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RESEARCH PAPER

The awakening of pisco in Chile

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Abstract

P. Lacoste, D. Jiménez, P. Aguilera, B. Rendón, A. Castro, and N. Soto. 2014. The awakening of pisco in Chile. Cien. Inv. Agr. 41(1): 107-114. This paper analyzes the historical antecedents of pisco (grape brandy) in Chile from unpublished original documents of the Archivo Nacional (National Archives) from the end of the 17th century to the beginning of the 18th century. This work also shows that during Spanish domination in the 17th century, the tradition of making brandy from grape wine using stills was consolidated in the northern Kingdom of Chile. In addition, a flow of brandy exports from the very early 18th century is demonstrated.

Keywords: Appellation of origin, colonial wine-growing industry, distillates, grape brandy, pisco.

Introduction

There is a commercial, juridical and academic battle between Chile and Peru in relation to the authorship of the Appellation of Origin “pisco,” a grape brandy that has been produced since the Spanish domination on the southern Pacific coast of America. Both of these countries participate in this battle using their commercial, juridical and political resources to vindicate their rights in the World Trade Organization as well as in the different national markets and other international organizations (Mitchell and Terry, 2011; Lacoste *et al.*, 2013). Nevertheless, there is some historical evidence that indicates that pisco has

some characteristics of a binational Appellation of Origin (Lacoste *et al.*, 2013).

As in every Appellation of Origin, the historical background is a fundamental pillar of the right. In that sense, the progress that has been achieved from the Peruvian standpoint is outstanding (Brown, 1986; Huertas, 2004, 2012; Soldi, 2006; Rice, 2011). Progress from the Chilean side has been less, and the only important publications are the text by Cortés (2005) and the text by Lacoste *et al.* (2013). While the former text covers almost five centuries of history in 40 pages, the latter focus its attention on the development of pisco in the context of the Chilean-Peruvian relationship between 16th and 17th centuries during the colonial period. To advance research of the historical background of pisco, this study focused on

demonstrating two aspects: the rise of the grape brandy industry in the northern Kingdom of Chile in the 17th century and the beginning of exports from that region to Peru from the beginning of the 18th century, all of which is supported by original documents from the Archivo Nacional de Santiago de Chile (AN hereafter).

Materials and methods

Vineyards and brandy in the northern Kingdom of Chile (17th century)

Wine brandy production in the northern Kingdom of Chile was consolidated in the 17th century. This production was so recorded in the writings of the scribes, which are kept in the Fondos Notariales de La Serena of the AN (Archivo Nacional). The existence of the vineyards, cellars, facilities and equipment for making the wine and distilling the brandy in the region, mainly in La Serena, the Elqui Valley and Copiapó, was attested (Figure 1). These areas were vegetable plots and small farms that were planted in the 17th century and cultivated by their owners with the help of slave manpower during the economically active life of the owners. This work was recorded at the end of their lives, by the end of the 17th and the beginning of the 18th centuries. Therefore, even though the registry was established only during those years, it corresponds to the production media that were built and administered in the previous decades. Therefore, in this study, the abovementioned sources of the documentary archives have been collated and analyzed using the critical heuristic method that is characteristic of historical analysis.

Results and discussion

The vineyards of the 17th century and their characteristics

The viticulture in Chile in the 16th and 17th centuries was, as in all of Hispanic America,

characterized by its development on small properties and the capacity of free day laborers to obtain their own small properties, to stimulate the exploitation of their vineyards using complex agricultural techniques, to permit a dynamical social mobility and to give birth to small bourgeoisies (Lacoste, 2007). The northern region of Chile (La Serena, Coquimbo, Copiapó, Huaso) was not an exception to this trend.

In general, these vineyards were small, with between 2,000 and 10,000 plants that covered an area of one to three hectares per owner. These vineyards were usually bound by an earth hedge on stone foundations and with roof tiles (*tapias*). As examples, Maestre de Campo (Field Master) Antonio Gómez de Galleguillos in the Estancia Pachingo had a vineyard of 2,000 plants that was walled in by a hedge (Gómez de Galleguillos, 1695); the vineyard of Antonio de Rivera had 3,000 plants (De Rivera, 1704); in the Copiapó Valley, there was another farm with 4,000 plants (Ramos Torres, 1700); in the Estancia de Todos los Santos (in the Elqui Valley), there was a vineyard with 9,000 plants; and in the Hacienda Rucapibi (in the Limarí Valley), a vineyard with 9,474 plants that was walled in by a hedge was cultivated (Pastene Aguirre, 1710). In general, the productivity was one *arroba* (1 arroba = 35.5 L) of must from every ten plants. Therefore, these vineyards produced between 200 and 1,000 “*arrobos*” of must each.

The grapes were treaded in the winepress. Some cellars had primitive winepresses, while others had more complex facilities. One of the best winepresses was that of the Copiapó farm, which had large winepresses that were made of brick and lime mortar (Ramos Torres, 1700). This type of equipment was extremely costly (average cost of \$150), which tended to concentrate the activity and enhance the power of the large landowners over the small grape-growers. This concentration changed in the decade of 1740 with the invention of the leather winepress, whose costs were substantially lower (\$5), an issue that was studied in depth elsewhere (Lacoste *et al.*, 2011).

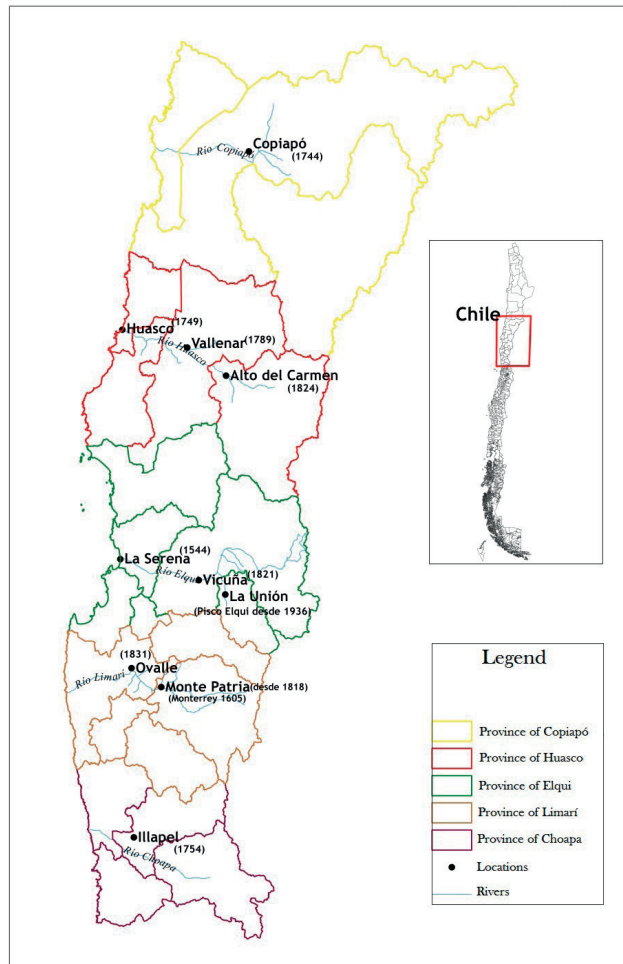


Figure 1. Map of Appellation of Origin Pisco delimitation as indicated in the Chilean Executive Order Law (Decreto con Fuerza de Ley) 181 of 1931. Map made by Bibiana Rendón and Diego Jiménez. Project FONDECYT 1130096.

Once the grapes had been treaded in the wine-press, the must was stored in large and small earthenware jugs in the cellar. Fermentation took place in these jugs, and the must turned into wine. It was important to have a large amount and quality of wine containers to ensure the process, including mainly the conservation and vintage of the wines. The grape-growers made significant investments in these containers. The Estancia de Gaspar de Calderas had 60 large jugs that were waterproofed with tar and that could store 419 arrobas (6.98 arrobas per large jug) of wine (Calderas, 1710). In the Hacienda de Copiapó,

there were 29 large jugs in which 150 arrobas of clear wine, 30 arrobas of crude wine, and 50 arrobas of vinegar were stored (7.93 arrobas per large jug). The total container capacity of this farm was 400 arrobas (Ramos Torres, 1700). The plot of Antonio de Rivera had 10 large jugs and 12 small jugs (De Rivera, 1704).

In general, the quality of Chilean wine that was produced using the abovementioned instruments and processes in the 16th-17th centuries period, which was controlled by producers, *pulperías* (general stores) and the Town Council, was

highly recognized by local chroniclers, such as Alonso de Ovalle and Juan Ignacio Molina, and foreign chroniclers, such as Jerónimo de Vivar and Alonso González de Nájera (Muñoz, 2012).

The availability of numerous grape plants since the first plants entered northern Chile has been registered in Copayapu Valley (Copiapó) since the second half of the 16th century (Sayago, 1973), and the plants that were registered from 1600-1601 in the Huasco Valley by the Dutch pirate Oliverio van Noort (Morales, 1991) opened the door to the preparation of brandy. Similar to Peru, at that time, caldrons and tubes were used in northern Chile. However, in this region, stills were also used in the 17th century, an innovation that, according to Lorenzo Huertas, was incorporated in Peru only in the 19th century (Huertas, 2004). However, later studies detected the presence of stills since the 18th century (Huertas, 2012). Documentary evidence shows this process. In his plot of the Elqui Valley, Rodrigo Rojas had two caldrons and a still (Rojas, 1693); the Hacienda Rucapibi (Limari Valley) had a copper still with its three-arroba capacity tubes; the Estancia de Todos los Santos (Elqui Valley) had three 150-pound copper stills (Pastene Aguirre, 1710); Gaspar Calderas had an equipped still (Calderas, 1710); the Estancia Pachingo had a middle-sized still (Gómez de Galleguillos, 1695); and Antonio de Rivera, in his "Las Diaguitas" plot, two leagues from Vicuña, had a still, two pans and 4 arrobas of brandy (De Rivera, 1704). Captain Rodrigo de Rojas y Rivero on his farm in the Elqui valley had two pans and three stills with their tubes (Rojas y Rivero, 1706); there was also a still on the Copiapó farm (Ramos Torres, 1700).

In the northern Kingdom of Chile, alembics were not only used in the 17th century but were also made and exported to other producer regions, mostly to the province of Cuyo. The winemakers of San Juan received alembics and other copper implements that were manufactured in Coquimbo (Rivera, 2007). For example, in 1698,

an alembic was recorded in the cellar of Doña Beatriz Mariel, the widow of Cabañas (Rivera, 2007). These cases were not particular but were rather a trend, given that in Coquimbo the copper mining in the 17th century was the main economic activity of that region (Pinto, 1992) and was capable of, according to De Ovalle (1646), providing copper to all of South America. The intense exploitation of copper gave birth to a dynamic geoeconomic space in which the copper craftsmanship was highly relevant. The coppersmiths and copper boilermakers artisans developed the use of copper to produce pots (Fernández Campino, 1744) and stills (Concha, 2011), among other copper items and utensils. In this way, in Coquimbo awoke the Chilean industry of copper and brandy because of copper mining and the production of copper alembics.

In the Kingdom of Chile, the brandy was prepared in the north from grape wine. From Copiapó to the Limarí and Elqui valleys, there were a number of plots and farms which, among other activities, were devoted to the cultivation of grapes, making wine, and distilling brandy. In this way, a production system was established that involved supplying the internal market first and the exports second. The latter reach a very high level of grape brandy production, to the point that the main Peruvian land-owners requested that the Council of the Indies forbid any entry or sale of Chilean grape brandy into Potosí (Assadourian, 1982).

Exports of brandy to Peru: the contract of 1711

Pedro Cortés y Monroy, known under the nobility title of "Marqués de Piedra Blanca, Huana y Huanilla" (La Serena, 1651-1717), granted in 1697, was one of the key actors in the production of grape brandy in Chile in the 17th century. He played an outstanding role within the Chilean society of the time in the military as well as in politics (he was chief magistrate, attorney general, town council alderman, and mayor of La Serena), in commerce and production in various fields, such as fruit

growing, mining, grape growing and wine making (Sayago, 1973). These activities were carried out by the marquis from the legacy of his relatives, as specified in his will: “I declare that all of the property that I took to the Kingdom of Peru during my mother’s life had its origin and was obtained with the contributions of my Indians who worked in the copper mine settlement, forges, tanneries and other farming work. I owe nothing to any person” (Cortés de Monroy, 1713).

The inherited property consists of a set of lands that were composed of Monterrey; the land grant of Atelcura (north of the Choapa); 800 *cuadras* (1 *cuadra* = 1.57 hectares) in the region of Huana (south of Ovalle), and 2000 *cuadras* that were close to the last two abovementioned regions. Within these lands, Pedro Cortés y Monroy formed the set of farms that constituted the nobility title that was mentioned at the beginning of this section.

The growth of the production potential of the Marqués de Piedra Blanca called the attention of Peruvian merchants because the marquis became an attractive provider of brandy and supplier of the always strong demand of the local market. The latter reached such a size that Manuel Vázquez de Osorio, a Peninsular Spaniard who had settled in Peru, and an outstanding person in Arica (he was chief magistrate during the 1722-1723 period), as the supply ability of the Peruvian brandy industry began to decline, made the decision to look for new suppliers in northern Chile.

The matter that was solved by Don Manuel was extremely significant because Arica was an important node among the regions commercial routes, especially in terms of the supply of goods coming from Peru, and whose final destination was the market of Potosí. The latter region had strong mining and therefore generated an ever increasing demand for food and drink.

Within the abovementioned context, Don Manuel contacted Agustín Niño de Zepeda, mayor of La Serena (1702-1703), to tell him about the problem

that they were facing in the region and asked for his assistance to solve it. Don Agustín agreed to provide his support, provided Don Manuel shared with him the business to be done. Then, Don Manuel and Don Agustín got in touch with the Marqués de Piedra Blanca and with General Lucas Arquero Ortiz, with whom the latter was acquainted, because the general had held some of the highest positions in La Serena (he had been chief magistrate and member of the town council many times). Finally, a short time after beginning these arrangements, the business was formalized by signing a contract (January 12, 1711).

In this way the Marqués de Piedra Blanca and General Arquero Ortiz would deliver 200 arrobas of “good quality brandy” to the port of Coquimbo, part of which was contained in wineskins and part in small jugs at a price of \$10 per arroba. Due to its historical meaning, it is appropriate to reproduce the complete document:

“I, the said Marqués de Piedra Blanca, and I, the said General Don Lucas Arquero Ortiz have sold 200 arrobas of choice and good quality brandy at a price of \$10 arrobas to the said don Manuel Vázquez Osorio and Agustín Niño de Zepeda, as follows: I, the said Marqués de Piedra Blanca shall deliver 100 arrobas of the said brandy in good quality tarred wine skins at the port of this city and the said wineskins (...) shall be paid to me according to the liquid cost of each one beside the \$10 of the said brandy. And I, the said General Lucas Arquero Ortiz have sold to the aforementioned the remaining 100 arrobas of brandy, in fulfillment of the 200, choice and of good quality and contained in small jugs at the said \$10 arrobas delivered at my plot el Mantén. And us, the said Manuel Vázquez Osorio and Agustín Niño de Zepeda, having heard and understood the explanation of this obligation, say that we agree and are satisfied with the referred contract” (Piedra Blanca *et al.*, 1711).

The contract implied the export of more than 7,000 liters of brandy from the north of the King-

dom of Chile to the port of Arica, with the final destination most likely in Potosí. This business interaction did not lack huge expenses that were meant to ensure the region's supply because the commercial routes were involved serious difficulties, of which one of the most complex is the following: "you owe me much for what I have given you, for what I have spent in this way in the negotiations with the Indians of Huasco, as well as with the others of the Pisco land grant" (Cortés de Monroy, 1713).

Therefore, northern Chile was part of the network of suppliers of that brandy route. This fact was the result of a long process that was marked by the consolidation of the brandy industry in northern Chile and its decadence in Peru. This contract shows that the Peruvian and Chilean brandy were part the same cultural space because they arose in a shared context and were supplied to the same market. Therefore, both of the production poles were complementary: when one had problems with supplying all of its clients, the other ensured the supply.

The documentary evidence shows the consolidation of the brandy industry in the northern Kingdom of Chile during the early colonial period. After the Spanish conquest and colonization during the second third of the 16th century, the introduction and propagation of grapes took place in Chile in general, particularly in its northern parts. The founding of La Serena (1544) marked this process; the colonization process of an extensive territory from Copiapó to Illapel was led from this city.

In the 17th century the grape, wine and brandy culture was consolidated in the northern Kingdom of Chile. Small wine-making centers appeared that incorporated early the technology of distillation in alembics.

The use of that instrument to distilled brandy in the northern Kingdom of Chile during the 17th century, as disclosed in this paper, is a theoretical novelty. Until now, there was knowledge of the

existence of this technology in Peru since the second half of the 18th century, but the period in which it was used in Chile is not known. This research shows that the alembic began being used in Chile one century earlier than in Peru. The Coquimbo region specialized in the manufacture of alembics, not only for use in northern Chile but also for exportation, mainly to San Juan (currently Argentina), where alembics of that origin have been recorded since 1698.

The early use of the alembic facilitated the maturity of the brandy industry in Chile, thereby generating the initial conditions for exportation. This study shows another theoretical novelty: the 1711 contract between the Marqués de Piedra Blanca, producer of brandy in La Serena, and the mayor of the Peruvian port of Arica, through which an agreement was reached for a significant export of brandy from northern Chile to Peru.

The collated documents show that between the second half of the 17th century and the first years of the 18th century, a substantial brandy industry was generated in northern Chile. The early presence of alembics facilitated the consolidation of this activity, even amidst highly complex commercial routes that required huge investments, as in the case of the negotiations with the Indians of the Pisco land grant to carry out their commercial activities with some normality. These foundations gave rise to the conditions to begin exportation since the very early 18th century, as shown by the contract of 1711. These documents show the historical depth of the brandy industry in northern Chile.

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Resumen

P. Lacoste, D. Jiménez, P. Aguilera, B. Rendón, A. Castro y N. Soto. 2014. El amanecer del pisco en Chile. Cien. Inv. Agr. 41(1): 107-114. Este artículo examina los antecedentes históricos del pisco (aguardiente de uva), en Chile, a partir de documentos originales inéditos del Archivo Nacional, entre fines del siglo XVII y comienzos del XVIII. Se demuestra que, durante la dominación española, se consolidó la tradición de elaborar aguardiente a partir de vino de uva en el norte del Reino de Chile con el uso de alambiques en el siglo XVII. Además, se demuestra un flujo exportador de aguardiente desde comienzos del siglo XVIII.

Palabras clave: Aguardiente de uva, alambique, denominación de origen, industria vitivinícola colonial, pisco.

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