

**ISTITUTO COMPENSIVO**

**"G.LOMBARDO RADICE "**

**SIRACUSA**



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# ERASMUS PROJECT

## «BON APPETIT»

ISTITUTO COMPRENSIVO GIUSEPPE LOMBARDO RADICE  
SIRACUSA-ITALIA

An olive tree can live for many centuries !

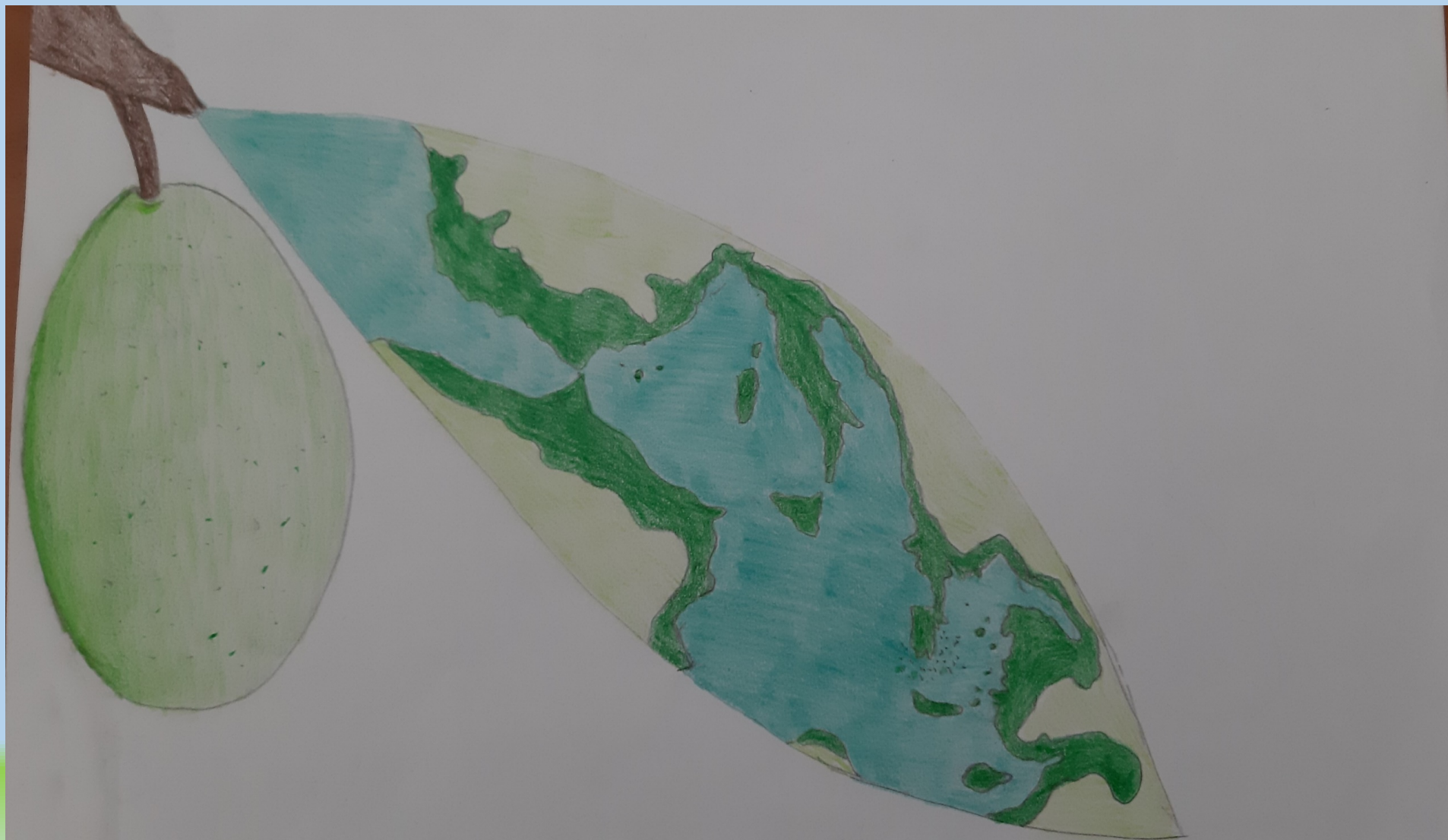


# OLIVE HISTORY

*The history of the olive tree is deeply linked to that of humanity; in the origins of this precious tree, history and mythology intertwine until they get confused. Appearing for the first time probably in West Asia, the olive tree plant spread throughout the Mediterranean area, where its cult was consecrated by all religions.*

- **Jewish tradition** says that on Mount Tabor, three plants were born: a cypress, a cedar and an olive tree.
- In the **Old Testament**, the dove, who announces to Noah the end of the Great Flood and the reappearance of the land that has emerged, carries in its beak an olive branch.
- From a dispute between **Poseidon** and **Athena**, built for the possession of Attica, Athena sprouted an olive tree and Zeus decided that the best gift had been made by Athena. (**Greece**)
- **Apollo** was born in Delos under an olive tree and **Aristeo**, son of Apollo and Cyrene, learned from the Myrtle Nymphs how to graft the wild olive tree to get the olive tree.
- **The first Christians** used the sacred oil for confirmation, the consecration of priests, the extreme unction.
- In **Egypt**, olive branches were placed on the graves of the sovereigns. **Phoenicians, Greeks and Carthaginians** traded oil and helped to spread the cultivation of olive trees, used not only as food, but also for body care and lighting.
- With **the barbarian invasions** the olive cultivation practice almost disappeared. In the **Middle Ages** small olive groves survived in convents.
- In the **Renaissance** the olive groves began to spread, **Florence** became an important center for cultivation and issued strict laws regulating the cultivation of oil and its trade. At the beginning of **the fourteenth century**, Puglia became a huge olive grove and plantations were built in Calabria, Abruzzo, Campania and Sicily.
- Italian oil was widespread throughout Europe. In **1830** Pope Pius VII guaranteed a cash prize for each olive tree planted and cured up to the age of 18 months. In **1944** King Umberto issued a decree, still in force today, which prohibits the slaughter of olive trees
- The use of the olive tree and its products is a testimony of human **ingenuity** as well as of the extraordinary characteristics of this plant





# The olive tree in mythology

- **A Greek myth** attributes to Athena the birth of the first olive tree that arose in the Acropolis to protect the city of Athens. Legend tells that Poseidon and Athena, disputing the sovereignty of Attica, challenged on who offered the most beautiful gift to the people. Poseidon, striking the ground with his trident, gave rise to the most powerful and quickest horse, able to win all the battles; Athena, striking the rock with her lance, gave birth to the first olive tree from the earth, to illuminate the night, to heal the wounds and to provide food for the population. Zeus chose the most peaceful invention and Athena became the goddess of Athens. A son of Poseidon tried to uproot the tree of Athena, but he did not succeed, indeed he wounded himself in committing the sacrilegious gesture and died. The rock that resisted was the Acropolis, where the olive tree was guarded by the soldiers because sacred to the Greeks.
- **According to a legend** reported by Pliny and Cicero, it would have been Aristeo the discoverer of the olive tree and the inventor of the way to extract oil, at the Phoenician age. Olive growing was very widespread in the time of Homer; The Iliad and the Odyssey often tell of the olive tree and its oil. Superb description of the bedroom in which Penelope welcomed Ulysses on his return, and that Ulysses himself had built before his departure with olive wood.
- **In Rome**, Pliny the Elder says that the olive tree was introduced in Rome under the reign of Tarquinius Priscus, in 581 BC, to spread throughout the peninsula. The olive tree was dedicated to Minerva and Jupiter. The Romans, even in their practicality to consider olive oil as a commodity to demand from the vanquished, to trade, to consume, borrowed from the Greeks some symbolic aspects of the olive tree. They honored the distinguished citizens with crowns of olive branches, as well as the newlyweds on their wedding day; finally, the dead were garlanded to signify to be victors in the struggles of human life. Romulus and Remus were born under an olive tree and together with the fig and vine plants were sacred. In the Roman forum when one of these plants died, immediately it was replanted otherwise it brought misfortune.
- In the **Islamic area** many legends refer to the olive tree and its product; we remember the story of Ali Baba and the 40 thieves hidden in the barrels that had to contain the oil

## The olive tree and the oil in Ancient Rome

During the winter season, a supply of oil was distributed to soldiers who protected themselves from the cold by greasing. The historian Polybius tells that the battle on the river Tebbia (218 B.C) was won by the Carthaginians against the Romans, because the Africans before the clash that took place in a rigid winter day, were protected with oil and the Romans, who still did not know this technique, had not done it; so when they found themselves fighting in the cold waters of the river with their limbs cramped by the cold, they could not even handle their weapons.

Among the ancient Italic peoples, the olive tree symbolized the fertility of man and the earth and also in Rome was venerated as a sacred plant. According to Pliny (XV, 8) Italy, in the mid-1st century A.D., owned so much good oil and so cheap to overcome all the other countries.

Decisive moments, such as pruning, harvesting, were loaded with understandable ritual and propitiatory meanings linked to the fertility of the earth. On an amphora of Vulci, from Attic origin of 520 B.C, a collection of olives is represented. There are three olive trees: in the central one, two workers hit branches and stems with long rods, on the tree's crown a third young man beats the olives with a stick; on the ground, on his knees, other young people collect the product in baskets.





■ Territori in cui  
cresce l'ulivo.



## **Horace and Olivetas: An Olive Oil Fairy Tale**

Once upon a time there was a child named Horace. He lived with his mother Olimpia and his father Osvaldo, in a nice house, on the hill. Horace was a child full of fantasy and joy. Every afternoon, after his homework and a snack, he went out for a walk up the hill.

One day, while he was walking in the woods, he met a pretty little girl. She was crying and Horace asked her the reason why she was so upset. The little girl replied: "I cry because a bad witch keeps me prisoner". "How can you escape her? What does she want in exchange for your freedom?" said Horace.

The little girl looked at him full of wonder and hope, and said "the witch will free me only if I bring her a bottle full of a golden yellow liquid, smooth and soft as velvet, scented, fragrant like a fruit and precious as gold". Horace reassured her that he would bring her the liquid the next day.

At dinner he told his mother and father about the little girl and the golden yellow liquid. The father promised Horace that he would help him. The following morning Horace and his parents went out to pick a bunch of olives. Washed them, passed to the pressing, mixed well the mixture, then they extracted the juice from the dough with the squeezing and finally put it in a container. It was the last thing to do before bottling.

The mom took a nice bottle and poured the juice into it. "But it is oil!" Exclaimed Horace. Yes, of course, it is oil and it is the most precious thing we have.

Horace took the bottle and walked towards the woods. When he reached where he had met the little girl, he stopped and waited. After a few minutes an old, ugly, crooked and wrinkled arrived: she was the witch. "I brought you the bottle you wanted. Take it and free my friend!"- said Horace.

The old woman stretched out her hands, took a slice of bread, poured over a few oil, spread a little salt and bite it. What a marvel! Her skin became smooth, the wrinkles on his face stretched out, her back straightened, her bones grew stronger, her hair sparkled. Bite after bite the witch turned into a little girl, the same pretty girl that Horace had met the day before.

"Thanks Horace!" Exclaimed the little girl "my name is Olivetas". Thanks to you that you understood what is that golden yellow liquid, smooth and soft like velvet, scented and fragrant as a fruit and....as precious as gold I was freed from the terrible magic that made me look old and ugly.

Horace was speechless. Then he recovered and, smiling, he said to Olivetas: "now that we are good friend, I can share with you this excellent snack".

# Olive Oil: Common Saying and Proverbs

- Smooth like oil.
- We plant the grapevine for ourselves, the walnut for the children, the olive tree for the grandchildren.
- The olive tree is blessed, it burns green and dry.
- The oil poured on the ground brings disgrace.
- New oil, old wine.
- Lie, like oil on water, floats on the surface of truth.
- The first olive is gold, the second is silver, the third is worthless.

# Students' drawings



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