



WORKSHOP

Wine in the Middle East & North Africa

IMAGES, PLACES, MARKETS, AND BRANDS
OF A CONTESTED COMMODITYMAR 15 | 17
2027

Call for Papers

Wine in the Middle East and North Africa: Images, Places, Markets, and Brands of a Contested Commodity

Workshop from Monday, 15 March until Wednesday, 17 March 2027, held at the Freie Universität Berlin, Germany

Description

The production, sale, and consumption of wine is a multifaceted and ambiguous phenomenon in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). The regional wine industry often goes unnoticed by the general public due to assumptions about the region's Islamic character and its reservations about alcohol. Even in academia, it is more frequently overlooked than are other areas of wine research. Yet, it is an age-old business, with a history going back to ancient times, when the area was the cradle of wine-growing. It was continued under Islamic rule despite ups and downs and experienced a new boom in colonial times. At the same time, wine has long been a controversial commodity, with conflicting religious and legal opinions contrasting with the praise of its pleasures in visual and textual representations.

More recently, the wine industry has received new attention from public authorities, private investors, and individual winegrowers, particularly since the 1990s and 2000s, when national economies began to open up and liberalise. Today, the wine business in the MENA region is facing multiple challenges: quality issues arising from mass production, deteriorating growing conditions due to climate change, and an increasingly restrictive political and social environment towards alcoholic beverages, all of which make it difficult for producers to operate successfully in the market. Additionally, the global wine industry is grappling with crises such as declining demand, particularly among younger generations, new pests, and the emergence of new, strong wine-producing countries. As in many other wine-growing regions around the world, numerous wine producers in the MENA region are attempting to overcome these challenges by launching quality campaigns to reposition themselves in the markets, often drawing on their long-standing winemaking traditions.

The planned workshop therefore aims to better address the still insufficient state of research by studying the Middle Eastern world of wines and vines, both **past and present**, and examining the many issues arising from its manifold developments. Although it will take a broad approach, developments on the ground as well as new concepts have given rise to a number of specific questions that deserve particular attention. A decisive, cross-cutting common theme of the workshop is to consider the region- and country-specific **socio-cultural and political contexts and conditions** that are usually given little consideration in wine studies of other parts of the world. These contexts and conditions can impede the cultivation, trade, and consumption of wine, resulting in practices of dissimulation and invisibilisation. Against this background, the working meeting will preferably investigate the field along five, partly overlapping, **thematic axes**:

- The historical and present-day formations, configurations, and (formal and informal) regulations of **wine markets**, including competition mechanisms, distribution channels, and trade economies; this also covers the varying colonial and postcolonial viticultural policies pursued by the state.
- **Qualities** of wine in the MENA region, encompassing technical and organisational innovations resulting in improvements to physical and material properties, as well as extrinsic attributions of quality by a wide range of instrumental devices, from advertisements to events and architecture.
- **Branding** of products, companies, people, and places, as a practice dating back to ancient times, used to claim ownership and mark origin, as well as a postmodern strategy focused on experience and reputation in the context of current globalisation and neoliberalisation.
- **Spatial aspects** and ‘wine geographies’ associated with regional viticulture, which can emerge from local, regional, and transregional trade networks, the definition of ‘terroirs’ and ‘appellations,’ and the spatialities of consumption, or can be constructed in qualification and branding processes.
- **Visions, imaginaries, and images** relating to the production, distribution, and consumption of wine, as materialised from ancient and early Islamic mosaics, frescoes, and stone carvings to colonial and contemporary advertising, bottle labels, and architecture, as well as in various textual forms.

Submissions

We welcome paper proposals from a wide range of disciplines – including, but not limited to, history, geography, economics, anthropology, arts, and Islamic and regional studies – as well as a broad array of conceptual and theoretical perspectives. We expect both disciplinary overviews of the general topic and conceptually well-framed, empirically rich papers. Studies of wines and vines can be historical or contemporary and can cover the Middle East and North Africa, but also other parts of the **Islamicate world**, from the Balkans to Central Asia and from East Africa to the Indonesian archipelago.

Interested authors are invited to submit an original **paper proposal** consisting of an abstract with a title (250–300 words; with no bibliographical references), plus keywords, including references to the five main axes, clearly outlining their research question(s) and methodology. Each proposal should be accompanied by a short **biographical note** (max. 200 words) indicating your position, institutional affiliation, main research interests, and contact details/email address, as well as an additional list of two or three of your main relevant publications. Please send your paper proposals as **Word documents** to Steffen.Wippel@ku.de by **30 March 2026**.

In April/May 2026, we will notify you whether your proposal has been accepted and send you the formatting requirements for your paper, along with further details about the conference. We will also circulate the abstracts among the participants to encourage cross-referencing and ensure a better fit. We expect to receive your **provisional papers by December 2026**. The submitted papers will be distributed among the speakers to allow for pre-meeting reading. At the workshop, they will be commented on by two other attendees. Afterwards, papers will be selected for publication in an edited volume. In addition to full chapters, the volume will also welcome shorter ‘vignettes’ and ‘snapshots’ (2-3 pages) based on testimonials, anecdotes, impressions, and other brief interventions that cannot be developed into full research articles.

Participants have to cover their own travel and accommodation costs. We will also ask you to pay a small conference fee (of around 50-100 EUR) to cover the costs of snacks, beverages, and information materials during the event held **at the Freie Universität Berlin**. Additionally, we will try to organise a tasting of regional wines on a self-pay basis.

Organising Institutions: Human Geography Working Group, Department of Geography, Catholic University of Eichstätt-Ingolstadt (KU), Ostenstr. 18, 85072 Eichstätt, and Institute of Islamic Studies, Department of History and Cultural Studies, Freie Universität Berlin (FU), Fabeckstraße 23/25, 14195 Berlin, Germany

Organising Team: The workshop is convened by Steffen Wippel (Researcher at the KU) in cooperation with Birgit Krawietz (Professor for Islamic Studies, FU) and Christian Steiner (Chair of Human Geography, KU)