

## RESEARCH SUBJECT

Continuity and change  
in ancient and present  
Negev desert viticulture

## TITLE OF PRESENTATION

Terroir and the  
mechanics of past and  
present Negev  
viticulture

The recent resurgence of viticulture in the Negev desert highlands appears based on the same regional bioclimatic features, known in the wine world as *'terroir'*, that existed in the ancient past when the area contained a prolific grape cultivator-wine making network. In both eras, the intense sun, constant wind, early-morning mists, mineral-rich loess soil and varying diurnal temperatures enabled Negev viticulturalists to produce fruity, crisp and well-balanced wines. Even as the operational dynamics of this enterprise have significantly evolved, then as now Negev farmers apply a mixture of technologies to contend with the desert aridity, with some of the modern-day fixes assuming a relatively straightforward form likely appreciated by earlier farmers. Drawing from ethnographic based field research, the following images depict the intergenerational overlapping woven into the mechanics of viticulture at Kerem Ramon, the largest vineyard in the Negev. The vineyard was established in 2010 by fourteen local families within the context of a national program to develop regional agro-tourism. The vineyard currently produces some 200,000 bottles of top-tier wine from 13 grape varieties.



Map depicting southern Israel, Mitzpe Ramon (pop. 5000) & Kerem Ramon (160 acre vineyard)



Arrows pointing to where tractors preparing a tract of desert for grape cultivation in Kerem Ramon, uncovered the remains of a Byzantine Era terrace



Rainwater is no longer essential for desert viticulture; to counter moisture evaporation, sheets of low-tech agricultural grade plastic cover drip irrigation emitters running along the rows of grapes



Drone equipped with infra-red video camera is applied in a vineyard experiment aimed at using foliage temperatures to help formulate a crop's water stress index



Vineyard pest control enacted via a simple bottle trap filled w/an alluring smelly-sticky substance hangs among grape foliage



Whereas once the grape harvest was a society-wide collective undertaking, today it is executed with heavy machinery by a handful of subcontracted professionals



To ensure peak sweetness, grapes are harvested at night and dispatched to a nearby winery for immediate processing; in previous times these logistics were performed with pack animals over several days