

THE (FRENCH) SARDINIAN PARADOX

by Daniel J. Voelker, August 17, 2022

If you thought you knew all there was to know about the health benefits of wine, drink again!

The study of the so-called French paradox, a term coined in 1990, revealed that while the French consume a diet rich in saturated fats and cholesterol and a great deal of red wine, they have an exponentially lower incidence of cardiac heart disease than Americans whose diets are less rich in harmful fats, cholesterol and drink far less red wine.

The study concluded that one of the principal reasons for the longevity of the French was that they were more active than Americans and, wait for it....., they drank significantly more red wine. This is where there is a marked similarity to the longevity of the French and where the Sardinian paradox begins.

Located only 120 miles west of the famed Amalfi coast of Italy, grows an ancient and indigenous vine bearing grapes, a relative of the Grenache of France and Garnacha of Spain, known as "Cannonau di Sardegna," which could very well be the proverbial "Fountain of Youth."

The Cannonau grape is loaded with antioxidant-rich anthocyanins and beneficial polyphenols like resveratrol, which research has shown appears in concentrations of three times that found in other grape varieties. In nature, resveratrol acts to protect the plant when it comes under attack from bacteria, insects or excessive ultraviolet light.

With their artery-scrubbing properties, polyphenols are known to reduce inflammation and the risk of certain cancers and dementia. The Cannonau grape also has a high content of oligomeric procyandins that have a cardioprotective action.

The connection between the Cannonau grape and heart health and the longevity of the Sardinian people, especially men, is not a mere hypothesis. Instead, the longevity of those who consume

daily doses of red wine made from the Cannonau grape is backed-up by well-respected empirical data collected over a period of many years.

Nestled squarely in what is referred to as one of the five “Blue Zones,” the island of Sardinia claims a higher percentage of centenarians than anywhere else in the world. While men almost everywhere in the world have a shorter lifespan than women, amazingly, the Sardinian men live as long or longer than the women.

For every male centenarian in the U.S. there are 5 women centenarians. In Sardinia, the ratio is 1 to 1. This is especially true in the hilly and mountainous regions of Barbagia and Ogliastra, including the central mountain known as Gennargentu, where some of the best Cannonau is grown and consumed.

Per capita, Sardinia has ten times as many centenarians than the United States. Neither France nor Spain, where the related Grenache or Garnacha varieties are grown, fermented into red wine and consumed, can make this claim.

Sardinia is an idyllic island with over 1200 miles of coastline and some of the most beautiful beaches and crystalline waters in the world. Its rolling hills and mountains of volcanic origin, nutrient-poor soils of granite, schist and a hot, dry climate create a unique terroir.

The typical Sardinian lives a healthy life-style, walking five miles a day or more tending to his sheep. The milk from the sheep is used to make the island’s Pecorino cheese (or “of sheep” in Italian). Pecorino is consumed daily. Because it is grass-fed, the hard cheese contains high levels of omega-3 fatty acids that also contribute to good health.

The gastronomy on the island is made up of a variety of locally-grown potatoes, barley, fennel, fava beans and chickpeas in addition to pasta, olive oil, whole wheat, fruits and vegetables. The surrounding sea brings abundant fresh seafood, but only to those who live near the coast.

Those who live away from the coast in the hills and mountainous regions, rarely eat fish. They also consume primarily radishes, fennel, celery and wild asparagus, mushrooms and chard.

On the other hand, pork, goat, lamb, mutton, beef, including home-made ham, sausage and salami (without preservatives or chemical additives), potatoes and pasta, also play a prominent role in the local cuisine, especially in those areas away from the coast. Whole-roasted suckling pig, Coiettas (beef meat rolls), Agnello in salsa (lamb and onions) and veal with peas, among other meat-centric dishes, are all local delicacies and are consumed regularly. The Sardinians consume meat, on average, 3 to 5 times a week, with a quarter of the population consuming it daily.

These meats contain a high concentration of saturated fats and dietary cholesterol which are associated with an increased risk of cardiovascular disease. Sardinians, especially men living in the hills and mountains who eat a great deal of meat and cheese, however, have a very low incidence of heart disease, significantly lower than anywhere else in the world. This is the “Sardinian paradox.”

The real secret to the longevity of the Sardinians likely lies in the Cannonau grape; a thick-skinned, dark grape grown widely in the higher elevations in the hills, especially in the east and north of the island, with juice that flows dark naturally from the grape. While most red grape varietals have a juice that runs clear, the Cannonau is unique in its naturally-high levels of heart-healthy compounds evidenced by its rich red hue at harvest even before contact with the skins in fermentation.

Sardinians have been growing and making wine from the Cannonau grapes for three thousand years. Within the community, Cannonau is perceived to have special powers, with stories of its healing properties passing down from generation to generation.

The Cannonau ripens late in the summer and produces wine that is higher in alcohol with medium to high body and low to medium acidity. The ruby red juices of the grapes may very well be the

“Holy Grail;” providing almost eternal youth to those who imbibe on a regular basis.

For the locals, the vines virtually grow themselves. After being hand-picked, a traditional fermentation allows natural yeasts to perform their magic on the grapes-skins, stems and pips-producing wine with smooth tannins and notes of strawberry, raspberry, cherry, wild herbs and a touch of white pepper. Cannonau pairs well with meat and cheese.

The locals typically make their own wine from small vineyards passed down from generation to generation. Sardinians consume at least two to three small glasses of Cannonau each day. But, like everything else, the native Sardinians consume their wine with food and, of course, all in moderation.

Cannonau is also available in bulk at the local alimentari or grocery store at a reasonable price to anyone with their own jug or container. There are several commercial growers on the island, as well, making Cannonau wine that is available for sale throughout the United States.

Some of the best wines come from the eastern regions of the island in Nuoro, Ogliastra and Cagliari. Of course, all wines harvested and bottled on the island can be sold under the Cannonau di Sardegna DOC as long as they have a minimum of 12.5% alcohol. Wines that are aged for at least two years (6 months of which is in oak or chestnut barrels) with an alcohol level of at least 13% can claim the *riserva* designation. Because of its barrel aging, the *riserva* takes on a pronounced bouquet, its color is more brilliant and it can have cedar and chocolate notes. There is also a sweet and fortified version of the wine called “liquoroso.”

While there might not be a single explanation for the longevity of the Sardinians, the clear message is that moderate consumption of wine made from Cannonau (two to three times a day) has a protective effect against coronary heart disease. Amazingly, this is equally true for those Sardinians living away from coast, in the hills and mountains, who consume meat and cheese with high levels of saturated fat and dietary cholesterol with frequency.

Perhaps the old adage, “the older the vine, the better the wine,” is, indeed, true! By consuming a glass or two of Cannonau on a regular basis, along with a daily dose of Pecorino cheese and a diet rich in saturated fats and cholesterol, you, too, may reach the ripe old age of 100 or more.

Salute!

Daniel J. Voelker is a lawyer and an internationally recognized forensic historian whose writings challenge common perceptions through intensive research. His articles have received international accolades. He is currently studying for the sommelier certificate at the Wine School of Philadelphia.

Voelker has written several ground-breaking articles including ***“It Ain’t So, Kid, It Just Ain’t So”, History’s Apology to “Shoeless” Joe Jackson, Charles Comiskey and Chicago’s Black Sox***, that literally rewrote the history of the 1919 Black Sox scandal. (www.chicagobaseballmuseum.org/files/it-just-aint-so-200909.pdf.) This article was read around the world and was the subject of a television show by Major League Baseball and program on public radio.

Voelker also wrote the article ***“Will The Real James Bond, Please Stand Up?”***, where Voelker shows that the Dominican bon vivant Porfirio Rubirosa was the likely muse for Ian Fleming’s James Bond. This article was ground-breaking to say the least having been translated into dozens of languages and appearing in the news around the world.

(<https://repeatingislands.files.wordpress.com>). Voelker’s extraordinary work is the subject of a recent podcast available on Apple, *Rubirosa With Christopher Rivas, Episode 3, @Sticher Media LLC (2022)*.

Voelker also wrote and published an article about the longest running litigation matter in history brought by Christopher Columbus and his progeny for their share of the spoils of discovering the New World, known as ***“Legal Lessons from the World’s Longest Running Litigation: The Lawsuits of Christopher Columbus,”*** <http://www.voelkerlitigationgroup.com/legal-lessons-from-worlds-longest-running...com>

Voelker also has extensive experience in the art of the sale of the works of Amedeo Modigliani and has authored the article ***“Modigliani: New Authentication Projects May Explode Global Collecting Market,”*** a literary work that stands alone in the world of Modigliani art.

Daniel J. Voelker can be reached at dvoelker@voelkerlitigationgroup.com and 312.505.4841.

