

# ***The Social Functions Assigned to Wine in Zhou and Scythia and Their Similarities and Differences --- Seen in the Shangshu·Jiugao and the Historiae***

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**Abstract:** This article presents an analysis of the social functions ascribed to *Jiugao* and *Historiae* during the Western Zhou period in China and in the early Scythian civilisation. While regulating the conditions under which wine may be consumed, *Jiugao* also ascribes very important ethical attributes and functions to wine. In *Jiugao*, the necessary indoctrination, national laws and ideologisation are applied to the otherwise simple act of drinking alcohol. While in *Herodotus: On the Scythians*, wine is an integral part of the sacrifice, and is also closely associated with warfare. The act of "drinking" is directly linked to one's military prowess and social status. There are fundamental differences between the Zhou and Scythian cultures. The fact that the Zhou culture was a subsistence agricultural civilisation, while the early Scythian culture was a nomadic civilisation living on water and grass, is the main reason why the two cultures assigned different social functions to wine.

**Keywords:** Western Zhou, Scythia, Wine, Social function.

## **1. Introduction**

Wine plays an integral role in the social fabric of any civilisation. However, the social function of wine differs significantly between nomadic and agricultural civilisations. This essay will examine the fourth book of Herodotus' *Historiae* and the *Shangshu Jiugao* as source documents, with a focus on wine. The aim is to study and compare the differences and similarities in wine culture between Scythia, a nomadic people in Central Asia from the 4th to the 5th centuries BCE, and the Western Zhou, an agricultural civilisation in East Asia. The author will analyse the relevant texts paragraph by paragraph, focusing on the social functions and roles assigned to wine, depending on the focus of the primary documents. It will then compare the two to identify common and divergent points. The most significant distinction between these two civilisations is that, despite the importance of wine in both, its role differs.

It is important to highlight that the author conducted an analysis of the *Jiugao*, which is a document from the Western Zhou Dynasty. What should be noted that during that period, people primarily utilised rice, millet, beans, broomcorn millet, and a variety of grains as the primary raw materials for brewing. This differs from the modern production of white wine [1].

## 2. The social functions assigned to wine

The Jiugao, in addition to establishing the circumstances under which wine was to be consumed, also ascribed a significant ethical quality and function to wine. In the article in Jiugao, the author makes the assertion that “祀兹酒。” [2] The translation is ‘Drinking wine only at the time of the great sacrifice.’ The phrase in question denotes that wine is to be consumed in the context of sacrifices. In this instance, the author of the Jiugao delineates a scenario wherein the consumption of wine is permitted, situated within the context of a national event, namely the sacrifice. This demonstrates that despite the initial prohibition of wine at the inception of the Zhou dynasty, due to its association with the decline of the Shang dynasty, it could be utilized and consumed in significant quantities during ritual sacrifices. This demonstrates that although the rulers were aware of the detrimental effects of wine, they also acknowledged its beneficial properties. Despite the potential risks associated with wine consumption, it was still utilized in ritual contexts, underscoring its perceived significance.

Additionally, the Jiugao states, “孝养厥父母, 厥父母庆, 自洗腆, 致用酒。” [2] The translation is, ‘Be dutiful and supportive of your parents; and when your parents are happy and you have made a good and plentiful meal, you may drink wine.’ The sentence can be interpreted to mean that the parents are happy and a celebratory meal has been prepared, allowing the son to consume wine. This establishes a second scenario for the consumption of wine, namely that it is permissible to imbibe wine after having demonstrated filial piety and good parenting. The scenario of being able to drink wine is founded on these two virtues. The combination of the act of drinking wine with filial piety serves to guide the construction of filial virtues. Initially, wine was used to worship the gods and ancestors of the heavenly emperor; however, it has since become a means of honouring one's closest relatives and parents. Having previously established the significance of wine as a state-sanctioned practice, it is now necessary to elevate filial piety to a state-level position and define its role in disciplining the populace. By equating wine with a state of being, it enhances the status of wine and simultaneously endows it with a degree of influence [3]. The act of consuming wine is indicative of its significance. It can therefore be surmised that wine has a certain edifying effect.

Additionally, Jiugao states that “庶士有正越庶伯君子, 其尔典听朕教! 尔大克羞耆惟君, 尔乃饮食醉饱。” [2] The translation is, ‘Officers of all ranks, you must always heed my teachings! All of you will be able to offer wine and food to the old man and to the monarch, and you will be drunk and well fed.’ The sentence can be interpreted as a directive for officials at all levels to adhere to the teachings espoused. One may proffer libations and sustenance to the aged and the sovereign, and one shall become inebriated and satiated. This sentence posits that there is a fundamental premise underlying the first two scenarios in which one may imbibe wine. This premise is the obligation to heed the teachings of the monarch (Zhou Gong) and to induct oneself in accordance with established social norms. The consumption of wine is contingent upon the maintenance of the virtues of neutrality and the fulfilment of the duties of governance. It is only in these circumstances that the act of drinking wine is permitted. In accordance with the stipulations set forth in the Jiugao, an individual was entitled to imbibe wine provided that they demonstrated the moral capacity to be dutiful to their parents and elders, to venerate their ancestors, and to adhere to the established norms of society and contribute to the governance of the nation [4]. It is evident that the Jiugao, in addition to establishing the prerequisites for consuming wine, also ascribes significant ethical characteristics and responsibilities to this beverage. The consumption of wine, which was originally a simple act of daily life, was treated as a necessary indoctrination, national law, and ideology.

In Herodotus' *Historiae*, wine played an indispensable role in the rituals, but it was also closely associated with warfare to the Scythians. The act of "drinking" was directly linked to one's military ability and social status. Herodotus recounts the mythological origin of the Scythians, which is as follows: ‘While they still ruled the land, there fell from the sky four implements, all of gold, a plough,

a yoke, a battle-axe, and a drinking-cup.’ [5] The cup and the axe, yoke together, were present in the creation myths and, like them, continued to serve the function of confirming leadership. For a nomadic people, both the yoke and the axe held significant symbolic value. The yoke represented military might, while the axe symbolised hunting. Both were integral to the nomadic way of life. The concomitant appearance of the wine cup alongside the axe and yoke indicates that the significance attributed to the cup by the Scythians is analogous to that ascribed to the axe and yoke. The cup signifies either wine or the act of drinking. This evidence demonstrates that wine held a significant position in Scythian society, functioning as an integral aspect of their cultural identity. Herodotus also states that, ‘An antique iron sword is planted on the top of every such mound, and serves as the image of Ares; yearly sacrifices of cattle and of horses are made to it, and more victims are offered thus than to all the rest of their gods. When prisoners are taken in war, out of every hundred men they sacrifice one, not however with same rites as the cattle, but with different. Libations of wine are first poured upon their heads, after which they are slaughtered over a vessel; the vessel is then carried up to the top of the pile, and the blood poured upon the scimitar.’ [5] The Scythian sacrifices were primarily to the god of war, and in this sacrifice, wine and captives became the most important offerings. The inclusion of captives in the ritual was essential to the sacrifice of the war god, and wine was also given an extremely important social function in this context, as an important medium for the expression of veneration. Similarly to the role of sacrifice in social rituals, wine became a fundamental element in a number of significant social behaviours. Herodotus provides the following description, ‘Oaths among the Scyths are accompanied with the following ceremonies: a large earthen bowl is filled with wine, and the parties to the oath, wounding themselves slightly with a knife or an awl, drop some of their blood into the wine; then they plunge into the mixture a scimitar, some arrows, a battle-axe, and a javelin, all the while repeating prayers; lastly the two contracting parties drink each a draught from their follower.’ [5] This passage demonstrates that wine also served as a tool in the context of a significant ritual activity, namely the making of a vow.

The fact that people held wine in high regard and believed it to be imbued with credit suggests that wine occupied a distinct position in their lives, one that differed from that of other beverages. In addition to its indispensable role in a multitude of ceremonies, wine was also regarded as an indispensable element of the Scythian lifestyle during this period. In his writings, Herodotus provides insight into the Scythian drinking customs, including the types of wine consumed and the beverages with which they were consumed. ‘The skulls of their enemies, not indeed of all, but of those whom they most detest, they treat as follows. Having sawn off the portion below the eyebrows, and cleaned out the inside, they cover the outside with leather. When a man is poor, this is all that he does; but if he is rich, he also lines the inside with gold: in either case the skull is used as a drinking cup... When strangers whom they deem of any account come to visit them, these skulls are handed round, and the host tells how that these were his relations who made war upon him, and how that he got the better of them; all this being looked upon as proof of bravery.’ [4] And ‘Once a year the governor of each district, at a set place in his own province, mingles a bowl of wine, of which all Scythians have a right to drink by whom foes have been slain; while they who have slain no enemy are not allowed to taste of the bowl, but sit aloof in disgrace. No greater shame than this can happen to them.’ [5] The production of the drinking vessels and the manner of their consumption were also connected to the phenomenon of war. Those who demonstrated a certain level of military proficiency and were able to engage in combat and kill the enemy were granted the privilege of partaking in the wine of the city lord. The city lord was the individual who held a certain degree of authority, and this reward represented the pinnacle of recognition for Scythian soldiers. Furthermore, the creation of a wine cup from the head of an enemy was considered a significant honour. The master demonstrated his financial strength and commendable personal qualities, including physical beauty and courage, through the use of such a drinking vessel and the manner of drinking it. These elements collectively

constituted the essential components of a Scythian's social status, with drinking serving as a primary means of demonstrating and asserting social status. In his writings on the Scythians, Herodotus frequently mentions wine, yet the significance of this beverage is often overlooked. In addition, the consumption of wine was closely linked to the Scythians' propensity for warfare. For these nomadic 5th-century BC populations, the sustenance of their nation was contingent upon their ability to engage in and prevail over military conflicts. The presence of wine was also socially significant. Wine was a highly esteemed beverage in Scythian society, held in high regard by the state, society, and the individual. For the state, wine was closely associated with the worship of the god of war. In society, wine served as a means of evaluating one's ability to drink with the ruler, with significant rituals only being performed in the presence of wine. For the individual, wine was a way to demonstrate personal competence, with the manner, company, and quantity of wine serving as a means of showcasing one's social status.

### 3. Conclusion

The preceding arguments demonstrate that, in both Western Zhou and Scythia, wine played a significant role in rituals, functioning as a conduit for veneration. Wine was a requisite element in rituals, serving both as a sacrificial offering and as a ritual object. In societies that were in the process of developing civilisations in the two centuries before the common era, the decision to make sacrifices was a matter for national governments. In other words, both in the Western Zhou and in Scythia, wine was closely associated with state governance, imbued with a specific ideology and serving to express the will of the state.

Although wine was of great social importance and its role in society was irreplaceable, the *Jiugao* indicates that in the Western Zhou, wine assumed a certain function of indoctrination and was an important means of maintaining social order. Wine was employed by the state to inculcate a sense of filial piety, to reinforce social norms, and to exhort officials to adhere to the highest standards of conduct, including integrity and accountability. And in Herodotus' *Historiae*, Scythian drinking is often associated with war. Wine was a prominent feature in rituals honouring the god of war and in social drinking practices that demonstrated military prowess and social status, which were closely associated with military prowess. Consequently, wherever wine was present, there was an element associated with war. For the nomadic populations of the era, migration, trekking and warfare were the primary activities, whereas for the agricultural civilisations of the Western Zhou, which had a fixed residence and a fixed source of food and resources, the maintenance of social stability was the overarching objective. The most significant distinction between these two civilisations is that, despite the importance of wine in both, its role differs.

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