

MOUNT ATHOS WINES

Shaping the Vine & Distinctive Wines



ΕΠΕΝΔΥΣΗ ΣΥΓΧΡΗΜΑΤΟΔΟΤΟΥΜΕΝΗ
ΑΠΟ ΤΗΝ ΕΥΡΩΠΑΪΚΗ ΕΝΩΣΗ ΚΑΙ ΑΠΟ ΤΗΝ ΕΛΛΑΔΑ
PROJECT CO-FINANCED
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PGI MOUNT ATHOS
ΠΓΕ ΑΓΙΟ ΟΡΟΣ



CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Athos peninsula is the easternmost of Halkidiki's three peninsulas, in Central Macedonia. It extends for about 50 km into the Aegean Sea, with a width of approximately 7-12 km and an area of about 330 km². South of its northern boundary lies the territory of the Autonomous Monastic State of Mount Athos. The landscape is mountainous, with steep forested slopes; the pyramidal summit of Mount Athos rises to 2,033 m.

Greek mythology recounts two different versions regarding the origin of Mount Athos. Both are connected to the legendary "Gigantomachy," the battle between the Giants and the Olympian gods. According to the first version, the giant Athos threw a massive rock at Poseidon, which missed its target and fell into the Aegean Sea, forming the Athonite mountain mass. In the second version, Poseidon used the mountain as a burial site for the defeated giant.

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

In ancient times, there are many references to Mount Athos in texts by authors such as Homer in the Iliad, Herodotus, and Strabo (a Greek geographer). The peninsula lay along the invasion route of Xerxes of Persia around 438 BC. After the death of Alexander, the Great, the architect Deinocrates even proposed that the entire mountain be carved into the likeness of Alexander.

The Christian era is the period that left an indelible mark on Mount Athos, transforming the area into a spiritual and religious center — the largest monastic community of Orthodox Christianity.

It is said that during her journey with John to meet Lazarus in Cyprus, the

Virgin Mary was caught in a storm that forced them to stop at Mount Athos, at the location where the Iviron Monastery now stands. The Virgin admired the beauty of the place and asked God to offer her the Athonite Peninsula as a gift. A voice replied: "Let this place be your inheritance and your garden — a paradise and a haven of salvation for those seeking salvation." Since then, Mount Athos has also been known as the "Garden of the Virgin Mary," where the rule of Avaton applies, and entrance is forbidden to women.

It is estimated that the first ascetic monks arrived at Mount Athos during the 3rd or 4th century AD. There is no precise date

for their arrival, as no historical records exist before 321 AD. Certainly, there were Christians in the broader area, but no references to monks or monasteries appear in the numerous imperial or patriarchal documents of the time. In the 5th and 6th centuries, according to Stephanus of Byzantium, cities such as Stratonikeia, Dion, Acanthus, Apollonia, Sani, etc., flourished, and there was a growing inclination among people to embrace clerical and monastic life.

More information becomes available after the Islamic conquest of Egypt (641 AD), when many Orthodox monks from Egypt set out in search of new places, among them Mount Athos.

It is believed that around 680 AD, after the Sixth Ecumenical Council under Emperor Constantine IV, which regulated matters concerning clergy, monks, and hermits, the first monasteries were founded.

During the period of Iconoclasm, Mount Athos served as a refuge for persecuted monks. Officially, Mount Athos entered historical records and was recognized as a notable center of asceticism during the Council of 843, convened by Empress Theodora for the restoration of icons, as some historians claim that monks from Athos were present at the Council.

From the 9th century onwards, large tracts of land were granted to monastic institutions through imperial chrysobulls (decrees sealed with gold), and Mount Athos was officially established as a monastic state. Its right to administrative self-governance was recognized, and in 908, the

mountain's independence from monastic communities outside the peninsula was formally acknowledged.

Historical memory preserves two key figures among the earliest representatives of monastic life on Mount Athos: Peter the Athonite (around 680), who represents hermitic monasticism, and Euthymios of Thessaloniki (around 860), who is associated with communal (or *lavra*-type) asceticism. The communal monastic system coincides with the Macedonian dynasty, with its first promoter being John Kolovos, a disciple of Euthymios of Thessaloniki.

Athonite monasticism began to develop by progressing through three stages—hermitic, communal, and cenobitic—within a short period. The first hermit monks initially settled at the beginning of the peninsula, but due to frequent pirate raids, they gradually moved to more remote and inaccessible areas.

Reforms on Mount Athos were implemented by Athanasios the Athonite, who, with the support of Nikephoros Phokas, founded the Monastery of Great Lavra. From the beginning, the institution was organized as a monastic brotherhood following the model of major cenobitic monasteries, which Athanasios had learned from his spiritual father, Michael Maleinos. It was not a monastery in the traditional sense, as it housed many monks and a complex of buildings, nor was it a *lavra*, as it was not a loosely organized group of hermits in scattered huts. In size, it resembled a *lavra*, but in its form of life, it was a monastery—



hence the name “Great Lavra.”

With the experience he had gained in managing the monks, in 970 Athanasios drafted the monastery’s final rule (typikon), based on the ascetic regulations of Saint Basil the Great, but in a reformed version.

In his biography, Saint Athanasios the Athonite writes about the monks that “... they built wooden huts with thatched roofs... and by gathering fruits from wild trees, they managed to find their food...”

However, followers of a stricter monastic lifestyle opposed these reforms and requested intervention from Emperor John Tzimiskes. The dispute was settled through the First Typikon of Mount Athos, known as the

Tragos, drafted by Athanasios and ratified by Tzimiskes. The First Typikon regulates the operation and responsibilities of the central administration of Mount Athos, defines the relations between the monks and the administration, and determines the relationships among the different categories of monks. It recognizes the superiority of the cenobitic system as the preferred method of ascetic life on Athos.

In 1046, the Second Typikon was signed by Constantine IX Monomachos, regulating the internal governance of the monasteries, the management of their properties, and their commercial activities.

The interest of the Byzantine emperors in the



monastic community of Mount Athos was evident through continuous donations and state subsidies. These revenues contributed to the acquisition of land in Central and the wider region of Macedonia.

During the following centuries, the Athonite community went through both periods of prosperity and times of turmoil.

In 1204, Latin Crusaders tortured and killed monks and destroyed several monasteries. Similar devastation occurred in the 14th century, during the raids of Catalan mercenaries, who destroyed many monasteries and looted their treasures.

Most of the material wealth of the monasteries was acquired during the Palaiologos dynasty (1261–1453), as well as from Slavic princes and rulers of the Balkan Peninsula.

During the Ottoman period, the monks pledged allegiance to Sultan Murad II, who acknowledged their previous imperial privileges. This ensured a period of prosperity up to the 16th century. However, later on, due to heavy taxation imposed by the Ottomans, the financial situation became so dire that the monks could no longer afford to live there, and Mount Athos was nearly abandoned.

In 1749, while the monasteries were in poor financial condition, the Athoniada Academy was founded at Vatopedi, with the aim of promoting Greek education. The Academy gained significant reputation during the tenure of Eugenios Voulgaris as its director. However, after his resignation, it fell into decline. Its operation was suspended in 1821

but was later re-established.

With the outbreak of the 1821 Revolution, the monks overcame their hesitation and took part in the uprising. Mount Athos functioned as a refuge where many families sought shelter, while the monasteries contributed to the struggle with money, food, and munitions. However, the suppression of the revolution in the region led to one of its greatest devastations. Monks and women with children who had found refuge there were massacred, treasures were looted, and monasteries were destroyed. The hardships of the Athonite monks ended nine years later, in 1830, when a firman ordered the withdrawal of Turkish troops from the Athos peninsula.

The autonomous status of Mount Athos was recognized internationally for the first time even before the recognition of the sovereignty of the Greek state over Halkidiki. This occurred with the Treaty of Berlin in 1878, where Article 62 of the treaty established general principles regarding religious and national minorities, as well as the protection of Mount Athos and its privileges.

Mount Athos was liberated in 1912 by the Hellenic Royal Navy during the First Balkan War.

In 1926, the Greek state ratified the Constitutional Charter of Mount Athos, which came into force in 1927 under the new Constitution, officially confirming the constitutional protection of Mount Athos's autonomous status.

With the outbreak of the Greco-Italian



War, the monasteries offered support to the Greek army. However, with the German advance, the monks began hiding relics in catacombs and smuggling out monks who had taken part in resistance activities. When the first German forces arrived, members of the Holy Community requested protection for Mount Athos from a possible Bulgarian occupation. On April 26, 1941, the Holy Community sent a letter to the German authorities, who promptly responded that Mount Athos was under German protection. Although no permanent military presence was established, there were still investigations and interrogations in response to allegations of sheltering partisans, British soldiers, or weapons.

From 1941, visits by German officers and scholars to study and photograph documents and manuscripts of the Monasteries caused concern. These missions were organized by the Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg (ERR), a group dedicated to appropriating cultural property during World War II. In 1943, an attempt was made to steal treasures, but it ultimately failed.

CHAPTER 2

CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

The monasteries of Mount Athos are living monuments of Byzantine and post-Byzantine art, containing priceless works of iconography, architecture, manuscripts, and relics.

- *They preserved and developed the Byzantine tradition in theology, literature, music, and the visual arts, functioning as workshops of culture and spirituality.*
- *The founding of the Athoniada School in 1748 contributed to the dissemination of philosophical and theological education throughout the Greek world.*
- *The spiritual influence of Mount Athos deeply impacted the Orthodox tradition in the Balkans, Russia, and Ukraine, where many monks transmitted the Athonite spirit, founding monasteries and strengthening local religious and cultural identity.*
- *Mount Athos is considered the “Garden of the Virgin Mary,” a title that grants it a special place in the religious consciousness of Orthodox Christians.*

TODAY

Mount Athos is composed of 20 Holy Monasteries, which are:

The Holy Monastery of Great Lavra, the Holy Monastery of Vatopedi, the Holy Monastery of Iviron, the Holy Monastery of Hilandar, the Holy Monastery of Dionysiou, the Holy Monastery of Koutloumousiou, the Holy Monastery of Pantokratoros, the Holy Monastery of Xeropotamou, the Holy Monastery of Zografou, the Holy Monastery of Docheiariou, the Holy Monastery of Karakallou, the Holy Monastery of Philotheou, the Holy Monastery of Simonos Petra, the Holy Monastery of Saint Paul, the Holy Monastery of Stavronikita, the Holy Monastery of Xenophontos, the Holy Monastery of Gregoriou, the Holy Monastery of Esphigmenou, the Holy Monastery of Saint Panteleimon, and the Holy Monastery of Konstamonitou.

Twelve Sketes (hermit communities) belong to the Monasteries of Mount Athos. These are:

- *The Dormition of the Theotokos (Bogoroditsa) (Holy Monastery of Saint Panteleimon)*
- *Prophet Elijah (Holy Monastery of Pantokrator)*
- *Saint John the Baptist (Holy Monastery of Great Lavra)*
- *Saint Andrew (Holy Monastery of Vatopedi)*
- *Saint Anne (Holy Monastery of Great Lavra)*
- *Holy Trinity (Kafsokalyvia) (Holy Monastery of Great Lavra)*
- *Saint Demetrios (Holy Monastery of Vatopedi)*
- *Saint John the Baptist (Holy Monastery of Iviron)*
- *Saint Panteleimon (Holy Monastery of Koutloumousiou)*
- *Theotokos (New Skete) (Holy Monastery of Saint Paul)*
- *Saint Demetrios (Lakkos) (Holy Monastery of Saint Paul)*
- *Annunciation of the Theotokos (Holy Monastery of Xenophontos)*

There are also about 700 “Kalyvæ” (cells), as well as huts, “kathismata” (hermit dwellings), and retreats, which are dependent on the monasteries.

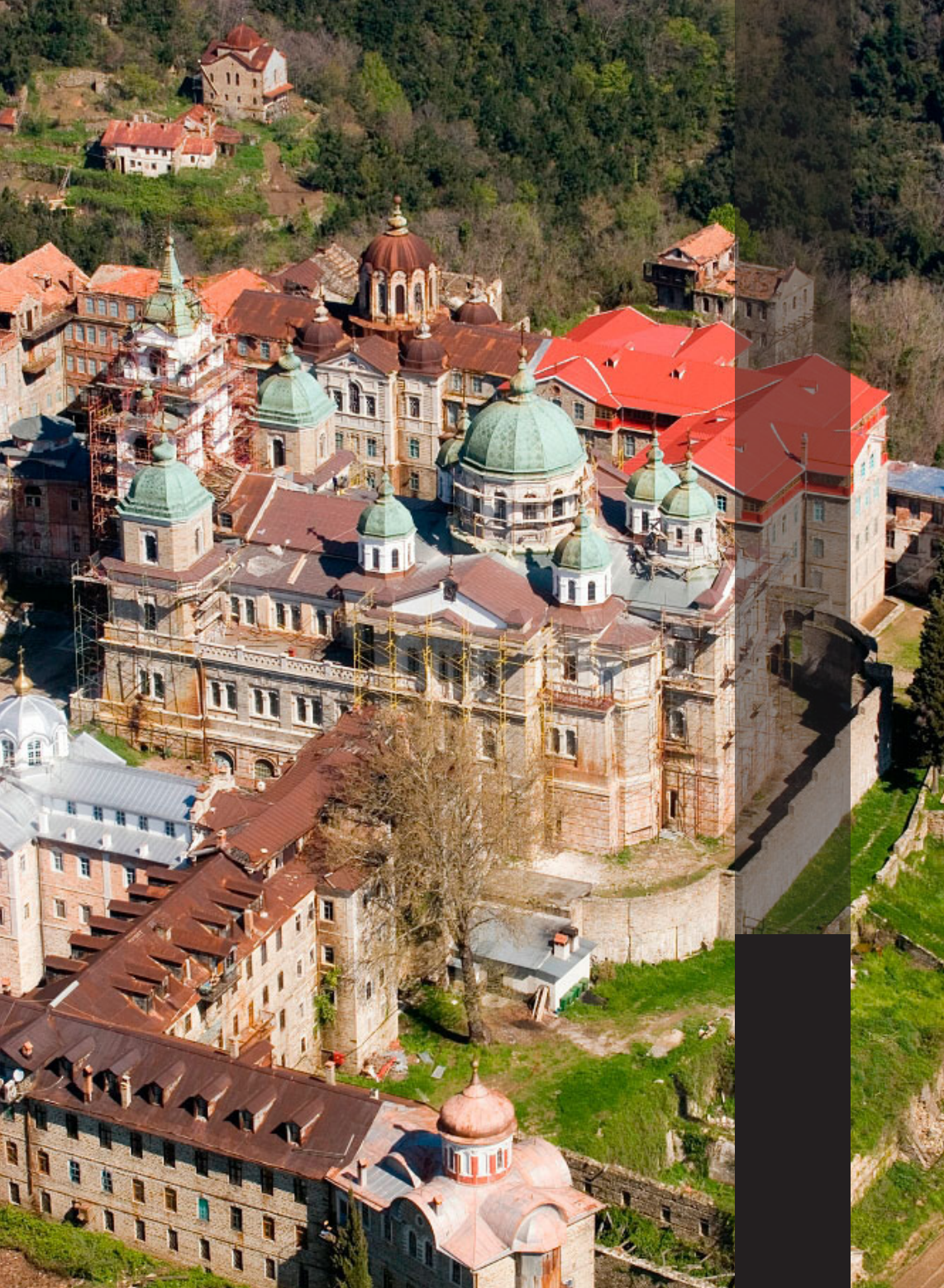
Mount Athos is governed by a special legal regime secured by constitutional provisions, international treaties, European Union law, and the Charter of Mount Athos, which organizes the administrative structure of the region.

The Athonite peninsula is divided among the 20 Holy Monasteries, and its land is inalienable.

The political administration of Mount Athos falls under the jurisdiction of the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs and consists of the Governor of Mount Athos, the Deputy Governor, and their staff.

The autonomy of Mount Athos is exercised through representatives from the 20 Holy Monasteries, forming the Holy Community with an executive body known as the Holy Epistasia. (The 20 monasteries are grouped into five tetrads; each tetrad assumes the Holy Epistasia on a rotating basis for one year every five years. The four “Epistates” (stewards) reside permanently in Karyes and implement the Holy Community’s decisions.)

The Holy Synaxis, in which the abbots of the 20 monasteries participate, is the highest legislative and judicial body of Mount Athos.





For urgent or critical matters, the Extraordinary Double Holy Synaxis is convened, consisting of the 20 abbots and the 20 representatives of the Holy Community.

The population of Mount Athos is approximately 1,800 monks. Entry is only permitted with a special permit called a “Diamonitirion,” issued by pilgrim offices of the Holy Epistasia in Thessaloniki and Ouranoupoli, Halkidiki.

Access to Mount Athos is exclusively by boat.

Since 1988, Mount Athos has been included among UNESCO World

Heritage Sites due to its unique global value. As stated on the official UNESCO website, it is “a vast repository of historical, artistic, and cultural heritage preserved by a monastic community for 12 centuries and constituting a living archive of activities.” At the same time, the area maintains rich flora and fauna thanks to careful forest management and the application of traditional agricultural practices. Due to its biodiversity, the Athonite Peninsula is also part of the European Natura 2000 Network.

ENVIRONMENT

The rich vegetation of Mount Athos (plants belonging to more than 500 genera and 96 families) is due to geographic isolation and, apart from favorable climatic and geographic conditions to the absence of goats and sheep, which prevented erosion and allowed dense forests to flourish.

Geologically, the Athonite Peninsula is a continuation of the Rhodope massif, dominated by metamorphic and crystalline schist rocks (gneisses, greenstones, limestones, crystalline limestones—marbles) and igneous rocks (granites, granodiorites, and ophiolites).

Morphologically, the region is defined by steep coastal slopes, intense folding, and the prominent Mount Athos, which rises abruptly in a pyramidal shape to 2,033 meters. This rugged relief, combined with steep coastal cliffs and southern marine currents, shapes the climate of the peninsula.

According to meteorological data, the climate of Mount Athos ranges from a coastal Mediterranean climate in low altitudes to a continental humid climate in higher elevations. The transitional Mediterranean climate of the area is characterized by mild winters and cool summers. Both the lowland and mountainous microclimates are marked by the absence of dangerous frosts or extreme heat.

The hottest months are July and August, with average daily highs around 31°C. The coldest months are January and February,

with average daytime temperatures around 8°C, but without extreme cold, since average nighttime lows remain above 0°C. Annual rainfall varies from 470 mm in lower areas to 850 mm in the mountains, with the highest rainfall occurring between October and April.

Winds in the region are mainly from the north and northeast, while southerly winds are more frequent in summer. The climate of Halkidiki is considered exceptional: although it lies in northern Greece, its long Aegean coastline (630 km) places it on the same isothermal lines for minimum and maximum temperatures as more southern regions like Messinia, Aetolia-Acarnania, and Attica.

CHAPTER 3

THE WINEMAKING TRADITION OF MOUNT ATHOS

The roots of viticulture on Mount Athos can be traced back to antiquity, as described in ancient texts. The region of Halkidiki likely produced some of the most renowned wines of ancient Greece, particularly in the historic cities of Mende, Aphytis, Akanthos, and Skione. During the Peloponnesian War, according to Thucydides, during the siege of Akanthos, the locals chose to ally with the Spartans rather than lose their grape harvest—their most precious asset.

In Stageira, Aristotle's birthplace, he planted the first model vineyard, and his student, the philosopher Theophrastus, recorded various observations about viticulture.

In many regions of Halkidiki, place names and marble wine presses are evidence of long-standing winemaking activity.

Saint Athanasios the Athonite mentions in his Typikon (monastic charter) that vineyards existed in the area even before his arrival.

Throughout the life of the monastic community, nearly every monastery has had a tradition of viticulture and its own wine-making facilities. This highlights the activity's importance and its close relationship with the monks' lifestyle—perhaps their only luxury. Wine plays a central role in monastic liturgy, is a staple of their diet, and has historically been used for its therapeutic properties (e.g., as an antiseptic or to relieve coughs).

Wine trade was so significant that it formed a dedicated section in the first Typikon of Mount Athos, known as the "Tragos." Rule 15 focused specifically on wine and offered guidance on the matter. The charter imposed restrictions on wine commerce and transactions. According to its regulations, selling wine outside Mount Athos (beyond the river Zygos) was forbidden. However, selling wine to laypeople visiting the Athonite peninsula was allowed, enabling monks to meet their livelihood needs. Disputes among monasteries and between monasteries and laymen continued, underscoring the economic value of vineyards.

In some monasteries, vineyard cultivation gradually evolved into a profitable economic activity. During the Byzantine period, the Athonite monasteries managed many vineyards in Eastern Macedonia and Halkidiki, developing businesses that bought and resold regional wine in markets as far as Constantinople. The wine production per monastery was estimated

at 8 to 10 tons annually.

This uncontrolled commercial activity was eventually curtailed by Emperor Basil II the Bulgar Slayer. Later, the Typikon of Emperor Constantine IX Monomachos tried to strike a balance by allowing the monasteries to own small vessels with which they could sell their own wine—as well as that of other Halkidiki producers—as far as Thrace, but not Constantinople.

During the Ottoman period, the monks, by declaring submission to the Sultan, managed to preserve monastery ownership. For viticulture, taxation applied only to the produce and not the land itself. Despite the various hardships faced over time, the monks continued to cultivate vineyards and produce wine. However, from the 16th century onward, the situation deteriorated: increased taxation led to major financial difficulties, indebted monasteries, and a reduced monastic population.

By the 18th century, Mount Athos remained under heavy taxation, with significantly reduced wine production.

At the start of the 19th century, a brief period of prosperity emerged at Mount Athos, which was interrupted by the Greek War of Independence in 1821. Wine production dropped considerably due to a lack of manpower and uncultivated land.

By the mid-19th century, conditions began to improve. With the founding of the modern Greek state in 1830—and although Mount Athos remained under Ottoman rule—monasteries began receiving assistance





and restoration efforts commenced. Concurrently, Ottoman reforms aimed at improving living conditions across the empire also fostered economic growth. Wine and tsipouro (pomace brandy) production on Mount Athos rebounded, and commercial activity intensified.

The 20th century began with Mount Athos' vineyards in full production. However, disaster struck with the arrival of phylloxera, the vine pest that ravaged European vineyards. Combined with other challenges, phylloxera led to the near-total abandonment of vineyards on the peninsula, declining wine volumes, and deteriorating quality. By 1980, with the arrival of a new generation of monks, Mount Athos began a revival of its vineyards, initiating systematic replanting and cultivation efforts.

Mount Athos was historically a nursery for indigenous Greek grape varieties such as Limnio, Fokiano, Roditis, and Muscat of Alexandria. A shift in varietal composition occurred after the phylloxera outbreak around 1925.

In addition to robust red wines, monks produced dessert wines from sun-dried grapes and fortified wines (liqueur wines), which were reserved for special occasions and significant Orthodox religious celebrations.

The development of the vineyards on Mount Athos was largely unplanned, evolving according to monastic needs and knowledge. Key characteristics of the Athonite vineyard include the region's isolation—surrounded by dense forests (chestnut, coniferous trees)

and the sea—and the monastic way of life, which demands respect for nature and its resources. As a result, only traditional farming practices are applied across the peninsula, making Athos one of the most authentic examples of organic cultivation.

Regarding grape pressing, the method remained unchanged through the centuries. The grapes were transported in baskets to wooden tubs where the first crushing took place. These tubs were then moved to paravoutes—large wooden barrels—where the must was collected and further pressed by foot. The must was then transferred to barrels for fermentation: for white wines, fermentation began immediately; for red wines, the must remained in the paravoutes with the grape skins for up to 40 days before being moved to vagenia (fermentation vats). The grape skins that remained in the paravoutes were left with a small amount of wine to ferment again, and once fermentation was complete, they were taken to the rakario (distillery) to make tsipouro (pomace brandy).

THE CONTRIBUTION OF WINE PRODUCERS TO PRESERVING MONASTIC IDENTITY

The contribution of wine producers on Mount Athos to preserving monastic identity is both vital and multifaceted, as viticulture and winemaking are directly linked to the monastic way of life—self-sufficiency, spirituality, and tradition.

Self-sufficiency and communal life: The monks' own wine production ensures the economic and nutritional autonomy of the monasteries, a core element of Mount Athos' communal ideal.

The monks cultivate the vineyards and produce the wine used both in the Divine Liturgy and in daily nutrition, thereby strengthening the self-sufficiency and independence of the monastic community.

Preservation of traditional practices and varieties: Athonite wine producers safeguard old viticultural and winemaking techniques, as well as indigenous grape varieties, passed down through generations of monks. This contributes to preserving Athos's cultural and agricultural heritage, a core aspect of its monastic identity.

Spiritual dimension: The winemaking tradition carries deep spiritual meaning, as wine is a fundamental element of the Divine Eucharist and of hospitality. Tending the vineyard and producing wine is experienced as an act of humility, offering, and blessing, reinforcing the spiritual character of monastic life.

Collective and communal spirit: Working together in the vineyards and wineries strengthens the communal ethos, cooperation, and solidarity among monks—core values of the Athonite monastic identity.

Relationship with the natural environment: Caring for the land and the vineyards is an expression of respect for creation and reflects the broader Athonite stance toward



nature, where agriculture and viticulture are closely connected to spirituality and prayer.

Winemaking on Mount Athos is not merely an agricultural activity, but an integral part of monastic identity. It sustains, expresses, and

transmits the values, traditions, and spirit of the Athonite community from the 10th century to the present day.

A fusion of heritage and select innovation: Wine producers on Mount Athos preserve the authenticity of tradition through a combination of reverence for monastic heritage, sustainable practices, and the selective adoption of modern methods.

Respect for Byzantine winemaking artistry: Athonite monks cultivate vineyards using traditional techniques rooted in the Byzantine era, preserving the authenticity of taste and the distinct character of their wines.

Cultivation of indigenous varieties: The dominant grape is Limnio, while other traditional Greek and international varieties are also cultivated—with respect for the local microclimate and historical legacy of the land.

Organic and low-intervention practices: In monasteries like Mylopotamos, cultivation is organic and non-intensive, maintaining stable vineyard acreage and applying methods that protect the environment and biodiversity.

Blend of tradition and modern know-how: Monks use modern winemaking equipment while remaining faithful to inherited viticultural and enological practices. This ensures both the quality and authenticity of the final product.

Close alignment with monastic needs: Wine is produced primarily to meet the liturgical and dietary needs of the monasteries,

preserving its spiritual and functional character.

Respect for nature and place: The philosophy of Athonite winemaking is summed up in the triad “place—people—respect for nature,” with wines expressing the authentic terroir of Mount Athos.

Through these practices, Mount Athos producers manage to safeguard the authenticity of their winemaking tradition, offering wines of unique character and profound historical continuity.

PRESENTATION OF THE REGION AND ITS WINEMAKING IDENTITY

Mount Athos is located in northern Greece, occupying the entire third and easternmost peninsula of Halkidiki, known as the Athos Peninsula. It is an autonomous and self-governed monastic state, covering an area of approximately 330–360 square kilometers, about 50–60 km in length and 8–12 km in width. At its center stands Mount Athos, rising to 2,033 meters, the highest point of the region, shaping its unique microclimate.

The area is characterized by rich vegetation, rugged terrain, ancient forests, and proximity to the Aegean Sea. Mount Athos is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and is home to twenty major monasteries and numerous cells and sketes, maintaining an unbroken monastic presence since the 10th century.

WINEMAKING IDENTITY OF MOUNT ATHOS

HISTORICAL CONTINUITY AND TRADITION

Viticulture and winemaking have been an integral part of monastic life on Mount Athos since the early years of the organized monastic community. Nearly all the monasteries maintain vineyards and produce wine for their liturgical and dietary needs, while in some cases, production is sufficient for export beyond Mount Athos. This tradition has remained uninterrupted, with monks continuing to apply traditional techniques and cultivate indigenous grape varieties.

GRAPE VARIETIES AND VINEYARDS

The dominant Greek variety is Limnio, the oldest recorded Greek grape, while other native varieties cultivated include Fokiano, Roditis, and Muscat of Alexandria, as well as international varieties such as Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, and Chardonnay. The vineyards are spread across various parts of the peninsula and benefit from characteristics such as: natural isolation and biodiversity; a large daily temperature variation; slightly acidic soils with granite bedrock, which promotes deep root development and imparts uniqueness to the grapes; and close proximity to the sea, which contributes to the region's distinctive microclimate.

MODERN WINEMAKING

Important wineries and metochia (monastic dependencies), such as Mylopotamos and the Chromitsa Metochi of Saint Panteleimon Monastery, have revived and modernized wine production by applying organic methods and cutting-edge technology—without losing their traditional character. Production includes red, white, rosé, and dessert wines, with a focus on quality and authenticity.

Mount Athos wines stand out for their rich character, intense aromas, and unique identity, earning distinctions in international competitions.

CULTURAL AND SPIRITUAL DIMENSION

Wine on Mount Athos is inextricably linked to Christian and monastic tradition. It is used in the Divine Liturgy and serves as a symbol of hospitality and spirituality. Winemaking on Mount Athos bridges tradition and innovation, preserving the living cultural heritage of the Athonite state.

Mount Athos is a unique wine-producing region where nature, history, and spirituality coexist, imparting authenticity, quality, and deep cultural value to its wines.

HISTORICAL TIMELINE

WHEN	MILESTONE
Antiquity	Renowned wines of Halkidiki (Mende, Aphytis, Akanthos, Skione); by tradition, a vineyard associated with Aristotle at Stageira.
10th century	Organised monastic community; nearly every monastery keeps vineyards.
c. 972 — the Tragos	First Typikon of Athos; Rule 15 governs wine, forbidding its sale beyond the river Zygos.
1046	Second Typikon (Constantine IX Monomachos) regulates monastery property and commerce.
Byzantine period	Monastery vineyards across Eastern Macedonia and Halkidiki; wine traded as far as Constantinople.
Ottoman period	From the 16th century, rising taxation and decline.
1749	Foundation of the Athoniada Academy at Vatopedi.
1821	War of Independence — production falls sharply.
c. 1925	Phylloxera reaches the peninsula; a shift in varietal composition follows.
1980	A new generation of monks begins systematic replanting and revival.
Today	PGI Mount Athos; modernised wineries and metochia (e.g. Mylopotamos, Chromitsa).



CHAPTER 4

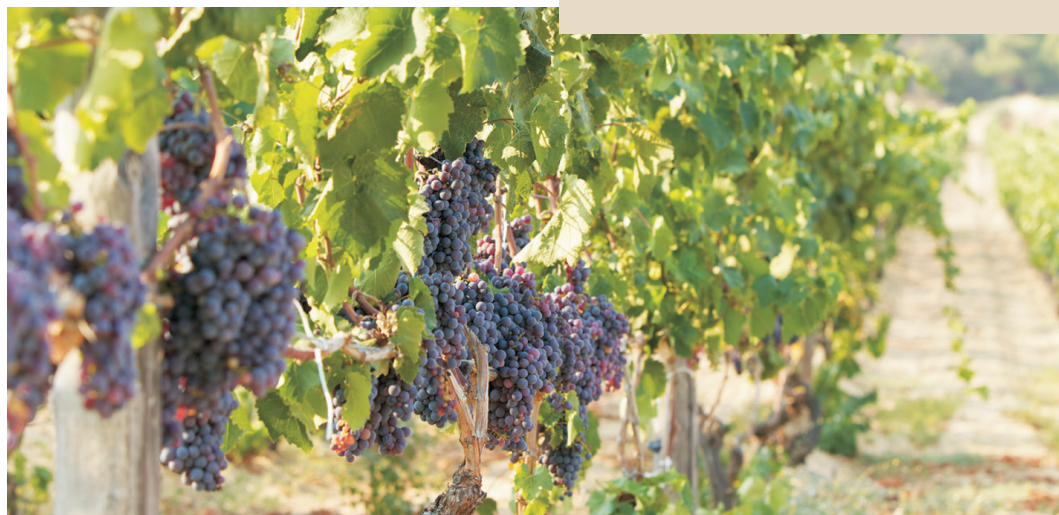
THE DESIGNATION OF ORIGIN – PROTECTED GEOGRAPHICAL INDICATION (PGI) MOUNT ATHOS

Mount Athos wines bear the indication “Protected Geographical Indication Mount Athos.” The boundaries of the PGI zone include the administrative region of Mount Athos and the neighboring administrative district of Ouranoupoli in the Municipality of Stagira-Akanthos, Halkidiki Prefecture, at altitudes ranging from 10 to 400 meters.

The vineyards are usually located either by the sea or on slopes up to 400 meters in altitude. The soils are of medium texture with a desirable pH range, typically sandy-loamy to clayey-sandy, with occasional sandy-silty patches. They show no salinity issues and are rich in iron, copper, and magnesium, with sufficient levels of phosphorus and manganese.

GRAPE VARIETIES AND WINEMAKING METHODS

The vineyards of Mount Athos are both traditional and linear in layout, cultivated organically. The varieties authorised by the current product specification are: Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon, Chardonnay, Grenache Rouge, Merlot, Sauvignon Blanc, Syrah, Agiorgitiko, Athiri, Assyrtiko, Limnio, Malagouzia, Muscat of Alexandria, Muscat Hamburg, Xinomavro and Roditis.



Winemaking on Mount Athos combines Byzantine tradition with modern techniques, preserving the authenticity and quality of the Athonite wines.

The methods vary depending on the type of wine (white, red, sun-dried, liqueur), but are based on specific principles and practices:

1. WHITE WINES

Modern white wine production technology is employed. Alcoholic fermentation is carried out at controlled temperatures not exceeding 20 °C, in order to preserve the wine's aromatic profile and freshness.

2. WHITE SUN-DRIED WINES

Grapes are harvested overripe and sun-dried for 10–15 days to increase sugar concentration. They are then pressed, and alcoholic fermentation takes place at low temperatures (16–18 °C) to preserve the aromatic profile.

3. RED WINES

Produced using the classic red vinification method: grapes are destemmed, crushed, and fermented together with the skins to extract color and aromas. Fermentation is carried out at controlled temperatures (20–22 °C).

4. RED SUN-DRIED WINES

Grapes are sun-dried as in the production of white sun-dried wines, pressed, and fermented at temperatures of 20–22 °C.

5. LIQUEUR WINES

Grapes are destemmed, crushed, and fermented. When the wine reaches the desired characteristics, fermentation is stopped by the addition of neutral grape-derived alcohol (minimum 96% vol.), in order to retain the residual sugars and produce a sweet, fortified wine.

6. ROSÉ WINES

Produced using modern technology, with fermentation at low temperatures (maximum 20 °C) to preserve the fruity character. Special practices for the production of semi-dry, semi-sweet, and sweet wines include the permitted sweetening according to European regulations.

THE TRAINING OF THE VINES

is carried out using traditional techniques (goblet, unilateral, or bilateral forms).

Key characteristics of the vineyard:

- Orientation: *Southeast*
- Altitude: *the official PGI zone extends from 10 to 400 metres; many vineyards are located around 250-300 metres*
- Climate: *Typical Mediterranean*
- Planting method: *Linear*
- Soil: *Alternating sandy-loam and sandy-clay-loam soils, with mountainous slopes and calcareous/granitic substrates*
- pH: *Slightly acidic to acidic*
- Organic matter: *0.5% » organic matter is added to improve soil fertility*
- Subsoil: *Granite beginning at 30 cm depth » vine roots penetrate to depths of 1.5–2 meters to access the nutrients required for growth*



GEOMORPHOLOGY

Mount Athos occupies a narrow, elongated peninsula measuring approximately 47–57 kilometers in length and 5–12 kilometers in width, with a total area of about 322–336 square kilometers. The terrain is markedly mountainous and steep, featuring numerous peaks, ravines, and gorges. Mount Athos itself dominates the southern tip, rising to an elevation of 2,033 meters.

The soils are predominantly calcareous and granitic, with a slightly acidic composition, offering ideal conditions for deep root penetration and imparting a unique character to the grapes. Vineyards are often situated on slopes with a northeast or southwest exposure, close to the sea or at low elevations (5–50 meters), conditions that favor aeration and drainage.

MICROCLIMATES

The geomorphology creates a variety of microclimates: coastal areas with mild winters and cool summers, as well as semi-mountainous or mountainous zones with cooler and more humid conditions. Northern and northeasterly winds are frequent and strong, particularly on the northern and eastern slopes, while southeasterly winds have less influence in sheltered areas.

The presence of the Aegean Sea moderates temperatures and provides humidity, while the pronounced variation in relief generates differences in temperature and moisture levels between vineyards, even over short distances.

CLIMATE

The climate of Mount Athos is predominantly Mediterranean, with mild winters, cool summers, and relatively high humidity. In the lower areas, the climate is temperate and semi-dry, with average annual rainfall of 600–800 mm, while at higher elevations precipitation exceeds 1,000 mm.

The sea moderates extreme temperatures and provides cooling during the summer months, while rainfall and wind contribute to the healthy development of the vineyards and the preservation of biodiversity.

IMPACT ON WINE

The combination of geomorphology, microclimates, and the Mediterranean climate endows Mount Athos wines with rich aromas, balance, freshness, and a unique terroir. Proximity to the sea imparts minerality and saline notes to the whites, while the reds are distinguished by intensity, structure, and complexity.

The terroir of Mount Athos is considered among the most distinctive in Greece, contributing to the authenticity and recognizability of its wines. Its uniqueness is the result of the interaction between place, people, and respect for nature, giving the wines an authentic character and high quality.

FACTORS	MOUNT ATHOS CHARACTERISTICS
<i>Microclimate</i>	<i>Variety due to topography and proximity to the sea</i>
<i>Climate</i>	<i>Mediterranean, with mild winters, cool summers, and humidity</i>
<i>Impact on Wine</i>	<i>Rich aromas, freshness, complexity</i>

TRADITIONAL AND MODERN PRACTICES

Traditional and Modern Winemaking Practices in Mount Athos.

The winemaking tradition of Mount Athos combines deeply rooted Byzantine methods with modern technology, preserving the authenticity and quality of Athonite wines.

TRADITIONAL PRACTICES

- *Hand Harvesting:* Grapes are picked by hand, with careful selection of the best fruit for winemaking.
- *Use of Indigenous Varieties:* Dominant varieties include Limnio, Fokiano, Roditis, and Muscat of Alexandria, cultivated traditionally in the region.
- *Traditional Vine Training:* Forms such as goblet or unilateral/bilateral systems are applied, promoting the vine's natural growth.
- *Natural Fermentation:* In many monasteries, fermentation is carried out using indigenous yeasts present on the grapes, without the addition of commercial yeasts.
- *Traditional Presses:* In some cases, grapes are crushed in stone or wooden presses, preserving Byzantine techniques.
- *Aging in Old Barrels:* Wines were (and in some cases still are) aged in large wooden barrels, which impart a distinctive character to the wine.
- *Organic and Gentle Practices:* Avoidance of chemicals and intensive interventions, with respect for nature and the environment.

MODERN PRACTICES

- *Controlled Fermentation: Alcoholic fermentation is carried out in stainless steel tanks at controlled temperatures (16–22 °C), ensuring freshness and aromatic expression.*
- *Modern Equipment: Use of advanced presses, tanks, and machinery for optimal winemaking management.*
- *Organic Certification: Many wineries follow certified organic methods, avoiding pesticides and chemical fertilizers.*
- *Selective Use of Commercial Yeasts: When required, selected yeasts are used to control the final wine profile.*
- *Production of Sun-Dried and Fortified Wines: Grapes are sun-dried for the production of sweet or fortified wines, using a combination of traditional and modern techniques.*



MICROVINIFICATIONS AND EXPERIMENTATION:

Experimental microvinifications are carried out to highlight the terroir and improve quality.

USE OF TECHNOLOGY IN RIPENING MONITORING:

Modern methods are employed to monitor vineyard health and grape ripening.

The monks of Mount Athos manage to preserve the authenticity of tradition while selectively integrating modern know-how, resulting in high-quality wines that express the unique terroir and the spirit of the Athonite community.

MAIN WINEMAKING STYLES:

Produced mainly from varieties such as Limnio, Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Cabernet Franc.

These wines are characterized by deep color, rich fruit aromas (plum, berries), floral notes, spices, and hints of wood, with structure, pronounced tannins, and balanced acidity. They are often aged in oak barrels for 12 months or more, enhancing complexity and length.

WHITE WINES:

Produced from varieties such as Assyrtiko, Muscat of Alexandria, Roditis, and Athiri. They stand out for their freshness, clarity, floral and citrus aromas, and lively acidity, reflecting the light and climate of the region.

ROSÉ AND LIGHT RED WINES:

Produced from varieties such as Muscat Hamburg and Merlot, offering a fruity

character, freshness, and pleasant acidity.

DESSERT WINES FROM SUN-DRIED GRAPES:

Grapes are sun-dried, producing sweet, concentrated wines with aromas of dried fruits and honey. Traditionally, these wines were served during major feasts and ceremonies.

FORTIFIED WINES (VIN DOUX):

Produced using traditional methods, in which fermentation is stopped by adding alcohol, preserving high sugar content and aromatic intensity. These wines are used for significant religious occasions.

CHARACTERISTIC STYLE —

ORGANIC VITICULTURE:

Many vineyards are cultivated organically, with respect for nature and minimal intervention.

TRADITIONAL AND MODERN TECHNIQUES:

Monks preserve traditional methods while also using modern equipment for controlled fermentation and aging, ensuring quality and authenticity.

DIVERSITY:

The use of both indigenous and international varieties allows the production of wines with diverse styles, covering a wide range of flavor profiles. The winemaking style of Mount Athos combines authenticity, complexity, and respect for tradition, offering wines that stand out for their quality, spiritual dimension, and unique identity.

THE VARIETIES:

MUSCAT

Variety: White Musca

Colour: Medium intensity

Acidity: Low to medium

Aromas: Rose petals, orange peel, bergamot, white citrus fruit flowers

Bottle ageing: Raisin, dried apricot, orange jam, rancio, preferably consumed while it is young (dry wines) high aging potential (sweet wines)

LIMNIO

Variety: LIMNIO

Colour: medium intensity

Acidity: medium

Aromas: fresh herbs, red wild berries

Tannins: medium

Bottle ageing: spices, red fruit jam, medium aging potential

XINOMAVRO

Variety: Xinomavro

Colour: Pale to medium

Acidity: High

Aromas: Red wild berries, morello cherry, black olive, tomato, cabbage

Tannins: High, austere

Bottle ageing: Develops slowly, high ageing potential, mushroom, tobacco leaves

CABERNET SAUVIGNON

Variety: Cabernet Sauvignon

Colour: Deep

Acidity: High

Aromas: Black currant, eucalyptus, blackberries

Tannins: High

Bottle ageing: Tobacco leaves, mushroom, earthy aromas, leather, coffee, long aging potential



CABERNET FRANC

Variety: Red · International

Colour: Medium

Acidity: Medium

Aromas: Raspberry, redcurrant, leafy / green pepper, violet

Tannins: Medium, fine-grained

Bottle ageing: Cedar, graphite, pencil-lead; medium ageing potential

SYRAH

Variety: Red · International

Colour: Deep

Acidity: Medium

Aromas: Blackberry, blackcurrant, black pepper, violet

Tannins: High

Bottle ageing: Smoked meat, leather, olive, spice; high ageing potential

MERLOT

Variety: Red · International

Colour: Medium to deep

Acidity: Medium

Aromas: Plum, black cherry, cocoa

Tannins: Medium, soft

Bottle ageing: Fruitcake, cocoa, tobacco; medium ageing potential

GRENACHE ROUGE

Variety: Red · International

Colour: Medium

Acidity: Low to medium

Aromas: Strawberry, raspberry, white pepper, dried herbs

Tannins: Medium, soft

Bottle ageing: Fig, leather, warm spice; medium ageing potential

MUSCAT HAMBURG

Variety: Red / light · International (aromatic; table & wine grape)

Colour: Light to medium

Acidity: Medium

Aromas: Grapery / muscat, rose, fresh red fruit

Tannins: Low

Bottle ageing: Best young and fresh; low ageing potential

FOKIANO

Variety: Red · Greek, native — grown in the region but not among the varieties authorised by the current PGI product specification
Colour: Light to medium
Acidity: Medium
Aromas: Bright cherry, redcurrant, light spice
Tannins: Low to medium
Bottle ageing: Best young; low to medium ageing potential

ASSYRTIKO

Variety: White · Greek

Colour: Pale, lemon-green

Acidity: High

Aromas: Lemon / citrus, flint, mineral, saline

Bottle ageing: Honeyed, waxy, nutty; high ageing potential (unusual for a white)

ATHIRI

Variety: White · Greek

Colour: Pale

Acidity: Medium

Aromas: Citrus, white flowers, soft peach

Bottle ageing: Best young and fresh; low ageing potential

RODITIS

Variety: White (pink-skinned) · Greek

Colour: Pale, faint copper tint

Acidity: Medium to high

Aromas: Citrus, melon, light floral

Bottle ageing: Best young; low ageing potential

CHARDONNAY

Variety: White · International

Colour: Pale to gold (when oaked)

Acidity: Medium

Aromas: Citrus, apple, pear (unoaked); butter, vanilla, toast (oaked)

Bottle ageing: Nutty, honeyed in the oaked style; medium ageing potential

SAUVIGNON BLANC

Variety: White · International

Colour: Pale, lemon-green

Acidity: High

Aromas: Citrus, green herbs, gooseberry, green apple

Bottle ageing: Best young and fresh; low ageing potential



TECHNICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF MOUNT ATHOS WINES

BASIC TECHNICAL DATA

Alcohol Content: PGI Mount Athos wines have an acquired alcohol content ranging, depending on the type, from 11% to 22% vol for sun-dried and fortified wines.

Total Acidity: Expressed as tartaric acid, minimum total acidity is usually 3.5 g/L for dry wines, and can reach up to 5.0 g/L for sweet wines.

Volatile Acidity: Maximum permissible value is 1.8 g/L (as acetic acid).

Sulphur Dioxide: Maximum permissible concentration is 400 mg/L for sweet wines and 200 mg/L for dry wines.

Sugars: For sun-dried wines, grapes are harvested overripe (over 270 g/L sugar), and after drying, sugar content reaches 350–370 g/L.

WINEMAKING TECHNIQUES

- *White Wines: Fermentation at controlled temperatures (maximum 20 °C) to preserve aromas and freshness.*
- *White Sun-Dried Wines: Grapes are sun-dried for 10–15 days; fermentation at 16–18 °C for intense aromas and concentration.*
- *Red Wines: Classic red vinification with color and aroma extraction; fermentation at 20–22 °C.*
- *Red Sun-Dried Wines: Grapes are sun-dried; fermentation at 20–22 °C, yielding rich aromas of dried fruits and spices.*
- *Fortified Wines: Fermentation is stopped by the addition of grape-derived alcohol (minimum 96% vol) to retain sugars and produce sweet fortified wines.*
- *Rosé Wines: Fermentation at low temperatures (maximum 20 °C) to preserve fruity character.*

ORGANOLEPTIC CHARACTERISTICS

- Reds: *Deep red color, rich aromas of black and red fruits, notes of wood and spices, pronounced tannins, long finish.*
- Whites: *Freshness, clarity, floral and citrus aromas, lively acidity.*
- Sun-Dried & Sweet Wines: *Complex aromas of dried fruits (apricot, fig) and honey, full body, balanced sweetness.*

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Wine Type	Alcohol (% vol)	Total Acidity (g/L)	Volatile Acidity (g/L)	SO ₂ Max (mg/L)	Fermentation Temperature (°C)
White	≥ 11	≥ 3.5	≤ 1.8	200	≤ 20
White Sun-Dried	15–22	≥ 5.0	≤ 1.8	400	16–18
Red	≥ 11	≥ 3.5	≤ 1.8	200	20–22
Red Sun-Dried	15–22	≥ 5.0	≤ 1.8	400	20–22
Fortified Wines	15–22	≥ 5.0	≤ 1.8	400	20–22
Rosé / Light Red	≥ 11				

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- Aging: *Many red wines are aged in oak barrels for 12 months or more, adding complexity.*
- Harvest: *Hand-picked, with selection of the best grapes.*
- Cultivation: *Often organic, with low yields per hectare to ensure high quality.*

The technical characteristics of Mount Athos wines combine strict production standards, traditional know-how, and modern technology, ensuring the authenticity and high quality of Athonite wines.



FOOD-PAIRING GUIDE

Each wine style linked to Greek and Mediterranean cooking and to the Lenten (nistísima) and feast-day (giortina) dishes of the monastic table. The guide concerns the table wine, not the wine of the Divine Liturgy.

STYLE / VARIETIES	GREEK & MEDITERRANEAN DISHES	MONASTIC TABLE – MAJOR RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS – MONASTERY FEAST DAYS
Crisp whites – Assyrtiko, Athiri, Roditis, Sauvignon Blanc	Grilled fish, seafood, lemony dishes, salads, feta	Lenten: legumes (fava, gigantes), wild greens (hórta), octopus, olive- oil vegetables
Aromatic & oaked whites – dry Muscat, Chardonnay	Poultry, creamy or buttery dishes, mild cheese, aromatic salads	Vegetable pies and herb dishes; richer olive-oil cooking on non- fasting days
Rosé & light reds – Muscat Hamburg, Fokiano, lighter Merlot	Charcuterie, tomato dishes, grilled vegetables, mild cheeses	Fasting vegetable stews (briam, ladera), tomato and pulse dishes
Structured reds – Xinomavro, Limnio, Cabernet, Syrah, Grenache	Grilled or roasted red meat, game, stews, aged cheese	Feast days: roast lamb, meat stews, aged graviera on feast days
Sun-dried & fortified sweet – sweet Muscat, liastos, vin doux	Desserts, dried fruit and nuts, blue cheese	Feast-day sweets, honey-and-nut desserts (e.g. baklava), dried fruit and nuts; after the meal



PRACTICAL GUIDE TO SERVING & TASTING

SERVING TEMPERATURES

WINE STYLE	SERVING TEMPERATURE
Crisp whites & rosé	8–10 °C
Fuller / oaked whites	10–12 °C
Light reds	12–14 °C
Structured reds	16–18 °C
Sun-dried & sweet whites	8–12 °C
Fortified sweet (vin doux)	12–14 °C

GLASSES — A GLASS SHAPE FOR EACH STYLE

Each wine glass is chosen by its shape, not its size: the shape steers the wine and its aromatics differently. Hold the glass by the stem, so the wine stays at temperature, and pour to about one- third to leave room to swirl.

STYLE / VARIETIES	GLASS SHAPE
Crisp aromatic whites — Assyrtiko, Athiri, Roditis, Sauvignon Blanc, dry Muscat	A small, tapered white-wine glass (Sauvignon Blanc shape) — narrow, so it keeps the wine cool, holds the acidity and lifts citrus and floral notes.
Fuller / oaked whites — Chardonnay	A wider white-wine glass (oaked-Chardonnay shape) — broader, giving room for texture and gentle toasty aromas.
Rosé & light reds — Muscat Hamburg, Fokiano, lighter Merlot	Rosé or small red glass, slightly flared at the lip to show the fresh fruit.
Aromatic, high-acid reds — Xinomavro	A wide, rounded red-wine glass (Burgundy / Nebbiolo shape) — it softens the tannin and gathers the delicate aromatics (Xinomavro parallels Nebbiolo).
Structured Bordeaux-style reds — Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Merlot, Limnio	A tall, generous red-wine glass (Bordeaux shape) — it carries the wine past firm tannins.
Spiced reds — Syrah, Grenache	Syrah shape (large red glass) — a slightly narrower chimney that tempers pepper and spice.
Sun-dried & fortified sweet — liastos, vin doux	A small dessert-wine glass — compact, with a modest pour that focuses the sweetness and keeps the alcohol in check.



STORAGE & ORDER OF TASTING

- Storage: a steady 11–14 °C, 60–70% humidity, cork-sealed bottles on their side, away from light and vibration.
- Order of tasting: lighter to heavier, dry to sweet, young to old — sparkling, whites, rosé, light red, structured red, sweet last.

THE THREE STEPS OF TASTING

- Appearance (όψη): clarity, colour and intensity, and the rim as a sign of age.
- Nose (μύτη): primary aromas (grape), secondary (winemaking) and tertiary (ageing); overall intensity.
- Palate (στόμα): sweetness, acidity, tannin, body, flavour and the length of the finish.

AROMA WHEEL — PGI MOUNT ATHOS

A wheel from broad aroma families at the center to specific descriptors at the rim, built from the aromas of the PGI varieties:

- Fruit → red fruit; black fruit; citrus; stone fruit; dried fruit.
- Floral → rose, orange blossom, white flowers, violet.
- Herbal / vegetal → fresh herbs, green pepper, tomato leaf, olive.
- Spice → black pepper, warm spice, liquorice.
- Earthy / mineral → flint, saline, mushroom, earth.
- Oak & ageing → vanilla, toast, cedar, tobacco, leather, coffee, honey, nuts.

WINE-IDENTITY MAP OF THE PGI ZONE

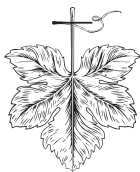
TRILINGUAL GLOSSARY OF TERMS

A single canonical glossary shared across EN / FR / ZH so terms stay consistent in every translation. Core terms:

- Origin & framework: PGI, terroir, vintage.
- Athonite & monastic: Avaton, Diamonitirion, Typikon, Tragos, metochi, skete, cenobitic, Nama, nisteia, panigyri, trapeza.
- Vineyard & cellar: gobelet, veraison, must, paravoutes (crushing / maceration vats), vagenia (fermentation vats), sur lie, malolactic fermentation, skin contact, sulfites.
- Wine & styles: sun-dried (liastos), fortified / (vin doux), tsipouro, organoleptic.

MASTERCLASS FACILITATOR KIT

- Tasting mat / placemat: numbered glass positions in tasting order, note space, a simple scoring scale.
- Presenter notes: per-variety talking points (character, aromas, pairing, one “did you know”) with timings.
- Handouts: the aroma wheel and a short serving-and-tasting sheet.



MOUNT ATHOS WINES

Shaping the Vine & Distinctive Wines



ΕΝΕΡΓΕΙΑ ΣΥΓΧΡΗΜΑΤΟΔΟΤΟΥΜΕΝΗ
ΑΠΟ ΤΗΝ ΕΥΡΩΠΑΪΚΗ ΕΝΩΣΗ ΚΑΙ ΑΠΟ ΤΗΝ ΕΛΛΑΔΑ
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PGI MOUNT ATHOS
ΠΓΕ ΑΓΙΟ ΟΡΟΣ