

Expectations: Rosati of Puglia
Prof. B. Smith

It is with deep regret that I am unable to join you in the beautiful surroundings of Otranto to share with you the best of the region, to learn more about its wines, and to celebrate the increasing recognition and rising reputation of Puglia in the world of wine. I hope I will have a chance to visit you on soon.

The brilliant light, the olive trees, the white stone and the iron-rich soils have given this fertile plain an abundance, perhaps at times too great an abundance, of grapes and now there is growing realization that care must be taken to use this abundance well. There have long been vines growing here because the soil was fertile and from the red clay came riches but with limestone to drain the vines and promise more acidity, and grip. The grapes grew in abundance, but they had to be cultivated and selected to produce wines of excellent quality, and this growing trend towards quality means more time and patience, greater efforts in the vineyard and the adoptions of new techniques. All of this will produce high quality wines that do so much to represent the region and its wine culture. At the same time, one must hold on to the essential features of the region and of vines grown here.

Not all wines will be at the same level. The differences encourage us, as tasters, to use our powers of discrimination, to seek out the differences. But in all cases, what we search for is something authentic: a wine that speaks of place and craft and tradition. Tradition resides both in human practice and in the materials fashioned into wines. These include the soils, the vines and the varietals. Here, as in so many parts of Italy, a wide range of grape varietals are kept alive to express difference and distinction. In this region, Negroamaro, Primitivo, Aglianico, Bombino Nero and many more varietals thrive. What you find in these grapes, growing in this place, with the help of careful wine makers, advanced techniques and much shared knowledge, expresses flavours that are appreciated by an ever increasing audience of enthusiasts. Expectations for the region and its wines are high. But expectations, like the vines, must be carefully managed. Growing wines that are well made but that show nothing of their origin will not do anything to perpetuate a region and its wine culture. So, as usual in wine making, one needs to balance innovation with tradition. And it is only by combining tradition with quality that a region will produce wines of distinction that can begin to change expectations.

I borrow quote from Severino Garofano who has said, "There's great potential because you've got some excellent grape varieties here. But what you really need is a group of producers to get together to create

an image for DOC Puglia.' He is right. The image helps people to understand and to know what to expect, and if this is something distinctive, tasters can recognize it and their expectations can be satisfied.

So what are the images needed, what are the expectations to change, and what are the traditions to preserve? Expectations shape what we taste, what we like and find palatable. If our expectations are neutral, we can feel surprise and perhaps delight when first tasting a new dish or a new wine. But if our expectations are set we can greatly influence how we taste and evaluate what we are tasting. If our expectations are countered we can find something unpleasant, like something salty when expecting ice cream, or vice versa. So what expectations do we, as outsiders, have about Puglia. The expectations are high that people are now recognizing the great potential for quality that exists in the region. Although some still need to change and older image of Puglia.

For a long time, Puglia was known as a region that produced large volumes of wine. More recently, it has been moving towards smaller production of high quality wines and these must carry the images that will change expectations. Puglia also has a tradition of producing very fine, perfumed, dry rose wines; wines that were among the first to be bottled locally, as so many are now in response to the increase in quality. This tradition of bottling rosé wines of excellent quality is a strong image of Puglia, especially with the Campari-red colour of these wines. But to enhance the reputation of the region we still have to confront people's expectations about rosé wines themselves. So the expectations for the region and expectations about rosé are bound up together.

What are people's images and expectations of rosé? One of the great pleasures in life is with sitting by the coast, staring at a shimmering sea, while eating *fruits de mer* and sipping a rosato poured from a perfectly chilled bottle. When sharing moments like these the experience of wine can reach fabulous heights. However, drinking a bottle of the same wine at home on a cold, grey, winter's evening is usually disappointing. Why? Is it that the wine doesn't travel? Hardly. This excuse would have been offered in the past, but wine-making techniques have improved immeasurably, and, besides, why would rosé wines alone suffer this fate? The trouble is that many people are not drinking good enough rosé. The wine tasted *au bord de la mer* was so delicious because the context contributed so much to people's enjoyment of the rosé. The sun, the sea, the salty mouthfuls of squid off-set by flavours of cherry and grenadine in the wine. The condensation-frosted bottle in the ice bucket with its pink colour;

all this, plus the relaxation that comes from sharing these pleasures with another, makes us imagine that the wine cause so much of our happiness, But the hedonic rush was not due to the wine alone, and it cannot serve later, like a single thread of memory, to re-create the experience as a whole. Nor should it. A good rosé can be enjoyed for its own sake and not just as the colourful accompaniment to days by the sea.

The ‘mere accompaniment’ view of rosé comes from its reputation as the poor relation of the wine world. And yet, rose, which is being produced in more and more wine regions, is a difficult wine to make. It takes skill and timing to leave the pressed grape juice in contact with the skins just long enough to bleed colour and impart flavour. Views differ on how long skin contact should be, and so we see everything from the cherry pink and Campari-like red Puglia Rosato, to the pale salmon pink or onion skin colour of Provençal rosés.

Colour is one thing, flavour is another, and if you want a wine with a depth of flavour and good grip you must turn to the wines of Puglia or Bandol to enjoy the precise savoury flavours and elegant perfumed fruit. What makes Puglia wines, and Bandol wines, so different from Provençal roses is the use of firmer grapes like Negroamaro: a grape, which like Mourvedre likes to have its head in the sun and its feet in the sea. It produces powerful reds with tannic structure but in rose it give the wines extra bite. These are wines for dinner not for aperitif. They combine the heady perfume of fruit with flavours of cherry, spice and orange rind. At their best, they are fully satisfying and complete wines. I hope the region will promote the image of these wines and those of best quality, which are needed to assert the reputation of the region and to change people’s perceptions of rosé wine. We need such wines that lock in the sun and bring the warmth of the south to our table in autumn. We expect nothing less from Puglia.

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