

Successful Reintroduction of Ancient Grape Varieties in the Czech Republic

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Abstract: Changes in the law have allowed Czech vintners to produce land wines from some ancient varieties. There is the chance now for the reintroduction of such varieties, when we can clearly explain the pros and cons of these varieties in comparison with the common varieties; plus be able to indicate the possible benefits for those vintners who start to plant these ancient varieties. The successful reintroduction of these ancient varieties could enlarge the selection of wines for sale, and represents an alternative way of storing genetics resources, similar to on-farm conservation.

Keywords: Pinot noir précoce; reintroduction; Traminer white; *Vitis vinifera*

When the Romans established a settlement in the South of the Moravian Region in the 3rd Century, they planted the first vineyards in the Czech Republic. Two ancient European varieties, Pinot noir précoce and Traminer white, were planted during the Middle Ages in the Czech region, Austria, Germany and France.

After that, wine became more important during the reign of Charles IV, due to the establishment of rules for its production, as well as decrees for more farmers to produce wine. Only in the 20th century did beer become more appreciated, because it was cheaper than wine. During the history of grapevine cultivation, some varieties that were produced some centuries ago were either lost, or replaced by others thought to be more favourable. This is the case with the variety Tramin bílý (Tramin White), and the variety Burgundske modré rané (Pinot noir précoce). In 2004, these two varieties were included in the Czech Landrace Catalogue, as varieties for wine making. These two varieties seem to be very suitable for the weather conditions in the Czech Republic. We conducted this evaluation in order to compare ancient and old varieties with cur-

rent commercial ones, in order to gather better information for vintners who are interested in planting the ancient varieties.

Pinot noir précoce is thought to be closely related to Pinot noir, and in old vineyards they were often planted together. There is only a single characteristic which differs between them, and that is earliness. Pinot noir précoce is about two weeks earlier in maturity, compared to Pinot noir.

Traminer white is a rare variety, bearing a morphological resemblance to Traminer rot, which is common. The difference between both varieties not only includes berry colour, but also earliness. In maturity, Traminer rot is about ten days earlier. Additionally, these two varieties were often planted together in ancient times, and the wines were processed from a mixture of bunches from both varieties.

At present, active plantations of Traminer white exist in Switzerland (where this variety is called Heida) and in France (in the Jura region) where it is called Sauvignon blanc. Similarly, in the case of Pinot noir précoce, there are vineyards in Germany planted out with this variety; even selected clones are available in German nurseries.

The reintroduction of Pinot noir précoce started five years ago, when Mr. Pospíšil decided to plant out five ha for young wine production in the Moravian village of Bošovice, and chose this variety. The young plants were imported from Germany.

In the historical park around Castle Kuks in East Bohemia, where a vineyard existed in the 18th century, the new owner, Mr. Rudolfský, decided to revitalize this location and used Traminer white. The young plants were imported from Switzerland.

It became legally possible to make wine from Pinot noir précoce and Traminer white in the Czech Republic in 2004. We looked into the reasons why the above mentioned varietal pairs had such different life stories, and we compare their must quality and suitability for wine processing.

In poor years, when Pinot noir had low amounts of sugar in its must, vintners made a cuvee (blend), using Pinot noir précoce in order to improve the quality of the wine (ŠIMÁČEK 1888). Pinot noir précoce was also recommended as a table wine grape for gardens (FOŘT & DOHNAL 1940). Up until World War II this variety was very common, due to its modest demands for cultivation conditions. At the present time, the earliness and high sugar accumulation are mentioned as a great advantage; however, it is recommended to choose locations with the best climatic conditions and also with rich soil for its planting, as the quality of wine is highly influenced by environmental factors. This is in accord with the opinion of the Moravian vintner who achieved an even better quality of must than had been reached in Karlštejn's vineyard, the same year.

The Austrian region around the town of Gumpoldkirchen has a long tradition of Traminer wine making, but in the Czech region we also have data from the Breeding Station in Mutěnice, where a comparison of Traminer rot and white was made from 1928 to 1940 (BLAHA 1947). In the book by ŠIMÁČEK (1888), a large plantation of Traminer white around the village of Žernoseky was mentioned. At that time, vintners thought highly of Prinč, due to the high quality of its must and its good frost resistance. The disadvantages were higher amounts of acids and late maturation, compared to Traminer rot. It also had the tendency to flower dropping during rainy periods, which could negatively influence the yield. Next season we will be able to evaluate the first bunches of Traminer white in Kuks, and give our recommendation to vintners who have an interest in introducing this variety.

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