



Lania's oak tree (ownership: Department of Forests)

Introduction

The oak is one of the few large broadleaved trees native to Cyprus. The oak family (Fagaceae) is a big one comprising eight genera and more than one thousand species.

The genus of oaks (*Quercus*) comprises about 600 species with distribution in Europe (27 species), North Africa, Asia, North America and in the western part of South America.

Three species of oaks occur naturally in Cyprus. The common oak (*Q.infectoria* ssp. *veneris*), the golden oak (*Q.alnifolia*), and the hermes oak (*Q.coccifera* ssp. *calliprinos*). A small number of other oak species was introduced in the past, very commonly planted in the squares of villages and towns. Among them are the *Q.illex*, *Q.macrolepis*, *Q. macrocarpa*.

History/Mythology

Originally Cyprus, the "Green Island" of the ancient world, was certainly more verdant than it is today. The oak was well - known by ancient authors and together with pines, cedars, planes, alders, cypresses, carob trees and other less important species were

forming the very dense forests with which Cyprus was covered in ancient times. Nowadays the open stands of oak represent remnants or relicts of older and more extensively distributed forests.

According to mythology the oak was devoted to Zeus and was believed that it had the power to give oracles. This power was mainly attributed to the oak forests of Dodoni. It was also believed that the Amadryades nymphs were residing in the oak forests and that each nymph was represented by one tree. After the death of an oak tree it was believed that the corresponding nymph was as well dying.

Description

The oak is a robust tree with a massive trunk which can attain the height of more than 20 m. It retains its leaves until the new foliage begins to develop in late winter or spring. Its bark is thick grey, with vertical fissures. The leaves are usually rather large 4 - 15 cm long, 2 -7 cm wide, vary variable in shape with wavy margins.

The inflorescences are monoecious. Male inflorescences generally crowded towards the tips of the branches. Female inflorescences elongate with 2 - 3 flowers at the base of the leaves. Acorns 3 - 5 cm long, 1 - 2 cm wide, narrowly ovoid or subcylindrical. Its wood is hard and durable and it is used in building construction, for carpentry and for charcoal production.

Ecology

It occurs generally in mountain valleys on igneous rocks, but sometimes in low-land areas or on limestone, from sea-level up to 1700 m, altitude.

The open stands of oak represent remnants or relicts of older and more extensively distributed forests. Human impacts seem to be the destructive factor, since the deep soils where the oak grows have been used for agricultural purposes for centuries. It is growing in association with the *Pinus brutia*, *Quercus coccifera* ssp. *calliprinos*, *Crataegus azarolus*, *Anagyris foetida*, *Pistacia terebinthus*, *Cistus* ssp., *Ferula communis*, *Geranium* ssp. and other less important plants.

Conservation status and management

The oak forests remnants have been included in the Annex I of the European Union Directive 92/43. The most representative oak stands have been proposed for inclusion in the Natura 2000 Network, so that their protection is secured.

A great number (50) of gigantic oak trees are as well protected. The largest among them is the oak at Phoiti with girth at breast height equal to 9,5 meters and height of 20 meters. Other famous gigantic oaks occur in Lania, Lagoudhera, Kannaviou, Kannavia and at Pyrgos tis Regainas in Akamas.

TEXT: FORESTRY DEPARTMENT
PHOTOS: FORESTRY DEPARTMENT ARCHIVES



P.I.O. 209/2003 - 3.000
Published by the Press and Information Office
Printed by: Government Printing Office

The tree of the year 2004

The Oak (*Quercus infectoria ssp. veneris*)



Photo: Lania's oak tree
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MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE, NATURAL RESOURCES
AND ENVIRONMENT
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