

Unit 7 – Thesis / Abstract

Prokupac: New-old wine identity of Serbia

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Motivation

It has been fairly easy for me to choose Prokupac as the topic of my paper for several reasons. It is the oldest and the only autochthonous Serbian grape variety in a relatively significant commercial use at the moment. Unfortunately, very little serious research has been done and very few expert-authored texts have been written about it so far. On the other hand, in recent years there has been a noticeable trend of revitalization of this variety, which has become one of the most popular wine themes in Serbia. Unit 7 Thesis provided me with an opportunity to present a comprehensive and analytical overview of Prokupac and its wines. Basing my thesis on specific arguments, I have tried to introduce ideas for solving the problems of the variety and to give some suggestions for the proper development and positioning of these wines. Believing that it will be useful both for professionals and wine lovers in Serbia, my intention has been to contribute to Prokupac's firm profiling and positioning in Serbia, so that it can later find its place in the global market. Hence, this paper will be my small contribution to uncovering the identity of Prokupac and could serve as a guideline for the development of its potential. I also wanted to present to international wine business professionals this variety as a symbol of the past and possibly the future of Serbian winemaking. If Serbia has a chance on the world wine scene, then it certainly lies in Prokupac. In that context, this paper will be a small contribution to the development of Serbian wine identity.

Problem/Objective

The objective of my paper was a detailed presentation of Prokupac variety and its wines as well as consideration of potential chances in the global market. I placed a special focus on its shortcomings (difficulties in reaching sugar ripeness, and especially phenolic ripeness, insufficiently examined clonal selection, poor availability of quality planting materials, etc.). Due to the lack of knowledge about the characteristics of this variety, there are many different

styles of wines, and it is currently unclear what Prokupac wines are. The ultimate goal of my paper was to suggest some ideas for building a clear identity of Prokupac and its wines, thus allowing for a better insight into its potential in the market, especially the global one. And only then, a precise strategy for branding and marketing could be developed.

Methodology

The main source of information for my paper were interviews with Sasa Matijaević, PhD, from the Department of Viticulture at the Faculty of Agriculture in Belgrade, and then also with Marko Malin, PhD, chief winemaker at the Rubin Winery and consultant in several Serbian wineries, and enologist Radovan Čorović, owner and winemaker at the Čokot Winery, which produces one of the most popular Prokupac wines in Serbia. I have also used the knowledge and information I acquired in Advanced Diploma Course WSET LEVEL 4, as well as through eleven years of experience gained in dealing with wine in the capacity of wine journalist, educator, wine seller and wine festival organiser. I have supported my claims in this paper with the findings of official scientific studies done so far on the subject of Prokupac - almost all of them were done at the Institute Radmilovac, which belongs to the Faculty of Agriculture in Belgrade, and were published in international professional journals and newsletters.

Content

I have presented Prokupac in several sections:

- a) Introduction – A brief overview of the current position of the variety, with special emphasis on the fact that it is the only active Serbian autochthonous variety. Prokupac used to be very popular a long time ago, then completely forgotten and today it is again one of the most current topics on the Serbian wine scene.
- b) Historical background – Presenting the history of Prokupac variety and providing evidence of its existence in Serbia back in the 12th century.
- c) Climate, geography, soil – Overview of geoclimatic factors in Serbia, with special emphasis on Župa region, where Prokupac is most popular and gives the best results.
- d) Viticulture – Presenting the variety profile, in particular its problems: excessive yield; difficulties in reaching sugar and phenolic ripeness; sudden loss of acids in the process of ripening; insufficiently examined clonal selection; poor availability of quality planting material. Prokupac is highly responsive to the application of some agrotechnical

- measures (such as crop thinning and defoliation at an early stage of growing season) and it has been shown that a major improvement can be achieved by their proper application.
- e) Vinification - Characteristics of the variety in wine making, with a focus on maceration. Precisely because of the problem of reaching phenolic ripeness, this stage is particularly important in the process of vinification. Depending on the way of conducting this process, wines can vary considerably both in style and quality - from simple and light ones to the attempts of making robust wines with a firm tannin structure. Taking into account its characteristics, Prokupac is most suitable for the production of light, smooth everyday wines of satisfactory quality.
 - f) Place in the market - Prokupac is now well positioned in the local market; its popularity is increasing and demand exceeds supply, so that the wines are quite easy to sell. It is slightly overpriced for the quality offered (EUR 10), but at the global market it would certainly be lower (EUR 7-8). In that case, Prokupac would have a very good price-quality ratio and thus a chance for successful market positioning.

Conclusion

The main purpose of this topic is to present all aspects of Prokupac in order to provide a better insight into its potential. In line with modern global trends of discovering new wine regions and local varieties, Prokupac certainly has a chance as the only autochthonous Serbian variety. Whether and how it will be used depends on many factors. First of all, it depends on whether the state will develop a serious and comprehensive strategy of Prokupac brand building, and then devise a way to launch these wines in the global market. The potential for good positioning certainly exists –the chances will certainly be greater if Prokupac is presented as variety that gives simple and easy to drink, inexpensive red wines intended for leisurely consumption without excessive aspirations.