VINICULTURE IN URARTU CIVILIZATION

History of Wine

- Wine, a holly drink
- In ancient mythology grape was dedicated to Gods
- Dionysus, the God of wine and harvest
- Priapus, the protector of fruits, plants and gardens

Wild grapevine was cultivated in the area between Georgia, Armenia and Eastern Anatolia

The Hajji Firuz Tepe hosted the world’s first wines.

In Anatolia the wine was first made.

The Eurasian Grapevine

VITIS VINIFERA

History of Wine

- According to the Torah and the Holy Bible, wine was first made in the area surrounding the Mount Ararat after the biblical flood.
- The Torah expresses “Then Noah began farming and planted a vineyard” (Aktan and Kalkan, 2004).
- Persian legend, Iranian King Jamshid (Bursa Şarap Kulübü sunum notları, 2007; Aktan ve Kalkan, 2004).

Paleobotanists have found lots of fruit, grape seed, and grape cluster remains in the Fertile Crescent (the geographical site between the Zagros, Eastern Taurus, Amanus, and the Lebanon Mountains).

First the Greeks and then the Romans developed the viniculture and started industrial wine production.

Importance of Wine in Urartian Kingdom

- Urartians gave special importance to wine and considered it as a symbol of wealth and nobility.
- The chronicles of Assyrian King Ashurnasirpal II (883 BC-859 BC) on the attacks of the Assyrians on the Urartian country note that wine was among the taxes demanded from the Nairi tribes.
- Assyrian King Sargon II explains that the northern region of the Urmie Lake was composed of gardens and that his army destroyed the region
Urartian Kingdom

Wine in Urartian Kingdom

- Assyrian King Sargon II explains: "I detached the cypress beams from the roof of your precious palace and moved it to Assyria. I opened the cellars full of wine and led my army to eat the plentiful cereal there. I entered their wine cellars and Assyrian soldiers drank the delicious wine stored in leather bags like the water of rivers" (Doğer, 2004; Salvini, 2006).

- Argishti I says "irrigation channel in the city of Taktumnia and the lands in Quriakagi were not planted, there was no vegetable, fruit and grapevine gardens, no channel had been constructed there. God Khaldi ordered me to build all of them...By the omnipotence of God Khaldi, Argishti, the son of Menua, built this impregnable fortress and called it Argiştihinili. The land here was arid. Nothing had been constructed there. I ordered the construction of four irrigation channels. I ordered the cultivation of vineyard and orchard..." (Doğer, 2004, Zimansky, 2004, Köroğlu, 2011).


- Assyrian King Sargon II tells that the wine dedicated to God Khaldi was carried with the boilers.

Xenophon tells “...Here were also wheat, barley and beans, and barleywine in large bowls. Floating on the top of this drink were the barley-grains and in it were straws, some larger and others smaller, without joints; and when one was thirsty, he had to take these straws into his mouth and suck. It was an extremely strong drink unless one diluted it with water, and extremely good when one was used to it (Doğer, 2004).

In Urartian civilization constructions such as irrigation channels, dams, roads, fortresses, palaces and temples were built especially during the reign of King Menua.

Irrigation channels and dams were constructed to water the vineyards.

Some of the irrigation channels constructed by the Urartians are still in function.

The most important of these channels is the 51-kilometer-long Menua (Semiramis-Shamram) channel.

The Shamram channel, which has been in function for 2800 years, gives life to an area of 500 hectares.

The city of Van and the surrounding regions have been one of the early viticulture centers not only in Anatolia but in the world.

Excavations in the Hoşap Castle, located in Güzelsu village of Gürpinar district, revealed the fossils of grapes in the Iron Age.
Wine in Urartian Kingdom

- **Karataş (İlantaşı) Rock Inscription (a),**
  - Belongs to Sarduri II (764-735 BC)
  - is read “By the greatness of God Khaldi, Sarduri, the son of Argishti says: when God Khaldi gave me the Kingdom, I ascended the forefathers; throne. The same year, I set a vineyard. It is called the Sarduri Vineyard. With the greatness of God Khaldi, the son of Argishti, Sarduri is the mighty king, great king, the king of the land of Bianili, the king of the world, the lord of the city of Tuspha.”

- **Hazine Piri Rock Inscription**
  - Belongs to the reign Ispuini (830-820 BC)
  - is read “Ispuini, the son of Sarduri, planted these vineyard and orchards, and erected this inscription to his Lord (Khaldi?).”
Wine in Urartian Kingdom

• Köşk Stella Inscription
• It belong to the reign of Menua (810-785/80)
• is read “The son of Ispuini, Menua built this stella for the God Khaldi. He built the Khaldi gates. He built a perfect fortress. He named it the city of God Khaldi. He built this vineyard and orchards. He named it Menua’s Vineyard. By the might of God Khaldi, Menua, is the son of Ispuini, the mighty king, the great king, the king of the land of Bianili, the lord of city of Tuspha. When vineyards ripen, one bull, three sheep shall be sacrificed in the name of God Khaldi. Wine shall be spilled in front of Khaldi Gate and this Stella. During grape harvest, qarmehi shall be made in the name of God Khaldi. Qarmehi shall be made in front of Khaldi Gate in the name of Arubani. Qarmehi shall be made in the name of God Khaldi”.

Wine in Urartian Kingdom

• Kadembas (Katepants) Rock Inscription.
• It is dedicated to a vineyard planted in the name of Tariria, wife of Urartu King Menua
• is read “(it) is the vineyard of Menua’s wife Tariria. Its (vineyard’s) name is Taririaḫinili (same sentences are repeated).

Viniculture in the Lake of Van and Abroad

• Grapes around the Van Lake were cultivated as an economic activity during the rule of the Urartians, Medes, Persians, Romanians, Byzantines, Armenians, Arabs, Seljuks, Karakoyunlular and the Ottomans.

• The grape production reached its golden age under the rule of the Armenians.
• Constructed by the Armenian King Gagik I in the 900s, the Akhtamar Church hosts numerous grape reliefs on its external walls.
Viniculture in the Lake of Van and Abroad

• During the reign of the Urartians, viticulture had its golden age and became an indispensable part of the socio-economic life.
• In an inscription found in Karataşlar site, King Menua cursed those damaging the vineyard.
• says: *Menua set this vineyard in the name of God Khaldi. If anyone damages these grapes, then may God Khaldi, God Teisheba, God Teishebe and all Gods remove him before the sun.*

Urartu civilization heavily influenced the Van Lake region.
• The vintage festivals, which were colorful and spectacular in the past, are still alive, even though the recent festivals are smaller.
• The festival takes place in September and October.

Face-to-face interviews indicate that some grape varieties cultivated in the region were moved abroad, especially to France, by the Armenians.
• The Armenians, lived in the region after the Urartians, left numerous works of art, engaged in viticulture activities.
• After they were forced to leave the country in 1915, the Armenians took away grape varieties to their new countries, especially to France.

Viniculture had important impacts over social life in the Van region that the region still holds the imprints of the culture.
• The names of cities and villages, such as the Beyüzümü, the Çelebibağı district and the Şah Bağı village, derive their names from grape.
Viniculture in the Lake of Van and Abroad

- The interviews with the archeologists and the local farmers and our observations in the field show that the region has an important potential for viticulture and that the viticulture can be revitalized.

- The most spectacular constructions of the Urartu civilization are found within the borders of the Van province.
- Archeological excavations reveal wine storages and cellars in the fortresses.
- Various wine storages were found in Çelibibağı tumulus.
- Equipment used in beer-making and remaining of beer in bowls were found at the excavations in Ayanıs.

- Vineyards were comprised of thousands of hectares during the Urartian period.
- Vineyards are mostly located in the southern, northern, and eastern shores of Van Lake.
- The existence of Van Lake and the surrounding high mountains provided a fertile ground for viticulture.
- The Van region is suitable for viticulture.
- As the ancient writer Columella stated that “the most well-informed farmers know three types of soil: plains, hillsides and hills. The most fertile soil in plains was the one with a slight slope rather than the flat ones. The fertile ground has a smooth slope for the hillside and is neither very high nor steep that is covered with grass for the hills” (Doğer, 2004).
Viniculture in the Lake of Van and Abroad

- The explanation of Columella defines the ancient areas covered with vineyards in the Van region.
- The area of 500 hectares located in Edremit province and watered by the Shamram channel has smooth slopes.
- These hillsides receive good amount of sunlight with good wind circulation, yet with no reservation of rain water.

Conclusions

- Viticulture and wine-making were the dominant agricultural activities during the period of the Urartians.
- Known as the water civilization, the Urartians used modern techniques of the time, particularly the watering systems.
- Based on our interviews with the archeologists working in the region, we might argue that the watering systems were constructed to vitalize the vineyards.

Viniculture in the Lake of Van and Abroad

- Various studies on viticulture note that similar physical conditions have to exist for viticulture and high-quality wine.
- The vineyards in the Erciş region receive more sunlight since they are located at the southern slopes whereas those in Edremit receive less as they are located at the northern slopes.

Conclusions

- Viticulture and wine making, are currently under the danger of extinction in the Van region.
- Damages given to vineyards during the war; the usage of agricultural grounds for settlements; diminishing of viticulture, lack of information about viticulture techniques, insufficiency to determine proper grapes and production targets, and the low income and product obtained from viticulture.
Conclusions

• The families opt for planting grapes in front of their houses for shade.
• Presently, viticulture is conducted over a total area of 235 hectares and 620 tons of grapes are produced annually.
• Erciș grapes are the only grape varieties which have been cultivated since the ancient times.
• Erciș grape is most suitable for wine and grape juice making but the local inhabitants consumes those grapes for their tables.