

M'Zab Valley (1982)

The **M'zab** or **Mzab**, (Tumzabt *Aghlan*), مزاب, is a region of the northern Sahara, in the Ghardaïa *wilaya* "province" of Algeria, around 500km south of Algiers.

The Mzab is a limestone plateau, centred around the Wad Mzab (*Oued Mzab*).

The Mozabites (Imzaben, or "At Mzab") are a branch of the big amazigh tribe Iznaten (Zenata in Arabic). This tribe was living in large areas of middle southern Algeria. The first ancestors of the Mozabites who named Msab, lived in Mzab valley during the stone age, and we can see a lot of amazigh letters and symbols from this period sculptured in different places of Mzab valley. After the Islamic conquest, the Mozabites became Muslims of the Mu'tazili doctrine, and after the fall of the Rostomid state, the Rostomid royal family with some of their citizens chose Mzab valley as their refuge. Because of the Ibadite doctrine of the Rostomids and the Mu'tazili doctrine of Mozabites, the Rostomids sent a preacher named Abu Bakr An Nafusi, to call the Mozabites for the Ibadit doctrine. After years of preaching, most of Mozabites became Ibadites, and the remnants of the Rostomids started immigrating to M'zab, but due to their low numbers they gradually melted into the mozabit community.

France annexed the Mzab in 1882 as part of their North African colonies. Upon Algerian independence in 1962, the territory became part of Algeria.

There are five *qsur* "walled villages" (*ksour*) located on rocky outcrops along the Wad Mzab collectively known as *the Pentapolis*. They are Ghardaïa *Tagherdayt*, the principal settlement today; Beni Isguen *At Isjen*; Melika *At Mlishet*; Bounoura *At Bunur*; and El-Ateuf *Tajnint*. Adding the more recent settlements of Berrian and Guerrara, the *Mzab Heptapolis* is completed. The combination of the functional purism of the Ibāḍī faith with the oasian way of life led to a strict organisation of land and space. Each citadel has a fortress-like mosque, whose minaret served as a watchtower. Houses of standard size and type were constructed in concentric circles around the mosque. The architecture of the M'zab settlements was designed for egalitarian communal living, with respect for family privacy.

In the summer, the Mzabites migrated to 'summer citadels' centred around palm grove oases. This is one of the major oasis groups of the Sahara Desert, and is bounded by arid country known as chebka, crossed by dry river beds.

The Mzab Valley was listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1982, as an intact example of traditional human habitat perfectly adapted to the environment.

-- Wikipedia [<http://www.wikipedia.org>]