

LIVING BULWARK sources of strength and renewal for Christian life and mission
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Scenes from Lebanon - A New Art Series by David Kurani



Ain Mreisse Cove, watercolor, 76x57 cms, by David Kurani

When Saint Paul the Apostle sailed up the Mediterranean coast on his last journey he made several stops on the way. There are numerous little bays that fishermen use to shelter their boats and repair their nets, one or two even have small churches marking sites where locals claim the saint landed on his way. The cove pictured here is the last remaining one in the capital city of Beirut and it happens to be near my work. Who knows, maybe the Apostle Paul also landed here.

The house is an older style of architecture far more interesting than the modern sea view apartment buildings around it which pale by comparison (quite literally and deliberately in this painting)

The youth on the kayak (called a 'hasaki' meaning fish bone) might be paddling out to check some lobster traps, or practicing for a race, or just having some sport. These hasakis combine the advantages of both canoes and surfboards and are great for outings on the clement Mediterranean coastal waters. I used to jump off them to dive for sea urchins with their tasty orange flesh inside the prickly spines! I think there may be a lesson there: finding virtue beneath a rough exterior.



Cedars of Lebanon, watercolor, 27x35 cms, by David Kurani

The cedar is the 'king of trees' and this grove is the oldest in Lebanon with some trees over 2000 years old. They were high enough to be practically inaccessible to the Phoenicians who traded in cedar and fir through the ports of Byblos (Gibileth or modern day Jubail), Sidon, and Tyre.

They also used cedars to build their boats. Why? They were plentiful and the wood was immensely strong. It has a triangular crystalline structure that supports weight. It is not uncommon to see branches carrying a great mass of snow extending out horizontally from the trunk and hardly bending down from the weight. The wood is also aromatic- repelling insects and water pests.

Its beautiful grain, also, must have recommended it to Solomon who wanted it for his temple. So much so that he concluded a very generous treaty with neighboring King Hiram of Tyre to obtain vast quantities of cedar wood and juniper from the Lebanese slopes as it says in 1 Kings, 5 and 6. Also mentioned are the skilled Lebanese workmen (the 'Giblites'- citizens of Gebal as mentioned above, the Greek Byblos just to the north of Beirut and still called 'Jubail').

So in total - what a grand creation is the cedar! (*Yet the voice of God can shatter it-* Psalm 29) Can it be that I can possibly grow into the human equivalent? Psalm 92 verse 12 seems to indicate so... with God's help.



Cedars in the Snow, watercolor, 24x32 cms, by David Kurani



Pine Copse, watercolor, 62x46 cms, by David Kurani

If the cedar is 'the king of trees' here in Lebanon, then the pine is the common man, so plentiful is it here. Called variously the umbrella pine, the stone pine, the pinion pine, (and there may be still other labels) its nuts enhance many local dishes and sweets, its cones and branches fuel the village ovens, carpenters use its wood and fieldworkers and travelers its shade. Truly a giving tree - one to be grateful for. I also happen to find it beautiful and have painted many a study of it/them in various lights and climes.

Last month I went back to the mountain house my family used to occupy during the summer months and saw this pine copse which was important to us then. The underbrush which now is thick as in this illustration, was cleared away and I and my family spent many a happy hour chatting, playing games, picnicing, and even calling out and listening to the echo from the facing hillside. So many good times! And in the bad times just to go and sit there was truly a medicine to recover a personal peace. I see how much God loved me and delighted to give me good things way before I knew him.



Jacaranda Trees, watercolor 27x35 cms, by David Kurani

Jacaranda trees grow differently in different places. I was told that in the Brazilian rainforests they grow tall and so thickly that they form a canopy solid enough for small animals to walk on some 40

feet above the ground. But here in Lebanon they branch out like lace and cover themselves (and the ground around) with myriad purple blossoms. Glorious! Their colors are so showy I am reminded of the story of the little boy who said "Isn't God great! Just think - he could have done it all in black and white!"

These here are in the garden of the house of the president of the university I teach in. While painting them I had the thought: Who said plants don't move? I mean besides upwards and outwards. To the artist's eye these trees with their sinuous swaying and striking colors remind me of maidens dancing at a wedding; a lot of movement there! (cf. the five wise virgins admitted into the party).

Another thought: My parents were married in this very garden way back in 1933. The ceremony was officiated by a Greek Orthodox priest for my father's side of things, and a Protestant minister for my mother's. I certainly am grateful to God for this early 'ecumenical convergence' in that one of the results was me!

David Kurani is a noted Lebanese landscape artist. He teaches classes in art and theater at the American University of Beirut, Lebanon. David has exhibited widely in art galleries and private collections throughout Lebanon, Europe, and the USA. He and his wife Gisele are active members of the People of God in Lebanon, a member community of the Sword of the Spirit.

Also see [previous art works](#) by [David Kurani](#)

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