
Varieties

of the Cypriot Vineyard

The vineyards of Cyprus are among the very few vineyards of the world that were not affected by the vine louse, known as *phylloxera*, a disease that fell upon the greatest part of Europe's vineyards at the beginning of the twentieth century, destroying them almost completely. The catastrophic consequences of *phylloxera* led European vine-growers to the option of trying to revive their ruined vineyards by engrafting scions of well-known European varieties on to American vine stocks which are resistant to the disease. This resulted in vine plants resistant to *phylloxera*, which, however, produced (and are still producing) grapes whose organoleptic or sense-related characteristics – i.e. colour, aroma and flavour – are not quite identical to those of the original European vine known as *Vitis Vinifera*. Cyprus, however, having escaped the *phylloxera* onslaught, maintained its vineyards free from any intervention and, to this day, the Cypriot vines are self-sown plants of the European *Vitis Vinifera* retaining their classic organoleptic characteristics as well as the potential of a long life.

Very few parts of the world continue to cultivate the European vine, apart from Cyprus. These are Chile, the Greek island of Santorini and some regions of Portugal and South Australia.

Quick guide

to Cyprus's grape varieties (Total hectares planted)

Red grapes

Mavro	5400
Carignan	840
Cabernet Franc	410
Cabernet Sauvignon	324
Shiraz	270
Mataro (Mourvèdre)	225
Maratheftiko	183
Othhalmo	162
Grenache	155
Alicante Bouschet	135
Lefkada	122
Cinsaut	119

White grapes

Xynisteri	2410
Muscat of Alexandria	270
Chardonnay	150
Palomino	82
Sémillon	44
Sauvignon Blanc	30
Riesling	25

INDIGENOUS WHITE VARIETIES

Xynisteri

The name *Xynisteri* makes its first appearance in 1893 in a report entitled "Rapport sur une Mission viticole à l'île de Chypre" by professor Mouillefert of the Grignon Agricultural College.

With 2410 hectares under cultivation, Xynisteri is the most wide-spread white grape variety in the Cypriot vineyard. Vinification at low temperatures (16°C) of grapes from select regions (such as Kathikas, Akamas Laona, Vouni Panayias, Ambelitis and Pitsilia) produces fresh, light-coloured, aromatic wines with medium alcohol levels (11.5-12.5% vol.) which are not usually amenable to ageing and must be drunk when young and robust – one year at most after production.

Xynisteri is essentially the only indigenous white variety with a significant role in Cyprus



winemaking. Other indigenous white varieties on the island (such as Promara, Spourtiko, Kanela, Morokanela et al.) have not managed to come forth, away from the marginal periphery of the Cypriot vineyard where, for several decades, they are no more than museum items.

INDIGENOUS RED VARIETIES

Maratheftiko

Professor Mouillefert was, again, the first to refer to this variety by name, in 1893, using the word *Marathophiko*. More recently, in 1988 to be exact, Robinson refers to this variety as "a local variety of superior quality found among Mavro stocks in many vineyards. It makes for a very concentrated wine

of which the tannin, fragrance, colour and structure are extremely close to those of a Cabernet. Very promising but too rare."

In the Pitsilia region this variety is known by the name *Bambakada* or *Bambakina*. It is a very rare variety, and it is estimated that only some 183 hectares are under cultivation in the whole of Cyprus, whereas

the Mavro variety – a grape with definitely less potential – covers a total area of 5400 hectares! This, of course, is due to the fact that Maratheftiko, being less productive than Mavro, was not as popular among the older generation of viticulturalists. The limited number of vine-plants of this variety that one finds interspersed within Mavro vineyards were planted for the purpose of giving a more intense dark colour to wines from the Mavro variety. That is why there are no old vineyards planted exclusively with Maratheftiko.

There is, however, another reason for the unpopularity of Maratheftiko. Unfortunately, the variety faces a serious viticultural problem, for it has a propensity to severe bud loss resulting in thinly clustered grape bunches. The reason for this is the fact that Maratheftiko is one of the very few varieties in the world which are non-hermaphroditic. Its buds are physiologically female and consequently it has to be planted in mixed vineyards to ensure pollination.

In spite of this severe handicap faced by what essentially is the only indigenous quality red grape, the appropriate authorities have done nothing to solve the problem, and this dynamic variety, in which the Cyprus wine industry could invest for its future, is staggering along, neglected and stifled amidst the dozens of imported varieties that



Maratheftiko with obvious signs of flower shedding

have flooded the island's vineyards. This unique opportunity for Cyprus to invest in this grape variety still remains unexploited. Maratheftiko is dispersed throughout the island but is to be found mainly in the hilly regions of Paphos (Panayia, Ambelitis) and in Pitsilia. It is a multi-dynamic variety that can give a multitude of wine types – from rosés and light reds to reds suitable for ageing. At its best, it produces high quality red wines of intense colour, thick fruity aroma reminiscent of cherries and blackberries and full body with select tannins that render it amenable to extended ageing. Wines of this variety that have appeared on the market quite recently were aged in new oak casks before being bottled.

DOMAINE ARGYRIDES

THE WINERY AT A GLANCE

Year of foundation

2000

Proprietor

Pambos Argyrides

Village

Vasa Kilaniou

Altitude

760 m

Vineyards owned

10 ha

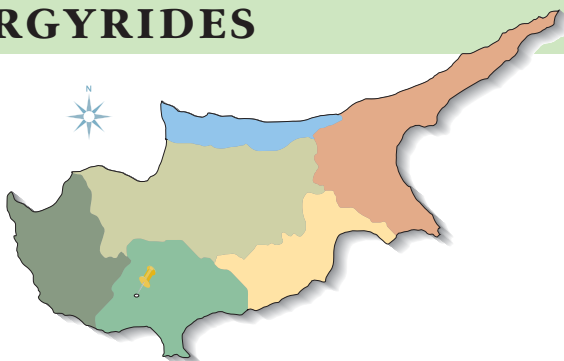
Total annual production

(in bottles of 750ml)

28500

Wines produced

1. Chardonnay, white dry
6500 btl
2. Cabernet Sauvignon,
red dry
5000 btl
3. Saint Timon, red dry
(Mataro)
6500 btl
4. Maratheftiko, red dry
6500 btl
5. Mourvèdre, red dry
4000 btl



Distance from

Lefkosia	126 km	90 min.
Lemesos	40 km	30 min.
Paphos	87 km	60 min.
Larnaca	107 km	90 min.
Ayia Napa	157 km	120 min.

Nearest Wineries

Ktima KEO (Malia)	5 min.
Linos (Omodos)	5 min.
Zenon (Omodos)	10 min.
Olympus (Omodos)	10 min.

Information

R&A Vasa Winery Ltd
Vasa Kilaniou 4771, Lemesos
Tel.: 25945999, 25945888, Fax: 25734744
e-mail: pargyrides@cytanet.com.cy

Visits

By appointment



Ktima Argyrides vineyards, among the most impressive on the island



In the whole of Cyprus there is only one winery that was built with absolute respect to the tradition of the region where it is situated. This is the Domaine Argyrides, owned by Pambos Argyrides, who constructed a small but model winery wholly from select local stone panelled with wood and featuring decorative doors and windows that bring to mind bygone times. The inspirer and creator of this doll-like "miniature" winery, whose total annual production does not exceed 30000 bottles, did not build this work of art in the heart of the village for the purpose of making money but to give an outlet to his passion for wine.

A successful businessman at the head of one of the most enviable companies on the island, which he had set up with two partners in 1985, two years before returning to Cyprus from South Africa where he had lived for years, Pambos Argyrides does not expect to make a living out of wine anyway. The fully restored old building that now houses the winery used to be the place where, for years, Pambos's father made his own wine. When the old man, ravaged by relentless time, had to gradually grind to a halt, Pambos, indulging his passion for wine, picked

up the baton from the tired old veteran to continue the task and raise it to higher standards.

But before all this came about, before the Domaine Argyrides took its present flourishing shape and form, it so happened that the wine in one of the traditional big earthen jars that fulfilled the function of winemaking tanks, turned sour. This prompted the winemaker to find out why. Knowledge came to him in various ways: he attended courses on wine and winemaking, he enriched his library with specialist books on the subject, he talked to wine experts, and finally he travelled to Bordeaux, to Rioja (Spain) and to Napa Valley (California).

"When I came back from these travels," Mr Argyrides confided to me in a friendly conversation, "having seen how far behind these people I was, I said to myself that I must either give up the whole project or try to get as close to their standards as I could." Opting for the second alternative, the winemaker does honour to his village which can pride itself on having the best premises housing a winery anywhere in Cyprus, where quality wines are produced that can easily claim to be included among the top five ranges of wine in the country.

DOMAINE ARGYRIDES

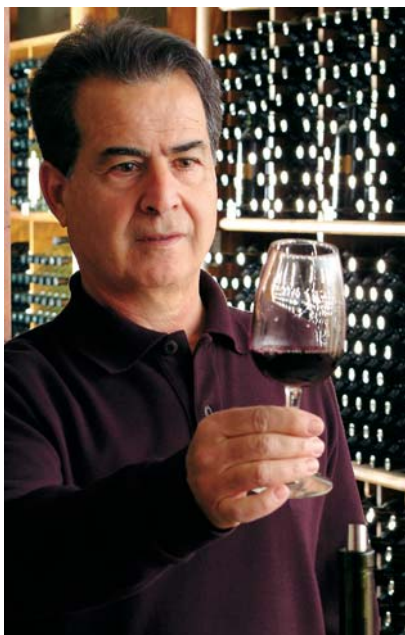
Maratheftiko 2007

Best Wine



The producer's Maratheftiko 2007 is, aromatically, perhaps the most interesting red wine produced on the island. Its flowery and at the same time fruity aromas, duly enveloped within well-chosen oak cannot but be appreciated, if for no other reason, at least for their authenticity. In terms of taste, the wine continues to be very interesting, and if the producer manages to restrain the highlighted acidity and the rather intense tannins, he will probably be in a position to bring out, some time in the future, the island's first great wine.

Rating ★★★★★



Pambos Argyrides

Recommended Wines

Saint Timon



The 2005 and 2006 Saint Timon are two of the best wines that Pambos Argyrides has produced so far. Compared to all previous vintages that I have tasted, they are distinctly more concentrated and more complex, both in terms of aroma as well as taste. Their tannins also are more round and their acidity a little more under control.

Rating 2005-2006 ★★★★★

Cabernet Sauvignon 2005



Over the last few years, Domaine Argyrides's Cabernet Sauvignon has been among the top Cabernet Sauvignon produced on the island. It is a concentrated wine from every point of view: dark red colour; rich and complex aromas, full mouth, with intense tannins, good acidity and well-placed barrel.

Rating ★★★★★

Mourvèdre 2007



The winery's first Mourvèdre cannot pass unnoticed: dense, dark red colour, concentrated and intense virile aromas of leather, farm, pepper, and red fruits in a background of vanilla and oak. The mouth features very good body, promising quality tannins, abundant alcohol and rather highlighted acidity. A very good first attempt.

Rating ★★★★★



The inviting, well-designed cellar at Domaine Argyrides

Commandaria

The oldest name for a wine in the world

Richard Lion Heart, while sailing for the Holy Land to participate in the 3rd Crusade, was forced by bad weather to seek an anchorage at Lemesos. It did not take Richard long to get into a quarrel with Isaac Comnenus, the self-styled king of Cyprus, and in 1191 Richard occupied the island and subsequently sold it to the Templars, a religious order of knights founded by French Crusaders in 1118 to provide military protection of the Holy Sepulchre from the infidels. The Templars soon realized that they would not be able to keep Cyprus under their control, they cancelled the agreement and departed. So Richard ceded the island to Guy de Lusignan, the French "King of Jerusalem", who became the founder of the Lusignan dynasty which reigned over Cyprus for three centuries (1192-1489). Thus, 1192 marked the beginning of a new era in the social and political history of Cyprus. The Lusignan period together with the Venetian rule (1489-1570) constitute the Frankish Era in the history of Cyprus. During the Lusignan reign, Cyprus

was swarmed with Western European settlers, mainly Catholic crusaders who took up residence on the island, and on whom were bestowed extensive areas of land, as well as rights and privileges, and thus the feudal system was set up. Among these settlers were the knights of St John, the ecclesiastical military order of St John (the Baptist) of Jerusalem. These knights had their administrative headquarters – the Commanderie or Commandaria – in a castle west of Lemesos, known today as "Kolossi Castle". The castle was situated in a large fertile area of land with extensive plantations of wheat, cotton, sugar cane and vineyards. The area was known as "Grande Commanderie" to distinguish it from two smaller commanderies, that of the Phoenix of Paphos and that of Templos in Kyrenia. The Commandaria wine of today still bears the name of this area, for the knights of St John gave this name to the wine not only because it was produced in the villages that constituted the Order's fief – the Commanderie – but also because knighthood was then held in high esteem among the Catholic countries of Western Europe and

among pilgrims who, on their way to the Holy Land, stopped at Cypriot harbours for provisioning – which of course included the sweet Commandaria wine.

The knights of St John, who knew the secrets of good wine and the techniques of its production, improved the quality of the wine and elevated it to the wine in greatest demand at the time. Commandaria acquired world fame, for the knights traded it with enviable success and at considerable profit for themselves.



Medieval knight (from T. Hadjidemetriou's collection)

Because of its exceptional quality, Commandaria was much in demand in the trading centres of the Mediterranean. In Venice, for example, Commandaria could be imported free of tax because it was categorized as a tonic.

Such was the fame of this wine that it prompted Portuguese merchants of the period to carry scions of Cyprus vine varieties to the Portuguese island of Madeira where they were planted, or grafted onto local stocks. The resulting vines thrived and produced the well-known sweet Madeira wine. This piece of information – namely that Madeira wine is made from grapes produced from original Cypriot vine stocks – is given by the winemakers of the region themselves in the form of a special label attached to the neck of the bottle.

Praise in abundance

There are several references in historical texts through the centuries, that extol the grandeur of the quality of Commandaria.

Wilbrand von Oldenburg, count of Oldenburg, who visited Cyprus in 1212, was highly impressed by the sweet wines of the island. He writes: "The wines of this island are so thick and rich as if they are meant to be consumed like honey on bread."

Equally astonishing is the reference, in 1213, by the poet Henri d' Angeli in his famous work "The Battle of the Wines", where he writes:

"During the gigantic wine-tasting competition of wines from all over the world, organized by Philippe August, king of France, the sweet wine of Cyprus was crowned as the Evangelist of Wines, shining like a true star."

It is also true that during a symposium held in 1363, which came to be known as "The Reception of the Five Kings" and which was organized by the Lord Mayor of London in honour of Peter I, then king of Cyprus, and four other kings (Edward III of England, David II, king of Scotland, John II, king of France and Valdemar IV, king of Denmark) Commandaria was served and it was very much appreciated by all. A painting at the Royal Exchange, London, portrays very vividly the splendour and the colour of the symposium.

According to historians, one of the main reasons that induced the Sultan Selim II (1566-1574) to conquer Cyprus was the fame of Commandaria, which the Sultan considered fit only for himself, the king of kings.

References to Commandaria's fame and attractions do not end here. Tomasso Porcacchi, an extremely voluminous writer, best known for his descriptions of the most famous islands of the world, entitled "L' Isole piu famose del mondo", published in 1576, writes about Cyprus: "The island is rich in all the fruits of the earth, and its more useful products. Its wines are very luscious and



1964 Cyprus stamp depicting a medieval knight drinking Commandaria outside Kolossi Castle

wholesome; as they grow old they turn from black to white, they are fragrant and of pleasant taste. One finds wine of 80 years and more, and a vintage that had graced a grandee's table, gets fresh honour as a medicine, for its healthgiving and preservative virtues, which are those of a balsam."

The Dutchman Cornelis Van Bruyn, who visited the island in 1683, gives his own testimony: "Of all the