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Information about the Environment and for travellers in Crete:

Cretan Handcraft: Cooperage since many generations at Crete



Cretan vintage look back to an more than 4.000 year old tradition (therefore see also our leaflet No. 052-04/E at: http://www.kreta-umweltforum.de/Merkblaetter_en/052-04E.pdf). Thus it is not amazing that also „barrel maker” practise this handicraft on Crete since many generations.



In ancient times hoses from animal bellows or large pottery vessels were used in place of the today common barrel. Also the famous tub of Diogenes (therefore see: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diogenes_of_Sinope) was such a vessel, which is called “Pithos” (see fig. left). From wood blocks or trunk segments carved containers from wood are already used since 1.000 BC. From staves compound wooden barrels are considered as invention of the Celts. The first mention of such barrels goes back to different Roman sources starting from 50 BC; however they were surely already used some centuries before in the Celtic area. A first detailed description of a barrel is known from Plinius, when he described the wine barrels of the Celts as a container, which is compound from staves and locked by a bottom above and down and is

held together by bands. Barrel representations on the column of the Trajan offer the proof for the barrels also in the centuries AD.

Depending upon intended purpose a barrel must exhibit certain characteristics. A barrel must be for example absolutely closely and if necessary breathe-actively, e.g. Oxygen permit or withstand to large pressure. Perhaps it must be resistant against certain chemicals or shall, if it is a wooden barrel, give a certain taste to the liquid, which is the case with alcoholic beverages.

The cylindrical form of a closed barrel permits an easy shifting (roll) by hand to another place with small distance. The bulged out form facilitates it additionally to change the direction during shifting. Concurrently a barrel can be, depending upon need and local occurrence, stacked on the even or rounded surface well and space-saving one on the other.

The production of the wooden barrels still has (also on Crete) a great traditional importance. A wooden barrel is manufactured by the barrel binder, cooper or tubber and is to a large extent hand-made. These barrels essentially consist of staves, which are held together by the iron or wooden band (see fig right) – and the two bottoms (in former times wooden bands were manufactured from withy, hazelnut-, birch- or lime tree rods.

According to the wine tradition barrel makers are to be found on Crete still in many places: therefore see the following (commented) images on Page 2.





View at and in to the workshop of a barrel maker in Perivolia (Prefecture Rethymno)
 Picture below right: “Barrel transporter” in Hersonissos (North Crete)



Since the antiquity varies woods from the tree species acacia, fever tree, chestnut, cherry tree, palm, pine and cedar have been used of the wine barrel production. In ancient Greek wooden barrel were still hardly known, but the Greek historian Herodot (482 – 425 BC) reported about from Babylon, made of palm wood.

Amongst all Greek wine barrels the 12.000 litres seizing barrel in Meteora Monastery Varlaam (central Greek) is probably the most know (see fig.; picture source: <http://www.wir-sind-weg.de/2006-09-Griechenland/2006-09-18.html>)