It has long been claimed that the earliest "wine culture" in the world emerged in the mountainous regions of Transcaucasia — modern Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan — during the Neolithic period (c. 5000–4000 BCE). The wild Eremacca grape sub-species (Vitis vinifera sylvestris) still thrives at higher elevations in this region. Prehistoric Neolithic communities had been established here by at least 6000 BCE, in which other essential preconditions for this revolution occurred (e.g., pottery-making) also came together for the first time in human history. Once Viticulture had taken hold in Transcaucasia, it appears to have radiated out to other parts of the Near East and eventually to Europe and the New World. Supporting this contention, the pre-Indo-European root meaning "wine," from which the modern Indo-European (including Slavic, Germanic, Italic, and Hellenic branches) and Semitic words are all derived, is believed to have had its origin in the Transcaucasus.

The earliest Neolithic evidence for the beginnings of a true wine culture, in which wine dominated social and domestic life, comes from Georgia (Mikheiluri, along the river Kura in southeastern Georgia), where xeric vines were already utilized. While the domesticated wine grape was the oldest domesticate grape (Vitis vinifera sylvestris), dating from the early sixth millennium BCE, the domesticated vine's main advantage over the wild type is its self-pollinating and thus able to produce a large and predictable fruit crop. This select crop that yielded larger, juicier, and tastier fruits with fewer seeds, the early Neolithic horticulturists also discovered how to duplicate a desirable grapevine by budding and grafting branches.

The invention of pottery during the Neolithic period was crucial for processing, storing, and serving wine. Again, sixth-millennium BCE sites in Georgia — Shal’var and Khvioritsa-Dziri Coca — have yielded the earliest, most important evidence. Even with sedentary farmers on their plantations (wine trees) were decorated with exterior appliqués (that appear to be grape clusters and phallic stick figures) with zero raised, high, under grape clusters.

The importance of Grapiculture in Georgian life seems to have intensified in later periods, finding new forms of cultural expression. For example, impressed or unique artifacts characterize the so-called Trialeti culture of the early second millennium BCE. Large burial mounds (kurgans) are found in the Trialeti itself west of modern Tbilisi, and other sites on the periphery of the period have yielded more finely engraved gold and silver goblets, often depicting drinking scenes or ceremonies (see note on Trialeti goblets, p. 6). Grapevines are even engraved in silver, accentuating the intricate nodal patterns of the plant. The latter specimens, with their nearly 4000-year-old wood still intact, are on display, together with several Trialeti goblets, in the treasury room of the Georgian State Museum.

In parts of Georgia today, especially in the region of Kakheti (to the east and Imereti to the southwest), wine is still made in the traditional way by being fermented, sometimes for several years, in large jars (kvevris) buried up to their necks underground or in artificially carved halikaks (caves). While the earliest instance of this tradition can be traced back to the Iron Age (eighteenth-seventeenth centuries BCE), numerous Roman and Byzantine periods have also been recorded. Wine production continued unabated after the country's conversion to Christianity and throughout medieval times, which was partly aided by the centrality of wine in the Eastern Church. Today as any modern-day traveler to Georgia will discover, secular life is permeated by wine conventions: hardly a small pause without the host assuming the role of hostmaster (Armenian). Long-standing traditions of cultivating the grapevines itself are reflected in the numerous modern red and white grapevine varieties, with each variety known as Saperavi and Khvioritsa, whose origins are probably to be found in the Neolithic period. Professor Boris Ramishvili, the head of the Georgian Agricultural University's viticultural institute, has identified the domesticated grape vine at Shalva. Both he and his father were pioneers in the botanical study of the various taxa. An intermediate type between the wild and domesticated varieties, first identified by and named for the elder Ramishvili, attempts to Georgia's crucial role in demystifying the plant.

Modern scientific analysis and further archaeological investigation of Neolithic sites are needed to fill in this brief overview of Georgia's wine culture. Chemical research on what may be the first wine inside the early Neolithic jars will establish whether or not wine was actually being produced. DNA analysis of ancient grape remains, along with modern cultivars, will enable the genetic history encoded in the Georgian grape varieties to be reconstructed. This will help to determine when and where the Eremacca grape was first domesticated. The so-called Noah hypothesis, named after the biblical patriarch who is said to have planted a vineyard on Mt Ararat (in modern-day Turkey) was not far from the current Georgian border) after the flood, poses that this horticultural advance very probably occurred in Georgia. If this is the case, then Georgia's impact on human civilizations will have been very significant and far-reaching indeed.