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Greece Greece's most interesting wines arguably come from the country's many indigenous varieties. These grapes thrive in hot, arid conditions, and provide Greece with a unique selling point on export markets. The three grape varieties that have received most recognition on export markets are each linked to a particular wine region: **Xinomavro** from Naoussa, **Agiorgitiko** from Nemea and **Assyrtiko** from Santorini.

CLIMATE AND GRAPEGROWING

Overall Greece has a hot Mediterranean climate. In the summer, temperatures can reach well over 30°C, although coastal areas tend to be moderated by the sea. Altitude and wind, which in the islands to the south-east of the mainland are strong enough to destroy unprotected vineyards, can also have a cooling effect. Most of the best vineyards are to be found in these cooler sites away from the blistering heat commonly associated with Greece. Rainfall levels can vary, but even in the wetter areas in the west of the country the almost complete lack of rain in the growing season can cause water stress. Drought is a particular concern on the eastern side of Greece, which lies in the rain shadow of the mountains where there is little available water for irrigation.

REGIONS AND WINES

There are over 200 grape varieties native to Greece, very few of which are grown elsewhere. These varieties are

well adapted to survive in the arid, hot conditions found in Greece and many can produce high-quality wines. There are some plantings of both black and white international grape varieties but most PDO wines require the use of native varieties. Of the many wines that are made in Greece the following three have gained the widest international reputation.

Naoussa PDO

Naoussa is in northern Greece in the region of Macedonia. The vineyards are at altitudes up to 400 metres and are noticeably cooler than the surrounding area. This PDO is for red wines that are made exclusively from **Xinomavro**, a variety that is often compared with Nebbiolo. It has high levels of tannin and acidity and its wines have traditionally had a medium colour that quickly fades to tawny and they tend to lack fresh fruit aromas even in their youth. As with Nebbiolo these wines are long-lived and can develop complex spice and earthy aromas with age. Some winemakers are now choosing to make their wines in different styles. Some are more deeply coloured and less tannic; and some are aged in new oak.

Nemea PDO

Nemea is in the north of the Peloponnese close to the narrow strip of land that joins the peninsula to the rest of mainland Greece. This is a PDO for red wines that are made exclusively from **Agiorgitiko**. The vineyards are spread over a wide range of altitudes from 230 to 900 metres. The best fruit comes from the vineyards in the middle of this range. Fruit from the hotter lower slopes can be overly jammy and tends to be made into fruity wines for early consumption. The fruit from the higher slopes has a higher acidity and less fine tannins. It can add freshness to a red blend but it is best suited to rosé production. The best wines have a deep ruby colour with high levels of smooth tannins, low to moderate acidity and sweet spice and red fruit flavours. These wines have a great affinity for new oak and age well.

Santorini PDO

Santorini is a windswept volcanic island in the Aegean Sea. The winds are so strong that a unique training method has to be used here to protect the vines. The permanent wood is trained very low into a basket



GREEK WINE LAWS

The wine laws of Greece follow those of other EU countries, with wines classified as Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) or Protected Geographical Indication (PGI). For export markets producers of dry PDO wines may either use the term Protected Designation of Origin or, less frequently, *Appellation d'origine de qualité supérieure* (a subcategory within the PDO classification) on their wine labels. On the domestic market the Greek equivalent of PDO is used (*Prostatevomeni Onomasia Proelefsis*).

shape and the fruit grows on the inside. The PDO covers red and white wines made in dry and sweet styles, but it is the white wines made from the **Assyrtiko** grape that have the highest reputation. Dry wines from this grape display perfumed aromas and concentrated flavours of ripe citrus and stone fruit, balanced by the natural high acidity of the variety. The sweet wines are known as Vinsanto. Late-harvested grapes are sun-dried for up to 14 days. The wines are then aged in old oak barrels for a minimum of two years, although many producers age their wine for far longer. The luscious sweetness is balanced by high acidity and the older wines show a marked oxidative character of caramel and nuts.



A close-up of an Assyrtiko vine in Santorini. The basket-like training system protects the vine and the grapes against the very strong winds experienced here.