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## **CONSUMPTION OF GREEK WINES IN ROMAN ITALY<sup>1</sup>**

There is no doubt that wine was one of the main consumption goods in the Mediterranean during antiquity. It formed a basis of the Mediterranean diet together with cereals and olive oil. Considering that an average Roman adult man drank probably between 0,5-1 litre of wine daily<sup>2</sup>, the production and trade of this beverage must have been significant from the economic point of view. Therefore, the study of the consumption patterns of wine in Roman Italy is an important research field as it sheds light on more general, social, cultural and economic dilemmas that puzzle the scholars.

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<sup>1</sup> This text is the author's summary of the doctoral dissertation that was defended at the Institute of History at the University of Wrocław, on June 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2015. The dissertation was supervised by Prof. Andrzej Łoś with academic advice of Dr. Zofia Archibald.

<sup>2</sup> A. Tchernia, *Le vin de l'Italie romaine. Essai d'histoire économique d'après les amphores*, Roma 1986, pp. 23-26.

The Romans produced wines in Italy, but they also imported them from all over the Mediterranean. It seems, however, that the Greek region provided the most particular beverages. The PhD thesis “Consumption of Greek Wines in Roman Italy” realised within the project “The Eastern Mediterranean from the 4<sup>th</sup> c. BC until Late Antiquity”<sup>3</sup> presents a broad perspective of the consumption of Greek wines in Italy during the Roman age. Its main aim was to answer the question whether this consumption was important from social and economic point of view, or whether Greek wines were wanted and insignificant beverages. The approach to this subject is interdisciplinary, which means that it uses three categories of evidence, these are literary, archaeological and epigraphic. Due to the availability of sources the geographical framework was limited to the central Tyrrhenian part of Italy, mainly Latium and Campania, and to a lesser degree Etruria, whilst the chronological range covers the period from the 3<sup>rd</sup> c. BC to the late 3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD (though the second chapter regards also earlier periods). The term “Greek wines” refers to beverages from the Aegean islands and the western coast of Asia Minor.

The issue of the consumption of imported wines in Rome has not so far been thoroughly investigated. This subject has been partly discussed in “Le vin de l’Italie romaine. Essai d’histoire économique d’après les amphores” by A. Tchernia<sup>4</sup>, which was published in 1986. One chapter of this book was devoted to Aegean wines. However, the main aim of this publication was to present the whole spectrum of wines that were consumed in Italy, as well as the economic implications of the wine trade, which is why the part devoted to Greek beverages is rather a brief description, without developing the matter. Nevertheless, for a long time it was the only study that concentrated on most of Greek wines that were imported to Italy and showed their consumption from an Italian perspective, upon the basis of written and archaeological sources. Other scholars focused on the production of one type of Greek *cru* only, such as Thasian<sup>5</sup> or Cretan<sup>6</sup>, or described certain Aegean wines upon

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<sup>4</sup> Tchernia, *Le vin*, pp. 100-107.

<sup>5</sup> F. Salviat, *Le vin de Thasos, amphores, vin et sources écrites*, [in:] J.-Y. Empereur, Y. Garlan (eds.), *Recherches sur les amphores grecques*, Athènes 1986, pp. 145-195.

<sup>6</sup> A. Marangou-Lerat, *Le vin et les amphores de Crete: de l’époque classique a l’époque imperial* *Le vin et les amphores de Crete: De l’époque classique a l’époque imperiale*, Paris 1995.

the basis of exclusively literary evidence<sup>7</sup>. Moreover, their publications very often resembled short syntheses that presented the subject in an encyclopaedic way without developing it or indeed without drawing any conclusions. There has so far been no comprehensive monograph that considered export of Aegean wines beyond their homeland or tried to estimate the scale of their consumption in Roman Italy, presenting the issue from the Italian perspective with the adoption of an interdisciplinary approach. Therefore, this PhD thesis is the first attempt to discuss this matter and fill the gap.

This dissertation attempted to examine four main issues. First of all, Greek wines that were imported to Italy in the Roman age were identified and the chronological framework of their consumption was presented. Secondly, the characteristics of these wines, such as taste, colour, age, production methods and special (including medical) qualities were described. This was in order to answer the question regarding Roman tastes in Greek wines. Moreover, it was a starting point for a further discussion concerning the scale of the consumption of various Aegean *crus* and their share in the Roman economy. Finally, an attempt has been made to identify specific consumer groups of Greek wines as well as the social position and ethnic origin of those who transported these wines to Italy. These issues were organised in six chapters. The first one is devoted to a description of sources, these are Greek and Latin texts, amphoras and amphora epigraphy, as well as methodological problems regarding their use as evidence. The second chapter presents the origins of viticulture and wine making in Italy, with particular emphasis being placed on the beginnings of the consumption of Greek wines on the Apennine Peninsula. In this part I also examined what kinds of Greek wines (from which regions) were imported to Italy and what the chronology of their consumption was. The third chapter is devoted to the characteristics

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<sup>7</sup> F. Salviat, *Le vin de Rhodes et les plantations du dème d'Amos*, [in:] M.-C. Amouretti, J.-P. Brun (eds.), *La production du vin et de l'huile en Méditerranée* (BCH Suppl. 26), Paris 1993, pp. 151-161; idem, *Vignes et vins anciens de Maronée à Mendé*, [in:] idem, A. Tchernia, *Vins, vigneron et buveurs de l'antiquité*, Rome 2013, pp. 71-100; J.M. García Soler, *El vino griego en las fuentes literarias latinas*, [in:] S. Celestino Pérez (ed.), *El vino en la antigüedad romana: II Simposio Arqueología del Vino, Jerez 1996*, pp. 227-232; idem, *Apuntes para un estudio sobre el vino en la comedia griega*, [in:] J. Maldonado Rosso (ed.), *Actas del I Simposio de la Asociación Internacional de Historia y Civilización de la vid y el vino 1, El Puerto de Santa María 2001*, pp. 257-263; idem, *Los vinos en la comedia griega*, *DUORO: Estudios & documentos* 7 (13), 2002, pp. 49-64; R. Brock, H. Wirtjes, *Athenaeus on Greek wine*, [in:] D. Braund, J. Wilkins (eds.), *Athenaeus and his world: reading Greek culture in the Roman empire*, Exeter 2000, pp. 455-465; A. Dalby, *Food in the ancient world from A to Z*, London-New York 2003; C. Cerchiai, *Nettare di Dioniso. La vite e il vino attraverso le parole degli autori antichi*, Roma 2013; S. Kourakou-Dragona, *La vigne et le vin dans le monde grec ancien*, Athènes 2013.

of these wines in terms of colour, taste, rank (quality), medical applications etc. In this chapter I made an attempt to answer the question: why the Romans imported these particular types? In the subsequent chapter I tried to show the scale of Greek wine consumption in the central Tyrrhenian part of the Apennine Peninsula. I also investigated the chronological and geographical variations concerning their importations. Finally, in Chapter 5, I intended to examine the actual people who dealt with the production, transportation and commerce of Greek wines that were imported to Italy, whereas in the last chapter I checked who actually consumed them.

The analysis of written sources revealed that the Romans imported mainly good quality wines, valued both in terms of their taste and medical properties. Two main groups may be distinguished, namely luxury drinks (such as Chian, Lesbian and Thasian) and mass beverages. The first group includes old wines that had matured for a long time (from several to more than 20 years), probably under the film of yeast (the so called *flor* in Spanish). Therefore, their taste was similar to the modern French *vins jauns* or *vins a voile* or the Spanish sherry of *fino* type. This taste, which is caused by a compound called sotolon, is described as similar to curry or roasted walnuts. These wines (except Thasian for which there is no evidence) had both a sweet and a dry variety, and were prepared without the admixture of seawater. The second category includes white wines from Cos and Rhodes, which were prepared with the use of seawater that was added to the must during the process of fermentation. This admixture helped to preserve weak and watery wines that were made of vines that grew in fertile soils (that had many grapes but these grapes had lower sugar content)<sup>8</sup>. It might have also served for the purpose of clarification of wine, since sodium chloride reduces the solubility of albumins in wine<sup>9</sup>. Among mass beverages there were probably also sweet Cretan raisin-wine called *passum*, as well as wines from Cnidus and the western shores of Asia Minor. Luxury wines were consumed mainly during the republican age – there is no evidence for their consumption after the 1<sup>st</sup> c. AD. Given that they were drunk in rather small quantities and mainly in aristocratic circles, we may conclude that their importation did not contribute significantly to the Roman economy. However, their consumption had significant social meaning, because it was seen as a symbol of prestige, high social status and luxurious way of living. It cannot be excluded that their

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<sup>8</sup> S. Kourakou-Dragona, *La vigne*, pp. 123-134.

<sup>9</sup> A. Tchernia, J.-P. Brun, *Le vin romain antique*, Grenoble 1999, pp. 114.

social significance was associated with the character of foreign wines in Italy in the archaic age – Greek wines reached Italy as an element of the practice of aristocratic gift-giving and were treated as symbols of wealth and prestige by the Etruscan elite. On the other hand, consumption of medium-quality Greek wines during the imperial period reached a massive scale, as indicated by the numbers of amphoras that were discovered in Latium and Campania. One can observe a significant increase in the consumption of these beverages between the late republican and the middle imperial period (from 10% to over 50% of all wines that were transported in amphoras found in Italy). In Rome and Campania Greek wines were the most numerous wine imports from the provinces. What is more, the percentages of Aegean wine containers sometimes even surpassed the percentages of Italian wine amphoras. This means that the Aegean region was very important from an economic perspective, because it was the major wine supplier to Rome and other urban centres of Tyrrhenian Italy. Furthermore, until the 3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD the percentages of Greek wines were considerably higher in Campania than in Rome, whereas in Ostia they were significantly lower. This means that observations made by C. Pavolini for the Flavian age<sup>10</sup>, according to which Ostia received mostly cargoes from the Western Mediterranean, seem right not only for the second half of the 1<sup>st</sup> c. AD, but also for a much longer period. It may be affirmed that throughout the early and middle imperial age Puteoli served as the main port of entry of Greek wines as well as other oriental goods, whereas Ostia specialised in receiving commodities from the western provinces.

Socio-onomastic and prosopographic analyses of names that were attested on Greek wine amphoras suggest that the trading of these wines was mainly in the hands of freedmen. Moreover, it seems that Campanian *negotiatores vinarii* often earned a substantial amount of money. In addition, their association with the municipal elite of Pompeii shows that the trade influenced social dynamics – importations of foreign wines probably facilitated enrichment and promotion in social hierarchy. At the same time, this association shows that the Roman elite (at least at the municipal levels) might have profited from sources other than agriculture and land tenancy. They might have been involved in trade and business, probably through their freedmen. Therefore, the trade in, *inter alia*, Greek wines was a factor that had an impact on socio-economic structures and their changes.

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<sup>10</sup> C. Pavolini, *Mercato ostiense e mercato romano: alcuni contesti ceramici a confronto*, [in:] A. Gallina Zevi, A. Claridge (eds.), *Roman Ostia Revisited*, London 1996, pp. 223-242.

These conclusions allow me for participation in the discussion regarding the character of the ancient Roman economy. For example, the mass importations of Aegean wines during the imperial age may favour the argument put forward by modernists, who claim that trade in antiquity was significant and was not limited to luxury goods. They show that imperial Rome imported huge quantities of staple goods, such as wines (from Crete, Cos, Rhodes) that were consumed by the middle and lower social classes. Considering that the imperial middle classes had access to imported wines, which means the goods that were reserved for the aristocracy during the Republic, we may assume that economic growth may be observed in Italy between the republican age and the 3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD. Moreover, mass scale importations of Greek wines throughout the early and middle imperial age show that many people could afford them and that they were commonly drunk. In addition, Cretan *passum* was particularly sweet, which means that it must have had a high caloric value. Considering that members of the middle and lower strata could easily buy this wine, we may assume that the calorific value of their diet increased when they were able to change, for example, local ordinary wine for sweet imported Cretan *passum*. This means that the overall well-being in Rome might have increased, which may suggest that economic growth had intensive character. Of course, this conclusion can by no means be regarded as a strong evidence for economic growth, *per capita* growth in particular. It simply allows us to see this issue from another perspective. It may be seen as a small piece of a puzzle that helps us to understand the nature of ancient economic growth. Summing up, I may conclude that the consumption of Greek wines in Roman Italy was important both from a social and from an economic perspective. These beverages influenced Roman tastes in wines and their wine production. Their consumption in the republican age was a part of elite self-identification and a determinant of luxury and social prestige. In the imperial period the Aegean region was the most important wine supplier to Roman Tyrrhenian Italy, whereas the trade in Greek wines was a factor that influenced social dynamics, at least in Campania.