

General

Trees nature monuments or Giant Trees, are significant elements of our natural and cultural heritage. They have lived in periods with highly adverse conditions and survived extreme climatic conditions and the passage of time but also the disastrous fury of fire and irrational actions of man. They are witnesses to distant historical events and are often closely associated with the traditions, myths and legends of our cruelly tried island. Contemporary Cyprus society has a duty to protect them as living monuments of nature and as remarkable aesthetic and cultural elements.

What are the Trees Nature Monuments?

When we talk about trees nature monuments we mean trees or high shrubs with unusually large dimensions and of very old age, generally exceeding two or three centuries.

It is evident that there can be no concrete limits regarding the dimensions a tree should have in order to be classified as a nature monument. The dimensions of a tree depend, to a large extent, on the species, the ecological conditions and other factors. Thus, a pine tree to be classified as a natural monument should have a diameter of more than 100 cm, while a golden oak or a juniper with a diameter of more than 50 cm may be regarded as rare. Accordingly, a pine tree growing on a windy mountain ridge, with shallow and poor soil may be 200 years old and its diameter may not exceed 50 cm and its height may be limited. Apart from dimensions and age, the historical value which a tree may have, or other characteristics such as its location, plant species and vigor, may increase its significance.

Some trees such as poplars, walnut trees, fig trees and oriental alder are normally short-lived and thus they rarely acquire big dimensions or have such a long life as to be described as monuments. Long-lived trees such as the olive tree, the oak tree and the terebinth, endure longer and present more often examples of trees-monuments..



The Oak Tree of Laneia (*Quercus Infectoria ssp. veneris*)

The need for protection

The value of trees-monuments has no direct relation to economic sizes. It is mainly emotional and aesthetic and often scientific, ecological, historical and cultural.

Many of us have felt strong feelings of admiration and awe at the sight of a giant tree. The man of today shows a spontaneous respect for trees which have survived over the centuries at a specific location and is prepared to take the necessary measures for their preservation.

A typical example which shows the economic cost the Cyprus society is prepared to pay for the preservation of a tree-monument is a terebinth tree in Pafos for the preservation of which many changes have been made in the construction plans of a road with an additional cost of over €119.600. This example is undoubtedly a good indication of the great importance society attaches to such trees.

Monumental trees of Cyprus

Trees-monuments lived in the previous centuries when extremely adverse conditions prevailed in our island for their survival: lack of legislation for their protection, uncontrolled woodcutting, since wood was the only source of energy for man, and complete lack of respect for the environment, leading to irrational exploitation of natural resources.

For the above reasons very few century-old trees have managed to survive. These were mainly:

- Trees which were regarded as sacred and were dedicated to some Saint. They were usually near churches as for example the kermes oak of Panagia Theoskepasti at Kalopanagiotis, the terebinth tree of Panagia Angelochtisti and the Mediterranean cypress of Agios Nikolas at Kathikas village of Pafos.
- Trees which were near ancient monuments, the sycamore fig of Agia Napa and rosewood at Kolossi.
- Trees occurring in state forests where the forest legislation is applied for at least 120 years, particularly trees in inaccessible areas.
- Trees which were valuable for their fruit mainly olive trees, the oak trees for the acorns used as fodder for pigs and terebinths for their edible fruit and their gum.



Kermes Oak of Panagia Theoskepasti at Kalopanagiotis (*Quercus coccifera ssp. calliprinos*)

Protection of Trees Nature Monuments in Cyprus

The protection of trees-monuments in the state forests has been feasible for many years now with the implementation of the Forest Legislation. But it is a fact that the need for protection of these trees even in state forests was recognized only in the last two decades, when a systematic effort for their effective protection was launched.

The protection of trees outside state forests is achieved with their declaration as protected, through the issuing of a Preservation Order under the provisions of the Country and Town Planning Law, section 39(1). In practice the procedure includes the location of the tree or a request by the local authorities or by the owner and subsequently the evaluation and description of the tree by the Department of Forests which submits a relevant suggestion to the Town Planning and Housing Department to promotion the issuing of an order. In this way, both isolated remarkable trees and groups of trees may be declared as protected.

These trees are inspected every year by specially trained forest officials and their maintenance is carried out with special funds included each year in the budget of the Department of Forests. The maintenance work is costly, to some extent dangerous and requires diligence, skill and specialized knowledge since specialized techniques are often applied.

Further below reference is made to trees which have been declared as protected and are situated outside the state forests as well as examples of century-old trees (nature monuments) found on state forest land and protected by the Forest Legislation.

A. Isolated trees occurring outside state forest that have been declared as protected until the end of 2011 (a total of 81 trees)

1. Oak Tree (*Quercus infectoria ssp. veneris*): Kampos, Kato Pyrgos,



The Terebinth Tree of Apeshia (*Pistacia atlantica*)



The Terebinth Tree of Panagia Angeloktisti at Kiti (*Pistacia atlantica*)

2. Laurel (*Laurus nobilis*): Omodos (1 tree)
3. Olive tree (*Olea europaea*): Anglisides, Steni (2 trees)
4. Forest Oak (*Casuarina equisetifolia*): Psimolofou (1 tree)
5. Grape (*Vitis vinifera*): Argaka (1 tree)
6. Mediterranean Cypress (*Cupressus sempervirens*): Nisou (1 tree)
7. Golden Oak (*Quercus alnifolia*): Apliki (1 tree)
8. Rosewood (*Tipuana tipu*): Kolossi (1 tree)
9. Kermes Oak (*Quercus coccifera ssp. calliprinos*): Kalopanagiotis (1 tree)
10. Stone Pine (*Pinus pinea*): Filani (1 tree)
11. Oriental Plane (*Platanus orientalis*): Nisou, Koilani (2 trees)
12. Storax (*Styrax officinalis*): Salamiou (1 tree)
13. Sycamore Fig (*Ficus sycomorus*): Agia Napa (1 tree)
14. Terebinth Tree (*Pistacia atlantica*): Apesia, Kritou Marottou, Limnatis, Poli Chrysochous, Simou (5 trees)
15. Carob tree (*Ceratonia siliqua*): Steni (1 tree)
16. White Mulberry (*Morus alba*): Trachypedoula, Steni (2 trees)

B. Groups of Trees outside state forests that have been declared as protected until the end of 2011 (a total of 20 groups)

1. Olive Trees (*Olea europaea*): Empa, Xyliatos and Flasou
2. Eucalypt Trees (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*): Aglantzia
3. Sweet Gum (*Liquidambar styraciflua*): Tala
4. Cypress Trees (*Cupressus sempervirens var. sempervirens*): Meneou, Troulli
5. Terebinth Trees (*Pistacia atlantica*): Emba, Kiti.

Apart from the above trees, a list of several other trees monuments of nature is before the Minister of the Interior for which protection orders will soon be published.



The Mediterranean Cypress of the Frank at Nisou (*Cupressus sempervirens var. sempervirens*)

Trees Nature Monuments of Cyprus

C. Trees-Monuments in state forest land

In state forests, hundreds of trees monuments of nature which are protected under the forest legislation, have been recorded. The most remarkable and definitely the most numerous are the **Pine trees of Troodos or Black Pine** (*Pinus nigra* ssp. *pallasiana*). Dozens of such trees have survived at an altitude of more than 1600m, aged between 500 - 1000 years which in some cases form century-old stands.



Black Pine at Troodos (*Pinus nigra* ssp. *pallasiana*)



The trunk of the oak tree of Laneia (*Quercus infectoria* ssp. *veneris*) following its maintenance by the Department of Forests

Katarraktis" in Pafos Forests, oak trees (*Quercus infectoria* ssp. *veneris*) at Laneia on land purchased by the Department of Forests and at Pyrgos tis Rigenas in Akamas, kermes oaks (*Quercus cocifera* ssp. *calliprinos*) in Agia Marina Xyliatou Valley, in the National Forest Park of Polemidhia and in Platy valley of Pafos Forest, laurel tree (*Laurus nobilis*) in "Mavroi Gremmi" and several other species.

Trees-Monuments and traditions

The presence of trees monuments in a place for many centuries resulted in their being associated with various stories and legends. The creation of these legends was rather directly connected with the awe and respect inspired to our naive ancestors by the great dimensions and the unusually old age of the trees which were often attributed to divine protection. Further below some stories are given about a number of trees-monuments.

The Cypress tree of Agios Nikolaos at Kathikas

Regarding this tree, which is just outside Kathikas village in Pafos district, old aged people of the village say that Saint Nicolas while passing through the area and feeling tired searched for a tree to sit down and get some rest.

As he could not find a tree, he sat at the point where the cypress

tree grows today and when he rose to his feet he picked his things but before leaving, he opened a hole with his walking stick and prayed to God that a tree should grow for passers-by to rest under its shade. It is rumoured that this cypress tree has since grown and those passing by, rest under its shade. As can easily be noticed most of the branches of the cypress tree have the shape of a walking stick.



The Cypress Tree of Agios Nikolaos at Kathikas (*Cupressus sempervirens* var. *horizontalis*)

Another story about this tree is the following: Many years ago, an inhabitant of the village, as he himself told us, cut some branches from a cypress tree and loaded them on his donkey in order to take them home to use in his oven. When he started unloading the branches from the animal, he saw in his yard an old man who said to him: «Don't unload them, take them back to the place where you cut them» and the old man disappeared. Immediately there came to his mind Agios Nikolaos to whom the tree was dedicated. So, he tied the branches again onto the animal and took them back to the Cypress tree. It is noted that this tree is going to be declared soon as protected. It has a circumference of 4,35 meters, a height of 14 meters and its age is estimated at more than 700 years.

The Oriental Plane of Agia Mavri

The tree is in the middle of the distance between Pera Pedi and Koilani. Its trunk has a circumference of 8 metres, a height of 36 metres and it is estimated to be 800 years old. According to tradition, Agia Mavri did not want to marry someone her parents insisted she should marry and for this reason she left her home on the night the wedding would take place. When those hunting her were about to catch her, in despair she asked Virgin Mary to help her. While in this kneeling position she hit the nearby rock with her hand and a large hole was opened into which she found refuge. When her parents and relatives tried to catch her they could not because a spring with a lot of water started to flow and flooded the surrounding area. The Agia Mavri monastery was built at the site by the faithful to commemorate the Virgin's miracle.



The Oriental Plan of Agia Mavri (*Platanus orientalis*)

Kermes Oak of Panagia Theoskepasti

The church of Panagia Theoskepasti is situated in the east of the village of Kalopanagiotis, about one kilometre from the square of the village and is estimated to have been built about the middle of the 15th century.

A tradition says that in 1571 AD when the Turks invaded Cyprus they looted and destroyed the whole Marathassa area and only the church of Panagia Theoskepastri was miraculously saved. It is believed that it was hidden from the Turks by the dense crown of Kermes Oak which was near the entrance of the church and it is thanks to this miracle that the church was given the name "Theoskepasti" (Protected by God).

Basic measures for the protection of trees-monuments or other significant trees

Some very basic measures are mentioned below which should be taken to slow down the symptoms of ageing of trees-monuments and of other significant trees.

- In cases where there are cobblestones, reinforced concrete or asphalt within the area of the crown of the tree, holes should be opened or small grills should be made in the area of the root system so that the ventilation of roots may be facilitated and the tree may get water, liquid fertilizer or even special chemicals. The covering of the surface round the trunk with such materials should be avoided and other solutions should be sought.
- The placing of constructions and nails on the trunk or on the branches of the tree should be avoided because otherwise scars are caused which prevent the growth of the tree and facilitate the entry of pathogenic organisms.
- The removal of branches from the tree without the advice of some specialist should be avoided because the careless removal of branches creates problems of disturbance of the balance and coherence of the crown rendering the tree susceptible to windfall by strong winds.
- If there is the possibility, and it is necessary, the tree should be irrigated and fertilized.

It has been observed that in many villages with noteworthy trees, local authorities put asphalt or pavement close to the trunk causing in reality the suffocation of the trees and this is the main cause of premature death of many important trees which are real gems of the countryside.

Conclusions

It emerges clearly from what is stated above that in the last years a substantial effort is being made for the effective protection of trees-monuments of our country. But it should be stressed that this effort will be much more successful with the more direct involvement of the local authorities and of individual citizens also.

Within the framework of the systematic effort of the Department of Forests more than 200 trees-monuments all over the island have been recorded. As some trees-monuments may not have been located, the public is called upon in case they know of such trees of great dimensions to inform the Department of Forests on the telephones 22805528 or 22805531, so that they may be evaluated and the procedures necessary for their protection and maintenance may be set in motion.



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