

Abstract

Will the grape variety Nebbiolo Rosé have a future in the DOCG's of Barolo and Barbaresco?

Yvo Erades

The reason for me to write this thesis is that I think it's very special that a new grape variety is discovered in such an old region as Piedmont. Clearly winemakers over the past decades never really felt it was a different variety and that it had enough in common with the other clones of Nebbiolo. I guess it would be same thing if they would find out in Burgundy that one of their clones of Pinot Noir is not really Pinot Noir but a cross between Pinot Noir and something we don't know yet.

Nebbiolo Rosé used to be seen, next to Lampia, Michet and Bolla, as one of the clones of Nebbiolo. However, ampelographers investigated the DNA of this thought to be clone of Nebbiolo and concluded recently that it is not a clone, but a different variety. Given those recent insights, the question is now whether this variety can still be used in the DOCG's of Barolo and Barbaresco, or whether it has to be excluded from the DOCG's, with as a consequence that the wines containing Rosé, which we used to regard as pure expressions of the DOCG's, could eventually no longer be called Barolo or Barbaresco.

The objective of the thesis is thus to discuss the future of Nebbiolo Rosé in the Langhe. First we take a look to the history of Nebbiolo and consequently Nebbiolo Rosé as in the recent past the two were never seen as separate varieties. The history of Barolo is rich and plentiful with a lot of evolution in the winestyle and winemaking process all to cater to the changing taste. Than a further and more detailed and technical approach is taken to see what Dr. Anna Schneider and her colleagues found on Nebbiolo and Nebbiolo Rosé. And what the two varieties have in common and what not.

Ian d'Agata writes in his book the Native Wine Grapes of Italy, "Nebbiolo Rosé is instead distinct from Nebbiolo and hence I treat it separatley in this book, as should every other wine writer" He adds later "I love this grape: sure, wines made with Nebbiolo are more complete and balanced, but wines born from Nebbiolo Rosé have an utterly compelling and mesmerizing perfume that is truly unforgettable."

He also references wines which he counts among the great of Piedmont. Apart from the Elvio Cogno, pure Nebbiolo Rosé, which he describes as "pale ruby in hue, penetratingly perfumed (rose petal, red currant, sour red cherry, marzipan, white pepper, violet, iris) austere, and mineral; years of patience are required for it to smoothen out completely, but even then it never displays the creamy charm and power of other Nebbiolo Lampia-dominated Barolos and Barbarescos."

No longer in existence but hallmarks of the variety are the wines Barolo Briacca that used to be made by Vietti, entirely Nebbiolo Rosé. And another truly great Italian wine of the past, is the vineyard which now owned by Gaja, Barbaresco Podere del Pajoré by Giovannino Moresco that was also a monovarietal Nebbiolo Rosé.

Through DNA profiling, researchers in Anna Schneider's laboratory at Torino and José Vouillamoz at UC Davis found that Nebbiolo Rosé is not a clone of Nebbiolo but is a distinct variety. Furthermore, Nebbiolo Rosé turned out to have a parent offspring relationship with

Nebbiolo. Several other parent offspring relationships were also discovered between Nebbiolo and traditional varieties from Piedmont (Freisa, Vespolina, and Bubbierasco) and Valtellina (Negrera and Rossola). While the complete pedigree of Nebbiolo is still unknown, these relationships indicate that Nebbiolo as a grape probably has its roots in Piedmont and/or Lombardia. In addition, a possible parent offspring relationship was suggested between Freisa and Viognier, so that Nebbiolo and Viognier are likely to be cousins.

For Nebbiolo Rosé on the other hand, genetic analyses have not only found a different genetic profile, but also referred to as very likely a parental relationship with Nebbiolo Lampia, because they found in the Simple Sequence Repeats markers analysed that these two genotypes always at least have one common gene. Although the presence of Nebbiolo Rosé seems limited to Alba, where it can have been derived from the crossing with the most common genotype, Nebbiolo Lampia, with another unknown parent. They add that even if the present state of knowledge cannot be prove that it is the same Nebbiolo Rosé that we know today is the one to have given birth to the Nebbiolo Lampia.

There are two paths for Nebbiolo Rosé, one is to keep it as it is with the change of the disciplinare as of 2010. And say that Barolo and Barbaresco should be made from 100% Nebbiolo and than just neglect the fact that Nebbiolo Rosé is not a real Nebbiolo. On the other hand you could acknowledge that Nebbiolo Rosé is the different grape variety that it is. And add another category of Barolo, Barolo Rosé DOCG. A wine which should be made 100% of Nebbiolo Rosé as Barolo DOCG is made from 100% Nebbiolo Lampia or Michet. In this way the cultural heritage of the grape could be saved and probably it also saves it from becoming extinct. Because the Nebbiolo Rosé which is now found in the vineyards will probably be ripped out if this could no longer be sold at the premium price at which Barolo or Barbaresco is sold.

I think this would be a viticultural loss, and that we should protect the variety also in the top vineyards were it is planted now. Because its here were the grape can come to its greatest heights and expression. The result would be that very tiny quantities of assumingly very elegant and perfumed wine could find it's way to the market. Even a way to make other producers replant the variety in their vineyards.

The variety Nebbiolo Rosé will have probably no future in the DOCG's of Barolo and Barbaresco. The variety is not Nebbiolo and should get it's own expression and rights for survival. It has been a too big integral part of both the DOCG's histories and one can only hope that the Italian government and wine bodies give the right of existence it deserves. If we look to the history there is evidence that these wines can be as interesting and long lived as a "normal" Barolo. If we look at the research we see that one and other are so close linked that Lampia is probably the parent of Rosé and that the two belong in the vineyard's of Barolo and Barbaresco. If look to the wine of Elvio Cogno we see that something special happens there and that the wine is a good example of modern day Barolo winemaking. Therefore we can conclude that Nebbiolo is different but Nebbiolo Rosé has the right to live on and survive, but maybe with a career on it's own.