

Title:

Tracing The Ancient History Of Wine

Word Count:

848

Summary:

Wine is one of the most favored and widely consumed drinks in the world, especially in Europe, America, and Australia. Interestingly, the history of wine has several meeting points with the history of the Western world.

Keywords:

wine

Article Body:

"Good wine", said Shakespeare "is a good familiar creature if it be well used".

Wine is one of the most favored and widely consumed drinks in the world, especially in Europe, America, and Australia. Interestingly, the history of wine has several meeting points with the history of the Western world. The origins of wine can be traced back to the Fertile Crescent area (Nile Delta) - a region that lay between the Nile and Persian Gulf. Historians are generally of the opinion that this drink was discovered accidentally during 4000 and 3000 B.C. As human settlements began to grow into larger formats (city/state) people started trading goods and products. The trading practice began to flourish throughout the Mediterranean region. Grapes, fruits, were particularly favored by dynasties such as Romans, Greeks, and Phoenicians and pretty soon, the knowledge of how to make a heady alcoholic drink from this fruit spread fast through the region and finally pervaded Europe too.

The Father Grape

Wine, has now been used for more than 4,500 years. Many believe that Middle East region was where wines were made for the very first time. Of course, throughout the course of history, there are several references to wine including in the Old Testament. The drink was also known to have been enjoyed by early Minoans, Greeks, and Etruscans. Now after hundreds of centuries, wine is still being used for sacramental purposes in Christian churches, celebrations, regular day to day use, and even for medicinal purposes.

Wine takes years to mature after being made from fermenting juice of grapes. There is only one species of grape, 'Vitis vinifera', which is used in all wines

manufactured across the world. This particular species of grape can be referred to as the father of all grape varieties, because as many as 4,000 varieties have been developed from it so far! Though different from each other, these grapes are also similar in size, color, shape, composition of the juice, time taken for ripening, among other things. But out of these 4,000 varieties, only close to a dozen are used for making wine and the prime among them are: Riesling, Chardonnay, Cabernet Sauvignon, Pinot Noir, Gewurztraminer, Sauvignon Blanc, and Muscat.

Birth of the Spirit

Many facts in the Western world history indicate that our ancestors were definitely familiar with the qualities of different types of grapes. Archeologists have discovered drawings of grape seeds on the walls of ancient caves! According to historians, who have been tracing the history of wine, it is a possibility that grapes may have been fermented with the help of wild yeasts, accidentally leading to the birth of wine.

The birth place of this fermented spirit in all probability is Egypt and Persia. And surprisingly by 3000 B.C. both these regions had developed simple and effective ways to make wine! White wine was perhaps the first one to be prepared by the Egyptians from a grape variety we now know as the "Muscat" grape of Alexandria. The drink was attributed to Orisis (God of death and fertility in Egyptian mythology) and was served during funerary rituals.

Early Years - Egypt & Persia

Since Egypt and Persia are attributed at the birthplaces of the wine, it is not surprising that the Persians also considered wine as a divine gift. Many wine experts believe that some of the finest grape varieties are a direct product of precursor grapes varieties grown by the Persians in ancient days. Furthermore, the Phoenicians are considered the people responsible for spreading the early techniques of winemaking to regions such as Greece, Italy - more specifically Tuscany region.

The Italian Connection

At this time, wine had already become a favored drink in Rome; in fact, wine cultivation became so popular that there was a large surplus of this spirit. So much so that in AD 92 a Roman emperor had to issue a decree that all vineyards outside of Italy be destroyed and uprooted. Though this led to much loss, but when replanting was allowed again, European countries such as France, Germany, and England benefited from it the most. Since Islam forbade wine drinking, areas under the Muslim empire - from Southern Spain to North India to North Africa - remained unaffected by the winemaking phenomenon. However, Catholic Church has definitely been responsible for the prosperity of winemaking and England also

succumbed to the winemaking temptation and now produces new wine varieties such as Sherry, Port, and Madeira.

The French Kiss

The Christian monks in France and Northern Italy maintained record of the winemaking techniques, rituals, practices, and method of grapes cultivation. The records played an instrumental role and more and more regions began to work hard to produce the best type of grape and best tasting wine in their areas. Therefore, by 1800, France and Northern Italy came to be recognized as the most well developed regions for producing wine worldwide.

And now...

Today, regions such as Australia, Eastern Europe, South Africa, and Napa Valley in America are providing tough competition to the reputed wine producing regions such as France, Italy, and England - not just in quality, taste, richness and variety but also technique and price.