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 irra-
tional 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 soci-
city 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
hedges or shubs 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. Accord-
ingly, 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 dimen-
sions 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 pions, 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 monu-
ments. 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 need for protection

The value of trees-monuments has no direct relation to economic
status. It is mainly emotional and aesthetic and often scientific, eco-
logical, 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 loca-
tion and is prepared to take the necessary measures for their
preservation.

A typical example which shows the economic cost the Cyprus soci-
yety is prepared to pay for the preservation of a tree-monument is a
terebinth tree in Paphos for the preservation of which many changes
have been made in the construction plans of a road with an addi-
tional cost of over €19,600. This example is undeniably 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
protection, uncontrolled woodcutting, overwooding, overgrazing, soil
erosion, human depredations. These were mainly:

- Trees which were regarded as sacred and dedicated to
  deities. They were usually near churches as for example the
  kernos oak of Panagia Theokalopi at Kalopanagiotis, the
  terebinth tree of Panagia Angelochtisti and the Mediterranean
  cypress of Ayios Nikolaos at Kathikas village of Paphos.
- Trees which were near ancient monuments, the stamnagati of
  Ayia Napa and artemonion 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 terebinth
  for their edible fruit and their gum.

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 trees as requested 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 protect 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 specify 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, in some extreme cases and
requires diligence, skill and specialized knowledge since specialized
 techniques are often applied.

Further below reference is made to trees which have been
deliberately 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
delared as protected until the end of 2011 (a total of 31 trees)

1. Oak Tree (Quercus infectoria ssp. veneta) Karnes Oak of Panagia Theokalopi at Kalopanagiotis (Quercus cerrisera ssp. calliprinos)

2. Olive Tree (Olea europaea) Binth tree of Panagia Angelochtisti and the Mediterranean cypress of Ayios Nikolaos at Kathikas village of Paphos.

3. Stamnagati (Ficus sycomorus) Aya Napa (1 tree)

4. Terebinth Tree (Platanus orientalis) Apotheke, Larnaca (1 tree)

5. Cypress Trees (Cupressus sempervirens var. sempervirens) Kolossi (5 trees)

6. Mediterranean Cypress (Cupressus sempervirens var. macrocarpa) Empa, Xyliatos and Flasou (5 trees)

7. Stone Pine (Pinus pinea) Filastis (1 tree)

8. Olive Tree (Olea europaea) Kolossi (3 trees)

9. Sweet Gum (Liquidambar styraciflua) Tala (1 tree)

10. Cypress Trees (Cupressus sempervirens var. sempervirens) Kolossi (5 trees)

11. Olive Tree (Olea europaea) Kolossi (3 trees)

12. Stone Pine (Pinus pinea) Filastis (1 tree)

13. Olive Tree (Olea europaea) Kolossi (3 trees)

14. Cypress Trees (Cupressus sempervirens var. sempervirens) Kolossi (5 trees)

15. Olive Tree (Olea europaea) Kolossi (3 trees)

16. Cypress Trees (Cupressus sempervirens var. sempervirens) Kolossi (5 trees)

17. Terebinth Tree of Apokria (Platanus orientalis) Kiti

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. Terebinth Trees (Platanus orientalis) Kolossi

3. Sweet Gum (Liquidambar styraciflua) Tala

4. Cypress Trees (Cupressus sempervirens var. sempervirens) Kolossi, Larnaca

5. Terebinth Tree of Apokria (Platanus orientalis) Apotheke, Larnaca

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 Terebinth Tree of Apokria at Kiti (Platanus orientalis)
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 sp. patula). Dozens of such trees have survived at an altitude of more than 1,500m aged between 500 - 1,000 years which in some cases form centu-
ry-old stands.

Other trees-monuments are found junipers (Juniperus foetidissimi) in Troodos Forest and the Greater juniper (Juniperus oxycedrus). Also golden oaks (Quercus robur) in Pafos Forest (e.g. golden oak at “Kremmos its Pelliis” locality), plane trees (Platanus orientalis) like the “Plane tree of Kataraokia” in Pafos Forests, oak trees (Quercus infectoria sp. vernus) following its maintenance by the Department of Forests and at Pyrgos in Kyrenia in Akamas, kermes oaks (Quercus coccifera sp. californica) in Aya Marina Xylotou Valley, in the National Forest Park of Polomandha and in Pitsy valley of Pafos Forest, laurel tree (Laurus nobilis) in “Maroni Grammen” and other species.

Trees-Monuments and traditions

The presence of trees monuments in a place for many centuries related to 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 tree species.

The Cypress tree of Agia Nikolaos at Kathikas

regarding this tree, which is just outside Kathikas village in Pafos district, old aged people of the village say that St. Nicholas while passing through the area and feeling tree 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 open-
ned a hole with his walking stick and prayed to God that the 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 the shade. As can be

The trunk of the oak tree of Lamia (Quercus infectoria sp. vernus) following its maintenance by the Department of Forests

easily be noticed most of the branches of the cypress tree have the shape of a walking stick.

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 own. 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 eat 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 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

The Oriental Plane of Agia Mavri

The tree is in the middle of the distance between Peri Pedi and Kalavasos at 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. For this reason she left her home on the night the wed-

ing would take place. When those hunting her went about to catch her, in despair she asked Virgin Mary to help her. While in this kneeling posi-

tion she touched a boulder which in 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 sur-

rounding area. The Agia Mavri monastery was built at the site by the faithful to commemorate the Virgin’s miracle.

Kermes Oak of Panagia Theoskepasti

The church of Panagia Theoskepasti is situated in the east of the vil-

lage 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 1371 AD when the Turks invaded Cyprus they looted and destroyed the whole Marathassa area and only the church of Panagia Theoskepasti 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 Law).

Basic measures for the protection

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.

(a) 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 chem-

cals. The covering of the surface round the trunk with such materials should be avoided and other solutions should be sought.

(b) 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.

(c) 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 coherences of the crown rendering the tree sus-
ticable to windfall injury.

(d) If there is the possibility, it is necessary, the tree should be irrigated and fertilized. It has been observed that in many villages with noteworthy local authorities put asphalt or pavement close to the trunk caus-
ing in reality the suffocation of the trees and this is the main cause of generative 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 and other significant trees. It should be stressed that such effort will be much more successful with the more direct involve-

ment of the local authorities and of individual citizens also.

The covering of the surface round the trunk with such materials should be avoided and other solutions should be sought.

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