

OLIVE AND OLIVE OIL IN ALBANIA, FROM ANTIQUITY UNTIL THE MIDDLE AGES

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Abstract

The exact location where the cultivation of olives began is still a subject of speculation. However various sources indicate as the olive origin a region somewhere between Syria and Iran, from where it spread around 5000 years ago in the entire Mediterranean basin. Olive cultivation from the territories of Mesopotamia, Egypt, Israel, Phoenicia, Crete, and Mycenae was spread by the Greeks and in part by the Phoenicians in the entire Mediterranean basin, from Italy to France and Spain to the northern coast of Africa. Olive cultivation and olive oil production in the territory of Albania doesn't changes from that of the other neighboring territories. For the earlier periods the sources are missing, and the data mainly comes from the archaeological cities of antiquity and belongs mainly to olive cores and vessels for reserves and transport of oil. In the III - IV centuries AD the olive tree was undergoing the same crisis as the Roman Empire that turned it for so many centuries in rare and precious a plant, which was used only for religious services or by the rich part of the population. Starting from the Xth century AD., olive will return again as part of the Mediterranean landscape, culminating in the XVII century. Production of olive oil requires today and required four main stages: collection of fruit from the tree; washing and pressing of olives; pressure and fluid processing to obtain oil. Oil production is realized not only in specialized workshops called torcularium (in Albania is used the term "oil mill"), but also with simple tools. Manufacture of oil were found in villages, farms, villas, monasteries and some of smaller size home in the city, village or church environments. It was owned by wealthy families, but also by the church (the Episcopal Complex in Byllis; St. Michael's Church, Kostar; the Monastery of Kamenos, Delvinë; Church no. 7, Kamenicë; Church of St. Mary, Sinjë; the Monastery of Ardenica, etc.). The best examples from the medieval period come from the village of Kamenica, where are preserved five workshops of olive oil, one of which belongs to church no. 7.

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