Weinakademiker Thesis - Abstract

Title of the Thesis: THE RESCUE OF SCHIOPPETTINO - A Story to Discover

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Background and Motivation

My interest in Schioppettino began with its unusual destiny: a grape documented since medieval times, yet almost forgotten by the mid-twentieth century. When I discovered how close it came to extinction, and how the Rapuzzi family of Ronchi di Cialla managed to rescue the last surviving vines in the 1970s, I felt that this story deserved to be told in full. The motivation for this thesis comes from this unique combination of history, identity and human determination. When I first listened from the family members this rescue story and tasted their wines, I was so impressed that when I had to choose a subject for my D7 thesis my mind went immediately to that experience. Meeting the Rapuzzi family and accessing their private archive added a personal meaning to the work and strengthened my desire to understand not only what happened, but why.

Research Questions and Objectives

The thesis is built around two research questions.

RQ1 asks how Schioppettino was able to survive and eventually revive after decades of absence from official registers, and which historical, agronomic and institutional factors made this possible.

RQ2 examines the current and potential future relevance of the grape variety, especially the role of Schioppettino di Cialla in shaping its reputation in Italy and abroad.

These two questions guided the structure of the research and helped keep the focus on both the past and the future of the variety.

Methodology and Sources

To answer the two questions, the thesis uses a combination of methods. A large part of the investigation relies on historical and institutional documents taken from the Rapuzzi family archive, including letters, municipal minutes, early technical notes, press articles and reports by local experts. These sources allow a detailed reconstruction of the period when Schioppettino was not authorized or recommended and how replanting it required special permissions. In addition, I conducted interviews with Dina, Pierpaolo and Jacopo Rapuzzi, whose personal memories help explain the motivations, challenges and emotions that accompanied the revival. I also consulted recent studies on Friulian terroirs, climate data for Cialla, and market information on the growing interest in native varieties. I also met few times the Brand Ambassador of the Consorzio Colli Orientali del Friuli where the biggest portion of Schioppettino is today cultivated. I organized a couple of Schioppettino tasting experiences, involving some DiplWset of Veneto and Friuli, to better understand its aging capacity (Ronchi di Cialla vertical) and the very extensive styles range (horizontal). Finally, a SWOT analysis was used to evaluate the current position of Schioppettino and identify elements that could influence its future development.

Scope and Structure of the Thesis

The thesis reconstructs the historical evolution of the grape, its disappearance from official registries, and the reasons behind this decline. The central chapters describe how the Rapuzzi family rescued the last vines, navigated bureaucratic obstacles, and gradually obtained the re-authorization of the grape, its inclusion in the Colli Orientali del Friuli DOC and the recognition of the Cialla subzone in 1995. These events form the core answer to RQ1.

A second group of chapters addresses RQ2 by exploring the terroir of Cialla, the stylistic profile of the wines, and the evolution of their reputation over time. This includes comments from journalists, official recognitions, tasting experiences as well as international plantings witnesses, inspired by the Cialla model. The SWOT analysis provides a final overview of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats that could influence the future of the grape.

Key Findings and Conclusions

The conclusion of the thesis is that Schioppettino di Cialla is a unique case in Italian wine history: a variety brought back from the edge of extinction thanks to the vision of one family, later supported by institutions and recognized by wine professionals. The answer to RQ1 shows that the revival was possible because of the combination of cultural awareness, personal dedication and favorable terroir conditions. The answer to RQ2 highlights that Schioppettino has a clear identity and some growing interest from wine lovers, but its future is far from guaranteed. Production remains very small, and the many different styles produced across Friuli can make it difficult for consumers to understand what to expect from the grape. Communication is still limited, and the variety is not yet strong enough to grow beyond a niche. However, the research also shows a different and important dimension: when Schioppettino is interpreted with consistency and depth—as in the Cialla valley—it can offer wines of great personality, freshness and longevity. The enthusiasm expressed by experts and passionate tasters, especially when evaluating aged bottles, demonstrates that the grape has the potential to write meaningful pages in the future of Italian wine. Its structure, aromatic profile and contemporary style (both in the classical version and the RiNera approach) align well with today's preferences for elegant and terroir-driven wines.

More broadly, the case shows how local heritage can survive when passion and determination meet a strong sense of responsibility toward the territory, but it also reminds us that protecting and positioning a rare variety is a long and delicate process. This thesis aims to document this story in a simple and honest way, faithful to the people and the place that made it possible.

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