

# THE ART OF GREEK WINE

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**Worth noting:**

“From the wine-dark sea of Homer’s Mediterranean to the Americas and beyond, Dionysos traveled west like the Sun in his golden cup. Greek soldiers, Greek grapes and Greek wine traveled with him. The Portuguese discovered the ageing benefits of long sea voyages for strong wines when they carried Malmsey from Crete to the Indies and back again as ballast. Magellan spent more on wine than on military equipment during his journeys.”

*The Illustrated Greek Wine Book*, p.260

## DIONYSOS’ GIFT TO GREEKS

**V**itis vinifera, the grape vine, most likely originated in Persia and was brought to the Mediterranean basin by the Phoenicians. It spread across Greece via Crete and the Aegean islands, and it took well to the idiosyncratic Hellenic geography.

Trans-plantations in ancient Greece came embellished in wonderful lore, and vitis vinifera is no exception.

Once upon a time, Zeus fell in love with Semeli (daughter of Cadmus, king of The-

bes) and she with Zeus. When Hera planted doubts in Semeli’s mind, Semeli asked her beloved to prove his identity.

**Cabernet Sauvignon grapes**

Zeus, being a good sport as always, complied, and appeared in full regalia – with trademark lightening and thunderbolts – and



Photo: Fred Smith. Strofilia Vineyard, Anávisos, Greece © 1999

Semeli caught fire (lovestruck?). But Zeus had managed in that instant to get her preg-

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## “TURPENTINE” TO NECTAR OF THE GODS: WE’VE COME A LONG WAY

**W**e have come a long way since 1971 when Hugh Johnson wrote in *Wine* (Simon and Schuster) about

Greek wine during his visit to Thrace: “Greek wine, it is true, lies right outside the mainstream of wine tradition in a quiet, undrinkable

backwater. The Greek taste for putting resin in the new wine makes it a struggle for anyone who is not used to it.

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## THE LEGACY OF DIONYSOS

(Continued from page 1)

nant! He saved the fetus and implanted it in his leg for nine months. When the baby – Dionysos – was born (near Thebes) Zeus entrusted the infant to his aunt, Ino. She took him to Thrace to look after him, with much help from various nymphs and satyrs. Dionysos was raised to be rather carefree and “democratic” – he liked everyone and

was liked by all.

At one point he became enamoured of a beautiful satyr named Ambelos, who had a rather violent and untimely death. Dionysos, inconsolable, asked his father to transform Ambelos into a plant; Dionysos loved the plant ambe-los (vine) as much as he had loved the satyr. On another occasion, while on a ship bound for Naxos,

he was taken hostage for ransom. As Dionysos freed himself from his bonds, vines and ivy started growing on the ship. His captors became afraid and fled into the sea, only to be transformed...into dolphins! Dionysos went on to Naxos where he met Ariadne (deserted by Theseus) and they got married and lived transgressively ever after!

## GREEK WINES ONCE AGAIN TOPS INTERNATIONALLY

(Continued from page 1)

Retsina, with its taste of turpentine, becomes a memory of Greece which it is difficult, once you have drunk it there, to forget.”

I wonder what Johnston was doing in Thrace - perhaps looking for Dionysos? Didn't anyone tell him that the Olympians could be rather vindictive if approached in disrespectful ways? Did he expect the wine to taste “heavenly” with his irreverent attitude towards Dionysos and his beloved vine?



Photo: Fred Smith. Cellar, Assimina Fragou, Spata © 1999

Well today, Dionysos (and his half sister Athena) are once again having the last word: the “Mediterranean diet” is what the doctors prescribe,

and as for the Greek wine, 'tis once again God's nectar, praised internationally, featured in gourmet magazines, and enjoyed by aficionados.

*Modern Greek wine laws were implemented in 1981 when Greece joined the European Community (now Union). Greece has 28 Appellations of Origin, including 20 of High Quality. Under Greek legislation, red wines must be aged in oak casks for a minimum of one year. Grande Réserve reds must be aged for at least four years.*

# YOUR GUIDES TO GREEK WINE

**A** landmark in my wine education was the publication of Miles Lambert-Gócs' book *The Wines of Greece* (Faber and Faber, 1990 - and only 1,900 drachmas!). This is a nice, scholarly book, friendly and exciting towards Greece and her wines, with all sorts of information about regions, grape varieties, vineyards and producers. For a number of years it was my reference – until 1994 when Nico Manassis' book *Greek Wine Guide* (Olive Press) hit the book stands. It was a versatile travelling companion to those of us curious not only about the history of the wine, but about the

many new wines appearing in Greece. I liked the details that Manassis' book provided on particular estates, their locations, the



Photo: Fred Smith

types of wine, and the bits and pieces of personal history of the producers – and it was nicely illustrated.

Not much later, I joined the "Athens Wine Club" and in Baccant reverence let myself be guided by

Lisa Vigileos (Chemist, Oenologist, Wine Consultant) – and it was then that the fun began! With every visit to Athens, I visited

with Lisa who always suggested a couple of new wines. I tried them all, found many favorites and kept going back...asking for more.

Next, a revised and updated edition of Manassis' book appeared in 1996 (Olive Press), more lush in its photographs, more personal in its storytelling. And this year, Manassis

*(Continued on page 4)*

**Strofilíá Vineyard, Anávisos, Greece, October, 1999**

## EDUCATING...CATERINA

**W**hen the first wine bar opened its doors in Athens in the early eighties, it was named "Strofilíá" (the old Greek wine press).

Strofilíá was the happening spot in Athens for many years, and anyone who was anyone (or just simply curious) went there to try different kinds of wine, and gawk at those "tasting." I used to stop in during my visits to Athens, and it was there that I became cu-

rious about Greek wine. (The wine bar is no more, but its owners are now putting all their efforts into wine production at their eponymous estate in Anávisos – their mission accomplished).

During the last twenty years, the production in Greece of what we in North America might call "boutique" wines has grown at a faster pace than anyone could ever have imagined.

***Stin iyíá mas!***



Photo: Fred Smith. Greek wine © 1999.

*A cool glass of Strofilíá Winery's "Nafsika" white, a blend of Assyrtiko and Savatiano grapes, is a perfect accompaniment to a late summer day!*

the artexchange news

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C. Pizanias, Editor

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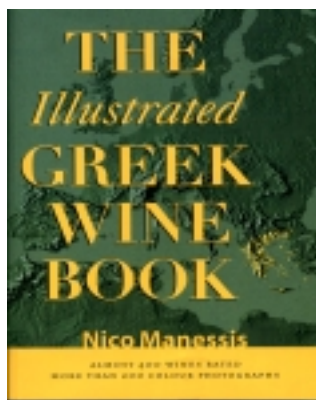
**A call to all wine lovers!** At the ArtExchange we believe that knowledge and fun should be shared equally. For this reason we have planned a special Greek journey for the fall of 2001, where we will trace Dionysos' footsteps – with, of course, all the appropriate reverence!

We will begin with some *preparatory rites* in Aidipsós, a spa town on the island of Evia, renown for its healing waters since antiquity. There, in luxurious accommodations, we will peel away our stress and worries, rejuvenate our bodies and spirit. We will then be ready to immerse ourselves in mythology as well as the historical derivations of wines, vines, and viticulture.

We will meet the small wine producers who passionately invest their efforts and resources in making contemporary wines with ancient root stock; we will visit their vineyards, taste their luscious wines, savour local delicacies and delight in the Greek countryside and hospitality. Hop on the Baccant Express next fall for Dionysian tastes...at drachma prices!

## BEST GUIDE YET

(Continued from page 3)  
outdid himself with his latest book *The Illustrated Greek Wine Book* (Olive Press, 2000). A masterpiece now – information and ratings of hundreds of wines, even more and better photographs, more personal accounts of the producers, a map of Greece and its wine production areas and the vineyards within each appellation region.



Manassis has now included scholarly articles on the past and present Greek wines. It is a "must" have book, because it is a "meraklidiko" book!

*The ArtExchange is embarking on an unforgettable adventure this October 6 – 24. Join us in Athens and Tinos, immerse yourself in artistic beauty, and sample some of the best wines Greece has to offer – along with unbeatable Greek hospitality!*

*The Illustrated Greek Wine Book*, by Nico Manassis, Olive Press Publications, Corfu, 2000

*Meraklidiko* - done with loving care; charged with passion (but we know that no dictionary can contain **meráki!**)