THE SECRETS OF GREEK OLIVE OIL

Olive trees have been cultivated since ancient times, with the first plantations appearing in the eastern part of the Mediterranean region. Between 5000 and 1400 BCE, cultivation spread from Crete to Syria, Palestine, and Israel. By 1500 BCE, the Greeks were the largest producers of olive oil, establishing olive groves in conquered territories where climate conditions were favorable. According to Greek legend, the city of Athens was named after the goddess Athena, whose gift—a olive tree planted on the Acropolis—was preferred by the ancient inhabitants over Poseidon's gift. In the Bible, it is mentioned that a dove brought Noah an olive branch as a sign that the waters had receded.

Dubbed the "liquid gold" by Homer and used by ancient athletes for anointing their bodies, olive oil was believed to possess not only medicinal but also magical properties. The tree itself symbolized prosperity and peace. Despite the passage of centuries, it is still highly esteemed, primarily due to its beneficial effects on the human body.

Greeks established olive plantations in southern Italy and North Africa, while the Romans did so in Provence and the Iberian Peninsula. Pliny the Elder wrote that Italians produced very good olive oil, the finest in the Mediterranean region, sold at reasonable prices.

Olive trees were highly valued in Israel—King David employed guards to protect them. In Greece, cutting down an olive tree was punishable by death or exile. Even today, in Greek families, when a boy is born, the father is obliged to plant two olive trees, and when a girl is born, Greece is enriched by one tree.

Maritime expeditions facilitated the expansion of cultivation—favorable climatic conditions for olive trees also existed in the Americas: plantations were established in California, Mexico, Peru, Chile, and Argentina.

Only 10% of harvested olives are used for direct consumption, while 90% are processed into oil. Currently, approximately 460 million gallons (about 1.742 million liters) of olive oil are produced worldwide annually, with 30% produced by Spaniards, and 24% by Italians. Other producers include Greece, France, Tunisia, Morocco, Turkey, Portugal, China, Chile, Peru, Brazil, Mexico, Angola, South Africa, Uruguay, Afghanistan, Australia, and the USA.