

How many times in your life, thus far, have you heard the name "Cedars of Lebanon"? What do you think of when you hear it?...the famous hospital?...obscure Biblical references?...ancient history? Well, the Cedars of Lebanon qualifies for all three associations, but did you realize that there really are Cedars of Lebanon, still there? When I ran across the cover shown below, it prompted me to find out a little about the subject.

The Cedars of Lebanon, located about 120 km from Beirut, have been famous since ancient times when the Phoenicians used them to build their ships. In the third millennium B.C., the city of Byblos prospered from a flourishing timber trade from the cedar forests. The famous kings and emperors, and priests of the ancient world all wanted to use the cedar for their temples and palaces. These mighty trees, mentioned often in the Bible, were used in the famous temple built by King Solomon in Jerusalem. The Cedar tree, majestic and indestructible, is the emblem of Lebanon and adorns its flag.

At one time, Mount Lebanon was covered with a forest of Cedars, but their exploitation began thousands of years ago. The Roman Emperor Hadrian in the 2nd century, A.D. tried to protect the forest; however, in the following centuries much of the forest was destroyed. The immense and wondrous cedar forests of ancient times have disappeared. Not much is left of the famous forests of biblical times, true, but what remains is impressive enough. Today, there are about 300 trees known as the Cedars of the Lord. They stand at an altitude of more than 5,000 feet. They average 100 feet in height, and some are 40 to 50 feet in girth. Of the 300, about a dozen are thought to be more than 1,000 years old and of those, a few probably go back 1,500 years. The "youngest" are about 200 years old.

There are of course other cedars in the world, but they are not so old, do not grow on arid rock as the Cedars of Lebanon do and therefore do not have the hardness or resistance from rot. And Lebanese cedar wood, though sweet smelling, is very bitter tasting. This protects it against worms, and its reputation as an imperishable wood follows. For this reason, as well as the fact that it is beautiful to behold, it was a must for palaces and sanctuaries in antiquity to have cedar wood as a building timber, for the roofing, for colonnades and for paneling.

Lebanon's pride was used most famously in the Temple of Solomon, built by Hiram Abi from Tyre (1 Kings 7:13). History tells us "everything" was of cedar wood; not a stone could be seen: a fact that earned the building the name, "the House of the Forest of Lebanon"(1 Kings 7:2). The Pharaoh Cheops' barge, unearthed near the Great Pyramid of Giza in 1954, had fittings of Lebanese cedar wood; they were still in a remarkable state of preservation after 4,400 years, and some observers swore they could still detect the wood's sweet smell. Egyptian documents dating from 2600 B.C. say that Pharaoh Snefru imported 40 cargoes of undressed timber from Byblos for boat building. Long-dead Sumerian and Babylonian kings are recorded as being avid customers for Lebanese cedar. More unusually, the Egyptians used cedar sawdust for mummification and the resin, known as Cedria, for embalming. The resin was also used to glaze and strengthen papyrus-- a



Cedars

very early example of "plastic" coating.

The interesting stone wall that encircles part of the grove, running up hill and down dale like the great wall of China, is the successor of one originally built in the 19th Century entirely at the personal expense of Queen Victoria of Great Britain. Her Majesty, on being informed of the destruction of the young cedar trees by goats, and the probable extinction of the species unless preventive measures were taken, extended assistance to Mt. Lebanon as a landmark in the growing campaign to save the Cedars of Lebanon, with their biblical connections, for posterity. Cedar saplings brought back to England by early travellers flourished on Britain's soil to remind the Queen of their progenitors on Mount Lebanon. [http://almashriq.hiof.no/lebanon/900/910/919/al_arz/conde/index.html]

Today, the area of the Cedars is a very picturesque ski resort with hotels, chalets, and ski lifts. Skiers came to the Cedars as early as 1920. The government installed the first ski lift in 1953. Located at a high altitude (2000m), the Cedars resort has a slightly longer season than the others, sometimes beginning early November and often lasting until late April. This historic winter wonderland is also the site for various international ski competitions as well as the casual sporting skiers. The tourists visit the Cedars of Lebanon throughout the year, and in addition to the Cedars forest, there are numerous sites of interest in the area. Bcharreh, a neighboring village of the Cedars, is the birthplace and place of rest of Khalil Gibran, one of Lebanon's famous poets and artist (author of *The Prophet*). There are also a number of Maronite churches and monasteries scattered throughout the mystic Qadisha valley.

As mentioned earlier, these wonderful trees are described often in Scripture: "The trees of the Lord are watered abundantly, the cedars of Lebanon, which He hath planted, In them the birds build their nests"(Psalms 104:16,17). One of the most famous verses is: "The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree, and grow like a Cedar in Lebanon."(Psalms 92:12). [<http://www.ourladyoflebanon-dc.org/histcedars.htm>]

Interesting notes: [*...showing the widespread influence of this ancient forest*]

-The highest web cam in the Middle East overlooks the Cedars forest and shows the slopes in the background. You can see it by going to: <http://www.skileb.com/webcam/camcedars.asp>

-There's a Cedars of Lebanon State Park in Tennessee.

-“Tall Cedar of Lebanon” is also a particular rank among freemasons. [<http://www.gmwp.org/tallcedars.html>]

-There's even a Cedars of Lebanon web domain [<http://www.cedarsoflebanon.org/>]

