

**Wine Cultures
Gandhāra and Beyond**

edited by Claudia Antonetti, Bryan De Notariis, Marco Enrico

Introduction

Claudia Antonetti

Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, Italy

Bryan De Notariis

Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, Italy

Marco Enrico

Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, Italy

This volume represents the main outcome of the MALIWI project,¹ a research project lasting 24 months (2021-2023), funded by Ca' Foscari University of Venice through a SPIN (Supporting Principal Investigators) Grant.

The MALIWI project aimed to analyse the cultural exchanges in the Gandhāran area through the lens of wine culture. A long-term study (from Achaemenid to Kushan ages, ca. VI BC-III AD), in an interdisciplinary perspective, was an urgent *desideratum*. Hence, the project has collected evidence on winemaking and consumption, starting from an interdisciplinary approach in order to trace the production techniques and the social and convivial uses of wine as well as changing, overlapping and *métissage* of cultures in the Gandhāran area.

A novelty of the project was to bring together two scientific fields that are academically separated in Italy: Classical and Indological studies. Therefore, the project pursued research in both fields, putting them in constant dialogue with each other.

The attempt of combining eastern and western sources has been demonstrated to be worthwhile. Especially sources of the eastern

¹ Making Libation of Wine from Golden Cups: Social, ritual, and ceremonial use of wine in the Gandhāran area, from the Achaemenids to the Kushans: SPIN 2021, P.I. Claudia Antonetti.

frontier of Greco-Roman influence on the social, ritual, and ceremonial use of wine lacked an exhaustive analysis. The study of alcoholic drinks (in general) and wine (in particular) in Indian sources was almost a virgin land. A notable exception to this gap in the academic literature is James McHugh's recent monograph *An Unholy Brew: Alcohol in Indian History and Religion*, the most important work in the history of these studies dedicated to the Indian subcontinent.² Our research has therefore been deeply inspired by the work of McHugh, whom we invited to introduce the volume: he kindly accepted, and we are grateful to him.

As for the Indological research, one primary investigation focused on tracing evidence for grapes and wine in the most ancient Buddhist literary sources, exploring a potential spread of grapes in the Indian sub-continent initially prompted by medical reasons.³ Later, the research extended to social aspects related to conviviality and collegial drinking of alcoholic beverages through an investigation of popular festivals with the involvement of royal elites, in addition to private parties with sympotic elements. Particular attention was paid to the following Indian and Chinese sources: *Sutta Piṭaka*, *Vinaya Piṭaka*, *Aṭṭhakathās*, *Milindapañha*, *Arthaśāstra*, *Mahābhārata*, *Rāmāyaṇa*, Medical *Samhitās*, *Manusmṛti*, Aśoka's edicts; *Nàxiān bīqiū jīng* 那先比丘經 (= *Milindapañha* in Chinese), *Dà zhìdù lùn* 大智度論 (= **Mahāprajñāpāramitā-śāstra*), *Gēnběn shuōyīqiè yǎobù pínàiyé* 根本說一切有部毘奈耶藥事 (= *Vinaya* of the *Mūlasārvāstivādins*), *Dà Táng Xīyù jì* 大唐西域記 (= Xuánzàng's travel reports).

Research on Classical sources lied first in examining Strabo's *Geography*, as it is considered a valuable source of the geographic and ethnographic data on Ancient India and Central Asia transmitted by Alexander the Great's historians. The research has revealed an intriguing aspect about the interpreters accompanying Alexander the Great's expedition and their role in the historians' retrieval of information. The hypothesis that has been tested is that certain inaccuracies in the geographical, ethnographic, and botanical information provided by Alexander's historians may have arisen from misinterpretations and translation mistakes made by their interpreters.⁴ Particular attention was paid to the following Greek and Latin sources: Arrian (*Indica* and *Anabasis*), Athenaeus of Naucratis, Ctesia of

² McHugh 2021.

³ This research resulted in the paper "Where is Grape Wine? On Grapes and Wine in Pāli Buddhist Literature and Beyond" (De Notariis 2023a).

⁴ This research resulted in the publication "Traduzioni e interpretazioni ai confini tra Grecia e India. Una rilettura di Strabone 15.1.20 alla luce delle fonti indiane e buddhiste" (De Notariis, Enrico forthcoming).

Cnidus (*Persica* and *Indica*), Diodorus Siculus, Historians of Alexander the Great, Curtius Rufus, Plinius the Elder.

Not only did the primary sources play a fundamental role in the research, but also the secondary sources used were quite heterogeneous, as they derive from two fields of study. Therefore, the bibliography of the project is itself an output of the research: we wanted it to be public, reusable, and expandable at the end of the project. Hence, the choice to collaborate with the Service Management Office of the BAUM (Biblioteca di Area Umanistica at the Ca' Foscari University of Venice) and with Dr. Mauro Mazzocut, who oversaw the realisation of the online bibliography in Zotero.⁵ The bibliography has been exported in RIS file format and uploaded on Zenodo,⁶ where it received a proper DOI.⁷

The research team was active in dissemination activities.⁸ To further spread knowledge about the project, a website⁹ has been designed by Eloisa Paganoni.

On May 5th and 6th, 2023, we organised the international conference *Wine Culture: Gandharan Crossroads* at the Ca' Foscari University of Venice. Speakers interested in the study of wine and drinking culture came to Venice from Canada, Pakistan, the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, Naples, Bari, Florence, Udine, Bologna and Genoa. The conference was an opportunity to delve into the drinking cultures in ancient Gandhāra and neighbouring areas such as Ancient Assiria and Arachosia, and today India. Many contributions presented at that time have been revised for the volume we are presenting, which addresses the overarching theme of the research project from three fundamental perspectives. The first part (*Indological Sources: Literature and Anthropology*) is devoted to Indological sources with a particular reference to literature and anthropology, the second one (*Archaeology of Wine: Comparisons and*

5 https://www.zotero.org/groups/4744246/wine_in_gandhara/library.

6 <https://zenodo.org/records/10245260>.

7 <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10245260>.

8 Some other publications related to the project are: “The Buddhist Text Known in Pāli as *Milindapañha* and in Chinese as *Nàxiān bīqiū jīng* 那先比丘經. Some Philological Remarks and the Problem of the Archetype” (De Notariis 2022); “Revisiting Levman’s View on the *Milindapañha*” (De Notariis 2023b); “Μηροτραφής: un nuovo frammento di Sofocle?” (Enrico forthcoming). Eventually, it is worth mentioning that Claudia Antonetti, Bryan De Notariis and Marco Enrico presented joint papers at the following conferences: “Il vino nell’India antica, una frontiera culturale fra geografia e politica” paper presented at the workshop *XII seminario di Geographia Antiqua*, Università degli Studi di Perugia, Italy (14-15 March 2024); and “Strabone e l’India: immagine (e simologie) della regalità indiana”, paper presented at the international conference “Da Sardi all’Indo: gli Orienti di Strabone fra popoli e culture”, Università di Genova, Italy (28-29 September 2023).

9 <https://mizar.unive.it/venicepigraphy/maliwi/public/>.

Diachronies) to the archaeology of wine through diachronic comparisons, the third one (*Gandhāra and Classical Sources: Imagery, Iconography, Epigraphy and Texts*) to Gandhāran and Classical sources delving into imageries, iconographies, epigraphs, and texts.

In particular, the introductory chapter has been written by James McHugh, who provides a fresh overview on some relevant approaches to the study of wine and intoxicating drinks in India and Gandhāra.

Bryan De Notariis initially discusses how Gandhāra could have been the ideal place to accommodate the Greek *symposion*. Later, he delves into the Buddhist literature, analysing how sympotic-like elements (alcohol, sex, and intellectual pursuits) were represented in a legislative account and examines some sympotic deities occurring in cosmological accounts.

Andrea Drocco presents an innovative analysis of texts written in Prakrit and Ardha-Māgadhī with a particular reference to the *desī* 'regional' words used to indicate 'intoxicating drinks'. In so doing, he explores a bunch of sources which have hitherto received little attention.

Stefano Beggiora presents a comparative study in an anthropological perspective. He proposes a comparison of the Vedic Soma and wine production in Gandhāra with the production of alcoholic, fermented products and traditional fermentation starters (and their related ritual uses) among the indigenous *ādivāsī* communities of India.

Elena Rova focuses on the Southern Caucasus, a key area where viticulture and wine production first develops in the Neolithic period. Her investigation adopts a multidisciplinary approach, employing bioarchaeology and archaeological sciences to explore recent results obtained on the field of "Archaeology of Wine".

Francesca Simi, Costanza Coppini, and Daniele Morandi Bonacossi present the discovery of the first wine production area ever identified in the archaeology of ancient Mesopotamia, situated in close proximity to Tell Khinis (Assyrian Khanusa). Their work highlights the enduring and extensive exploitation of this agricultural landscape over an extended period.

Prabhjeet K. Johal investigates the beginning of viticulture in the Achaemenid satrapy of Arachosia, proposing that the region swiftly embraced viniculture under the empire's standardised administrative and cultural norms, evident through changes in material culture, architectural advancements, and mentions of local wine in administrative documents.

Omar Coloru, Elisa Iori, and Luca Maria Olivieri delve into the geographical sites associated by the Greeks accompanying Alexander the Great with wine production and the myths of Dionysus and Herakles in Gandhāra. They place a specific emphasis on Nysa in the Kunar/Chitral valley. Additionally, the research explores the economic dynamics of wine production in this region until the late antiquity period.

Cristiano Moscatelli and Anna Filigenzi offer some observations on the values underlying Gandhāran wine symbolism and associated figurative themes, aligning with a recent enquiry on the interactions between Buddhism and the local cultural substratum in the north-western part of the Indian subcontinent in ancient times.

Claudia Antonetti explores the plausibility of the ritual practices described by Curtius Rufus in Greater Gandhāra and in the broader “Indo-Iranian frontier”, focusing on their significance for elite prestige. She highlights how the use of gold libation cups functioned as a powerful symbol of kingship, connecting Indian and Greek cultural traditions.

Stefan Baums investigates the drinking culture of ancient Gandhāra through the analysis of manuscripts and epigraphs, collecting the available material and considering the information that can be extracted from it. In so doing, he provides an original perspective on the Gandhāran wine culture.

Marco Enrico focuses on the description of Central Asia and India offered by Strabo of Amasea and aims to critically examine Strabo’s evidence on vine cultivation and wine production in India, focusing on Musikanos’ kingdom and the utopian setting where wine-related information is presented.

As the reader can see, we opted for grouping the contributions based on the sources, methodologies and academic disciplines used. Clearly, it is often difficult to draw a sharp line between fields of study and methodologies, especially when an author adopts more than one. However, we editors believe that the heterogeneity of disciplines and approaches is a richness and a strength of this work. Therefore, the drinking culture of Gandhāra was analysed from different perspectives, also investigating the alcoholic traditions of neighbouring countries, based on a multiplicity of sources, from textual to material ones, passing through anthropological glimpses. In so doing, we had to recognise the existence of a plurality of ‘cultures’, hence the title: “Wine cultures”. When we use the word ‘wine’ in English, we chiefly mean the fermented juice of grapes, but it can also indicate, more generically, any fermented juice from a fruit or a plant. Therefore, starting from the ‘wine’ *par excellence* drunk and produced in Gandhāra, which is the grape wine, we had plenty of intoxicants flowing into this book, involving a plurality of countries or cultural areas, whence we opted for the subtitle “Gandhāra and Beyond”.

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