

OLIVE OIL AS PROTAGONIST FOR CENTURIES

By Elia Fiorillo, the president of Unasco

The olive oil has been protagonist in the mediterranean diet for centuries. The extra virgin olive oil only derived from mechanic press is not only a pleasure in our mouth or a simple dressing , but real food. Among all the vegetable oils the olive oil is one of the most digestible for our stomach.

In fact it contains anti-oxidants like vitamine E, poliphenols, Clorophiles and charotenoids that have a protective task in our body. Thanks to these elements the extra virgin olive oil can retard the activity of anti-radicals, that is to say the chemical components responsible of cell-ageing.

The olive oil supplies also vitamineA obstaculating the drying process of mucosa and fighting our skin-ageing. The presence of vitamineD allows regular calcium-assumption in the intestine and a resulting activity against calcium-losses for old people. As it is highly digestible it is considered one of the best vehicles of anti-oxidants and vitamines, present even in other kinds of food and whose assumption is favoured by it. The balanced presence of lynoleic acids and their derived acids let cholesterol be eliminated through the intestine, thus reducing the risk of coronaric diseases, gallstones and hearh-attacks. Furthermore it is already known that the usual use can prevent from colon and breast cancers, but even from cardiovascular diseases thanks to the oleic acid that makes lipoproteines more soluble and enable them to eliminate the cholesterol. Even nutritionists say that the extravergine olive oil helps digestion and it is easily absorbed by our body at any age, because of its percentage in vegetable fats.

The olive oil can resist high temperature up to 200°C. Therefore the extra virgin olive oil is fundamental for any diet. It useful for children because it supplies them with oleic acid, present even in mothers'milk, excellent food from any viewpoint; for sportspeople because it is a source of energy, and for old people because it limits calcium losses.

It has lots of vegetable fats that support our body with energy. Finally it is to be underlined that the olive oil is present in Several cosmetics, cleaners and shampoo.

Oil in literature

"Fece un'insalata di erbe e con poco d'aceto e oglio cenarono" (he made a salad with some vinegar and oil and they had dinner) "Lo zelo della giustizia, lo quale è un foco, dee ardere nell'olio della misericordia"- (the task of justice which is like fire must burn in the oil of misericordy). Domenico Cavalca (Vicopisano 1270- Pisa 1342)

"Non fo il de e la notte altro che filare, tanto che la carne mi s'è spiccata dall'unghia, per poter almeno avere tanto olio che n'arda la nostra lucerna"- (I don't do anything but spinning night and day, my skin tore from my nail, just to have some oil for our lamp).

Giovanni Boccaccio (Certaldo 1313- Firenze 1375).

"Se tu sei cristiano vero, l'olio di che tu sé unto di Spirito Santo pentrerà l'anima tua e colerà di fuori per tutto buone operazioni"- (If you are a True

christian the oil given
you by the Holy Spirit will go into your soul and pour out with good actions).

Girolamo Savonarola (Ferrara 1452- Firenze 1498).

"Il mio olio è durato poco. Quando io credeva di poter trovarmi a sentir questi venerandi lettori dello Studio, mi son sopraggiunte occupazioni che mi concedono né meno un quarto di ora di libertà" (My oil lasted just a little. When I believed I could study hard, I had so much work, I have not any moment of freedom).

Francesco Redi (Arezzo 1626- Pisa 1689)

"Soffocato dal sole e dalla polvere ho corso queste cinquanta miglia-e sempre pieno di voi, e vinto dal desiderio della mia patria, e funestado dalle disavventure de' medici cari-il mio olio e il mio vino è scarso e tante piaghe!"- (Suffocated by sun and dust I ran these fifty miles, and longing to my home countries, but persecuted by the misfortune of my dear doctors, I have little oil and wine for my plagues).

Ugo Foscolo (Zante 1778- Londra 1851).

"Dice il magontino arcivescovo Acanto de la mazza ferrata io porto l'olio santo: ce n'è per tutti" – (The archbishop Acanto says: I have the Holy oil for everybody).

Giosuè Carducci (Pietrasanta 1835- Bologna 1907).

"Così va fatto! Le nostre opere non devono mirare solo al presente, ma all'avvenire, non a noi soli, ma ai discendenti nostri. E allora i discendenti, anche lontani, prenderanno un poco d'olio degli ulivi che noi abbiamo piantato". –(We will do this way! Our work is not for the present but also for the future, it is not only for us, but for our descendants. They will get some oil from the olive- trees we planted). "L'olio cantò, murmure sommesso, un acre odore vaporò per tutto"- (The oil sang, a low sound, an acre smell spread everywhere).

Giovanni Pascoli (San Mauro di Romagna 1855 – Bologna 1912).

" In quella casa era illuminata una sola finestra, la finestra del cristiano che agonizzava aspettando l'olio santo"- (In that house there was only a light coming from a window where a christian was dying, but he waited for the Holy oil). " Il mare è quieto come l'olio"- (The sea is as smooth as oil).

Gabriele D'Annunzio (Pescara 1863- Gardone Riviera 1938).

"Tutta la nottata, quella delizia le. E fosse stato cattivo il mare! Ma che! Un olio"- (That pleasure all night long-and the sea wasn't rough! As smooth as oil!). Luigi

Pirandello (Agrigento 1867- Roma 1936).

"La sera colava il suo olio, dai bronzi riflessi di cangianti putredini, e le onde n'eran tutte impeciate"- (The night poured its oil, with its dark dirty things, and the waves were full of that grease).

Filippo Tommaso Marinetti (Alessandria d'Egitto 1876- Bellagio 1944).

"Ernesto mi dice: -Aspettate, le dà l'olio Santo"-(Ernest says to me:- Wait, he will give her the Holy oil). Cesare Pavese (Santo Stefano Balbo 1908- Torino 1950).

The history of the oil

The olive-tree (*olea europaea*) knotty and silver-like, is an ever-green tree, from five to eight meters high (sometimes fifteen meters) with a six-meter-circumference. The flowers, white coloured, sweet smelling, are grape-shaped and they bloom in April or May. The drupes, oval shaped, first have a green colour, later shading into red-violet and finally into black. They get ripe between October and November and they are used, depending on the kind, for oil-extraction or for food.

The olive tree is considered the typical tree, grown thanks to the mediterranean climate. But the origins of this tree are traced back to centuries ago. Fossils of the spontaneous of olive- tree in the mediterranean area can be dated back to millions of years ago, before men appeared on earth. Just an olive branch, brought by a dove, announced Noah the end of the storm, while Adam, next to death, received it right from God. An Angel gave his son Seth three seeds, born from the tree of Good and Evil: before burying his father, he will have to put them in his lips. From his tomb three trees will be generated: the cedar, the cypress and the olive-tree.

But the best-known legend in this field is about the challenge between Athena and Poseydone. Zeus decided that Athens and the Region of Attica would be given to the God that would produce the most useful gift. The final competitors are Athena and Poseydone. The latter makes a wonderful horse appear from the wood while Athena makes the earth generate a new kind of tree: the olive-tree. Athena, his daughter and Goddess, is the winner according to Zeus'will, maintaining that the horse is for useful war while the olive is useful for peace. There are many more legends. Among them, we will remember Aristheus', sheperd and wanderer, who was the first to get oil by pressing the olives; Latana's, who gave birth to the twins Dyane and Apollo under the first olive-branches that were then worshipped. Finally, there is the famous legend of the holy olives in Olympia, with which the serths crowned olympic winners. Then olive-culture moved from the north of Syria to modern Egypt and to Greek isles over all Crete, Rhodes and Cyprus, then it migrated to Greece and to Asia Minor.

The Babylonian codex already regulated the trade of the olive oil and for centuries it was given particular importance to this activity. The Egyptians considered it as a gift from Gods, the Jews used it to oil their king, the Greek built special ships to transport the huge amphora-containers. It is believed that the Greek brought the olive to Italy; they considered it as a gift of the goddess Athena. The Romans specialised the oil storage and distribution and ran the great quantities produced by the subdued people. The oil was used for cosmetic purposes, as medicine and for enlightenment, but it was mainly present in cooking, in receipts that have similar ingredient to our mediterranean diet. Apicus' essays witness that already in the first century b.C. the olive oil was

used to preserve, to dress, to cook. After a long period of decline, due to the fall of the Roman Empire and to the Barbarian invasions, the culture of oil, survived only in monasteries, has an important role from the twelfth century, when the oil trade started, again, improving the wealth of several states. Apulia was changed into a huge olive oil-field, this trade improved the economy of south-Italy. In our century over all in the 50s oil culture was spread all over the world thanks to the nourishing qualities of the olive oil.