the olive tree

Archaeological records as well as historical sources give evidence of the fact that the history of Crete is closely connected with the olive tree and with its basic product of olive oil. Archaeological findings from Knossos have proved that as early as the Minoan period the fruit of the olive tree was processed in order to produce olive oil, which was stored in large earthenware jars and amphorae and often exported to the Aegean islands and to the Greek mainland.

However, apart from for the economic profit the tree provided, it was also worshipped as a sacred tree and the olive oil was offered to the gods and to the dead. It was also used for medical and athletic purposes, while in ever day life it was used as the basic component for nourishment, lighting and heating. Thus, from ancient times up until now the olive tree and its blessed fruit have been the symbol of wisdom, of peace, of health and of power.

During recent years international medicine and dietetics recommend olive oil as being essential for healthy nutrition and a long life. Due to its Mediterranean climate Crete is predetermined for the development of olive trees, which grow in both valleys and mountainous areas and fruit in winter.

There are millions of olive trees on the island and thousands of families make a living from cultivating these trees. Both the climate and the composition of the Cretan soil guarantee the fine aroma and superb flavour of the Cretan olive oil, which is internationally acknowledged for its high quality.

The prefecture of Rethymno boasts an abundance of olive groves and the production of olive oil is one of the inhabitant's main activities. The sorts of olives that are cultivated are mainly "chondrolies", some "koroneikes" and a few "tsounates". These varieties produce olive oil as well as edible olives of excellent quality. The famous olive grove near Adele in the Municipality of Arkadi, which stretches in a vast flat and semi-mountainous area, is considered one of the largest olive groves in the Mediterranean.

The area of Rethymno and generally the entire island of Crete has always been closely linked with the olive tree and the production of olive oil. On the grounds of this long-lasting relationship a Museum of the Olive-tree was founded in the settlement of Kapsaliana, which was formerly a dependency of the Arkadi Monastery. At this place the Monastery's oil press as well as other buildings were established towards the end of the 16th and in the beginning of the 17th century. It is a scheduled settlement and today has almost entirely been restored and preserved.