



The Peculiarities of the History of Viticulture and Winemaking in Central Asia (Based on Historical and Archaeological Samples)

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Abstract

The article attempts, using written and archaeological sources, to study some aspects of the development of viticulture and winemaking in Uzbekistan and other Central Asian countries. It shows how, in the territory of Uzbekistan, this branch of economy has deep roots, originating in the Bronze Age. Currently, Uzbekistan is a major supplier of viticultural produce to the global market. Besides, a brief overview of history and archeology, devoted to viticulture and winemaking, showed that in Central Asia this branch of the economy has deep roots and dates back to the Bronze Age.

Keywords: *Viticulture; Winemaking; Central Asia; Cultivation; Archaeological Sources; Bronze Age; History; Maverannah; Samarkand; Penjikent; Margiana; Ustrushana; Middle East*

Introduction

Viticulture and winemaking associated with it is one of the oldest crafts, which, having originated in the warm, fertile regions of the planet, has become widespread both in everyday life and in various religious rites. All this is reflected in written and archaeological sources, painting and plastic arts. Central Asia is one of the oldest centers of viticulture and winemaking culture. Since ancient times, winemaking has been considered a noble deed here, because grapes have always occupied an important place in the diet of the peoples of the East.

Results and Discussions

It is believed that wild grapes were first cultivated during the Neolithic era in the Middle East. The oldest remains of wine were found in Georgia (6000 BC) and Iran (5000 BC) [1]. In Central Asia, grapes have been cultivated since ancient times in all areas of irrigated agriculture. This is evidenced by the finds of grape seeds and wine presses during excavations of the Bronze Age sites of Sapallitepa and Jarkutan (II millennium BC) [2, p. 118, 137; 3, p. 19–20]. This fact itself testifies to the cultivation of grapes in the south of Central Asia already at that time (Figure 1). An unusual surge of winemaking in Western and Central Asia is associated with the conquests of the Greeks [4, p. 12–13]. Here they brought their methods of arranging wine presses, which here acquired their form in accordance with local traditions. One of the oldest centers of viticulture was located in Margiana.

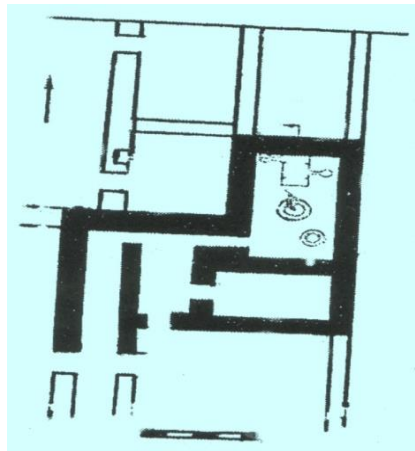


Figure 1

Strabo (64/63 BC–23/24 AD) wrote that “This country is rich in grapes” [5, p. 487–488]. The fact that winemaking was developed in Parthia is evidenced not only by narrative sources, but also by archaeological finds. At the settlement of old Nisa, located near Ashgabat, warehouses where wine was stored were opened. A famous collection of Parthian ivory rhytons was also found here, the origin and purpose of which are still debated by world scientists [6, p. 30].

Sogd in this respect was not much inferior to Parthia, where viticulture stood at the perfect level for its time. At the settlement of Afrasiab—ancient Samarkand—a vessel of the Kushan period was found, molded in imitation of the Greek crater. In ancient Greece, craters are large vessels in which wine was mixed with water. The vessel from Afrasiab almost exactly repeats one of the varieties of Greek craters [7, p. 175]. It should be noted that many terracotta figurines of the Kushan period from the settlement of Afrasiab, depicting the goddess of fertility, had a grape bunch as one of their attributes. This is due to the high development of viticulture and winemaking here and the widespread veneration of the cult of the vine [8, p. 48].

Fergana was an important center of viticulture in Transoxiana. The Chinese tourist Zhang Tian visited Fergana–Davon in the 2nd century BC and noted that agriculture, including viticulture and winemaking, was developed here [9, p. 161]. The grapes and wine were supplied here by the Sogdians. It is no coincidence that images of the vine also appeared on Chinese mirrors. The Sogdians made a great contribution to the spread of winemaking in Sogd and neighboring countries. One of the cities they founded in the 7th century was even called a vineyard after a vineyard located in its center [10, p. 68].

A significant indicator of the developed viticulture and winemaking are workshops for the preparation of wine—wineries and wine presses. The last archaeologists uncovered quite a lot in various

areas of Maverannahr. A kind of winery dating back to the 3rd century AD studied in Fergana. Here, a crushing platform and a rectangular bath–reservoir covered with alabaster were opened, and a chute extending from it is connected to a khum–reservoir dug into the floor [11, p. 54–68].

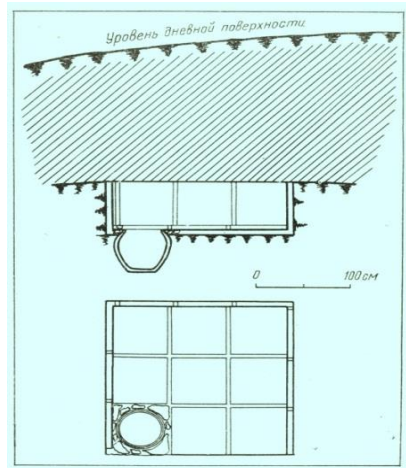


Figure 2

In Bactria, on the site of Dalverzintepa, a winery of the Kushan period was discovered. According to the researchers, a vineyard was located here (Figure 2), wine was produced here, and then it was transported to the city wine storages [12, p. 171].

In medieval Ustrushana, a wine–making workshop of the 7th–8th centuries has been completely excavated. Actually, it was not just a workshop, but a housing and production complex of a professional winemaker, who, apparently, grew, produced and sold his products [13, p. 43].

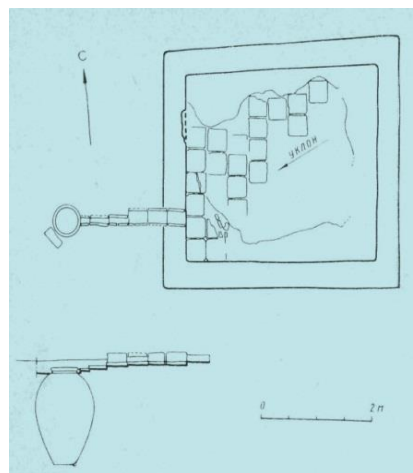


Figure 3

Similar wineries have been studied in other sites of Maverannahr [14, p. 100–101; 15, p. 69–71; 16, p. 121–123]. Numerous finds of wineries may indicate that almost every wealthy farm of that time was either engaged in viticulture or enjoyed the fruits of its processing. According to written sources, Central Asian Christians widely used wine both in everyday life and in religious ceremonies [17, p. 22–24].

The most significant is wine production in the first centuries AD in Khorezm. Here, in the settlement near Ayazkala III (Figure 4), there were several wineries [18, p. 38–39].

As you can see, almost all wine presses had a similar design, despite the time difference, that is, it was a common type of construction of this kind, which stretches from the Bronze Age. Of the variety of vessels for wine, the most famous are the so-called rhytons, oinochoes, goblets and special drinking vessels with a long spout-plum, which have been used in everyday life since ancient times. The oldest painted vessel of the last type from Sialk is stored in the Iran Bastan Museum. Probably, ceramic flasks – mustakhara – with intricately decorated sides were also used to transport liquids, including wine. The fact that viticulture in the Central Asian Interfluve was developed in the period of the mature Middle Ages (IX–XIII centuries) is evidenced by written sources and archaeological data.

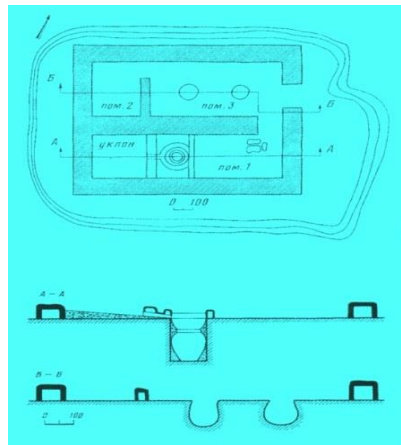


Figure 4

Marco Polo (1254–1323) wrote: “Samarkand, Bukhara and other magnificent cities are places decorated with gardens and vineyards. I had to drink wine from the local population, which struck me with its excellent quality” [19]. After the Mongol conquest, various kinds of mausoleums, “tombs of saints” began to be erected, near which vineyards were often located (Figure 5). Under Amir Temur, great attention was paid to viticulture. The territory of Samarkand was surrounded by beautiful gardens, melon fields and vineyards. Samarkand was surrounded by beautiful gardens and vineyards. Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur described the city of Andijan in his work “Baburnoma” as follows: “There is a lot of bread, abundant fruits, good crops and good grapes” [20, p. 29].

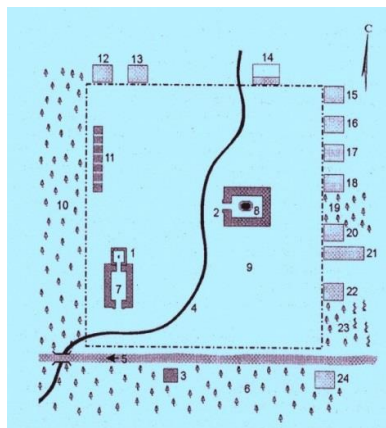


Figure 5

The experience of planting, caring for and propagating grapes and their varieties, obtained by the local population over the millennia, remained virtually unchanged until the 19th century. European grape varieties of grapes in Uzbekistan appeared only in the 19th century in Samarkand during the formation of winemaking on an industrial scale [21, p. 1–111].

The above brief review of history and archeology, dedicated to viticulture and winemaking, showed that in Central Asia this branch of the economy has deep roots and dates back to the Bronze Age.

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