

ZAPISI¹ IN THE VICINITY OF KRAGUJEVAC (CENTRAL SERBIA) AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE

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ABSTRACT. The significance of “Zapis” is emphasized within this work. “Zapis” is holy, sacred tree, named by the xylographic cross in its bark. “Zapis” represents the peak of tree cult in the traditional religion; it mustn’t have been cut, burnt or used in any purpose by people. Today, as witnesses of uncontrolled forests that existed in the past, sporadic trees have remained. They have great cultural, historical and religious value, as well as extraordinary biological quality (those trees are still branched, healthy, vital and fruitful). “Zapisi”, several thousand years old monumental trees, represent cultural and biological monument, as well as a resource of biological and genetic material. There are 15 sacred trees in Kragujevac vicinity (Central Serbia) with all available details (species, location, old age, morphometric data, photographs) listed in this work.

Key words: zapis (serb. = holy, sacred tree), Kragujevac vicinity, Central Serbia

INTRODUCTION

In Serbian tradition, the tree cult was preserved since the pagan time until today. Constantine Porfirogenit, Byzantium emperor and a historian, in X century wrote about Slavs who took over the island of St. George and immolated by the great oak tree. Serbian people performed numerous ceremonies in order to prevent and cure illnesses. In their basis was the pagan tree cult, later accepted by the Orthodox Church as symbols, such as Yule block, basil² and wooden branches in the worship.

In the last decades of the XX century, Serbian people renewed the customs, especially those religious related to the tree “zapis”, in the regions where herb and tree cults had traditionally important role (Fig. 1). The tree “zapis” is to be found in the

¹ zapis (orig. translation: inscription) is the name for historically significant trees in which bark were engraved crosses as symbols of their sacredness; the name „zapisi“ in serbian is plural of single name „zapis“.

² a herb used in churching services

areas with great and thick forests, in the first place in the Central Serbia (Šumadija), Eastern Serbia, Kosovo and in the areas where the Serbs lived before the moving.

Šumadija was, as its name says (serb. šuma = forest), especially suitable for preserving and cherishing the tree cult and the tradition that have lasted since the pagan time. Entailed customs and beliefs were later accepted by the church and organized according to the calendar and crop farming, with the sequence of events “that, with its, on one side magic and on the other religious ceremonies, served to make contact with ancestors, to disable demoniac forces, to implement a taboo system” (ČAJKANOVIĆ, 1985). The tree “zapis” is entire the religion of pastoral life and pastoral cult (STANOJEVIĆ, 2000). Pastoral gatherings, as well as delivering verdicts, important for the whole community, were taking place under its crown. As an interesting historical data stands an example that in the time of Kočina Krajina³, rebels against the Turks gathered under the oak crowns. Under the oak tree in Takovo⁴, duke Miloš Obrenović⁵ raised The Second Serbian Uprising.



Fig. 1. The tree “zapis” in the village Donje Grbice, oak tree *Quercus sessilis* Ehrh.

The name “zapis” comes from the fact that in such a tree is engraved cross (BANDIĆ, 1991) (Fig. 2). One village could have had a few trees “zapis”. However, one main “zapis” always existed and its position was usually in the centre of the village. The cult of “zapis” culminates during the village festivity celebration – kermes. A group of people “krstonošē”⁶ carries the cross, pennants and icons through the whole village, they go across the fields, along the houses where villagers welcome them, and sprinkle with water and wheat and at time happens that they bring out the diseased people (Fig. 3). Key moment of the ceremony is saying prayers and engraving the cross in the wood. Actually, the cross engraved in its bark is renewed and consecrated, then decorated with flowers, fruits, young crops (wheat, corn) and girdled with red string. The ceremony of kermess was finished with collective village feast.

³ the battle against the Turks in The First Serbian Uprising

⁴ the place where The Second Serbian Uprising was raised

⁵ the leader of The Second Serbian Uprising

⁶ krstonoša (krst – orig. translation cross) – people who carried cross during the kermess



Fig. 2. The tree “zapis” decorated during the kermess in the village Čumić, oak tree *Quercus conferta* Kit.

The tree “zapis” was the protector of a village. It protected from the thunder and foul weather in general. The ceremony of calling rain was taking place under its crown in order to assure fruitfulness.



Fig. 3. “Krstonošē” on the day of kermess in the village Krčmari, year 1940

It can be said, with good reason, that the tree “zapis” represents the peak of tree cult in the traditional religion. Therefore, it is reasonable fact that village “zapis” was expressively taboo tree. Not only it mustn’t have been cut, but it was forbidden to cut its branches and even avoided to pluck its leaves.

In case when someone bought grounds with tree “zapis”, he mustn’t have, not only cut or destroy the tree, but also had to continue to celebrate the saint related to that tree. In case someone would harm “zapis”, there was the belief that, that person, or somebody else in the family, would die soon or meet with some other misfortune.

The tree “zapis” usually becomes an old, specific oak tree. Old Slavs considered oak as the tree of god Perun, the god of thunder. Beside oak, “zapis” could also be hornbeam, turkey oak, pear, lime (www.etnomuzej.co.yu). However, oak remained the main cult tree. Among Serbian people, oak is normally taken as Yule block and “zapis”.

If there is an oak or an arbor near the church, there are “zapisi” trees as well, probably remained from pagan time (STANOJEVIĆ, 2000).

Lime is the tree that had great significance with Slavs. In the ancient times, it was substitution for sacral object, and the wedding ceremonies take part around it. Lime was of great religious importance as well, so that Serbian idols were made of its wood and its tree was taken as “zapis”. Those customs and ceremonies changed in times so that the lime cult was replaced by the cult of some other trees.

We could also say that there is another general division on good and bad trees, trees of fortune and misfortune, those possessed by good and evil creatures, firstly giants, and then demons, witches and devils. Demoniac creatures, after the belief of Serbian people, caused numerous misfortunes and illnesses. Therefore, people felt the necessity to propitiate them by immolating by the trees, as their habitats, at first with sanguine and later on, after the Christianity had been adopted, with immolations in bread and wine. In that way people wanted, not only to propitiate the tree’s demon, but also to return, or give over an illness or any other misfortune to the tree. When we wish something nice, when we praise somebody or when something we wished for happens, we usually knock on the wooden object and say: “knock on wood”. By this way we actually touch the sacred tree asking its inhabitant to help us. Many customs, such as osculating the sacred tree, walking around it, flogging or bracing with its branches (willow, hazel, cornel), eucharisting by buds and swinging, had as their aim to pass on the life force from tree to a man in order to strength and protect him from every illness and misfortune. Great Christian saints’ days during the spring time (Mladenci, Lazareva subota, Cveti, Djurdjerdan), when the vegetation is in bloom, have these customs.

Condition of forests in Šumadija considerably worsened in the last sixty years. Thermophilous forest communities suffered the greatest changes, and among them the community of hornbeam. Some forests entirely vanished (ash, oak forests), some became degraded and decreased their area (MARKOVIĆ & ŽIKIĆ, 2003).

“Zapisi” trees, particular trees of different wooden species are preserved thanks to the folk tradition, customs, beliefs and ceremonies. Today they testify about forest’s wealth that used to exist and they preserve part of cultural heritage of Serbian people.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Field researches, made for the aim of this work, were done in 2006. Determination of wooden species was made by using standard keys JÄVORKA & CSAPODY (1979), Flora of The Republic of Serbia (JOSIFOVIĆ, 1970-1980) and other literature (ŠILIĆ, 1990; BLEČIĆ & TATIĆ, 1996). Photos of trees “zapisi” were taken by Cvetković, in ten villages nearby Kragujevac, just as in the city itself.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Totally, 15 trees “zapis” were registered and their full examination was given in this study.

In the family *Fagaceae* and genus *Quercus*, 6 species has been determined. The area of Šumadija belongs to the vegetative type of deciduous forests of the temperate zones, climatic community *Quercetum confertae – cerris* Rudski (1940), so it is reasonable that within this genus is the majority of trees “zapis”. In the flora of Serbia

the most common species of oaks are: *Quercus cerris* L., *Q. robur* L., *Q. sessilis* Ehrh. and *Q. pubescens* Willd., *Q. conferta* Kit. (*Q. farnetto* Ten., *Q. fraineto* Ten.).

Several trees “zapis” that belong to the species *Quercus confertae* Kit. are registered on the area of the city of Kragujevac and nearby. In the village Cerovac is registered *Q. conferta*, perimeter 3.16m, height around 15m, crown diameter 18m, age over 200 years (Fig. 4).



Fig. 4. The tree “zapis” in the village Cerovac, oak tree *Quercus conferta* Kit.

The biggest tree “zapis”, comparing other oak trees “zapis”, is in the village Čumić on the property of the family Petrović. This tree “zapis” belongs to the species *Quercus conferta* Kit., of estimated age 500-600 years. Its perimeter is 5.85m, height around 20m, crown diameter 27m (Fig. 5).



Fig. 5. The tree “zapis” on the state of the family Petrović in the village Čumić, oak tree *Quercus conferta* Kit.

In the village Donje Grbice is the tree “zapis” that belongs to the species *Quercus pubescens* Willd. (*Quercus lanuginosa* Thuill.) - perimeter 4m, height around

15m, crown diameter 18-20m. The age of this tree “zapis” is estimated around 300 years (Fig. 6).



Fig. 6. The tree “zapis” in the village Donje Grbice, oak tree *Quercus pubescens* Willd.

The oak tree *Quercus sessilis* Ehrh. (= *Quercus petraea* (Matt.) Lieb.), is registered on the private property in the village Donje Grbice - perimeter 4m, height around 15m, crown diameter 20m (Fig. 7).



Fig. 7. The tree “zapis” in the village Donje Grbice, oak tree *Quercus sessilis* Ehrh.

In the village Drača is registered the tree “zapis” that belongs to the species *Quercus sessilis* Ehrh.- perimeter 2.8m, height 20m, crown diameter 18m (Fig. 8).



Fig. 8. The tree “zapis” in the village Drača, oak tree *Quercus sessilis* Ehrh.

Nearby Kragujevac, in the village Petrovac, the oak tree “zapis” *Quercus robur* L. (*Quercus pedunculata* Ehrh.) is determined. This tree “zapis” has perimeter 3.4m, height 18m, crown diameter 24m (Fig. 9).



Fig. 9. The tree “zapis” in the village Petrovac, oak tree *Quercus robur* L.

Three trees “zapis”, white, silver lime, *Tilia tomentosa* Moench. (*Tilia argentea* Desf.), the family *Tiliaceae*, are registered. In the ports of many churches in Serbia could be seen trees of early and white lime (*Tilia platyphyllos* Scop. and *Tilia tomentosa* Moench.), age over 300 years. Lime tree is the sacred tree of all the Slavs. Lime arbours and individual trees used to be the centers of the cult. According to the old Slav’s belief, lime is the protector of the doorstep and fire. Many old trees are preserved as trees “zapis” and folk feasts and ceremonies are taking place beside them. One of the registered lime trees “zapis” is in the port of a church in the village Pajazitovo. This tree “zapis” has perimeter 2.3m, height is around 20m, crown diameter 15m. It is estimated that its age is over 90 years (Fig. 10).



Fig. 10. The tree “zapis” in the church port in the village Pajazitovo, lime tree *Tilia tomentosa* Moench.

Another specimen of this species is in the church port in the village Desimirovac. This tree “zapis” has perimeter 2.4m, height 12m, crown diameter 10m (Fig. 11).



Fig. 11. The tree “zapis” in the church port in the village Desimirovac, lime tree *Tilia tomentosa* Moench.

In the church port in Kragujevac is lime tree “zapis” *Tilia tomentosa* Moench. Perimeter 2.2m, height 20m, crown diameter 18m (Fig. 12).



Fig. 12. The tree “zapis” in the old church port in Kragujevac, lime tree *Tilia tomentosa* Moench.

Two trees “zapis” species *Fraxinus excelsior* L. – white sylvan ash, are registered within the family *Oleaceae*. In the village Lužnice, on the property of the family Božinović, young tree “zapis” of this species was found, with perimeter 1.10m, height around 12m, crown diameter 10m (Fig. 13).



Fig. 13. The tree “zapis” on the state of the family Božinović in the village Lužnice, ash tree *Fraxinus excelsior* L.

An older specimen of the same species was found in the church port in the village Čumić. Perimeter 2.5m, height around 16m, crown diameter 10m (Fig. 14).



Fig. 14. The tree “zapis” in the church port in the village Čumić, ash tree *Fraxinus excelsior* L.

Two trees “zapis”, species *Pirus piraster* Bursgd. – pear, are registered within the family *Rosaceae*. According to the folk belief, pear is a shadily tree on which gather and live demons, therefore “it’s no good” to sit or sleep under its crown (PAVLOVIĆ et al., 2003). Pear, as the tree “zapis”, is registered in the village Desimirovac. Perimeter 2.3m, height 10m, crown diameter 5m. Part of its tree is noticeably droughty (Fig. 15).



Fig. 15. The tree “zapis” in the village Desimirovac, pear tree *Pirus piraster* Bursgd.

The tree “zapis” species *Pirus piraster* Bursgd. is registered in the village Maršić as well. Perimeter 3m, height 20m and crown diameter 20m. Age of this pear is estimated at over 150 years (Fig. 16).



Fig. 16. The tree “zapis” in the village Maršić, pear tree *Pirus piraster* Bursgd.

Juglans regia L. - walnut, belongs to the family *Juglandaceae*. Walnut, according to the folk belief, belongs to the underworld of witches and evil ghosts. However, it is also sacred and exists as the tree “zapis”. In the village Lužnice, on the property of the family Katanić, young tree of this species is registered, with perimeter 2m, height around 12m, crown diameter around 15m. Age of this walnut is estimated at about 45 years (Fig. 17).



Fig. 17. The tree “zapis” on the state of the family Katanić in the village Lužnice, walnut tree *Juglans regia* L.

One tree “zapis” species *Morus nigra* L. – black mulberry is registered within the family *Moraceae*. Today, it exists as the tree “zapis” in the village Maršić. Perimeter 2.7m, height around 11m, crown diameter 13m. Age of this tree is estimated at about 50 to 60 years (Fig. 18).



Fig. 18. The tree “zapis” in the village Maršić, mulberry *Morus nigra* L.

Today, we are witnesses that many trees “zapis” wane because of the ravage of time and human negligence, taking away with themselves legends, beliefs and customs, but also biological and genetic potential preserved for centuries. The example of that is the tree “zapis” that dries and fractures under the burden of age and storms (STANOJEVIĆ, 2000). Confirmation of this fact is the tree “zapis” in the village Donje Grbice, that dies and will remain there to merge with ground (Fig. 19).



Fig. 19. The tree “zapis” that disappears in the village Donje Grbice

The Institute for the Protection of Nature in Serbia, beside the localities characterized by beautiful landscapes, extraordinary natural, cultural and other values, within 57 years of work, has protected over 200 individual trees of different species (oak, lime, walnut, mulberry, pine, magnolia, cedar and larch). These trees are resources of biological genofond (www.sumadinac.com). Dominant examples like these exist all over Serbia. In several villages near Kragujevac, trees of 300 years old oak and 200 years old trees of elm, ash, beech, lime and poplar could be seen (www.aert.org.yu/forum1/topuzović_m.htm). Trees “zapis” are of religious, historical

and great botanic importance. Some of those “gigantic antediluvians” have been put under the protection of the state as natural rarity of extraordinary national importance.

CONCLUSION

According to the field researches nearby Kragujevac during the 2006 year, researchers’ personal experience and the insight in the scarce archive files, following conclusions can be given:

- The trees “zapis” are most often in the church ports in the center of villages, by the roads and on the properties of respectable families. Within this work detailed taxonomical, morphological and historical view of 15 trees “zapis” is given.

- In the research, six trees “zapis” belong to the genus *Quercus*: *Quercus conferta* Kit. and *Quercus sessilis* Ehrh. are represented by two examples each, *Quercus robur* Ehrh. and *Quercus pubescens* Willd. are represented each by only one example.

- The oldest tree “zapis” *Quercus conferta* Kit. is registered in the village Čumić. It is estimated that its age is 500-600 years, perimeter 5.85m, height around 20m and crown diameter around 27m.

- There are registered three trees “zapis” of species *Tilia tomentosa* Moench (white, silver lime), two *Fraxinus excelsior* L. (white, sylvan ash) and two *Pirus piraster* Burgsd. (pear), one *Juglans regia* L. (walnut) and one *Morus nigra* L. (black mulberry).

- Estimated age of listed trees is up to 600 years. Most of them are healthy and vital, but those that wane because of the ravage of time and human negligence, like the oak in the village Donje Grbice, are also registered.

- This work can serve as an encouragement for further research, in order to put those “gigantic antediluvians” under the state’s protection as natural rarities of extraordinary national importance, as resources of biological genofond and as the part of cultural Serbian heritage inwrought with legends, beliefs and customs preserved for centuries.

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