

Matt Harvey and Joseph Jordania. "Where Wine was Born? Wine and Identity in Georgia", Chapter 6 In: *Wine and Identity. Branding, heritage, terroir*. 2014. Matt Harvey, Leanne White and Warwick Frost (Eds.). New York. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group. Routledge studies of gastronomy, food and drink. pp. 71-85.

Chapter 6

Where Wine was Born? Wine and Identity in Georgia

by

Matt Harvey and Joseph Jordania

Introduction and cultural context

Georgia is a small mountainous country (70,000km²) in the Caucasus where Europe and Asia meet. As with many other countries with deep cultural history, Georgians love history. "The older the better" is an unwritten law for Georgians, both lay people and scholars. And they do have very ancient elements of culture preserved between the mountain ranges.

Georgians value their unique language, which has very few relatives among indigenous north Caucasian Languages, and has possibly only one distant relative, the Basque language – the only surviving non-Indo-European language in Western Europe. Georgians value their script, which is one of the six existing alphabetic systems in the world. They also value being one of the first Christian states of the world. After accepting Christianity as a state religion in 337, Georgia became the second Christian state in the World (after neighbouring Armenia). Another source of pride for Georgians is their traditional vocal polyphony, acknowledged for its richness and great age, and gradually leading to the establishing the International Research Centre for Traditional Polyphony in Tbilisi. And although we cannot claim the Georgian identity of our 1.8 million years old distant ancestor, whose remains were found in Dmanisi, Georgians were still happy that it was also found on the territory of Georgia. This hominid is known as "Homo Erectus Georgicus." It is the earliest hominid found outside Africa (Vekua et al., 2002).

And of course there is wine, one of the biggest cultural icons and a potent symbol of Georgian identity. For several decades, if not for centuries, Georgians were sure that the world's first wine was made in Georgia. Finally, progress in genomic research made it possible to start researching the birthplace of wine on a more scholarly basis. During an extensive gene-mapping project in 2006, archaeologists analysed the heritage of over 110 grape cultivars. The results that a region in Georgia, where wine residues were also discovered on the inner surfaces of 8,000-year-old ceramic storage jars, was the birthplace of wine (Keys, 2003). Patrick McGovern, author of the book "Uncorking the Past: The Quest for Wine, Beer, and Other Alcoholic Beverages," was the key force behind this study. According to McGovern, the second oldest archaeological site with wine-making connections is in Iran and it is 1000 years younger than the Georgian tradition. Iran is followed by Ancient Greece (6500 years old traditions) then and by Armenia (a 6,100 year old winery was found here) (McGovern, 2009-2010).

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Biochemical tests on the ancient pottery wine jars from Shulaveri, southern Georgia, show that, at this early period, the Georgian winemakers were deliberately adding tree resin as an anti-bacterial preservatives to grape juice so that the resulting wine could be kept for longer periods after fermentation (Keys, 2003).

This technique is still alive today, but not in Georgia. "Retsina," the resinated wine from Greece, may taste like the wine made 8,000 years ago.

Even the worldwide term for wine, *vino*, probably had come from Georgian term for the wine: *ghvino* or *hvino* [Rvino]. In Georgian, this term has plenty of interesting linguistic connections with several other Georgian terms, terms that mean to bloom, to arouse, to boil, to ferment, and to awaken. Even the Georgian name for the liver, RviZli (*ghvidzli*) possibly has connections to the Georgian term for wine. Georgians traditionally believe that "red wine goes straight into the blood." This metaphoric/metabolic connection between the wine and the blood is most likely as old as wine itself, was the reason why the first wine, made in Georgia some 8000 years ago, was red, and why it is red wine that is used in the ritual of the Eucharist to represent the blood of the Christ. Even the dominant colour of the flag of the Democratic Republic of Georgia, dark red, is connected to the colour of red wine. Georgia has reverted to a flag featuring the lighter red cross of St George, but dark red, Rvinis feri (lit: 'colour of wine') remains a signature Georgian colour.

Wine is sacred in Georgia as in many other cultures of the world. The place where wine was made and kept, the marani, *marani*, wine cellar with several qvevri, *qvevri* buried in the ground. was specially blessed by the priest; Dripping some wine on a piece of bread, or wetting the piece of bread in the wine is a traditional way of remembering and sending a blessing to the deceased when a toast to them is pronounced.

Figure 1: A Georgian qvevri

History

Georgian wine has been famous for a long time. Apart from the famous 8,000 years old beginnings, there is plenty of historical evidence from the ancient authors. Xenophon noted on the verge of 4th-5th centuries BC that Georgians drank wine undiluted. He also noted their love for singing and dancing. According to Strabo, vineyards were so abundant in Iberia (eastern Georgia) that the population could not utilise the entire harvest. Procopius of Caesarea, a Byzantine historian from 6th Century, noted that Georgians were making plenty of wine and were taking wine to other countries for trade. The 17th century missionary Christoforo de Castelli noted the Georgians' love of wine. Jean Chardin in 18th century noted both the quantity and quality of Georgian wine and its drinking.

After Georgia submitted to the Russian Empire in 1810, the Imperial Court soon discovered the virtues of Georgian wine and in due course took control of a large part of the industry. After the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, Georgia proclaimed its independence, but was soon brought into the USSR. The Bolsheviks condemned wine as "decadent". Vodka, they claimed, was the patriotic drink!

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Collectivisation under the USSR was a major drawback for Georgian agriculture. Farmers were permitted to have small plots of land for family needs, and understandably, these small plots were much more fruitful. This enabled them to continue to make wine for personal use. The emphasis was on quantity rather than quality and commercial wine suffered. High quality wine was still produced for party bosses.

Although Stalin generally disliked his native Georgia (as communists have never been popular in Georgia), after he came to rule over the whole Soviet Union, he retained many of his Georgian roots, including his taste for Georgian wine. He gave Georgia a monopoly on the supply of wine to the USSR. This entailed a shift in the Georgian wine industry towards mass production with an associated decline in quality. Georgian winemaking could be roughly divided into three categories: high end reserved for senior party officials; industrial mass market; and personal and local use. The first and the third categories were quite close to each other in quality. In mass production, wine falsification was widely practised.

Georgia thus has the world's oldest wine heritage, which has now become part of its branding. It also has a unique set of both grape varieties and *terroirs*.

Place, Climate and Terroir

Georgia is a predominantly rural and agricultural country located between the latitudes of 41 and 44 degrees north, an ideal zone for grape growing and indeed for growing many other fruits. It is also mountainous in the leading wine growing regions and thus has the combination of sunshine and coolness that grapes need. Vines are also an ideal crop for small farmers as they return a high yield per hectare and require considerable maintenance. And of course, water is in abundance in a mountainous country.

Rich diversity of soil, climate, the angle at which the sun falls on the vineyard, and the many indigenous grape varieties creates a huge variety of wine tastes and aromas. Georgia has many distinct *terroirs*, recognised by a number of designated wine regions.

Wine Regions

Georgia has adopted a system of Protected Designations of Origin (PDO). The protected designations are Akhasheni, Ateni, Gurjaani, Kakheti, Kardenakhi, Kindzmaruli, Khvantchkara, Kotekhi, Kvareli, Manavi, Mukuzani, Napareuli, Sviri, Teliani, Tsinindali (sub-region of Kakheti), Tibaani, Tvishi and Vazisubani.

The Tsinandali sub-region of Kakheti also signifies a dry white wine made mostly from Rkatiseli with up to 15% Mtsavane. The area was pioneered by Prince Alexander Chavchavadze, who introduced western winemaking techniques but also built on Georgian traditions. He introduced some French varieties but also developed the leading Georgian varieties Saperavi, Rkatiseli and Mtsavane. In 1886, the Chavchavadze estate was acquired by the Russian state and through the subsequent Soviet Union, Tsinandali was the leading Georgian brand for white wine.

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Mukuzani, using Saperavi, is a well known wine region. Mukuzani is a sub-region of Gurdjaani, itself a sub-region of Kakheti. Cold air from Caucasian glaciers is credited with giving its unique character. It was also famous in Russia under the USSR. 'Mukuzani' may be derived from 'muguzali' – embers – all that was left after a Persian attack.

The revival of viticulture after the Persian devastation demonstrates and symbolises the Georgians' ability to survive the depredations of hostile neighbours and preserve their culture and viticulture. This is another demonstration of the centrality of viticulture and wine in Georgian identity. There is even a proverb: 'wherever is my home, there I will plant a vine.'

Kvareli is another subregion of Kakheti. Saperavi is again the variety used and the swift-flowing rivers from the Caucasian mountains are thought to give the *terroir* its character. Kvareli wine is a dry red.

Kindzmarauli is from the same area as Kvareli but is a naturally semi-sweet style. It was one of the most popular wines in former USSR.

Hospitality

Most importantly, wine in Georgia is a powerful social connector of people. Two things are culturally unacceptable in Georgia: drinking alone, and drinking without pronouncing a toast. We will specially discuss the importance of toasting in the traditional Georgian *supra* feast, but the rule of sharing drink and food with another human being is even more important. Two stories from Georgian life, one from folklore, one from personal communication, illustrate this rule.

In the first story, popular throughout Georgia, a man arrived on the train to Kutaisi, the second largest city of Georgia, in the 1970s. He hired a taxi at the station and started searching for a certain address. The main difficulty was that addresses and house numbers were sometimes almost impossible to find in Georgia following normal human logic. House numbers were often not written at all, or were impossible to see. You needed the good luck to meet someone who knew where this house was, or more likely, knew the occupant. The taxi driver and the visitor started looking for someone in the street to ask for directions. Finally they saw a person, sheltering from the rain under the balcony at the block of the flats, looking miserable. The searchers asked the man if he knew the address they were looking for. To their relief, the man informed them that the block of flats they were standing at was exactly the house they were looking for and that the person they were looking for was his neighbour. The happy visitor paid his taxi fare and then followed the man into the block of the flats. There the host opened one of the doors with his key and invited the visitor in. There was a table ready for a feast with food and wine. When he asked the host how the person he was looking for could be reached, the host confessed he had no idea. Apparently, he wanted to have a good meal with wine, but as you cannot do this alone if you are Georgian, he just went into the street to invite someone. "Don't rush," said the host to the confused visitor, "now it is heavily raining. Let us wait until the rain finishes, and let us meanwhile have a good meal, you must be hungry. Then I will also help you to find the person you are looking for."

Another story was related by Jordania's uncle Farnavaz Imedashvili, a doctor. He was visiting Moscow in the late 1960s, and was living in the "Rossiya Hotel," the largest hotel in

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the world for couple of decades. The first evening, he went down to the restaurant and ordered a meal and wine for two. "I am waiting for a friend" he told to the waitress. Actually he had not arranged to meet anyone, but: "I was waiting for a single male to enter the restaurant, preferably a person from the Caucasus, and wanted to invite him to share the dinner." After some time, he saw such a person, who came alone and was looking for an empty table. Farnavaz invited the newcomer to join him, explaining that he did not want to eat and drink alone. The newcomer (who turned out to be Karen Demirchyan, later President of Armenia) happily accepted his offer.

One of the authors of this chapter (Jordania) had a different type of experience of Georgian hospitality in western Georgia. He, his wife and nine year old son, in June 1999, were having a meal at the local diner. As his son was speaking English, they caught the locals' attention. After some time, the family was sent a bottle of wine from the neighbouring table, and the two tables toasted each other and drank together. The neighbours left the diner. When the family finished their meal and wanted to pay, the waitress said that the neighbours had already paid for their dinner. The authors cannot promise that this will happen to every visitor to Georgia, but it is a further example of the strong Georgian culture of hospitality, all the more remarkable given the collapsed state of the economy at that time.

Singing

Apart from legendary hospitality, Georgians are known for their love of singing, particularly the rich traditions of polyphonic singing. There was a popular joke showing connections between Georgian singing and drinking of wine: "Two Georgians and a bottle of wine is three-part polyphony."

If drinking wine for a lone man is culturally unacceptable ('Are you alcoholic?' Georgians would ask such a person), singing for a lone person is culturally acceptable, but difficult, as virtually all Georgian songs are to be sung in harmony, by at least three singers. Solo singing was reserved only for situations when a person was alone.

Anzor Erkomaishvili has a lovely story: 'A big group of artists of the Georgian Philharmony (the State Concert Organization), arrived from Tbilisi to our village Makvaneti, in Guria. After their performance a traditional supra-banquet was organised in the spacious room... Village singers were also invited... As the feasting reached its highest point, one of the guests, a professional opera singer, started singing, announcing beforehand that he was going to sing for us the aria from the opera. Ilarion Sikharulidze, a well-respected Gurian traditional singer who was at the table waited for a while, and when he lost faith that the lone singer would be supported by any of his own friends or colleagues, he himself gave a supporting high harmony to his singing. Another traditional Gurian singer who was at the feast supported the aria with the bass part. I should confess that the result was not bad at all, particularly considering that two out of the three performers had no idea of the song they were singing. 'This is an aria from the classical opera and should be performed alone', announced a professional opera singer with mild annoyance in his voice as the song came to an end. 'Well', came the reply from Sikharulidze, "as we Georgians say, it is a pity for a man to be alone while eating, as for singing, I have never heard of a song that has to be sung alone"' (Erkomaishvili, 1988:56).

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Wine features prominently in Georgian music, especially drinking songs, but also songs about wine and winemaking. (Kvizhinadze, 2002; Tsitsitshvili, 2006).

Both drinking and singing are powerful mechanisms of social cohesion in Georgia, and no surprise they are tightly interconnected. The Georgian traditional feast became a powerful force to save Georgian traditional polyphony. As in many other cultures, Georgians traditionally had a variety of songs connected to different situations of life. With the change from traditional to modern life, many of the original social situations were disrupted. So the songs connected to these situations were left without their feeding social environment. It was in this situation that traditional *supra* came to the rescue. Many traditional songs have been "sheltered at the table" for the last century or so.

And of course, wine makes quite a few appearances in Georgian songs, sometimes together with singing. See, for example, in the song "Supruli" (lit., "banquet song"):

"They are having a banquet,
they are drinking and eating,
but I can't hear singing.
Possibly they are mourning someone's death?
Or possibly they cannot sing?"

Sometimes the mention of wine is a suggestion to the host to start the anticipated feast (song "Our host"):

"Our joyful host,
your cellar door is screeching;
Please give us your wine
to wet our throats with the young red liquid."

In the song "Kakhetian Wine" the love for Kakhetian wine is directly declared (the song is from the Classical opera "Daisi" by Zachari Paliashvili, and later became very popular):

"Kakhetian wine,
I love drinking you,
both in white
and in red colours."

There are dozens of various *mravalzhamier* songs. *Mravalzhamier* can be translated as "wishing you eons of good luck and happiness," and the word is so potent, that some of the most complex table songs have only one word *Mravalzhamier* repeated over and over again. There is even an unique song, that has a title three times longer than the entire song lyrics: the song "Long Kakhetian Mravalzhamier" has the text of only one word: *mravalzhamier*. "Chakrulo", (The term Chakrulo means literally 'intertwined' or 'embracing' (vine or people embracing each other)) arguably the most famous Georgian song, that was sent into space with the Voyager spacecraft in 1977 on a golden disc, is a drinking song.

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Toasting

Another strict element of traditional etiquette forbids the drinking of any amount of alcohol (and particularly wine) without proposing a toast. Drinking a sacred liquid without toasting something is culturally unacceptable for Georgians. "Are you Russian?" they would ask if someone was going to drink without toasting first. This rule is even stronger than the rule forbidding drinking alone. So even if a rare Georgian still would have a glass of wine at dinner when alone, he would at least propose a toast, even if there is no one around to hear it.

Toasting is a vitally important tradition connected to wine consumption, though there is disagreement as to how old this tradition really is in Georgia. On one side of the argument, some literary sources suggest that this can be only a one to two hundred year old tradition (which for Georgia sounds like yesterday). The other side argues that this tradition has been going on for millennia (this is a more respectable age for Georgian traditions). For the believers of the second argument, probably the distant ancestors of Georgians, living in Shulaveri some 8000 years ago and drinking the just-invented red wine, were already toasting each other, their parents, and their gods. Finally the sides seem to agree that the tradition of toasting came out from the tradition of blessing at the ritual festivities, both Christian and pre-Christian religious practices.

The toasting tradition has several rules. First, you do not drink whenever you want to drink. Everyone is waiting for the *Tamada* (toastmaster) to propose the next toast. But who is the toastmaster? This is a person nominated by the host and then elected by the members of the banquet. This can be either the host, or a venerable guest. For any person at the table to be elected as the *Tamada* is a great honour, but at the same time, this is a formidable task. He is not only an MC, he is the chief performer as well during the evening. It is the task of the *Tamada* for everyone to have a good time, to know each other better after the feast, to have plenty of singing, dancing, humour, and memories from the participants of the feast. So the *Tamada* must be an eloquent speaker, good singer, with a good sense of humour and good knowledge of the cultural etiquette - and of course, a distinguished drinker of wine! Sometimes *Tamadas* are better at some things than others. It is also the *Tamada's* responsibility to give the *supra* a rhythm, a flow. He must give some time for table participants to talk to each other, but then he must command attention and propose the next toast, uniting again all the participants around the same idea. For everyone to feel part of a community is crucial for a Georgian feast.

After the toast is proposed by the *Tamada*, it must be pronounced and drunk by all members of the party. This is obligatory for all males, and is encouraged in female guests as well. Women can also be *Tamadas*, and at some *supras*, a woman has "stolen" the leadership from a male *Tamada*.

There is a set of "obligatory toasts" at Georgian table that any self-respecting *Tamada* must cover. Toasts for parents, for grandparents and ancestors, toasts for siblings, for Georgia, for the deceased, and for the children are all obligatory. The toast for the deceased is often drunk by everyone standing. The *Tamada* might request from the hosts the "special vessel" for some toasts of his choice. The special vessel can be anything, from a special decorated cup, or a horn known as yanwi "*Kanci*," to an object that has never been used as a

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vessel before. For example, when the Georgian soccer team "Dinamo Tbilisi" won the European Cup Winners' Cup in 1981, they filled the cup with the wine and drunk from it. Even when touching their glasses together for *gaumarjos* *Gaumarjos* (cheers), Georgians follow the unwritten rule: if you believe the person putting their glass against yours is more venerable, you try to keep your glass lower than his. Age is the biggest factor of a person's status at Georgian table and in society.

There were local differences in toasting as well. For example, in Guria, western Georgia, the first toast was as a rule *mSvidobas gaumarjos* *mshvidobas gaumarjos* (for the peace). Tusheti, the East Georgian mountain region, was known for its particular reverence for the deceased, and they had up to a dozen separate toasts on this theme. Women were also mentioned in a toast, sometimes women would also suggest toast for men. Friends, neighbours, guests, memories, love, wishes, beauty, all could become separate topics of toasting and conversations. Sometimes *Tamad*s would propose "free" toasts on any subject they wished. We might toast a treasured object, or the day when we will die. Many of the toasts bring a philosophical mood to the feast and the argument both for and against *Tamada* is widespread. Another big topic of toasts is the personal toast. The *Tamada* might start a series of toasts, dedicated to each members of the feast. If the feast participants are too numerous, they are grouped according to various criteria (neighbours, school friends, if international guests, according to their countries, etc). The *Tamada* makes every *supra* a symposium – the combination of drinking and thoughtful discussion.

Taking Georgian Wine to the World

When the authors visited Georgia recently (September, 2012) they were greeted with a bottle of wine at passport control! This seemed a powerful demonstration of both the Georgian attachment to wine and the Georgian tradition of hospitality. In the many feasts that we experienced, the above mentioned elements of elaborate toasting, *Tamada*, singing, and dancing were present. These elements are probably becoming even more important as elements of Georgian identity as Georgia continues to emerge from the Soviet years.

Both during and after the Soviet period, wine was a major export for Georgia and Russia was by far the biggest market. A Russian ban on Georgian wine from 2006 to 2013 damaged the Georgian economy, but forced Georgia to take its wine to the world. As Georgia was also in the process of modernising, privatising and looking westward, wine has been a good spearhead for projecting Georgian identity to the world. Georgia can present a good product which is the fruit of Georgian *terroir* and tradition and which also says a lot about the Georgian people and their country. Wine is an integral part of the tourist experience in Georgia and wine tourism is a great way to see beautiful country while experiencing wine and wine culture the Georgian way. Perhaps there is too much emphasis on wine and tradition, but it is the authors' contention that Georgia has been able to modernise and globalise while retaining the best of its traditions of wine, hospitality, music and celebration.

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Winemaking Techniques

The first recorded Georgian book on winemaking was Levan Djordjadze's "Vinegrowing and Wine-making, Maturing and Ageing: A Guidebook to the craft of Kakhetian Wine" published in 1875. Chavchavadze introduced foreign grapes, especially well known French varieties and also introduced western winemaking techniques.

There is a distinct traditional Georgian method of winemaking using a large terra cotta urn or qvevri, *qvevri* which is lined with beeswax and buried in the ground. Grapes are crushed and placed in the urn which is sealed so they can macerate and ferment. The wine can then be drawn off without filtering.

Traditionally, the placing of grapes in the qvevri is a semi-mystical moment, accompanied by prayers and spells. Georgia has a generally male-dominated culture, but women are responsible for the *qvevri* and it may not be drawing too long a Freudian bow to suggest a resemblance between the *qvevri* and the womb.

Wine in contemporary Georgia is also made using conventional modern techniques, but the *qvevri* method is generating increasing interest around the world.

Georgia and Wine after the USSR

Since the end of the USSR in 1991, Georgian politics and relations with Russia have been turbulent. Russia has made military incursions and facilitated the secession of Abkhazia and Southern Ossetia, formerly autonomous regions of Georgia. Russia has imposed import bans on Georgian wine when it has sought to punish Georgia. Most recently, a ban was imposed in 2006 purportedly for safety reasons. Georgia has thus had to find new markets for its wine. This is in some ways a hard sell as the world is awash with wine and people's tastes are formed, but Georgian wine is unusual and delicious and is winning many converts around the world. In particular, USA, China and Poland have been good new markets, but the news in April 2013 that the Russian ban had been lifted heartened Georgian producers.

The Georgian Wine Society was established in England, while the USA, Europe and China are other emerging markets.

Wine and Religion

Wine is a central part of religious ritual. After seventy years of Soviet communist domination came to an end in 1991, religion has made a strong comeback. Ironically, one of the hardest moments for the Georgian wine industry was in 1985-88, during Gorbachev's *perestroika* period. Gorbachev, concerned by the rise of alcoholism in Russia and the increase of mentally retarded children as a result of alcoholism, put a strong ban on the sale and consumption of alcohol in entire Soviet Union. Many wineries were considered unnecessary and were cut during these years.

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One of the strongest indications of sacred meaning of wine for Georgians is that Christianity was introduced to Georgia by St Nino in the fourth century. She made her cross out of vines interwoven with her own hair.

Viticulture has also provided a source of wood suitable for carving and extensively used for church doors and interiors.

Figure 2: The 18th century silver box, kept in Sioni Cathedral, where the original St Nino's vine cross is believed to be kept until today (Photo: Paata Vardanashvili)

Wine also features prominently in pre-Christian religion. Georgia was strongly influenced by Ancient Greek civilization with Bacchus/Dionysus the god of wine. There is also the sense that wine - that appears as if by magic from grape juice placed in an amphora – is the work of a god. In 1902, the Russian Imperial Agricultural Commission set down standards for church wine and provided for its certification, thus bringing bureaucracy to God's work!

A twelfth century anthem addressed to the Virgin Mary "Shen khar venakhi" – "Thou art a Vineyard", perhaps written by Demetri I, King of Georgia, epitomises the intertwining of wine, viticulture and religion in Georgia. According to a very popular folk tale, when God was giving lands for living to various peoples, Georgians did not show up on time (still a problem for many Georgians!). Finally when they came to God, all the lands were gone. "Where have you been?" asked God sternly. "We were feasting and drinking to your health," answered the Georgians. God, pleased with this answer, decided to give Georgians the land that he had put aside for himself! This also fits with the idea of Georgia as the site of the Garden of Eden, making it a holy land for both Christianity and wine. This identity can only have been enhanced by the spread of Islam, with its prohibition on drinking alcohol, surrounding Georgia on almost all sides.

Wine is thought in Georgia to have many healthy properties. As well as nutrition, it is thought to be healthy to inhale and to be applied both internally and externally. Georgians are famous for their longevity and moderate but regular wine consumption is given much credit for this.

Allegedly, the best mrvadi *mtsvadi* (shashlik) is made on an open fire from vine wood.

Reading the Labels

Surveying the labels in *The Best of Georgian Wines and Spirits 2012*, (Vinoteca, 2012) depiction of a grape vine or bunch of grapes is common. Sometimes these are stylised in a coat of arms. The *qvevri* is a popular motif. There is also depiction of the vineyard with a winery building or chateau in the background and often some hills, a distinctive feature of much of Georgia. One striking image drawing on legend is the "Pheasant's Tears" winery with its depiction of a pheasant in a stylised artistic setting. The Imeretian Wine Company

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depicts a large rooster. The necessity for text in both Georgian and Latin and/or Russian script gives the opportunity for the Georgian script with its curls to be used artistically. There is not a distinctive Georgian bottle shape. The vine leaf one of the most distinctive motifs of old Georgian church artistry. Sheep are depicted on one label (Konocho & Co). Duruji Valley has a coat of arms with birds; Mossano depicts a man inhaling the bouquet of a glass of wine. Use of gold lettering and gold vine leaves is popular.

Grape Varieties

Georgia has many indigenous grape varieties. Over 800 indigenous grape varieties have been identified and approximately 80 are in commercial use for wine production. The most popular red variety Saperavi has been transplanted outside Georgia, including in Australia at Domaine Day in the Adelaide Hills, but still seems to do best in Georgia.

Wine in Georgia comes in many colours: red, amber, green and white as well as rosé, clear chacha (grape spirit) and dark orange brandy.

Saperavi is the most popular red variety, and is even grown in Australia at Domaine Day in the Adelaide Hills. Mukuzani, Napareuli and Kvareli PDOs all use Saperavi in a dry style while in Kvareli it is used in a more aromatic style and in Akhasheni and Kindzmaruli, it is used in a semi-sweet style. In Khvantchkara, it is used in a blend with Aleksandrouli (see below).

Shavkapito originally from Kartli, has been revived in recent years.

Aleksandrouli from Racha is used in both the semi-sweet Khvantchkara (with Saperavi) and in a dry style.

Otskhanuri Sapere is a West Georgian variety used to make a dry style and blended as a rosé.

Cabernet Sauvignon has been the most successful foreign variety, especially since the Russian takeover of the late C19. It blends well with Saperavi, proving that east and west can meet successfully in Georgia. Merlot is also blended with Saperavi.

Rkatiseli is one of the most popular whites.

Mtsvane, a specific wine, is particularly known from the village of Manavi. It is famous for its greenish colour ("mtsvane" means green).

Tsolikouri, grown mainly in Western Georgia – Imereti, Tvishi, Lechkhumi, is remarkable for its gulabi pear notes.

Goruli Mtsvane, no relation to Mtsvane, is best known in the Atenuri region of Kartli. It is called Kvishkhuri in Imereti.

Chkhaveri from Guria, suitable for white, red or rosé, sweet or dry, still or sparkling; grows on trees. It can also be used to make amber coloured wine.

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Wine Tourism in Georgia

Wine tourism in Georgia is gradually developing although there still is a lot of potential. The capital Tbilisi is in one of the leading wine regions Kartli. By far the most famous viticulture region, Kakheti, is just to the east of Kartli, within easy reach of Tbilisi. Other regions are Imereti, Samegrelo and Guria. While Georgian roads can be scary with adventurous driving blended with donkey carts, it is ideal country for wine tourism with the hilly country providing stunning panoramas, the long history providing historical ruins and functioning churches and wineries. Chateau Mere near Telavi is the perfect combination of a historic castle sympathetically restored as a hotel and restaurant in the heart of the Kakheti wine country. Other wineries also display Georgian horse culture.

After acting as a premium sponsor for the 5th International Wine Tourism Conference (IWINETC) held in Zagreb, Croatia in March, 2013, it was announced that Georgia will be the host of the 6th annual conference to be held in March 2014.

During the conference at Zagreb, Georgia held a presentation to show the trends and developments of the wine sector in the country, in addition to showing that Georgia has the appropriate infrastructure needed for wine tourism. In recent years, Georgia has made improvements in the growth of this type of tourism.

Within the framework of developing new tourism products, the Georgian National Tourism Agency initiated projects to improve wine tourism throughout the country. During the first stage of the project, the potential of wine tourism was explored and wine factories and wineries were identified and catalogued. Based on this, Georgia's first Wine Route was developed. Special signage guiding tourists towards wine tourism venues were put on highways, making it easier for a visitor to find the appropriate place.

The authors recommend that the developers of wine tourism in Georgia enable visitors to experience a *supra*. At the traditional banquet, accompanied with traditional polyphonic singing, dancing, drinking and toasting, guests can have an unforgettable experience, possibly each guest served by the wine of their choice (although at the Georgian traditional *supra* all the guests are served with the same wine, provided by the hosts).

One more suggestion from the authors: a unique 'only in Georgia experience' can be organized if a contemporary wine-tasting complex is built in Shulaveri, the historical place where the earliest tradition of winemaking in human history was identified. 'The Birthplace of Human Wine Making Tradition' might attract wine-loving tourists to the place, where the remnants of the 8,000 years old wine were found. Shulaveri is only about 40 kilometres south of the capital Tbilisi. About the same distance from Shulaveri to the west is another historical place for humanity, Dmanisi. Dmanisi is the place where Homo Erectus Georgicus, the earliest hominid outside of Africa was found. In fact, a day trip could be organized from Tbilisi to both Shulaveri and Dmanisi, with lunch at Dmanisi and dinner in Shulaveri, with traditional singing and toasting. Visiting on the same day two unique places, and experiencing the place where the 'First Europeans' lived, and then visiting the place of the 'birth of the winemaking' might attract great number of tourists. Perhaps the 'cave man' was in fact in his wine cellar!

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Conclusion

Wine is central to the Georgian landscape, economy, society, culture and identity. It is a source of pride, pleasure, income and social status. It is something to see, something to do, something to experience as well as sustenance and alcoholic transcendence. It helps Georgians to sing and gives them something to sing about. It gives them a reason to meet and take pleasure in each other's company. It reinforces social cohesion and identity in a shared experience. It gives foreigners a warm welcome to Georgia and a vivid insight into Georgian culture. It is literally "drinking the country". The practice of toasting and replying to toasts is an intellectual and emotional bonding in wine. Georgia seems inextricably intertwined with wine, and seems to be inviting the world to one long table, where everyone can toast each other, trying to live amicably on a shared planet – or *terroir*!

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