

GREEK WINES FOR THE ROMAN ELITE:  
IN SEARCH OF EASTERN LUXURIES ON WESTERN TABLES\*

by

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper investigates the status of Greek wines from Chios, Lesbos and Thasos in Roman Italy. The analysis of both literary and archaeological evidence shows that these wines were luxurious drinks for the Romans. They were consumed in limited quantities and usually only on special occasions by the elites of the Eternal City.

There is no doubt that wine was one of the main consumption goods in the ancient Mediterranean. It formed a part of the so-called Mediterranean triad together with bread and olives. Similarly to what we can observe nowadays, in antiquity there were various kinds of wines, from those of the lowest quality to the most sophisticated beverages. The Romans produced wines in Italy as well as imported from all over the Mediterranean. However, it seems that the Aegean region provided the most unique beverages.

Many types of wines were produced in ancient Greece, but only a few of them were drunk and appreciated by the Romans. Since Chian, Lesbian, Thasian, Rhodian, Coan and Cretan wines are frequently mentioned in Latin texts, it seems that these wines had a privileged position. Besides these, Roman authors mention: Leucadian<sup>1</sup>, Ephesian, Cnidian, Mysian, Myconian, Mesogitic<sup>2</sup>, Tmolian<sup>3</sup> (from the area of Mount Mesogis and Mount Tmolus in Lydia), Catacecaumenite (from Maenoia)<sup>4</sup>, Maroneian<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Pl. *Poen.* 699; Plin. *HN* XIV 76.

<sup>2</sup> Plin. *HN* XIV 74–76.

<sup>3</sup> Plin. *HN* XIV 74; Vitruvius VIII 3, 12, Ovid *Fasti* II 313.

<sup>4</sup> Vitruvius VIII 3, 12.

<sup>5</sup> Plin. *HN* XIV 53; Tibullus IV 1, 57.