

Calabria

Curinga Plane Tree

Estimated age:
over 400 years

Oriental Plane
(Platanus orientalis Linné)

Municipality: Curinga (CZ),
at the Hermitage of Sant'Elia
vecchio

Circumference of the trunk:
about 12 m
Height: 21 m

This distinctive plane tree, with its peculiar twisted shapes reminiscent of octopus tentacles covering a small hill, thrives near an ancient Byzantine hermitage dating back to the 11th century that overlooks the village of Curinga, at an altitude of about 800 metres. Once at the hermitage, the tree can be reached on foot in about ten minutes along a path through a pine forest. The presence of the Oriental plane tree in southern Italy is well known and represents a remarkable westward expansion of a tree typically native to the East. It is commonly found along riverbanks and is often seen in valleys opening out towards the sea, mirroring its distribution in regions such as Crete and Sicily. The plane tree in general is one of the most common and widely used trees in parks and along city boulevards due to its high tolerance of pollution and pruning, especially with the various hybrid forms. In towns and cities, the tree regularly sheds its bark, which peels off easily in large sheets, thus helping it avoid the effects of smog. Its wood was used in the past by bakers to make their peels – those versatile tools used to slide loaves of bread in and out of the oven –, as it is a wood that is very resistant to wear and the heat of the oven. The Romans claimed that this tree kept away bats, which were thought to be a bad omen. In Greek mythology, the plane tree was chosen by Zeus to celebrate his marriage to Hera, and it seems that the great philosopher Socrates held his lectures under a large, centuries-old plane tree.