Greek wines rank with the best

By TULA LEWNES

With a history of wine-making dating back to antiquity and the favorable climatic conditions prevailing in Greece for the cultivation of the vine — hot springs and summers, mild winters, plenty of sunshine, proximity of the sea to the vineyards, rocky soil, and vineyards located in semi-mountainous areas, it is little wonder that the wines of Greece rank with the best to be found anywhere and their high quality has won them many international awards.

The types of wine made in Greece include red, rose', white, sparkling wines, table wines, dessert wines, dry, semi-dry, medium sweet, and sweet.

Some of the better known wines are the splendid, natural aperitifs and dessert wines of Samos, Patras, Lemnos, Rhodes, and Cephalonia; Mantinia, an elegant white wine with a delicate bouquet; Robola of Cephalonia, a distinguished white; full-bodied reds of Naoussa, Amynteon, and Nemea; and the ruby wines of Rapsani, Rhodes, Archanes, and Daphne.

The selected grape varieties for whites are as follows:

**Assyrtiko** — grown on the island of Santorini and on Chalkidiki; produces a full-bodied taste with delicate bouquet.

**Vilana** — grown on the island of Crete; fruity in taste with a floral bouquet.

**Robola** — one of Greece's noblest wines, from Cephalonia.

**Savatiano** — the most widely planted variety of white grapes.

**Roditis** — well-balanced with a delicate bouquet. Comes from Attiki in the north, western Peloponnese, and

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A three-handled amphora in the palace style from the port area of Knossos (15th century B.C.)

Wine making in Ancient Greece. From an amphora.
Thessaly.
The selected grape varieties for reds are as follows:

Moschofilero — grown on the Peloponnese; produces a dry wine with an aromatic bouquet.

Agioritiko — also from the Peloponnese, in the region of Corinth; has a velvety taste suitable to both young and aged wines.

Xynomavro — grown in Macedonia for an aged wine; this is a taut, astringent grape, tasting like a sour plum. In the bottle and the barrel, it develops an elegance and delicate flavor which penetrates and lasts.

Kotsifali — grown on the island of Crete.

Of Greece's annual wine production, 60% is white wine and 40% is red. The vineyards cover an area of 90,000 hectares and are all privately owned.

Mountains and water divide Greece into many regions. High peaks cut off valleys and plains, separating them from one another, while long arms of the sea indent the coastlines, shaping it into peninsulas.

The wine-growing regions are as follows:

—The western slopes of the Pindus Mountains in Epirus; Locales of Zitsa and Metsovo (where the highest vineyard in Greece is located). Considerable experimentation on French and Greek cultivars is taking place there.

—North of the Plain of Salonika — pressed against the Yugoslavian border in the towns of Naoussa, Goumenitsa, and Amynteon.

—The Sithonian Peninsula on two of the three fingers extending from the Chalkidiki land mass. Locales of the Porto Carras environs and Mount Athos, where vineyards have been tended by the monks for centuries.

—The Peloponnese — in the mountainous region of Nemea (known for its fine red wines) and that of Mantinia (known for its delicate whites). The area of Patras, famous for its Mavrodaphne.

—The Southeastern Uplands in the Plain of Attica and on the island of

A nine handled Pithos (amphora), a famous example of the marine type (from the museum of Heraklion about 1450 B.C.).
Euboea. Cephalonia in the Ionian islands is home to Robola.

In the Aegean island group, Samos, Lesvos, and Lemnos are the wine-producing islands and in the Cyclades group, Santorini is the wine-making island.

The Dodecanese Islands have Rhodes as the major wine producer.

**Viticulture in Greece**

Contemporary Greek vineyards are exactly in the same loci as in mythical years when warriors and heroes harvested the nectar of the vine. In Crete, especially, one finds the most traditional European vineyards, planted with old varieties producing red and white wines from the ungrafted vines that yield “sultanas” and “rasaki” table grapes. The old Cretan grape strains in the “reds” are: Romeiko from Canea; Kotsifali from Herakleion; and Liatiko from Lasithi. In the “whites,” there is Vilana, Athiri, and Ladikino. In the extreme east corner of Crete are the Sitia and Daphnes vineyards, which are the descendants of the Malvasia, known in medieval times as “malmsey” wine in England. According to legend, it was the nectar of the gods and was made in huge jars in the palace of Minos at Knossos from a recipe given to the king of Crete by the Delphic oracle, which symbolized wisdom.

In ancient Greece, wine was classified according to quality, age, vineyard, and the method by which it was stored. This was considered so important that amphorae handles were marked with the name of the vintner and of the local provincial or city ruler. For greater enjoyment, the wines were sometimes scented with myrrh or floral essence. Rose-scented wines were very desirable. They would be served in different vessels: a skyphos, kylix, or oenochoe — depending on the occasion and the particular wine. Amphorae were used to store, trade and transport the wine.

Today, wine from Greece’s ancient, indigenous vine varieties, is elemental and vigorous — tasting of rocks and bushes.