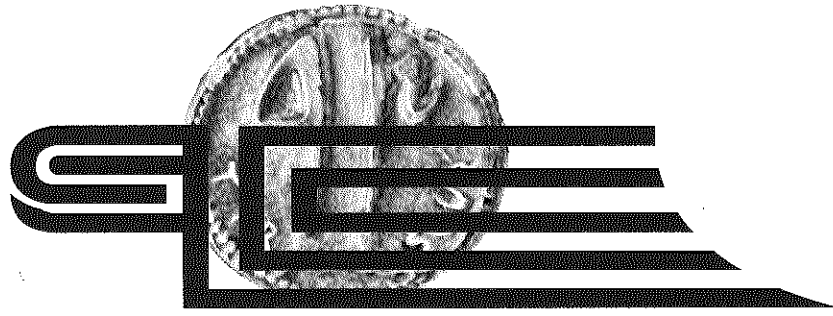


FONDATION TYR



Ligue des Cités Cananéennes, Phéniciennes et Puniques

FORUM I

30 mars 2009

Maison de l'UNESCO

Paris, France

FORUM II

30 octobre 2009

Auditorium St. Jean-Marc

Jbail-Byblos, Liban

FORUM III

8-9-10 juillet 2011

Ktima Makenzy

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ASSOCIATION INTERNATIONALE POUR LA SAUVEGARDE DE TYR

TWO LUXURY ITEMS OF THE CANAANITES AND PHOENICIANS: ROYAL PURPLE AND WINE

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Thank you very much for inviting me to this conference. My first experience in archaeology was here in Lebanon – at the site of Sarepta or Sarafand, back in 1974 – so this is truly a homecoming.

In the brief time that I have today, I want to focus on two luxury items, Royal Purple dye and grape wine, which the Canaanites and the Phoenicians in their homeland of Lebanon had much to do with developing and spreading to the rest of the world. It truly demonstrates their competence in arts and crafts, and the solidarity of their culture.

I'm sure many of you are familiar with my work on fermented beverages. I previously edited and wrote two books on ancient wine (McGovern, et al. 1995; McGovern 2003/2006), and this month, my new book, *Uncorking the Past* (2009), appeared. It traces alcoholic beverages around the world as far back in time as possible. It tries to show how far we've come in understanding the origins and biocultural importance of alcoholic beverages world-wide since our species came "out of Africa" some 100,000 years ago. Drawing upon recent archaeological discoveries, combined with chemical sleuthing which is my speciality, reexamining ancient art and writings, and drawing upon ethnography and experimental archaeology along the way, it shows how innovative our ancestors have been in concocting alcoholic beverages. Lebanon was no exception, and it was likely the most powerful force in spreading winemaking around the Mediterranean and ultimately around the world.

First, I'd like to say a few words about Royal Purple. Sarepta or modern Sarafand (Pl. 1), midway between Tyre and Sidon, probably remains the most extensively excavated homeland Canaanite-Phoenician city-state along the coast. Canaanite Jars and processing vessels were recovered with purplish deposits on their interiors, dated to about 1300 B.C. (Pls. 2 and 3). Chemical analysis, in fact our first research on ancient organic compounds (McGovern and Michel 1990), showed that these vessels had once contained Royal or Tyrian Purple (6,6'-dibromoindigo), a dye derived solely from certain Mediterranean mollusks for which the Phoenicians were famous (Pl. 4). A Purple-dye factory was found in the same area at Sarepta where the purple-colored sherds were excavated. This is the earliest Purple-dye factory in the Mediterranean, dating from pre-Phoenician times. I believe that it will eventually be shown that Lebanon is where Purple-dyeing began. The shell heaps on Crete and other Mediterranean islands have not yet been tied unequivocally

to Purple, and they could have been used for food or their shells as temper.

The wines of Lebanon (see Karam 2005) probably tell a similar story of Lebanese enterprise, although we are yet to carry out any organic analyses of potential containers from the area—such as Canaanite Jars or amphoras, mushroom-rimmed jugs (Pl. 5), and drinking-bowls. This is a project for the future! But we know from biblical and later classical writers (see McGovern 2009: 174-175) that Phoenicia, especially Byblos, was renowned for its fragrant wine, perhaps derived from a Muscat varietal—this hypothesis still awaits confirmation by DNA analysis. In the meantime, let me lay out the rationale for how I think it may well turn out.

My research into ancient wine really got going when I organized a conference on “The Origins and Ancient History of Wine” at the Robert Mondavi winery in the Spring of 1991. The star of the show at our 1991 Mondavi conference was a rather nondescript pottery jar from Godin Tepe (McGovern 2003/2006: fig. 3.1 and pl. 2), which had been excavated by T. Cuyler Young of the Royal Ontario Museum. Dated to about 3500 B.C., it provided Virginia Badler, who first noted the reddish residue on the interior, and my laboratory with the earliest chemical evidence for wine at the time. That the vessel came from high up in the Zagros Mountains of Iran, which now outlaws alcoholic beverages, made it all the more intriguing!

Our analyses of the residue inside the Godin Tepe jar showed the presence of tartaric acid, the finger-print compound for grapes in the Middle East, and terebinth tree resin. In other words, we had a resinated wine. That’s a grape wine to which a tree resin (usually terebinth or pine) has been added, to help preserve and give a special taste to the wine. Some of you have probably tried Greek retsina, and have some idea of what a resinated wine tastes like—definitely an acquired taste, but one easily come by while traveling in Greece.

The upland region of the Caucasus, Taurus, and Zagros Mountains are all possibilities for the earliest domestication of the grapevine and the beginnings of winemaking (Arroyo-Garcia, et al. 2006; Vouillamoz, et al. 2006). An especially strong argument for the origins of viticulture somewhere in this broad area is based on archaeological evidence from Neolithic villages of the earliest Near Eastern “wine culture,” probably including

Shulaveri in Georgia and Göbekli Tepe and Nevali Çori in eastern Anatolia. From small beginnings, viticulture then gradually radiated out in time and space, to become a dominant economic and social force throughout the region and later across Europe in the millennia to follow. And the Canaanites and the Phoenicians of Lebanon were likely the prime movers in this development.

The “wine culture” in the northern mountainous areas of the Near East appears to have begun in the Neolithic period, based on pottery types and the finding of grape seeds of the “domesticated” type from there around 6000 B.C., and probably soon afterwards spread to Lebanon, which represents the farthest south that the wild *Vitis vinifera* grapevine grew along the Mediterranean coast. From there, the Canaanites probably transplanted the vine and carried the wine culture to the Jordan Valley around 4000 B.C.

The wine culture then spilled over into Egypt mediated by viticultural specialists in Lebanon and the southern Levant. Like the southern Levant, the wild grape never grew in Egypt. Yet, a thriving royal winemaking industry had been established in the Nile Delta by at least Dynasty 1, ca. 3000 B.C. Numerous tomb reliefs and frescoes illustrate the viticultural process--from picking the grapes overhead from well-trained pergolas, to stomping them out in small presses, to transferring the red-colored must to amphoras for fermentation, and stoppering the jars for storage (Pl. 6). Much of this knowledge likely came from Lebanon.

The archaeological and chemical evidence for wine from Bronze and Iron Age Lebanon is still very limited. It is significant, however, that the famous sarcophagus of Ahiiram or Hiram I, the early 10th c. B.C. ruler of Byblos, shows him in standard Near Eastern fashion, holding a cup in one hand and a lotus flower dangling from the other, as he is provided with sufficient food and drink for his journey into the afterlife. In the Ugaritic texts, we also read of funeral banquets (*marzeah*) at which wealthy landowners donated their best wines and often over-indulged. They could do no less, since even the gods were expected to drink excessively. More detailed discussion of the available evidence can be found in McGovern 2003/2006: 201-206 and McGovern 2009: 178-179.

In fits and starts and greatly depending on shipping expertise (for which the Canaanites, with their “Byblos ships,” were renowned—we are definitely in the right place today!),

the trade in wine and the establishment of new wine industries and wine cultures then spread westwards across the Mediterranean (see McGovern 2009: 179-182), especially as rulers or the upper class took an interest in it and started importing it and serving it up at special events and ceremonies. During the early Iron Age, I would propose that the Phoenicians were the primary agents for the transference of the wine culture, including special serving sets and the transplantation of the grapevine. These seafarers also carried the Purple-dye industry, the alphabet, and undoubtedly many other elements of Near Eastern and Levantine culture, throughout the Mediterranean. Note that the earliest Greek and Etruscan inscriptions, based on the Phoenician alphabet, are wine inscriptions (McGovern 2009: 186 and 192). The recent discovery of two Phoenician ships (named Tanit and Elissa) off of Ashkelon, using a remotely operated vehicle, show that thousands of liters of wine, contained in amphoras, were being transported to Egypt or Crete from a Lebanese port. My laboratory's analysis once again points to a retsina as the wine of choice (McGovern 2009: 171-172).

We have evidence that the wine culture probably first reached Greece by at least 2200 B.C., so the Canaanites might have been plying these waters with their loads of wine long before the Phoenicians. We identified the earliest retsina at the site of Myrtos-Phournou Koryphe on the southern coast of Crete (McGovern 2003/2006: 247-252 and McGovern 2009: 184-186), and maritime contacts with Canaan/Phoenicia and/or Egypt could well have played a major role in this development.

Greece was still dominated by a mixed beverage made from Pramnian wine, honey and barley, topped with cheese (note the graters from elite tomb groups on Euboea in the Aegean and at Pithekoussai on the island of Ischia in the Bay of Naples)—the so-called kykeon of the Homeric epics (McGovern 2003/2006: 267-268 and McGovern 2009: 187-189). It was served up in large cauldrons. In light of such considerations (further elaborated upon in McGovern 2007 and McGovern 2009:189-193), is it not more likely that the main impetus for transplanting the grapevine and large-scale wine production in Etruria came from the Phoenicians?

After all, the Etruscan amphora is probably modeled after the Phoenician amphora, and where a similarity of form exists, there is often a similarity of use and therefore contents. In the early Iron Age of the Near East and along the Levantine coast, wine was clearly

the preferred beverage, whereas the situation was more murky in Greece, to judge from the analyses already carried out and the Homeric kykeon. The answer to this question is likely to be found at early Etruscan coastal sites, where amphoras predominate, or at the bottom of the Mediterranean where so many shipwrecks full of wine-related pottery have been discovered and excavated (Parker 1992).

It should also be noted that a profusion of Iron Age shipwrecks have now been located and excavated along the Italian and French coasts (McGovern 2009: 192-194). They were so loaded up with wine-related vessels that, in a very real sense, one could say that the transfer of first Phoenician and Greek culture and then Etruscan culture in the Western Mediterranean was mediated by the wine culture itself (Morel 1983).

In my opinion, the Etruscans thus took up the banner of the "wine culture" mainly from the Phoenicians, and to a lesser extent from the Greeks, who were more wedded to a mixed beverage, and eventually embarked upon the mass production of wine and its shipment by boat, especially to southern France by 600 B.C.

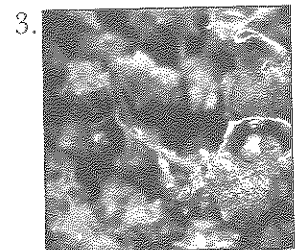
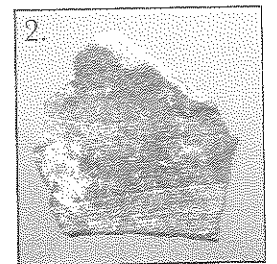
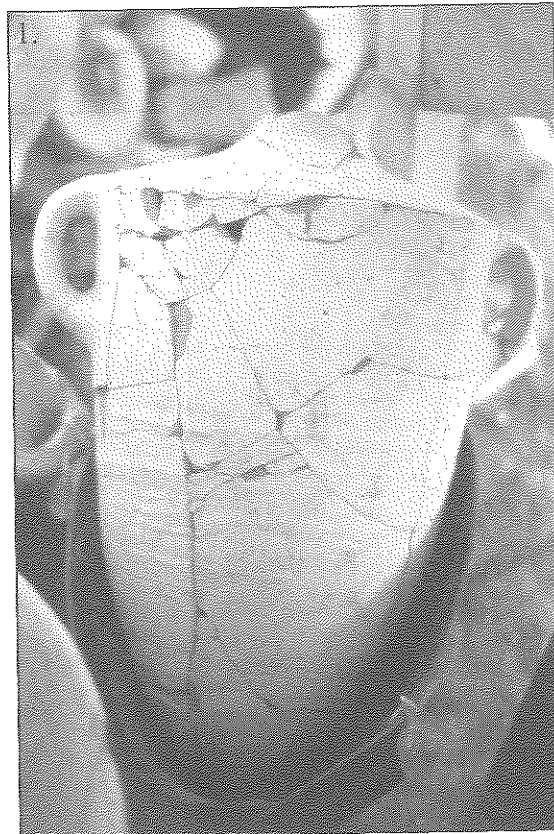
I wish that I had time today to say more. The history of civilization is, in many ways, the history of wine and other fermented beverages. The domesticated grapevine and winemaking was carried by the Etruscans, and later the Romans, to southern France. Relatively recently, viticulture has spread to the New World. Almost every New World wine, with their infinite varietal range of tastes and bouquets, ultimately derives from the Eurasian species of the mountainous Near East transplanted or crossed again and again. Each culture (whether Canaanite, Phoenician, Egyptian, Etruscan, or Californian) has its own story to tell about its relationship with wine and the vine. Together, they form a truly remarkable history of a truly remarkable plant and its product intertwining itself with human culture throughout the world.

And it all likely began with the Canaanites and Phoenicians of Lebanon. But more analyses and collection of wild grapevines and ancient vessels are still needed. Many more analyses from Lebanon itself, as well as sites throughout the Mediterranean, are needed to firm up the picture.

1. Canaanite Jar, dating to the 13th c. B.C., from Sarepta (Lebanon). (Photograph courtesy of the Directorate General of Antiquities of Lebanon and the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology.)

2. Royal Purple dye on the interior of a Canaanite Jar sherd, from Sarepta (Lebanon), dating to the 13th c. B.C. (Photograph courtesy of the Directorate General of Antiquities of Lebanon and the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology.)

3. Murex brandaris mollusks, oozing Purple dye, in a modern market in Marseilles (France). (Photograph courtesy of David S. Reese.)



4. Red-polished, mushroom-lipped jug, likely part of the Phoenician “wine set,” from Amathus, Cyprus, 8th c. B.C. (Photograph courtesy of Limassol Museum.)

5. A fresco showing a winemaking scene in the Theban tomb of the scribe Nakht, dated to ca. 1400. (Photograph courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, no. 15.5.19e (facsimile painting), Rogers Fund, 1915.)

