

# Notes & News

●Exercises by the **National Guard** in early June were observed for the first time by military officers from the member states of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), who were in Cyprus under the 1999 Vienna accord on building confidence by means of mutual inspection. The 44 officers represented 27 of the 54 OSCE states, including the USA, Russia and 13 of the 15 EU members, although Turkey refused to attend. Later in the month the National Guard held its annual manoeuvres, code-named "Dimitra" and focusing on maintaining capability in a conflict.

●Probably the **largest ancient theatre** in Cyprus, dating to c.300 BC, is being excavated at Nea Paphos, the Department of Antiquities announced on 12 June. With a diameter of some 80 metres and capable of holding 8,000 people, the theatre shows how large and prosperous the city was in ancient times.

●The **tourism sector** continued to grow strongly in the period January-May, with arrivals reaching a total of 874,000, over 8 per cent higher than in the first five months of 2000. Official figures showed that arrivals in May were particularly encouraging, being 11 per cent up on the May 2000 figure.

●Bishop Pavlos of Kyrenia on 18 June issued a strong protest against the destruction of the **religious heritage** in the Turkish-occupied area, following a Turkish Cypriot press account of further desecrations in Kyrenia. Sent to the UN Security Council and other bodies, the Bishop's protest pointed out that the occupation regime "has not only stripped our churches of their icons, frescoes and sacred vessels but even changed many of them into Muslim mosques, store-rooms and latrines". He contrasted such desecration with the scrupulous maintenance of Muslim places of worship in the Government-controlled area.

●Commerce, Industry and Tourism Minister Nicos Rolandis confirmed on 22 June that the construction of **six new marinas** in Cyprus, with a total capacity of 4,100 boats, will start by mid-2002. Intended to be the flag-ships of the planned upgrading of tourist facilities, the marinas will be built by selected bidders under self-funding arrangements.

●US Ambassador Donald Bandler and Mayor Lellos Demetriades on 13 June carried out a tour of **Nicosia old town** to inspect buildings and sites being restored with US financial assistance expected to surpass £4 million in 2001. Mr Bandler commented that the master plan for the old town had already produced impressive results—"everything from the sewage and waste treatment plants to the restoration of the Venetian walls". □



• Old renewed... A renovated house in Nicosia.



•Harvest of the Gods... The island of Cyprus has been famous for its wine since classical times.

## Cyprus wines as old as Dionysus

The important wine industry of Cyprus will be in the spotlight on 21-29 July during the second regional cultural festival of mountain resorts, featuring various events in the wine-producing villages of Foini, Pano Platres, Kato Platres, Mandria, Omodos, Kilani and Pera Pedi in the Troodos mountains north of Limassol. The festival will highlight the island's centuries-long reputation for high quality wine and its status as probably the oldest centre of continuous wine production anywhere in the world.

It is virtually certain that when settlers arrived in Cyprus from Asia Minor four thousand years ago they brought grape vines with them and therefore that the first Greek settlers in c.1,200 BC found that the island was already producing wine, although of a type very different from those with which they were already familiar. Legend and ancient history bear testimony to the importance of Cyprus wine. It was praised in the Song of Solomon and described by Hesiod (c.800 BC), while the poet Euripides wrote of pilgrimages to the island to taste its wine, then known as "Cyprus Nama". The god of wine, Dionysus, is depicted in a mosaic to be seen in the House of Dionysus in Paphos Archaeological Park, while fascinating evidence of vine culture and wine-making is on show in various museums.

### Richard the Lion Heart in Cyprus

Little historical evidence exists about wine production in Cyprus from the Graeco-Roman period to the Middle Ages, although it is clear that the tradition of sweet wine was already established. In the era of the Crusades and the sojourn in Cyprus of Richard the Lion Heart of England in the late 11th century, the generic description of the island's much-praised sweet wines as "Commandaria" became current and their renown spread throughout the civilized world.

For Cyprus, however, invasion followed invasion, the end of the Lusignan era in 1489 being followed by Venetian rule and then the conquest of the island by the Ottoman Turks in 1571. Under alcohol-averse Muslim rule, vine growers and wine producers suffered from crippling triple taxes and Cyprus was cut off from its natural markets in Christian Europe, so that Cyprus wines lost their international fame.

The birth of the modern wine industry in Cyprus can be dated to the foundation in 1844 of the House of Haggipavlu, which exported

wine throughout the Eastern Mediterranean region and established the island's first winery in 1893 at Zanatzia in the Lemesos district. Meanwhile, Cyprus had become part of the British Empire in 1878, following which the English Chaplin family built a large wine-making plant at Pera Pedi. The Chaplins eventually sold out to the local KEO company in 1927, while two other major Cypriot wine co-operatives, LOEL and SODAP, were created in the 1940s.

### Modern role of "big four" companies

Between them, the "big four" companies have dominated the Cyprus wine industry in recent times. They have developed new vineyards and planted hundreds of thousands of new vines, including many rediscovered traditional local types, benefiting from the fact that Cyprus has never been subjected to the Phylloxera beetle predation which devastated all other European wine-growing regions in the past. The companies have also built or restored wineries in the hills, researched new production techniques in their laboratories and introduced new styles and many new brands.

Since independence in 1960, moreover, the Government has encouraged the creation of smaller wine enterprises in the grape-growing regions. Today there are more than 20 registered regional wineries, making a major contribution to the diversification of style and the development of new wines.

Each year brings advances in quality and the introduction of exciting new wines using local grapes as well as famous international varieties. The combined talents of the large companies and the smaller enterprises give the Cyprus wine industry bright prospects, especially when Cyprus joins the European Union in the near future. □

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