

Beautiful Lebanon

The Museum premises, at Level 10, 309 Pitt Street, Sydney (11 October 2013, 15 November 2013)

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[Slide] map of the Mediterranean Sea

The following are places which I shall be discussing: Lebanon, ancient Phoenicia, Israel, Jerusalem, Carthage

[Slide] map of Lebanon

The following are places which I shall be discussing: Toula and the Zgharta district, the Kadisha Valley, Tyre, Sidon, Beirut, Baalbek

Lebanon, which is situated at the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea, is a country which has long been celebrated for its outstanding natural beauty, as well as for the beauty of what has been created by man in the long history of civilisation in the region.

With the Mediterranean Sea on one side, and mountainous terrain throughout the length of the country, Lebanon's geographical gifts provide the country with many opportunities for nature's beauty to manifest itself.

[Slides] Cedars

The cedars of Lebanon are, of course, famous in the Bible. They are trees of great beauty, which give splendour to the mountains where they are found in the north of Lebanon. They

are especially known from the mountains surrounding the Kadisha Valley, which is close to the Zgharta district, and thus not far from the village of Toula.

[Slide] Cedar wood

Their wood is very beautiful, which is why it was chosen by the Kings of Israel, such as Solomon, who used it in the Temple, which he built in Jerusalem.

[Slide] Temple of Solomon *Nordisk familjebok* 1st (1876–1899), 2nd (1904–1926) or 3rd (1923–1937) edition

The cedars are mentioned many times in the Old Testament of the Bible, and they are very important in the economic and political relations between the Hebrews and the Phoenicians. Their beauty and usefulness was recognised by many other empires in the region during antiquity.

[Slide] Flag of Lebanon

Because of its significance, the cedar tree is the national emblem of Lebanon and is portrayed on the flag of Lebanon and on the coat of arms.

[Slide] Flag of Lebanon, original design

This is the original design of the flag, drawn in 1943, at the time of independence from France, when the design of the current flag was adopted.

[Slide] Flag of Austria

The red and white stripes may have been inspired by the design of the Austrian flag.

[Slide] Flag of the State of Greater Lebanon

The cedar tree had appeared on the flag of the State of Greater Lebanon, during the French Mandate from 1920 to 1943. In my opinion, the design of the present Lebanese flag is also influenced by this flag. We can compare the same design of the cedar tree, and the placement of the tree in the central white stripe, which is bounded by two coloured stripes, one of which is red. By a simple trick of rotating the vertical stripes to horizontal and copying the Austrian flag, the designer of the Lebanese flag has produced a flag which is different from the one under the French Mandate, but which follows the same concept.

[Slide] Flag of France

As you can see, the flag of the State of Greater Lebanon, during the French Mandate is the French Tricolour flag with the cedar tree in the central panel.

[Slide] View of Toula

Situated in the Zgharta District in northern Lebanon, Toula is a village whose inhabitants belong to the Maronite Catholic Church. The village is situated in a mountainous region of the country. It is known for its agricultural products, which are a result of the fertile soil which surrounds it. Of particular note are the high quality grapes which are used to produce *arak*, the strong distilled alcoholic drink flavoured with aniseed. Characteristic of many countries in the eastern Mediterranean region, a similar drink is also made in Greece, where it is called *ouzo*.

The population of Toula which lives in Lebanon is approximately 1000 people.

[Slide] View of Toula in winter

Since the village is made relatively inaccessible by snow in the winter, the small resident population is increased in the summer by many people who return there during the vacation period.

[Slides] Views of Toula in winter

These images give you a good idea of the village in winter and the surrounding geography of the mountains. These beautiful photographs were taken by Fadi Nicolas Jilwan, an architect who comes from Toula. It is clear to see that the mountains, trees and plants, and in the winter, the snow, create a beautiful environment in which the village of Toula is situated, and is characteristic of the mountainous geography of a lot of Lebanon.

[Slide] Tyre, Fishing Harbour in the Old Town

The proximity of the Mediterranean Sea lends to the beauty of the cities and towns which are situated on the coast. Inhabited for many thousands of years, the cities were built on the coast largely for economic reasons, as a central point between sea and land trade routes. Tyre was a famous city of the ancient Phoenicians. Today, the city has beautiful scenery as a result of its location as a port, and this is a photograph of the fishing harbour in the Old Town.

[Slide] Sea Castle, Sidon

Sidon was also an important city of the ancient Phoenicians. Its strategic value was appreciated by others in later times and this is a photograph of the Sea Castle, which was

built by the Crusaders in the 13th century AD. Although of practical use, its design and position next to the harbour provide a beautiful focus of the present day city.

[Slide] Sea Castle, Sidon, view by night

It is also very beautiful during the night when it is floodlit.

We remember that the Phoenicians had a great trading empire throughout the Mediterranean Sea, and they founded Carthage in modern day Tunisia, which was itself the centre of a great empire.

The various civilisations and empires which have occupied the area of present day Lebanon each created architectural marvels and other artistic works, many of which can still be seen today.

[Slide] View of Temple of Mercury-Bacchus Baalbek

The famous temple complex at Baalbek in the Bekaa Valley, which is not far from Toula, given that Lebanon is a relatively small country, was built in the Roman period in the 1st-3rd centuries AD, at a time when the classical orders of architecture had been in existence for many centuries after their development by the Greeks. I am showing you a view of one of the best preserved temples, the Temple of Mercury-Bacchus, the former being the Roman messenger god and god of commerce, and the latter being the Roman god of

wine. The temple is built in the Corinthian order with its leafed capitals.

[Slide] View of Temple of Jupiter-Hadad Baalbek

This is a view of the Temple of Jupiter-Hadad, the king of the gods in the Greco-Roman pantheon.

[Slide] View of details of temple of Mercury-Bacchus Baalbek

These are some of the beautiful details of the Temple of Bacchus.

The buildings are products of the classical tradition, what we call its receipt, that is, its development in later cultures.

[Slides] Views of Church of St Assia

There is a beautiful stone church in the village of Toula, which is dedicated to St Assia, the patron saint of the village, who lived in the period of the later Roman empire. The style of the church incorporates the round Romanesque arch, which is found in Byzantine and western European architecture of the mediaeval period, and the pointed Gothic arch which is found in western Europe. There are statues in the two niches over the door. The bell tower is of a style found in various parts of the eastern Mediterranean, such as in Greece. Indeed, in the region of Toula, there are other significant religious buildings of similar style

[Slide] St Anthony's Monastery

such as the famous monastery of St Anthony of Qozhaya, and is also influenced by these architectural styles.

[Slides] Interior of Church

This is a view of the interior of the church of St Assia, and you can see the painting of the saint above the altar and the pointed arches.

[Slide] Photo of painting of St Assia

A painting of him, of which this is a photograph, hangs above the altar in the church of St Assia in Toula. We are still researching the artistic style and date of this painting, but it could very well date from the 15th-18th century AD and may be of a style influenced by Italian art. We remember that the Venetians were influential in the Levant during the early part of this time and they thus brought Lebanon in contact with the important schools of Italian art of the Renaissance.

[Slide] Buildings in Beirut

Beirut, the cosmopolitan city with its mix of cultures, is famous for buildings of a European style from the period of the French Mandate. This gives it the feeling of a European city beside the Mediterranean Sea, incorporating a rich Arab culture. These are photographs of buildings dating to before the Second World War, which convey the beauty and give a good idea of the character of the older sections of modern Beirut.

[Slide] Book by Mikhail Farah

In the realm of culture, poetry is one of the great artistic achievements of man. The major civilisations of the Mediterranean region and the Middle East have produced great poetry, which has shaped our understanding of humanity. The Arabic language is famous for its literary achievements, such as its poetry, and for the outstanding beauty of the script which conveys the profound message of the words.

I am showing you the cover of a book by Mikhail Farah, who was a poet from the village of Toula. He lived from 1927 to 1975, and was killed in the Civil War. The book illustrates the Arabic script. The book itself is in the museum and we can view it after the lecture.

This lecture has described and shown images of both the outstanding natural beauty and the beauty of the products of human civilisation in Lebanon. It can truly be said that Lebanon, as a country, has some of the world's most beautiful places to visit.