

Introduction

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Young man, don't drink, but if you drink, repent, and don't drink on Fridays, and here is how you drink in the proper manner. This is the advice of a 15th-century Persian manual on good manners.¹ It contains, in a nutshell, the challenges which students of the culture of wine in Iranian and Persianate culture are facing. When looking at wine consumption from a normative-prescriptive angle, one gains a picture that is difficult to reconcile with evidence for banqueting as social practice or with references to wine in literary traditions. This could be said for many cultural phenomena. Yet the apparent paradox of strong historical and literary evidence for a culture of wine in a predominantly Muslim society such as Iran gives this phenomenon a particular twist.

As Bert Fragner puts it in his contribution to this volume, a certain degree of affinity between "wine" and "Iranians" is a widely perceived phenomenon. This perception merits Iran to be put center stage of inquiries into viticulture and wine culture in Asia. A mighty stream of symbolic references to wine and its consumption meanders through Iranian visual and literary art. Solid and continuous evidence underscores the social and economic relevance of the production, trade, and consumption of wine in the Iranian cultural sphere.

The apparent opposition between the omnipresence of references to wine and Iran's Islamic heritage and presence has produced certain patterns of interpretation which have proven surprisingly persistent. These patterns share neat distinctions between "Islamic" and "non-Islamic" dimensions of Iranian culture. These argumentations are not altogether unfounded; yet framing the question of wine culture merely within an Islamic discourse bears the risk of missing many shades, or occasionally to be misled entirely. For example, the explanation of alcohol consumption as an inherited extra-Islamic pattern of Turko-Mongol military and court elites, when carried to far, not only isolates this cultural practice from developments of "Islamic" elite milieus in a hardly justifiable way. It has led also to far-reaching and widely accepted conclusions often grounded in modern attitudes to alcohol

¹ Shojā', *Anis al-Nās*, ed. Iraj Afshār (Tehran, 2536/1977), 189–204.

rather than historical evidence. The present volume tries to frame the exploration of Iranian viticulture and wine culture more widely. It assembles specialized studies and interpretative essays ranging from the question of the origins of viticulture and winemaking and the trade of wine between the Iranian plateau and China to viticulture and wine consumption in 20th-century Kafiristan, from the place of intoxicating beverages in hadith to the nature and function of wine in classical Persian poetry and Iranian architecture, from the ambiguities of alcohol in pre-modern Persia to the challenges of modernity and colonial penetration. It thus aims at taking the non-simultaneity and interlacing of the different dimensions of this phenomenon into fuller account.

One should therefore not expect an encyclopedic overview of viticulture or of the production, marketing and consumption of alcoholic beverages in Iran and its wider Asian context, nor should one look for systematical comparative studies. Rather the volume turns the spotlights on issues where different aspects of viticulture and wine culture in the wider Iranian cultural sphere meet and intersect. In a more general way one may read the volume as a whole as an attempt to bridge across conventional divides between literary studies and history, between art history and social history, between history, anthropology and archaeology. Even though the majority of contributors may describe themselves as historians, this volume does not represent an attempt to prioritize history over other approaches to Iranian culture. If the “historical” writ large runs through the volume, it does so in an engaged conversation with philology, literature, art and anthropology.

What is Iran’s place and role in the early history of the cultivation of grape-vine? The initial motivation to rethink the history of viticulture, wine production, and wine consumption in Iran in a wider Asian context came from important new archaeological findings and insights. Patrick McGovern discusses the archaeological evidence for the emergence of viniculture and of alcoholic beverages based on grapes in the Caucasus/Taurus/Zagros region and in China. Peter Kupfer follows with an interpretative essay on the place of grape wine in Chinese culture. Ulf Jäger looks at the role of Sogdian traders in the communication of viticulture and wine culture between the Iran, Central Asia and China. Max Klimburg’s discussion of wine culture in 20th-century Kafiristan is an example for the persistence and adaptation of traditions of viticulture, winemaking and wine consumption in the Iranian sphere.

This leads to another general question: How were cultural patterns of alcohol production and consumption accommodated into Iranian society in the

processes of Islamization? Stephanie Brinkmann studies materials from Qur'an and hadith not primarily from a normative or lexicological point of view, but keeps a close look on the dynamic formation of the corpus and its interpretation in the historical process. How far reach alcoholic consumption patterns socially and culturally in the course of Iranian history? Each focusing on a different period of the Islamic history of Iran – one might conventionally call them medieval, early modern and modern –, Willem Floor, Rudi Matthee and Bert Fragner map the social practice of alcohol consumption and the cultural reactions (in the sense of a process, not a response) it entailed. Dariush Borbor approaches the same fundamental question from the intersection of the social, cultural and physical spaces of wine consumption in his cross-epochal study of the influence of wine culture on architecture. How does cross-cultural contact and non-Muslim political domination affect the production and consumption of alcoholic beverages in Persianate societies? Florian Schwarz tries to disentangle the intriguing dialectical processes triggered by the Russian conquest of Central Asia. How do alleged severe alcoholism and successful military and political leadership go together? Giorgio Rota and Morris Rossabi, in their respective studies of the Safavid and Mongol imperial courts, recreate a multifaceted picture of royal drinking and banqueting that challenges the simple link between elite alcoholism and political decline. What do we make of the abundant imagery of wine in Persian poetry? Undoubtedly the most conspicuous locus of wine in Iranian culture is literature, more specifically poetry, the focus of the two concluding contributions. Mehr Newid sets the stage with a tour d'horizon of the place of wine in Persian poetry. With his considerations on the nature and functions of wine in classical Persian poetry, Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak returns the quest for the ambiguous place of wine in Iranian culture to where most of us may first have met it: in the aesthetic – but by no means a-historical – realm of literature.

The tensions between the historical and the aesthetical appraisal of references to wine in Iranian literature, art and material culture which have haunted students of history, religion, art history and literature alike for so long remain evident in this volume. These should be, however, fruitful tensions, as different approaches to the study of Iranian and Persianate culture increasingly open up to engaged conversations.

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