Motivation for Choosing the Topic

As a committed wine enthusiast, I have always been proud of the diversity of Bulgaria's indigenous grape varieties. I have had a personal interest in the Struma River Valley and its native grape varieties for many years and have been privileged to work with some of the region's producers on wine-related projects. The Struma River Valley is also one of the fastest-developing wine regions in Bulgaria over the past two decades. I believe that wines produced from indigenous grape varieties in the region have the potential to become among the most recognizable and highly regarded Bulgarian wines, both in the domestic market and internationally.

Thesis Objective

The objective of this thesis is to examine the diversity and potential of the indigenous grape varieties of the Struma River Valley in Bulgaria, as well as the contribution they make to the identity and development of the region. Particular attention is given to the opportunities and challenges facing the local wine industry in relation to grape growing, winemaking, marketing, and the commercialization of wines produced from indigenous grape varieties. The thesis also evaluates the future potential of these varieties within both domestic and export markets.

Methodology

The opportunities and challenges facing the local wine industry are examined through a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis. The analysis focuses on grape growing, winemaking, marketing, and the sale of wines produced from indigenous grape varieties with the highest potential in the Struma River Valley.

The research is based on both secondary and primary sources. Secondary research includes relevant academic and industry literature, as well as publications by Bulgarian and international wine authors. Primary research was conducted through face-to-face interviews with local grape growers, wine producers, an agronomist, and a specialist wine retailer and sommelier. The interviews were conducted in Bulgaria in April 2026.

Content

The thesis consists of six chapters, followed by a bibliography and acknowledgements. The first chapter provides a brief introduction. The second chapter presents the most important historical events and developments that have influenced the Bulgarian wine industry. Chapter Three introduces the Struma River Valley, including its geographical location, climate, soils, principal indigenous grape varieties and their characteristics, as well as the international varieties cultivated in the region. Chapter Four contains a SWOT analysis focused on grape growing, winemaking, marketing, and the commercialization of wines

produced from indigenous grape varieties with the highest market potential in the Struma River Valley. Chapter Five examines the future prospects of the region and discusses the potential of Broad-Leaved Melnik to become a flagship Bulgarian grape variety. The sixth chapter presents the conclusions of the research.

Conclusion

The current generation of producers in the Struma Valley is opening a new chapter in quality-focused wine production. Important progress has already been made through the recognition that high-quality wines can only be produced from high-quality grapes. Higher standards in both the vineyard and the winery have become essential, and producers are demonstrating not only passion but also knowledge, expertise, experience, and strategic thinking focused on differentiation.

The SWOT analysis highlights significant strengths and opportunities for the region's most promising indigenous grape variety, Broad-Leaved Melnik, as well as for its related varieties. At the same time, increasing attention is being given to Keratsuda, which is attracting growing interest among producers seeking to explore the potential of indigenous white grape varieties.

The findings of this research indicate that the future prospects for the Struma Valley and its indigenous grape varieties are favourable. Nevertheless, important challenges remain. Climate change, water scarcity, economic uncertainty, inflationary pressures, and evolving consumer preferences all represent factors that may influence the future development of the region and its wines.

The local wine industry has already begun to embrace common quality-oriented production principles and to recognize the importance of cooperation in marketing and regional promotion. The long-term success of the region will depend on the ability of producers to align their strategic objectives, maintain high quality standards, and communicate a clear and distinctive regional identity to consumers.

The pace at which the wines of the Struma Valley achieve stronger commercial positioning and international recognition will depend largely on the successful implementation of these strategic priorities, as well as on the preservation of the region's unique cultural and viticultural heritage.

Based on the findings of this thesis, Broad-Leaved Melnik and the related indigenous grape varieties of the Struma Valley appear to be well positioned for further development and increased recognition over the next five to ten years. Their future success, however, will depend on continued commitment to quality, effective regional cooperation, and the ability to adapt to future environmental and market challenges.