

“Parfum de Chypre”

The research started after the intriguing discovery of the oldest known perfumery in Cyprus, to be dated around the 1800 BC. Among the peculiar outfit including more than 90 clay objects two complete alembics have been found. Their discovery predates the technic of distillation of 2600 years. Today we know that have been not the Arabs to invent it in VII century.

That have allowed a team of Italian CNR researchers to redesign the story of the ancient Cypriote art on extracting essences and creating perfumes since the II millennium BC. The discovery at Pyrgos (Lm) of a 2000 BC perfume factory has been the start of an addressed research (Institute of Technologies Applied to Cultural Heritage of Italian National Council for Researches), still in progress, on the lost world of Cyprus's perfumes. The analyses on the paraphernalia brought to light, revealed that at the beginning of II millennium BC, Cyprus was already producing perfumes from the wild plants of the Troodos.

The same fragrances mentioned by the ancient writers, the Egyptian Hieroglyphs and the Bible as a component of the perfume Kypros, later named Ciprininum and other famous Cypriote perfumes as the Sausympkinon, Myrtinum and Amarikinon. Since the Mycenaean period, we have the record of Cyprus's trade on

perfumes on the Linear B tablets of the second half of II millennium BC. Later some of Cypriot scents became famous in all the ancient Mediterranean, especially in Egypt, where the recipes have been reported in hieroglyphics. Moreover, the Cyprus scents are mentioned by Greek and Roman writers Theophrastus, Dioscurides and Pliny the senior.

The name of many historical perfumes changed and disappeared in the darkness of the centuries, but the fame of the perfumes produces in Cyprus and named Cypros, Cyprinum, Amarakos and Amarikinon, etc. survived in mediaeval times and during the Renaissance spread in Europe until the last century when François Coty gave the name of the island to one of the ten olfactory families of the world.

In fact, despite different dominations, devastating conflicts and natural disasters, the island never stopped producing scents for ephemeral and religious uses. Chypre de Coty has been the first scent sold all over the world and to day the 60% of the most used perfumes belong to the Chypre family.

This family has been recently recognised as one of the most important by Fragonard, who reduces to seven the ten olfactory

families including Chypre.

The research on the origins and history of this perfume family is starting to become a reality born from the Italian and Cypriot cooperation addressed on the conservation of Cypriot Cultural Heritage from which this perfume comes. It is the witness who transfers this knowledge in the long path that characterizes and gives continuity to the research conducted so far.

To articulate the whole spectrum of historical, archaeological and scientific experiences, in connecting knowledge and experiences, the volume “Parfum the Chypre” has been published, containing a modern approach on the research in progress, to propose the investigations as a resource in the most innovative and sustainable economic policies and social development.

This multidisciplinary approach which has led the investigations reported in this volume, is indeed an important testimony of the cooperative spirit that fuels the research.

This innovative pattern of research will try to reconstruct the elements of the very Cypriot ancient civilisation, exploiting, enhancing and consolidating the continuity of one of the most ancient perfume traditions without betraying its fundamental

matrices.

The investigations and the results are fully in line with a strategic approach and responds to new policies promoted by the Lazar group that will create strong synergies between Scientific research and Humanities, as well as conservation of Natural Cultural heritage.

Mystikò is the name of the oil-perfume invented by M.Rosaria Belgiorno and Yannulla Lazarou, containing five basic ancient elements of the famous Kypros- Chypre: Olive oil, Bergamot, Majoran, Ayioklima and Laudanum and something more. They have been strictly extracted in Lazarou's laboratory using exclusively the wild plants of Troodos, which represent the survived treasure that links the past and the present of Cyprus.

This treasure is completely ignored to day by the perfumes' world which use mainly chemical components and essential oils produced by cultivated plants, consisting of hybrids of the wild plants of the Mediterranean flora, whose original fragrances is long far away from the ones available today on the market.

The Flora of Cyprus, accomplished by R.D. Meikle of the

Herbarium, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, U.K., includes both native and cultivated plants. Among these *Foeniculum vulgare*, *Lavandula hybrida*, *Lavandula Stoechas*, *Mentha viridis*, *Origanum cordifolium*, *Origanum Majorana* Amaracos, *Rosmarinus officinalis*, *Salvia fruticosa* and *officinalis*, *Sideritis perfoliata*, *Thymus capitatus* and the *Centaurea Akamantis* are strictly protected by Bern Convention.

The continuity in the production of scents until to day is attested trough the centuries by historical documentation and objects coming from Old Europe, regarding specially the containers for “Cipria”, the most famous cosmetic known all over the world since the 15^o century. There are traditional objects too that are still used nowadays in Cyprus to make essences for domestic or liturgical purposes. These are the stills to extract perfumed oils from lemon, sour orange and rose.

Most of our information about the role of perfume in the ancient world comes from the Greek and Roman writers of the time. Pliny writes in his Natural History that, “The pleasure of perfume is among the most elegant and honourable enjoyments in life”. Pliny also observed that the first thing proper to know about perfumes is

that their importance changes.

All the ancient Mediterranean Gods delighted in aromatics, and all the ancient religions used aromas in their rituals. However, the most fragrant of all the ancient divinities was Aphrodite, the patron-goddess of Cyprus.

Homer writes of Aphrodite visiting her fragrant temple “where her precinct is and fragrant altar, and passed into her sweet-smelling temple. There she went in and put to the glittering doors, and there the Graces bathed her with heavenly oil such as blooms upon the bodies of the eternal gods- oil divinely sweet, which she had by her, filled with fragrance”.

Virgil says of Aphrodite that “the ambrosial locks of her hair were fragrant with heavenly odour, and Athenaeus describes her as “dressed in robes perfumed with rich treasures of the revolving seasons”. Moreover, Leonardo da Vinci arriving on the coast of Cyprus around the 1500 left us his description:

*..... “From the shore of the Southern coast
of Cilicia may be seen to the South*

*the beautiful island of Cyprus,
which was the realm of the goddess Venus,
and many navigators being attracted by her beauty,
had their ships and rigging broken amidst the reefs,
surrounded by the whirling waters.
Here the beauty of delightful hills tempts
wandering mariners to refresh themselves
amidst their flowery verdure,
where the winds are tempered
and fill the island and the surrounding seas
with fragrant odours”...*

from: *The Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci* (1452 – 1519) 1104 – XVIII,

Jean Paul Richter ed., 1880.