

wine—its history and culture, its wisdom and quirks, into this marvelous book—truly a work of love and erudition.

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LISA GRANIK, MW: *The Wines of Georgia*. Infinite Ideas, London, 2019, 322 pp., ISBN 978-1-913022-00-6 (paperback), \$39.95.

Any wine lover with even the slightest interest in wines from the country of Georgia would be familiar with such words as “cradle of wine,” “8000 vintages,” “qvevri,” and “supra.” This tiny country—the size of Tasmania and only slightly larger than West Virginia—arguably has the longest history of winemaking from grapes, and is one of the most grapewine-focused countries in the world. It shares with Portugal the honor of having the world’s largest share of national crop area under vines (almost 10%) but has a heritage of producing wine for four times as many centuries as Western Europe. It shares with Croatia the highest unit value among east European countries and former Soviet republics for its wine exports. Moreover, it claims to have more than 400 (possibly 500) native *Vitis Vinifera* winegrape varieties (Ketskhoveli, Ramishvili, and Tabidze, 2012), thus exceeding even Italy (D’Agata, 2014)—and many of those grape varieties are not grown elsewhere. So even though Georgia produces barely 0.5% of the world’s wine production, it is certainly worthy of being the subject of a volume in the Infinite Ideas Classic Wine Library.

The author of this book, Lisa Granik, is highly qualified. She became a Master of Wine in 2006, having previously earned a BS and MS in Foreign Service from Georgetown University, a J.D. from Georgetown, and an LLM and JSD from Yale Law School. She first visited the Soviet Union as a law professor on a Fulbright Scholarship (1990–1991), but a side visit to Georgia piqued her interest in the newly independent country and in wine. Currently, she serves on the governing council of the Institute of Masters of Wine, and the advisory board of the Women in Wine Leadership Symposium, and was a board member of the Institute of Masters of Wine (North America) from 2007 to 2018. During 2013–2015 she was a professor of wine at the New York Institute of Technology, but is now a private consultant and wine writer and continues to frequently visit Georgia.

The book begins by briefly exploring the extremely long history of the country and its wine industry, its fascinatingly complex geology, and its traditional winemaking methods. Many archaeologists dream of working in the region, the most famous westerner being the University of Pennsylvania Museum’s Patrick McGovern (2003, 2009; McGovern et al., 2017). In the most-recent two centuries, the country’s

wine industry, like most other things in Georgia, has been closely tied to developments in Russia, following Georgia's official annexation into the Russian Empire in 1801. That means it flourished in much of the 19<sup>th</sup> century's globalization era, shrunk as phylloxera belatedly took hold leading up to the Russian Revolution, and then became "industrialized" under Stalin's collectivization mania aimed at maximizing the volume of production when processing was centralized through a state monopoly (Samtrest). By 1980 around 150,000 hectares were under vine. But in 1985, when Gorbachev abruptly introduced his anti-alcohol policies, huge areas of vineyards were uprooted. The fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 was followed by the collapse of the cooperative system and the civil war, causing further abandonment of vineyards—down to perhaps 40,000 hectares—such that less than one-eighth of the country's wine was available for export in the 1990s. In the new millennium production and exports began to grow, and the share of production exported peaked at almost 50% by 2005 before Russia imposed a ban on imports from Georgia. This embargo triggered an export diversification drive, but the area under vines has recovered only to the extent of about 50,000 hectares so far.

Traditional winemaking involved maturation in buried clay qvevri (large amphora) that averaged around 1,000 liters but ranged from 100 to 3,500 liters. Grapes and stems are fermented and allowed to mature in these vessels for more than six months, for white as well as red varieties. The "whites" thus become amber in color and more tannic than most other white wines—fitting in perfectly with the current consumer infatuation with "orange" and "natural" wines. Even though today only a small fraction of Georgia's commercial wine is produced in qvevri, it continues to provide an intriguing point of difference for marketing the country's product.

The book explains in some detail Georgia's highly integrated wine and food culture. The word "supra" cannot be easily translated into English because it involves far more than just a feast. Wine is integral, as are myriad heart-felt speeches and toasts led by a "tamada" (toastmaster), plus singing and maybe dancing. Few visitors to Georgia will forget their first supra.

Most of the rest of the book examines the country's winegrape varieties and regions of production. On varieties, Granik discusses not just those grown currently but also many unique varieties that are beginning to be or could be resurrected by producers. Rkatsiteli and Saperavi are Georgia's best-known white variety and red variety, respectively. However, the widely varying climate and soils across this tiny country ensure many regions also specialize in one or more other varieties that, over the centuries, have proven their worth in their locale. This diverse genetic stock will be of increasing interest to those seeking alternatives to the world's most popular varieties, whether just to be different or in response to climate change.

Turning to the key winegrape regions, two-thirds of the country's wine is produced in the Kakheti region east of the capital (Tbilisi) toward the border with Azerbaijan. That is also the region with the most-developed wine tourism infrastructure, and is only about an hour's drive from the capital. Yet just as many pages of the book are

devoted to the regions of western Georgia. This detailed coverage of regions (half the book's pages), and of winegrape varieties, will no doubt interest those wanting to specialize in working with Georgia's wine industry, but is far more than the average tourist or wine economist is likely to want.

The final chapter briefly summarizes where Georgia currently fits in the wine world and how it might evolve in the future. The industry has moved on somewhat from what was described nearly a decade ago in Anderson (2013), but it is still heavily dependent on export sales to Russia and other formerly planned economies (now including China). Breaking into the United States, the United Kingdom, and western European wine markets is its current challenge—and its most obvious opportunity for returning to its former size. As it does so, more and more consumers in the West who are interested in new wine experiences (wine styles, winegrape varieties, wine tourism) will be able to discover for themselves this unique place and its wine culture.

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