

Marches

From the Apennines to the sea, Marches are a variegated vineyard capable of offering interesting white and red wines, an enological challenge restarted from the great Verdicchio grape

The change, or better to say the progress, of Italian enology and wine in the last twenty years has been truly remarkable. Quality of wines in every region has shown remarkable progresses: a renewal process of quality that, perhaps, few could imagine. The Italian heritage of grapes, as it is commonly known, it is huge, rich and variegated: every region has its typical grapes as to make every area unique not only for the environmental and climate characteristics. There are in fact many Italian regions that, during this period of renewal, have taken advantage of the many grapes found in their territories, therefore beginning to change Italian enology and resuming the way of quality, forgotten for many years in favor of quantity. Among the regions which mainly confided in the grapes of their territory, there is Marches which believed in the revaluation of its most famous grape, Verdicchio, today one of the most renowned white wines of Italy. A success which has then extended to the reds of the region, such as Rosso Conero, Rosso Piceno, Vernaccia di Serrapetrona and Lacrima di Morro d'Alba.

The origins of viticulture and wine production in the Marches are dated back to Etruscan times, between the tenth and the eighth century BC, when the characteristic vine training system of *vite maritata* spread in this area - in the Marches also known as "a *folignata*" - consisting in using the trunk of a tree to be used as a support for the vine to climb. The presence of the vine in ancient times is also proved by the discovery of the tomb of a warrior dated back to the eighth century BC, where it was found a bronze basin containing more than 200 pips of *vitis vinifera*. Despite Pliny the Elder wrote about the wines of Marches in his important book *Naturalis Historia* - by describing the wines of this land as *generous* - it will be only at the end of the 1500s that grapes and wines of Marches will be described comprehensively. Andrea Bacci - philosopher, doctor and writer who was born in Sant'Elpidio, in the Marches - published in 1595 his monumental and important book *De Naturali Vinorum Historia* (Natural History of Wines).

In the fifth book "Wines of the many areas of Italy", Andrea Bacci describes the many areas of the Marches, identifying twenty different territories, as well as the cultivation and wines making techniques typical in this region. Andrea Bacci particularly emphasizes the white berries grapes *trebulane* and *malvasie*, white and black *moscatelle* grapes with which were produced sweet wines, as well as mentioning the Lacrima, the grape that today is having a renewed success thanks to its wines. Viticulture and wine production were very common in the Marches far before the times of Andrea Bacci, a spreading began in the 1200s and since those times regulated by specific laws and regulations about how and what should be planted in vineyards. At those times there also were laws for the safeguarding of wine genuineness, severely punishing the ones who adulterated it or, for example, diluted wine with water before selling it. In 1579, in a document which regulated the type of vines to be planted in a vineyard, it is mentioned for the first time the Verdicchio grape referred to the territory of Matelica.

In the beginning of the 1800s, the agriculture in the Marches was mainly characterized by the cultivation of cereals and fields were crossed by rows of vines, a cultural sharing which allowed the production from the same field of the two main goods for the survival of people: bread and wine. At those times the most cultivated white grapes - as well as considered to be the best - were Verdicchio, Trebbiano, Moscatello Bianco and Uva Bianca della Maddalena; among red grapes, the best ones were Balsamina, Vernaccia and Moscatello Aleatico. Still in the 1800s are found witnesses about the difficulty of keeping wines, and therefore it was suggested to cook the must in order to make the so called "cooked wine" (*vino cotto*), a tradition still alive in the Piceno area and which is also found in the Abruzzo region. An event which contributed to the change and to the development, not only of viticulture in the Marches, but also of the agriculture of the region, was the institution at the end of the 1800s - thanks to the abbot Rinaldi - of "Cattedre Ambulanti per l'Agricoltura" - schools for agriculture founded in many cities - in particular at Jesi, Osimo and Ascoli Piceno, providing a fundamental contribution to the development of agriculture in the Marches.

In the 1900s is still confirmed the importance of the Piceno area as the main producer of wines in the region, in particular the wines produced with Sangiovese and Montepulciano grapes, whereas in the northern part the production was mainly about white wines from Verdicchio, Trebbiano and Malvasia grapes. In the 1950s will take place the first important event which boosted the selling of the wine of the region. Angelini family, proprietors of the Fazi Battaglia, published a contest in which participants were asked to design the bottle which will have characterized the commercialization of Verdicchio. In 1953, Antonio Maiocchi, an architect from Milan, designed the amphora shaped bottle which is still today associated to Verdicchio. The amphora shape was chosen because it reminded the typical Etruscan wine container and also the label was written with characters reminding the Etruscan writing, emphasizing the will to keep a strong connection between this wine and its history. One of the first and most important commercial operation about wine was just born: in 1970 will be sold all over the world one million and a half of Verdicchio amphorae.

The notoriety of amphora bottle will play an important role for the revaluation and development of Verdicchio, today one of the most interesting autochthonous white berries grapes of Italy. Whether Verdicchio is a great grape capable of great wines it is not a mystery anymore - frequently capable of full bodied wines as to be defined *red wines with a white color* - however, despite the notoriety of this grapes, in the Marches are also found other interesting autochthonous grapes which in recent times have become internationally renowned. Among them, Lacrima di Morro d'Alba and, in particular, Vernaccia Nera di Serrapetrona, the wines of this latter grape have recently acquired the status of *Denominazione di Origine Controllata e Garantita* (Denomination of Controlled and Guaranteed Origin, DOCG), together with the other famous red wine of Marches: Rosso Conero. Among the other wines which are getting more and more known in recent times, should be mentioned the excellent Rosso Piceno that - just like Rosso Conero - is produced with Montepulciano and Sangiovese grapes. Finally, of particular interest is the vast production of *Indicazione Geografica Tipica* wines (Typical Geographical Indication, IGT) that, in many aspects, are defining a new course in the history of quality wines in the Marches.



The main wine areas of Marches

Classification of Marches

Wines of Marches are classified according to the quality system in force in Italy which provides for *Vini da Tavola* (Table Wines), *Indicazione Geografica Tipica* (Typical Geographic Indication, IGT), *Denominazione d'Origine Controllata* (Denomination of Controlled Origin, DOC) and *Denominazione d'Origine Controllata e Garantita* (Denomination of Controlled and Guaranteed Origin, DOCG). In 2004 Marches has obtained the *Denominazione d'Origine Controllata e Garantita* for two wines: Vernaccia di Serrapetrona - produced with the homonymous red berried grape in the dry, sweet and sparkling styles - and Rosso Conero, produced with Montepulciano and Sangiovese grapes. In the Marches, besides the two DOCG areas, are being defined 14 *Denominazione d'Origine Controllata* (DOC) areas: Bianchello del Metauro, Colli Maceratesi, Colli Pesaresi, Esino, Falerio dei Colli Ascolani o Falerio, I Terreni di Sanseverino, Lacrima di Morro o Lacrima di Morro d'Alba, Offida, Pergola, Rosso Conero, Rosso Piceno, Serrapetrona, Verdicchio dei Castelli di Jesi and Verdicchio di Matelica.

Production Areas

The territory of the Marches offers a pretty wide variability of landscapes. The western part of the region is characterized by the Apennines and by going eastwards, after having crossed hilly territories divided by valleys, it is finally met the Adriatic sea. The cultivation of the vine in the Marches is mainly done in the hilly areas and the main varieties found in vineyards are Verdicchio, Trebbiano Toscano, Montepulciano and Sangiovese. In recent times it has been seen a more and more frequent presence in vineyards of the so called *international* grapes, sometimes used for the production of wines blended with other local grapes. The white berried grapes mainly cultivated in the Marches are Verdicchio, Trebbiano Toscano, Bianchello, Maceratino, Pecorino and Passerina; whereas the most typical red berried varieties include Montepulciano, Sangiovese, Vernaccia Nera and Lacrima, the latter two almost exclusively and respectively found in the territories of Serrapetrona and Morro d'Alba. Among the *international* varieties are found Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Syrah and Pinot Noir.

Verdicchio dei Castelli di Jesi and Matelica

One of the most famous grapes of Marches, the one which has contributed more than other to the affirmation of the enology of this region, certainly is Verdicchio. This renowned white berried grape is the absolute protagonist of two *Denominazione d'Origine Controllata* areas of the Marches: Castelli di Jesi and Matelica. Two different ways of interpreting Verdicchio: it is very hard to tell what is the best of the two because they both are excellent. Of the two, the most famous certainly is the one from Castelli di Jesi and which provides for the definition of the *classic* area, that is the most typical and traditional one, and recently, the *reserve* indication that, together with Verdicchio di Matelica, is among the few Italian white wines to have it. Verdicchio is an extremely versatile grape and besides the production of dry wines, it is also used for sweet and sparkling wines. The characteristics of wines produced with Verdicchio are pretty varied, from light and crisp wines, to robust and structured wines, whose body can also be increased by the aging in cask.

Rosso Conero and Piceno

Red wines from Marches are mainly produced with Montepulciano and Sangiovese grapes, of which the most famous representatives are Rosso Conero - which in 2004 has obtained the *Denominazione d'Origine Controllata e Garantita* (DOCG) for the *riserva* style - and Rosso Piceno, produced in a pretty wide area which goes from the southern part of the region to the borders of the province of Pesaro. The main grape in both wines is Montepulciano - which must be present for at least 85% - to which it is sometimes added Sangiovese. Of the two wines, Rosso Conero is the most famous one, produced in the promontory of Conero - from which it takes its name - near the city of Ancona. Despite the two wines are produced with the same grapes, Rosso Conero and Rosso Piceno express very different qualities. Rosso Conero in fact benefits of an absolutely particular microclimate because of its position near the Adriatic sea: the influence of sea breezes, as well as the limestone composition of the soil, make this wine unique in its genre.

Vernaccia di Serrapetrona

Vernaccia di Serrapetrona - in the province of Macerata - after having been underrated for many years and not very considered in the Italian wine making scene, has been the first area of Marches to obtain the *Denominazione d'Origine Controllata e Garantita* status (DOCG). The production of this wine is pretty limited, in fact the total acreage of vineyards is of about 45 hectares. Vernaccia di Serrapetrona represents a very special case in the Italian wine making scene, as it is a sparkling red wine produced in the dry and sweet styles. The production of this sparkling wine is rather particular. After harvesting, a part of the grapes are vinified according to the method of red wine making, whereas a part is allowed to dry in order to concentrate the quantity of sugar. Dried grapes are then crushed and the must is added to the first wine, therefore starting a second fermentation. The production of Vernaccia di Serrapetrona ends with the procedure of sparkling wine making which will give the wine its characteristic pink foam and its unmistakable aromas.

Other Production Areas

Among the other famous wines and areas of Marches, a particular mention goes to Lacrima di Morro d'Alba, a red wine which in recent times is getting more and more popular among consumers. Obtained by the vinification of Lacrima grape, this wine is produced in two styles. The first one consists in bottling the wine in advance in order to obtain a lively wine and to be drunk young, the second style is produced according to the traditional red wine making method. Among the other wines of Marches are mentioned Bianchello del Metauro - produced in the province of Pesaro with the Bianchello grape, also known as Biancame - and Falerio dei Colli Ascolani. Other interesting areas include Offida and Esino, from which are being produced white, red and sparkling wines. Among white wines from Marches, of particular interest are the ones produced with Pecorino and Passerina grapes - vinified together or alone - as well as Maceratino, with which are being produced the white wines of the Colli Maceratesi area.