

GRACIOUS

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The collection and initial characterization of Israel's native grapevine population

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The holy land has a long history of winemaking, widely mentioned in ancient scripts. The Muslim occupation of this region in the 7th century started a long period of wine consumption prohibition, resulting in the eventual loss of local wine varieties. Thus, the renewing Israeli wine industry is based solely on international varieties. In the last three years we are collecting and assessing for the first time a wide Israeli grapevine germplasm collection. Our efforts are in two directions: Collection of local cultivated varieties, and adding new ones by a wide survey done all over Israel. We collect both *Sylvestris* and *Sativa* populations. Most importantly, we strive to identify varieties suited for quality wine production. A collection vineyard is being planted with 6 plants per unique accession. By now we collected 270 accessions. 148 accessions were analyzed by 10 SSR loci, and we found 61 unique profiles which were analyzed against European databases. Out of these, 10 were identical to Israeli and Palestinian accessions. To understand the relation in this group and to other collections, we conducted an initial population analysis. The analysis revealed two main groups, one of 35 accessions, mostly *V. v. ssp. Sativa*, and a second of 15 accessions, all *V. v. ssp. Sylvestris*. In addition, Primary and secondary descriptors, Phenophase description, and some eno-carpological traits were obtained for most of the accession, resulting in the identification of at least 3 white and 3 red *Sativa* varieties suited for quality wine production. The wilds in Israel contain wide populations of both *V. v. ssp. Sativa* and *Sylvestris*. We believe that by collecting and assessing these populations, an array of new-old varieties would be presented, starting a new era in the Israeli wine industry.