



Bullas: wine History and culture

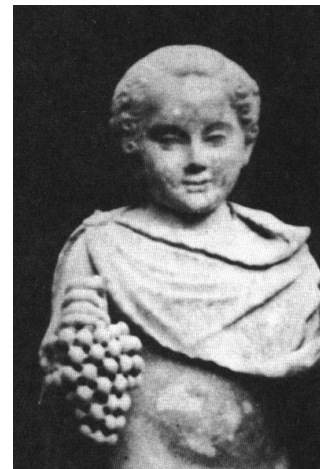
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There are some evidences showing the existence of vines in the Iberian Peninsula from the third millennium before Christ. However, Iberian and Celtic people were the ones who started its cultivation (8th century B.C.). Phoenicians propitiated the regulated cultivation thanks to the commercial impulse of their colonies. In Denia (Alicante) an archaeological investigation shows the existence of winepresses to elaborate wine (6th century B.C.).

In the Murcia region, Greek luxurious ceramics have been found (6th century B.C.), preserved in the Iberian Museum in *El Cigarralejo* (Mula). They show the importance of commerce and consumption of wine in this epoch. The Roman great commerce causes a situation in which towns like Cartagena provoke the remarkable growing-up in zones of the inside such as in the old *Gemina* (Jumilla).

Vine cultivation in Bullas and its transformation into wine has its root in the very Roman epoch. The *Villa de los Cantos* is an important archaeological deposit (1st century A.C.) closely joined to wine culture in Bullas: it is the place where an image of Baco, the wine god, represented as a child showing in his hands a bunch of grapes.

All the boundary embracing the *Bullas Origin Denomination* has been one of the 'great wine producers during the Middle Age and the Modern Epoch. The Santiago's Order of knighthood preserved some data about cultivation and production of wine in this territory.



Niño Baco, Los Cantos (Bullas).

Maybe the oldest written document which has been preserved, concerning the importance of wine production in Bullas, comes from the historiographer Martin de Ambel when he says that: "*there are a lot of wine-presses which in this land people call 'bodegas' (cellars), where more than 20.0000 'arrobas' of excellent wine are gathered and transported. This wine is gathered from a wide quantity of 'peonadas' of the vines...*"¹.

¹ From Martin de Ambel y Bernard; "Antiquities in Cehegín city" .Transcription and commentaries from José Moya Cuenca. Ed. Municipal Government in Cehegín, 1995.

At the middle of the 18th Century, the "Padre Ortega" (a priest) also mentions the principal cultivations in the zone: "*wheat, barley, maize, a lot of hemp, a moderate harvest of oil and silk but a great quantity of wine...*"².

Data about traditional cellars in Bullas

But, indubitably, the most concluding datum about intensive wine production in the boundary is the great quantity of traditional cellars which still are preserved both in the old part of the cities in the main nuclei of population and in the country. The concentration of these cellars is of such a manner that nearly all the houses in the old part of the village preserve some rests from ancient cellars, some of them still perfectly preserved and with more than 300 years of antiquity.

Nowadays, if we speak only about Bullas City, 221 traditional cellars, built mainly in the 18th and the 19th Centuries and abandoned the majority at the middle of the 20th Century, are preserved. They are mainly localized in the historical part of the population and its size is, generally, small (4-12 jars: 80%), although some of them has a moderate size (12-20 Jars: 13%) and big size (more than 20 jars: 7%)³.



Traditional cellar (Avda. de Murcia, Bullas)

Phylloxera spread out all over the fields in Bullas

Phylloxera appears the first time in Spain in 1876 (Malaga) and begins spreading out slowly in the most part of Spanish provinces.

Although the isolation in Bullas with the regard to other separated zones of vineyard countries seemed to exclude it from this plague, it is discovered in the decade of the 90s and spread out quickly all over the plantations. Agriculturists' fear is manifest, as in Bullas, near all the landmark has vineyards, its main economical resource, and now it seems to succumb the insect. The engineer Vicente SanJuan's information done in 1889, recognize the total invasion of vineyard-countries, asserting that "*the losings of vineyards in Bullas would involved the complete ruin of the village,*

² From Fray Pablo Manuel Ortega; *Description of the Cehegín city*, published by Baquero Almansa: "*Rebuscos y Documentos sobre la historia...*" Murcia, 1881.

³ From the *Catalogue of cellars in Bullas*: done by the Rural Tourism Guides workshop from *Escuela Taller* in Bullas.

its inhabitants would have to emigrate from it, as in these terraces cannot be planted others than vine-stocks"⁴.



However, measures were taken thanks to the similar experience lived in other regions in Europe. Agriculturists consociated and created trade unions and the Local Agrarian Council in order to fight against the problem. From this moment works concerning extirpation and burning of the infected plants and also the creation of planting nurseries with vine-shoot of American vines which can resist the insect so that the destroyed zones could be repopulate.

Vine and wine cultivation Sector: Transformation and new ways of organisation

At the middle of the 20th Century began the creation of cooperative-societies concerning vine and wine sector and, consequently, small traditional cellars were abandoned and those tools which were used in these cellars became useless. The great quantity of small owners of vineyards and cellars became, from that moment, partners of these cooperatives-societies. Little by little new technologies were introduced in order to increase the production and cheapen prices.

Nowadays, modernization of industry concerning vine and wine cultivation and the profit of technological advances has favoured the increase of the qualities of wines and its prestige. These all conditions have allowed the official concession of *Bullas Origin Denomination* for the wines, which are cultivated and produced in this land (Ministerial order 5-9-1994).



⁴ From J. Gonzalez Castaño; *Phylloxera in Bullas in the end of the 19th Century*. " Revistas de Fiestas 2000. Ed. Bullas Municipal Government.