

Μαστίχα Χίου

**Chios Mastiha**<sup>PDO</sup>  
Overview

**chiosmastiha**  
VOYAGE TO THE EAST MEDITERRANEAN

## Chios Mastiha, a PDO product

On 1992 the European Union enacted 2081/92 regulation (substituted by 510/2006), for the protection of the designation of origin products of the agricultural products.

By **“Protected Designation of Origin – PDO”** the name of a specific region is meant, or in extraordinary cases the name of a country is meant, which is used in the description of an agricultural product or of a food originating from this region, from the specified location or country, and the quality or the characteristics of which are mainly or exclusively due to the geographical environment, including the natural and human factors and the production, alteration and process of which take place in the delimited geographical area.

Since 1997, Chios mastiha has been identified as **Protected Designation of Origin** product (PDO), subject to No.123/1997 Regulation (L0224/24-1-97) of **European Union** and has been registered in the relevant Community List of PDO Products.

All Protected Designation of Origin Products bear the PDO mark 

The PDO acknowledgement, for the agricultural products and food, allows growers to promote more easily their products distinguished by special characteristics, on one hand, and on the other hand it allows the consumers to buy quality products, with guarantees for their production, process and origination.

The registered names for the PDO products are protected against any direct or indirect commercial use for products which do not comply with the special specifications of every product, as well as against any expropriation, imitation, insinuation, false or deceitful indication as far as it concerns the origin, derivation or nature of the product and against any other practice able to misinform the public on the actual origin of the product.

Apart from PDO products, European Union has enacted PGI (Protected Geographical Indication) and (ETG) Traditional Speciality Guaranteed products. More specifically:

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By **“Traditional Speciality Guaranteed (ETG) Products”** alteration products are mainly meant, characterized by their composition or their mode of preparation, having a history of a number of decades and integrate the history, the manners and customs, which means the folklore and the traditions of the people that produces such products. These products are based on the tradition and alimentary culture of the European citizens and display special characteristics which are due to the soil-climatic conditions of the cultivation area and to the special production and alteration conditions.



## CHIOS MASTIHA

Chios Mastiha is the natural resin that is excreted from the trunk and branches of the schinos, the Greek name for the mastiha tree (*Pistacia Lentiscus* var. *Chia*). This excretion is produced by incising the bark with a sharp pointed instrument. Mastiha appears in the incisions in the form of tears and exudes in droplets onto the soil. While it is flowing, it is a gummy, clear liquid; it solidifies in irregular shapes after 15-20 days. Its form, after solidification, is crystalline, and its taste is initially somewhat bitter. However, this bitterness soon gives way, to the particular flavor that makes it unique.

The degree of hardness of the mastiha depends on the ambient temperature, the length of time it remains outdoors, as well as the size of the tear. A constant mastiha flow produces large, relatively soft tears, while an interrupted flow yields small, but harder, tears.

## THE SCHINOS or MASTIHA TREE

The mastiha tree or schinos – scientific name *Pistacia Lentiscus* var. *Chia* – is an evergreen shrub, 2-3 meters tall, which grows slowly. It takes 40-50 years to reach its ultimate form, but has the potential to produce mastic five years after it is planted. The mastiha tree is a resilient plant, vulnerable only to frost and mistreatment. New plantations are propagated from the branches of older trees (grafts) and old plantations are renewed with suckers or layering. The shrubs of this family compose the main element of the Maquis vegetation found throughout the Mediterranean region, but only in Chios does the combination of tree and natural environment result in the magic formula that gives us the pleasure, the relief, and the therapeutic benefits obtained from mastiha's precious tears.



## CULTIVATION

The cultivation, collection and processing of mastiha occupy all four seasons of the year. Similarly to other traditional cultivations, such as the olive, mastiha is a family operation.

In January and February, the lower branches are pruned. In March and April, digging commences, and by the end of spring, all the ministrations and preparations of the plants have been completed. Summer is the season of mastiha production and collection, which starts with the preparing of the ground in June. First the ground beneath the tree is methodically cleaned. It is then spread with argil, a white chalky powdered stone known locally as asprohoma, which retains the mastiha that drips from the tree.

July marks the start of the “kentima” or incising of the trees. This is the high point in Chios-mastiha cultivation and lasts about 75 days, depending on weather conditions.

Kentima is the incising of the tree trunk and main branches with a sharp pointed tool, which generates the exudation of mastiha. The mastiha drips to the ground in the form of tears that, after remaining there for 15-20 days, harden into crystalline granules and are ready for collection.

Collection is completed in September, after which starts the process of cleaning the mastiha, a procedure that takes months. At first, this procedure takes place in the producers house and following that at the facilities of the Chios Mastiha Growers Association.

It is important to note that the entire production and cleaning process of Chios Mastiha is free of all chemicals and additives and has remained unchanged throughout the centuries. The basically primitive tools and cleaning methods, the producers’ garments, and the medieval settlements in Southern Chios, combined with the virtually untouched natural environment of the region, are undeniable proof of the historical continuity of this product.

The cleaning of the mastiha is done painstakingly by hand, and includes sifting, sorting and washing in natural spring water. It is then immediately turned over to the Chios Mastiha Growers Association,\* where the cleaning continues with mechanical means. Finally the mastiha is sorted, classified and graded according to the color and size of the granule. To protect the product as well as the consumer, Chios Mastiha is distributed only in packages marked PDA (protected designation of origin) accompanied by the insignia of the Chios Mastiha Growers Association.

\* The Chios Mastiha Growers Association is a compulsory collective of all the mastiha producers on the island, and according to the Law 1390/1938, is the sole managing agent for Chios Mastiha.



## THE MASTIHA VILLAGES (THE MASTIHOHORIA)

Mastiha gave its name to the medieval settlements in Southern Chios, which are described as “Mastihohoria” (mastiha villages) because this is the only place in the world where the mastiha-yielding tree (*Mastihoforos schinos*) flourishes. Its exploitation has always been the primary source of revenue for the inhabitants of the region.

The founding of these settlements dates back to the Byzantine era. But it was under Genoese rule (1346-1566) that mastic cultivation was systematized and the villages themselves acquired their ultimate form. Despite the ravages of time and the disasters suffered over the centuries, the Mastihohoria remain to this day a cultural heritage monument.

The reason of the foundation and the organisation of the villages was the systematic exploitation of mastiha as a monopolistic product. To protect the villagers from the pirate invasions that plagued the Aegean during the Middle Ages, the villages were situated out of sight and were placed in such a way as to form a fortress. All of them have features in common in their layouts: their perimeters form closed rectangle, with the outermost houses creating a defense wall.

Today, mastiha is produced in 24 villages that are listed as traditional or landmarked settlements by the Hellenic Ministry of Culture. These villages are: Agios Georgios, Armolia, Vavyloi, Vessa, Vouno, Elata, Exo Didyma, Tholopotami, Thymiana, Kalamoti, Kallimasia, Katarraktis, Lithi, Mesa Didyma, Mesta, Myrmingi, Nenita, Nehori, Olympoi, Pagida, Patrikia, Pyrgi, and Flatsia.



## PROPERTIES

Chios Mastiha was recognized in ancient times as much for its distinctive flavor as for its therapeutic properties. Documents show that it was the first natural chewing gum of the ancient world, used to clean the teeth and freshen the breath. It was even used in cosmetology for cleansing the face and body Chios Mastiha participated as an active ingredient in a series of pharmaceutical formulas and nostrums, many of which have been recorded from time to time in international pharmaceutical companies. In all, Chios Mastiha has distinguished itself throughout the centuries for its properties beneficial to human health and its role in relieving various ailments.

Nowadays, the scientific community, albeit belatedly but with sound, scientific methodology, has come to corroborate and document the therapeutic actions of Chios Mastiha. It has now been scientifically proven that Chios Mastiha displays beneficial action against digestive disorders, contributes to oral hygiene, displays significant antimicrobial and anti-inflammatory action, is a natural antioxidant, and also aids in trauma healing and skin regeneration. Today, a series of reports in international medical journals corroborate the historically recorded properties of Chios Mastiha. These bulletins are based on the results of laboratory studies as well as on clinical trials carried out by independent researchers in Greece and abroad, and have revealed that Chios Mastiha possesses unique beneficial and therapeutic properties.

## USES

The uniqueness of Chios Mastiha lies unquestionably in its therapeutic properties, in the fact that Chios is the only place in the world where it is produced, and to its distinctive flavor. This uniqueness is bolstered by the wide array of its uses and by the fact that it has been prized by so many peoples and incorporated into so many cultures, especially in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Chios Mastiha has extensive applications and uses as a raw material in the food and drink field, in the pharmaceutical and chemical industry, and in the production of cosmetics and perfume.

Currently, Chios Mastiha is exported throughout the world for use in the production of a wide range of products, including baked goods, sweets, preserves, ice cream, chocolate, chewing gum, candy, beverages, tea, coffee, milk products, pasta, sauces, liquor, ouzo, wine, dietary supplements, oral hygiene products, surgical sutures, compresses for burns, dental floss, soap, cosmetics, scented candles, essential oils, artists' varnishes and resin-based adhesives.



# HISTORICAL AND FOLKLORE REFERENCES

## Medical Remedies

**Aretaeus**, a physician from Cappadocia (2nd century CE), recommends a poultice of dates pulverized in wine together with mastiha and aloe to help the patient regain strength after a heart attack.

**Ar-Razi** (868-932 CE), a Persian philosopher and physician, considered himself the Islamic counterpart of Hippocrates. He prescribes a mixture of potter's clay and mastiha to fill decayed teeth as well as the chewing of mastiha as an appetite stimulant for pregnant women.

**Abu Yusuf Ya'qub ibn Ishaq al-Kindi**, a physician in 9th century in Baghdad, provides a formula for an antidepressant "that makes those who drink it happy." It fortified the stomach, sweetened the breath, and aided the liver. and contained rose oil, clove, valeriana, cinnamon, saffron, cardamom, hazel nuts and mastiha.

**Abu Marwan'Abd al-Malik** or **Avenzoar** was born in Seville in 1091. In his text, *Kitab at-Taysir*, he prescribes a preparation of licorice, raisins and mastiha for liver problems.

**Gilbertus Anglicus** (England, 13th century), in his *Compendium Medicinae*, mentions a nostrum for the spleen. He calls it diacerasus, and it contains cherry juice, cinnamon and mastiha.

**Giovani de Vigo** (1469-1525) was personal physician to Pope Julius II. In his book, *Practica in Arte Chirurgia Copiosa*, he provides an anti-itching formula for that contains egg white, linseed, black hellebore, poplar buds and mastiha powder, beaten in olive oil.

**Philip Thicknesse**, in 1777, published his book, *A Year's Journey through France and Part of Spain*. In it he mentions a powder called "coloradilla", used by Spanish surgeons, which was made from myrrh, mastic and cinnabar.

The Capuchin Balsam, formulated in Austrian monasteries, was made from mastiha, storax, terebinth, myrrh, walnut oil, angelica root, saffron, amber, and sandalwood.

Lady Webster's Dinner Pills, one of the most popular laxatives of the 19th century, contained aloe, mastiha and rose-oil.

Mastisol, a solution of mastiha in benzol, was used in surgery as an antiseptic dressing sticker.

## Cosmetics

**Dioscorides** (1st century BCE) notes that mastiha was used in facial masks, and for sweetening the breath and cleaning the teeth.

**Aetius and Oribasius**, personal physicians to the emperors Justinian and Julian the Apostate, prepared cosmetic creams and sunscreens using mastiha.

**John Partridge** (*The Widowers Treasure*, 1585), mentions an ointment that "heals chapped lips by wind and cold," which contains rose oil, beeswax, mastiha and frankincense.

In *Manual de Mugeres* (Manual for women), Spanish book of the 16th century, there is a formula for preparing soap with mastiha: two ounces white soap, one fourth mastiha, one eighth southernwood resin and one fourth borax.

Chypre Oiselets, was a French formula from 1721 for a room deodorizer. It contained cypress resin, frankincense, storax, laudanum, mastiha, marjoram, cinnamon, clove, sandalwood and rose oil.

**Francesco Placenza**: "Mastiha is a stimulant that has a mysterious virtue and power to feed the pleasures of Venus and to arouse in a remarkable way the most somnolent and numbed aphrodisiac appetites."

**Thomas McGill**, the 18th century English traveler, writes, "Some say that mastiha maintains clean teeth. Others claim that it incites debauchery. I'm of the opinion that because women in Turkey don't enjoy the same freedom of speech that they do in Europe, they use mastiha to keep their jaws in motion..."

Hellenic Pharmacopoeia, published in Izmir in 1835, offers a formula for "scented lozenges," a kind of incense in tablet form. It contained frankincense, storax, laudanum and mastiha.

## Gastronomy

**Saliq** is one of the best known rice dishes in Saudi Arabia and is essentially a rice porridge cooked with meat, flavored with cardamom and mastic. It is served with roast meat and the traditional Arab salad of onion, celery and hot pepper, finely chopped and seasoned with salt and lemon juice. Delicious!

**Bouza al habib** is a popular Lebanese desert of milk, mastiha, salep and rosewater.

**Tuffahiya (al-Baghdadi)** Iraqi recipe: Cut a piece of fat meat into cubes. Fry with a little salt and coriander. Dice an onion and add along with mastiha, pepper, cinnamon, ginger and a little mint. Next pulverize a tart apple in a mortar and pour the juice into the meat mixture. Add blanched almonds and stir over a slow fire until done.

A recipe from Arabic Andalusia: Roast lamb stuffed with chopped meat sautéed in sesame oil, with pistachios, pepper, ginger, cloves, coriander, cardamom and mastiha, sprinkled with rose water to which musk has been added.

## More still...

**D.G. Schreber**, in *Der Schuster* ("Regarding Shoes" Leipzig 1769), gives a formula for boot polish that contains mastiha, white poppy oil, white beeswax, asphalt and ebony sawdust.

In texts by Medieval alchemists, mastiha incense corresponds to the planet Mercury and to the fourth day of the week.

In the vegetation on *The Mysterious Island* (**Jules Verne**), among the dragonroots and sycamores, mastiha trees were also found.

**Gargantuan**, the hero of **François Rabelais'** homonymous story, allegedly cleaned his teeth with toothpicks made from mastiha wood.

In 17th century Russia, the distillers of vodka used to flavor their product with various substances. One version, designated for the salons of nobility, was vodka with mastiha.

Mastiha is one of the ingredients in holy oil. Holy oil is prepared by the Ecumenical Patriarchate and distributed to Orthodox churches. Its formula has varied over the years, but has always included mastiha.





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