

PRE-CHRISTIAN RITUAL, SYMBOL AND EQUIPMENT IN GEORGIAN VITICULTURE-WINEMAKING

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Georgian traditional winemaking is becoming increasingly popular in the international arena. In 2013 Georgia's ancient *qvevri* winemaking method has been added to the world heritage list of the UNESCO as a monument of the Intangible Heritage of Humanity. This is the recognition of viticulture as an integral part of Georgian culture.

Besides the ancient technology of winemaking, more than 500 grape varieties are preserved in Georgia. Except alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages (wine and its different types – *shumi*, *saxarjo*, *chacha* (grape vodka), vodka, *badagi* (condensed grape juice), *tkbili* (grape juice), vinegar, etc.) there are various grape products (grapes, raisins, *isrim-maqhvali* (unripe grape and blackberry sauce), *tatar*, *pelamushi*, *tkbiliskveri*, *churchkhela*, *janjukha*, *ghvinotbili*, *boghli*, *so*, *majigaro*, etc.). Ancient winemaking-viticulture traditions, related rituals, symbols, folk legends, equipment, terminology etc., are still in use in Georgia.

Different equipments and tools for processing and use of grape products are discovered in archaeological sites in East Georgia (Kvemo Kartli region). These artifacts date back to the 6th century BC.

Palynological investigation of organic remains on the internal side of Neolithic ceramic vessels from the early agricultural settlement of Gadachrili Gora showed the presence of well preserved pollen grains of *Vitis vinifera*. There is also a lot of pollen of weeds characteristic for vineyards. Gadachrili Gora layers were dated to 5815 cal BC and 5783 cal BC. The organic remains from the pot walls were investigated chemically too. Contact of wine with ceramic remains on its walls calcium tartrate, which is precipitated from wine. Fragments of investigated ceramic are characterized by rough, coarse lyporous structure.

If wine stays in pots with such structure, liquid is penetrating deeply in pores, so calcium tartrate settles not only on the surface, but in pores too. Therefore, amount of settled tartrate will be enough to be analyzed by instrumental methods. Investigating fragments using HPLC, trace amount of tartrate was found. This indicates contact of above mentioned pot with wine.¹

It should be noted that lately retrieved grape pips which by their ampelographic features are assigned to a cultivated variety of grapevine, have been discovered by archaeologists almost on the entire territory of Georgia. As for the discovered grape pips in other historical viticulture centers in the world – Greece, Italy, Cyprus, Jordan, Turkey and the Middle East, they belong to wild sorts of vine and date back to the 3rd-4th millennia BC.²

Specialists suppose that already in the Neolithic era, wine was an integral component of religious cult practices. In religious ceremonies the ritual of cult worship ended with wine drinking. The tradition of using wine in cult rituals is observed in other centers of viticulture-winemaking (Mesopotamia, Egypt) since the 4th millenium BC.⁴

Winemaking equipment and tools have become more diverse in the Kura-Araxes (4th-3rd millennia) and the Trialety cultural (2nd millennium) periods in Georgia. Items decorated with vine shoots and pips used in religious rituals, emphasize the vine and wine cult⁵.

The long usage of grape and grape juice processing items in rituals and daily life in Georgia contributed to the emergence of a variety of utensils – for wine storage, for serving at a table (*satsde*) and different drinking vessels. Simplicity of their manufacturing and availability of raw materials determined wide distribution of the inventory until now (pitcher, winepress, drinking vessels, grape portable utensils, gideli, orshimo, khapera, etc.).

Drinking vessels are especially notable for their diversity; their manufacturing technology, structure and function definitely reflect

¹ E. Kvavadze, M. Jalabadze, N. Shakulashvili, (2010) Arguments indicating the presence of wine in Neolithic pots from Georgia using the method of palinological and chemical analysis. in: Proceedings of the 33rd World congress of Vine and Wine and the 8th General assembly of the International organization of Vine and Wine, 20-25 June 2010, Tbilisi, Georgia, [http://www.oiv2010.ge].

² T. Ghloni, O. Goidadze, ქართველები, ვაზი და პურ-ღვინო, Tbilisi 2000, p.10.

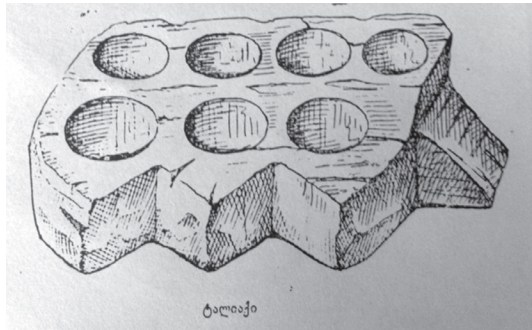
³ L. Chilashvili, ვენახი, ღვინო და ქართველობა, Tbilisi 2004, p. 52.

⁴ L. Pruidze, საქართველოს მევენახეობის და მეღვინეობის ისტორია, I, Tbilisi 2014.

⁵ L. Chilashvili, ვენახი, ღვინო და ქართველობა, Tbilisi 2004, pp. 61–64.

their developmental path. for example, a seven- socket taliaki and marani. Taliaki – a flat wooden plate where several cups are placed, is the same marani, though more primitive; it is composed of immovable base shtasadebeli with seven sockets and seven drinking vessels. Seven-socket taliaki was used for glorifying seven deities: the first vessel was intended for the glorifying toast to the Father God, the second for the Savior, the third for St. George, the fourth for Kviratskhoveli, the fifth for Archangel, the sixth for Virgin Mary and the seventh for Crucifixion.⁶

Marani is a developed form of Taliaki which is presented by 7 or 9 pottery connected by the principle of communicating ves-



sels. Wine filling takes place through a comparatively big vessel - *Churula*, which often has the shape of a deer and wine is drunk from its lips.⁷

In the study of manufacturing technology of wine drinking and wine care vessels important is Kula, which is widespread in Georgia. Kula is made of aqhiro (bitter pumpkin in Imereti), wood, copper or some



⁶ N. Rekhviashvili, საღვინე ჭურჭელი – საწლე, სასმური, „მეგლის მეგობარი“, Tbilisi 16 (1968), p.18.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

other materials. The common trait of *kula* is that it has a pleasant voice when drinking wine from it. Specifically for this purpose, a wooden plate is inserted in the rim of *Kula* made from *aqhiro*. Both wooden and metal *Kulas* have a semicylinder body and a long and narrow neck. They are often decorated with silver plates, jet and pearl. While drinking wine the same sound emits *Chinchila* which is generally produced from clay and also *Qharqhara* which is often made of silver sheets by cold forging.⁸

From the above list the most famous is *Qvevri* (pitcher), which is considered the unique pottery for winemaking and wine storage. The present form of *qvevri* emerged in the 3rd -2nd millennia BC. Prior to this period, mainly small pitchers were common; their height did not exceed 1-1.5 meters and they had a flat bottom and a wide body. Currently oval shape pitchers are most wide-

spread. Capacity of *qvevri* varies from several hundred liters up to several tons. Kakheti was distinguished for making large-capacity *qvevris*. Here one still can find pitchers that hold 6000-8000 liters. Most widespread are *qvevris* holding 1-2-tons.



Qvevri wine generally implies fermentation of certain amount of grape juice with *chacha* (grape skins, stalks and pips), maturation and aging. The first and most important rule of *qvevri* winemaking is wine storage in *qvevri* with *Chacha* during alcoholic fermentation and after.

It may be assumed that just simple wine drinkware made from plants, for example a semicylinder vessel produced after cutting an *aqhiro* (pumpkin), has become a prototype for the clay bowl currently widespread in Georgia, which in turn gave rise to a variety of wine drinking vessels of different sizes and materials: *tasi*, *jam-tasi*, *badia*, *bardzimi*, etc. The *aqhiro*-shaped wine drinkware – *kula*, *chinchila*, *qharqhara*, which belong to the original type of sound emitting drinking vessels were

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 18–19.

developed simultaneously. At the same time aqhiro-shaped are – *satsde* and various wine care utensils: *sura*, *doki*, *koka*, *chapi*, *tungula*, *orshimo*, *kotani*, *qvevri*, *churi*, *kotso* etc. Besides, this view is supported by the fact that the wine drinking vessel *qhantsi* (animal horn), widely practiced since ancient times in Georgia, is made of different materials (clay, wood, etc.); functionally these vessels are identical, they are called ‘the different’ and are used for exclusive toasts.

Qvevri, which is now related only with wine was multifunctional in ancient times and it was used even as a burial. Professional literature suggests, that burying a dead in a *qvevri* was an imitation of conceiving as the deceased had the embryo form. *Qvevri* by itself was considered abdomen. Abdomen as a hollow space had previously been accentuated on art monuments. Empty ovals on animal body depicted on bronze belts could be a representation of abdominal emptiness. In some cases there is an embryo in the belly of an animal. Abdomen could have also been a synonym for vagina, as conception means impregnation. On the other hand, the term abdomen/belly denotes an empty space of an object, e.g. the belly of a boat; we still use an expression — ‘a jug (*dergi*, *koka*, pot, etc.)



with a belly’. So that, the hollow space of *qvevri* formed a full association of an abdomen, and a deceased buried in a pitcher perhaps went up to the mother deity of all creation as embryo.⁹

Wine was considered a sacrifice to God. After picking grapes a family made sacramental (*zedashe*) wine from its part. They filled a specially designated for this purpose *qvevri* with wine and reserved it for certain religious holidays. No one could touch this wine and it was drunk only during religious ceremonies for the glory of the saints for whom the wine was produced. *Zedashe* was sacrificed to rural, community and family deities as to supreme ‘patrons’ and protectors. There are different *zedashes* – *Samghvto* (designed for God), *Sakalando* (for New Year), *Samaiso*, *Sachabuko*, *Samagiero*, etc. Thanks to the cult of vine and wine the buildings for

⁹ I. Surguladze, მითოსი, კულტი, რიგული საქართველოში, თბილისის სახელმწიფო უნივერსიტეტი, Tbilisi 2003, p. 13.

the storage of wine - *marani* (wine cellar) and even *churistavi* (an outdoor cellar) became objects of veneration. These places were considered holy; sacrificial animals were cut and wedding and baptism ceremonies were also held there.¹⁰ From a gender perspective, the activities associated with win-making and wine care were strictly limited. Women were not allowed to squeeze grapes for wine, wash pitchers, draw of wine from a *qvevri*, open a *qvevri* and take wine out of it. However, women like men, participated in the feast and they were not forbidden to drink wine there.

A *supra* (traditional Georgian feast) is always led by a toastmaster (*tamada*, *tolumbashi* and its old forms – *puris upali*, *mtavari tadzrisai*, *mkhnis tavi*).¹¹ *Tamada*'s main function is to introduce a toast// blessing during the feast. According to Kh.Ioseliani the first three essential toasts in Svaneti are direct repetition of a text of a prayer which is conducted in the church while donating sacramental wine - *zedashe*, ritual bread and sacrificial animal's heart and liver; besides, before the term *tamada* was established in the Svan language, there was another term, which verbatim denoted a person, who blesses; however, in the Georgian language to say a toast is otherwise called praying//blessing (*locva//dalocva*). perhaps, initial performer of religious rituals, who conducted prayers, gradually has become the initiator and the leader of the feast¹². The evidence in support of this view can be the fact that traditional Georgian feast/*supra* is still strictly regulated, e.g. the sequence of toasts are strictly defined. Even during the usual *supra* drinking wine without saying a toast is considered unacceptable. Essential are toasts to God's glory and to the memory of the dead. Until now a clergyman is considered to be a desired *tamada* at the festive as well as at the mourning *supra*. Meanwhile, *Tamada* tried to observe the already established rules and the form and contents of a toast have preserved similarities to the form of praying//blessing till our days.

It should be noted, that in the mountainous regions of Georgia, the so called toasts to deities and the ritual of blessing is performed by the ancient drinking vessel – *qhantsi*. At a festive *supra* (wedding, baptism, birthday etc.) *qhantsi* (as a different drinking vessel) is designed for exclusively honorary toasts; it makes us suppose that folk life has closely linked the ancient vessel and the religious ritual of blessing with each other and introduced *qhantsi* into the everyday life.

¹⁰ V. Bardavelidze, აგუნა-ანგურა, „ქეგლის მეგობარი“, Tbilisi 16(1968), p. 12.

¹¹ Kh. Ioseliani, სტუმარ-მასპინძელის გრადიცია სვანეთში, Tbilisi 20015, p. 91.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 95.

In the opinion of V. Bardavidze viticulture had its own patron, the deity 'Aguna-Angura'. Its traces are observed in the ritual preserved till the 1970s in Georgia. For abundance of grapes special unleavened grape-shaped bread was baked. On the New Year morning a head of a family hung the bread on a vine shoot or broke it near the vine. This bread was called - *mtevana* (cluster) or *Aguna bread*. The fact that this bread should have been unleavened indicates that the ritual is archaic. V. Bardavidze also appeals to the popular in Racha-Lechkhumi 'vineyard greeting' on New Year, when one of the family members went to the vineyard and loudly asked Aguna for abundant harvest. Interestingly, a similar ritual has been widely spread in other parts of Georgia. Although in some places, for example in Imereti, the ritual bread was baked on New Year's day, the above ritual was performed in the evening (*Chiakoknoba// aruli kudianebi*) before Maundy Thursday. It is interesting that the ritual supras of Christian holidays (Easter, Ghvtismshobloba [the day of Virgin Mary], Alaverdoba, Lomisoba and others) show some resemblance to mass religious festivities of pre-Christian period.

In the late Middle Ages as a result of cultural expansion of the Islamic countries viticulture had significantly decreased; it suffered certain damage during collectivization in Soviet period. Nevertheless, the main criteria of economic strength in the lowland regions of Georgia was cornfield, vineyard, bread and wine.

A folk poem says:

'Mother-in-law, do not reject your son-in-law because of his darkness,
But go to the village and ask whose vineyard is larger'.¹³

Wine is the most important constituent of a Georgian man's life; production of wine in the family conditions is considered essential for almost all Georgian men from Georgia's winegrowing regions. Therefore, in Soviet-era urban life in Georgia cultivation of climbing sort of vine - *maghlari* near residential buildings for wine production was common. It should be noted that commendation of wine is a great honor for a winemaker and, on the contrary, if wine is disliked or some imperfections are noted, winemakers are very insulted and it often becomes a source of disagreement.

Georgian scholars suggest that not only wine (*ghuino*, *ghini*, *ginia*, *ghuino-vino*, *wine*, *vein*, etc.) but the cult of Bacchus could also be of

¹³ A. Khundadze, ვენახი და მევენახეობა ქართულ პოეზიაში, Tbilisi 1962, p. 4.

Georgian origin. We have to admit the existence of opposite view which considers that wine is an Asia Minor term which is found in Semitic, Egyptian, Hittite and the Kartvelian languages. It is of Indo-European origin and is likely to be related to the *ueino* archetype, which in turn is derived from the root *uei-ui* meaning 'curl, weave'. Wine-vineyard-vine are the variants of a Greek word, which were peculiarly transformed and changed into a historical process; here the combination of Greek sounds 'vi' could be distinguished, which means uneven, curly .

Of particular note is the role of the Georgian Orthodox Church. Except that Churches and Monasteries had their own vineyards and the best wines have been produced there, with more sophisticated ornaments of vine and grape bunches are decorated the following Georgian temples: Svetitskoveli, Samtavisi, Tsilkani, Ananuri, Pudzari, Bana, Oshki, Ishkhani, Mtskhetsisvari, Bagrati, Alaverdi, Metekhi, Sioni, Ertatsminda, Nikortsminda Tbeti, Kheoti, Barakoni, Martvili, Koreti Trinity, Tserovani Trinity, Khirsi, Tsunda, Atheni Sioni, Achi St. George and others. This is not surprising if we recall the postulate of identity of Virgin Mary and vine in the Georgian hymnography (Thou Art a Vineyard). This in some way may explain preservation of attributes associated with winemaking (marani, *qvevri*, zedashe, etc.) in the present life.

Thus, it can be said that the certain elements of Georgian supra, as well as the tradition of making sacramental (zedashe) wine, have been preserved in the life until recently. Ethnographic, folklore, linguistic, historical and archaeological data suggest that the culture of wine influenced the people's way of life throughout centuries, which is clearly reflected in the material and spiritual spheres. It should be noted that it is still actual and has a great role in contemporary life.

Pre-Christian Ritual, Symbol and Equipment in Georgian Viticulture-Winemaking

Georgian traditional winemaking is becoming increasingly popular in the international arena. Besides the ancient technology of winemaking, more than 500 grape varieties are preserved in Georgia. Except alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages there are various traditional grape products. Ancient winemaking-viticulture traditions and related rituals, symbols, folk legends, equipment, terminology etc., are still in use in Georgia.

Different equipments and tools for processing and use of grape products are discovered in archaeological sites throughout Georgia. Georgian scholars suggest that not only wine (*ghuino, ghini, ginia, ghuino-vino, wine, vein*, etc.) but the cult of Bacchus could also be of Georgian origin. Though according to the opposite view wine-vineyard-vine are the variants of a Greek word.

The long usage of grape and grape juice processing items in rituals and daily life in Georgia contributed to the emergence of a variety of utensils – for wine storage, tableware and and drinkware. Simplicity of their manufacturing and availability of raw materials determined wide distribution of the inventory until now (pitcher, winepress, drinking vessels, grape portable utensils, gideli, orshimo, khapera, etc.). Drinking vessels are especially notable for their diversity; their manufacturing technology, structure and function definitely reflect their developmental path.

From winemaking and wine storage pottery the most unique and famous is qvevri (pitcher). Capacity of qvevri varies from several hundred liters up to several tons. *Qvevri*, which is now related only with wine was multifunctional in ancient times and it was used even as a burial.

Specialists suppose that already in Neolithic era, wine was an integral component of religious cult practices. Wine was considered a sacrifice to God. The tradition of making sacramental (*zedashe*) wine, have been preserved in the life until recently in Georgia. After picking grapes a family made sacramental (*zedashe*) wine from its part which was kept in a special qvevri and reserved for certain religious holidays. It was drunk only at traditional Georgian feasts //supras during religious ceremonies. Supra is still strictly regulated in Georgia and is always led by a toastmaster //tamada .

Certain elements of Georgian supra, as well as ethnographic, folklore, linguistic, historical and archaeological data suggest that the culture of wine influenced the people's way of life throughout centuries and made it the most important constituent of a Georgian man's life.