

CONSECRATED TRADITIONAL CURES AND TREATMENTS FROM OLTENIA USING MEDICINAL WINE REMEDIES*

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Abstract: The present study, based on the information provided by the performers from Oltenia, resulted from our personal field research, intends the identification of some particularities specific for the traditional medicine, by using wine as a remedy in treating most of the diseases.

In the introductory part, there was accentuated the special importance that the viticultural products have in the human life, which, through the wide variety of the substances they contain, have been utilised in diets and therapies for thousands of years. In the investigation part, the wine is described and recommended, along with the vineyard products, simple or mixed, as remedies used in the prophylaxis and the treatment of the diseases, as it results from the field information. The traditional experience of the dwellers from the investigated area, in the domain of the traditional medicine, can bring some contributions to the acknowledging of the wine-making culture and civilisation.

Keywords: traditional remedies, wine remedies, Oltenia, the prevention and the treatment of the illnesses, nutritious qualities.

The present study contains information on the healing virtues, the effects of the wine on the human body, in an endeavour to capture the traditional medical experience of the dwellers from Oltenia, when fighting against some diseases. The naturist therapies reflect the preoccupations of the people related to the knowledge and the usage of the land resources, the awareness over their consumption, the grasping of the mysteries behind the prolongation of the living, for the man in sufferance.

Since immemorial times, the wine and the vineyard products have been used as aliments, and also as therapies for a healthy body with the help of food and diet.

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According to the archaeological researches and the historical discoveries, the vine was cultivated 7000-9000 years ago in the southern area of the Caspian Sea¹.

The doctors from Babylon and the renowned doctor of the Ancient Greece, Hippocrates, were recommending the grapes, the must of grapes and the wine in the treatment of the different internal and external diseases. The ancient Greeks were using the ashes obtained after burning the vine cords for the preparation of the must and wine².

In our country, the viticulture has been an important branch in agriculture, the vine being cultivated, as it is confirmed by the archaeological discoveries, since the Prehistory. The vine related products (the grapes, the natural juice, the must and the wine) have been known as basic elements for the daily nurture. The first written evidence on the Getae-Dacian vineyards belongs to Strabo, who gives us the information that the Getae owned a lot of them³. In his turn, Herodotus mentions that the Getae-Dacians were utilising the wine for performing certain rituals⁴.

Mentions of the wine in the Romanian space appeared in the first texts written in Slavonic, Greek, Latin, along with the ones in Romanian. The oldest drawn up text in which there are certain references to the sacred wine used in the Christian cult is *The Passions of the Martyrs Epictetus and Astion*⁵. This narrative text contains three sequences depicting the Christian living, in which Epictetus, Astion and the bishop Evangelus advise the Christians to receive the Sacraments⁶. There ought to be considered the fact that three of the Christian Sacraments include the presence of wine.

The Romans, in order to preserve the different varieties of wines, and to make them resistant to degradation, used the method of treating it with solid of dissolution salt, invented by the ancient Greeks of Kos. This wine preserving method was used for keeping almost unchanged the oenological characteristics, in order to accelerate the antioxidant activity, to impede intoxication, and also for therapeutic and curative reasons. Nonetheless, for preserving the wines, in the Greek-Latin Antiquity, there were other methods, which included the treating of the wine with resins, ashes, and, furthermore, with tar.

A description of the method that involves the adding of a specific quantity of salt water into the wine, is made by the ancient author Cato, who, besides the special value conferred by the age, it is also important for it offers fascinating

¹ Valentina Iarovi, *Vița – de – vie în cultura moldovenilor*, in “Buletin Științific. Revistă de Etnografie, Științele Naturii și Muzeologie”, Științele Naturii magazine, vol. 7(20), new series, Chișinău, 2007, p. 208.

² *Ibidem*, p. 215.

³ Vasile Pârvan, *Getica*, Bucharest, 1926, p. 137.

⁴ Răzvan Voncu, *O istorie literară a vinului în România*, Bucharest, Curtea Veche Publishing, 2013, p. 9.

⁵ See Nestor Vornicescu, *Una dintre primele scrieri ale literaturii române vechi. “Pătimirea martirilor Epictet și Astion”*, Craiova, Oltenia Metropolitan Church Publishing, 1990, pp. 6–18.

⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 15–16.

information on the oenology: “There should be taken water from the open sea, when the sea is calm, the wind is not blowing, seventy days before harvesting the grapes, from a place where the fresh water does not reach. After taking it from the sea, it is poured into a barrel: it should not be filled up, but five quadrants less. Put a lid on it, leaving a space for breathing. After thirty days, pour it gently in another clean barrel: leave the precipitate on the bottom of the first barrel. After twenty days, pour it into another barrel: it ought to be left like this until the grapes are picked... Then, take the above-mentioned sea water: pour ten quadrants of sea water into a fifty quadrants barrel. Subsequently, separate the berries from the clusters of different grapes and put them into the barrel, until it is filled: press the berries with the hand until they are soaked in the sea water; after the barrel has been filled up, put a lid on and leave a space for breathing. After three days, take the grapes out of the barrel and tread them; keep that wine into washed, clean and dry barrels”⁷.

Pliny the Elder was underlining the temporal dimension when gathering the sea water, used in preparing the wine: “It should be taken from the high sea and preserved since the spring equinox, or at least, at night, on solstice when the Aquilon blows, or it should be boiled, if it is taken around the harvesting time”⁸.

Although the grapes were representing the raw material used for obtaining viticultural products, the ancient peoples used to make wine “from the plants that grow in their gardens too: from asparagus roots, from thyme, marjoram, celery or wormwood seeds, wild mint, rue, catmint, wild thyme and horehound: there are put two bunches of them in a cauldron with the sixth part of some reduced must and a hemin of sea water”⁹.

The sea water had a great influence, usually positive, on the quality of wine, which was also depending on a lot of other factors, among which the nature of the vine variety. Nonetheless, there were exceptions, when, by adding sea water, the wine was harmful for the human body: “The Ephesus wine is not healthy, because it is mixed with sea water and sweet juice”¹⁰.

The ancient wine, treated with sea water was used in the treatment for different diseases. For example, Athenaeus was recommending it for calming the stomach pain and spasms, for facilitating food residue elimination¹¹.

For the Romans, the grapes represented a basic nutriment, being consumed with bread. In order to be kept fresh as long as possible, the Romans used to

⁷ Cato, *De agricultura (Cartea despre cultivarea pământului)*, bilingual text, translation from Latin, introduction, notes and index by Ioana Costa, Bucharest, University of Bucharest Publishing House, 2010, p. 112.

⁸ Plinius, *Naturalis Historia*, volume III, “Botanica”, Book XIV, 25, translation by O. Gordon, supervised edition, preface, notes, annexes and index by Ioana Costa, Iași, 2002.

⁹ *Ibidem*, Book XIV, 19.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, 9.

¹¹ Bernard Moinier, Marius Alexianu, *Sare și vinuri în antichitatea greco-romană*, in “Tyragetia”, vol. V, nr. 1/2011, p. 286.

preserve them through different methods, some of them being practiced and met in many Romanian settlements nowadays as well¹².

In the Middle Ages, the Romanian wine was exported from Muntenia and Moldova in Transylvania, and the Central Europe markets¹³. The foreign travellers who passed through the Romanian regions noticed the abundance of vineyards and the quality of the wine produced in Principalities. Nevertheless, the notes of David Frolich (1629–1639) mention not only the superior quality of the Transylvanian wine, but also its harmful effects for the human body, due to the fact that it used to be treated with a food preserver called sulphur dioxide: “The wine, which is produced abundantly, is better than the Romanian, French, Austrian, Moravian wine, but of a poorer quality than the Roman or the Hungarian one: it contains more tartar and more sulphur, and, for this reason it causes arthritis in arms and legs. Healthier and stronger wines are made at Alba Iulia, Deva, Aiud, Biertan, Feneş and Mediaş”¹⁴.

Proving obvious interest, the Syrian traveller Paul de Alep was remarking the fact that, at the monasteries, the sacral wine used in the Christian cult was preserved in a barrel “made by a holly person”: “In the cellar of Tismana monastery, there is an enormous barrel, whose length is of twenty-six spans and width of nine spans. It contains three thousand *vedre* (1 *vadră* = 2.5gallons) of wine, each *vadră* measuring 12 *ocale* (1 *oca* = approx. 3lbs) (...). The monks fill it up with wine, using some long funnels, connected to top of the container and reaching the external side. The wine is kept for a whole year, for blessing causes, the barrel being made by a holly person, by hand, from a type wood that grows only around the monastery, called the yew-tree”¹⁵.

In the writings of Petru Bogdan Baksic, while passing through Iași in 1641, there can be found a piece of information referring to the fact that the Romanian wine is also known as an export product: “The wine is expensive, because it is made in small quantities, in three or four places from the country, and people come all the way from Poland to buy it. The wines are a bit tart”¹⁶.

Dimitrie Cantemir makes some observations and describes the oeno-gastronomic customs of the Romanians: “Their greatest delight is to celebrate in feasts, sometimes from six in the evening to three at night, other times until dawn, and to drink until they throw up. Yet, they do not use to party every day, but only on holidays and when it is a bad weather, in the winter, when the frost makes

¹² Nicolae Lașcu, *Cum trăiau românii*, Bucharest, Editura Științifică Publishing, 1965, p. 227.

¹³ Răzvan Voncu, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

¹⁴ *Călători străini despre Țările Române*, vol. V, supervised by Maria Holban, M.M. Alexandrescu-Dersca Bulgaru, Paul Cernovodeanu, Bucharest, Scientific Publishing, 1973, p. 46.

¹⁵ *Idem*, vol. VI, part I, bio-bibliographical study and translation by M. M. Alexandrescu-Dersca Bulgaru, Bucharest, Scientific Publishing, 1976, p. 199.

¹⁶ *Idem*, vol. V, supervised by Maria Holban, M. M. Alexandrescu-Dersca Bulgaru, Paul Cernovodeanu, Bucharest, Scientific Publishing, 1973, pp. 232–233.

people stay inside and warm their hearts with wine”¹⁷. Moreover, the scholar prince provides another interesting piece of information. The local people drink with moderation, do not consume wine excessively, only a small glass, before meals¹⁸. It is noticeable that our forefathers knew the prophylactic and therapeutic effect of the wine drunk with restraint, as an old saying goes: *an old wine, drunk in moderation, does not nurture, but heals*.

A traveller in Transylvania between 1656 and 1658, Conrad Jacob Hildebrandtis amazed that the wine is a poor quality one, and its consumption generates certain health problems: “The wine is very limy and unhealthy, a fact proved by the dwellers’ crooked fingers and arms”¹⁹.

Valuable information on the curative effect of the wine is found in the notes of Anton Maria Del Chiaro: “Most of Transylvania is provided from Wallachia with the best wine and red wines, which have delicate taste and are healthy for the stomach”²⁰. Brâncoveanu’s secretary is impressed with a custom the dwellers from Wallachia have, that of sharing, on holidays, the same drinking goblet: “If it is a holiday, they wish each other to be healthy and meet again the following year, and then the house owner, after crossing himself, drinks the first glass of wine. The Wallachians do not ask for drinks, they wait the host to offer them the drink in the same glass, which is passed on; the foreigner, who is used to other hygiene rules, gets used to this with difficulty”²¹.

At the beginning of the 19th century, count P.H. Vixtghenștein would cultivate, in the south-western part of Dniester river, varieties of table grapes with curative properties. In the hospital built on his estate, the war invalids from 1812 were treated with these grapes²².

In the 19th century, the treatment with grapes was also common in Italy, France, Germany, Russia, along with many other countries²³.

In Oltenia, the wine is a part of the ethnoiatry recipe, being often used, along with healing plants, apicultural products, brandy, vinegar, water baths, acupuncture, for prophylactic and therapeutic purposes.

Some traditional therapeutic remedies are based on a mixture of wine and different parts of the curing plants: “When one has lung problems, few roots of chopped common comfrey or marsh-mallow are macerate din litre of white wine, for a week, in a glass jar. The mixture is stirred once a day, using a wooden spoon. It is then strained and one should drink a small glass of the liquid, twice a day,

¹⁷ Dimitrie Cantemir, *Descrierea Moldovei*, translation from Latin by Petre Pandrea, Chișinău, Litera Internațional Publishing, 2003, p. 176.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*.

¹⁹ *Călători străini despre Țările Române*, vol. V, ..., p. 554.

²⁰ Anton Maria Del Chiaro, *Revoluțiile Valahiei*, (after the text re-edited by Nicolae Iorga), in Romanian by S. Cris-Cristian, Iași, 1929, p. 7.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 14.

²² Sofroni Carpov, *Elixir din struguri*, Chișinău, Cartea Moldovenească Publishing, 1989, p. 33.

²³ *Ibidem*.

before meals. The cure is a month long. It is repeated once in three months”²⁴; it prevents and treats skin cancer, hepatic diseases and corns: “Three spoons of common celandine powder are macerated in a litre of wine. It is filtered and preserved in a tightly closed bottle. It should be administrated as a small glass drunk in the morning, for about two months. It should be made a pause for a month and the treatment is started again”²⁵; it ameliorates the cold symptoms and it heals cough: “A handful of basil flowers are macerated in a litre of wine, from the evening to the morning. It is filtered and preserved in corked bottles. A small glass of it should be drunk after each meal”²⁶; “Two handfuls of wormwood are macerated in a litre of wine, for two days. It is strained through a double-folded gauze. There should be administrated two spoons of it before the meals”²⁷; it reduces the cholesterol and induces sleep: “A handful of rosemary or linden flowers is macerated in a litre of wine, in a lid-fasten glass jar, for a few days. A small glass of it should be drunk three times a day, after meals”²⁸.

The wine combined with vegetables has important therapeutic qualities: “To eliminate the kidney stones, two finely chopped stalks of leek are macerated in a litre of wine for a week. It is stirred once a day, with a wooden spoon. It is strained through a double-folded gauze. There should be administrated two spoons of it each morning. The cure lasts for a month. It is repeated few months after”²⁹; it calms the sore throat and the cough: “When you have a bad cough, there are boiled two handfuls of finely chopped wild garlic in a litre of wine. It is strained and poured in tightly fastened bottles. A small glass of it should be drunk each morning and evening”³⁰; “In a glass jar, for two weeks, there is macerated a half of kilo of finely chopped onion and two hundred grams of honey in a litre of wine. A small glass of it is drunk three times a day”³¹; it calms down the pain caused by rheumatism and spondylosis: “Two black radishes with the peel on are grated and macerated in a litre of white wine, in a glass jar, for ten days. A small glass of it is drunk in the morning, after each meal. The cure lasts for three weeks”³²; a cure against anaemia and asthma: “Few grated horseradish roots are macerated in a litre of red wine for a week. It is filtered, bottled and a spoon of it is administrated three times a day, after meals. The cure lasts for a month. After a pause, the treatment is repeated”³³; adjuvant in digestive and renal diseases: “Two handful of lovage and parsley are macerated in a litre of wine for two weeks. A small glass of it is drunk

²⁴ Informer Iuliana Ghiță, 62 years old, locality of Podeni, Vâlcea County, 2020.

²⁵ Informer Eugenia Raicea, 84 years old, locality of Drănic, Dolj County, 2020.

²⁶ Informer Paraschiva Nisipașu, 76 years old, locality of Maglavit, Dolj County, 2020.

²⁷ Informer Dochia Capotă, 86 years old, locality of Ciungetu, Vâlcea County, 2020.

²⁸ Informer Lenuța Păun, 82 years old, locality of Gubandru, Olt County, 2020.

²⁹ Informer Elena Mihai, 75 years old, locality of Nedeia, Dolj County, 2020.

³⁰ Informer Viorica Sârbu, 82 years old, locality of Lunca, Gorj County, 2020.

³¹ Informer Gheorghe Diaconu, 82 years old, locality of Bocea, Vâlcea County, 2020.

³² Informer Ana Ungureanu, 71 years old, locality of Gubandru, Olt County, 2020.

³³ Informer Rozica Ristea, 81 years old, locality of Bechet, Dolj County, 2020.

three times a day before meals³⁴; it fights fatigue and stress: “Two grated celeries and 100g of honey are macerated in a litre of wine for a few days. A small glass of it is drunk before each meal. The cure lasts for a month³⁵; it reduces the risk for heart diseases and ischemic cardiomyopathy: “If one has heart problems, a handful of parsley, its root included, is boiled in a litre of white wine, 100g of honey are added to it. The mixture is brought to a boil for a few times. It is strained and two spoons of it are administrated two times a day. The cure lasts for three weeks. It is repeated after a month³⁶; “Few smashed garlic cloves are macerated in a quarter of litre of white wine for a few days. A teaspoon of it is administrated empty stomach for a month³⁷.

Some mixtures for regaining a good health and curing diseases, include wine, honey, therapeutic plants and fruits. “When you lack appetite, a kilo of honey is macerated with a litre of wine. It is stirred with a wooden spoon once a day. It is filtered and preserved in corked bottles. Two spoons of it are administrated twice a day, after meals. The cure lasts for a month. It is repeated after three months³⁸; it improves the gastrointestinal tract functions, it calms the nervous system and it diminishes stress: “A handful of dried mint leaves and a half of kilo of honey are macerated in a litre of white wine for two weeks. Two spoons of it are administrated for three weeks, before each meal. The cure is repeated after a month³⁹; it fights depression, insomnia and headaches: “A kilo of crashed wild berries is macerated in a litre of red wine for ten days, in a glass jar. After it is strained through a gauze or fine strainer, there are added 250g of honey. A small glass of it is drunk twice a day, before meals. The cure lasts for two months. It is repeated after three months⁴⁰; it cures the cold: “When one has a cold, it should be drunk a mug of red wine, boiled with honey and pepper⁴¹.

Grape juice has an antioxidant, diuretic, depurative effect, it fights cancer and it is full with vitamins: “Black grapes are squeezed and a glass of the juice is drunk before meals⁴²; it fights gastritis, it stimulates digestion, it protects the heart and it stimulates the liver function, it heals and prevents headaches and it is recommended for the respiratory duct.

Grape must has vitaminizing properties, it helps detox the body: “Three glass of must are drunk after meals⁴³; it prevents and treats heart, stomach, kidney diseases, anaemia, rheumatic pains, it diminishes headaches, and it is recommended in fatigue.

³⁴ Informer Maria Ștefan, 64 years old, locality of Spinu, Vâlcea County, 2020.

³⁵ Informer Elena Toma, 87 years old, locality of Silea, Vâlcea County, 2020.

³⁶ Informer Victorița Ruță, 76 years old, locality of Ghizdăvești, Dolj County, 2020.

³⁷ Informer Elisabeta Dumitrașcu, 82 years old, locality of Bulzești, Dolj County, 2020.

³⁸ Informer Anastasia Antonie, 82 years old, locality of Prundeni, Vâlcea County, 2020.

³⁹ Informer Emilia Pătrână, 62 years old, locality of Gângiova, Dolj County, 2020.

⁴⁰ Informer Ana Ungureanu, locality of Gubandru, Olt County, 2020.

⁴¹ Informer Viorica Sârbu, locality of Lunca, Gorj County, 2020.

⁴² Informer Porumbița Popescu, 92 years old, locality of Bulzești, Dolj County, 2020.

⁴³ Informer Iuliana Ghiță, 62 years old, locality of Podeni, Vâlcea County, 2020.

Vine leaves infusion cicatrizes wounds, and vine sap is used for treating eye diseases⁴⁴.

Natural remedies for treating bone diseases are also the mixtures of wine and wheat bran: “When you suffer from rheumatism and your bones ache, in a clay pot, there is mixed a litre of white wine, a bowl of wheat bran, a finely chopped cabbage, and everything is boiled until softening. When the porridge is lukewarm, it is applied on the sore spot, in a folded piece of gauze”⁴⁵.

Some cures offered by the traditional medicine are based on the quality of wine, to which there are added fruits: “When you suffer from anaemia, 250g of dried unsmoked prunes and 100g of honey are macerated in a litre of red wine. It is filtered and poured in bottles. Three spoons of it are consumed before meals. The cure lasts for three weeks. After a pause, the treatment is repeated”⁴⁶; it treats atherosclerosis: “One kilo of blueberries is boiled in a litre of red wine. A cup of it is drunk each morning, after meals, for a month”⁴⁷, diabetes, anaemia and renal diseases: “Half of kilo of pears is boiled in a litre of wine. It is strained through a multiple folded piece of gauze, and it is kept in corked bottles. Two teaspoons of it are administrated before the meals. The cure lasts for a month”⁴⁸.

Through the fermentation of the white or red wine, it is obtained the wine vinegar, which normalises digestion and helps maintain the normal body weight, or the acceleration of weight loss process, the high antioxidant content helps neutralise the free radicals, prevents heart diseases, helps decrease the cholesterol level to normal values. In wine vinegar, there are macerated different herbs, fruits or spices⁴⁹.

In the ethnographic space of Oltenia, as on the entire space crossed by the Carpathians and the Danube, the medicinal wine that is used in almost all the diseases, carries a special importance in keeping and restabilising an individual's health, its prophylactic effect and therapeutic properties being renowned for thousands of years. The form of treatment based on wine remedies unravels specific features of the traditional medicine from the research area, the preservation and the perpetuation of the traditional medical knowledge being noticeable.

⁴⁴ Informer Eugenia Mitrică, 84 years old, locality of Drănic, Dolj County, 2020.

⁴⁵ Informer Evghenia Antonie, 85 years old, locality of Prundeni, Vâlcea County, 2020.

⁴⁶ Informer Polina Grădinaru, 80 years old, locality of Argetoia, Dolj County, 2020.

⁴⁷ Informer Ghița Onete, 54 years old, locality of Spinu, Vâlcea County, 2020.

⁴⁸ Informer Elena Barnea, 80 years old, locality of Gârlești, Dolj County, 2020.

⁴⁹ See: Loredana-Maria Ilin-Grozoiu, *Terapeutici arhaice și actuale legate de întrebuințarea oțetului. O cercetare expresă din spațiul etnografic oltenesc*, in “Memoria Ethnologica”, year XVII, no. 74–75/2020, pp. 56–69.