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Wine-Growing in Switzerland:

Small but exquisite

Switzerland is a small wine-growing country as regards its wine-cultivated area. With just a meagre 14 000 hectares, it ranks 14th in comparison to other European countries. Concerning the quality and variety of its wine, Switzerland, however, does not have to fear any comparison.

The unique position of Switzerland, situated between four distinct wine-growing countries with totally different eating and drinking habits, necessitates that also the Swiss wine be possessed of many varieties. Indeed, precious little is known of this fact abroad. What is more, in many places the mere existence of Swiss wine is unknown. No wonder, because the Swiss drink their wine largely themselves and from their annual output of one million hectolitres of Swiss wine only a few drops reach foreign countries.

Valais at the top

By far the most important Swiss wine-growing region stands on an area of 11 000 hectares in the western part of Switzerland. Of this surface, almost half extends into the Valais, thus making it the largest wine-growing canton of Switzerland. At some distance follow the cantons of Vaud, Geneva, Neuchâtel, Fribourg and the Bernese side of the lake of Biel. The leading sort of grape in the whole of western Switzerland is the white Chasselas, which according to its origin, yields different varieties of wine which bear different names. Thus, the corresponding wine in Valais is called Fendant; in Vaud Dorin and in Geneva Perlan. Beside the Chasselas, increasingly more varieties of the red sort, originating from nearby Beaujolais and Burgundy, bearing the names of Gamay and Pinot Noir, have been recently grown in large parts of western Switzerland. The pressed wines



Sion, the Capital of the Valais and the Swiss Wine Cultivation

from these sorts are called either by their variety name, or bear the Trade names of Dôle (Valais) and Salvagnin (Vaud).

Also in Eastern Switzerland

Compared with western Switzerland, the rather dismembered wine-cultivated surface of eastern Switzerland appropriates around 2 000 hectares – as wine-land geographically seen – not only in the eastern, but also in the north-west and central part of the country become infinitely small. The wine from here is of local importance and is mostly drunk in the locality. Drastic curtailment of the area actually suitable for wine-cultivation and the new knowledge of wine preparation has enabled one to make fruity and palatable wines from the scorned sour drop of not too long ago. These wines are drunk from

Basle to Zurich, Schaffhausen and St. Gall up to Chur with great pleasure. Far and away, the most important variety of eastern Switzerland is the red Blauburgunder (Pinot Noir). The foremost white variety is the Riesling Sylvaner (Müller, Thurgau), which even in Germany today is a widespread hybridization of the Riesling and Sylvaner varieties, which was researched by Professor Hermann Müller of Switzerland.

Still more scattered than the wine growing area of eastern Switzerland presents itself the area of southern Switzerland, in which Tessin holds the prime place and next to it figures the Grison's Misox. The atrocious construction boom of the past decades has shrunk the wine-cultivating surface to less than 1 000 hectares. Nevertheless, this danger has been recognised and legal measures have been undertaken to prevent the dying-out of wine-culture in the Tessin. Variety-wise, in Tessin today, the red Merlot imported from the Bordeaux, wholly dominates, which, after the devastation through the vine-louse at the beginning of the century has fully replaced the older indigenous variety.

Quality before Quantity

As heterogeneous as the Swiss wines are, they still have something in common: they are unfortunately relatively expensive. The high cost of living in Switzerland, the working conditions of wine-growing mostly on slopes, the frequent small lots and the necessity to assure the wine-growers of a suitable income, lead inevitably to the fact that the production cost of Swiss wine is higher than in several foreign territories. In order to prevent a drifting away of the consumers towards the cheaper foreign competitors, certain Import restrictions, especially with regard to white wine, have been imposed due to political and

economical reasons and are indispensable. Experience has shown that the right is delicate and the laws of free enterprise virtually contradict the instrumentation of Import restrictions for the inland wine-producers. Nevertheless it ought to be understood that it is not a licence for the production of inferior and correspondingly overpriced commodities, which during

the past years of abundance have shown that many a cask has in the true sense of the word, overflowed, because the customer was suddenly not willing to go along with it anymore. For all that, it is apparent that out of the mistakes of the past years, a lesson has in the meantime been learnt and once more quality rather than quantity is being promoted. Swiss

wine, if it wants to be sure of a solid footing, has no other choice but to have unconditional quality. What is more, perhaps it may one day succeed in capturing a firm place in the hearts of foreign wine-lovers. Many a Swiss abroad has already had great success.

Andreas Keller, Chief Editor of the International wine journal VINUM

2000 Years of Rhaeto-Romanic:

A Minority consolidates itself

The Rhaeto-Romanic Language celebrated its 2000 years of existence. During a whole week the village of Savognin was transformed into a huge University extension: Round Table Conferences and Discussions, Courses on Poetry, Cooking and Philosophy, Introduction to Tarot and Art of Caricature and a Festival of Theatres were all there. Hundreds of Rhaeto-Romanic speaking people took part and thereby depicted their rich language and culture.

2000 years ago, in the year 15 B.C. the Romans conquered the Rhaetian Alps and by degrees imported the Latin language, out of which Rhaeto-Romanic has later evolved. A date, such as this, has naturally something arbitrary in it, for the Rhaeto-Romanic speaking people this birth-date has come in very opportune. They are today, more than ever, determined to un-itedly show themselves to their fellow-Confederates and to assert their existence.

A Family of Languages

The smallest Helvetian Minority has a somewhat special position. Since 1938, Rhaeto-Romanic has no doubt been acknowledged as a national, though not as an official language of the Confederation. This discrimination has practical reasons. Rhaeto-Romanic is not a single language but a family of languages. One can count not less than five written regional lan-

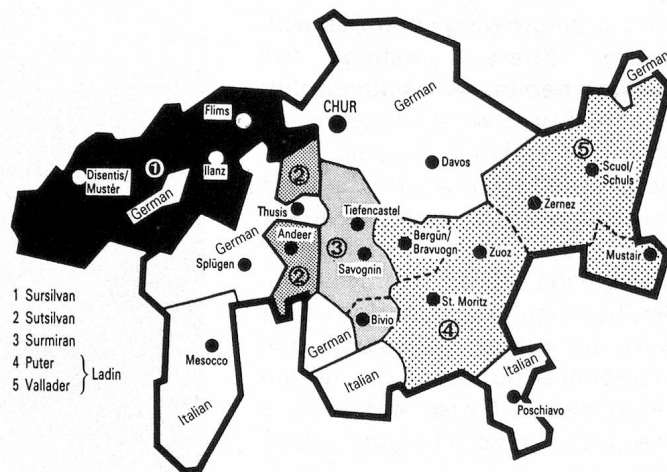
guages. The difference between the manner of speech from Disentis and Scuol is by far greater than between the Appenzell and the Oberwallis dialects. In its isolation each valley had, during hundreds of years, cultivated its own dialect. Chur, the Capital, very early took over the German language as a unifying factor. As a result of that, it is not surprising that today all Rhaeto-Romanic speaking people know German as well as Rhaeto-Romanic. Their access to the outside world was compulsorily only through the German language.

Nevertheless, in the last few years, the community has consolidated itself. In the Grison, as elsewhere, there is a come-back to regional values, which gives the minorities a new confidence. The religious differences have today been wiped out. The radio station gives its listeners the possibility of getting familiar with the dialects

of other valleys. Since 1982, in addition to this, a fascinating experiment is in process: the preparation of a common written language – *The Rumantsch Grischun*. This is so formulated that all Rhaeto-Romanic speaking people would be able to read it, without having had to learn it. But it shall not supersede the traditional dialects.

Hopes for the Future

If the Rumantsch Grischun succeeds in being carried through, the main objection against the official usage of Rhaeto-Romanic would be dropped. Only a limited few demand that in Bern Rhaeto-Romanic occupies the same position as German, French and Italian. On the other hand, it would be more than justified, if in the Grisons on questions of Federal Law, it could be implemented. That is also the aim of a



The Languages of the Grisons