

COST
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Cultural associations with Valuable Broadleaved Trees

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Cultural landscapes have been derived from the long-term interaction between human activities and nature and constitute a social, economic and ecological heritage for humanity.

The dominant feature of these landscapes are valuable broadleaved trees (VBTs), which are called 'noble broadleaved trees' in Greek.

Besides their importance for wood production and the supply with other, non-wood products, VBTs in the landscape had important cultural values. **Mythology, religion, customs and legends** are the most unique aspects that influence the social reaction on particular VBTs.

A comparison of the associations linked to different tree species in several European countries revealed that there are:

- ❖ traditions or stories unique for each country,
- ❖ remarkable similarities across Europe.

❖ It can be realized that:

- there are some tree species with strong symbolic power, the same for several countries

Alder: "evil tree" in Finland,
the tree of evil ghosts, the devil and witches in Germany,
the tree of war and death in Ireland

Elm: symbolizes death, sorrow and the transition into the Underworld in the UK, Germany and Switzerland

Birch: symbol for the emergence of spring, for joy and happiness, fertility and love in nearly all countries

Ash: sacred tree in France and Poland,
connected with healing/regeneration in Ireland and Poland,
connected with young men and warriors in France and with human strength in Greece

- there are the same issues (religious, superstitious, cultural...) connected with different tree species in the different countries

Magic protection against witches or evil ghosts (placing parts of trees for example over doors or in windows):

Ireland – **ash**

Poland - **birch**

Germany and Ireland - **sycamore**



Trees of justice (Middle Ages):

Germany - **lime**

France, Switzerland and Portugal - **elm**

Greece - **ash**



❖ The cultural/religious importance of a species often determined the place where these trees could (or still can) be found

Religion: holy trees like ash, lime or walnut growing in holy groves or in front of churches → e.g. in Greece, lime tree (tree of Virgin Mary) and walnut (its leaves are used in Orthodox Christian ceremonies) are very often present in front of churches.

“Trees of justice”: lime trees in Germany in the middle of the villages

lime trees growing on farms and in front of houses and symbolizing hospitality (France, Switzerland)

elm trees planted next to graves because their winged fruits followed dead persons souls to Last Judgement (France)

VBTs were associated with:

- ❖ place, village and family names
- ❖ weather prediction
- ❖ sayings concerning lightning or superstitions
- ❖ magic protection against witches or evil ghosts
- ❖ justice, prophesy
- ❖ symbolisms

In this presentation, some aspects will be presented in details and illustrated with examples from Greece.



Alnus glutinosa (black alder)

Nothing good, nothing bad,
but of great respect.

Cutting of alder is
strictly forbidden

Το σκλήθρο (*Alnus glutinosa*)...

... είναι δέντρο που αβάνει από τον Απρίλιο μέχρι τον Ιούνιο. Το σκλήθρο προσφέρει καύση. Τα φύλλα του σκλήθρου χρησιμοποιούνται για την παραγωγή του σκλήθρου. Τα κλαδιά του σκλήθρου χρησιμοποιούνται για την παραγωγή του σκλήθρου. Τα κλαδιά του σκλήθρου χρησιμοποιούνται για την παραγωγή του σκλήθρου.

Το ξύλο του σκλήθρου, που κοκκινίζει χαρακτηριστικά οι βραχεί, είναι πολύ χρήσιμο και στο παρελθόν αποτελούσε μοναδικό υλικό για τσάκαρα.

Το σκλήθρο προστατεύεται καθήκοντος από την εθνική και εθνική νομοθεσία και συμπεριλαμβάνεται με το φυτό (*Fraxinus excelsior*) στην κατηγορία των Αλλοβιοτικών (Παραποτάμια) Δασών των Ευκρατών Περιοχών της Ευρώπης.

Η υλοτομία του σκλήθρου απαγορεύεται αυστηρά.

Fraxinus sp. (ash)

Melia = the tree of justice



- ❖ **Symbol of Nemesis**
Nemesis, goddess of justice, holds a branch of 'melia', symbol of her rigidity and sedateness.
- ❖ **Symbol of Erinyes**
Erinyes as divinities of revenge got in their iron made palaces in the netherworld sticks of 'melia' wood for the punishment of sinful people.
- ❖ **Symbol (emblem) of vigor and robustness** of the highlanders.

Ashes are planted in the farms for the protection (safeness) of babies.

Μελια 'Melia' is the ancient name of *Fraxinus*, reminding the Melies or Meliads (Μελιαδες) Nymphs, the most ancient divinities of nature and protectors of flocks and livestock.

Meliads Nymphs of the ash tree were born from drops of blood spread by Uranus after Cronus had wounded him.

In memory of their birth in blood, deadly lances were made from the wood of the ash trees in which they lived.

Melies or Meliads Nymphs



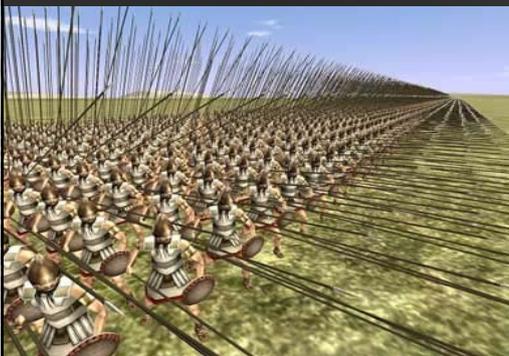
The Bronze Age race sprang from ash trees. This was the third age of people who inhabited the earth and was warlike and harsh.



For the creation of human being, Hesiodus claimed that 'melia' or 'melegos' (*Fraxinus*) was used. He reports that Zeus created the third generation of human being *'strong as the wood of melia'*.

Fraxinus excelsior (ash)

Fraxinus is called also melegos (μελεγος), which means black spear (μελας=black and εγχος=spear)



Sarissa = Spears of Macedonian phalanx

- Achilles' spear
- Hercules' club

The Latin name *Fraxinus* perhaps derives from the Greek name *phraxos*, from the verb "φρασσω" (phrasso), which means fence or palisade or rail, block and/or defense blocking with spears or fight with spears, which were made mainly of ash or copper sheathing as well, as the ash spearheads.

Betula pendula (silver birch)

Birch was the symbol of Sun and Moon.

Athena, the warrior goddess of Wisdom, of Reason, presided over the arts and literature, more closely connected with philosophy, patroness of spinners, weavers etc, protectress and patroness of towns, is associated with olive tree and **birch**.



Birch is the symbol of Nereids (50 sea- deities!!!), the grand-daughters of Oceanus.

They personify the countless waves of the sea (*like the birch branches waving under the strong winds in Northern Greek mountains?*).

They were all very beautiful and they spent their time spinning, **weaving** and singing.

Perhaps this is the connection between **birch**, goddess **Athena** and **Nereids**.



Birch is the tree of all fairies and of the witches according to folklore, (being a tree in foggy and mysterious, dense forested high mountains of Northern Greece)



Prunus avium (wild cherry)

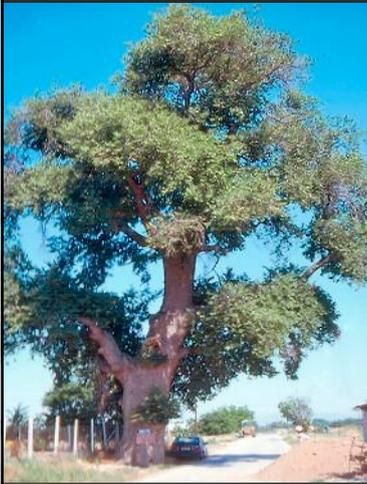


'In month October plant in paradises olive trees and almond trees and cherry trees and all the fruit trees and elms and poplars and ashes and limes...'

- Cherry tree is reported:
in children's songs, proverbs & sayings, dream-books, folk Cretan couplets, poems, folk songs, nostrums.
- symbol of optimism
"Cherry trees will blossom again this year",
a very well known novel in Greece.



Ulmus sp (elm)



Pollarded *Ulmus minor*

Ptelea: The farmer's tree

❖ Name of a nymph

❖ πτελεα, φτελια (ptelea, phtelia) perhaps the name derives from the word πτελας = wild boar, since there is strong belief that wild boars appear usually in areas full of elms.



Paradise cannot be understood without the **tree of life** and this tree is vine, even since ancient times, especially during Orthodox Byzantine period the *anadendrada ampelos* (vine on tree).



'...Not all of trees should be anadendrades, but only those, And these trees are elms, upright poplars, ashes and sycamores.'

Tilia sp (lime)

Philyra: The women's tree



The name φιλύρα (philyra) derives from the words φίλος (friend) and ὑρον (υραξ) = σμηνος (bevy), because lime attracts bees.

- Symbol of Uranus, Poseidon (Neptune) and Ares (Mars)
- Philyra – mother of Centaur Chiron (father Cronus)
- Tree of all fairies
- Curing the sickly children



Sacred symbol in Greece and the symbol of the female ancestor of the human race.



The mother

A couple that survived after the great flood upon the world, was Deucalion and Pyrrha.

Deucalion threw acorns and Pyrrha threw seeds of **lime** over their shoulders. From the acorns sprang men while from the lime seeds sprang **women**.

Another couple that survived was Baucis and Philemon. Their cottage became a temple. Zeus turned them into two trees (Baucis to **lime** and Philemon to **oak**), in front of the temple. Since that time their names are proverbial,

as symbols of harmonic, beloved and kind mates.

Jean de la Fontaine



These myths show the importance of these two trees, used for leafy hay for the winter, for the survival of humanity.

Lime is the symbol of strong, true marital faith.

In Greece, lime and oak or lime and walnut are common in front of churches as in the past.

Landscape of Baucis-Philemon, 1984, Ligare



Woodcarving - the ART OF GOD

Cherry, elm, lime, sycamore, walnut are used for carving. But the wood of lime is the best. It is used especially in churches, that is why lime is called the tree of Virgin Mary.



Acer pseudoplatanus (sycamore & maples)



Ancient Greeks considered that the maple tree was under the power of Fovos (=Fear), demon of horror and god Ares (Mars) attendant.

This was possibly because this beautiful tree during the autumn gets a very rich red colour.

Maple = symbol of rain

In plain villages groups of children, called *Berberitsa* (kind of maple), are going around the village in times of long rainlessness and drought asking for rain. The boy or girl-leader is crowned and covered with branches and leaves of maples. They sing the propitiatory song:



*Berberitsa walks
and pleads God
-My Lord send a rain,
a good, light rain
for our grapes to be set
and for our maize ...etc*

The housekeepers throw water on the green branches for good luck and fortune.

Maples and ashes are the symbols of beauty and aesthetics.
They represent the idyllic landscapes.



Poem

.....
Seven-colored sun rays play
with maple trees
blond-green ashes wash
down in the springs
.....



Greek names



- The name σφενδαμνος (sphendamnos) is derived from sphondylos = whorl, scroll or sphendoni = sling.
- The name κρεκεζος (krekezos), derives from the verb κρεκω (kreko) = produce sound.
- This is reasonable since the bodies of all traditional music instruments in Greece, such as bouzouki, baglamas, outi etc are made of walnut and sycamore, while the long arms of all these instruments are made of sycamore.
- The necks and scrolls of music instruments are made also of sycamore.



Sorbus sp (service tree)

Service tree (wild medlar or wild loquat) was very important for the fruits, especially during famine periods (starvation).

Proverb

*unripe-eater ate and survived
ripe-eater didn't eat and died*



- Only in Greece there are cultural associations with service tree.

- ❖ Symbol of prophesy (Walking stick of soothsayer Tiresias).

- ❖ Wood - for talismans to avoid Fairies.

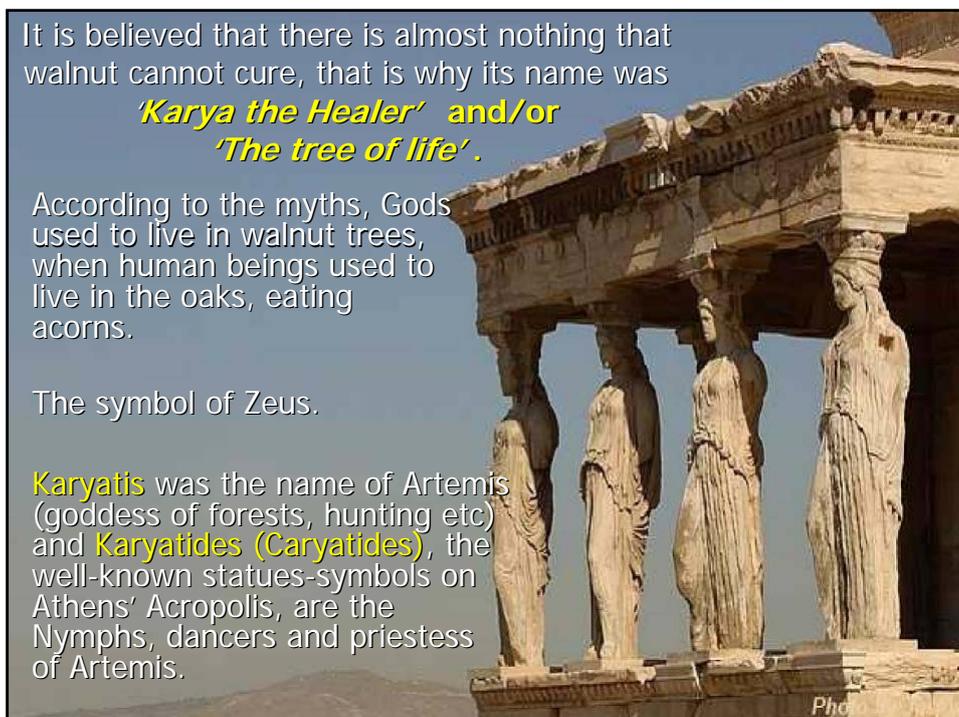
Well known is the New Year's Eve carol '*sourva-sourva*' in Northern Greece (Macedonia and Thrace). Children used to enter houses holding a stick of *service tree* and carol:

« *Sourva-sourva* *and joyfulness
purse-strings of the householder
full of cents and euros
amen for many
and next year to be more»



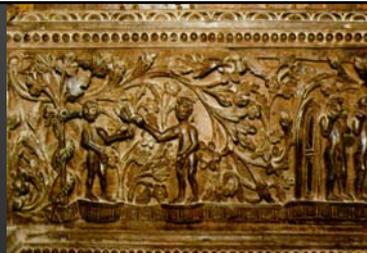
These carols were well known since Homer's period. It is reported that he used to carol these in Samos island.

**Sourva* (the fruits of service tree) symbolize wealth and prosperity.



It is reported in:

- ❖ votive epigrams, poetic miscellanies
- ❖ carols, children songs, folk Cretan couplets
- ❖ dream-books,
- ❖ proverbs and sayings,
- ❖ culinary recipes,
- ❖ feasts, mores and traditions,
- ❖ traditional medicine,
- ❖ the main ingredient of the secret antidote against poisons (Mithridates, king of Pontus - **mithridatism**),
- ❖ religious ceremonies,
- ❖ together with the thick oil from the kernel of wild cherries and other stuff, preparation of the **Holy unction**.



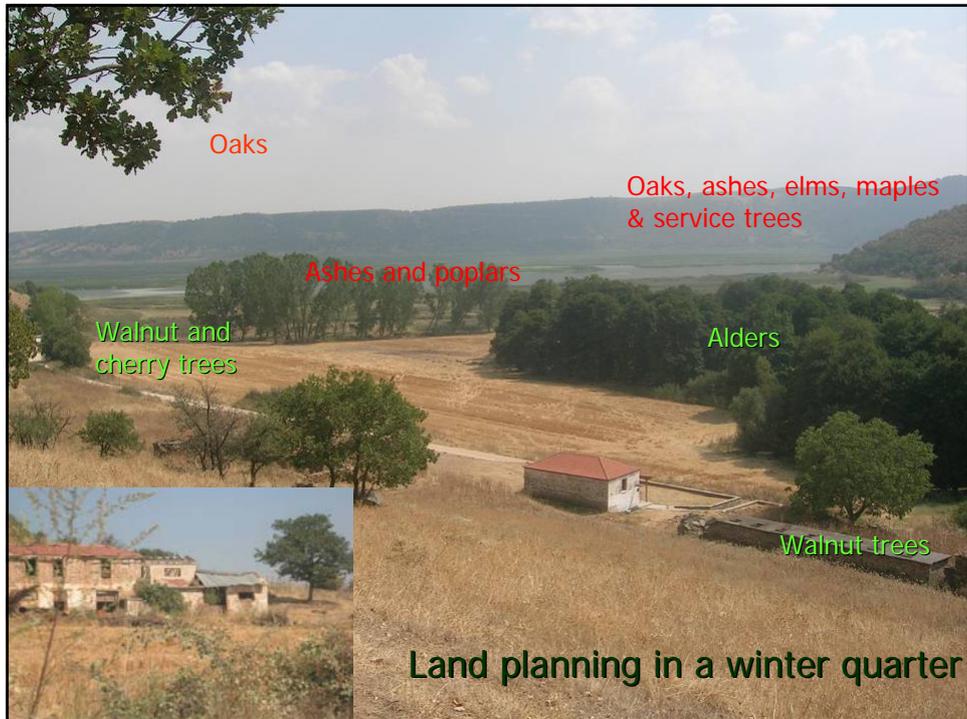
Walnut has a **negative** widespread symbolic value as a host tree for **evil spirits** (its shadow brings **illness** and **bad luck**).

- ❖ People avoid to plant it next to the house.
- ❖ **Cutting** walnut was considered as supernaturally **dangerous**.
- ❖ **Planting** was associated with many old beliefs concerning the **life of the planter**.

The Greek name **Karya** is derived from **karos = sopor**, due to the common belief that **sleep under the shadow of the tree** is wakeless and causes headache (**kara = head**).

According to Plutarch, **Karya** was named because of this.







Greek nomads

Alder, maple, cherry
and secondly
oak and beech,
are the traditional
smoking wood for
fish and meat.



Ancient, double pollarded alder, for fodder, bark for dyes and smoking wood.

Traditional costumes

Black alder

- black dye for local textiles (bark)
- blue ink (cones)

Ash

- gray- black dye for local textiles

Walnut

- yellow – brown dye for local textiles



But the most important in land planning was the common belief that:

- Walnut tree, lime, birch (beech, spruce, cypress etc) don't attract lightning and thunders,

While

- Ash, maple, elm (fir, oak, poplar etc) attract lightning and thunders.



Common Greek names of the majority of conifers are masculine:
fir (o elatos), pine (o pefkos), cedar (o kedros), yew (o itamos)



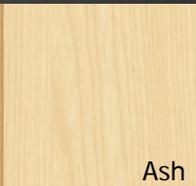
Pine

But VBTs are feminine: The noble ladies

walnut (i karydia), cherry (i kersasia), lime (i flamouria), elm (i ftelia), alder (i klithra),
ash (i melia, melina), birch (i simyda),
service (i sourvia, avgaria).



Alder



Ash



Birch



Cherry



Maple

