

## **ABSTRACT** of the Weinakademiker Thesis (D7)

“Reviving of ancient Hungarian grape varieties and their commercial value today”

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### **Motivation**

Hungary is experiencing a notable revival of native Carpathian Basin varieties. Over the past 20 years, a handful of producers have, using the propagation materials found in the Pécs gene bank, worked hard but with even greater enthusiasm to bring these varieties back into production. The first plantings have matured into stable vineyards, yielding high-quality wines. Today, production has reached a reasonable size range that has enabled it to open to the general public. Hungary is a small country, and every opportunity to show its uniqueness must be seized. That is why I dedicated the topic of my thesis to this phenomenon.

### **Objective**

This thesis explores whether the enthusiasm of the winemakers is justified, is the production economically viable, and if these local varieties can succeed alongside internationally recognized ones to strengthen Hungary's reputation in the wine market?

### **Methodology**

The thesis explores the development, systematization and preservation of indigenous varieties. It details the viticultural and oenological characteristics, looking at the positive or negative effects of factors in production. Wines are evaluated using organoleptic methodology. Mapping supply and demand, the routes to reach consumers, and market opportunities will address the questions posed.

The research includes historical descriptions, collections, interviews with growers, and professional sources. Wine evaluations are based on my own personal tastings using WSET methodology. Marketing data is sourced from producers, distributors and online sources.

### **Content**

Ancient Hungarian wines are originated from the Carpathian Basin, the natural border of Hungary till 1918. Grapes developed or naturalized here at least 200-300 years ago, grow exclusively or predominantly in this area with outstanding impact on local viticulture and winemaking are part of the “vinum hunicum” group. Some of the varieties has been cultivated throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century establishing the awareness of original Hungarian breeds such as Furmint, Kadarka, Hárslevelű. Others, more sensitive to weather conditions, specific cultivation and pruning methods, and unable to adapt to mechanisation, were neither revived after the phylloxera era nor survived the large-scale production of the communism, and thus completely vanished from active viticulture in Hungary.

In 2003, Mr Jozsef Szentesi took the challenge to plant 10 white and 10 blue varieties from those ancient grapes. In the thesis I have deliberately focused on 7 white and 7 blue varieties, based on their pre-phylloxera and current distribution, importance, wine quality and potential. These are in alphabetical order: Bakator, Budai zöld, Csókaszőlő, Góhér, Fehér járdovány, Kék bajor, Purcsin, Sárfhér, Szerémi zöld, Tarcali kék, Tihanyi kék.

Since the early 2000s, the Hungarian National Wine Law has recognized Budai zöld, Csókaszőlő, Bakator and Kék bajor as state-recognised varieties qualified for PDO or PGI wines. Additionally, several high biological value varieties such as Feketefájú bajor, Hajnos kék, Kék bajor, Purcsin, Tarcali kék and Tihanyi kék are registered as experimental plantations, allowing for their propagation and sale under their respective names.

Previously widely cultivated before phylloxera, recently, the growing area is considered as micro and small-scale, encompassing around 20 ha area under cultivation. Producers started to recognize the potential of certain ancient varieties under local conditions, perfectly matching the regional characteristics and microclimate. The cultivation methods of the ancient breeds require significant manpower and advanced pruning skills, although some varieties such as Szerémi zöld and Budai zöld could be adapted for large-scale technology as well. Traditionally used ancient mixed plantations are no longer common, which could challenge the productivity of the female-type varieties like Bakator, Góhér, and Sárfehér where ensuring the right pollinator variety is essential to secure sufficient fruit set and yield.

Providing suitable conditions, ancient varieties show good to very good quality with some excellent potential for being outstanding. Typically, high acidity, even at longer ripening period, gives good structure with noticeable fruitiness, while barrel maturation adds more complexity for those able to integrate wood aromas, such as Szerémi zöld, Csókaszőlő, Tihanyi kék and Tarcali kék. There is a historical practice of making cuvees from grapes with similar characteristics, such as the early-ripening Lisztes, Góhér and Budai Zöld for white wines and Csókaszőlő and Kadarka known as “Buda cuvee” for the reds. Some carries characteristics for versatility, suitable for producing still or sparkling, dry or sweet, rosé or red wines. One will find light bistro wines or a more tannic kind, with a broad the spectrum of the aromas.

## **Conclusion**

Although these wines are not yet widely famous, their distinctiveness stands out when presented, offering consumers good opportunity to experience something very special, sought after by local guests and international traders. In the future, maintaining the balance between demand and supply shall be based on using reliable, high-quality varieties with consistent yields. Producers must increase production to achieve the collateral benefits of better selection for being able to show full potential of a variety. Collaboration should be established by producers, research institutions, supported by legal frameworks to leverage each other's expertise and experience.

Efforts to reintroduce and recognize ancient Hungarian wine varieties must continue. These breeds, developed over centuries in the Carpathian Basin, offer a chance for Hungary's wine sector to gain global recognition with unique local specialties that can rival international varieties in taste and aroma.

## **Acknowledgement**

I am thankful for establishing a valuable relationship with the growers of the ancient grape varieties, observing their dedication and enthusiasm. I hope that their endurance will yield success, and I aim to support them to the best of my ability with my acquired winemaking knowledge.