

The Zweigelt grape variety – experts oppose renaming

After many years of detailed reappraisal and scrutiny and after having accorded careful consideration to material which has now come to light for the first time, an independent Committee of Historians has unanimously arrived at the view that the Zweigelt grape variety should not be renamed. This recommendation will be followed by representatives of Austrian viticulture policy and by the Supervisory Board of the Austrian Wine Marketing Board.

“Blauer Zweigelt” is Austria’s most important red wine grape, and no other red variety is grown over a wider area in the country. It has, however, been a constant object of debate in national and international media. The reason for this is connected with the person who first cultivated the variety, Professor Friedrich Zweigelt (1888-1964). Zweigelt gained a doctorate in entomology and went on to become Director of what is now the Federal Institute of Viticulture and Fruit Production in Klosterneuburg. However, as well as being Head of Austria’s sole state-owned vine cultivation station, he was also a committed National Socialist.

Gaps in Zweigelt’s biography had been evident for many years. Documentation regarding the role he played in the inter-war years and especially during the period following the annexation of Austria by Nazi Germany was incomplete. In 2016, therefore, the Austrian Wine Marketing Board (AWMB) decided to attempt to put events into context by undertaking a comprehensive historical investigation of the issue within the scope of a book entitled “Wine in Austria: The History”. The historian Professor Ernst Langthaler set out the general picture of Austrian wine growing during the era of the Third Reich, and the services of Dr. Daniel Deckers, a renowned wine historian and long-serving FAZ editor, were acquired to look at the topic of Zweigelt in particular. This new standard work on the history of Austrian viticulture was instigated by Willi Klinger, who served as Managing Director of the Austrian Wine Marketing Board for many years. It was published by Brandstätter Verlag in October 2019. Professor Karl Vocelka acted as lead academic researcher for the project and also contributed articles. An English edition of the work followed at the end of 2019.

During the course of extensive research in various archives in Austria and Germany, Dr. Deckers uncovered a wealth of material that had not been examined previously. This enabled various contentious aspects of Zweigelt’s biography to be clarified beyond doubt, and a clear overall picture of the life and work of this much-discussed personality has now emerged. The chapter authored by Dr. Deckers also cleared up the question as to how the naming of the “Zweigelt” grape variety arose. The widespread assertion that Zweigelt himself had initially applied the designation “Rotburger” to the variety was definitely refuted. The name “Zweigeltrebe” appeared for the first time in 1972, when the new Grape Variety Index for Qualitätsweine (Quality Wines) was launched. The name of the variety was altered to “Blauer Zweigelt” in 1978.

At the request of the Federal Institute of Viticulture and Fruit Production in Klosterneuburg, the synonym “Rotburger” was created at the same time. The aim here was to demonstrate that the new cultivations of Blauburger, Goldburger and Rotburger/Blauer Zweigelt all shared a common origin.

On 26 May 2019, Dr. Deckers presented his results to an audience of around 200 national and international journalists, who had assembled on the occasion of the AWMB’s Wine Summit in Vienna. Since this time, his article has also been available for download in unabridged form on the AWMB website in both [German](#) and [English](#). An abbreviated version can also be accessed from anywhere in the world via Jancis Robinson’s [“Purple Pages”](#).

In autumn 2019, Willi Klinger convened a Committee of Historians to look at the findings produced by Dr. Deckers and to discuss the question of whether the variety should receive a different name. The members of the committee were Dr. Daniel Deckers himself, Professor Ernst Langthaler, Professor Oliver Rathkolb, Dr. Robert Streibel, Michaela Vocelka and Professor Karl Vocelka. Following thorough consultations, the committee arrived at the unanimous conclusion not to recommend a renaming of the grape variety. The feeling was that a new designation would not be conducive in terms of pursuing the necessary reappraisal of Zweigelt’s problematic career. Indeed, such a process had only recently been properly instigated, and this would bring it to an abrupt end again. The outcome would be to create a distorted picture of historical events, and a renaming would do nothing to undo Zweigelt’s cultivation achievements. The committee also emphasised that the Austrian Wine Law permits any producer a free choice between the variety names of “Zweigelt” and “Rotburger”, which are used as synonyms.

The Supervisory Board of the Austrian Wine Marketing Board and a panel representing the Austrian wine sector acceded to this recommendation. The Zweigelt grape variety will thus not be renamed. The existing statutory regulation regarding the synonym “Rotburger” remains in place.

Additional information:

[Link](#) to “Friedrich Zweigelt as reflected by contemporary sources” by Dr. Daniel Deckers (Article from: “Wine in Austria: The History”)

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