



The wine in Athenian Mythology

V o u l a L a m b r o p o u l o u

Greek Mythology is extremely wealthy as far as Dionysus' arrival in Greece is concerned. As it is well-known, Dionysus, God of wine, brought Greeks the vineyard and the wine. He taught them how to cultivate the vines and how to produce wine, how to maintain it and how to drink it.

In Attica, and especially in Athens, the first vine-grower and wine-maker was the hero named Athenaios Ikarios or Ikaros or Ikarion. According to mythology, Ikaros, feeling great willingness, offered hospitality to Dionysus, when so exhausted and foreigner arrived in Athens after having an adventurous voyage over sea and land, confronting piratical ships and other obstacles. God Dionysus rewarded him for his hospitality and taught him the wine production.

After taking God's advice, Ikarios, boarded on a chariot and accompanied by his faithful dog named Maira, was wondering in Attica in order to teach vine cultivation, while at the same time he was distributing at everyone- as a valuable present from God- the wine he had in skinbags. Beyond Athens, he met some shepherds and other peasants, who in a pleasure way, drank Dionysus' gift, but they got intoxicated and felt asleep.

His comrades, thought, suspected that Ikarios poisoned them and after attacking him with clubs, they killed him. Then, they threw his inanimate body in a well, which was situated under a tree.

After that, the faithful dog returned to its proprietor's home. When Ikarios' daughter, Erigone, saw that the dog came back home alone, suspected that something bad happened to her father, with her eyes full in tears and so much pain in

her soul. With the faithful dog's guidance she found her father's grave easily because when they reached the well, Maira started barking in a mournful way. Erigone's sorrow was so unbearable that she hung herself on the tree, which was next to the well. Before that she had cursed every woman in Athens to put an end to their life at the same way as Erigone did.

One of the biggest municipalities of Athens- Ikaria- took its name from Ikarios but according to other people's opinion Ikaria's first king was Ikarios and princess was Erigone.

Erigone's curse became truth. Every Athenian's daughters hung themselves on trees. Athenians, feeling anxiety and pain, begged Apollon to exempt them from this calamity and received from him an oracle, to propitiate goddess Erigone. In this way, Athenians established a celebration, the one of 'Aiora'. The feast, even the song they were singing during the festivity, was called 'Aletis', because while Erigone was searching for her father, she had already been roamed all over Attica, and that was the reason Erigone was named as 'Aletis'.

During the celebration, young women holding ropes, were constructing swings, they were binding them on the trees and were waving themselves. This custom is being maintained up today in many provinces of Greece. On April 23, at St. Georgios' name day, in the heart of spring, young girls hang swings on the trees and wave themselves while singing a wonderful spring song, which is related with fertility, crop and the light dressing of women.

Erigone symbolizes the young grape, which is born in spring. Maira is the constellation of dog, named Sirios. In spring, vine gives birth to grapes. While grapes grow up, swing on the tree by which it was born, while the burning rays of summer sun help it develop and mature.

The meaning of all these simple ideas may not have been well-known posteriorly, when the residents of the municipality of Ikaria, during the Aiora fest, were attaching to the branches of the trees idols made of aluminium or wax, which were swinging towards the winds blowing.

According to another myth, all these happened during Kekrops' – god of Earth-reign. According to Pausanias' – Geographer of 3rd century A.D. – opinion, Kekrops is regarded as the creator of Attic culture because he built on Acropole's rock, the city which was called Kekropia due to his name. Residents named it 'Kekropidaes'. This was the place at which Zeus and Polias Athena's worship was taking place. According to myth, Kekrops was the witness and arbitrator at the affair of the quarrel between Athena and Poseidon, at which Athena was the winner and the reason why the city was named 'Athens'. This story is pictured on the west pediment of Parthenon.



It didn't take much time for the cultivation of vineyard to spread all over Attica and all its municipalities. The wine was accompanying every celebration and banquets of Athenians. Both in good and in bad times, in funfairs, in weddings wine's presence was indispensable. Philology describes in detail its usage. In great festivities, such as Thesmophoria, one day was dedicated to the opening of 'pythos', that is the big ceramic vessel, in which wine was being protected all year. That day was called 'Pythigia'. Archaeology has dug up thousands utensils of wine, jugs and glasses.

Wine in Attica was always being consumed mixed with water, was being served, as said, with specific jugs, which thousands of them were found during excavations.

Wine was inseparable from sacrifices and rites of Athenians and from worship of Olympos' Gods it is inseparable from Christian – everyone knows that we receive Holy Communication with wine and bread, which symbolizes the blood and body of Jesus. That is the reason why many modern Greek poets name Jesus Christ as Dionysus. Attic tragedy, and especially Euripides' tragedies, sing Dionysus' arrival in Attica and many Athenians become his fans.



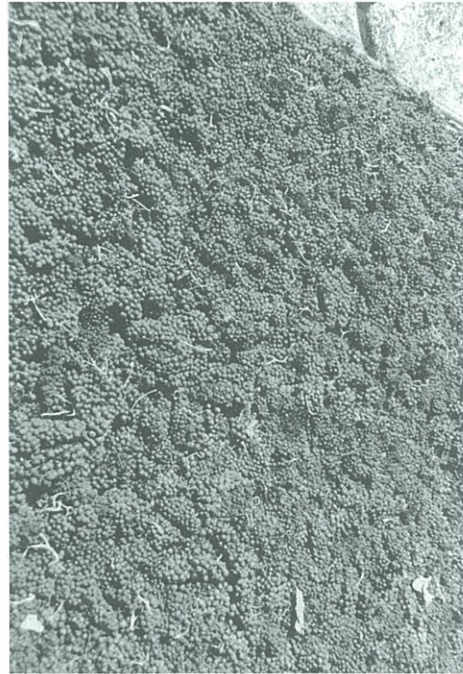
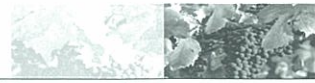
Dionysus is being born through Zeus thigh .His mother, Semeli, welcomes him. Italiotic crater in Tarantas. National Museum. Detail from pottery.



The photograph depicts the place, where Nestor, king of Pylos, had his vineyards. Thousands of glasses and 'pythi' for wine, were found at the stores of his Palace.



Grapes are hung out on the threshing-floor in order to dry up and become raisin (Egrianos, Palace of Nestor, Pylos)



Grape-harvest in Eglianos nowadays. There must be no difference between today and the Mycenaean era, at exactly the same place and way.

