



The Cedar Tree Delusion



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**“Ill fares the land,
to hastening ill a prey,
Where wealth accumulates,
and men decay.”**

Oliver Goldsmith (1770)

Environmental Situation Today

- Cedars are 3% of total forest cover
- Stop praising the cedars in public & destroy them in private
- Human greed & ignorance going back to *Gilgamesh*
- Cedars proclaimed to be sacred, noble, magnificent
- The “cedar tree delusion”: disturbing double standard
- Lebanon perfected the art of exaggeration re cedar
- Put an end to “dominion” & “cedar tree delusion”

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The Landscape

- “Elsewhere man has cultivated the land: In the Lebanon, he has made it.” Urquhart
- Oldest humanized landscape in the world
- Forest and its animals were thought inexhaustible
- Men and goats – both greedy – took what they wanted
- For centuries no guardians of the public interest in forests and topsoil (Douglas,1951)
- “Five thousand years of service to civilization has left the Lebanese highlands a permanently degraded vestige of their former glory.” Eric Ekholm,1976)

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The Cedar Tree

- Arz Lubnan / Cedar of Lebanon / *Cedrus libani*
- erez (eres) as it appears in the Scripture
- (se-der) is derived from the Arabic kedr meaning worth
- “Cedar” also used for other trees
- Genus *Cedrus*, and Species *C. libani*.
- Threatened in Lebanon and restricted in Syria
- Plentiful in Turkey

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How Many Kinds of Cedars?

- Lebanon cedar [*Cedrus libani*] branches are level
- Atlas cedar [*Cedrus atlantica*] branches ascend
- Deodar cedar [*Cedrus deodara*] branch descend
- Cyprus cedar [*Cedrus brevifolia*] has short leaves

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Where Cedars Grow Best

- Western side of Mount Lebanon facing the Mediterranean sea
- Annual precipitation usually exceeds 1000 millimeters
- Cold winters and warm summers
- Gilgamesh had to cross 'seven mountains' to forest
- In the early Sumerian era the 'Cedar Mountain' was 'edge of the world'
- The envoy of Thutmosis III traveled "above the clouds" to cedar forests

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The Uses of the Cedar (Slide 1/3)

- **Aroma:** "and the smell of thy garments is like the smell of Lebanon" Song of Solomon
- **Preservative:** resists rot and insect damage as well as being very durable
- **Ships:** Triremes / merchant ships / Cleopatra's Nile barges / solar ships
- **Burial:** sarcophagi and cedar resin for mummification

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The Uses of the Cedar (Slide 2/3)

- **Palaces:** Assyrian King Ashurnasirpal ordered cedar for the beams of his palace
- **Temples:** roofs of the Temple of Diana at Ephesus / Temple of Solomon at Jerusalem
- **Churches:** Helen mother of Constantine in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, Jerusalem
- **Baalbeck:** Few examples of cedar wood for construction in Lebanon
- **Firewood, charcoal, and lime:** Prime agents of forest degradation over last thousand years

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The Uses of the Cedar (Slide 3/3)

- **Medicinal uses:** Everything from green needles to bark is of benefit to people
- **Disinfectants:** bactericidal and fungicidal properties of the cedar are amazing
- **Aroma therapy:** essential oil to combat infectious diseases of the respiratory tract

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Cedars and Religion

- Cedar famous long before the Bible or the Koran
- The word cedar is mentioned 75 times in the Bible
- Attributes of strength, beauty, endurance, grandeur, majesty, dignity, and nobility
- The righteous are compared to a cedar "... he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon" (Psalms)
- Destruction of the cedars became the symbolism of dire calamity and disaster
- "Open thy doors. O Lebanon, that the fire may devour thy cedars." (Zechariah)
- The cutting of the cedar seen as the destruction of world-empires – the end of history

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Symbolism of the Cedar

- In Lebanon the legendary cedar is a powerful symbol "land of the cedars"
- Features on national flag, national airline, govt. logos, AUB, currency and other logos
- Feature of books, poetry, post cards, posters and art
- Why must the "Cedars of God" be restricted to a part of Lebanon?
- The cedars of Bsharre is misleadingly referred to as "The Cedars" (Al-Arz)
- Luther Burbank : "what greater marker can one have than the cedar of Lebanon."

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A Cedar Myth

- Formation of the Bekaa valley
- The twin ranges and the famous Levantine Rift Valley
- According to the Epic of Gilgamesh, they were formed when Gilgamesh and Humbaba fought in the cedar forest thereby causing the mountain chain to split in two
- "At the heels of their feet the earth burst asunder, they shattered, as they whirled, mounts Sirion and Lebanon."

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The Lebanese Flag

- The present flag was adopted in 1943 after independence
- The cedar tree first appeared in 1861 when Lebanon was part of the Ottoman Empire
- From 1918-1943 the colonial French Tricolor was hoisted over all the government buildings
- American University of Beirut preferred to fly a white emblem with a cedar tree
- The funds allocated in the national budget to protect the cedar are shameful
- The cedar tree occupies 20% of the area of the flag yet receives 0.03% of national budget

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A History Of Deforestation



The Phoenicians

- "That was the heart of our history - timber... Neither Egypt nor Mesopotamia had good wood." Emir Maurice Chehab (1974)
- "Cedar timber provided a resource with which their thalassocracy (dominion of the seas) was established." Dimitri Baramki
- The Phoenicians needed timber for their new triremes, and defiantly got it from the Persian reserves "paradeisos".

The Egyptians

- Timber governed their foreign policy in the eastern Mediterranean
- Vast quantities of cedar and pine timber towed from Byblos to Egypt (2800 B.C.)
- Overland trading was dangerous - nomadic bandits of Sinai and Palestine
- Much of the timber Phoenicia exported to Egypt was done as a form of tribute

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Sumerians and the Epic of Gilgamesh

- On his knees, with Gilgamesh's sword at his throat, Humbaba begs for his life
- The mythic battle between Gilgamesh [the consumer] and Humbaba [the conservationist] has been repeated in every generation, to satisfy civilization's appetite
- It is the oldest conflict on the planet, and includes rivers, aquifers, mountains, tundra, the ozone layer, countless species and our own genetic make up
- In destroying nature, we are cannibalizing our very life-source just as the Sumerians did

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The Assyrians

"With my chariots I have gone up to the heights of the mountains to the far recesses of Lebanon, I felled its tallest cedars (erez). Its choicest beros (pines), I came to its remotest height. Its densest forest, I dug wells and drank up waters. And I dried up with the sole of my foot all the streams..."

- These forests are primarily a military objective
- Today war is still about resources

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The Babylonians

- Nebuchadnezzar carved his inscriptions on the rocky walls of Nahr el-Kelb in the year 587 B.C. and on stelae in the Wadi el-Barissa in the Hermel
- In the Wadi el-Barissa carvings, the Babylonian king faces a Cedar of Lebanon
- What no former king had done (I achieved): I cut through steep mountains, I split rocks, opened passages and carried to Marduk, my king, mighty cedars, high and strong, of precious beauty and of excellent dark quality, the abundant yield of the Lebanon

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Solomon and the Temple

- King Solomon contacted King Hiram of Tyre for help
- "And Hiram sent to Solomon saying: "I have heard what you have sent to me; I shall do all your desire for timbers of cedars (arazim) and timbers of junipers (berosim)."
- Solomon's reign like that of Gilgamesh - a lust after the cedar's hardwood
- How wise was Solomon? He did not show wisdom in conservation
- "King Solomon gave Hiram 20 cities in Galilee."
- How pleased was Ahiram? Not at all and called them cabul (dirty)

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The Persians

- Persian control of the Phoenician ports provided the means of assembling a navy for use against their enemies the Greeks
- "I am Darius the Great King, King of Kings, King of countries, king in this earth... The Cedar timber, this - a mountain by name Lebanon - from there it was brought. Persian
- Darius' successor Xerxes is supposed to have built 1200 warships in 483-480 B.C. preparing for the Greek campaign, among other places in Phoenicia and Cyprus.

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Alexander the Great

- The forests of Lebanon not totally denuded at the time of Alexander the Great 4th century
- Ptolemy I of Egypt inherited Alexander's fleet
- Antigonus to built his own large fleet using 8000 lumbermen & 1000 wagons
- This launched the greatest naval arms race in ancient history

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The Romans and Emperor Hadrian

- Found bigger trees farther east and north and built roads
- Most if not all these forest stones (100-200) were installed during Emperor Hadrian's rule
- IMP HAD AUG D F S A G IV C P
- IMP(eratoris) HAD(riani) AUG(usti) D(e) F(initio) S(ilvarum) A(rborum) G(enera) IV C(etera) P(rivata)
- Boundary of the forests of Emperor Hadrian
Augustus: 4 species. Remaining species are private

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The Arabs

- Muawiyah decided to build his own navy
- The forests of Lebanon provided the necessary timber
- He charged the shipbuilders of Acre, Tyre and Tripoli to build and man the ships
- Muawiyah embarked with his wife to inaugurate the fleet (647 A.D.)
- 1700 galleys commanded by Lebanese and Syrians mainly Christians
- Cyprus was occupied in 649 A.D., Rhodes in 654 A.D., annihilated Byzantine forces

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The Ottomans

- The Ottoman Turks introduced goats after they conquered Syria and Lebanon in 1514
- To provide fuel for their Hijaz railway in 1914 to 1918 deforested all of the cedar areas
- The Kamou'a forest had healthy stands of iron oak, cedar, fir and juniper.
- It was severely logged during WWI by the British forces for the Orient Express

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Some Travelers' Tales (Slide 1/3)

- Many American, British, French, German, and other European travelers visited cedars
- They were all taken to only one cedar grove - in Bsharre
- Pierre Belon (16th) (Frenchman) "the Maronites or the monks acting as guides"
- Leonhart Rauwolff (16th) (German) "looked for young trees but could find none"
- John Lewis Burkhardt (19th) (English) "I counted 11-12, trunks covered with names"

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Some Travelers' Tales (Slide 2/3)

- John Madox (19th) (English) "cut my name on it finding it would yield to my knife"
- Sir Frederick Henniker (19th) (English) "a clump of trees considerable only by name"
- Alphonse de Lamartine (19th) (French) carved his name on a tree
- Lord Lindsay (19th) (English) "do not think we were sacrilegious enough to wound these glorious trees - I would soon have cut my name on the wall of a church."

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Some Travelers' Tales (Slide 3/3)

- Henry Baker Tristram (19th) (English) "Besides Kadisha, described by every traveler, there are many other groves, clumps, and whole tracts of Cedar forest in Lebanon."
- Sir Richard Burton (19th) (English) "none of us fell into the usual ecstasies before these exaggerated Christmas trees. Badly-clad, ill-conditioned, unpicturesque, except from above"
- S. R. Oliver (19th) (English) "The wall that encircles part of the grove, is the successor of one originally built in the 19th century entirely at the personal expense of Queen Victoria"

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A Future of Conservation

- It took humanity about 5,000 years to nearly destroy the grand cedar forests
- Hopefully it will not take another 5,000 years to restore them
- Large cedar forests (500 ha+) Shouf, Tannourine-Hadath Al Jibbe and Seer Al Dhinniya
- Medium forests (100-300 ha) Sweisse, and Qammoua.
- Small stands (less than 50 ha) include Ain Mraaj, Al Najas, Bsharre, Jaje, Dahr Al Arz, Jiwar Al Abhal, Maaser Al Shouf, and Jabal Niha.

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The Protected Areas Project

- Early 1990s a small group of concerned citizens, NGOs, and scientists began to defend conservation as an integral part of development
- The IUCN consultant faced an enormous task after 17 years of civil war
- Many of its decision makers still conducted business with a battle mentality
- MOE insisted funds to go to protected areas in the north "where the cedars grow"
- When the consultant told them that cedars also grow in the Shouf - they were offended

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Lessons Learned During the PAP

- 1) Humans are the main threat to cedar forests
- 2) Some serious diseases that threaten cedar forests
- 3) Most forest fires are caused deliberately by humans
- 4) Planting trees is not the only solution to Lebanon's landscape
- 5) Plants and animals need effective legal protection or they will perish
- 6) Hunting in Lebanon is not a sport - it is a massacre
- 7) Financing the protection of cedar forests is shamefully inadequate

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The Shouf Biosphere Reserve

A Success Story

- All cedar forests are important no matter their size, location, or which God planted them
- The only difference is how well they are being protected by the people around them
- 22 villages are home to over 70,000 people living around the core zone of the reserve
- Their involvement attracted the attention of UNESCO - in July 2005 declared the SBR

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The Shouf Biosphere Reserve

A Success Story (Continued)

- The SBR manages an extensive area, conserves its biodiversity, trains numerous staff, attracts generous funding, encourages rural tourism, markets local products, and promotes environmental education
- A source of national pride

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In Gratitude

- Without international and bilateral donors none of the protected areas in Lebanon would have been able to achieve their objectives
- The financial and technical assistance provided by the international donor community allowed the protected area movement to become a reality
- Without them, conservationists would still be waiting for the government to allocate sufficient funds and resources for nature conservation

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