

The sacred wine of the land: Ktima Biblia Chora

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Anegret Stamos of Ktima Biblia Chora

Allison Levine, Please The Palate photo



In the past week, I have dined out at four restaurants and at three of these, there was a Greek wine on the menu. More and more, we are seeing Greek wines in the U.S. And, after traveling to Greece the last two summers, I was starting to feel confident in my growing knowledge of the wines. But this week, I learned about yet another wine region in Greece called Pangeon and the winery Biblia Chora.

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Allison Levine

There are 28 wine districts in Greece, and within these districts are the 58 wine areas that have been designated with Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) status. One of these regions is Pangeon in Northern Macedonia, approximately 100 kilometers from the city of Thessaloniki.

Established as a PGI in 1995, the vineyards of Pangeon are located on the slopes of Mount Pangeon and on Mount Symvolos at altitudes of 350 to 480 meters. A Mediterranean climate by day and a continental climate by night, the region is known for lots of wind, high altitude and cold nights. The soils of clay, loam and stone are home to many local and international varieties, including assyrtiko, roditis, malagousia, muscat of Alexandria, viognier, gewurztraminer, chardonnay, sémillon, sauvignon blanc, trebbiano, agiorgitiko, lemnio, pamidi, grenache rouge, cabernet franc, cabernet sauvignon, merlot and syrah.

One of the largest wineries in Pangeon is Ktima Biblia Chora. *Ktima* means “estate”; *biblia* comes from the original *biblinos oenos* or “sacred wine”; *chora* means “land.” Biblia Chora was started by enologists Vassilis Tsaktsarlis and Vangelis Gerovassiliou. Gerovassiliou studied in Bordeaux under Emile Peynaud before returning to Greece in 1976 to work as enologist at Porto Carras. He started Ktima Gerovassiliou in 1981. Tsaktsarlis also studied enology in Bordeaux, studying under Denis Dubourdieu and Pascal Ribereau-Gayon. He would return in the summers and work at Ktima Gerovassiliou. In 1992, he began working as enologist for Domaine Costas Lazaridis in Drama and noticed the potential of grapes from Kavala. Together, he and Gerovassiliou planted the vineyards of Ktima Biblia Chora in 1998 and their first vintage was in 2001.

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While at Lazaridis, Tsaktsarlis worked with Annegret Stamos, a chemist from Germany. Stamos married a Greek man and has been living in Greece for 30 years. She spent 10 years working at Lazaridis and joined Biblia Chora in 2001. As the chief chemist and export manager for the brand, Stamos works closely with Tsaktsarlis. While they have worked together for more than two decades, their connection is even deeper. By complete coincidence, Stamos' husband's cousin is married to Tsaktsarlis. Tsaktsarlis has two children, Areti and Michalis who have both studied chemistry, and has named two of the wines after Areti, even using artwork from when she was child on the label.

In addition, Stamos' 30-year-old daughter, who studied enology in Germany, and her husband, an enologist from Chile, are also working now at Biblia Chora. Biblia Chora is currently a family business and, as Stamos explained, "it is more than a job, it is a passion."

The passion of Biblia Chora is today 48 hectares where they primarily grow sauvignon blanc, assyrtiko, chardonnay, semillon, gewurztraminer, syrah (for rose), cabernet sauvignon, merlot and agiorgitiko. They also have a small plot of land where they experiment and test 27 different varieties. Biblia Chora produces 11 wines: Ktima Biblia Chora White, Ktima Biblia Chora Rosé, Ktima Biblia Chora Red, Ktima Biblia Chora Chardonnay, Ktima Biblia Chora Merlot, Ovilos White, Ovilos Rosé, Ovilos Red, Ktima Biblia Chora Sweet, Areti White and Areti Red. During Stamos' recent visit to California, I tasted three of the wines:

— **Areti White 2014 and 2015**