

About the origin of the grapevine cultivar Blaufränkisch

Abstract

An exciting field of the viticultural history is the use and development of grapevine cultivars during the centuries. In ampelography nowadays genetic SSR markers are used to identify the relationships between the grape varieties. In this way, heritages and grapevine families could be defined. Furthermore it is also possible to draw conclusions about the origin of a cultivar. However, this conclusion should also be comprehensible with historical literature. This procedure has been applied successfully with many cultivars in Central Europe. Unfortunately, there exist also varieties where it is not quite easy to draw conclusions about the origin from the parental vines. In the specific case of Blaufränkisch, it has been clear for a long time that this variety descends from the Heunisch grapevine and shows a closeness to the Wildbacher Blau. However, the second parental variety Sbulzina cannot be clearly assigned in the German-speaking world and consequently it is difficult to determine where it could have been raised. In addition, in earlier times a mixed set was often cultivated in the vineyards. Neither all members of the set were exactly determined nor described.

The special feature of Blaufränkisch is also the regionally different designation and consequently a large number of synonyms, some of which were also used for other varieties. On the base of the literature, its use is undoubtedly documented as early as the 18th century. Only a few synonyms have survived to nowadays and can therefore be used as direct evidence. Overall, however, the literature already gives a clear indication of where the variety first gained importance and probably originated there. In the case of Blaufränkisch, the origin from Austria is the most likely variant. The origin is particularly located in the wine-growing region south of Vienna.

Keywords: grapevine, heritage, genetic fingerprint

Volume 9 Issue 4 - 2025

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Received: October 10, 2025 | **Published:** November 28, 2025

Introduction

At the 3rd International Ampelographic Conference in Colmar 1875 it was decided to give the prime name to the cv Blaufränkisch (BF) besides of numerous existing synonyms.¹ The main argument was its confirmed origin from Lower Austria. Despite this decision in all regions the synonyms survive till today. It is not so easy to change a name of a traditional variety even if the designation is false or is based on a mistake or a fake.² By using a synonym in the context of historical literature you never can be sure that it is a true synonym or a different variety or in some cases a mutant. However, the ampelographic literature was the source to define the origin of a variety.

To confirm the affiliation to a variety that earlier findings were called into question, it became possible by means of DNA fingerprinting.³ Numerous false synonyms have been uncovered and homonyms have also been recognized. In addition, relationships between grape varieties could also be defined.⁴ The revelations of parenthood were particularly exciting. For many varieties, both parents could be confirmed to be a natural but also a targeted cross.⁵ There are now thousands of genetic fingerprints across Europe that are comparable due to the coordinated use of certain 9 SSR markers.⁶ As a result, SSR profiles can be compared without the need to have access to the vine.

In the case of the variety Blaufränkisch (Figure 1), the genetic analysis created an uncertainty that existed already before, but ultimately deprived many theories of their scientific basis. Above all, the idea that BF was a Burgundy variety was no longer tenable. Rather, it was recognized very early on that BF descended from the

variety Heunisch, which served as one of the key parental for the development of numerous accessions.⁷ The inherited traits were above all vitality, stability and performance. Descendants of Heunisch reveal these abilities to a large extent. The genetic proximity to the varieties Wildbacher but also Gamay is based on the ancestry of Heunisch. The second parental variety could not be recognized for a long time. With the genetic profile of the genotype of Sbulzina, it was possible to reconstruct the second parent (Table 1). Since Sbulzina was a very rare and unknown name until the discovery,⁸ an attempt was made to find a synonymous name for the variety. In a German grape collection at that time, this variety was known as Blaue Zimmettraube.⁶ Unfortunately, it did not match genetically with the only correctly identified Grauen Zimmettraube.⁹ At this point, at the latest, it was clear that the Blaue Zimmettraube was a misnomer. The fact that the correct Blaue Zimmettraube was found in Croatia with the name Modra Kosovina confirmed the wrong designation.⁴ Since the assignment of old unknown varieties with their historical names is a very dubious and scientifically incomprehensible activity, it is probably better to refrain from doing so. What the real name of this genotype would be cannot be properly depicted.¹⁰ Presumably, it is one of the many synonymous names that is not yet associated with any other variety. Based on this realization, the origin of Blaufränkisch (Figure 2) is not to be located where the mislabeled Zimmettraube grape comes from, but where the historical names assign it.¹¹ This restores the significance of ampelography. Of course, on the basis of the facts, it is not possible to clearly show in which vineyard the first vines of the cultivar were grown. Only an overview of the historical ampelographies allows to define where was the most probable place of origin.¹²



Figure 1 Cultivar Blaufränkisch ampelographic pictures of young shoot, mature leaf and ripening grape.



Figure 2 Blaufränkisch vine with grapes.

Table 1 Genetic profile of the parentage of Blaufränkisch according to the genetic OIV descriptors (801-809)

Locus	Sbulzina		Blaufränkisch		Heunisch	
VVS 2	n+20	n+ 20	n+20	n+20	n+10	n+20
VVMD 5	n+ 4	n+ 4	n+ 4	n+18	n+12	n+18
VVMD 7	n+8	n+24	n+8	n+18	n+8	n+18
VVMD 25	n+12	n+18	n+18	n+18	n+6	n+18
VVMD 27	n+6	n+19	n+4	n+19	n+4	n+6
VVMD 28	n+30	n+44	n+30	n+30	n+12	n+30
VVMD 32	n+18	n+38	n+16	n+38	n+16	n+38
Vrzag 62	n+ 20	n+30	n+ 20	n+30	n+ 22	n+30
Vrzag 79	n+14	n+22	n	n+14	n	n+6

Results

Slovenia

In this chapter we focused on ampelographies mentioned varieties in today Slovenia and in former times Lower Styria. In the year 1849 the regions south of Graz were separated from Lower Styria district of Maribor and added to nowadays South Styria. Forregger¹³ described in his book, „Versuch über den Weinbau im Pikern-Gebirge“, that 85% of the wines derived from variety Mosler (Furmint) and all red wines together are only 0,5% of the volume. He did neither mention the term Blaufränkisch nor a possible synonym for this variety therefore this grapevine did not exist at that time in this region.

Krenz¹⁴ told about his visit in 1822 to the Brandner vineyard in Schmidsberg; there he found a planting of about two-thirds with Mosler and about one-third with the Spanish or parsley shaped vine leaves (Gutedel, Chasselas). Occasionally he saw the Chernina or Vraneg (later associated with Zimmettraube). In the Vinarie Wine Mountains near Gonowitz, almost exclusively red wines were pressed from Kauka and Tschernina or Vranek. Neighbouring wine regions do not manage to produce a high-quality red wine with the same grapes. The Gonowitz soil and location are likely to be unique. He mentioned nothing about Blaufränkisch or a synonym of this variety.

Rath¹⁵ mentioned for the first time a Blaue Zimmettraube under many Slovenian and German names (Spätblaue, Großblaue, etc.)

for Lower Styria in Cilli district and in Vinarie. The most important grapevines, however, were Kleine Wälsche, Sippa, and Kauka. Johann Bronner¹⁶ on his wine journey through Lower Styria reported about the Blaue Zimmettraube in the Sausal region (today Styria) and Gonowitz (today Slovenia) but no BF in that area. Hlubek¹⁷ mentioned no BF or Zimmettraube; later¹⁸ he described the Blaue Zimmettraube as a quality grape (especially in Witschein and Sausal). BF was classified as a non-domestic grape. Portugieser and Blauer Fränkischer are referred as foreign grape varieties. Trummer described all varieties of the “Herzogthume Steiermark” in 1841. However, BF is not referenced. Trummer¹⁹ mentioned the Zimmettraube under many Slovenian and German names (Spätblaue, Großblaue, etc.) for Lower and Central Styria. In the second edition in 1855²⁰ he mentioned BF and he offered as possible sources: Porto, Burgundy and Franken. That means he had no idea about the origin of this cultivar. The names he used were: Schwarze Fränkische, Frühschwarze, Schwarzgrobe and the place where the variety was cultivated was Vöslau (south of Vienna).

There exists also the rumor that the German designation Lemberger has something to do with Lemberg near Maribor but in this literature no indication is available.

Estimating the probability that BF derived from a cross happened in today Slovenian area is not realistic.

Croatia

Goethe²¹ declared that Modra Kosovina as well as Prava Crnina are the name of the Zimmettraube in Croatia. As we know today this was a correct definition.⁴ As origin for the cultivar BF Austria is mentioned. The oldest useful ampelography for Croatia is “Der Weinbau des österr. Kaiserthums” written by Franz Ritter von Heintl.²² Trummer on the occasion of his extensive wine travels^{23,24} through northern Croatia and Slavonia came to the same result.

Hungary

Today the importance of BF for Hungarian viticulture is not doubted. The most important grapevine occurs on 10% of the vine area. BF was never mentioned as an autochthonous Hungarian variety and due to the morphology did not belong to the Carpathian genepool.

In Hungarian Almanach of 1778 from Korabinsky,²⁵ Grobe Schwarze (Heunisch), Wildschwarze, Schwarze Zirifandel are mentioned for red wine production. For the Ruster viticulture within the, Georgikon “book from Conrad²⁶ BF is not mentioned. One of the most profound work about Hungarian varieties is from Schams 1832.²⁷ In Ungarns Weinbau in seinem ganzen Umfang “Blaufränkisch or Kekfrancos are not used in Hungary at that time. But Schams²⁸ mentioned for Austria at Vöslauer terroirs, beside other red varieties, Schwarzfränkische (synonym: Mährische) is planted. Later on, in 1896 the Hungarian ministry for agriculture recommended for Rust, Sopron and Bratislava region to plant Nagyburgundy a synonym of BF. Rumi called the Schwarze Fränkische “Fekete Nemet Szőlő” (Black German Grape) or “Czerne Frankuske Hrozne”.²⁹ Within the Günser wine tradition, first citation of BF was in 1806 as Nagyburgundy.³⁰ In his book about Hungarian wine Halasz also tells the myth about the name in this way: Napoleon on his way through Hungary appreciated BF of Sopron as one of the best red wine in Europe and his soldiers have to pay the wine with Blue Francs instead of the usual red Francs of soldier’s wage. However, usually wine was confiscated by victorious soldiers without any paying.

Czech and Slovakia

Also in these countries BF has some tradition but no information is available on who brought the vines to these areas. In 1885 BF was already one of the most popular varieties in Moravia. As they used the synonym Frühmährische it also could be a different variety, for instance St. Laurent. It is mentioned that the origin for this cultivar is Austria.

Germany

A legend without substantial documents argues that the Earl of Neipperg a nobleman and diplomat imported 300 years before this variety from Austria to Württemberg. In fact, BF was brought to Zabergäu not earlier than the 2nd half of 19th century from k&k Austrian- Hungarian Empire.³¹ Today there is still the most important production of Limberger (synonym of BF) in Zabergäu and close by. For the first documentation of varieties in Württemberg 1826³² no Limberger (BF) is mentioned; also Dornfeld wrote nothing about BF in “Anpflanzung der edleren Traubensorten”. In the 1859³³ in the book “Weinbauschule” he considered: nowadays many growers start to plant varieties as Limberger, blue Liverdun and others. He raised the question if climate and soil are appropriated.

Johann Bronner from Wiesloch near Stuttgart recommended in 1853 Limberger as high cropping but also dense and storeable wine. Single (Director of Weinsberg) published in a newspaper for Agriculture and Viticulture 1864 a recommendation to plant Limberger for higher wine quality. As a conclusion: BF and the halfsister Blauer Portugieser (BP) scions were delivered together from Bad Vöslau (Schlumberger) to the Wuerttemberg royal court chamber.³⁴ The growers association noticed in 1866 the import of cuttings of Limberger from Schlumberger Vöslau. Fries noticed in 1871 that this grape variety from Austria is very often grown in the monastery vineyards in Lemberg near Stuttgart, so it was given the name Lemberger. That means Lemberger is the name of a domestic terroir and therefore not of a variety! In most German sources Limberg (a village nowadays part of Maissau in Lower Austria) is mentioned. From there huge amounts of cuttings were sent to Württemberg. Therefore the official synonym Limberger used in Germany get an explanation as a place of origin at least of cuttings.

The name of BF was changed in Württemberg from Limberger to Lemberger after the sudden death of director Christian Single of the Royal Grapevine School in Weinsberg (founded 1868). The assistant director Johannes Mühlhäuser became the next director in 1869. As he was a proponent for an association with Prussia (called “Kleindeutsche Lösung”) and a declared opponent of Austria he wanted to hide the true origin behind a local synonym. That’s why Wuerttemberg did not send any delegate to the “International Ampelographic Commission” to Vienna in 1873 and kept their new synonym Lemberger.

Other countries

In France BF was almost unknown³⁵ and only mentioned for the Alsace. Probably canes were transferred from Württemberg. Galet³⁶ supposed an origin in Hungary but excluded a French origin. All previous attempts to associate BF with French varieties have failed. Perhaps it was suspected to get more acceptance and prestige if this variety has French roots. Despite a relationship to Gamay – as both varieties share one parent - there is no direct link between BF and Gamay. Nevertheless Game(y) is a synonym for BF in Romania and Bulgaria. Obviously the close ampelography of the cultivars initiated

this designation. Another synonym is Portugais Leroux; it was created as BF was brought together with Portugieser via brothers Baumann to Alsace to Mr. Leroux. The canes of Mr. Leroux get their own name inspired from the related Portugais bleu.

Austria

The first ampelographic documentation of BF in Austria was made by Helbling.³⁷ “Das Fränkische ist ... der beste rothe von den um Wien gepflegten Gattungen“. As he indicated to the French variety „Black Morillon“, “Le Morillon noir ordinaire“ it was not clear that it is an autochthonous variety. In 1767³⁸ improvement of the Lower Austrian viticulture Baumann called this variety Schwarze and it seems a further designation of BF. Chaptal³⁹ mentioned Limberg as source of delicious red wines for the imperial court. In 1815, a vine grower complained to the court in Traiskirchen that his Blaufränkisch vines had been damaged by game in Gumpoldskirchen and he demanded money for the damage and that the deers should be eliminated.⁴⁰ Pustet⁴¹ described varieties used in Baden, mainly Pinot, sweet Portugieser and Blaufränkler (BF).

Burger⁴² used in his systematic classification und description the name Catonia burgundica and local names Frühschwarze, Fränkische. That would also mean a French origin. He reported from local names in Klosterneuburg there it is called Schwarzgrobe and in Baden they use the name Mährische.

In his ampelography Goethe¹ mentioned that BF comes from Lower Austria near Vöslau, spread together with BP by Mr. Schlumberger. Single grapevine plantations were only observed in Siebenhirten and Matzen. At that time plantings with several accessions were common. He supposed that BF spread from Vöslau to the crown lands of Hungary, Croatia and also to Germany and Italy (Figure 3).



Figure 3 Historical ampelographic picture of Blaufränkisch.⁴³

The description of the variety is identical with today's ampelography and therefore is true to type for the first time. In 1912 Mittmann reported of the Austrian viticulture that main variety for red wine in Klosterneuburg is BF.³⁴ In 1932⁴⁴ Matthias Arthold reported the local synonyms for BF Spätschwarzer, Schwarzgrobe, Großburgunder, Mährische and Limberger. Limberg near Maissau was in 1804 known for excellent red wine and the Habsburg emperor Ferdinand I (from 1830 to 1848) preferred BF from Limberg (only referred as Limberger). In 1863 Babo complained⁴⁵ that at a grape show in Vienna BF were called Burgundy instead of the right name. Fuchs⁴⁶ reported that at a wine presentation for the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the k.k. Landwirtschafts-Association in Vienna the Count of Merkenstein (today part of Vöslau) presented red wines from Portugieser, Limberger and Burgunder. Schmidl, 1893 a teacher from Hollabrunn confirmed Limberg as the origin of BF and considered that this variety is well known for Austria.³⁴ Reckendorfer⁴⁷ an expert and breeder clarified that BF is often also referred to as Spätblau or Schwarze and that they are so well known in Lower Austria that no description was necessary. However, since there, existing so many names for the designation of the same variety was the main source of the confusion. On the other side different names also could be a consequence of higher variation within the variety what is an indication that the genotypes were in use already for long time with intensive propagation.

Concerning the parents of BF both were available in Austria, Heunisch mainly with the name Grobe and Sbulzina could be the name Spätblau or other synonymous designations. Even the grandparent Gansfusser was planted in former times on different places in Austria.⁴⁸

Conclusion

The origin of BF is not very precise, but concerning the historical data and the variability of the cultivar, the highest probability for the origin is given to a place south of Vienna. Even Vöslau was reported as a source for the material brought to different places and countries. A high variability within BF genotypes could be observed as well as analyzed and therefore today's genotype could be a result from a selfing or a mutation from former types of this variety.

Acknowledgments

None

Conflicts of interest

None.

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