

THE FIRST SCIENTIFIC MISSION IN 1860 TO THE CEDARS OF MOUNT LEBANON

Badr El-Hage

69

In winter 1998, I successfully acquired a very interesting journal consisting of an autographed notebook and sketchbook by Sir Joseph Dalton Hooker (1817-1911), the famous botanist who visited Syria in 1860. I started the process of photocopying the notebook and scanning the sketches in preparation for editing and publishing the journal. Unfortunately both notebook and sketchbook were stolen from my office in February of this year. Here is a brief account of Hooker's journey entitled: "*Journal of an Excursion to Syria and Palestine in 1860*".

Hooker was one of the great botanists of the nineteenth century. He was also a friend and supporter of Darwin, as well as Huxley and Lyell. Inspired from his youth with a keen desire to travel and carry out botanical studies, Hooker travelled extensively in the Himalayas, the Antarctic, New Zealand, Sikkim, Bengal, Syria, Morocco, as well as North America and Europe. He followed in his father's footsteps in 1865 by holding the position of director at Kew Gardens; in 1873 he was also elected president of the Royal Society. He was awarded numerous prestigious medals and awards, including the special Linnaean Medal, which the Swedish Academy of Sciences awarded him in 1907.

Scholars set a trend for expeditions to the Holy Land, Egypt, and Greece since the end of the 18th century. Due to the desire of the European powers for expansion and colonisation, waves of researchers, poets, painters, photographers, and missionaries travelled to, or resided for a period of time, in the Holy Land. Scientific missions financed by European governments were active throughout the nineteenth century preparing the ground for the effective control of the Holy Land. Joseph Hooker participated in one of these missions in the autumn of 1860. It was Captain John Washington (1800-1863), a hydrographer in the British Royal Navy, who invited Hooker to accompany him to Syria to take part in a scientific expe-

dition and to locate and investigate the history of the celebrated Cedar Grove on Mount Lebanon. One of Hooker's friends, the pharmacist Daniel Hambury, was among the party, and eight of the studies in the sketchbook are identified as Hambury's work. Vice-admiral Arthur Lukis Mansell (1815-1890)* also joined the expedition as a hydrographer with the Royal Navy serving aboard the HMS *Firefly*. Mansell had already served aboard the survey vessel HMS *Beacon* from 1842 to 1846. His main target was to survey the Syrian coast, and other parts of the Mediterranean coast in preparation for future British military involvement in the Eastern Mediterranean.

According to Hooker's notebook, the party left Trieste by steamer on 15th September bound for Beirut. They travelled to the Ionian Islands, Aegean Sea, Smyrna, Rhodes and on September 24 anchored at Larnaca in Cyprus. The next day they sailed to Beirut and at daybreak, "a splendid long mountain range appeared on the horizon"

IN LEBANON

The members of the British expedition arrived in Beirut at a period when the civil war was still raging between Druses and Maronites. They stayed at the Bellevue hotel*. Hooker noted that Beirut was full of French soldiers sent by Napoleon III in the aftermath of the civil war. Indicative of the British-French rivalry, Hooker mentioned that "the French efforts to restore order are doubtful as they are mistrusted everywhere". He also complained about the French having requisitioned most of the horses and mules, as he was negotiating with the dragoman Michael Sommah to hire horses for their journey. In Beirut Hooker met the Consul Mr Moore and the first Marquis of Dufferin and Ava (1826-1902). Moore was appointed as British Commissioner at the Porte to hold an inquiry into the massacres in the Levant and other districts of Syria. Hooker asked the chief dragoman of the

* See cover photograph.

* See p. 93.

THE FIRST SCIENTIFIC
MISSION IN 1860
TO THE CEDARS OF
MOUNT LEBANON

70



1

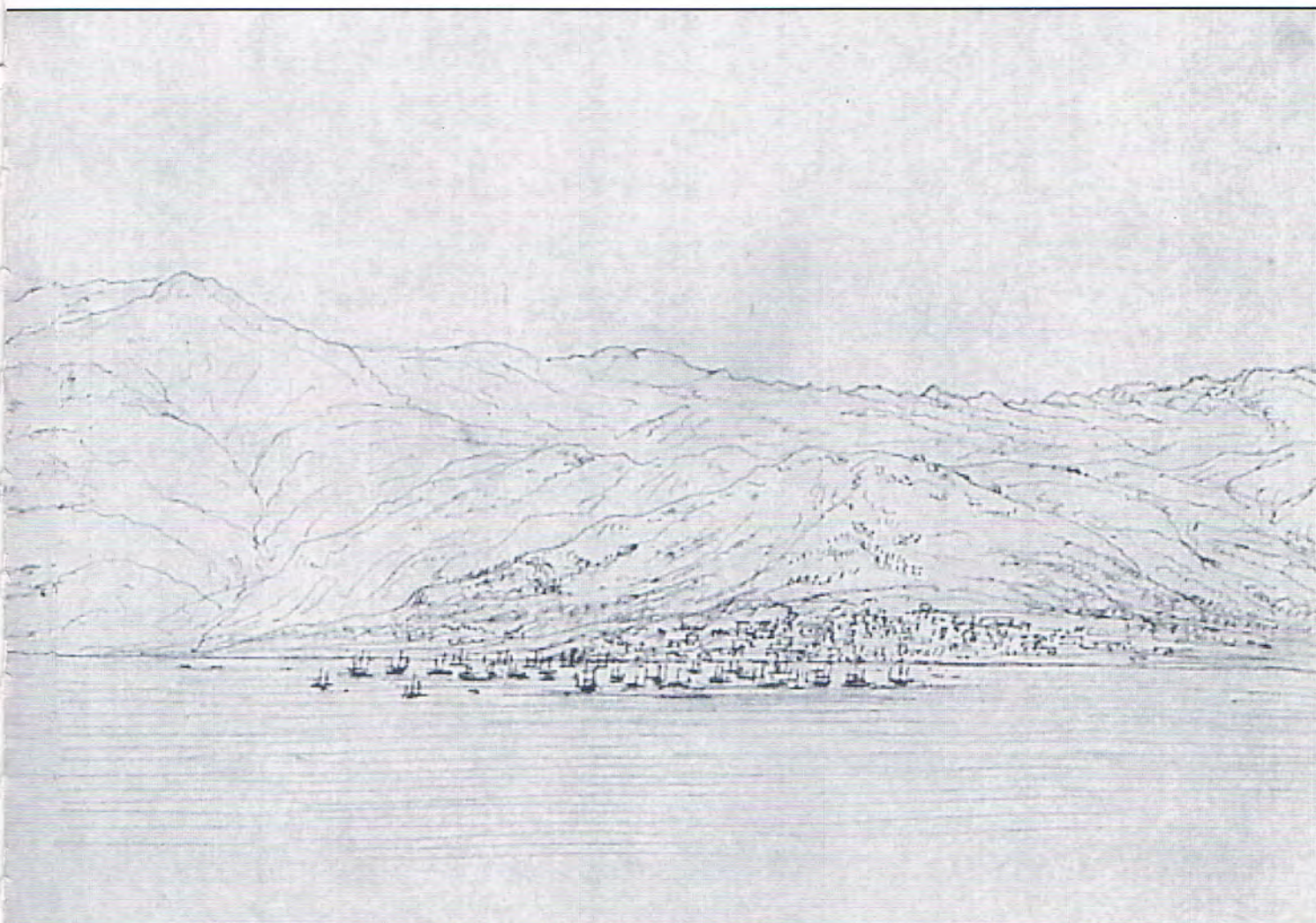
PART OF LEBANON. from the Sea.
Sept 25/60 Peaks of Surmian

British consulate Francis Misk to help him prepare the food, tents, bedding, servants, guards and animals for the journey.

Hooker spent the entire day preparing to leave Beirut and mentioned how news reached the city that some of the Druse had defeated the Turks and taken their arms. The party of eight horsemen along with ten baggage horses and mules accompanied by five Christian-Maronites and two dragomen as escorts rode through the town heading towards the bay, passing through the lanes of *Sacchamun*, *Donax Rosa*, *Asclepias*, and *Rubus*. Hooker describes the beautiful sunset in stark contrast to the war-torn villages and noted his impression of the celebrated inscriptions of the Assyrian and Egyptian monarchs on the rocks at Nahr el-Kelb. The party camped that night in the village of

Zuc, their sleep being disturbed only by the tolling of the convent bells. In the morning they proceeded along a very rocky road ascending through pinewoods and ragged limestone cliffs.

On September 27th he described the "barren heights dotted with small trees, shrubs, bushes, long ranges of wild crags, white berries, roads overall dreadful, but worst over last 3-4000 ft, vine yards replace Mulberry." They ascended another ridge reaching Afka at the head of a valley and sighting the top of the northeastern part of Lebanon. They camped near a fountain on a bare white slope. He noted several kinds of small plants. The next morning as they crossed the village of Afka, Hooker noted that half of the village had been burned because of the war. At about 7000 ft above sea level, they entered a desolate, barren area with



1 Pencil sketch from the sea showing peaks and summits of the Lebanese mountains and Beirut on the right side. 25 September 1860.

Beirut

a few scattered Bedouin tents in sight. Hooker collected several kinds of plants en route and makes mention of the variety of plants he saw throughout his journey.

Between the 28th and 29th of September, Hooker and his party proceeded towards the Cedars, descending via a very bad, rocky road to Hasrun to reach the edge of a cliff overlooking the Kadisha valley. They continued their way to Beshherri that also overlooks Kadisha with splendid scenery, and at 6 pm they reached the Cedars. Hooker, Commander Arthur L. Mansell and Mr Gray left the Cedars for the summit at 7. 30 the following morning and observed large blocks of limestone of various compositions. It is possible that the Mr Gray mentioned in Hooker's notebook is Gustave Le Gray, the famous French photographer who vis-

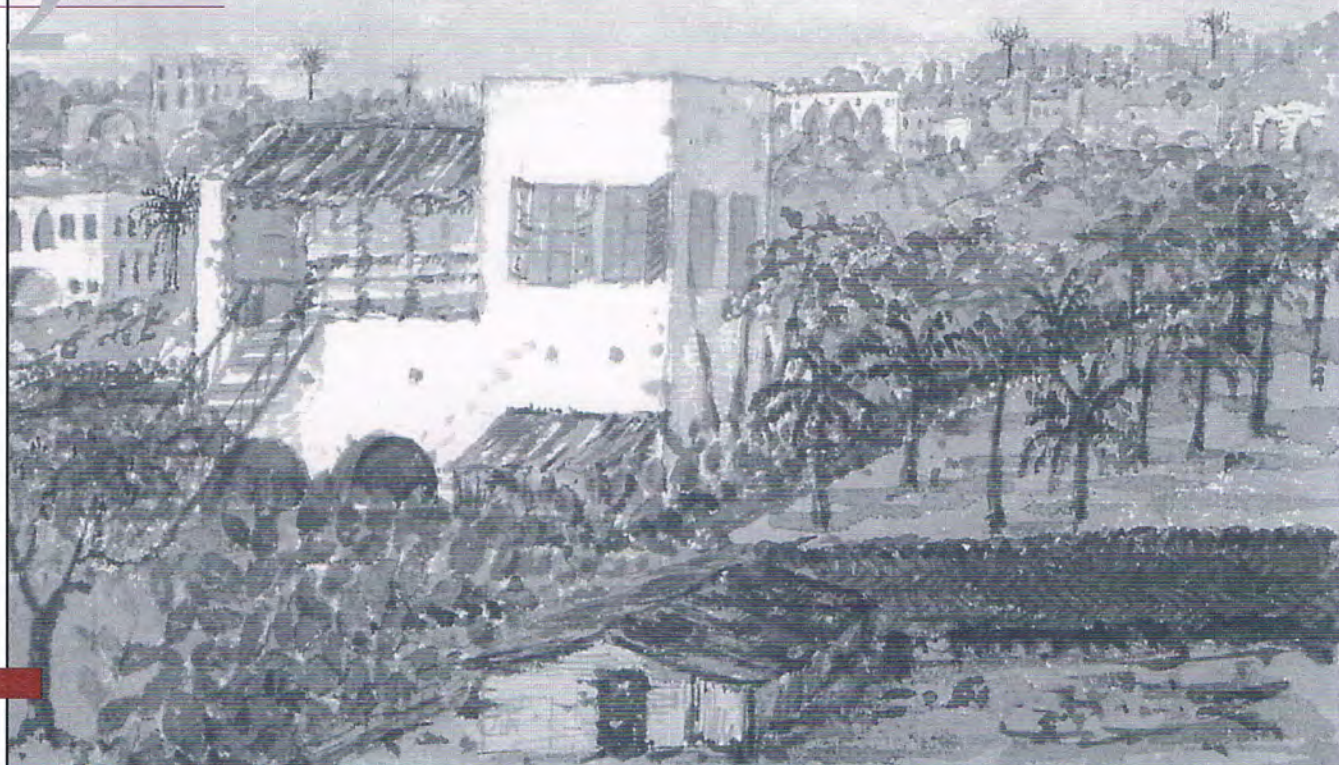
ited Syria in 1860. Le Gray is known to have taken superb photographs of the Cedars of Mount Lebanon at that period. Hooker noted that, looking down at the Cedars, the trees appeared numerous with cultivated fields below them. At 9.30 am they reached the summit overlooking the plain of Bekaa. Hooker described the superb view of the plain and the distant view of Mount Hermon noting the whole scene to be: "desolate beyond description".. He found *Oxyria reniformis* sheltering under stones or in deep rock fissures.

After more observations and measurements, Hooker and his team descended to the Cedars. He mentioned; " J. Washington and J Hawkey have sketched and planned the Cedars. The largest is 40 ft in girth and others are also very large, but all the largest are very old. One large old dead tree is cast

THE FIRST SCIENTIFIC
MISSION IN 1860
TO THE CEDARS OF
MOUNT LEBANON

72

2



down and I have had a dried part from it. The smallest one is about 27 inches in girth".

It is worth noting that two of the members of the party who counted and measured the trees estimated the number to be nearly 400 trees in nine groups. Only eight trees were over 20 feet in girth. It was assumed that the forest's sanctity had ensured its survival. Commander Arthur L. Mansell who was serving aboard Her Majesty's ship *Firefly* drew a plan of the Cedars indicating the number of trees in each group. He also provides each tree's height in feet. Hooker drew from his visit to the Himalayas in 1849 and another expedition to the Atlas Mountains in Morocco in 1871, to propose that the Cedars of Lebanon and those of the Himalayas were an extreme form of the same Cedar, which was now extinct. He elaborated his theory in an article published in the *Natural History Review* in January 1862.

In October Hooker and his party began a second

ascent to the summit. He fell off his horse, broke his barometer and burst a large boil on his thigh. They descended a steep incline towards Baalbeck entering the city at 6 pm as the sun was setting and the plain turning purple. They camped near the astonishing ruins with beautiful moonlight views of the splendid Bekaa plain.

At 7.45 in the morning of the 3rd of October, the party left Baalbeck reaching Zahleh where they breakfasted near a stream. They left Zahleh for Damascus on the same day, crossing the Zabadani. After three days stay in Damascus, they headed back to Beirut travelling through green slopes, barren hills and burnt villages. Hooker noted that the silk factories owned by the French were spared. He also noticed the presence of French troops at Sofar. On the 11th of October they descended towards Beirut with "the weather steady, pretty fine and almost cloudless during the whole journey". In Beirut they had breakfast the next day with Lord

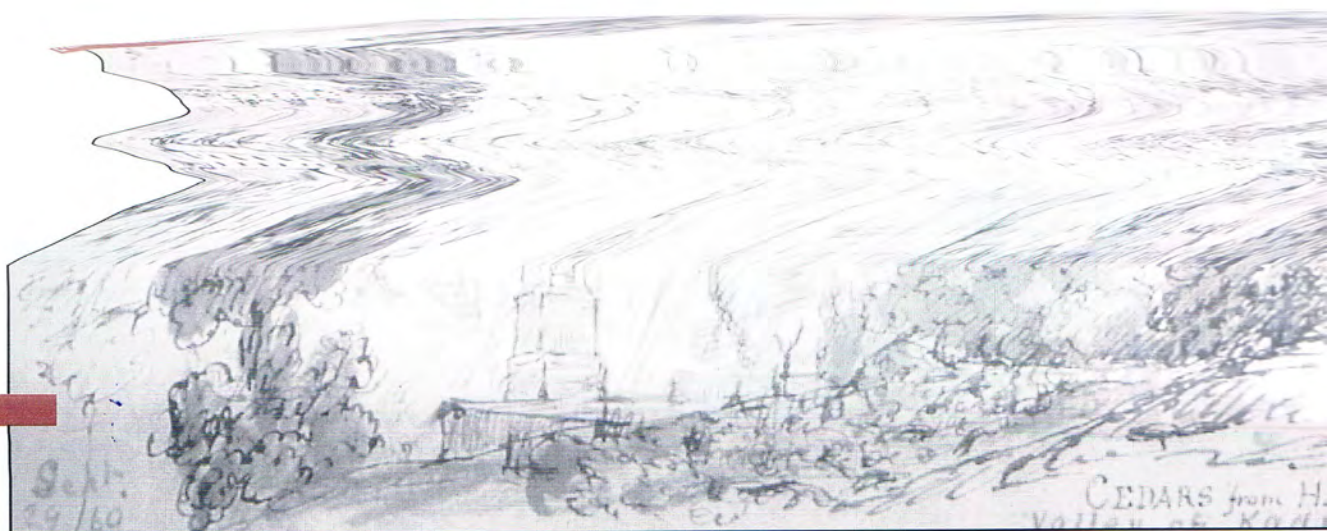
3



4



5



THE FIRST SCIENTIFIC
MISSION IN 1860
TO THE CEDARS OF
MOUNT LEBANON

74

5

Hasrun and the valley of Kadisha, 29 September 1860.



5



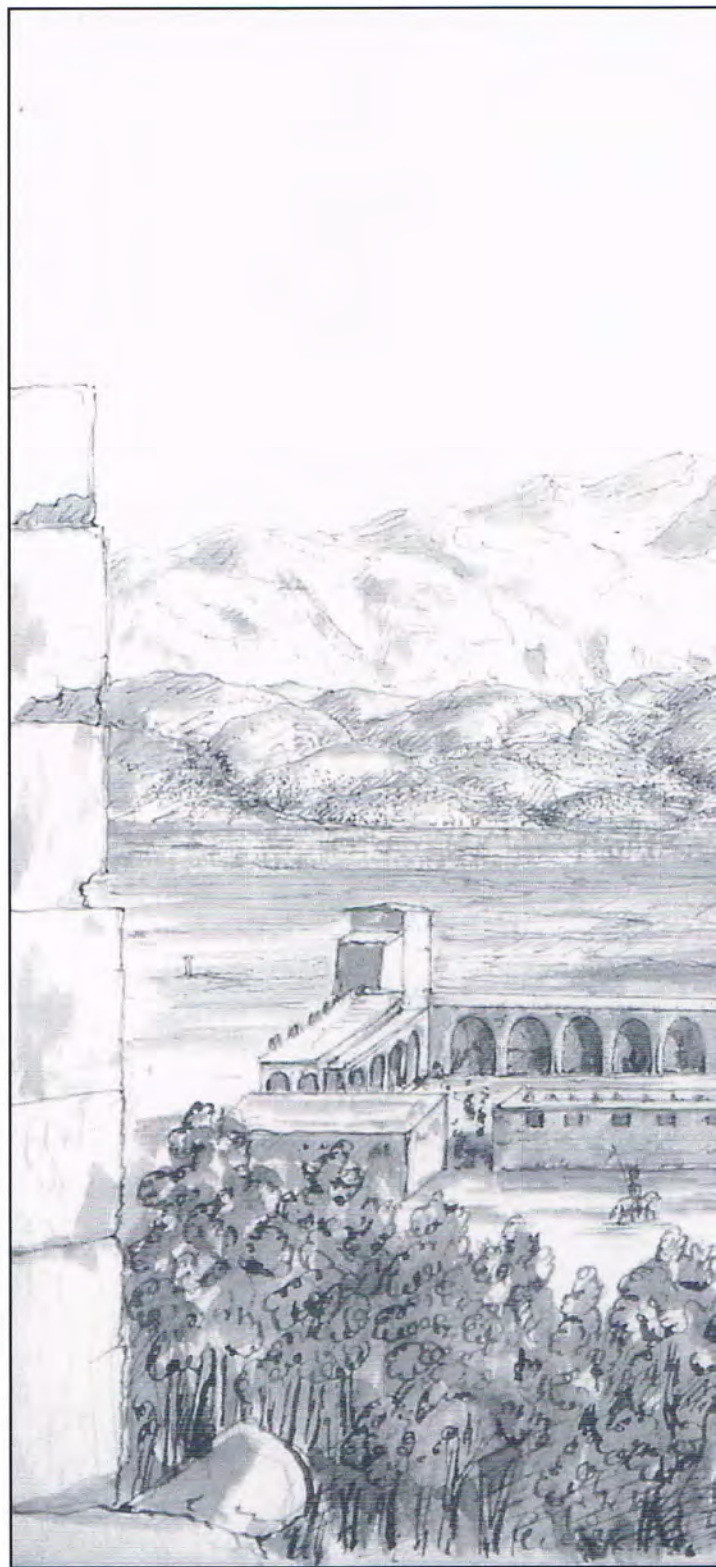
**THE FIRST SCIENTIFIC
MISSION IN 1860
TO THE CEDARS OF
MOUNT LEBANON**

76

Dufferin, who observed that the the French were bound by a convention to withdraw their forces within six months. At 8.30 pm Hooker left Beirut for Saïda reaching the picturesque town surrounded by "very large splendid green orange, figs and bananas". He went straight to Mr Charles Gaillardot (1814-1883), a French doctor serving as chief medical officer with the Ottoman army and director of the hospital at Saïda*. Gaillardot told Hooker that he had not yet met any botanist in Syria. The next day he left Saïda for Tyre at 2.30 pm reaching the town at 5 pm that evening. Tyre, according to Hooker, was not picturesque but it had good houses and antiquities, ruins and old columns everywhere. At 5 am October 15 they left Tyre heading for Palestine. Hooker recorded his impressions of Mount Carmel, Nazareth, Jerusalem, the Jordan valley, Al-Khaleel, Bethlehem, Mar Saba, Nablus, Tiberias, Safed, Akka, and Haifa. On the 3rd of November the party took a steamer from Haifa to Beirut, and on November 5 they left Beirut by steamer for Marseilles.

Hooker's research in the Cedars and his journey to the Atlas mountains in Morocco to research Cedar trees there convinced him that Lebanon's *Cedrus Libani* and the *Cedrus Atlantica* in Morocco are varieties of the same species. He found the Cedar grove to be an old moraine 4000 feet below the summit, which is no longer, covered with perpetual snow. Hooker believed that the climate must formerly have been colder, under such conditions he speculated as to the possibility of the Cedar of Lebanon, the Atlas, and Deodar having been part of continuous forest at a low level. He also considered the Himalayan and Lebanese cedars to be forms of an original cedar, which is now extinct. In addition the plan of the cedars drawn by Commander Arthur L. Mansell during that journey is considered to be the first scientific research ever carried out on the cedars of Lebanon.

Later in 1893 Hooker sketched the flora of Syria and his illustrations were used in Sir William Smith's *Dictionary of the Bible*. Hooker considered



6 The Lebanese mountains, a view drawn in Baalbek, 3 October, 1860.

* See p. 35.



LEBANON
from Baalbeck. Oct 3/60

THE FIRST SCIENTIFIC
MISSION IN 1860
TO THE CEDARS OF
MOUNT LEBANON

78

that the plants in Syria are in general Mediterranean plants mixed with cultivated European types. He divided Syria into three floristic regions: the west or the littoral, where most of the prolific plants were of a familiar type, secondly the valley of Jordan, the Dead Sea and the area around Damascus and thirdly the middle and mountainous

an oak that had broken off in the winter of 1856-57 and was dated by the count of its annual rings to about seven hundred years.

Hooker's Mount Lebanon expedition is considered to be the first modern scientific research account of the Cedars. Although research into the botany of the Holy Land started as early as 1575 when the German traveller Leonard Rauwolf gave his first ever account of the botany of the Holy Land and



regions where oaks predominate below 3000 feet. Besides his botanical studies, Hooker had been asked by Darwin to collect beetles from under the stones of Mount Lebanon, to examine the microscopic life of any brine lakes and to study special types of asses with double or treble shoulder stripes.

Hooker and Hambury made a diagnostic study of three species of oaks, and a portion of a branch of

the Levant followed by several other travellers including Robert Tyas, who published in 1852 *Flowers in the Holy Land*, Hooker's studies laid the ground for the modern scientific approach to that subject. In later years, members of the Palestine Exploration Fund expeditionary missions continued their research in this field. Another landmark in the botanical research of the Holy Land was the two-volume work by George Post,

Professor of Natural Sciences at the Syrian Protestant College (American University of Beirut), who published in 1883 his masterpiece entitled *Flora of Syria, Palestine, and Sinai*.



All of the information mentioned in this article is derived from the following:

Club with the Royal Botanic Garden, Kew, London, 1999.

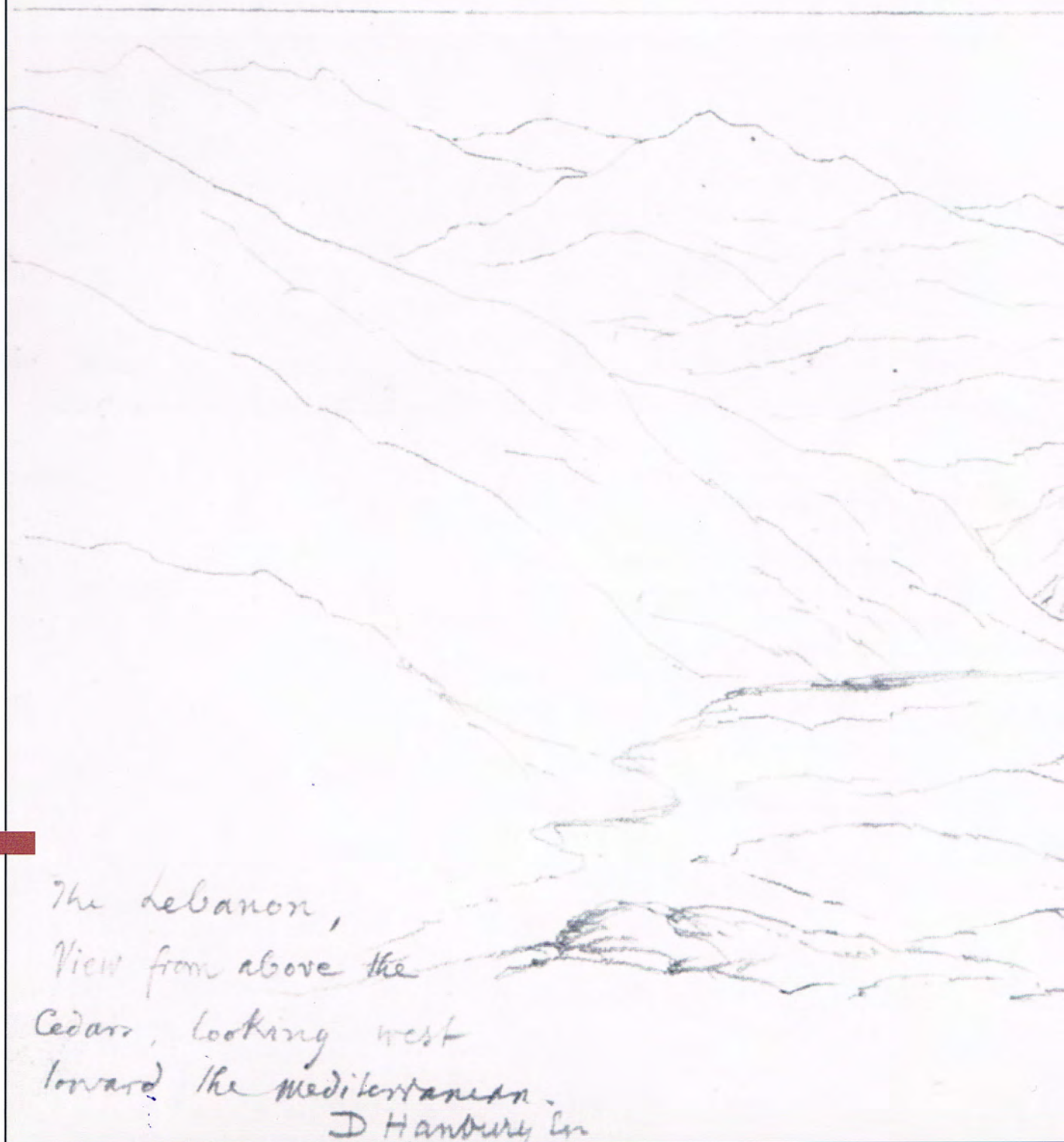
- 1- Sir Joseph Dalton Hooker, *Journal of Excursion to Syria and Palestine in 1860*, manuscript copy.
- 2- *The Dictionary of National Biography*.
- 3- Ray Desmond, Sir Joseph Dalton Hooker, *Traveller and Plant Collector, Antique Collector's*

7 Afka cave and the valley of Adonis, 27 September 1860.
8 Cedars of Lebanon, 1860.

THE FIRST SCIENTIFIC
MISSION IN 1860
TO THE CEDARS OF
MOUNT LEBANON

80

9 The cedar forest, a view from the summit looking west towards the Mediterranean.
30 September, 1860.



9

The Lebanon,
View from above the
Cedars, looking west
toward the Mediterranean.
J. Hanbury Esq



30 Sept.
1860.