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Greek wine unlike any other—Sclavos Wines

By Caterina Pizanias, [The ArtExchange](#)



[Cephalonia](#)

During the last twenty years Greece has been experiencing a vini- and viticultural renaissance, mostly undetected by the wine connoisseurs outside the country. This is partly due to the fact that Greece does not produce large enough quantities of wine to effectively compete with traditionally established wine-producing countries, and partly because the tourist industry continues to tirelessly promote “retsina” and “ouzo”—Greece’s tried (and not so true anymore) beverages.

But Greece and some of its current wine producers deserve a second look...and taste, of course. Greek producers might be using ancient indigenous grape varieties but they are at the same time using the latest viticultural methods—making them really the newest kids on the “New World Wine” block! Greek grape varieties’ names might be difficult to pronounce but choosing and enjoying Greek wines should be a great new adventure for the discriminating traveler. An exemplar of this old/new producer is the Sclavos Winery on the island of Cephalonia. A quick historical detour is in order first.

Cephalonia is the largest and most ruggedly mountainous of the Eptanissa or “Seven Island Complex” on the Ionian Sea, giving it microclimates that would allow the growing of many grape varieties. And although geography and climate play a central role in any wine region, what makes Cephalonia unique is also the temperament of its people, a temperament shaped by its many conquerors/occupiers and a series of catastrophic earthquakes, the most recent in 1953. The earliest colonizers were ancient Athenians—it was one of them, Cephalous, who brought the first vine stocks as a momentum of his Attica roots and who eventually lent his name to the island. Then Romans followed, and Franks, Venetians, Ottomans, British, French, all of them leaving their mark, least of all the Ottomans and mostly the Venetians and British. Wine

production waxed and waned over the centuries, always for personal use, at times resulting in successful exports—to Venetians mostly, but always learning and improving the methods so as to produce wines that reflected the individuality and temperament of the producer...wine in Cephalonia was/is a gentlemanly occupation.



The Sclavos family has been making wine for generations mostly in the southwest region of Paliki peninsula. The person that has taken the reins now is Evriviadis Sclavos, a trained viticulturalist and a follower of biodynamic agriculture. Like biodynamic agriculture in general, biodynamic grape growing is based on the philosophy of Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925) who advocated an “inner attitude” on the part of the grower based on the belief in the inter-connectedness of the ecological, energetic and spiritual in nature. Evriviadis has created an ecological self-sufficiency in his vineyards by utilizing/recycling existing materials from within his properties throughout the growing cycle and also by timing all activities on the planetary movements. He uses natural yeasts, and avoids sulphur dioxide and filtration for his estate wines. As result of his biodynamic methods, Sclavos’ wines have

stronger tastes and stay longer in the mouth, reflecting the earth from which they have come. Savouring Sclavos’ wines is like performing libations to the gods, offering thanks for being one with nature, whispering to her “we are yours...”

The continuous give and take between innovation (biodynamic farming) and tradition (working and perfecting almost-abandoned grapes such as Vostilidi) is also mirrored in the naming of the wines, a process that pays homage to Greece’s millennia-old involvement in wine making and enjoyment. The Metagitnion, a white wine made from Vostilidi grapes, is translated as "Between Neighbors" and it hails back to the second month of the year in ancient Attica, approximately comparable to the last half of August and the first half of September (our harvest time), where a popular festival was also held at the same time in honour of the god Apollo. The name of another wine, the Orgion, an excellent red cask-aged local Mavrodaphne, makes reference to the high level initiate in the Dionysian Mysteries in charge of making sure the wines were appropriately mixed—in antiquity wines were “helped” along with the addition of spices, water and other substances to make them “palatable” for drinking. Efranor, a Muscat-like wine made of Goustolidi and Moschatella, refers to an ancient adjective about wine that translates as “wine that delights the human heart.” Sclavos’ Idis, their sweet wine made of sun-dried Muscat of Cephalonia, pushes the envelope on how to create a unique wine out of a popular grape. Sclavos Wines have been singled out for their quality by Greece’s Master of Wine,



author and teacher Konstantinos Lazarakis, who said: “Sclavos wines are not for those who enjoy forward, fruity wines. The style is complex, multi-faceted, and quite oxidative, making appreciation very much a matter of personal taste. Even if some people are not keen on the style, it is fair to say that Greece needs more people like Sclavos—not charmed by what is popular, but willing to explore new possibilities”. I would like to second this statement and add that in these times where the “Parkerization” of wine production and styling is in full force, producers like Evriviadis Sclavos deserve a second or third taste.

Adventurous and cultured travelers can try the Sclavos wines at good restaurants and wine cellars in Greece, at the regularly scheduled wine producers gatherings at Oinoteleia gatherings (check it out at: <http://www.oinotrapeza.gr>) , or better yet when visiting the easily accessible Captain Corelli’s island— by plane, boat, bus/ ferry—and by calling ahead the Sclavos Winery at +30 26710 91930. May Dionysos be with us always!



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