

Weinakademiker Thesis D7

The Future Potential of Georgian Amber Wine on the Global Market

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ABSTRACT

Motivation

Georgian amber wine has been a source of inspiration to the orange wine **pioneers** after liberation from Russia (1991). Friulian winemakers *Josko Gravner and Stanko Radikon* visited Georgia to discover ancient skin fermented whites and reveal Georgian traditional hand-crafted qvevri hidden behind the iron curtain for nearly two centuries. Amber wine's distinct character comes from its **protective ancient winemaking practice in qvevri**¹. UNESCO included traditional *qvevri winemaking* in **The Intangible Cultural Heritage** List in 2013², which describes the ancient wine-making process: “*The wine-making process involves pressing the grapes and then pouring the juice, grape skins, stalks, and pips into the Qvevri, which is sealed and buried in the ground so that the wine can ferment for five to six months before being drunk. Most farmers and city dwellers use this method of making wine.*”³ Georgia has an uninterrupted winemaking **know-how** for **8.000 years**, and it is a **heritage** passed through generations from families, neighbors, and friends. Georgia was declared the birthplace of viticulture after discovering a clay vessel with grape seed residue dating back to 6.000 BC⁴. Georgians are proud of their inheritance and the geography was declared as the “*cradle of wine*” including closer parts of Armenia, Türkiye and Mesopotamia.

Amber wines have challenged the global wine industry both from the production and consumption side since the end of the twentieth century. The growing interest in *natural wines* takes attention to it. There are more styles of amber wine on store shelves, in restaurants, and on bar wine lists. Some customers confuse or misunderstand natural wine and amber wine, though both have a “**low or no intervention**” *philosophy* behind them. Amber wine stands straight against the rules of conventional winemaking, leaning back on a firm, enduring, and traditional winemaking history.

Objective

European pioneers of amber wine visited Georgia to discover and learn more about ancient techniques. They were impressed by Georgian's amber wine and experimented with it in the qvevri exported from Georgia. Europeans start making amber wine like Georgians. Most implement amber winemaking techniques and imitate them to achieve higher quality. The number of followers increased in the coming years after satisfying improvements in their qvevri fermented amber wines. Now, different styles of amber wines developed through the experimentation of winemakers⁵. The objective of the thesis is to determine the place of **Georgian** amber wine and project the future potential of this ancient wine in the world wine market.

Methodology

Amber wine capacity in international markets can not separated from the different types of wines produced in Georgia. It is always shipped and promoted along with other wines as a prestigious product in line. So, while assessing amber wine, the export capabilities of the whole industry are evaluated. Due to its short existence in the market, there is limited written literature on its market performance. Georgian amber wine's strengths and weaknesses are specified in the SWOT analysis; then, current international market competitiveness is listed in opportunities and threats. A strategic approach is presented in both competitive and expansion strategies.

¹ see Wines of Georgia (2023), Traditional Winemaking, Online

² see UNESCO, Online

³ see UNESCO, Online

⁴ see Kvelaidze, T., (October 2024), Personal interview

⁵ see Woolf, S.J., Amber Revaluation, pp. 134-137

Amber wine production is very tiny compared to other types of wines; it is not considered a category, so resources are scarce, and there is limited access to data in other countries as well. Its included in conventionally made white wines values and volumes. Research is made on general global wine production and demand tendencies. Recent customer preferences on wine consumption and producer's choices in grape growing and winemaking are broadly reviewed to gain insights into concepts in the industry. Information about the natural winemaking approach and its philosophical impact on production is gathered from

- books, articles, and online resources.
- Interviews with amber wine authorities
- Winery visits to Georgia

Content

The research content is broad, and the analysis is derived from various sources. The appendices provide overall market information regarding the general global industry, customer preferences, market trends, the impact of the natural wine philosophy on producers, skin-fermented white wines, amber wine production, and export details. They also provide information about the Georgian wine industry, including amber wine production, and sources of SWOT analysis and strategic evaluations.

The thesis content starts with an introduction and a brief explanation in Section 1. The analysis of amber wine is presented in the first part of Section 2. The analysis includes:

- Strengths and Weaknesses: Georgian amber wine's authentic characteristics, qvevri-fermented wines distinction, labor-intensive, artisanal work, limited production capacity, high distribution costs and weakness of their distribution network, increased supply-chain costs due to global inflation.

Opportunities and Threats are outlined: increasing customer interest in amber wine with sustainable production and a low-intervention approach, non-recognition in international markets, confusion with other natural wine styles, low margins, and competition from established regions.

The second part of the analysis is detailed strategic implications:

-Competitive Strategies: Premiumisation, marketing campaign with national promotional bodies, target market strategies, product design made to appeal to the customer

-Expansion Strategies: Mechanised production of amber wine, Target markets and marketing strategies, improve distribution network

The outcomes of the research are finalized in the conclusion section.

Conclusion

Georgian amber wine shows growth potential amid rising global trends for natural, handcrafted products. While it offers a unique appeal, it remains a small niche. Georgia must enhance awareness through tourism, effective export strategies, cultural highlighting, and quality production. It should strive to establish itself alongside traditional wine colors like white, red, and rosé, requiring increased production.

Georgians must choose between maintaining amber wine as a premium handcrafted product or transitioning to mass production for larger volumes. Both approaches keep them in leadership roles. High pricing could attract new generations, avoiding migration. However, labor shortages and supply chain costs might push some producers towards mechanization, risking the uniqueness of Georgian amber wine.

Georgians maintain traditional, small-scale production, challenging the wine's future. The wine could appeal to various price segments, from cheap to premium, depending on market trends. Market demand will dictate these decisions.