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In his book *The History of the Turks (L'Histoire des Turcs)*, the French historian Jean-Paul Roux (considered an important authority on Turkish history, and known to somewhat favor the Turks) wrote that, "Interest in festivities was conspicuous". Then he adds, "Because the Turks were very hospitable then as they are now, guests would joyfully be invited to these festivities and lots of food and drinks would be consumed." But, what would they be drinking? Roux answers the question as follows: "Wine was unknown. (Indeed it was known in Sogdiana. Moreover, the Turks were the ones who introduced grapes to northern China) But getting drunk was common." So much so, that the famous historian would then write, "Cengiz Han, who was a Mongol and a famous lawmaker, would demand that the people get drunk only once a week. But this law did not help either. And for the historian, it became a habit to end the biographies of Central Asian leaders with the following words: "He died of drunkenness!"

Interest in wine must have developed

when the Turks arrived in Anatolia –the fatherland of wine making-around A.D. 1000. But this date corresponds with another historical date: The Turks' encounter with Islam. To be honest, the conflict between Islam and wine is inescapable. The 219th verse of the Baqarah surah in the Qoran says, "They question thee about strong drink and games. Say: In both is great sin and some utility for men" and right after this, is written "but, the sin of them is greater than their usefulness." The Qoran later forecloses the option for those who wish to interpret these verses as suggesting that wine has "some" benefits. The point is clarified in the 90th verse of the Ma'idah surah : "Oh, ye who believe! Strong drink and games of chance and idols and divining arrows are only an infamy of Satan's handiwork. Leave it aside in order that ye may succeed". The next verse underscores this even further: "Satan seeketh only to cast among you enmity and hatred by means of strong drink and games of chance, and to turn you from remembrance of Allah and from (His) worship." The last sentence of the verse is pretty dramatic:

"Now you are quitting, right?"

Even so, Islam makes a promise to the faithful that they will have a chance to drink in Heaven. However, as is clearly stated in the Saad surah, these drinks are "totally different" and in another surah it is written that these drinks do not make people drunk. As a result, there is no room for doubting that Islam forbids people from drinking alcohol under the generic name of "wine" – at least in this life.

As a result of these prohibition there is a thousand year gap in our wine traditions as the inhabitants of this land and inheritors of Anatolian civilizations. Even today, this is what accounts for the layman's aversion to wine. But let me say immediately: This is the bad news.

The good news is that, over time, a noble drink like wine was able to overcome every obstacle. Even in that lost millennium, wine had a place on the emperor's table, was consumed by the elite, and could even be found in the gatherings of the ulema (doctors of Muslim theology). Otherwise, why would Seyhülislam Yahya –who was, as his title indicates, the ultimate

authority in matters of theology in the Ottoman Empire- say, "Let the hypocrites dissimulate in mosques – Ye come to the tavern where there is neither hypocrites nor hypocrisy."

The Turks' persistence to enjoy this drink despite all the obvious religious prohibitions must be due to their determination to fully exploit the delights of this world. This attitude is especially visible among the elite groups, who are refined enough to appreciate the pleasures of wine drinking.

Currently, the 10 million tourists who come to Turkey every year account for a considerable part of wine consumption. Among the Turks, the main consumers are the young, educated urban population. Still, yearly wine consumption per person does not even reach 1 liter. Such a low rate of consumption is the sorry part of this story. On the other hand, the rising consumption among the young urban population and the huge interest that this group has shown in wine in recent years point to the bright side of things.

One other fact should also be emphasized: With a yearly wine consumption rate of 1 liter per person, Turkey is lagging way behind its Western counterparts. However, it is in this same country that the consumption of "rakı", which is a 90 proof hard drink, reaches a yearly 1.5 liters per capita. Moreover, tourism accounts for a negligible portion of this consumption and the rakı is not an export item. In other words, the Turks, themselves consume all of the rakı. This highlights the fallacy of attributing the low wine consumption rate in Turkey to the fact that it is an Islamic country.

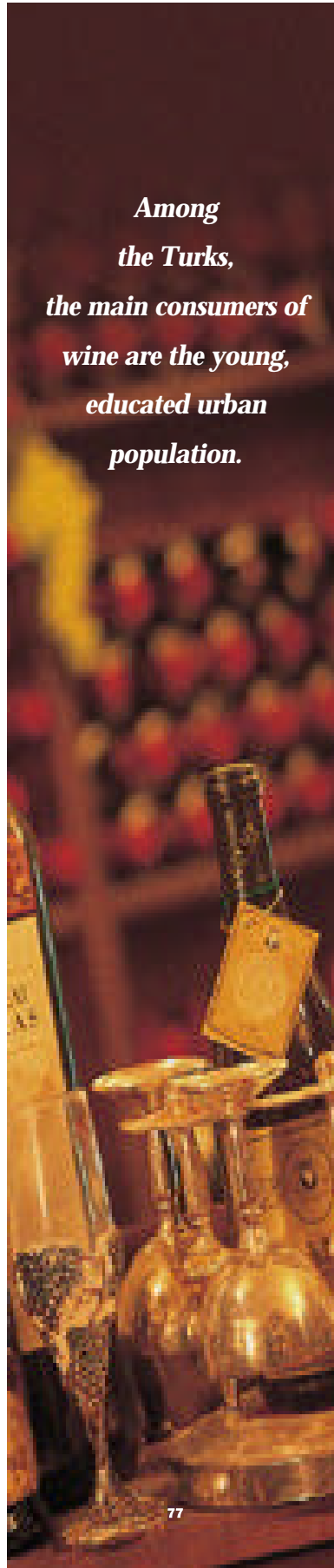
During the 600 years of Ottoman rule, wine production was

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monopolized by the Christian subjects and registered some serious developments. Hungarian sources state that their local variety, which takes its name from Üsküdar, was introduced there by the Ottoman janissaries. Turkish wines won international awards in the 19th century. And the list goes on...

However, this picture started to change around the beginning of the twentieth century. Right after National Independence in the 1920s, with the emigration of the Christian population, the wine business in Turkey collapsed. Despite being a heavy rakı drinker himself, Atatürk understood the correlation between wine and civilization and tried to revive the wine business in the country through substantial government incentives. The wine factories and research institutes that the government monopoly TEKEL opened all over Anatolia and the Thrace are the fruits of this effort. Even today, no company in the Turkish wine industry can compete with TEKEL, the state monopoly, in terms of volume. TEKEL, which is currently being privatized, still produces nearly 40% of all the wine in Turkey.

To conclude on an optimistic note, I can say that today a few companies, with Kavaklıdere and Doluca taking the lead, are making serious investments in the wine business. I can mention the hundreds of acres of modern Sarafin vineyards in Çanakkale established to grow French varieties. I can tell the story of wealthy people in this country – such as Güler Sabancı – who are investing in the wine business and I can mention boutique productions. And best of all, I can talk about a small but very influential group that gets excited by the rediscovery of wine. Turkey's



élites seem to be hooked on the magic spell of this drink. Currently the discovery of wine might well be the most far reaching fad in Turkey. In a few years, this fad will have created a truly elite group that appreciates wine. My real hope lies with this conscientious consumer group. New investments, a rapidly rising interest in wine and an opening to the world are literally a holy triad. The Turkish wine business can look forward to a bright future based on these sound fundamentals.

The varieties of wine in Turkey

An equal amount of red and white wine is produced in Turkey. Rosé wines are rare. Turks mostly produce dry wines.

Semi-sweet or sweet wine consumption is very low, mostly because wine is rarely consumed with sweets. In fact, most of the sweet wines are produced to be exported to Scandinavian countries, where these kinds of wines are in demand.

Sparkling wine is also very rare and it seems that it is produced only to be consumed as ersatz champagne in nightclubs. Fortified wines are almost non-existent. Even though Kavaklıdere's "Tatlı Sert" may seem like an exception, it is not commendable because of the low quality of alcohol that, by law, must be bought from TEKEL.

Grapes

Reliable sources record that there are approximately 1250 kinds of grapes in Turkey. But only about 50 of these are used in the business. Among these, the very special ones

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and those used in good wines do not exceed a dozen.

I think that the king of white grapes in Turkey is the "Narince". This grape is found in the city of Tokat, in the Black Sea region. It grows on sand and gravel, in vineyards at a 500 meter altitude, where summers are hot and dry, and winters cold). It is a very elegant variety and conforms to barrel treatment. It is one of (if not the only) white grape varieties that age well. When it is treated well, it produces full bodied and balanced wines.

Another white grape variety, the "Emir", is a specialty of the Cappadocia region. It is known as a richly aromatic and fine variety. It is generally used in the production of wines that are best if consumed within their year of production.

The favorite grape variety for those who really want to drink an aromatic Turkish white wine is the "Bornova Misketi". Belonging to the Muscat family, the "Bornova Misketi" is a local variation of this grape variety. In contrast to the European tradition, this grape is used for the production of dry wines with very pleasant and local aromas.

Finally, the Semillon is a grape type that is mostly grown in Thrace. It is certain that this grape, originating from France, has acquired a local character over the years. In fact, the Turkish Semillon offers different tastes than its counterparts in the West.

The two kings of Turkish red grapes are the "Öküzgözü" and "Boğazkere". Both grapes are grown in Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia.

With its origins in Elazığ and Malatya, Öküzgözü instantly stands out with its lush and purplish color. Producers note that the wine from this grape embodies tastes of red forest fruits like the blackberry, raspberry,



and boysenberry. With barrel treatment, a vanilla and ripe cherry taste is added. This culminates in a smooth, generous taste with body. This wine usually reaches its peak within a few years.

Bo^zazkere is a variety that is mostly grown around Diyarbakır. It is known for its very thick and almost purplish red color. Producers point to aromas like fresh fig, raspberry and cinnamon in the wines produced from Bo^zazkere. As it ages, it is said to also acquire aromas like vanilla, cocoa, cinnamon and dry pears. But the most important characteristic of wines made of this variety is their full body.

We should say that, as a result of long years of experimentation, it is possible to make notable wines from using different combinations of the acidic and stemy Bo^zazkere and the more round Öküzgözü. This is Turkish wine at its zenith. However, with the softening of the weather due to the dams and water systems around the GAP project (the Southeastern Anatolian Project), an important problem arises as to whether the Öküzgözü and especially the Bo^zazkere grapes will be able to maintain their current quality.

Let us end with an old Central Anatolian variety that has been discovered thanks to the efforts of the Faculty of Agriculture at Ankara University. This grape, named after its town of origin Kalecik, was named "Kalecik Karas" (Kalecik Dark). It is a pity that this elegant grape so close to Ankara has until recently faced extinction. There is an effort to popularize this variety which gives very elegant wines with weak body. Today the Kalecik Karas is the most liked, most sought out, least available and consequently most expensive wine in Turkey.

What to drink?

The answer to this question obviously reflects a personal choice. My answer is not and cannot be an exception to this fact.

Despite the fact that Turkey is home to about 100 producers (according to official counts), daring producers of serious quality wine are very rare. Diren, Doluca, Kavaklıdere, Pamukkale and Tekel are the first names that come to mind.

Diren's owner and producer, Orhan Ziya Diren is a connoisseur who should be saluted as a master wine-maker. Educated in Bordeaux, Orhan Diren takes full advantage of the fact that he is from Tokat and produces very pleasant wines with the area variety "Narince". "Dörtal" (dry) and "Vadi" (semi-dry) are serious wines. This company's Öküzgözü-Bo^zazkere coupage Karmen Selection stands out among its counterparts.

The president of the Thrace-based company Doluca, Ahmet Kutman, has graduated from a wine school in California, USA. Doluca buys grapes from all over Turkey. Among its white wines, the ones that immediately stand out are the "Özel Kav", produced with "Narince", its sweet wine "Safir" and among its red wines, the Özel Kav, which goes very well with Turkish food. I must also mention that this last wine responds very well to ageing.

Kavaklıdere is among the oldest wine companies in Ankara. This company, has been cooperating with the French for a long time. It is mainly interested in domestic grape varieties. The most popular Kavaklıdere wine among the young, wealthy, and ostentatious is the "Kalecik Karas". This firm offers wonderful products

for wine connoisseurs as well. Among its white wines, the Kavaklıdere Sélection White, which is made of Narince and which contains a bit of Semillon and its single-variety wine (which is named Narince as well), stand out. From Emir, it makes its Primeur wine, which has become very popular in recent years, and its sparkling "Altınköpük". Among its red wines, the single-variety Öküzgözü and the Bo^zazkere are good wines and well worth trying. Kavaklıdere's big classic in this area is the Kavaklıdere Sélection Red, which is a coupage of these two wines.

We can also make some suggestions for those who would like to try less competitive wines. To taste some interesting examples of the Emir grape, the best brand must be the Cappadocia based Turasan. For those who would like to try the dry and very aromatic and pleasant Turkish variety called Bornova Misketi, I would suggest the Kavaklıdere Muscat. A modest example of the Turkish Semillon is TEKEL's Trakya. A pleasant example of the Thrace-grown Gamay is, again, TEKEL's Hoffba^z. The red wine of Pamukkale is an experiment by another Turkish wine-maker Yasin Tokat, who makes local Çalkarasi grapes. Finally, I suggest you try Cem Çetintas' Melen wines. Mr. Çetintafl is another Turkish wine-maker who is also open to bold experiments.

Dr. Tuğrul Şavkay is one of Turkey's leading commentators on gastronomy.

Photos courtesy of La Cave, www.lacavesarap.com

