



OLIVE OIL AND THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA

The history of olive oil and its cultivation has an unbreakable bond with the sea.

Its origin takes place in the Middle East and distribution by sea is a very ancient practice. Almost five thousand years ago the first ships containing amphorae filled with oil crossed the Mediterranean to reach Egypt. Then thanks to Greek and Phoenix merchants cultivation of the olive tree was expanded through the entire Mediterranean basin up to the boundaries of the ancient world. However olive cultivation reaches its peak in the areas dominated by Rome. Entire provinces are covered with olive groves and Rome's fleet ensures its distribution and supply.

Oil becomes indispensable for daily life: it is used in meals, as the base of perfumes and medications and for light, as well as for anointing in symbolic spiritual and religious practices.

Reconstruction of roman ships found in the Mediterranean show the ingenious methods by which the oil was stored for transportation.

Olive trees have been revered since ancient times for their longevity and the capacity of its trunk to regenerate itself. The olives are gathered and pressed until they form a uniform paste. This paste is pressed again and the oil is extracted.

In Tuscany as usual the Medici family encouraged the cultivation of olive trees giving rise to one of the most important resources of the region of today where over 138000 acres of land are devoted to its production.

As it has been done for wine, olive oil produced in Tuscany has been awarded the DOP designation (product of protected origin).

There are many varieties all extra virgin but they can be divided into three main categories: SWEET, oil pressed of mature olives, with mild perfume, reminiscent of almonds and pine nuts. FRUITY, has a distinct oil flavor with a mild bitter after-taste reminiscent of fresh fruit.

CHARACTERIAL, oil pressed with small or not quite mature olives with a pungent odor, and bitter-hot taste.