Torah in the world that dates back more than 3,652 years. The Samaritan community has received generous offers to sell the Torah or keep it in other world museums, but all the offers have been rejected. Believing that the value of each and every Samaritan derives from the ancient Torah, Priest Al-Samiri insists that the copy of the Torah must remain in the possession of the sect and transmitted to successive Samaritan generations. Earlier, two copies of the Torah (one 600 years old and the other 700 years old) were stolen from the Samaritans, and despite the efforts made to identify who was behind the theft and retrieve the copies, the perpetrators remain anonymous to date.

The oldest Torah in the world is kept in a metal cabinet. The Samaritans regard the Torah as the most important pillar for their existence and an essential component of their identity. The Torah is read on special religious occasions only.

The Samaritans Museum on top of Mt. Gerizim is a rich source of knowledge about the history and culture of the Samaritan sect. But the Samaritans are also an integral part of the Palestinian people and the Palestinian social fabric.



A painting showing the arrival of the people of Israel to Mt. Gerizim 3,000 years ago. Photo courtesy of Ahed Izhiman.



A copy of the Samaritan Torah handwritten by Priest Wassef Khader Al-Samiri in 1944. Photo courtesy of Ahed Izhiman.