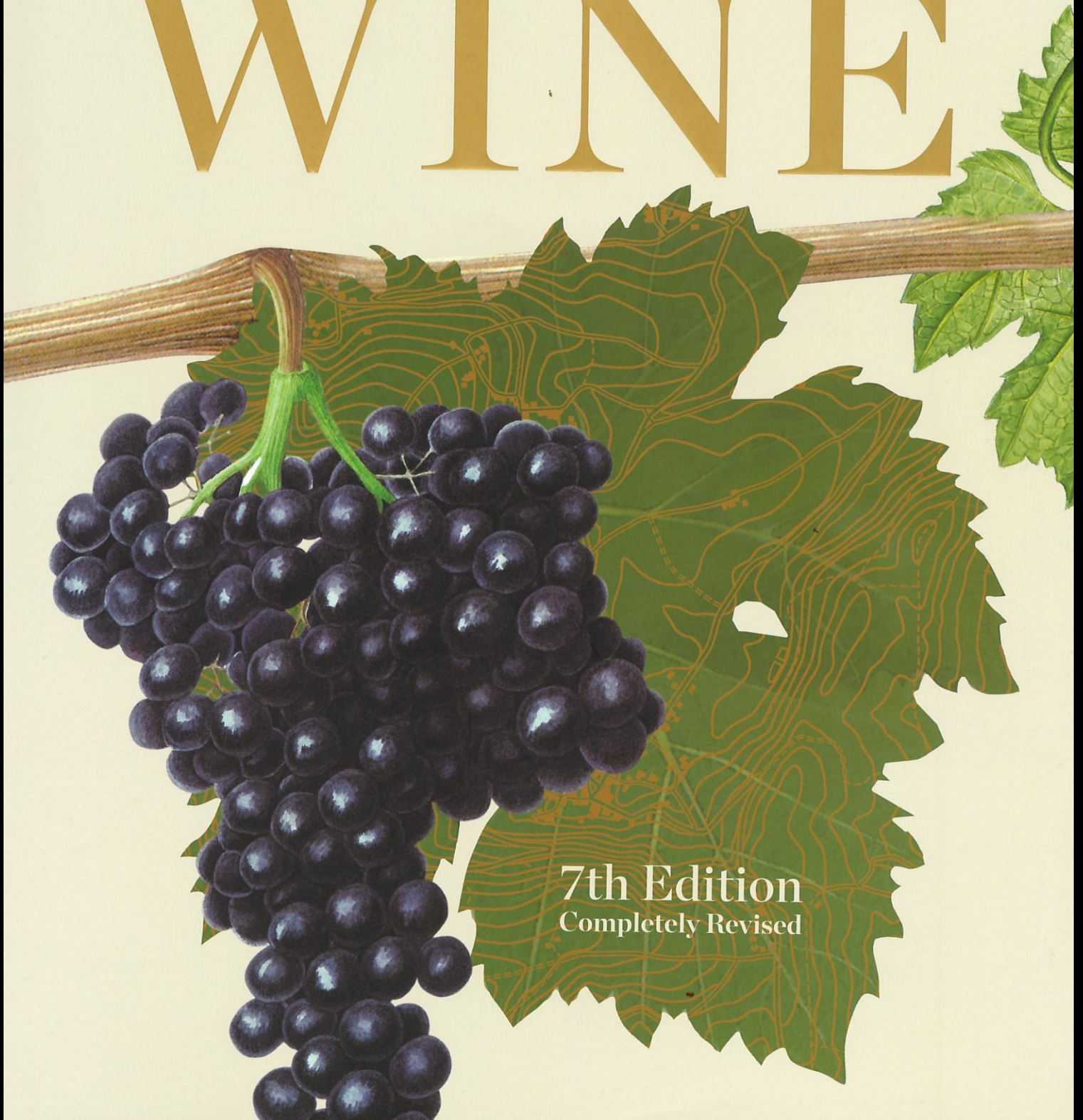


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THE WORLD ATLAS OF WINE



7th Edition
Completely Revised

The Eastern Mediterranean

No matter where wine was first made, there is no doubt that the Middle East is the birthplace of the culture of drinking wine.

Cyprus

Recent archaeological evidence proves that Cyprus was producing wine from at least 3500bc. In the Middle Ages it was acknowledged as producing the best of all sweet wines – the ancestor of Commandaria. The Ottoman Empire ended a great tradition, but EU membership in 2004 has given Cyprus a new chance. In place of the subsidies that used to be paid for exporting vast quantities of nondescript wine in bulk to manufacturers of cheap drinks, more than 6 million euros in EU subsidies have gone on grubbing up the worst vineyards, planting new ones, and establishing winemaking centres in the mountainous interior. The total area of vineyard has shrunk to just over 22,200 acres (9,000ha), mainly on the southern slopes of the Troodos Mountains, where a combination of altitude and valuable precipitation make viticulture possible. The best vineyards lie where the rains fall, in valleys at heights of 1,980–4,950ft (600–1,500m).

The old clear distinction among the four big wineries and about 50 boutique wineries has now become blurred, with the only really large enterprise being the grower-owned SODAP co-operative, whose wines are now reliable and cheap. The other producers have changed focus from quantity towards quality, too, and today the best producers (such as Vlassides, Zambartas, Vasa, Kyperounda, Hadjiantonas, Tsiakkas, and Fikardos) are making genuinely exciting wines from their own vineyards.

Cyprus has never been invaded by phylloxera, and its ungrafted vines are still protected by strict quarantine, which has slowed the introduction of international varieties. Even now, almost half of the island's wine-grape vineyards are planted

with the indigenous and rather unexciting grape Mavro, so common that its name simply means "black". The local Xynisteri, planted on a further quarter of the total, can make reasonably delicate whites, and some ambitious ones from the highest vineyards. Shiraz has overtaken Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, and Carignan as the most significant incomer for red wine, having proved especially well-suited to the island's hot, dry terrain. The indigenous Maratheftiko is making quite impressive reds from better-managed vineyards, while tannic Lefkada can add a touch of local spice to blends.

Still the most individual of Cyprus wines is the liquorous Commandaria, made of raisined Mavro and Xynisteri grapes, grown in 14 designated villages on the lower slopes of the Troodos Mountains. Commandaria, which must be aged in oak for at least two years, can be simply sticky, or almost alarmingly concentrated, with four times as much sugar as port. The best have a haunting, fresh grapiness that explains their ancient reputation.

Lebanon

For now, however, the modern Lebanese wine industry is much better known abroad than that of Cyprus. If pressed to name an Eastern Mediterranean wine, many drinkers would cite Chateau Musar of Lebanon which, war notwithstanding, somehow continued to produce dry-farmed Cabernet Sauvignon, Cinsault, and Carignan blended into an extraordinarily aromatic red – like exotic Bordeaux, long-aged before sale and capable of ageing for decades after. Musar, however, is an anomaly. The majority of Lebanese wines are powerful (perhaps too much so for some tastes), concentrated, and just what you would expect from a hot, dry country whose vines are virtually disease-free and which has around 300 days of sunshine a year.

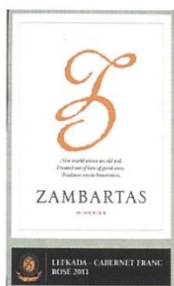
In 1990, there were three wine producers in Lebanon, but by 2012 there were more than 40, most making no more than 50,000 bottles a year. Châteaux Kefraya and Ksara are by far the biggest producers.

In the absence of indigenous red wine grapes, Lebanese producers have embraced foreign varieties, especially those from Bordeaux and the Rhône, but also from the warmer Mediterranean areas. Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and Syrah may have been fashionable, but there is a gradual realization that drier-climate grapes such as Cinsault, Carignan, Grenache, and Mourvèdre (and to a lesser extent Tempranillo) might provide a more authentic expression of Lebanon's formidable and varied terroirs.

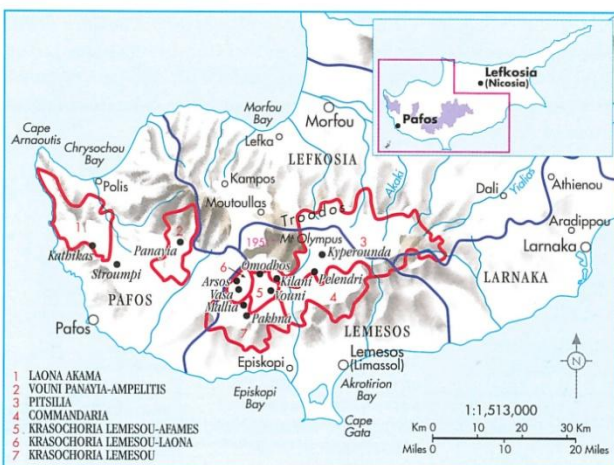
The Bekaa Valley is still the epicentre of the modern industry, with the majority of the vineyards in the western Bekaa towns of Qab Elias, Aana, Amiq, Kefraya, Mansoura, Deir El Ahmar, and Khirbit Qanafar. There are also vineyards in the hills above Zahlé, where altitudes of around 3,280ft (1,000m) help to produce fresh wines not spoiled by sun-baked flavours, as well as in the more arid regions of Baalbek (home to the famous Temple of Bacchus) and Hermel. Massaya (set up by an impressive triumvirate from Bordeaux and the Rhône), Domaine Wardy, and Château St Thomas are all serious, second-generation enterprises. They have been joined by a resurgent Domaines des Tourelles (it was founded in 1868 but fell into decline during the war), as well as the newer Chateau Khoury, Domaine de Baal, and Château Marsyas.

Israel

Across the much-disputed border, Israel is the other seat of wine revolution in this part of the world. Plantings have been so enthusiastic that Israel now has 13,600 acres (5,500ha) of wine grapes, to Lebanon's 7,400 acres (3,000ha) and

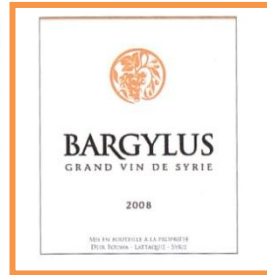
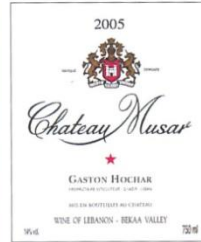
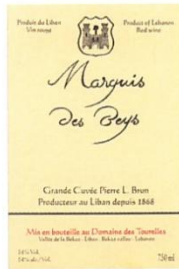
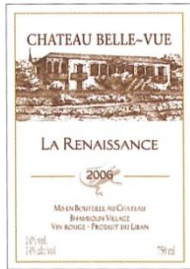
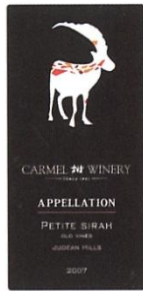
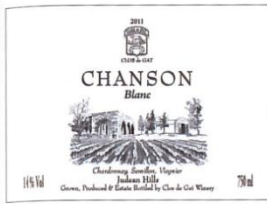


Evidence of Cyprus' progress as a wine producer. Zambartas' rather fine rosé is a blend of Lefkada and Cabernet Franc, while Kyperounda's Petritis, the label on the right, is the island's best Xynisteri.



CYPRUS

To satisfy EU requirements, a controlled appellation scheme has been developed, although it has so far been little used. Wines carrying the name of one of the four PGI regions – Pafos, Lemesos, Larnaka, and Lefkosia – account for nearly half of production.



The finest wine produced in the Eastern Mediterranean is arguably the most surprising: Barygus, a blend of Cabernet, Merlot, and Syrah grown near the ancient Roman city of Antioch in Syria by the Saade brothers, who also make wine in their native Lebanon. On the left above are two of Israel's best; the rest are Lebanese.

exports far more, largely to satisfy world demand for kosher wine. Sweet red kiddush wines were for years the standard output of the original co-operative wineries of Carmel at Rishon LeZiyyon and Zikhron Ya'aqov in the coastal regions of Samson and Shomron, a gift to Israel from Baron Edmond de Rothschild. They have recently reduced production considerably in their search for quality, and have been planting better-designed vineyards, especially in the Upper Galilee.

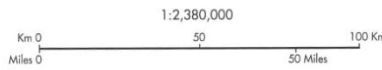
It was the late-1970s planting on the volcanic soils of the Golan Heights, from 1,300ft (400m) above the Sea of Galilee up to 4,000ft (1,200m) towards Mount Hermon, that signalled a new direction. There are now considerable vine plantings at these altitudes, not just in the Golan Heights but in the scenic foothills of Mount Meron, on the Lebanese border (just south of the Bekaa Valley) in Upper Galilee and on the shallow calcareous soils of the Judean Hills west of Jerusalem.

A wine culture is now well and truly established in Israel – a culture that celebrates Israeli wine rather than solely kosher wine – complete with wine magazines, international wine lists in restaurants, recognized wine regions, and scores of small but ambitious new wineries. Castel, Clos de Gat, and Flam are in the cool Mediterranean climate of the Judean Hills near Jerusalem, Margalit is in the Sharon Plain, and Yatir has to fend off grape-scoffing camels in the northern Negev.

The three leading wineries are supporting the wine-quality revolution by diligent vineyard site selection and by investment in technology. Israeli farming prowess and determination is good at coaxing wine from challenging environments that will stand international comparison. Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Chardonnay, and Sauvignon Blanc are clearly at home but, as in Cyprus, Shiraz is challenging Cabernet as the most popular red wine grape. Cabernet Franc shows promise, but for many the old Carignan and Petite Sirah bush-vines are most characteristically Israeli.

ISRAEL AND LEBANON

Lebanese viticulture is no longer restricted to the crowded Bekaa Valley (see Batroun), and at least five very distinct wine regions have emerged in modern Israel where the improvement in wine quality has been nothing short of miraculous. Many of the better producers choose not to make kosher wine.



- Batroun
- Bekaa Valley
- Galilee
- Shomron
- Samson
- Judean Hills
- Negev
- International boundary
- Notable producer
- Land above 1000 metres

