



Written by
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The Cyprus wine revolution



To complement Dr José Vouillamoz's fascinating report on discovering indigenous grape varieties on the Mediterranean island of Cyprus, I'm publishing my notes on a presentation on the recent Cypriot wine revolution made last October by Dr Caroline Gilby MW, one of the five finalists in our recent wine writing competition.

Her lecture and the tasting that followed it (see my 42 tasting notes below) took place in Vintners' Hall in London, where the then king of Cyprus was one of the five kings entertained to a feast by the vintners and aldermen in 1363. (For much of its early history, the Wine & Spirit Education Trust was based next to Vintners' Hall in a building known as Five Kings House.)

Last time I studied the wine scene on Cyprus in any detail, it was dominated by four big wineries located on the coast, far from the vineyards but convenient for the tankers that used to ship out vast quantities of a fortified wine of dubious quality, known, until the Spanish had their

protective way, as 'Cyprus sherry'.

The island's wine industry is still very much work in progress but the big transformation has been that the island now has 60-odd much smaller wineries typically processing 3,000 to 30,000 tonnes of grapes a year, run by well-travelled, well-trained young specialists. More crucially, they are located close to vineyards up in the hills in the interior of the island such as those of Tsiakkas at Pitsilia above, photographed by Caroline. This far south, elevation is critical, apparently, with vines planted between 600 and 1,450 m (1,970-4,760 ft) above the blue Med, making the likes of those of Kyperounda, producers of a past *wine of the week*, some of the highest in Europe. As a result of this variation, the grape harvest lasts from July to November. Caroline's picture below of some of the many classical remains on the island was taken in March.



One major distinguishing mark is that Cyprus never had phylloxera, so ungrafted vines are common. And, as José points out, the indigenous varieties are unique – although not all are desperately exciting. The most common is the dark-skinned Mavro (which was grown on 44% of vineyard land in 2015), light-skinned Xynisteri (25%) and also, in declining order, Sultanina (for eating), Shiraz (sic), Cabernet Sauvignon (declining), Carignan, Maratheftiko, Mataro, Cabernet Franc, Chardonnay, Muscat of Alexandria, Othalgo (86 ha), Lefkada (83 ha) and Grenache.

Unfortunately Mavro, the dominant variety, makes generally pretty ordinary wines that are, according to a pragmatic Caroline, 'very good with dolmades'. Most of the wine is sold in boxes and cartons. Xynisteri is the other variety allowed to produce Cyprus's signature stickie *Commandaria*, which Cypriots claim is the oldest wine in continuous production, since AD 800 (see *Hesiod*). Its name, potentially worryingly, means 'low acid' but apparently the pH is usually and usefully quite low too. Xynisteri's great virtue is that it is drought-resistant, and, according to Caroline, its better wines can easily last up to eight years. Annual production of table wine is about 43,000 hl whereas that of the raisiny *Commandaria*, in my experience one of the world's great wine bargains, is less than 1,500 hl.

Apparently there is a current trend for deep-coloured rosés. I asked whether malolactic conversion was a given and was told no, because malic acid levels are so low!

Because of tourism, land costs are relatively high, about €100,000 a hectare (£84,706/\$109,206), so it can be extremely difficult to find the funds to invest in new vineyards – not least because Cyprus, very much in the lee of Greece, has just come out of a massive banking crisis. Some optimistically started vineyard projects are already in the hands of banks.

This is all a great shame as there is clearly excellent potential on the island, despite the constant problem of drought. The 42 tasting notes below are ordered alphabetically by producer

(sur)name but you can choose another order

Order by ▼

THE WINES

- *Ayia Mavri, White Dry 2015 PGI Lemesos100% Xynisteri.*
Slightly heavy on the nose and could do with a little more freshness on the palate. Astringent finish.12% Drink 2016-2016
Under £8 RRP 14
- *Ayia Mavri Lefkada 2012 PGI Lemesos100% Lefkada, aged in new oak barrels for 26 months.*
Oak dominates fruit. Pretty bitter finish. Harsh. Very rasping.12% Drink 2018-2019
£8-£10 RRP 14
- *Etko, Ktima Haggipavlou Xynisteri 2015 PGI Lemesos*Pale orangey gold. Very nice labels but not much character in the wine. Low acid and a distinct lack of fruit. Very old fashioned.12% Drink 2016
Under £8 RRP 13.5
- *Etko, Ktima Haggipavlou Maratheftiko 2014 PGI Lemesos**Matured in oak barrels for nine months.*
Very dark crimson. Well-managed tannins but rather a shortage of fruit on the mid palate. All structure! Pretty harsh. Then falls away on the end.13.5% Drink 2018-2021
£8-£10 RRP 14.5
- *Etko, St Nicholas 2012 Commandaria60% Xynisteri, 40% Mavro. Matured in oak barrels for three years.*
Pale greenish tawny. Looks FAR older than four years old! Rather sweaty nose and slightly too raisiny for my taste. Good refreshing finish but a tad syrupy. Fades away a little on the end.15% Drink 2016-2019
£10-£15 RRP 15.5
- *Fikardos, Amalthia 2015 PGI Pafos86% Xynisteri, 14% Sémillon. Diluted by rain just before harvest.*
Rather struck-match character. Racy and I would imagine it would be hugely refreshing on the island in high summer. A touch of Hunter Valley!10.5% Drink 2016-2018
Under £8 RRP 16
- *Fikardos Maratheftiko 2014 PGI Pafos**Maratheftiko aged for 10 months in old oak barrels.*
Nicely balanced, light and round with definite fruit in evidence and the toughness of the variety relatively tamed. Though it's still a little inky on the end!12.5% Drink 2017-2020
£10-£15 RRP 15.5
- *Hadjiantonas Xynisteri 2015 Cyprus*Rather light on the nose and low acid on the palate. A tad astringent too. A little old fashioned.12.5% Drink 2016-2017
14.5
- *Karapashis Xynisteri 2014 PGI Pafos**Very small production: about 25,000 bottles a year. The vineyard is by the winery at 600 m (1,968 ft) elevation.*
Very lightly smoky on the nose - by no means unpleasant. Good integrity.12.5% Drink 2016-2019
£8-£10 RRP 16
- *Karapashis, Rosé Shiraz 2015 PGI Pafos*Pale crimson. Smells of roses. Then tough and tart.Drink 2016-2017
14
- *KEO, Krasochoria Xynisteri 2015 PGI Lemesos**Another of the old big producers. This was a top*

wine in a national competition.

Round and floral but with a green streak running through it. Very long.13% Drink 2016-2018
Under £8 RRP imported by S Aspris & Son 16

- **KEO, Aphrodite 2015 Cyprus**The varietal Krasochoria Xynisteri is new to KEO, but Aphrodite is an old favourite. This is apparently a bit drier than their Xynisteri. Actually it tastes harder-pressed and more astringent.12% Drink 2016-2017
Under £8 RRP imported by S Aspris & Son 14.5
- **KEO, Heritage Maratheftiko 2013 PGI Lemesos**From KEO's own vineyards in Mallia. Aged for at least 12 months in oak barrels.
Dark garnet. Some oak on the nose, which rather suppresses the fruit. Very tough end.13% Drink 2017-2020
£10-£15 RRP imported by S Aspris & Son 15
- **KEO, Othello 2015 Cyprus**Red blend, mainly Mavro from the Lemesos and Pafos regions.
Pale garnet. Not much nose. Sweet, soft start but without much character, and a very astringent finish.13% Drink 2016-2017
Under £8 RRP imported by S Aspris & Son 14.5
- **KEO, St John NV Commandaria**Xynisteri and Mavro. Aged in barrel for 7 or 8 years, I'm told. Biggest selling Commandaria.
Dark brownish tawny. Sweet, raisiny nose but good freshness on the end. Very lively and correct. Good balance. Less sticky than many. **VG**15% Drink 2016-2019
£10-£15 RRP imported by S Aspris & Son 16.5
- **Kyperounda, Petritis 2015 PGI Lemesos**100% Xynisteri. Matured for six months on the lees in stainless-steel tanks and 20% of the wine undergoes three months' ageing in 225-litre oak barrels. 1,140 m (3,740 ft) elevation, so possibly the highest winery in Europe. The winemaker studied in Glasgow and did a vintage at Villa Maria in New Zealand. Research into yeasts and Xynisteri is ongoing here. Usually picked in November.
Light and fresh with some greenness. Nice balance and very ready. Lightly chewy on the end. Good tension.13% Drink 2016-2018
£10-£15 RRP imported by Hallgarten Druitt & Novum Wines 16
- **Kyperounda 2008 Commandaria**100% Xynisteri. Unfortified. Seven years' maturation in oak barrels of 225 and 300 litres.
Pale orange. Light nose – a sort of Lite version of Commandaria. Refreshing, and light notes of lime plus lots of sugar.14% Drink 2016-2019
£17.95 per 50cl Berry Bros & Rudd 16
- **Rebecca NV Commandaria**50% Xynisteri, 50% Mavro, from the village of Agios Mamas in Lemesos.
Pale orange. Slightly tired nose. Lacks the punch of some but it's low in alcohol. Quite marked acidity. Lemon peel in this case.12% Drink 2016-2018
£8-£10 RRP 15.5
- **SODAP, Kamanterena Xynisteri 2015 PGI Pafos**This co-op with 1,000 members is probably the island's biggest winery, crushing 40% of the island's production. They have sold their old Limassol site. This Xynisteri is sourced from the villages of Kathikas, Lemona and Stroumbi.
Not much nose but a creditable, fresh, just off-dry white. Just a little astringent on the end.12% Drink 2016-2017
Under £8 RRP imported by Kingsland Drinks 14.5
- **SODAP, Kamanterena Rosé 2015 PGI Pafos**50% Lefkada, 50% Shiraz, from the villages of Letimbou and Giolou. Lefkada has very thick skins and can be quite tannic but has lots of flavour.
Pale red colour. Big, sweet, strawberry candy nose. Good fruit on the palate and (just) not too sweet on the end. Fine tannins and a clean finish.13% Drink 2016-2017

Under £8 RRP imported by Kingsland Drinks 15.5

- SODAP, Kamanterena Maratheftiko 2011 PGI Pafos *From the villages of Polemi, Stroumbi and Letimbou. 25 days on the skins. Aged for 10 months on the lees in 300-litre French oak casks.* Smells quite evolved and gentle aromatically, but it's still hugely tannic even though I suspect the fruit is fading. Obviously a winemaking challenge! 13% Drink 2013-2016
£10-£15 RRP imported by Kingsland Drinks 15
- SODAP, Marks & Spencer Maratheftiko 2015 PGI Pafos *From the villages of Polemi, Stroumbi and Letimbou. 25 days on the skins. Aged for 10 months on the lees in 300-litre French oak casks.*
Some intensity on the nose. Although less so on the palate. Very tough on the end. Demands food! Leaves the palate feeling as though it has been soaked with stones. 13% Drink 2017-2019
£9 (when buying a case of 6) Marks & Spencer 15
- SODAP, St Barnabas 2011 Commandaria 75% Xynisteri, 25% Mavro, from the villages of Agios Konstantinos and Zoopigi.
Bright orange tawny. Slightly burnt orange-peel sensation but very attractively racy and lively. Really distinctive and not at all heavy. Lovely with or without food, with real drive. Cut peel flavours. Long. 15% Drink 2016-2020
Over £15 RRP imported by Kingsland Drinks 17
- SODAP, St Barnabas 2002 Commandaria 100% Xynisteri, from Agios Konstantinos village.
So relatively old! Rancio nose and rum toffee flavours but good freshness on the finish. Bite on the end. **GV** 15% Drink 2012-2020
Over £15 RRP imported by Kingsland Drinks 16
- Tsiakkas Xynisteri 2015 Pitsilia 97% Xynisteri, 3% Malaga.
Good focus and fruit impact on the nose. A green streak. And then relatively low acid on the palate, but very well made. Proper modern wine and I suspect this will age very well, as well as having quite enough fruit at the moment. Smoky finish. 12.5% Drink 2016-2020
£10-£15 RRP imported by Amathus Drinks 16+
- Tsiakkas, Vamvakada 2014 Pitsilia 100% Vamvakada (Maratheftiko).
Mid crimson (not as dark as some). Oak (just 30% new) rather dominates the nose, but good quality fruit underneath with some vigour. 15% Drink 2017-2021
Over £15 RRP imported by Amathus Drinks 15.5
- Tsiakkas Yiannoudi 2013 Pitsilia 100% Yiannoudi (of which there are very few single-variety vineyards).
Very dark crimson. Violets and some oak. Very high elevation. Full and round and quite high in acidity. Falls away a little fast. Blueberry fruit. Rather severe tannins on the end. 13.5% Drink 2018-2022
Imported into the UK by Amathus Drinks 16
- Tsiakkas 2008 Commandaria 100% Xynisteri. *Commandaria must be made from Mavro and/or Xynisteri, but no longer has to be fortified. The grapes must be from one of 14 villages located on the south-facing slopes of the Troodos Mountains, and must be dry farmed and vinified (though not necessarily aged) in the region. Grapes are sun dried for 10 days to lose 40% of their weight and then aged for over two years in barrel. The desired level of residual sugar is around 170 g/l. The locals are not great fans of this ancient wine, but there is a drive to improve it, as it is definitely Cypriot.*
Nutty, hazelnut nose. Just a little sticky on the palate with definite raisin flavours and some astringency. Just a tad sticky. 13% Drink 2017-2020
Over £15 RRP imported by Amathus Drinks 16
- Vasa, Argyrides Vineyards Viognier 2015 PGI Lemesos *From vineyards in the Laona region.*
No varietal aroma but very clean and fresh on the palate. I'm scoring it as a white wine not a

varietal!13.5% Drink 2016-2017

Over £15 RRP 15

- *Vasa, Argyrides Vineyards Maratheftiko 2013 PGI Lemesos100% Maratheftiko, which is usually planted and often blended with Mavro (as it needs a cross-pollinator).*
Dark crimson and more structure than Yiannoudi. Broad fruit on the palate with light crispness on the finish. Lots of tannin. Slightly bitter on the end. I could imagine this drinking well with oily dishes. Bring on the dolmades. Flagship red wine grape for Cyprus.14% Drink 2019-2024
Over £15 RRP 16
- *Vasilikon Xynisteri 2015 Laona Akama*Some green leafy aromas, firm full body and something to chew on. Sufficient acidity. Quite long. Lees ageing. A bit of added acid.12.5% Drink 2016-2018
£8-£10 RRP imported by Ampeli 16
- *Vasilikon, Einalia Rosé 2015 Laona Akama*60% Syrah, 40% Maratheftiko.
Pale crimson. Very modern-winemaking nose. This is chock full of fruit even if it doesn't taste particularly distinctive. Maybe it has just a little bit more tannin on the end...13.5% Drink 2016-2017
£10-£15 RRP imported by Ampeli 15.5
- *Vasilikon, Agios Onoufrios 2014 Laona Akama*45% Syrah, 21% Cabernet Sauvignon, 14% Lefkada, 11% Merlot, 7% Cabernet Franc, 2% Maratheftiko.
Tangy, fully evolved, light fruity blend. Easy-peasy with a slight Cypriot accent. Dry finish. Falls away fast.13.5% Drink 2016-2017
£8-£10 RRP imported by Ampeli 15
- *Vasilikon, Methy Cabernet Sauvignon 2012 Laona Akama*Aged in new French oak barrels for 18 months.
Very fancy bottle. Very lightly varietal on the nose, with some evolution. Could do with a little more fruit weight in the middle.14% Drink 2014-2017
Over £15 RRP imported by Ampeli 15.5
- *Vlassides, Grifos 2015 PGI Lemesos*80% Xynisteri, 20% Sauvignon Blanc.
Lots of fruit! Remarkably so. The Sauvignon is not dominant. Racy and fruity. A successful dry white that is only slightly astringent on the end.13% Drink 2016-2019
£10-£15 RRP 15.5
- *Vlassides Shiraz 2014 PGI Lemesos*Matured in oak for 12 months.
Cool and reasonably sophisticated – certainly in terms of tannin management. A little hot on the end, and it could ideally do with just a little more of a fruity mid palate.15% Drink 2017-2020
Over £15 RRP 15.5
- *Vlassides Yiannoudi 2015 PGI Lemesos*100% Yiannoudi, matured in four-year-old barrels for nine months. Yiannoudi translates as 'little John'. Very short stamens so fruit set can be tricky. Nice and friendly, with relatively low tannin. An old variety but this is the debut vintage of a varietal version, made by Sophocles Vlassides, who trained at UC Davis. Unusually, the vineyards are right next to the winery. High limestone content leads to chlorosis in the vines. Deep purple. Very layered nose of mulberries with metal. Unoaked. Well-managed tannins and very interesting. Dusty and long. Relatively fresh. First class for interest!13.5% Drink 2017-2021
Over £15 RRP 17
- *Zambartas, Krasochoria Single Vineyard Xynisteri 2015 PGI Lemesos*From a single 0.45 ha (1.1 acre) vineyard in Mandria village, at 900 m (2,952 ft) elevation. The bush vines are 29 years old and unirrigated. 60% of the wine was aged for five months in French oak barrels of 300 to 400 litres. No malolactic fermentation.
A bit broader than most Xynisteri. A good experiment and with masses of fruit. Rather

sophisticated. Texture rather than flavour from the oak.13% Drink 2016-2020

Over £15 RRP Berry Bros & Rudd 16

- **Zambartas, Rosé 2015 Laona Akama** *Small winery. Working on viticulture. 65% Lefkada, 35% Cabernet Franc.*

Lefkada has a herbal note to it apparently. Very chewy end.13.5% Drink 2016-2017

£15.50 Berry Bros & Rudd 15

- **Zambartas, Krasochoria Maratheftiko 2012 PGI Lemesos** *100% Maratheftiko, aged for 12 months in two- to three-year-old French oak barrels. Single variety vineyard, but needs a cross-pollinator.*

Broad, ripe aromas. Though pretty tough and dry on the end. A little rasping.14.5% Drink 2019-2024

£14.95 Berry Bros & Rudd 15.5

- **Zambartas, Krasochoria Maratheftiko 2014 PGI Lemesos** *Aged for 12 months in two- to three-year-old French oak barrels. Founder Akis Zambartas' son Marcos, who studied at Roseworthy, has been winemaker here since around 2012. Malolactic fermentation on the skins. 'We ferociously sort - 42 man-hours per tonne. The aim is to eliminate 'chicken' berries. We cut the second crop in our growers' vineyards. The variety tends to produce a second crop that goes purple quickly but we try to eliminate it.'*

Dark garnet. Firm, almost metallic fruit, but very pure and varietal. Good tannin management.

Fruit carries on much longer towards the end. A bit of a standout.15% Drink 2017-2023

Over £15 RRP Berry Bros & Rudd 17

- **Zambartas, Krasochoria Lefkada/Shiraz 2014 PGI Lemesos** *50% Lefkada, 50% Shiraz. Aged in a combination of new and one-year-old French oak barrels for 12 months. Angela Muir consults.*

Round start and then a bit aggressively chewy on the end. Crunchy.15% Drink 2017-2020

Over £15 RRP Berry Bros & Rudd 15.5