

Preliminary Notes on Viticulture and Winemaking in Colonial Central Asia

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In the orientalisising Turkestan pavilion at the All-Russian industrial and Artisans Exhibition at Nijni Novgorod in 1896, export products of Turkestan were represented by cotton, silk, lambskins, wool, fruits and wine.¹ Wine from Russian Central Asia was displayed alongside wine from already established producing regions in the southwestern parts of the Russian Empire around the Black Sea: Bessarabia, Crimea, the Don and the Caucasus.² The Russian newspaper *Niva* thought it necessary to explain how wine could be showcased in an exhibition of products from a predominantly Muslim region. It stated confidently that winemaking (*vinodelie*) had been introduced to Central Asia only after the Russian conquest. According to *Niva*, this economic branch had a great future because of the rich harvest of the Central Asian vineyards, and because grape phylloxera, the pest that had been wreaking havoc on the European wine industry since the 1850s, had spared Turkestan.³

As the Russian newspaper pointed out, Russian colonial administrators, scientists, entrepreneurs and settlers found a highly developed viticulture in the conquered regions of Central Asia. Fifteen different local grape varieties were presented at the fruit and vegetable fair in Tashkent in the fall of 1872.⁴ Grapes seem to have been used for the production of alcoholic beverages in brandy distilleries very soon after the Russian conquest.⁵ Located in the new

¹ Anonymous (1896a)

² Verstraete (1897), 252.

³ Anonymous (1896a). In February 1875 N. Maev described the damage caused by the *phylloxera vastatrix* to the European wine industry in a meeting of the Turkestan statistical committee. The committee suggested several measures to prevent the spread of the pest to Russian Turkistan, including the publication and distribution of articles and brochures to raise the awareness of the local population. Maev (1875).

⁴ Anonymous (1872), 202). The same publication contains another quite different list of names and properties of 15 local grapes of Turkestan.

⁵ Krauze (1872), 198.

Russian part of Tashkent, the distilleries catered to the demand of the Russian population. Yet the production and consumption of strong alcoholic drinks from grapes preceded the Russian conquest. A small number of distilleries is said to have been run by Central Asian Jews⁶ in Tashkent under the Khans of Khoqand before the Russian conquest in 1865 and for a short period under Russian rule. The Jewish distillers were operating “cautiously and secretly” but were not harassed by the Khoqandi authorities. In 1872, only five years after the formal establishment of the Governorate General of Turkestan, all traditional Jewish distilleries in Tashkent had disappeared.⁷ The simple traditional stills of the Jewish distilleries could not compete with the new Russian distilleries which used the then state-of-the-art industrial Pistorius double stills.⁸ Yet the Central Asian Jewish distillers left an important legacy to their Russian colonial successors: the production of brandy on the basis of dried grapes. Only one out of six distilleries operating in the Russian part of Tashkent in 1872 used grain to produce “vodka” in the usual sense, while all other distilleries operated on the basis of fruits.⁹

The standard procedure described by Krauze in 1872 differed from the traditional Jewish brandy production mainly in the use of modern stills which yielded a much higher volume of production. Like the Jewish distillers, the Russian producers of brandy added warm water (ca. 20° C) to the dried grapes to gain the mash and induce fermentation. Krauze calls the dried grapes *kishmish*. He uses this word to refer to both the Corinth and the sultana varieties of dried grapes and distinguishes between black *kishmish* from the Khanate of Khoqand and brownish *kishmish* from Samarkand. The latter, he writes, produces a much stronger and yielding mash than the former.¹⁰

⁶ Krauze uses the terms *evrei* (Jew) and *bukharskii* (Bukharan [Jew]).

⁷ Krauze (1872), 197.

⁸ Krauze (1872), 198. For a photograph of a traditional Central Asian distillerie see Kun/Brodovskii (1871–72), plate 39 = <http://memory.loc.gov/phpdata/pageturner.php?type=&agg=ppmsca&item=09954&seq=44> (last accessed 2 July 2012).

⁹ Krauze (1872), 198.

¹⁰ The terminology for grapes and raisins in Central Asian standard and vernacular Persian (Tajik) and Turki (Uzbek) and in Russian is sometimes confusing. The standard Persian word *xūše* for “bunch of grapes” is known in Standard Tajik, but the Turkic word *šingil* is more commonly used; in many dialects *xūše* is not understood. The grape itself is *angūr* in standard and vernacular Tajik (as in standard Persian) and *uzum* in Uzbek (Turki). The generic word for dried grape is *maviz* (a Persian word) or *mayiz* in Tajik and *mayiz* in

Krauze was, however, much more interested in exploring the possibilities for producing wine instead of brandy in Russian Turkestan. He drew attention to local grapes which had so far been harvested mainly in order to be dried for local consumption, for small scale export to Russia, and to make brandy. Instead, he suggested, local grapes should be studied carefully to see if they could be used for making high quality wine. He pointed out the general juiciness and high sugar content of local grapes as important preconditions for the production of strong and durable wine.¹¹

Russian winemakers began experimenting with local grapes soon after the conquest. Among the first was a merchant named Fedorov, but he was not accredited with much success. Better results were achieved by winemakers I. I. Pervushin and A. Grinberg in Tashkent and Fovickii in Khojend, one of the best wine growing region in Central Asia.¹² Already in 1868 Filatov opened a winery in Samarkand.¹³ There was a local market for those wines, as wine imported from Russia to Turkestan tended to be of the worst kind and much more expensive. Krauze credited a winemaker named Raevskii with the first breakthrough toward a decent wine produced from local red grapes in 1871. Yet Russian winemakers in Turkestan saw more potential in white grapes; sorts such as Shahrangur and Aqkishmish are mentioned.¹⁴

Uzbek. In Turki as well as in Persian kishmish – or mayiz-i kishmish - is a kind of dried small seedless grapes, similar to sultana raisins. They have a brownish color and are slightly bigger and softer than the black Corinthians, or mayiz-i siyah (qora mayiz), that are produced from a different kind of seedless grapes. This can be a little confusing, since in South and Southwest Asia the word kišmiš is used for Black Corinthians, not the sultana raisin. In Russian parlance, a different sort of confusion over the terms for fresh and dried grapes can be observed from the beginning of the colonial period. Kishmish tends to be used for the fresh seedless grapes, while izium – derived from Turki uzum, fresh grapes – means dried grapes, or raisins. This reversed use of uzum (izium) and kishmish is now the standard usage in modern Russian. In the Colonial period it is encountered side by side with the “correct” use. Therefore one must always take care to understand what a Russian author had in mind when he writes kishmish or izium.

¹¹ The author of the article, I. I. Krauze, can probably be identified with Ieronim Ivanovich Krause (1845–8.8.1909), a Russian pharmacist of German origin who settled permanently in Tashkent in 1870. *Erik-Amburger-Datenbank*, data entry no. 63720.

¹² Anonymous (1872), 200.

¹³ Anonymous (1909); the correct name (here misspelled Filippov) was corrected in *Golos pravdy* 1305. The winery founded by Filatov in Samarkand still exists and is now known under the name of the famous late colonial and early soviet winemaker Khvorenko.

¹⁴ Anonymous (1872), 200.

With five wineries operating in 1872, wine had quickly become an important nascent industry in Colonial Turkestan. Yet production volumes were relatively small, not more than 120.000 litres per year. They were mainly consumed locally in the Russian settlements in the Tashkent, Samarkand and Khojend regions. Krauze's suggestion that one should consider exporting those wines to non-wine growing areas in Turkestan and to Siberia shows how small the scale of wine production and its market still was in the early 1870s.¹⁵

Yet the pioneering experiments with local grapes had planted the seeds for an important colonial industry. Although the number of wine producing companies remained small throughout the colonial period, it developed relatively quickly to become one of the prestige products of Turkestan economy, second only to the dominating cotton and silk industries. In contrast to cotton, the archetypical colonial raw material that supplied weaving mills as far away as Moscow and Lodz, wine and silk were the only industrial products of Turkestan. Silk of course had a long tradition of manufacturing, local consumption and export in Central Asia. Alcoholic grape products had to adjust to new markets and demands.

In the course of the 1880s Turkestan winemakers quite successfully presented their products at international exhibitions. The 1890s seem to have been particularly important. Turkestan authorities and private entrepreneurs invested in chemical research. The first major scientific publication on winemaking was commissioned and published in 1896 by the Statistical Committee of the district of Samarkand, which in the meantime had become the most important wine growing and winemaking region in the governorate general.¹⁶

But there were also setbacks. Since the mid-1890s, Turkestan winemakers were trying to have Turkestan officially acknowledged by the Russian government as a winemaking region, on a par with the Caucasus provinces, Stavropol, Bessarabia, the Crimea and several regions on the Don and Dnepr rivers, a request that was repeatedly rejected by the Ministry of Finance in St. Petersburg.¹⁷ Only in 1909, on the occasion of the All-Russian industrial and Artisans Exhibition at Nijni Novgorod, did the Ministry acknowledge the existence of all necessary conditions for excellent viticulture in Turke-

¹⁵ Anonymous (1872), 201.

¹⁶ Virskii (1896); Stekol'nikov (1907).

¹⁷ Anonymous (1896b).

stan.¹⁸ It is in this context, in the effort to match international (Russian and Western European) recognition and market opportunities with structural obstacles resulting from Russian bureaucracy that an interesting discourse appears in the newspapers in Turkestan and Russia. The support of Turkestan viticulture and winemaking was presented as a major civilizing effort, an effort that would contribute to the progress of Turkestan, but also of Russian society and help to bring it to a Western European level.

Krauze wrote already in 1872 that “in terms of quality grapes are the most important fruit of Central Asia. The native population stands at a very low level with respect to processing grapes, but the climate takes care that the grapes are in no way inferior to Western European grapes.” This gap – refined product, unrefined native population – was in the 1890s woven into a historical narrative, which may be summarized as follows: Winemaking had an age-old tradition in Central Asia, but this tradition was disrupted by the Arabs and Islam. Now Russians have come to Central Asia to revive this tradition. The myth of the revival of wine culture as an active civilizing effort by Russia was coupled with a passive civilizing effect on Russia: The high potential of Turkestan wines, it was argued, could help improve Russian viticulture in general and thus move Russia closer to Western European standards.¹⁹

The assertion that Central Asia has had an ancient viticultural tradition and may even be considered the homeland of wine but abandoned this tradition and knowledge after the Arab-Muslim conquest in the seventh century runs through the Russian viticultural literature. Of course the simple assertion that wine was not produced or drunk in Central Asia in the Islamic period was difficult to maintain. Hence one can occasionally find a modified version, as for example in Franz von Schwarz’s influential (if highly problematic) cultural geography of Turkestan. Von Schwarz, who had lived in Tashkent for 15 years before he published his book in German in 1913, probably echoes the common opinion among Central Asian Europeans when he writes in a footnote:

¹⁸ Anonymous (1909). An article in the *St. Peterburgskiiia vedomosti* of the same year lists only the Syr-Darya district among the 19 major winegrowing regions of the Russian Empire, S. T. (1909). This prompted an angry response in the *Turkestanskii kur'er* which claims that already in 1908 the Turkestan krai was included among the winegrowing regions, Kh[vorenko, M. A.?]. (1909).

¹⁹ Sluckii (1897), 1–5.

The decline of wine production in Turkestan dates not to the period of Arab domination, but only to the rule of the fanatic Uzbeks, who in this regard were and still are more catholic than the Pope. The memoirs of Sultan Babur show us that in his time (1483–1530) wine production and wine drinking were still very common among the Muslim population of Turkestan, .../361/... In Babur's time the wine of Bukhara was considered the strongest wine.²⁰

The discursive connection of the great future of viticulture and winemaking with the total absence of it before the Russian conquest makes winemaking a type fossil for a particular colonizing discourse. On the one hand, Central Asian wine was supposed to help Russian viticulture and wine-making in general to reach a higher, West European level of winemaking. It could be used to highlight the “fanaticism” of the “Uzbek regime”. Viticulture as a colonial blessing also had a particular advantage, namely that at least initially it largely excluded Central Asian Muslim competitors from this “modernizing industry”.²¹

Within a few years after the consolidation of Russian rule in Turkestan, viticulture and winemaking became a primary focus of attention among Russian imperial officials. The reasons are manifold. Grapes were a high-yield cash crop that did not require a complicated process of experimentation, implementation and infrastructure as its biggest competitor for the attention of colonial developers, namely cotton. There were also cultural aspects. Wine became a marker of progress, a sharp discursive delineator between the fanatic Uzbek Muslim old regime and the civilized and civilizing Russian colonial administration. Yet this civilizing mission was not only directed toward the colonial subjects. The vineyards and wineries of Turkestan were thought to help Russia itself to reach the level of Western Europe. The ability to grow and produce wine that could compete internationally with the best wines played an important role in the development of viticulture in Russian Central Asia.

Not surprisingly, however, this development had its flip side, publicly visible alcoholism. In addition to concerns with public health and security in the Russian settler communities such as New Tashkent, alcoholism worried the Russian administration as it tarnished the picture of wine as a marker of

²⁰ von Schwarz (1900), 360–1, n.1 (my translation of the original German).

²¹ I could not find references to Muslim owners of alcohol-producing firms. On the other hand Central Asians (i. e. Muslims?) are said to have represented an important segment of the workforce of this industry and of the owners of alcohol-selling establishments, see Sahadeo (2007), 110–111.

civilization. Alcohol consumption presented a particularly complex problem for the discursive process of colonization. Socializing in alcohol-selling establishments blurred the social boundaries, but also the discursive boundaries between colonizers and colonized in the cities and towns. Muslim authors eagerly picked up alcoholism as a cause (and sign) of moral decline resulting from the encounter with the colonizers.²² Reversely Russian colonial authorities blamed Central Asians for the negative moral effects of alcoholism in New Tashkent. As writes Sahadeo in his study of Colonial society in Tashkent, a committee set up by the Tashkent city board in 1883 “noted that Central Asians owned many of the dirtier bars and brothels, which were ‘infecting’ poor Russians who visited. Worse, Central Asian men, ‘on periodic binges’, not only had developed a fondness for alcohol, but consorted with Russian women, particularly prostitutes.”²³

We find a similarly ambiguous image of alcohol consumption in discourses on progress. Addiction to wine became a negative foil for the own quest for civilizatory progress and cultural reform in the writings of Central Asian Muslim progressives around the turn of the twentieth century. Adapting traditional Islamic and modernizing Russian motifs, Central Asian Muslim progressives routinely included alcoholism among obstacles to modernization.²⁴ Sahadeo quotes an article published in 1914 in the Tashkent Jadid newspaper *Şadā-yi Turkistān* which “approved traditional religious courts’ harsh treatments of Muslim drunkards who indulged in their habit in the Russian city, hoping to escape sanction.”²⁵ A few years earlier, however, during an official investigation mission to Turkestan the Russian senator Count Konstantin von der Pahlen, deplored precisely this practice of the Muslim courts. In Pahlen’s view, it undermined Russia’s claim of the uni-

²² See for example the lament of the Kokandian poet Muqīmī (n. d.); cf. also Crews (2006), 255. One should keep in mind, however, that the references to alcohol and gambling in Muqīmī’s poem come in a topical sequence of indicators of moral decline well established in Islamic legal literature.

²³ Sahadeo (2007), 111.

²⁴ Sahadeo (2007), 159. Khalid (1998), 145–149. Khalid, 138, cites an interesting (though perhaps rather exceptional) essay in the Tashkent reformist journal *Khurshid* published in 1906 that presents French policies against alcoholism as a model for Central Asian Muslims.

²⁵ Sahadeo (2007), 159.

versality of its law. "Russian state power, of course, cannot regard such violators of the shari'a and adat ... as criminals."²⁶

By 1900 wine and the consumption of alcohol had become an important if ambiguous discursive element in the politics of colonial and Muslim reform. On the other hand the efforts of Turkestan's Russian entrepreneurs promoting local viticulture and winemaking by weaving it into the discourse of civilizing mission seems to have largely failed. The promotion of Central Asian wine for Russian and Western European markets met with little success. And even in Turkestan the elite continued to prefer European wine, as Count Constantin von der Pahlen noted as late as 1908 in his description of a banquet hosted by the Governor General in Tashkent.²⁷

Yet the "civilizational discourse" on wine did not remain entirely without consequences. The myth of the destruction of Central Asian wine culture by the Arab-Muslim conquerors, an important narrative element already in the early colonial viticultural literature, as we have seen, resurfaces in the quest of the contemporary post-soviet Central Asian states to root "national history" deeply in the pre-Islamic history of the region. In the context of what one might call "neo-Sogdianism", local vines create a link to the pre-Islamic past. In a promotional blurb for the Samarkand winery, a local grape variety is derived from a "magic vine" that miraculously appeared during the "horrible times" of the Muslim conquest of Samarkand. Thus the culture of Sogdiana, despite the destructions of the Arab conquest, lived on in a vine that since the nineteenth century has been used to produce wine.

To fully gauge the significance of the discursive processes outlined above one would have to have a better understanding of the actual impact of colonial and Soviet viticulture and the production and import of alcoholic beverages on the social and cultural practices of alcohol consumption among Muslims in Central Asia. To what extent is modern drinking and banqueting behaviour rooted in pre-Russian cultural patterns? In lieu of answering this question, one may conclude with an anecdotal observation. Bottles of cognac carrying the effigy of the Turkmenbashi, the late president of Turkmenistan Saparmurad Niyazov, may not quite be on a par with the famous Parthian rhytons from Nisa. Yet they show that in a rather traditional Muslim Central

²⁶ Crews (2006), 268–269. The translation is Crews'. On Pahlen's Commission for the Inspection of the Turkestan region see Morrison (2012), especially p.4 on Pahlen's views on the Central Asian legal system and his attempt to impose a unified legal code.

²⁷ Pahlen (1969), 38.

Asian society wine has come to carry sufficient prestige to promote the glory of a political leader. The merging of traditional royal banquet and the Russian quest for superior wines created a fascinating cultural hybrid.

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