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## **CEDAR OF LEBANON IN THE HISTORY OF CIVILIZATIONS**

Lebanon cedar (*Cedrus libani*) is the genus of coniferous trees in the plant family Pinaceae. It grows in Lebanon, Israel, Palestine, Northwest Jordan, Western Syria and Southern Turkey. In ancient times slopes of Lebanese mountains were shaded by thick forests of the "Cedars of God". Lebanese cedar grows in the mountains at an altitude of at least 800 meters. The species can successfully survive in the mountainous areas and is very sensitive to technogenic pollution. The cedar is famous for its longevity and a huge size. Cedar of Lebanon is able to reach more than 2000 years of age, its height being 50 meters and the diameter of the trunk reaches up to 3 meters. If planted today it will grow mature only after 500-1000 years. For thousands of years the tree has been valued worldwide for its high quality timber, oil and resins

Lebanese cedar is the national emblem of Lebanon, the Lebanese flag depicts a Lebanese cedar tree enveloped by two red stripes from the top and bottom. The cedar symbolizes holiness, strength, eternity and peace. In ancient times the territory of present Lebanon – the North-Eastern coast of the Mediterranean – belonged to Phoenicians, a small Semitic nation. Phoenicians actively used cedars for the construction of ships on which they sailed the Mediterranean showing off their maritime power.

Lebanon cedar played a key role in the development of early human civilizations. All parts of the cedars were used for various needs: for ritual and religious purposes; imported from Phoenicia Lebanon cedars timber presented a valuable building material; it was a subject for profitable trade and precious war trophy. The cedars were used by Assyrians, Babylonians, Greeks, Romans and Persians to build their houses and temples. The most famous of which is the temple of Jerusalem and the temples of Solomon. Egyptians used cedar resin in mummification, and Jews used the bark of the cedar for treatment of diseases. The Turks used cedar wood as fuel for steam locomotives because it burned much better than traditional oaks. The famous city on water – Venice was built on piles of Lebanese cedar.

History witnesses many attempts to prevent the deforestation in reference to Lebanese cedar. In the Middle Ages the Emperor of the Mamelukes issued a regulation on its cutting down. The Maronite Patriarch Yusuf Hbaic took the cedars under the personal patronage in 1882. In 1876 the British Queen Victoria financed the construction of fences for the Cedar of Lord. Currently, in Lebanon an active program acts on preservation and planting of the Cedar of Lebanon. "Cedars of God" were added to the UNESCO List of World Heritage Sites.