Olive in the story and art in Albania

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1. Agriculture in Albania (Short Information)

Albania belongs to the subtropical Mediterranean climate zone.

Average altitude is 706 m above the sea level.

Agriculture is estimated at 22% of the GDP.

Agriculture provides the incomes for more than 50% of rural population.

More than 100 thousands ha of agriculture land is identified very suitable for olive tree growing.

The average agricultural land per capita is very small at 0.2 ha.

Agricultural sector suffers from the:

• small size of farms, &
• higher fragmentation of farm land,

which are a barriers to production and marketing.
2. Distribution of Olive Trees in Albania

Albania also belongs to the first & second favourable climatic zones of Olive trees distribution (Koppen 1923).

Local climatic variation occurs from one region to another, & = the specific olive genotypes were grown in different ecological areas.

The western part of the country, under the influence of Adriatic & Ionian seas,

= has more moderate temperatures than the rest of Albania.
DISTRIBUTION OF OLIVE TREES IN ALBANIA

Olive trees are among:
- the most extensively cultivated crops &
- important fruit tree crops grown ALB.

&

cover near 12% of the arable land (Ismaili 2013).

Main geographic production zone covers

the entire coastline from Saranda to Shkodra
(coastal areas of Adriatic & Ionian seas)

+ the intermediate hills + inland river valleys
(Shkumbin, Osum, and Vjosa rivers),

All these zones possess olive trees.

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From **8.1 million** in **1912** the number of olive trees **decreased to 1.768 million** by **1946**.

**Large olive plantations were established** in coastal lands during (1955-90) period.

**Privatization of land** (in 1991-92), = resulted in highly fragmented olive land.

**Historically considered to be sacred & well protected by laws,** = olive plantations **suffered massive destruction** (in 1990).

The number of olives **decreased to 3.5 million** by 1996.

**In transition period (1991-95) > 1.2 million olive trees were damaged**
After the country restored its stability in 1999, the number of olive trees increased near to 10 million by 2013.
4. ALBANIAN OLIVE GERMLASM / VARIETIES

Olive germplasm is represented by the wild and domesticated forms, & it is presented by 3 basic populations: Kaninjot, White of Tirana & Wild forms.

In areas under Ionian Sea influence (Vlora County) are grown olive genotypes originated from Kaninjot population.

In central part under Adriatic sea influence (Tirana County) are grown olive genotypes originated from White of Tirana population.

The olive genotypes generated from wild populations (such as Pulazeqin, i Holli Himares etc.) are grown in both two regions (VL & TR).
OLIVE VARIETIES

Variety is one of the most important factors of olive productivity.

28 varieties cover 82% of olive areas, but only 8 native varieties as: Kaninjot (table + oil), Big grain of BR and EL (table), & Mixan, White of TR, Nisjot, Thin of Himara, + Frantoio (Italian var.) (for oil), are most cultivated.

Replacement of old olive trees with news varieties and substitution of rustic cultivars with more productive ones, = are changing the varietal structure of olives grown in Albania.

So foreign varieties as: Frantoio, Lecino, Carolea, Pendolino, Nocelara, Messinesse, etc (from Italy), & Kalkidhikia, Cunatis, Koroneqis, Amigdanolia, Calamon etc (from Greece), etc. growing rapidly = are changing the varietal structure of olives in Albania.
5. STATUS OF OLD OLIVE TREES IN ALBANIA

Old olives (> 1000 years old) are presented by individuals or small group of individuals (from 5 to 20 olive trees/ha).

Olive trees (>100~500 years old) are presented in blocks with 80–100 plants/ha.

Olives (~30 -50 years old) are presented by classical blocks (120-150 olives/ha). Recently ALB farmers are using modern high density planting systems (270-330 trees/ha) (as in EU, USA, etc).

OLD OLIVE TREES

There are 1.7 million Old Olive Trees evaluated about 500-3000 years old.

Near 1 million were inventoried in (Vlora, Tirana, Kruja , Berat & Lezha areas).

More than 10% of Albanian olives are evaluated as very old (1000 – 3000 years old) (Ismaili 2013; Kafazi N. 1972).
**Status of Old Olive Trees in Albania**

Old olive trees cover about 30% of total areas in Vlora County, and more than 60% of total areas with olive trees in Tirana County.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DISTRICT / COUNTY</th>
<th>Total area with olives (ha)</th>
<th>Multi-Century old olive trees (ha)</th>
<th>Olives trees (50-70 years old) (ha)</th>
<th>Planted after 1990 year (ha)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VLORA</td>
<td>10787</td>
<td>3199</td>
<td>6700</td>
<td>888</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SARANDA</td>
<td>2050</td>
<td>427</td>
<td>1486</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DELVINA</td>
<td>1638</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>1200</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VLORA COUNTY</td>
<td>14475</td>
<td><strong>3987</strong></td>
<td>9386</td>
<td>1102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TIRANA</td>
<td>2982</td>
<td>1845</td>
<td>806</td>
<td>330</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KAVAJA</td>
<td>1521</td>
<td>941</td>
<td>333</td>
<td>246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TIRANA COUNTY</td>
<td>4503</td>
<td><strong>2786</strong></td>
<td>1139</td>
<td>577</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Olive Tree ~ 1500 Years old, Varosh-Tirana; Bardhi Tiranes ~ 2000 years old, Dajt, Tirana; Olive tree ~ 3000 years old, Preze, Tirana.
6. THE HISTORY, CULTURE AND MYTHS OF THE OLIVE TREE

The olive tree may have originated in Syria, Asia Minor, Ethiopia, Egypt, or India.

The spread of the olive tree to western places (including Albania) is due to Phoenicians who traded with other maritime centres. The Greeks spread it through their colonies. Later, the Romans expanded the tree throughout the huge empire.

Hypothesis that different species are native to different areas, proved that the olive tree, in Albania (= Mediterranean area)

→ took place at the same time

→ is as old as in the other Mediterranean neighbouring countries (Greece, Italy).
THE HISTORY, CULTURE AND MYTHS OF THE OLIVE TREE

There are several testimonial things that proved the olive tree presence in different region of western coastal part of Albania, where there are a lot of olive trees more than 1000 - 2000 years old.

Scymnus (a Greek geographer) three centuries B.C describes Epirus and Illyria as a warm prosperous country, filled with good olives, orchards and vineyards (Ismaili et al. 2010, Kafazi N. 1972).

Strabon in his work “Geography” wrote “Warm and fruitful is this Place (Illyria), as it is full of olives and vineyards except for few regions of harsh climate” (Kullaj E 2012).

During the Apollonic civilization the French merchants, describe the Illyrian-Epiriotic wine and olive oil, imported from Apollonia, as really delicious and aromatic.
THE HISTORY, CULTURE AND MYTHS OF THE OLIVE TREE

Julius Cesar describes Aulona as a country with widespread olives of great importance.

The Illyrians are described as masters of olive and grapes cultivation.

Olive oil processing, referred by many Roman scholars as “Olea Liburnicum” (Kullaj 2012) was a mastery developed by the famous Illyrians.

Moloses (Illyrians situated in Southern part of Illyria) know cultivation of olive trees 6000 years BC (Ismaili 2013, Fetahu, 2012), and spread the olive, through the harbours of Apollonia, Aulona, Epidamme and Scutari.

In ancient civilization centres (> 2500 years), such as Antipatreia, Scampi, Aulona, Byllis, Olympe, Amantia, Albanopolis, etc there are old olive trees whose age corresponds to the age of those ancient centres.
The History, Culture and Myths of the Olive Tree

The culture of the olive tree is manifested in many different ways (objects, arts, customs, religious, magical rituals, medicals, cosmetics, etc).

Illyrians has regarded the olive tree sacred for thousands of years. The olive tree has served as a symbol of peace, life, and fertility.

In battles the main food of Illyrian soldiers was: olives + oil + bread. Scanderbeg faced thirsty of soldiers using dried olive fruits during the battles.

A young couple, to be blessed, was obliged by Scanderbeg rules to grown, before marriage, 10 olive trees.

Popular tradition assigns the olive tree a divine origin and the tree is associated with rituals on special occasions, such as weddings, etc.
The antiquity of olives tree in Albania is evident because there are currently a lot of centennial individuals (especially in TR and VL areas).

In Tirana areas (Petrela, Lanabregas, Tufin, Preze, Brret & Tujan) old olive trees which have a measured perimeter up to 30 meters were evaluated up to 3000 years old (Ismaili et al. 2013).

A couple of olives in forest of Brret village (near of Tirana) are evaluated about 3000 years old.

41° 25’15.58”N, 19°39’28.69”E, H:157m.

(Photo© H. Ismaili)
7. THE ANTIQUE OLIVE OIL PROCESSING

In the past near 70% of olive fruits were processed using antique methods, especially oil mills with stones.

Other part about 30% of olives is processed using traditional family methods (by feet and hands and warm water).

Oil Mills with round stones were the basic method used in the past.

Olive stones have been found in several archaeological excavations. Proof of olive processing dates back to the 6th century AC.

According to 1940 inventory there were 546 oil mills in Albania, and near 88% of those was inventoried in Vlora, Delvina, Mallakastra and Tirana areas.

In this study are identified 283 oil mills (or the rests of oil mills) in 84 villages of Vlora and Tirana Counties.
The Antique Olive Oil Processing

Number of Olive Mills in Vlora and Tirana Counties
(Inventory of 1940)

- **Vlora Center**: 132
  - 17 (Vlora coastline)
  - 42 (Saranda coastline)
  - 26 (Konispoli)
  - 28 (Delvina)
  - 6 (Kavaja)
  - 25 (Tirana)

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8. THE ALBANIAN OLIVES ARCHAEOLOGY

Wine & olive oil were important products for Illyrians. Different containers discovered in Byllis, Kanina, Himara, Oriko, Cerje proved the existence of olives.

Various vessels, such as amphorae, barrels, pots, wooden bowls used by pre-Illyrians & Illyrians were discovered in Katundas, Cakran, Blaz, Kolsh (Neolithic, Bronze Age) and in Byllis, Kanina, Himara, Oriko, Cerje.
The Albanian Olive Oil Mills archaeology

Oil mill in Byllis (left) and Olive tree (wall picture) in Hekal, Byllis (right), dated III Century B.C.

Oil Mill in Kanina Vlora, IV century B.C.

Oil mill of 14th century in Brar of Tirana (Albania)
Traditional olive mill in Vlora

Olive mill in Tirana Brar village
Fixed and rotating parts of milling stones found in ancient city of Byllis (Kozelj)

(Photo ©. Skender Bushi)
The Olive oil mill (No. 4) in the medieval village of Kamenica, Delvina

Part of the oil mill from church (No. 7), medieval village of Kamenica, Delvina
Church of St. Mary, Sinjë, Berat

Church of St. Michael, Kostar, Saranda

Monastery of Kamenos, Delvinë
A “modern” oil mill and parts of an earlier one, Kakunjë, Tirana
9. Old Olive Trees and Castles

The Castles symbolized antique civilization centres.

The most old olive trees were tried near or relatively near the castles.

It is very significant the fact the great number of Old olive trees is situated near the castles.

This fact assume that the old centres of civilization were considered as the old areas of olive tree distribution.

There is a high relationship among Castles (pre-Illlyrian/Illlyrian Fortresses) and distribution of Old Olive Trees.
OLD OLIVE TREES AND CASTLES

Persqop Castle
Petrela Castle
Varosh Castle
Kanina Castle
Preza Castle
Kruja Castle
In Tirana County around 14 Castles there are situated more than 25 villages where the great number of Old olive trees (still producing olives) was inventoried.
In Vlora County around 19 Castles there are situated more than 28 villages where the great number of Old olive trees (still producing olives) was inventoried.

There are also 9 other castles that have influenced on olive tree distribution.
10. Old Olive Trees – Castles - Tourism

Around the antique Castles there are marvellous panoramas, landscapes, fresh shades and waters sources, etc.

In Tirana areas from 14 castles only 5 – 6 Castles (36% - 43%) are used as touristic points/places.

In Vlora areas from 19 castles only 7 – 8 Castles (37% - 42%) are used as touristic points/places.

In Albania there are still under the ground a great number of castles (not yet studied by archaeology = lack of infrastructure, means, lack of money, etc).

So, these potential touristic places can be used in the future, especially of the coastline areas known as Riviera.
11. Olive tree in the art and folklore

The Illyrian people had the ritual of the olive wreath (olive branches) as a symbol of blessing, happiness and prosperity of the new family.

The wreath was a symbol of joys and victories for those who performed remarkable works for the homeland.

The wreath with new branches of olives are used on special occasions, such as weddings.

When King Pirro was married to Brikena, the daughter of the powerful Dardanian King Bardhyl, an olive wreath of thin olive twigs/branches stood on her bride’s veil, (=leaves + fruits woven by gold).

This ritual has been inherited generation after generation, at the right place and of great importance in the culture and popular art.
Olive Tree in the Art and Folklore

There are lots of songs, dances, and folklore testimonials that prove the ancient relationships among Illyrians and Olive Trees.

- Dance in /or under shadow of olives.
- Olive branches as symbol of peace.
- Olive is a blessed tree.
- Who plants an olive makes a fortune.
- Olive branches are used in 6 January, the Day of the Blessed Water.
- The Marriage of Olive with Fire.
- The wreath of the bride.
- Uses of Olive branches (as decorative parts) in Summer Day Celebration
- Eye like an olive or her eyes like olive (fruits) (for a beautiful girl).
- Olive of Scanderbeg or Olive of Tears. (Olive tree in Piqeras, Vlora).
- Suffering the black of the olives.
- Olive tree a decorative plant.
- etc
Olive Tree in the Art and Folklore

Mosaic with a branch of olive. III Century B.C. (Uji i Ftohte, Vlora) (Source: National Museum, Tirana)

"Albanian Olive Collectors" Painting Picture by John Singer Sargent (Florence 12 Januar, 1856–14 April, 1925)

Ismail Qemali proclaiming the independence in 1912. Source: Picture took from "Second November" film

Coin of 1995 and 2000 with a branch of olive.

Repairing an Olive Mill. Source: Picture took from "The stones of my House" film
Olive tree in the Landscape Decoration

Madre Tereza Airport (Tirana)

Decorative objects from Trunk of Olive tree by artist Muhamet Trepci. Source: National Museum, Tirana, Albania
LANDSCAPE DECORATION = DAMAGING ACTIVITY = GENETIC EROSION

What is happening??

Decorative activities are damaging the antique story of the multi-century Olive Trees, and it is a pure Genetic Erosion of Old Olive Trees.
What is happening???

Landscape Decoration = is causing

- Genetic Erosion
- Environmental Erosion
- Documentation Erosion
- History Erosion
- etc

What we have today, will not be any more tomorrow
but

Failure is not fatal, Success is not final: it is the courage to continue that counts.

Winston Churchill
Thank You