

Pilgrimage to historic town of Maaloula in Syria



An emotional pilgrimage was undertaken recently to the isolated and mountainous Syrian town of Maaloula, located some 60 kilometers northeast of Damascus on the border with Lebanon.

Groups of Syrian nationals living in Russia, and Russians residing in war-torn Syria, visited the historic town, the scene of repeated clashes in 2013 and 2014 between government forces and Islamist rebel groups, including the al-qaeda affiliate in Syria.

Rebels and terrorists briefly took over the predominately Christian town before a government counter-attack liberated it for good.

Pilgrims visited the St. Sergius & Bacchus monastery, which was built in the 4th century and devastated during the war by Islamist rebels.

According to a statement by one of the pilgrims quoted in a dispatch by the Tass news agency, only three objects remained from the monastery: its 4th century doorway, a bell tower and an icon.

Maaloula is significant as one of three towns on the border with Lebanon where western Aramaic – the language of Christ – is still spoken.