

The history of Rebula comes across a list of tales, often shrouded in mystery.

The first mentions of the name of the variety are to be found in medieval statutes and land registers, mostly part of the Venetian Republic, the Patriarchate of Aquileia or the County of Gorizia, as well as in sale contracts. All the evidence from the historical documents shows that the variety was considered an asset that preserved its value over time. Rebula was a wine often referred to as a gift reserved for important guests, such as church prelates and other dignitaries.

Written records from Treviso and Venice, referring to Rebula as *vinum navigatum*, show that it was an imported wine.

In the 14th century, the tax rate for the wine varieties of Malvasia, Rebula and Teran was being negotiated for the wider regions around Udine and Gemona. A certain Ancil, son of Henry, signed a contract with Henry Rittersberg and thus sold him a tenth of vineyards, producing six buckets of Rebula every year (*sex urnas Rebiolli*). The vineyard, probably located near the village of Barbana, was sold for eight marks.

Another written record contains details about the dowry offered to Ádám Batthyány, a Hungarian Count, who was marrying Aurora Formentini from San Floriano del Collio in 1632, and thus received a few barrels of Rebula and 300 vines ‘from here’.

Two centuries later, in 1844, Matija Vrtovec, the father of the Slovenian ampelography, wrote that in Brda “*all the wine they produce they call Rebula, although they have little of it*”. The honourable Vrtovec was in fact one of the first Slovenian writers, who separated vines by variety and he listed many (sub)varieties of Rebula.

There were other things happening, as well.

The Josephinian cadastral register—completed in 1790—tried to assess the taxes to be collected from the value of the land for different crops, and the best vineyards of the County of Gorizia turned out to be the ones in today’s wider region of Brda. Only Cormons and Podgora could match the quality of Barbana, Spodnje Cerovo, Dobrovo, Gonjače, and all the way to Medana, Kojško and Kozana. The quality of the different types of wine and of the Rebula, in particular, were praised by many writers, describing places and customs, such as Anton Muznik in *Clima Goritinese* (1781), or even poets and storytellers.

Rebula was the first wine from this area to be presented at international trade shows. The specific variety was first officially recognised at the Fourth Oenological Congress, held in 1891 in Gorizia, when the noblest vine varieties were being selected to replant the vineyards destroyed a few years earlier by the Great Wine Blight, a severe case of the *Phylloxera* aphid attacking the plants. Habits changed as well. Count Baguer, the then owner of the Dobrovo Castle, described the newly introduced planting methods, while cellaring methods turned towards sweet wines from barely fermented grape must that were to be sold to the nobility in the markets of Carinthia and Germany.

Other changes came with the 20th century, as the Brda region had been split into two by a national border and the two sides took on different paths of wine growing. While Rebula lost its appeal on the Italian side of the border, it came to be considered a promising variety to be relied upon on the Slovenian side. Although, initially only praised for its high yields, the variety soon proved to be suitable for producing top-quality white wines. Drinking trends have changed and Rebula seems to have gained in popularity overnight.

In all these changes there is but one constant: the best locations for Rebula vineyards continue to be carefully selected hilly plots of land. The best Rebulas come from these lands and that is how the Brda Region earned its title of ‘Home of Rebula’. Is Rebula native to these lands or just a well-

settled newcomer is anyone's guess. The answer, however, is irrelevant. It had been accepted as a local sort and winegrowers are now taking good care of their new family member.

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