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Pompeii Revives Ancient Vineyards in Archaeological Park to Reconnect with Its Cultural Heritage

New partnership plants organic Greco and Aglianico grapes, blending scientific research with sustainable farming on historic volcanic soil

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The ancient city of Pompeii is taking a new step in reconnecting with its past by planting vineyards within its archaeological park. This initiative is the result of a partnership between the Pompeii Archaeological Park and the Tenute Capaldo Group, which includes Feudi di San Gregorio, a well-known wine producer from Campania, and Basilisco from Basilicata. The project was presented to an international audience at the Italian Cultural Institute in London on February 25, where Gabriel Zuchtriegel, director general of the park, explained that the plan goes beyond producing wine for commercial purposes.

Zuchtriegel emphasized that the project aims to combine scientific research, sustainability, and the promotion of Italian agricultural products. The six-hectare vineyard will be planted with Greco and Aglianico grape varieties and cultivated using only organic methods. Professor Attilio Scienza from the University of Milan, a leading expert in oenology, is providing guidance for the project. The choice of grape varieties reflects those historically grown in Campania and aligns with the expertise of Feudi di San Gregorio.

The origins of this initiative can be traced back to botanical studies conducted in the 1990s by Pompeii's applied research laboratory. These studies focused on understanding ancient vineyard techniques and dietary habits in Pompeii before the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 AD. Over time, this research expanded into a broader archaeo-farming program that now includes olive cultivation and social farming activities within what the park describes as a social and cultural farm.

Zuchtriegel pointed out that wine has always been more than just a commodity in Pompeii. He referenced recently excavated banquet rooms decorated with frescoes depicting Dionysus (Bacchus to the Romans) and other mythological figures associated with wine. These images served as reminders to ancient diners that wine drinking was a communal act tied to religious rituals and mythology. Zuchtriegel also noted that Italy's approach to wine consumption differs from some other countries where health warnings on bottles are being considered. He suggested that lower rates of alcohol addiction in Italy may be linked to wine's role as part of shared meals and cultural traditions rather than as an isolated intoxicant.

Historically, wine played a central role in Pompeii’s economy. Paintings from antiquity show Mount Vesuvius covered in vineyards, and archaeological evidence indicates that Pompeian wine was exported across the Mediterranean, reaching regions as far as Spain, Turkey, North Africa, and southern France. Not all ancient consumers appreciated Pompeian wine; some inscriptions advised visitors to eat bread from Pompeii but drink wine from neighboring Nuceria instead. Roman tastes also differed from modern preferences, as they often mixed their wine with water and spices.

The current project does not aim to recreate Roman wines exactly but seeks to revive viticulture on land that supported vineyards two thousand years ago. The goal is to allow visitors to experience both the landscape and the products of these renewed vineyards. Antonio Capaldo, chairman and president of Feudi di San Gregorio, described the project as a long-term commitment similar to how Romans established their presence by planting vines and olive trees before building infrastructure or collecting taxes.

Capaldo highlighted that Roman soldiers drank about one liter of wine per day, usually diluted with water due to concerns about water quality at the time. For today’s wine industry, which faces regulatory challenges and changing consumer habits, Pompeii’s new vineyard offers a story of resilience and continuity.

The park is investing not only in preserving its ruins but also in conserving its landscape and environment through this partnership with private enterprise. Plans include developing winemaking and aging facilities on site. By replanting vines in volcanic soil, Pompeii aims to revive an agricultural tradition rooted in patience and cultural richness rather than simply replicating ancient flavors. This effort marks a shift for Pompeii from being seen solely as a site frozen by disaster to one actively cultivating its heritage for future generations.