# The New Wave of Old-Vine Garnacha in Sierra de Gredos

Weinakademiker Thesis Abstract

Dennis Weijers

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**Motivation for choosing this topic**

Sierra de Gredos has undergone a remarkable revival in the twenty-first century. Driven by old-vine Garnacha and a new generation of growers and winemakers, the region has shifted from bulk-wine production towards terroir-focused fine wine. This topic was selected because Sierra de Gredos has become one of the most dynamic and closely watched Garnacha regions in Spain, while remaining relatively underexplored in systematic wine research. The region also serves as a case study of how neglected old vineyards in marginal mountain areas can be revalued through premiumisation, site expression and renewed critical attention.

**Problem and objective**

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the rise of old-vine Garnacha in Sierra de Gredos and to assess its significance within the contemporary fine-wine landscape. More specifically, the study investigates how the region's history, growing environment, vineyard practices, winemaking choices and structural conditions have shaped the current "new wave" of Gredos wines, and whether this revival can underpin a sustainable long-term future for the region. The thesis addresses questions of terroir and wine style alongside broader issues of economic, social and institutional sustainability.

**Methodology**

The research combines a literature review with qualitative fieldwork conducted in Sierra de Gredos. Fieldwork consisted of semi-structured interviews with six winemakers, supported by vineyard and cellar visits and guided tastings. Podcasts and online sources were used to complement and contextualise the written and interview material. The study has several limitations: it is based on a limited number of interviews and visits, does not represent all producers or sub-zones, and remains qualitative rather than quantitative, without attempting a full economic analysis. Instead, it develops a focused, interpretive account of the principal dynamics shaping old-vine Garnacha in Sierra de Gredos today.

**Content**

The thesis first examines the modern history of Sierra de Gredos. It shows how the region long functioned as a bulk-wine-producing area in central Spain, where Garnacha was undervalued and many old vineyards were abandoned as grape prices remained low and rural depopulation intensified. The analysis then considers how a group of pioneering producers reassessed the potential of old bush vines on granite and slate soils, contributing to a qualitative reappraisal of the region and laying the foundations for the present revival.

The study next examines the growing environment and viticultural conditions of Sierra de Gredos. It identifies altitude, climate, soils and fragmented old vineyards as key natural and structural factors shaping the region's wines. Most vineyards are dry-farmed bush vines on decomposed granite, with important slate formations in certain sectors, especially around Cebreros, favouring low yields and labour-intensive viticulture but also wines with a strong sense of site. Garnacha is by far the dominant red variety, while Albillo Real remains the historic white grape.

The analysis then explores winemaking and wine style. Many new-wave producers favour low-intervention techniques, gentle extraction and restrained oak use to express freshness, finesse and transparency to place. The resulting wines are typically pale to medium in colour, moderate in alcohol and marked by floral aromatics, fine tannins and notable acidity. Sierra de Gredos is not stylistically homogeneous, however: higher and cooler granite sites tend to yield more lifted, mineral and tension-driven wines, whereas warmer or slate-influenced sites often produce broader, riper and more Mediterranean expressions.

A SWOT framework is used to assess the broader position of Sierra de Gredos as a wine region. The analysis highlights distinctive mountain terroir, stylistic individuality and growing critical prestige as key strengths, while emphasising structural weaknesses such as vineyard fragmentation, difficult topography, labour shortages, low yields and limited infrastructure. Major opportunities lie in further export development, the growth of wine tourism and the strengthening of regional identity and branding. Main threats relate to rural depopulation, climate change, economic fragility and the ongoing fragmentation of the region across several appellations.

Building on this, the thesis explores the future of old-vine Garnacha in Gredos in terms of the conditions required for a resilient premium wine economy. Particular emphasis is placed on value-led export growth, the development of wine tourism and the question of whether Sierra de Gredos needs a stronger shared appellation framework or can continue to rely on existing denominations and an informal common identity.

**Conclusion**

The thesis concludes that Sierra de Gredos has developed from a neglected source of bulk Garnacha into one of Spain's most distinctive fine-wine regions. Its emerging identity is rooted in altitude, old vines, granite and slate soils, fragmented vineyard landscapes and low-intervention winemaking. Nevertheless, the revival remains fragile. Its long-term success will depend on improved economic sustainability for growers, the development of wine tourism and the strengthening of Sierra de Gredos as a shared regional identity across existing appellation boundaries.

Overall, the study concludes that the recent critical prestige of Gredos can only become a durable wine culture if qualitative recognition is converted into lasting social, economic and institutional renewal.