



Informationen zur Umwelt und für Naturreisende auf Kreta:
Information about the Environment and for travellers in Crete:

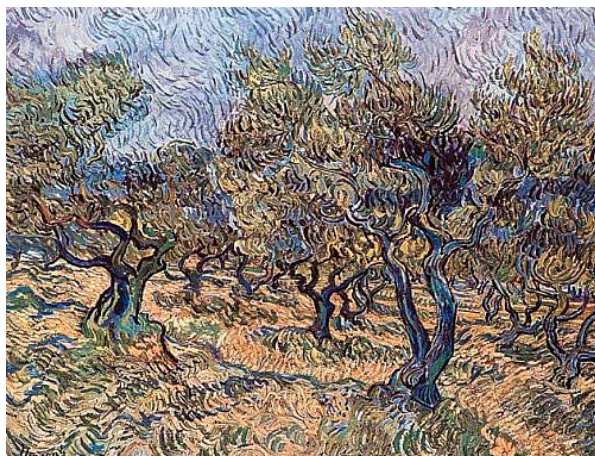
The Olive tree (*Olea europaea*)

The Olive tree limb – Symbol of Peace



The olive tree is a mid-size, often knobby old tree. Originally coming from the southern Middle East it is cultivated as crop since the 4th Millennium BC. It is likely that the olive tree grown today in the Mediterranean area and in Crete came from a hybrid of two different kinds, one of which perhaps is the *Olea africana*. The longish leaves are probably coming from this and the succulent, more oil containing olive are the result of another, unknown species. A botanical description of Olive tree is waived at this point; the same applies to the complex subject's cultivation, propagation, varieties, use and economics. Space will be given for a brief description of the cultural history and an idea of the various "faces" (growth forms) of Olive trees by some image examples.

According to Greek mythology the olive trees originate from the first olive, grown by the goddess Athena on the Acropolis during a dispute with God Poseidon to get control of the city Athens. Salomon, one of the "Seven Wise Men" of ancient Greece, gave a legal code to the city where he stressed the role of the Athens "Olive culture". Based on this rules it was absolutely prohibited to cut down olive trees, except for the service of holy place but then not older than two years. No agricultural product could be exported, except olive oil. At Homer's times, because of its high stability, the wood of wild Olive trees has been used for the manufacturing of axe shafts; the oil was used to anoint body. In the 6th Century BC the olive tree came to Italy also. Like in Greece, a wreath from olive branches was the highest honouring of citizens and the highest winning price at the Olympic Games. The olive-limb was always the symbol of peace, as in the old Christianity (the Dove with the Olive limb). According to the Bible Noah sent a dove after the Flood. She returned with a limb in the beak: Earth turned green again, life was back.



"The Olive trees are very characteristic and I try my best to capture this". In terms of this citation of *Vincent van Gogh* (letter 608 to his brother) hereinafter some examples to "Faces" of Olive trees at Crete (see Page 2)

The right figure shows a scion from a "new olive grove".





The figures show (from left to right): wild growing olive trees; graft (middle) and dead tree (right);
The following photos show "centennial trees"!



Pictures: (5612, 5617, 5633, 5642/29.07.2005) U. Kluge / (55263, 5265, 5268, 5358, 5372, 5374/29.07.2005) H. Eikamp

For more information about *Olea europaea* see: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olea_europaea

[Art.-Nr. 2.774; Zitat-Nr. 4.770]