

## WINE CULTURE IN CYPRUS, 4,000 YEARS OF TRADITION

The island of Cyprus has been a wine-producing area since antiquity and the vine is still widely cultivated on the island, more than any other kind of fruit.

Some fifteen varieties among the vines of Cyprus are considered indigenous to the island and many of them are cultivated nowhere else in the world (Galet 1993, 61).

According to archaeological evidence, the cultivation of the grapevine goes back to the early 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium B.C. (Karageorghis 1993, 32). The important role played by vine tending and wine drinking in daily life in antiquity is reflected in Cypriot works of art, mainly in the figure representations on Roman mosaic floors at Kato Paphos. Here, a late 2<sup>nd</sup>/ early 3<sup>rd</sup> century villa was given the name “House of Dionysos” precisely because the god of wine and activities associated with him are represented in several of its mosaics (Michaelides 1992, 27-37).

In the same Roman villa a very large number of amphoras were found, some still containing the solidified lees of the wine they once contained. The wine the Cypriots drank was local as well as imported, as indicated by the amphoras from many different parts of the ancient world found throughout the island. Cypriot wine, too, was famous, and was widely exported.

In the Middle Ages the most celebrated wine was “Commandaria”. According to the poem “La Bataille des Vins”, which was written in 1224 by Henri d’ Andeli, the then King of France, Philip Auguste, organised a mammoth tasting in which it would be determined which wine was most worthy to quench the thirst of the king. The first of more than a hundred wines the king asked for was the wine of Cyprus, which shone like a true star and at the end of the contest was judged “the apostle of the wines”, or even the “pope”!

Soon after this wine of Cyprus became known as “Commandaria” which was the name of the area where the wine was produced; that area belonged to the Order of the Knights of the Temple, and they built in it a castle known today as Kolossi castle. Later, the Templars were disbanded and their area was taken over by the Knights of St. John who became in 1307 masters of the whole area around Kolossi, giving the name of their headquarters to the superior wine produced in that area – “Vin de la Commanderie”.

Ludolf von Suchen, a priest of the church of Suchen in Westphalia, who visited Cyprus between 1336 and 1341, described the different kinds of grapes on the island, praised the excellent wine produced “in the highest mountains facing the sun”, and concluded that “in all the world are not greater nor better drinkers than in Cyprus”! (Cobham 1908, 18).

In 1363, in the city of London, there took place the famous “Feast of the Five Kings”. This was the occasion when Sir Henry Picard, at that time Master of the Vintners’ Company, gave a dinner at his mansion. The kings invited were, according to tradition, those of England, Scotland, France, Denmark and Cyprus. The King of Jerusalem and Cyprus, Peter de Lusignan, had been travelling around Europe at that time, trying to assemble an army for a new crusade, instigated by the Pope. Cyprus wine was included among those offered to the guests, and King Peter may even have brought some with him (Vandyke Price 1993, 80).

Under Venetian rule (1489-1571) the wine trade especially that of Commandaria was continually growing and great quantities of Cypriot wine were then exported to Venice and also to Ragusa and the rest of Europe as far as England. Already before the Venetian period, between the years 1420 and 1445, Cyprus vine cuttings were imported to the Madeira islands (Psaras 1993, 97).

During the period of Ottoman rule (1571 - 1878) and the subsequent period of British administration (1878-1960), the Cypriot wine continued to be a main product and one of the principal articles of export. It is often mentioned in travellers' accounts, consular reports and historical documents. Estienne de Lusignan, a Cypriot writing in 1580, refers to the wine of Cyprus as "the best in the world", a view which, as he mentions, is confirmed by Saint Bernard, Saint Thomas Aquinas, Saint Hilarion and Saint Gregory. The latter believed that Solomon planted in his garden some vines which he had transported from Cyprus (Lusignan 1580, 222).

In 1683 Cornelius van Bruyn made interesting comments on the wines: "They are excellent and when drunk on the spot are very different from the same wines after export to other countries... on the journey they acquire a certain taste of pitch, which partly helps to preserve them. I have drunk wine here over thirty years old; it had a very pleasant taste and a beautiful colour, and was so oily that it adhered to the glass like eau de vie..." (Cobham 1908, 242 - 243).

Wine was traditionally kept in large earthen jars, the inside of which is coated with pitch to prevent the earth from drawing the wine. Furthermore, wine was transported in leather skins which were also covered inside with pitch to keep them from leaking.

It is worth mentioning that this kind of treatment was an ancient custom evidenced in pitched wine amphorae found in Paphos (Karageorghis 1993, 42). It persisted until the manufacture of the last wine jars - made in Phini in 1972 - and even the gourds in which wine was served until the previous generation, were always pitched.

Other attributes of the local wines, on which visitors made comments, were the quality and colour but more persistently the strength of the wines. The Augustinian monk Jacobus de Verona, who stayed in Cyprus twenty days in 1335, mentions a native wine called Marea, the strength of which if it were drunk neat "would burn up a man's entrails... anyone who would drink it must put one glass of wine to four of water, and even so it is strong enough" (Cobham 1908, 18). In 1683, van Bruyn mentions red wines and white wines "both excellent, but so strong that for ordinary use you have to put twice as much water as wine. I do not remember ever meeting with stronger wine" (Cobham 1908, 243). In 1801, the Rev. Edward Daniel Clarke gives further comments on the strength of Commandaria: "A greater proof of its strength cannot be given, than by relating the manner in which it is kept; in cases neither filled nor closed. A piece of sheet lead is merely laid over the bung-hole; and this is removed almost every day, whenever persons visit their cellars to taste the different sorts of wine proposed for sale. Upon these occasions, taking the covering from the bung-hole, they dip a hollow cane or reed into the liquor, and by suction drawing some of it, let it run from the reed into a glass" (Cobham 1908, 380). This smart way of wine tasting is illustrated in a presentation of a Cyprus wine cellar dated c 1890, and is still practised (**Fig 1**).

Apart from the Commandaria, the superiority of which over all the other wines of the island was indisputable, morocanella of a fair quality is mentioned, as well as a very good muscat wine, the "mavro" (black), xynisteri, flurico, cocchinoro and others (Doazan in Kyriazis 1931, 285). All these depended on the varieties of local grapes, which were used both for table consumption and for wine-making.

This paper focuses on the period from the 18th to mid-20th century in an attempt to elucidate the following aspects of the Cypriot wine:

- \_ The entire process from the cultivation of vine to the production of wine (from the grape to the vat)
- \_ The economic aspect of wine (distribution, trade)

- \_ The importance of wine and its by-products in nutrition
- \_ The cultural aspect of wine, its role in traditional life and relevant customs and rites.

### *From the grape to the vat*

References to viticulture in the past are largely limited to wine. Our basic source of information about vine planting to harvesting and wine making to marketing during the 18th century is the study *Wines of Cyprus, 1772*, by Giovanni Mariti, Correspondent Member of the Academy of Agricultural Experts of Florence, who spent seven years in Cyprus, from 1760 to 1767.

What we read in Mariti's study is not very different from the viticultural practices as described by Doazan, the French consul at Larnaca, in his comprehensive report dated November 18, 1855, on vine-growing in Cyprus. In the same year A. Gaudry in his book *Recherches Scientifiques en Orient* devoted a long chapter to viticulture and wrote that Cyprus wines were justly among the best in the world.

Viticultural practices did not change much from that time until the 20th century. Traditional methods of cultivation are still used today in some vine growing areas, especially on the Troodos mountains.

Vine growing has always been a very demanding business, associated with much toil and many difficulties. As a Cypriot proverb says, "a vine needs a hump-backed man". In the hilly areas vineyards were planted in terraces and dry stone walls had to be built in order to help retain moisture and prevent soil erosion. The ground had to be ploughed three times with a wooden plough driven by oxen. The vine cuttings used to be buried in order to develop roots and they were left in the ground until their planting (Doazan in Kyriazis 1931, 285, and Rizopoulou - Egoumenidou 1989, 20). The method of planting and the instrument used is similar to that described by Mariti and bears the same name, *scala*. It was an iron rod pointed at the end, and the cultivator had to put his foot on it and push it into the ground (Mariti (1772) 1984, 38-39. See also description by Doazan in Kyriazis 1931, 285). The traditional *scala*, still employed, was V-shaped with wooden handles and an iron end, and is used in the same way (**Fig. 2**). Planting was a co-operative affair; relatives and friends used to help and at the end they participated in a feast.

The labourers took particular care to uproot all the weeds that grew among the vines. The latter were also pruned to retain their short stunted shape, which still characterises the vineyards of Cyprus. Pruning was necessary and, according to the proverb, the vine itself called for it: "Give me hits to the head and I will give you wine in the jar". Saint Tryphon, who, as is believed, protected plantations from harmful insects, is represented holding a pruning hook (18<sup>th</sup> century wall painting in the church of Arpera, Tersefanou) (**Figs 3 and 4**).

According to Mariti, at harvest time the workers gathered the grapes, put them in baskets made of wicker or reeds and loaded two or four of them on each donkey to carry them to the house, where they spread them on terraced floors (Mariti (1772) 1984, 45, 47). According to Etienne De Lusignan, the ripe grapes were left on the flat roofs of the houses in the sun for three days, so that "its ardour might consume whatever water might remain in them. Then, being trodden, and the pips and stalks removed before fermentation, the wine which afterwards was made was of a great perfection" (Lusignan 1580, 223). Mariti's description of the pressing of the grapes is very illuminating: "Then by hand with shovels they take up the grapes from the terraced floor and move them to a room they call Linos which slopes down on one side and is polished or paved with tiles or covered with boards. Here they throw the grapes and trample them and beat them

with mallets and gradually put them through the wine-press which they call *Patitiri*, and they repeat this operation once or twice if necessary" (Mariti (1772) 1984, 48).

The traditional wine-presses are still known by the ancient name, *Linos* (recalling the feast *Linaia* in honour of the god Dionysos), and were in use until a few decades ago. The installation was housed in a spacious oblong room covered with a flat roof and functioned with the help of a long beam, actually two beams one on top of the other, which acted as a lever. The lever passed between two pillars which restricted its movements and at the same time supported the roof. One end of the beam entered a deep opening in the rear wall which acted as a fulcrum to the lever of the press. The other end of the beam was penetrated by a screw, the lower end of which was fixed into a heavy stone weight. The section of the winery to the side of the fulcrum was built at a higher level and separated from the rest. It was this part that was used for the pressing of grapes, which were stored on this raised platform, called *tzathi* (from the ancient Greek word κύαθος, κύαθιον, meaning a bowl). The functioning of the wine-press was based on a lever system of the second type, like a nutcracker. The stone weight at one end of the beam counter balanced the grapes at the other end. The weight was raised and lowered when two or three men turned the screw, and the grapes, which were covered with layers of planks, were pressed accordingly (**Figs 5 and 6**). The must (grape juice) ran through a hole in the lower part of the *tzathi* in a big jar half-buried in the floor. Such large wineries belonged to rich families or to many owners collectively. Several stone-built structures which housed this type of wine-press are still preserved in vine producing villages, and representative examples have been declared "Ancient Monuments" and restored by the Department of Antiquities. An original installation, however, had survived only in the wine-press of the village of Lania, a copy of which has been reconstructed in a similar winery in the neighbouring village of Omodos, both in the district of Limassol. A spacious winery which was used by the whole community is preserved in the small village of Fikardou. Its date is carved on its wooden door: 1774 (For this type of wine-press see Sinos 1984, 360 - 363 and Rizopoulou - Egoumenidou 1989, 20 - 22; it has also been described by Doazan in Kyriazis 1931, 293 - 294).

Another simpler and less expensive type of wine-press was common in villages where small scale viticulture was the main occupation of the inhabitants. The apparatus is still to be found in the corner of a ground floor room in old houses (**Fig. 7**). The horizontal beam, through which passes the screw, is fixed in the corner walls. The grapes spread on the flat roof (*doma*) are thrown through an opening (*louros*) to a stone area (*tzathi*), enclosed by a low parapet. The opening usually consists of a bottomless jar incorporated into the flat roof. The grapes are first trampled on the pressing ground and then pressed in a barrel. In order to do this, the screw is rotated with a wooden or iron bar (*liveri*). The pressed grapes are spread again on the paved area to be beaten with a long piece of wood (*matsouka*). The above procedure is repeated until all the juice has been extracted. The juice runs through a hole in the lower part of the parapet into an earthenware jar (*podoshi*, from the verb υποδέχομαι which means receive) half-buried in the floor, before being transferred into large wine-jars for fermentation.

Must could also be extracted by men pressing the grapes barefoot at the *patitiri*. The latter could be a stone-built pressing ground or, according to Doazan's report, a jar with a wide open mouth (Doazan in Kyriazis 1931, 296). Furthermore, there is the grinder (*alestiri*), still in use today for pressing grapes. It consists of a wooden trough with two cylinders inside which, when set in motion by hand, crush the grapes. The must is poured into a jar placed under the grinder.

The procedure of fermentation is as described by Mariti: "Once the must has been transferred to the other jars, they keep it boiling for the required period of forty days. The jars are never filled to the brim so that when the must effervesces it does not overflow... Others adopt a different method. When the must is put in the jars, they seal the mouths, leaving only a small hole so that

it can receive air and breathe while it boils and on the island this method is considered the best" (Mariti (1772) 1984, 51).

Thousands of huge wine jars (*pitharia* from the ancient word *pithoi*) are still found in the storerooms of old houses in the wine producing villages all over Cyprus (**Fig. 8**). They have a pointed bottom and their lower part is usually buried in the ground. Many of them are recorded in 18th century registers of property belonging to monasteries, very often in association with wine-presses. Their presence testifies to the wide consumption of wine.

In monasteries there was a long tradition in wine making, since many of them are built in mountain regions where vines were cultivated and wine had been made for centuries before. Consequently, many wine-presses are found in the possession of monasteries.

From the countryside wine was transported in skins pitched or tarred inside, to Larnaca, the main port of the time. There, according to Mariti, the wine was emptied into barrels, usually fitted with iron hoops. Mariti mentions that some merchants had in their stores, besides barrels and the usual earthenware jars, "vats expertly made with a good glaze". In such containers wine remained for a year (Mariti (1772) 1984, 67, 69).

According to the inventory of property of the rich merchant Evangelos Peristianos (1787), in his "workshop" in Larnaca were found, among a surprising variety of other items, wine containers recorded as *papamanolides* (Rizopoulou – Egoumenidou 1998, 53, note 42). In the Aegean islands, the name *papamanolis* was applied to 18<sup>th</sup> century and later wine-jugs with stamped human masks on the neck (Korre – Zografou 2000, 38-42). In Cyprus, only one example of a jug with such a bearded face has been preserved, in Larnaca (**Fig. 9**) (Rizopoulou – Egoumenidou 2006, 256-259). In my opinion, by comparison with Aegean examples, the Cypriot jug can be identified as a *papamanolis* and can further be connected with the salt-glazed stoneware ceramics which were originally produced in Germany (Cologne) and later in England (mainly in the factory established in 1672 by John Dwight at Fulham) (Hildyard 2001, 128-129).

Barrels with iron or wooden hoops are also recorded among the personal belongings of Evangelos Peristianos, in Larnaca (Rizopoulou - Egoumenidou 1998, 19 and 35, note 69), and Doazan reports as late as 1855 that earthenware jars and skins were the only wine containers in Cyprus, so that a cooper could find work only in Larnaca and Limassol - the second port of the island in importance. What is even more important is the lack of proper cellars for storing wine; these cellars, known as *cannabis*, built slightly under ground and containing barrels in two or three rows, were to be found in Larnaca and Limassol and were used exclusively for the Commandaria (Doazan in Kyriazis 1931, 297 - 298). About 90 years earlier, however, Mariti refers to the storage places in Larnaca as being long rooms with barrels placed on beams or low walls. He states: "the storage places are always on the ground floor and there are no underground cellars" (Mariti (1772) 1984, 68).

In 1856 a traveller published anonymously in the *Dublin University Magazine* (No. CCLXXXIV, Vol. XLVIII, August 1856, pp. 175 - 189), under the title "Cyprus", a text with three chapters, the first of which is devoted to "The Wine Cellars of Salina" (Salina is only a mile from Larnaca proper, which lies inland, and takes its name from the saltpans in the vicinity).

His description of the wine cellars recalls oriental fairy tales; they were "caves of considerable dimensions, partly artificial, partly natural, in which the inhabitants of old saved the most precious treasures from the grasp of the Levantine pirates, the entrances being curiously concealed". The traveller and his friends visited the wine cave of a Cypriot. Passing through arched and narrow passages in sandy ground, they emerged into a wide and spacious vault ("into

a huge bell of sand") with twenty or thirty jars and casks at the further end. All of them contained Commandaria, some twenty years old. The wine they tasted was ice cold and the whole space was very cool. The host assured the guests that the air circulated freely by a thousand minute channels through the sand above. The chamber was dark and illuminated with torches held by the servants (op.cit. pp. 176 - 177).

A very important feature of the good wine was the lees, a thick layer of dregs deposited in the barrel. The lees, called also *mana* (mother) or flowers of wine, were thought to have the property of maturing and clarifying the wine, of giving it "body", aroma and flavour. New wine, having kept for two years in a barrel with lees 60 - 80 years old, became as good as a 10-year old wine (Doazan in Kyriazis 1931, 298 - 299). According to Mariti, barrels with a rich deposit of lees, if one could find them on sale, cost four times the price of a barrel without lees (Mariti (1772) 1984, 70-71). Even now, Commandaria is bottled after careful blending through the traditional system known as the "mother" system (*mana*), which is the topping up of selected old stocks with younger ones. With this system, high quality and uniformity is secured (Psaras 1993, 104).

From what remains after the must has been pressed from the grapes, people in Cyprus still extract - as they did in the past - an excellent aquavite called *zivanja*. For the production of *zivanja* a special still is used which consists of a bronze cauldron covered with another spouted cauldron made of bronze or sometimes of pottery. The distilling of *zivanja* is carried out in the open or under shelter (**Fig. 10**). The still is filled with grapes or the remnants after pressing for wine, and placed on a hearth; the joints are sealed with clay or dough. The spout of the upper cauldron is connected with a tube passing through a large jar. Pressed grapes are boiled in the cauldron to produce vapour which condenses as it passes through the tube in the jar, containing cold water. The spirit drips from the aperture of the tube and is collected in clay jugs. *Zivanja* is produced in this traditional way in many villages throughout Cyprus.

In 1855 Doazan refers to a factory for making spirit in Limassol, equipped with stills brought from Trieste (Doazan in Kyriazis 1931, 302 - 304).

### *The economic aspect of wine*

Throughout the period under consideration, the wines of Cyprus have played an important role in export trade. Where were the wines shipped?

Referring to the markets for Cyprus wine, Mariti informs us that most of it was exported to Venice, where it was largely consumed, even in the cafes. But the Venetians never bought wine older than 18 months and paid only a piastre per *couza*. The older and finer quality was sent to France, Holland and Tuscany, and cost from 2 1/2 to 3 piastres per *couza* (Mariti (1772) 1984, 88, and Mariti (1769) 1971, 115 - 116). In 1815 Turner ascertains that most of the one year old wine was exported to Venice and some to the Black Sea, while the commonest red wine and the weak white brandy (*raki*) were sent to Turkey and also supplied European ships docking at the island (Cobham 1908, 426). About the middle of the 19th century, according to Doazan's report, Cyprus provided Egypt, Syria and the Archipelago with all kinds of its wines. Two new markets were Genoa and Leghorn. Dark-coloured wines were usually sent to Alexandria (Egypt) and Beirut. Chios used Cypriot wine to make its famous mastic brandy (Doazan in Kyriazis 1931, 305-308).

During the second half of the 19th century large quantities of all sorts of wines were exported to Egypt, Turkey, Syria, Trieste and Venice, some of the older and better qualities to France and Italy (Vice-Consul's White report in Papadopoulos 1980, 82 - 83; for other consular reports see Savile 1878, 106 - 108).

In the 18th century the wine trade was based in Larnaca, the main port and the seat of European consuls and merchants for many centuries. According to the report of the French Consul in Larnaca, Benoit Astier, for the years 1776 to 1781, common wine, old and new, as well as Commandaria, were exported by local but mainly by foreign merchants - Venetians, Neapolitans, British and Ragusans – who controlled 61,67% of the trade in general (Pouradier Duteil-Loizidou 1991, 334, tabl. III, VI, IX, X).

From the second half of the 19th century exports were shipped mainly from Limassol, in the vicinity of which the principal wine-producing districts are situated.

During the period of British rule, more specifically from 1887 to 1958, the production of wine ranged between over 2,000,000 and about 3,500,000, according to the *Cyprus Blue Books* and the *Annual Reports, Department of Agriculture* (Christodoulou 1959, 161).

In 1927 an attempt was made by the Governor of Cyprus, Sir Ronald Storrs, to promote wine exports to Britain by maintaining a prescribed standard. For this purpose, wine exports to Britain were controlled by a licence which, however, was issued only to one local firm, thus creating a “controversial wine export monopoly” (Georghallides 1985, 123, Angelides 1996, 214-217).

In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Cyprus vine industry was jeopardised by the sudden expansion of vine cultivation which was encouraged because of the destruction of all the European vineyards by phylloxera. Cyprus was a phylloxera-free country and the cultivation of the vine was expanded to unrealistic levels in order to satisfy the great demand for wines.

During the two World Wars dramatic booms occurred. Cyprus wines became popular primarily because of their low price. In the 1940s, there was an increased production of stronger beverages such as aged brandies and ouzo, as a result of experiments conducted by Crown Colony chemists and Cypriot wine producers (Angelides 1996, 219 - 220).

Soon after World War II, the Colonial Government introduced the first legislation for the protection of the Industry, and the first law cited as the “Appellation Protection Law” was decreed in 1950.

By late 1950s, according to the study of D. Christodoulou on the evolution of the rural land use pattern in Cyprus, vine-growing accounted for 8% of the agricultural land and 8% of the gross agricultural output. It was the main livelihood of about 30,000 families, but it supported many more and it also fed various other industries (Christodoulou 1959, 162). In the early 1990s vines grew on more than 10% of the total cultivated area and contributed about 7% of the total value of agricultural production. Almost one quarter of the agricultural population of the island was still engaged in viticulture, at least part-time, and derived a large proportion of their income from the vines (Roumbas 1993, 47).

The first wine manufacturing company was established in the year 1844 in Limassol. All four major wine companies, which have now become highly organized wine industries, are based in Limassol, while over a dozen smaller wineries are found in rural areas. The production of good quality wines in monasteries can be seen as a revival of an old tradition.

In 1958, on the recommendation of Professor Vranas of Montpellier, France, new varieties were introduced to Cyprus with a view to widening the potential of Cypriot grapes and produce wines of the high standard demanded in today's world markets. The most suitable varieties were introduced into local vineyards according to a replanting scheme started in 1970 ( Karamichalis 1993, 8).

In 1990, the Council of Ministers issued an order which prescribed the geographical area “Commandaria” by defining the villages concerned and their administrative area, as well as the wine with controlled Appellation of Origin “Commandaria”, and the conditions it should comply with.

Commandaria is the romantic noble wine with the longest life of all wines of the world; old stocks of 100 years of age justify and confirm its fame and its appellation "the Apostle of Wines".

Today the wines produced by the Cypriot wineries are exported throughout the world.

### *The importance of wine and its by-products in nutrition*

"Perhaps there is no part in the world where the vine yields such redundant and luscious fruit. The juice of the Cyprian grape resembles a concentrated essence", noted Clarke in 1801 (Cobham 1908, 380). Grapes were eaten as a fruit but more often consumed as raisins. Those called *zabib*, fine large and black fruits, dried naturally by the sun, are mentioned by Porcacchi in 1585 (Cobham 1908, 166).

The thick and sweet boiled grape juice was a substitute for honey. Cypriots used grape juice for a variety of products which formed part of their diet; these are *kiofteri* and *palouzes*, a kind of sweetmeat with must-jelly as the main ingredient; another product from the unfermented juice is *soutzoukkos*, made of almonds or nuts covered with grape juice jelly. To make this, a piece of string, knotted with almonds, is dipped into the heated and thickened must, and acquires a jelly-like coating. After several subsequent dippings, *soutzoukkos* takes the shape of a sausage which is then hung to dry (**Fig. 11**).

According to Archimandrite Kyprianos (1788), several sweetmeats were made from grape juice with apples, pears, nuts and almonds; in combination with wheat they made the so called *portos* (Kyprianos (1788) 1902, 543).

The main product of vines, however, is wine, which has always been consumed at meals. According to the survey made by Surridge in 1929, each family consumed annually about 50 bottles of wine and 20 bottles of *zivania*, the Cyprus eau de vie, which we mentioned before. *Zivania* has alcohol up to 50 strength, and is still a common traditional drink in Cyprus (Christodoulou 1959, 162). Magda Ohnefalsch-Richter (late 19th/early 20th century) refers also to the production of a kind of brandy to which sugar, anise and mastic were added. Tasteful liqueurs used to be produced in small quantities in the monasteries (Ohnefalsch-Richter (1913) 1994, 109).

Wine was also used in cooking but mainly as a food preservative, especially for meat. As a preservative, tenderiser and flavourer, red wine was very important in traditional cooking, usually combined with pork. In the villages, each family would fatten a pig throughout the year, and slaughter it about Christmas time. The appropriate parts of the meat were cured to make *lountza* (loins), *hiromeri* (ham), and spiced sausages. The meat was first salted, then marinated in red wine with herbs, and finally smoked. Not only meat, including game, but also sea food, especially octopus and squid, are slowly cooked in wine which blends with the flavour of spices and herbs. Wine is widely used in traditional Cypriot dishes, which have been handed down from generation to generation (Davies 1993, 123-135).

Apart from all these uses, it has long been noted that Cyprus wines were of great comfort to the sick. Through personal experience Mariti found them most beneficial to patients suffering from tertian and quartan fevers. He had also seen cases in others where they had washed their wounds with wine and bandaged the injured part. Without using any other treatment, the wounds were healed over "as if by the effect of a balsam" (Mariti (1772) 1984, 106). Referring to forty year old Commandaria, Clarke notes that "after this period it is considered quite good as a balm, and reserved, on account of its supposed restorative and healing quality, for the sick and the dying". The same traveller also mentions that "the wine of the island is so famous all over the Levant,



that, in the hyperbolic language of the Greeks, it is said to possess the power of restoring youth to age, and animation to those who are at the point of death" (Cobham 1908, 380).

### *The cultural aspect of wine, its role in traditional customs and rites*

Because of its very long history on the island and its importance in everyday life, wine is closely connected with the mentality and customs of the people. Van Bruyn (1683) claimed that it was possible to find wine up to a hundred years old, "for when a father marries his child he presents him with a vessel of the best wine he has, and whenever this is tapped it is refilled with a like quantity of wine of the same kind, so that it always keeps its first goodness, and the older it is the better it is" (Cobham 1908, 243).

The oldest and best wine was kept for the most important events in a family's life. Mariti tells us that it was customary on the birth of a child for the father to bury a jar full of wine well sealed. This was kept until the day of his or her marriage, when it was served at the wedding feast, and distributed among relatives and friends (Mariti (1769) 1971, 116).

Wine was also closely related to religious customs and rites.

Protector of the vines in the area of Amathus near Limassol was Saint Tychon, to whom the following miracle is attributed:

While cultivating the Saint's vineyard, workmen threw away the dry vine cuttings. Tychon grasped one of them and stuck it in the soil, praying to God to give it the juices of life, fertility, sweetness and untimely ripeness of the grapes. His wish was granted and since then it is believed that on the nameday of Saint Tychon, the 16<sup>th</sup> of June, the miracle is repeated in the same area. Although it is not the season of the grape harvest, during the Mass grapes acquire colour and sweetness so that they can be used for Holy Communion.

Commandaria was and continues to be provided to the Church for Holy Communion. In this case it is called *nama* and symbolizes the blood of Jesus Christ.

It is a common practice to serve wine after funerals, together with bread, olives and cheese.

The head of the new-born child was traditionally smeared with a mixture of salt and wine in the belief that it would become healthy and prudent (Farmakides 1938, 130-131).

So, a person was in touch with wine from the very beginning of his life to the very end, since even the bones of the dead, when exhumed, were washed with Commandaria.

### *Epilogue*

Wine is a gift of Gods and a product of man's toil. It has accompanied the lives of men, both rich and poor, for thousands of years as a favourite drink but also as a food preservative, tenderiser and flavourer. Wine inspires euphoria and a sense of well-being.

Vineyards are a characteristic feature of the Mediterranean landscape.

Wine-making is both a science and an art. Furthermore, wine is closely connected with religious beliefs, customs and rites. It is part of our Mediterranean and European culture.

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## Captions

**Fig. 1:** Wine tasting in a Cyprus wine cellar c.1890.

**Fig. 2:** The traditional *scala* for planting vine cuttings.

**Fig. 3:** Saint Tryphon holding a pruning hook. 18<sup>th</sup> century wall painting in the Church of Saint George of Arpera, village of Tersefanou, Larnaca.

**Fig. 4:** A traditional pruning hook.

**Fig. 5:** Men turning the screw in the *Linos* of the village of Lania (photo by A. Koutas).

**Fig. 6:** Pressing of grapes in the *Linos* of Lania (photo by A. Koutas).

**Fig. 7:** Small wine-press in an old house in the village of Fikardou.

**Fig. 8:** Wine jars (*pitharia*) in the village of Lefkara.

**Fig. 9:** A wine-jug with a bearded face on its neck. From Pierides House, Larnaca (Laiki Group Collection).

**Fig. 10:** Making *zivania* in the village of Askas.

**Fig. 11:** Making *soutzoukkos*.