

EDITORIAL

Gifts, wine and blood



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Bone Marrow Transplantation (2024) 59:157–158; <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41409-023-02149-3>

Timeo Danoas et dona fereventes (I fear the Greeks, even those bearing gifts).

Virgil (Publius Vergilius Maro) Roman Poet. 70–19 BC, from the *Aeneid*. Speaker, a Trojan priest, Laocoön.

Whatever about the Greeks bearing gifts, there is no doubt that they make very good wine. Although this phrase is now well-known in the English-speaking world, it's meaning is somewhat confusing. In fact, the wooden horse, although commonly referred to as the Trojan Horse, was built by the Greeks in a successful attempt to trick the Trojans. The Trojan Horse is not mentioned by Homer but by Virgil Fig. 1. Laocoön 'smelt a rat' but was not believed and subsequently, Apollo sent two serpents who strangled Laocoön and his two sons, Antiphanes and Tymbraeus in revenge for sleeping with his wife Fig. 2. The Greeks, as we know, captured Troy.

What has this got to do with wine or blood? I was recently in the beautiful medieval town of Todi, in Umbria, with its stunning central square (Piazza del Popolo), for the launch of my wife's latest book [1], and we were introduced to a grape which was new to both of us, Grechetto di Todi (Pignoletto) which probably originated from Greece [2] through Magna Grecia. The grape is widely planted in Umbria [3] but also in Lazio and parts of Tuscany. It is commonly used for blending, often with Chardonnay, and for making Vin Santo. We consumed numerous glasses of unblended Grechetto di Todi from Cantina Roccafiore and found them very palatable, Fig. 3. The vineyard was the brainchild of Leonardo Baccarelli and the oenologist Hartmann Donà. The wine label of their Fiorefiore, unblended Grechetto, is particularly attractive but always remember you can't judge the contents of a wine bottle by the label [4]. The relatively thick skin of Grechetto di Todi apparently offers some protection from downy mildew, which helps with late harvesting. Needless to say, it was mentioned by our old friend Pliny the Elder in *Naturalis Historiae* and not to be outdone, Jacopone, a famous medieval Umbrian poet said: *D'ellacqua solo bereve chi non have del vino (It is a grave mistake to drink water if you can have wine)*. As I said in my previous editorial, wines from Greece are becoming increasingly popular and standards of wine making are excellent [5].

So, we have 'discovered' a new grape, how can we find out what are the trends in Haematopoietic Stem Cell Transplantation (HSCT)? Luckily, due to a large extent to the dedication of EBMT members and the hard work of the data collection group, we can assess the trends, at least in Europe. We should be especially grateful to Professor Alois Gratwohl whose early vision initiated the EBMT to embark on this venture.

The first thing that one notices on looking at the EBMT activity maps is the discordance between activity in different countries. This may reflect access to sophisticated and expensive treatments such as HSCT in different countries or physician/patient choice, not always dependant on evidence, or other reasons which are



Fig. 1 Horace, Virgil and Varius. Horace, Virgil and Varius @ the house of Maecenas. Charles Jalabert (1818–1901). Oil on Canvas, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Nîmes, France. Public Domain.



Fig. 2 Laocoön. Laocoön and his sons by Hygesandros, Athendros and Polydoros. Marble copy of a Hellenistic original found in the baths of Trajan in 1506 AD. Vatican Museum collection. Public Domain.

Received: 30 October 2023 Revised: 30 October 2023 Accepted: 7 November 2023
Published online: 24 November 2023



Fig. 3 Grechetto di Todi Grapes. Grechetto di Todi Grapes. Their thick skin makes them relatively unlikely to contract downy mildew.

not always obvious. Gratwohl and colleagues in 2010 published the results of a survey of Haematopoietic Cell Transplantation (HSCT) [6]. Their conclusion was that HSCT is used for a variety of malignant and benign conditions. The frequency was highest in countries with higher gross national incomes, higher national health care expenditure and higher HSCT team densities. Once again, it seems that the frequency of complex (and sometimes simple medical care) depends, unfortunately, on national wealth and not on patient need. Hopefully, with the passage of time, these treatments will become more widely available.

Setting up a HSCT unit is a complex venture requiring many inputs including dedicated staff, excellent blood transfusion and HLA typing support, close connection with a good radiotherapy centre, a proper clean unit and last but not least, enthusiasm of the HSCT team. Needless to say, financial support is paramount and every effort should be made to make sure HSCT is available to patients based on need and not income.

Wine making is also a complex venture requiring dedicated and trained staff especially for harvesting of grapes, decisions about the grape variety and clone to plant and where to plant, how much sulphur to use and what, if any insecticides, and of course when to harvest?

As in HSCT the final result will sometimes take a long time to become evident and as in HSCT, wine making requires enthusiasm and good judgement. The financing of a HSCT unit is often problematical, and creating new markets and transportation of wine can also be difficult and costly. Weather is something most wine makers take seriously but have little control over.

The results of a successful HSCT can mean a life saved, while the making of a good wine can give pleasure to many people.

The landscape is changing for both wine making and HSCT. More natural methods and less use of artificial insecticides are increasing in popularity for oenologists and new methods of carrying out HSCT and the use of immunotherapy are on the increase. Whether you are a wine maker or part of a HSCT team remember to keep going and hopefully the results of both will continue to improve.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to Dr Brenda Moore-McCann for bringing Jacapone to my attention. All the ideas and writing are those of SM.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The author declares no competing interests.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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