

Sicily & Sardinia

November 2nd 2019

By Ormond Smith

What better way to while away a cold, wet November evening than dreaming of sitting in the sunshine on a Mediterranean island with a glass (or two!) of delightful Italian wine to hand. Well, hosts James and Heather Sheerin couldn't quite conjure up the idyllic venue and the sunshine but they did put together a most enjoyable evening in their house in Inverness with Italian wines from the Mediterranean area, the islands of Sicily and Sardinia, accompanied by nibbles of Italian breadsticks, olives and salamis.

They had managed to procure a selection of wines from these two islands, leading to a tasting which encouraged much stimulating discussion. A welcoming glass of **Blanquette de Limoux (Methode Traditionelle)** preceded a warm welcome by Connetable Nicol, prior to handing over to Heather who briefly outlined the format of the evening coupled with a stern warning not to overdo the tasting quantities as there were only two bottles of each wine! Duly disciplined, the members and guests picked up their wine glasses and sallied forth. The opening white wine was a **2017 Miopassa Fiana** from Catania in Sicily, the Fiana vine being considered as "classical" in southern Italy with its origins in ancient Roman viticulture and perhaps may have even been cultivated by the ancient Greeks before them. It is a vine with low yields but the resultant wine is fresh and appealing, light and pleasingly balanced, a nose of citrus and honeysuckle leads to peaches and apricots on the palate with subtle hints of almonds and hazelnuts. Onward to the second wine,



"Right, let's try wine no. 3"

a Sardinian **2017 Vermentino** from the Pala vineyards at Pala just north of Cagliari in the south of the island. The "**I Fiori**" range, 100% Vermentino, straw coloured with greenish reflections gives floral, perhaps even light vegetable aromas with hints of limes and greengages. On the palate the agreeable vegetable notes are predominant with floral overtones, the wine well balanced with good depth and leading to a long persistent finish, a perfect accompaniment to seafood! The evening was off to a good start....!

Moving round the table to wine three and back to Sicily, indeed to 700 metres up the northern foothills of the

active volcano Mount Etna, for a **2017 Barbazzale Bianco**, a blend of Viognier and the indigenous Inzolia grape. The nose was assailed with aromas of pears and preserved lemons with a hint of herbs while on the palate, well balanced, dry and with just a hint of honey on the lingering finish. The final white, or should we be "PC" and call it 'bianco' of the evening saw a return to Sardinia for a **2016 Torbato di Algerho** from the Terre Bianche vineyards in the north-west of the island. The Torbato grape is a rare variety (now exclusive to Sardinia) and is thought to have been brought to the island in the 8th century by the Phoenicians from Catalonia. Straw coloured with golden tones,

it is crisp and dry with a rich and complex aroma of grapefruit, dried herbs leading to a minerally palate, elegant and with a hint of smokiness as it lingers on the finish.....delicious!

Moving on, as they say, we progressed to the first rosso (red) of the evening, a **2016 Frappato** from **Fuedo di Santa Tresa** near Ragusa in the south-east corner of Sicily (some of us might just recall visiting the area in 2009). Frappato is thought to be a hybrid of the Sangiovese grape and is only grown in Sicily where it produces a red wine of light colour and great delicacy. A very pale garnet in the glass (reminiscent of a Beaujolais Gamay), an aroma of red berry fruits, and the palate is smooth, with medium tannins and an explosion of fruit flavours, culminating in a long, very slightly spicy finish.....lightly chilled, excellent with fish! Staying in Sicily, we move inland to the centre of the island for the next red, a **2016 Nero d'Avola "Regaleali"** from **Tasca d'Almerita**. Nero d'Avola is Sicily's most important red grape and can be compared with New World Shirazes with its sweet tannins and peppery flavours. An intense ruby red in the glass, the aroma assails you with black cherries, blueberries and vanilla and the palate echoes these fruits, soft, fresh and well balanced with a long finish. Mount Etna comes back into the picture with the penultimate wine, a **2016 Barbazze Etna Rossa** from the



The rosso wines certainly provoked discussion

vineyards over 700 metres above sea level on the northern slopes of the volcano. A blend of Nerello Mascalese (80%) and Nerello Cappuccio (20%), the nose displays blackberry fruits with floral hints, the palate is well balanced with good fruits and tannins and the wine lingers pleasantly on the aftertaste. The final "rosso" of the tasting saw us move north again to Sardinia to sample a **2016 Cannonau di Sardegna Riserve** from Sella & Mosca's historic vineyards at Algeria in the north-west of the island. The Cannonau grape of Sardinia is in fact the Grenache in other parts of the world - it is thought that the variety arrived on Sardinia with the Aragonese when they conquered the island in the early 14th Century (from what is now Aragon in Spain). However, in the past few years, Italian researchers have uncovered evidence suggesting



Delicious cheeses from Connage Dairy

that Cannonau (and therefore Grenache) may well have originated in Sardinia. History lesson over, the 100% Cannonau Riserve comes through strongly on the nose with a complex bouquet, hints of black cherries and herbs and this is carried onto the palate with intensity and balance. Well balanced, mouth filling, rich, with flavours encompassing tobacco, cocoa and liquorice on a long lingering aftertaste. What a finish to the Tasting!

The assembled confrères (and guests) then sat down to enjoy a very tasty and satisfying dish of Mediterranean

Chicken with Potatoes and Aubergine Parmigiana, followed by a trio of tangy cheeses, a Pecorina Tartufo, a Pecorino Sardo and an Ubriaco Prosecco from the local Connage Highland Dairy. "An excellent evening" was the unanimous critique by the assembly and sincere thanks go to Heather and James

for their hospitality, organisation and selection of wines and also the very acceptable repast, ably assisted by Susan Robb. A first class dégustation, a very tasty culinary experience and most convivial company.....just another successful Goustevin Scotland tasting!

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