

CHIAN WINE AND OTHER CHIAN PRODUCTS IN ANCIENT GREEK AND ROMAN LITERATURE*

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Abstract: *The island of Chios produced a number of goodies, among which the famous wine and olive oil. Other products were the masticha and cheese that were exported to the Mediterranean markets. Some of these are documented in ancient Greek and Roman literature, providing evidence about their circulation too. Certain relationships throughout the years explain the intense trade that seems to have existed.*

The poet Callimachus¹ mentioned that in Egypt “comes many a jar across the Aegean from Chios rich in wine...”. Chian wine, mentioned in ancient literature, is placed among the most expensive wine on ancient market. Marcus Terentius Varro, in the *Menippean Satires*, calls Chian wine “amphorae of the rich”². This is documented in Zenon³, where a keramion Chion (c. twenty-three litres) of wine that arrived in Pelousion (on the easternmost mouth of the Nile River) was priced

* Prof. Alexandru Avram undertook the supervision of my PhD Thesis, registered at the University of Bucharest, as the most expert on stamps and epigraphy. My PhD Thesis which is to be submitted soon, concerns all the amphorae and laygnoi stamps that come from the island of Chios, and more particularly the city of Chios, where all the industrial activity was taking place. This work will be essential for the worldwide bibliography because one will be able to interpret whether one stamp found outside the island of Chios, is Chian or not, and accordingly to search for the origin somewhere else. Prof. Alexandru Avram supported this thesis and before his terrible loss, he had also corrected and given instructions for a number of chapters. For the needs of this research, Chian wine, which was transported into the stamped amphorae and lagynoi, as well as other famous Chian products mentioned in ancient literature have been studied.

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¹ Callimachus, fragments 399 II. 1341-2 [ed. MAIR & MAIR 1921 (repr. 1960), p. 306-307].

² Varro, *Sat. Men.* 28.106 (Non. 543.16): *divitum amphoras Chias*.

³ *P.Cair.Zen.* I 59012-59014. Especially no. 1948 (dated 257 BC), for Chios, no. 2114, for Chian wine, no. 2142 and 2144, for Chian pottery, see SKEAT 1974.

at eighteen drachmae and a hemichion at nine drachmae. Similarly,⁴ in the 3rd c. BC in Alexandria, a disbursement of wine to people connected with the household of Apollonius, servants, only got a jar of Egyptian wine, while people referred to by name, presumably of a higher status, received *Θάσια* and *Χία*. In addition, Amyntas mentioned two Chian vessels of aged sweet wine, dated to 257 BC⁵. Another document referred to Chian as a sweet wine; in the middle of the 3rd c. BC, Kidyppos wrote to Zenon and asked him to send “a jar of either Lesbian or Chian wine, as sweet as possible”⁶.

This intense presence of Chian wine in Egypt was the result of the relationships between Chios and Egypt in the 3rd c. BC. From the early 3rd century BC Egypt, under its new ruler Ptolemy II Philadelphus (284–247 BC), became a major power in the Aegean region⁷. Ptolemy controlled a number of islands and sea-ports leading some scholars in suggesting that Chios had been part of this overseas network⁸. Chios acquired much of its wealth through trading with Egypt and this would have led the Chians to support politically the Ptolemaic kingdom over other Hellenistic monarchies in the region⁹. This discussion is confirmed by the presence of large numbers of Chian stamps in the region of Egypt.

Apart from wine, Chian cheese was also well-known and was found in Egypt often¹⁰.

In the 1st c. BC Philodemus¹¹ in another epigram described the attempt to keep away from the madness of crazy life that contained garlands, music, and when he reached the wine, among those that provoked such a life, he mentioned the Chian. Thus, Chian wine was considered among the good quality wines still in the 1st c. BC. The quality of Chian wine was praised also by Dionysius of Halicarnassus in *Strato's Musa Puerilis*¹² in his query if Acratus loved him, where he also implied the name Acratus, which means unwatered wine, he asked him to prove his love by ranking it with Chian wine. The scale opposite to the good quality of Chian wine was the jar of vinegar. The excellent quality of the Chian wine was also praised by Aristophanes earlier in *Ecclesiazousai*¹³, when the maidservant, addressed to Blepyrus, at the banquet, informed him that there was Chian wine left and lots of other things.

The region Ariousia in Chios (a hilly district in the center of the island) was mentioned by Strabo¹⁴, when he described the voyage around the island, as producing the best of the Greek wines, called Ariousios, taking its name from the region.

⁴ *P.Cair.Zen.* IV 59682.

⁵ *P.Cair.Zen.* I 59110, II. 28-29.

⁶ PSI IV 413, ll. 14-15.

⁷ FRAZER 1972, p. 163.

⁸ BELOCH 1927, p. 345; MEYER 1925, p. 93.

⁹ BAGNALL 1976, p. 168–169.

¹⁰ DREXHAGE 1996, p. 33–41.

¹¹ Philodemus 11.34; G-P21, G. (transl. by GOW & PAGE 1968).

¹² Dionysius 12.108, H3, G. (ed. JACOBY 1885–1905).

¹³ Aristophanes, *Ecclesiazusae* 1139.

¹⁴ Strabo 7.5.9. (transl. by JONES 1924).

Pliny¹⁵ noted that Caesar provided Chian wine at his triumphal banquets. Pliny¹⁶ also discussed the varieties of foreign wines and indicated that the Chian wine held the first rank among wines, and more particularly, the Ariusian, mentioned also by Strabo above¹⁷.

A wine import from Chios to Egypt was recorded in a papyrus dated to 197–198 AD¹⁸. This is the first literary evidence to Chian wine in Egypt or any other region after almost two centuries of silence. It also recorded that the wine was contained in Chian lagynoi, evidence that the local ceramic industry would have continued producing lagynoi jars too for storing and exporting wine during this later period.

In a fictional narrative chapter of Lucian in the 2nd c. AD, in his work *True Stories*¹⁹, in his attempt to focus on the wine production of Chios, he made up a river flowing with Chian wine which could also take boats.

In the novel with the title *The Loves of Cleitophon and Leucippe* of Achilles Tatius²⁰, dated to the 2nd c. AD, the Chian wine was mentioned among the famous wines. This is a novel that took place in Egypt.

Athenaeus from Naucratis in his work *Deipnosophistae* in the early 3rd c. AD described that Ion of Chios, after having gained the tragic crown at Athens, gave a pot of Chian wine to every Athenian citizen²¹. Athenaeus²² also put Theopompus to have said that the Chians were the first, who made black wine and that the Chians were the first people, who imparted the knowledge of planting and tending vines to the rest of mankind, who learnt it from Oenopion, the son of Dionysus, who was the founder of the island of Chios. Furthermore, Athenaeus²³ in the description of wines, described Chian as a nicer wine, and from all Chian wines, the Ariusian was the best. And that there were three varieties of it: a dry kind, a sweet kind, and a kind between the two, the autocratic that was the self-mixed. The dry kind was described as pleasant to the taste, nutritious, and more diuretic than the others. The sweet kind was nutritious, filling, and apt to soften the bowels. The autocratic wine in its effects was something between the two. In general, Chian wine was digestible, nutritious, produced good blood, was mild, and filling. For the wines that had no seawater and were of a more severe nature, for the Chian and Lesbian wine, the purest water was the most suitable. Another kind was the black wine, a variety of red wine that according to Pausanias²⁴ owed its name to Melas, the mythological son of Oinopion²⁵. The Phanaios wine mentioned by Virgil²⁶ was another variety of Chian wine.

¹⁵ Pliny, *NatHist.* 14. 17. (BOSTOCK & RILEY 1855).

¹⁶ Pliny, *NatHist.* 14. 9. 7.

¹⁷ Strabo 14.1. 35 (ed. JONES 1924).

¹⁸ PINTAUDI 1976, p. 37–38.

¹⁹ Lucian, *Ver. Hist.*, 7.9–11.

²⁰ HERCHER 1858.

²¹ Athenaeus, *Deipn.* 1.5.21–22, (transl. by BOHN 1854 and KAIBEL 1887–1890).

²² FGrHist 115 F276.

²³ Athenaeus, *Deipn.* 1.59. (transl. by BOHN 1854 and KAIBEL 1887–1890).

²⁴ Pausanias, *Geogr.*, 7.4.8–10.

²⁵ Athenaeus, *Deipn.* 1.47.26; 1.50.18.

²⁶ Vergilius, *Georg.* 2.98.

Among other products mentioned in ancient literature was the mastic bush, called *pistacia lentiscus var. Chia and pistacia terebinthus*²⁷. A resin was found in an Egyptian grave of the 26th dynasty, 663–525 BC, in El-Matarieh, in Cairo and it was considered as originating from Chios, as well as the resin substance in a vessel from Naucratis in the 6th c. BC²⁸. Roebuck²⁹ supports that the cultivation of mastic and its trade was organized already by the classical period. According to Pliny 450 gr of mastic did cost 19 dinars, while the same quantity in the 3rd c. AD did cost 179 dinars³⁰. Until nowadays the white mastic is good for the stomach and the intestines. There is also a supposition that the excellent quality and highly priced Chian wine might well have contained mastic.

According to Aristotle³¹, Thales from Miletus lent in the 6th c. BC, the olive presses of Chios and Miletus. The Chian olive oil was being exported too³². The content of olive oil is suggested by the transport amphorae that have cup shaped rims and ovoid body, a form that suggests the olive oil content³³.

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²⁷ ZOLOTAS 1921, p. 213, 223

²⁸ YALOURIS 1976, p. 16 and n. 39–40 and 48.

²⁹ ROEBUCK 1986, p. 82, n. 3.

³⁰ YALOURIS 1976, p. 18, n. 44; Pliny, *NatHist* 12. 36. 72.

³¹ Aristotle, *Pol.* 1.11.1259a.

³² ROEBUCK 1986; OPAIṬ & TSARAVOPOULOS 2011, p. 275–323.

³³ OPAIṬ 2007, p. 101–122.

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