

FERRANDES

The island of Pantelleria is a luminous volcanic fragment that lies at the center of the Mediterranean Sea, between the continents of Europe and Africa, exactly 40 nautical miles from Cape Mustafâ in Tunisia and 60 nautical miles from Cape Granatola in Sicily.

The climate is humid and windy, the predominant Scirocco and Maestrale blowing hard most of the year. Mean temperature is 25°Celsius in August, at harvest, and rainfall, at a yearly 349 mm, is the lowest in Europe.

The island's noble varietal is Muscat of Alexandria, planted in individual "conche" (dugouts), 20 cms deep, in order to protect the vines from the wind. The grape was most probably brought to Pantelleria by the Arabs around 800 A.D. - though previous vineyards planted by the Greeks certainly existed, and a Passito was equally produced - and was employed to produce raisins as well as wine. In fact, the grape is locally known as Zibibbo, "Zebib" being the arabic for raisin. And still today, notwithstanding a growing agricultural depression, Zibibbo remains the island's farming staple, both in raisin form and in wine. Indeed, the only significant wine of the island - aside from small quantities produced for local consumption - is Passito di Pantelleria, a wine produced from dried grapes, obviously the finest expression of this Muscat.

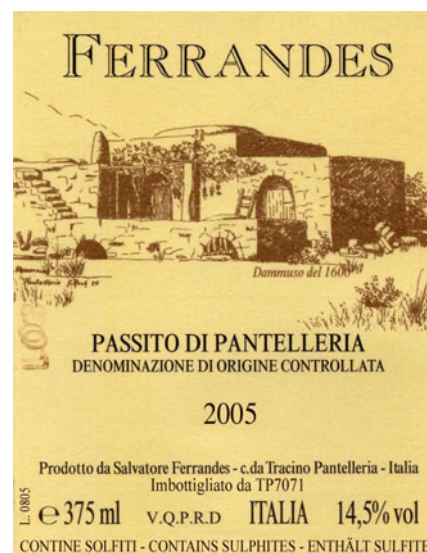
The Ferrandes family is of Spanish descent, established in Pantelleria in the 15th century. The tradition of producing Passito di Pantelleria, possibly Italy's most ancient dessert wine and the island's claim to fame, was passed on from father to son and is perpetuated today by Salvatore Ferrandes. The estate's entire production (of raisins as well as wine), is strictly organic. The Muscat grapes, carefully open-air dried for

two weeks against lava stone walls, are crushed and then fermented in tiny vats - given the 2,500 litre production! - deep in the estate's 17th century cellars. The wine decants and is left to mature for 1 year minimum, whereupon it is bottled.

The result is unique and truly remarkable. And, indeed, in mythology we find the Carthaginian goddess Tanit (Carthage being the closeby current day Tunis), substituting divine Ambrosia with the ancient Passito from Pantelleria (following Aphrodite's advice!), in order to seduce much desired Apollo, the inflexible Lord of the shining sun.

The wine's colour is a rich gold with deep amber hues. The bouquet is powerfully aromatic, clearly reminiscent of dried apricots and figs, hazelnuts and vanilla, layers upon layers of spice and musk - an unforgettable fragrance! On the palate it is honey-rich and deep-toned, a divinely lingering wine, truly embodying the full solar sensuality of the mediterranean spirit.

For this jewel, as for all Sicilian wine and experience, I am deeply indebted to my friend and excellent winemaker Salvatore Foti. ◇



Passito di Pantelleria

Zone: *Pantelleria*
 Varietal: *Moscato di Alessandria*
 Vineyard Ext.: *1.6 hectares*
 Average Prod.: *2,500 bottles*