Olive in the story and art in Albania

Conference
’The Adriatic Olive Grove: Risk Prevention, Sustainability, Learning’
24 January 2015, AUT, Tirana, Albania.

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1. AGRICULTURE IN ALBANIA (SHORT INFORMATION)

- Albania under Mediterranean climate zone.
- Average altitude > 700 m above the sea level.
- Agriculture is estimated at 22% of the GDP.
- Agriculture provides the incomes > 50% of rural population.
- >100,000 ha agriculture land = very suitable for olive tree.

Agricultural sector suffers from the:
- small size of farms, 0.2 ha /per capita
- higher fragmentation of farm land,

which are 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).

- Olive area is under the influence of Adriatic & Ionian seas.
- Local climatic variation occurs from one region to another, and as result:

= the specific olive genotypes were grown in different ecological areas.
DISTRIBUTION OF OLIVE TREES IN ALBANIA

Olive is:
- 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
- coastline from Saranda to Shkodra
- intermediate hills of western part
- inland river valleys (Shkumbin, Osum, and Vjosa rivers),

All these zones possess olive trees of different age.

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

1955-1990: Large olive plantations were **Established** in coastal lands.


Historically considered to be sacred & well protected by laws, = **olive plantations suffered massive destruction** (in transition period 1991-1995).

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

During transition > **1.2 million olive trees were damaged**
DYNAMIC OF OLIVE TREES IN ALBANIA (1912-2012)

After restored stability in 1999, the number of olives increased near to 10 million by 2013.
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 farmers are using high density (270-330 trees/ha) (as in EU, USA, etc).

**OLD OLIVE TREES**

≈ 1.7 million Old Olive Trees were evaluated about 500-3000 years old.

≈ 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>3987</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>2786</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
Old olive trees (~1000-3000 years old)

Olive in Story & Art (Albania)  
B. Gixhari et al. 24 January 2015, AUT, Tiranë.
6. The History, Culture and Myths of the Olive Tree

- The olive may 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.
- Greeks also spread it through their colonies.
- Romans expanded the olive tree throughout the huge empire.

Hypothesis that different species are native to different areas:

Proved that the olive tree, in Albania (= as a 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 testimonials that proved the presence of olives in coastal parts of Albania, with olive trees more than 1000 - 2000 years old.

Scymnus (a Greek geographer) 3 Cent. 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 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, as really delicious and aromatic.

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

The History, Culture and Myths of the Olive Tree

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 it 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 (Tirana) are evaluated ~ 3000 years old.

duhen shpallur
= Natural bio-monuments

(Olive in Story & Art (Albania) B. Gixhari et al. 24 January 2015, AUT, Tiranë. (Photo© H. Ismaili)
7. **THE ANTIQUE OLIVE OIL PROCESSING**

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

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

**Oil Mills with round stones** was the basic method used in the past. The rests of **Oil Mills** were found in several **archaeological excavations**.

**Proofs 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.

This study has identified **283 oil mills** (or the rests of oil mills) in **84 villages** of Vlora and Tirana Counties.
Number of Olive Mills in Vlora and Tirana Counties
(Inventory of 1940)

Number of villages and Olive Oil Mills in Vlora and Tirana Counties

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.

Rest of Oil mills of III Century B.C. in Amantia, (left) and in Byllis (right) evaluated respectively 2400 and 2200 years old.
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 ©. S. 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. 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

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 January, 1856-14 April, 1925)

Reparing an Olive Mill
Source: Picture took from "The stones of my House" film

Coin of 1995 and 2000 with a branch of olive.

Ismail Qemali proclaiming the independence in 1912
Source: Picture took from "Second November" film
10. Old Olive Trees and Castles

The Castles symbolized antique civilization centres.

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

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

There is a high relationship among Castles (pre-Illyrian/Illyrian 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.
11. **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, lack of adequate tools, lack of money, etc).

These potential touristic places can be used in the future, especially touristic OLIVE-CASTLE landscapes of the Albania coastline areas known as Riviera.
12. STORY OF OLD OLIVE TREES AND LANDSCAPE DECORATION

Olive Tree

- Landscape Decoration

- Olive Story

What is happening?
Olive tree in the Landscape Decoration

Madre Tereza Airport (Tirana)

Decorative objects from Trunk of Olive tree by artist Muhamet Trepcë. Source: National Museum, Tirana, Albania
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

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