

Exploring the Role of Toponymy in Wine Naming Strategy: A Greek Case Study



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Abstract The choice of wine label raises questions whether it intends to communicate historical concepts, identity, or quality. There are elements that can influence the buying operation in terms of purchase decision. The label reflects the winemaker's perceptions, while the name remains a crucial point for the general wine context. A vineyard name attributes in the storytelling of a wine's origin. Labels tell the story of the specific vineyard from which the wine originated. The application of toponymy as name in wine label is of significant importance, because it conveys the element of terroir. This paper aims at decipher the toponymy of Greek wine labels, providing valuable insights about description of the name, the cause of selection, and the language.

Keywords Toponymy · Wine communication · Wine regions

JEL Classification Z32

1 Introduction

The wine label constitutes the winemaker's throwback to his awareness, ideas, and feelings about his own wine. These aspects are the ones that he tries to communicate to his customers. All labels make vigorous efforts to convince us that there is something special about wine. This effort is the one that contributes to the increased prize of it and makes the consumers willing to purchase it. Some wineries, in order to overcome this confusion, provide less information on their labels. But the question that logically arises is this; do those words give the notion of quality to the wine or reflect marketing technics? The answer is not simple; it may even be as controversial as the practice

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itself. When we refer to wine branding, we do not refer only to the creative of the label and the general packaging (bottle), but to the values, the correlations, and in general to the whole “myth” that can surround the wine and give to it a certain status. We can consider, in terms of simplicity, that this is limited to the design of the label or the name of the wine.

Wine reports indicate that consumers still pay more per bottle while consuming less frequently, establishing a shift from quantity to quality (Intelligence, 2019). Wine consumption has certain characteristics involving quality and brand in form of identity that motivates consumer with high annual income to select high-quality wine (Di Vita et al., 2019). According to International Organization of Vine and Wine (OIV), annual per capita wine consumption in Europe fluctuates from 52 L per year of Portuguese champions in wine consumption to average 32 L per year for average European civilian. Premiumization is the effort to offer higher quality wine(s) that consumers value, not in financial terms (expensive in price), but with the assumption/expectation that the wine bottle—brand stands for what consumer expect from consuming it (having in mind the diversification of value to each and every person). Lim and Reed (2020) indicate that consumers are willing to pay premiums for either organic or sustainable wine. And for consumers, terroir matters economically as they are evidently willing to pay more for wines with extrinsic qualities such as area of origin (Cross et al., 2011). The breaking point is how to explain why this wine is worth an extra amount of money (considering that an inexperienced drinker can understand, let alone the insider).

The main factors to achieve the production of high-quality wines are the variety, the viticulture or winegrowing techniques and the so-called terroir. This combination is unique and cannot be copied or transferred. The concept of terroir constitutes the ultra-core component of the Geographical Indication (GI) (an official description of a wine zone, region or subregion in a form of a textual description). Neither the grapes are grown on their own, nor the wine is created automatically, so the element of human factor is fundamental for terroir. The deeper concept that terroir reflects is that wines of a certain arealplots are unique and cannot be produced outside this domain even if everything is copied (variety, oenological methods etc.). This distinctive characteristic is considered to give elements of recognition to wine, something like a fingerprint. Wine must have an identity of origin, meaning not being a blend of large different regions. A major issue is the equivocal meaning of wine names.

The naming strategy of a product used by manufacturers (in our case a winery) provides a basic background why consumerist culture is determinant (Danesi, 2011). Communication is dual; is both signified and signifier, it includes the level of the message or the content or the information and the level of the form, the statement or, in other words, the expression of the content. Due to the fact that the relationship between content and form is never a one-to-one relationship, there is always the possibility of choices, which is the most creative process of language. But what is language? It is the creation and use of signs(s) recognizable and understandable in the same way by members of a community of people.

There are three typical ways for the producers to name their wines which are related to the specific grape variety, the wine zone where the vines are planted, and lately, the terroir of the wider region, which is characterized by the climate and soil.

Naming strategy is separated in accurate and metaphorical. The single most popular approach from literal naming seems to be the use of toponyms (Caballero et al., 2019). The totality of information resulting from the wine label provides the basic information background which influence consumer choice (Danner et al., 2017). Findings also suggest that younger consumers are more influenced by the label of bottled wine (Lunardo & Guerinet, 2007). Also, front labels seem to be more important than back labels (Thomas & Pickering, 2003).

2 The Greek Wine Zones

Greece is a country that has as key concept to get along the quality with premiumization. Greece is divided into 13 regions (perifereies). Each region (perifereia) was further divided in departments (nomoi), provinces (eparchies), municipalities (dimoi), and communities (koinotites). The European Union Geographical Indications System consists a protection frame for the names of products origin from specific regions and have specific (Wines of Greece) (European Commission). The differences between product of denominated origin (PDO) and a product of geographic indication (PGI) is identified with the distinction whether how much of the product's raw materials must come from the area or how much of the production process has to take place within the specific region. PDO Wines of Greece originates from a specific winegrowing zone (based on the borders of communal municipalities that have been established). In addition, all production phases must be carried out in that specific area. The PGI Wines of Greece are in specific geographical boundaries, with varietal compositions to be set and at least one production phase must be carried out in that specific area. Greek wine is a niche market (meaning that consumers exist in a market willing to pay a higher price for specific products or benefits, i.e., limited and specialized) and has nothing to do with mainstream industrial productions, such as Chilean or Australian wine.

3 The Concept of Terroir and the Sequence of Toponymy

Terroir is a concept that is not limited to the sense of flavor because it hides in it the cue of culture effect (Trubek, 2008). This is the element that makes the difference and is created autonomously, since neither producers can create it nor consumers can find it anywhere (Charters et al., 2017). This means that there is a connection between taste and regions (Trubek, 2008). A negative point in the theory of terroir as a sales enhancing factor is the confused attitude of the consumer (Wilson & Jourjon, 2010). Many producers use terroir in order to give to their wines the antagonistic advantage

of the origin in their marketing plan (Charters, 2010). Territory, plant growing, advertising, and identity are the four components that characterize terroir (Marlowe & Lee, 2018).

The geographical dimension emerges as stepping stone in the terroir equation as it connects soil and climate (Bohmrich, 1996). It seems that only the use of terroir will not be enough for the economic enhance of the wine, that is why blending it with places could contribute to the amplification of wine purchases (Lenglet, 2014). Additionally, interconnecting areas of wine with identity (with a particular focus on terroir) may lead to the fact that the wine consumers could understand it in a more profound way (Harvey et al., 2014). Not to mention that the specific place could give to the consumers a wider idea about the wine as a structural element of the area, fact very useful for the planning of the niche markets (Sillania et al., 2017).

4 Approaching Wine Labels and Labeling Through Toponymy

During the wine communication process, many transmitters are involved, as the consumers, communicators, and marketers who try to focus on different messages and marketing means each time (Sillania et al., 2017). The very first step between the communication of the wine producers and the possible buyer is the wine label (Tonder & Mulder, 2015). This does not only happen with the front labels but also the back labels seem to influence the purchase and preference (Danner et al., 2017). An object is preferable to be distinguished and have commercially attractive place names that have a certain economic interest (Medway & Warnaby, 2014).

Segmentanting the place names has not been an easy project as the bibliography indicates. Stewart, (1954) has made a categorization based on the theory the name functions as a separate and distinct advantage. His taxonomy conveys:

1. Descriptive names
2. Associative names
3. Incident-names
4. Possessive names
5. Commemorative names
6. Condemnatory names
7. Folk-etymologies
8. Manufactured names
9. Mistake-names
10. Shift-names.

After an extensive research using websites, social media, and digital environments related to wine, personal communication and interviews, we collected data regarding the naming choices of the wine producers. The basic core of the feedback we had is that wine producers had not been so drastic about the naming strategies, at least

until so far. The data presented below indicates wines with toponymic labels (Tsiakis et al, 2022).

Descriptive names

A name that describes a geographically descriptive, a feature located there. The geographic element is considered the name laureate of wineries.

Tselepos Winery

In 1989, Yiannis and Amalia Tselepos founded Ktima Tselepos in Mantinia and made the first plantings. It is situated on the eastern side of the Mantinian plateau, in the center of Arcadia, at an altitude of 750 m, at the foothills of Mount Parnonas.

Label *Kokkinomilos*–Kokkino (>Eng. “red”) + milos (>Eng. “mill”) = Kokkinomilos (the red mill). The vineyard with gravelly red clay soils (loam) that surrounds the watermill gave its characteristic name.

Label *Melissopetra*–Melisso (>Eng. “bee”) + petra (>Eng. “rock”) = Melissopetra. Similar, the soils are schist (type of rock) and the place used to host beehives.

Label *Avlotopi*–Avlo (>Eng. “reeds”) + topi (>Eng. “field”) = Avlotopi (the field with many reeds). Reed area, the place where reeds grow that, are suitable for the construction of flute (musical instruments mainly for shepherds). Vineyard is close to an affluent River (Dolianitis) where reed grows. τόπι [tópi] as 2nd compositional to composite neutral indicates the area full of what the first compositional expresses.

Label *Marmarias*–Marmarias (>Eng. “marble”). The soil up in the hill after the plot of Kokkimomilos is gravelly clay with limestone, it contains significant amounts of marble, and the locals gave the characteristic toponymy “Marmarias” as marmaro stands for marble.

T-oinos

The winery was founded by Greek businessman Alexandros Avatangelos and Gerard Margeon, executive head sommelier for Alain Ducasse restaurants worldwide, back in 2002. The winery name T-OINOS comes as a neologism, (T) for Tinos island and oinos (allegory from greek word “οἶνος”» standing for oenos). It produces eight labels, wines giving to the half of selection (4 in number, the premium ones) the toponymic name of vineyard, referred as “stegasta”.

Label *Stegasta*–A name stemming from the Greek word “στεγαστά” [stégasta] referring to a kind of stonework low buildings, a type of small roof that covers the topically placed wine press (usually in contact with the vineyards) that workers and residents of Tinos island used in order both to protect themselves from the strong winds and because after the harvest it was practical impossible to transport the grapes through the labyrinthine villages, so they needed to press and ferment the vines on the certain spot of production.

Acroterra Wines

Or «Acro-Terra», means in a simplified translation “Earth at the Edge”. This name oenologist Thymiopoylos and viticulturist Chryssos chose to give as in showing

directly the extreme and adverse conditions in which Assyrtiko grows in the land of Santorini.

Label *Skafida*–{σκαφίδα} is a rectangular wooden or tin washtub in which they threw food or water for the animals. This was the place for the animal to rest and feed.

Artemis Karamolegos Winery

The winery is established in 1952, and from 2004, the 3rd generation, the grandson Artemis Karamolegos proceed to contemporary facilities and vinification in the privately owned vineyards.

Label *Louroi*-Platia–Various areas in Greece have taken their name from the old owners. Societas Iesu settled in Santorini at about 1642 and used the word Louro (dark blonde; golden) for the characteristic color of Santorini land. Platia {πλατιά}–stands for widely, as the area is giving the essence of space.

Ktima Kir-Yianni

Kir-Yianni Estate was founded in 1997 by Yiannis Boutaris (Greek businessman and politician, former mayor of Thessaloniki city when he left the Boutari Wine Group, the premium family wine company that his grandfather established in 1879. Kir, a less formal calling (from abbreviated Kyrios), and Yiannis forms the synthesis of the winery name.

Label *Ramnista*–{ράμνιστα} is a compound word formed by Ramnos < latin Rhamnus and loan word (-ista = -ιστα). The winery also states that Ramnos (white buckthorn) was characteristic of the fields before they become vineyard. The first Xinomavro PDO label was given the name Ramnista.

Label *Samaropetra*–The steep hill (a layer of solid rock- petra”πέτρα”) that vineyard is placed on the top of it, gives the aspect of packsaddle (samari {neuter} σαμάρη in greeks). So Samaropetra equals the sum of samari + petra.

Dalamaras Winery

Dalamaras winery continues a great family tradition, since in 1840, John G. Dalamaras created his first vineyard in Naoussa. From then till today, the family is inextricably connected with viticulture and production of quality wines.

Kokkinos Winery

Stavros Kokkinos, first generation producer and winemaker, created a “boutique” winery by its first bottling in 2009. The winery facilities are located in the outskirts of the historic town of Naoussa in Greece.

Label *Paliokalias*–Both wineries (and only those two until now) share the same toponymy. Paliokalias is the name of the vineyard located north of Stenimahos, an area of the City of Naoussa, in the region of Imathia in Greece, and possibly the first ever single vineyard wine in the appellation of Naoussa. Paliokalias is known for the deep underground waters and the cool breezes that come down from Mount Vermio. The soils are alkaline and clay-limestone. “Palio” (old) + kalias (nest) = Paliokalias

(land that looks like an old nest). The lash-up wooden hut gave the image of how ancestors were imagine the area.

Associative names

Associative names are differianted from descriptives in that they identified with human adaptions to the location.

Lyrarakis winery

Lyrarakis winery was established in 1966 by two brothers, Manolis and Sotiris Lyrarakis who gave their last name to the winery. It is established in the place of origin of the family, in the heart of the prefecture of Heraklion (Crete), in a village called Alagni.

Label *Armi*– “αρμύ” is a word in the cretan dialect to define the top of a mountain-side. The vineyard called “Armi” is an area that faces the east and lies at an altitude of 500 m.

Label *Plakoura*– “Πλακούρα” delineation of soil morphology in simply terms wide and large stone: plaka (>Eng. “flagstone”) + magnifying suffix oura = plakoura.

Label *Gerodeti*–Gero (>Eng. “old”) + detis (>Eng. “stone”) In Cretan dialect, an old stonewall that joins or separates two fields.

Label *Pirovolikes*–Toponyms referring to war from pyrovolo (>Eng. “firearms”) where in general, their location, position is determined on the one hand by the importance of the space and the purpose of coverage, on the other hand by combining the maximum possible visible area of control.

Label *Voila*–The name Voila probably comes from the Byzantine name “Voilas” as it was called by the Byzantines, the landholder.

Incident names

A name associated with something that happened there.

Douloufakis winery

Is located at the village of Dafnes, located in Crete, the largest island of Greece, and is named after the last name of the owner of the winery.

Label *Aspros Lagos*–Aspros Lagos (white hare) is a toponym of vineyards and came from the hares and “Asperoula”. Asperoula is a wild flower that grows in the area and an endemic plant of Crete (*Asperoula rigida* M.). In the spring, the dry stones around the vines are filled with its white flowers. Their stems are the favorite food of the hares, which prefer the area to build their nests.

Commemorative names

Commemorative Names are result from the desire to honor a person.

Alpha Estate

Alpha (= α) is the first letter of the Greek alphabet and the initial letter of Amyndeon, the geographical location of the estate’s vineyards (the northwest and coolest part of Greece in Florina region, province of Macedonia) and also a declaration of a quality

term in the greek argo. For those reasons, the name Alpha was chosen. It is the soil, the climate, the human factor, and the evolution in time that create the ecosystem philosophy behind the label choice.

Label *Barba Yannis*–Barba (>Eng. “mister”) + Yannis (John) = Barba Yannis (mister John). Mister (Barbas from the Latin *barbas* meaning bearded and uncle, as bear were a sign of maturity and therefore of respect) and Greek name Yiannis. Named in honor of the last owner, Barba Yannis, that planted the single block vineyard in 1919 and sold it in 1994 to the current owners (Alpha estate). The vines are ungrafted, pre-*phylloxera* bush vines which are over 90 years old.

Lyrarakis (mentioned above)

Label *Aggelis*–Aggelos > diminutive “Aggelis”, a patronymic surname, derived from the baptismal name Aggelos { *Άγγελος* }. Apparently, from a person called “Aggelis” who was the owner (gen. Possessor) of this plot.

Artemis Karamolegos Winery (mentioned above)

Label *Papas*–Papas (>Eng. “clergyman”) apparently was the owner of this resource and gave his name to the vineyard.

5 Conclusions

Winemakers desire to improve the recognizability, differentiation and value proposition of their wine(s) in the market. In order to achieve that, they usually use two methods or combine them. One consists of using international varieties with the local ones as blend and the other one refers to using toponymic names to wine label. The certification in the form of either PDO or PGI influences consumer choices and the market for origin labelled is working (Di Vita et al., 2019; Skuras & Vakrou, 2002).

As geographers and historians begin to examine the role of toponymy in relations to commerce, it is the right time to start combing geographic position and economic prospect with the names and the Greek wines are the perfect example. Greek wine labels and names should be synoptic, in agreement and reconciliation with the Latin rather than the Greek alphabet. Simplicity is the key; the assumption that the consumer will keen on pompous names is erroneous and leads the consumers to confusion. A vineyard name helps to tell a wine’s origin story. Labels tell the story of the specific vineyard which the wine is originated from. Recognizing the value of grapes grown on specific vineyards, wineries have begun using vineyard designates and use them in their toponymy name on the wine label. Due to the fact that consumers’ choices apart from price, are determined also by quality features of the product, the provision of quality signals by producers, such as toponymy in a wine label, could assist to the consumer’s buying process so as to reduce information search costs and to augment their willingness to purchase.

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