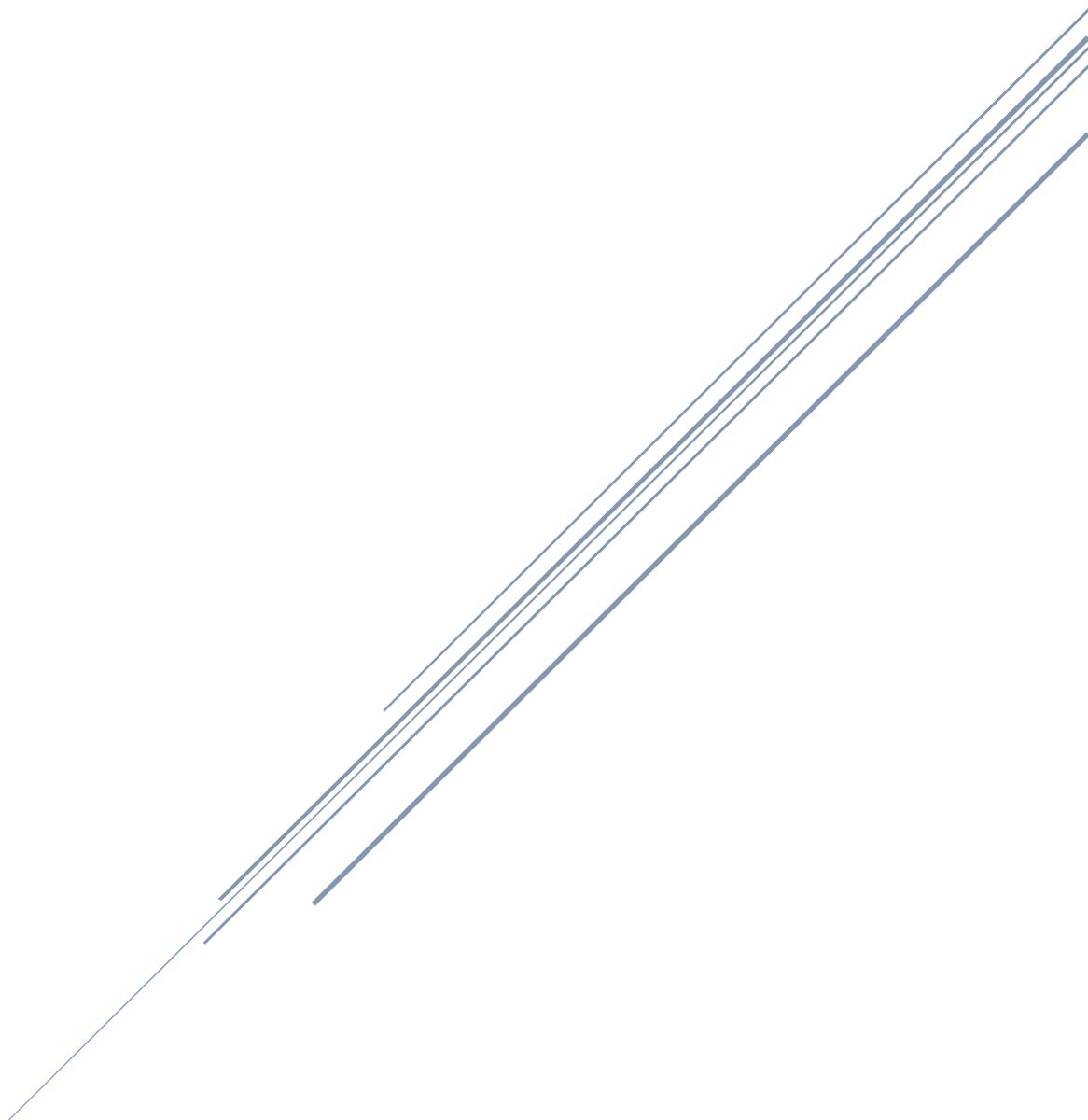


THE BRIEF HISTORY OF AZERBAIJANI WINE

Embassy of Azerbaijan to the P.R. China,
Office of the Trade Representative





Azerbaijani wine is produced in several regions throughout Azerbaijan. Prior to 20th century communist rule, Azerbaijan had a thriving wine industry that dated back to the second millennium BC. Azerbaijan's long history of wine production was rediscovered at archaeological digs of settlements in Kultepe, Qarabaghlar and Galajig where archaeologists discovered stone fermentation and storage vessels that included residue and grape seeds dating back to the second millennium BC. The Ancient Greeks were well aware of wine production in the area by at least the 7th century BC according to Herodotus. Later Strabo would comment in the 1st century BC about an Azerbaijani wine known as Albania. Arabic historians and geographers - most notably Abu'l-Fida, Al-Masudi, Ibn Hawqal and Al-Muqaddasi - described the extensive viticulture around Ganja and Barda that was taking place even after Islamic conquest of the area.

Since the fall of Communism and the restoration of Azerbaijani independence, ardent



attempts have been made to revive and modernize the Azerbaijani wine industry. Today vineyards are found in the foothills of Caucasus Mountains as well and the Kur-Araz lowlands near the Kura River. In the 21st century, Ganja, Nagorno-

Karabakh and Nakhchivan have emerged as centers of wine production in the region. Research has recorded more than 450 different categories of wild grapes found in Azerbaijan which had been used for winemaking throughout its history. Among the grape varieties used to produce Azerbaijani wine include Pinot Noir, Rkatsiteli, Pinot Blanc, Aligote, Matrassa, Podarok Magaracha, Pervenets Magaracha, Ranni Magaracha, Doina, Viorica and Kishmish Moldavski. Indigenous grape varieties to Azerbaijan include; White Shani, Derbendi, Nail, Bayanshire, Gamashara, Ganja Pink, Bendi, Madrasa, Black Shani, Arna-Grna, Zeynabi, Misgali, Khindogni, Agdam Kechiendzhei, Tebrizi, and



Marandi. The wines produced in ancient and medieval times, were not similar to contemporary wines; being thick and sweet as honey which people had to dilute with water. In Goygol Rayon of the country, archeologists have found jars with remains of wines which date back to the second millennium BC. In the Khanlar district of the Azerbaijan Republic, for example, archeologists have found jars buried with the remains of wine dating back to the 2nd millennium BC. Greek historian Strabo who had traveled to northern Azerbaijan (Caucasian Albania at the time) described cultivation of crops of grapes as so abundant that the residents were not able to harvest them. Other sources such as the epic poem Kitabi Dada Gorgud written in 7th-11th centuries describe enriched culture of wine-making. Sources from 13th-14th centuries indicate that the annual harvest of grapes from the fields around Tabriz in southern Azerbaijan was nearly 150 tons. The wines produced in ancient and medieval ages, however, are not similar to contemporary wines. They were thick and sweet as honey which people had to dilute with water. One of the latest discoveries was nearly 10 years ago when the residents of Shamakhy, two hours west of Baku, found a big ancient

ceramic jar containing thick syrup which turned out to be a very concentrated fragrant wine.

One of the most ancient and notable regions known for its wine-making produce is Tovuz in northwestern Azerbaijan. Archeological findings in this region speak of ancient vessels for wine storage, stones and remains of tartaric acid used for wine-growing. In addition to

historians and travelers such as Homer, Herodotus, Columella, Ibn Hawqal, Al-Masudi, who made remarks about wine-making in Azerbaijan, the Arabian geographer of the 10th century Al-Muqaddasi, noted in



his writing that the sweet kind of wine found in Nakhichevan cannot be found anywhere else. The region developed as wine producing center from 1820-1830's attracting many foreign investors. The famous culture of wine-making was enriched with arrival of German immigrants to the region in the early 19th century. German immigrants from Württemberg were settled in Azerbaijan by the Russian tsar Alexander I circa 1817-1818 and enhanced the wine and cognac producing potential of the country by heavy investments into the industry. Famous German family businesses such as Vohrer Brothers and the Hummel family based in Helenendorf industrialized the wine production making it competitive with European wines.

Medical use

In the Middle Ages, some wines were also used against tiredness and relaxation. For instance, in the court of Shah Suleyman Safavi, royal physicians recommended wine to alleviate tiredness. Other sorts were utilized as medicine. In his writings in 1311, historian and scholar Yusuf ibn Ismail al-Kutubi notes that small doses of wine can

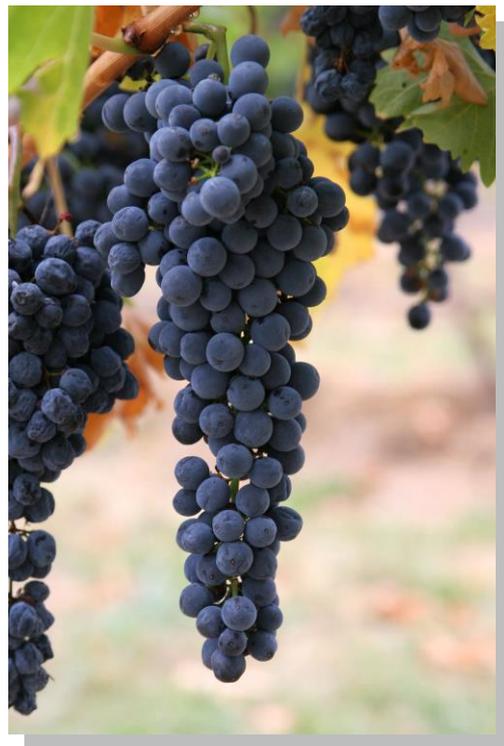


strengthen the sense of organs and the whole body, and melancholy, depression and bad mood, while water-diluted wines are a good medicine against fever and cold. Wines produced from rose petals were used

against headaches, heart disease and stomach ache.

Wine styles

In Azerbaijan, wines made from grapes are called sharab while wines from other fruits including apples, pomegranates and mulberry are called nabiz. Other sorts are called chakhyr. According to historians, there are more than 450 different categories of wild grape found in Azerbaijan which had been used for wine-making throughout the history of Azerbaijan. Among the historical names of wine brands are Reyhani, Jumhuri, Mishmish, Valani, Arastun, Handigun and Salmavey. Contemporary brand names include Shahdagh, Chinar, Sadili, Aghdam, Kurdamir, Aghstafa and Madrasali. Others, such as "Giz Galasi" (Maiden Tower), "Yeddi Gozal" (Seven Beauties), "Gara Gila" and "Naznazi" made from the Madrasa pink grape are exclusive to Azerbaijan since they are indigenous to Madrasa village of Shamakhi Rayon only. Rkatsiteli is another kind of grape grown and used for wine-making in northwestern Azerbaijan.



The Azerbaijani Wine Industry Today

The contemporary wine-making in Azerbaijan is seen in Ganja-Kazakh and Shirvan economic zones. Vineyards in these regions account to about 7% of the country's cultivated land. The regions are famous for 17 vine and 16 table grape varieties, the most common of the wine cultivars being Pinot Noir.

Azerbaijan is one of the main wine producers in the Caspian Sea region. Contemporary wine-making was ambitiously developed during the 1970s by Soviet authorities who preferred to increase the wine production versus development of the grain



industry.. Most of produce is currently being targeted for Russian and European markets as well as new growing markets for Azerbaijani wine such as China. Due to growing demand, new grape plantations have been set up over 100 hectares in Shamkir



region of Azerbaijan. Since restoration of independence of Azerbaijan in 1991, the Azerbaijani wines won 27 prizes at international competitions. Azerbaijan is aimed to gain more reputation in the world's vine market. It is a result of joining the International Organization of Vine and Wine (OIV). Wine production increased by 2.6 times,

from 0.4 million to 1.063 million decaliters in Azerbaijan from 2005 to 2012.

This is evidenced by data released by Azerbaijan's State Statistics Committee, as well as in the growth in exports. In particular, wine exports increased 7.8 times, from 49,400 decaliters to 389,000 decaliters, in the reported period. The production of grapes also increased significantly. In particular, Azerbaijan harvested 79,700 tons of grapes in 2005, while in 2012 this figure reached 151,000 tons. Experts believe this rapid growth is related to the adoption of the Law on Viticulture, which paved the way for increased investments in this sector of the economy. The investment, in turn, led to the growth of both sown areas and the production of grapes. Experts also claim that demand for grapes and its production will continue to grow in Azerbaijan in the future, as well.

