

Origine del Gewürztraminer: il DNA incontra la storia

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Riassunto

[Excerpts from the forthcoming 'Great Wine Grape Book' by Jancis Robinson, José Vouillamoz & Julia Harding, due out through Penguin Press in 2012-3]

Do not speak about the 'Savagnin family' or the 'Traminer family'

Traminer, or Savagnin as it is called in the Jura and Franche-Comté in north-east France, is a very old variety that has developed several different forms over centuries of vegetative reproduction, like other very old varieties such as Pinot, Trebbiano Toscano or Gouais Blanc. Today Traminer shows a considerable level of clonal diversity, seen in berry colour, aroma, leaf shape, cluster size and so on. Several of these forms have often been mistakenly considered to be distinct varieties, for example: Gewürztraminer in Alsace, Südtirol/Trentino-Alto Adige in Italy and in Germany, Heida or Païen in Switzerland, Traminer or Traminer Weisser in Germany, Traminer Aromatico in the Südtirol/Trentino-Alto Adige in Italy. Yet DNA profiling has shown that they all have the same genetic fingerprint, with the exception of some minor clonal genetic differences, and that they all correspond to the same variety. It is consequently misleading to talk about a 'Savagnin family' or a 'Traminer family' because this suggests family ties such as parent-offspring, uncle-nephew, cousins.

Traminer is not from Tramin

Traminer is usually said to originate from the village of Tramin/Termenò in the Südtirol/Trentino-Alto Adige in northern Italy, whence it spread to Switzerland and Germany before reaching central Europe and France, in particular the Franche-Comté. This legend was probably sparked off by German botanist Hieronymus Bock who wrote in his *Kreuterbuch* in 1539: 'darnach Traminer drauben/deren wachsen vil inn der Etsch/als zu Tramyn und Elsaß' (then Traminer grapes/that grow widely in the Etschtal/as well as in Tramin and Alsace). However, numerous old documents reject Südtirol as the origin of Traminer:

- In the 19th century, German ampelographer Johann Philipp Bronner visited the Südtirol/Trentino-Alto Adige and was surprised not to find a single Traminer vine.
- Neither Traminer nor any of its synonyms was ever mentioned in Italian ampelography books before the 19th century, when plantings of Traminer began in the Südtirol.
- There is no local synonym for Traminer in the Südtirol, which there probably would have been if the variety had been cultivated there for centuries.
- The first occurrence of the name Traminer for a wine was 'vini de Traminne' (wines from Tramin/Termenò) in a document about wine prices issued on 17 September 1242 in Bolzano/Bozen in the Südtirol/Trentino-Alto Adige in northern Italy. However, Traminer wines were made back then from several distinct varieties (Muscat Blanc à Petits Grains/Moscato Bianco/Muskateller Weiss and Weisser

- Lagrein among the oldest), but certainly not from the variety Traminer.
- Mentions of Traminer as 'wine from Tramin' appeared in many documents in the Middle Ages, for example: 'wein guets Traminer' (good wine from Tramin) in the Tirol in 1362, Tramin at the Council of Constance in 1414, Traminer in Strasbourg in 1450, Traminner also in Strasbourg in 1514, Traminer in Basel in 1532, Traminer Wein in Tirol in 1558. This explains why the most planted variety of the Rheintal in Germany was named Traminer as early as 1483 at the monastery of Bebenhausen near Stuttgart - a deliberate attempt to piggy-back on the fame the wines from Tramin had at that time.
 - The variety is called Traminer in the village of Tramin/Termenò in the Südtirol, which makes this an unlikely origin because no one in Tramin would have simply named it Traminer if it had originated there (otherwise they would have had several grapes all called Traminer).

History of Gewürztraminer

Gewürztraminer is not a distinct variety, it is simply an aromatic mutation of Traminer Rot, itself being a colour mutation of Traminer Weiss. The first occurrence of the name Gewürztraminer (*gewürz* is the German for spicy, aromatic) appeared in Germany in 1827 under the pen of Johann Metzger: 'Rother Traminer. Rother Rießling bei Oppenheim, Traminer kleiner, Gewürztraminer im Rheingau, aber äußerst selten und nur an einigen Orten gekannt' (Rother Traminer. Rother Rießling near Oppenheim, Traminer kleiner, Gewürztraminer in Rheingau, but rare outside this area and only known in a few places). This mention strongly suggests that the mutation occurred in the Rhineland-Palatinate, which is backed up by the first mention in France in 1886 in Oberlin, Alsace: 'le Gewürztraminer, rouge (une variété du Edler), du Palatinat' (Gewürztraminer, red (a variety of Edler), from the Pfalz).

DNA meets History

So where does Traminer most likely originate from? The most recent DNA parentage analyses have shown the following natural genetic relationships, which are the result of natural crosses:

- In northern France, Traminer and Gouais Blanc have given birth to Aubin Blanc in the Lorraine and to Petit Meslier in Champagne. Traminer also has parent-offspring relationships with Pinot and with Teinturier but it is not possible to tell which is the parent and which the progeny. In addition, it has crossed with a single, unknown and probably extinct variety to give birth to Sauvignon Blanc, Trousseau and Chenin Blanc, which are therefore siblings.
- In southern France, Traminer is a likely parent of Petit Manseng and a grandparent of Gros Manseng, both in the Pyrénées-Atlantiques, and has likely parent-offspring relationships with Béquignol Noir from the Gironde and Téoulier Noir from Provence.
- In Austria, Traminer and Österreichisch Weiss gave birth to Silvaner, while Traminer and Roter Veltliner are the parents of Rotgipfler. It was also recently shown that Traminer is a parent of Grüner Veltliner through a cross with St-Georgener.

Based on historical and genetic data, it seems that Traminer was born somewhere between north-east France and south-east Germany, either through a natural cross between Pinot and an unknown variety, or through a natural cross between two more ancient, undetermined and most likely extinct varieties.