

Abstract for “Bandol: reawakening the legend?”, the Unit 7 Thesis submitted by Kevin Gagnon

#### Introduction and motivation:

The thesis I have written concerns itself with Bandol AOC, found on the Mediterranean coast of France between Toulon and Marseilles. It is a small appellation currently better known for its rosé wines than its reds, if it is known at all. Writing about Bandol AOC was a natural choice for me; I became aware of the wines of the appellation in 2009 and, since then, have had great difficulty in finding them on the German market, despite the large amount of wine imported by Germany from France and the quality of the wines produced by the majority of the domains in the AOC. The wines are clearly high-quality and, though often not cheap, they offer good value for money. Combined with the popularity of other appellations from Southern France, I was surprised that there should be so little representation of this, admittedly small, AOC. Due to my tendency to want to learn as much as possible about everything that I enjoy, I was further frustrated with the lack of literature to be found about the appellation. It seems long to have been neglected both by industry publications and by books on wine, at most earning a few pages of ink in books about the South of France. After beginning the Weinakademiker program, it quickly became clear that this AOC would be an ideal zone for me to write about. The direction for the paper virtually presented itself after a short assessment of the situation regarding the German market and what I already knew about the AOC.

#### Problem addressed:

The problem I have chosen to address is the lack of relevance of Bandol AOC on the German market. I investigate whether there is a foundation for the AOC to increase its market relevance in Germany, and then make concrete proposals for the same.

#### Methodology:

The main tool for the assessment is a SWOT Analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) of the AOC. To accomplish this, I first located as much literature as could be found on Bandol AOC and its primary grape, Mourvèdre, in industry publications and in books. Having prepared the background, I organised appointments to conduct interviews, tastings and visits with 15 producers in Bandol, ensuring representation from all levels of quality, as well as representatives from the *Organisme de Défense et de Gestion* (ODG). Tasting the wines was very important to ascertain the overall quality to be had, and particularly important in the case of the older vintages, where I needed to assess the development and age-worthiness of the wines generally. The main objective of the research was to establish first-hand the quality of the wines at all levels, the current state of winemaking and viticulture, experience the history and traditions, the geology and the terroir, and otherwise assess the situation directly in the AOC. To supplement this direct research, I interviewed German wine retailers and importers who represent a broad cross-section of the industry, after having identified those retailers that carry both Bandol and other representative AOCs from Southern France, such as Châteauneuf-du-Pape and Gigondas, or who have done so in the past and have stopped. The main criteria here was an awareness of and experience with Bandol AOC. The results of the interviews and assessment were then compiled, summarised and gleaned for the relevant information with which to create the SWOT Analysis, which was then carried out and evaluated to create the proposals for addressing the problem.

#### Content:

Included in the paper is a brief history of the region, an overview of the geology, climate, winemaking and viticulture, a special vignette focused on the grape variety Mourvèdre, a brief

introduction to six representative domains and my experience of their wines, summarised results of my interviews in both Bandol and in Germany, the SWOT analysis, my evaluation of all of the data collected, and, finally, my solutions and suggestions for how to increase the relevance of Bandol AOC in the German market. Furthermore, the appendices contain a superb map of the appellation kindly supplied by Octopus Publishing Group, details on the interviews conducted both in France and Germany, and a table of all wines tasted, with special remarks where applicable. Naturally, a bibliography and table of contents are also included.

#### Conclusion:

My conclusions from the research were very clear: Bandol AOC is perhaps not forgotten so much as it is unknown. The wines are of high quality. The zone has a variety of strengths that make it ideal for the German market, including organic production, the wines offer good value for money, climate change is not a challenge and there are other, better-known appellations that can be used as a basis for comparison to establish the quality and value offered by the wines of the AOC. Weaknesses that were uncovered, such as the inactivity of the ODG internationally to promote the AOC, as well as apathy from – mostly older – producers, can be overcome. There is a common will from many quality producers, and there is a new, ambitious president of the ODG. If things move politically in the zone, as they look set to, the wines can be positioned properly, as premium products, for the German market, which will help to justify the prices as well as the small quantities available. Once retailers and sommeliers have the opportunity to be convinced about the quality of them, the wines will essentially sell themselves. Wine ambassadors should be employed by the ODG directly to bring the wines to the relevant decision-makers in Germany and elsewhere.