



Informationen zur Umwelt und für Naturreisende auf Kreta:
Information about the Environment and for travellers in Crete:

If the gods wear grapes ...
Cretan Wine – a gift of Dionysos



According to legend the Cretans learned viticulture from *Dionysus*, the God of wine and ecstasy, who came across the sea to Crete and married *Ariadne*, the daughter of King *Minos*. The wine press of a Minoan manor in *Vathypetro* considered (around 1600 BC) as more eloquent witness. Crete winegrowers thus look back on a 4,000-year-old tradition, because already in early Minoan times the art of the viniculture came from the Orient to the island. Since then grapes are grown especially in the South of *Iraklion* around *Archanes*. Ancient authors, from HOMER, THUKYDIDES up to PAUSANIAS, were full of praise for the Cretan wine.

The most important wine-growing areas besides *Archanes* are around *Dafnes* and *Pezá* (Prefecture Iraklion). Noble grapes also flourish in the area near *Sitia* (Lassithi Prefecture) and *Kissamos* (Prefecture Chania). Mostly in cooperatives, Crete growers produce approximately 60,000 tons / year (which is approx. 15% of total wine production in Greece).

Cretan wine, this is first and foremost has always been red wine. The *Mandilari* grapes give a pleasant sourness, a rich tannin full flavour and deep red colour, while the *Kotsifali* grape is responsible for aroma and sweetness. Also the cultivation of grapes for the production of white wine is becoming increasingly important. The preferred grape variety is the fruity and flowery *Vilana* grape which gives a fresh white wine with light apple aroma.

Until today only a small part of the good wines goes in the export. The largest amount is still produced for own use. For a first wine tasting in a tavern, *Chíma*, a strong, pink wine is advisable.

HIPPOKRATES said about the wine: "Wine is a thing, suitable in a wonderful way for the people, that the drink is used in good and poor health meaningful and to the right extent applied, in accordance with the constitution of each person" – in this sense: "Cheers!"



Wine delivery in cooperative in *Archanes*; the Cretan wine growers wait patiently in endless lines until it's "their turn" (fig. left).

Sweet smell is in the air and the streets stick from the dripping juice of the grapes
It is weighed, sampled and unloaded in the "container" without any rush.

A "central pillar" (fig. right) leads the grapes from the "container" to the processing in the factory.

Pictures: H. Eikamp (9/2004)

