

Amphora Wine: A secular production technique recovered for the present¹

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Abstract: Amphora wine uses a secular production technique. Still alive in Portugal, specifically in Alentejo, this method of production was brought to us by the Romans. Amphora Wine is characterized by the simple method of production and the fact that it is made in clay pots (amphoras) instead of the traditional wood barrels. It stands out from other wines for its sustainable methodology, and by faithfulness to the ancestral processes it follows.

These knowledge is regarded as a source of search and impulse for the creation of utilitarian pottery objects that being a call to memory can serve for the return of the pleasure in cooking, being at the table and sharing knowledge, affections and flavours, adapted to the current living.

This article aims to show this knowledge: its particularities in the production of wine, the role of clay in the process and sustainability inherent to it. Finally, we present a project (developed by the proponent of this article) that is born with the aim of recognizing and valuing this type of wine, its historical and cultural impact and its potentialities. It's proposed to produce Amphora Wine in a domestic context, with the use of a container with a capacity of about 8 litres design to our 21st century homes.

1.Introduction

The clay, as an element, brings bits and pieces of our history as individuals and as collective entities. The most important rules of our behaviour as human beings are established in our childhood, within the household, and a lot of them, including the most important ones, are created in around the table, while sharing food with our family.

With this, we start to experience all the scents, the colours, the fragrances that bring us back to other parts of our lives, times of affection and childhood joy.

At the table, we recall, not only the act of eating, but above all, celebrating life, warmth, sharing affections, learning our place as a part of a larger system, in which we had grandparents, uncles and aunts, distant and near cousins and friends as close as family.

This way of being as a family made us look at the meal in a different way. Looking to fully

comprehend how we prepared those moments.

In order to understand this, we need to begin, necessarily, with watching the making process of the objects itself, specifically in the regions that have a tradition of clay and pottery such as Trás-os-Montes and to collect ceramic bodies from those exact regions. As we watch in an ethnographic way, gathering what we see and what is said by those who are under study, ancient knowledge metamorphoses itself into new objects, before our eyes. That's exactly what happened with the results of the Baixo Alentejo's study, that showed us the red clay amphora, in which the Amphora wine is made; a tradition carried since the Romans lived in that area.

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2.Experimental Method | Proposal

2.1. The Amphora Wine

Amphora Wine's making process is a secular technique. Still alive in Portugal, specifically in Alentejo, this production method was brought to Portugal by the Romans. Amphora Wine has, as its main characteristic, the simpleness of the production technique; instead of the traditional wood barrels, with different kinds of wood, but essentially oak wood, or even in other kinds of containers made of stainless steel, this wine is made in the clay amphora.



Fig.1 Amphoras.

There can be found many different kinds of clay amphoras with different capacities, some of which can hoard up to two thousand litres of must. They're given a waterproofing treatment, not to a hundred percent, that's called *pês*, which is a mix of pine resin with bee wax and sometimes olive oil. When it comes to the wine making process using this technique, the grapes are smashed in wine stemmers, or through traditional pressing, creating the must; then, the must is put in the amphoras. The fermenting process happens in a natural way, about a week after the placing of the must. A blanket is created in the fermenting process and has to be broken everyday in order to keep the pressure in the container under control, otherwise, if the pressure were to rise uncontrollably, which could lead to the breaking of the amphora.

After about a month, the fermenting process is done and the must deposits itself in the bottom of the amphora. This is when the amphora is open, by placing a spigot in a hole about thirty centimetres from the ground up. At first, the wine is turbid, but right afterwards it becomes clear, given that the must deposit is a

natural filtre by itself. From here, the wine can be drunk immediately and transferred to other containers, such as other amphoras or bottles.



Fig.2 Amphoras Wine's making process.

Amphora Wine stands out from all other wines from its method and for the faithfulness in its ancient wine making processes.

2.2. Object TALHA

The main challenge behind this project, *BARRO, Um pedaço de tempo na alimentação*, is to find the perfect mediator between Past and Present, respecting the traditions and, through non-glazed ceramic objects, bring it to the 21st century meal table, allowing the users to make their own wine.

TALHA is born with the intention of recognizing and valuing the Amphora Wine for its historical and cultural impact and for its potencial. What is proposed with this project is the home production of Amphora Wine, using a container with the capacity for eight litres of must.



Fig.3 and 4 TALHA in utilisation.

The process is as mentioned before, with the difference that all steps are executed inside of the amphora, to which was added a bunch of grapes to be smashed inside the amphora. This bunch, the lid and the spigot are made of french oak wood, the most commonly used wood in the production of wine barrels, because of its natural porosity, capable of creating micro-oxygenation and a slight influence over the final product. Aiming to substitute the internal coating process of the *pês* in the amphora, we chose to resort to another method: to polish the inner part of the container (with the help of a river stone or a similar object, rubbing the surface, covering the clay's pores, which grants a more waterproof and polished surface). The clay used for this object was *São Pedro do Corval's* clay, for its tradition in the production of amphoras and for its favourable properties in the production of wine, as told by Master Tavares, master potter in *São Pedro do Corval*, in an interview carried during the investigation of *BARRO, Um pedaço de tempo na alimentação*:

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 "(...) I have many stacks of clay, black, brown, yellow (...) According to the needs of the object, I'm the one who mixes the clays." This is the main attribute of the *São Pedro do Corval's* clay, given that in that area exists a lot of different clays, with different properties, the secret to work with the clay is to know how to mix those kinds of clay, as said by Master Tavares "there's more porous [clay], less porous [clay] (...) [and] this region's clay is amazingly rich in iron (...)"



Fig.5 Clay from São Pedro do Corval.

3.Discussion | Case studies

Amphora Wine confirms the growing tendency to preserve and value the ancient techniques and knowledge in the differentiation and appreciation of products and processes, therefore, preserving and valuing of cultural heritage of a geographical area and its people.

This is a never forgotten secular tradition in Alentejo, the production of wine and the amphoras was never discontinued.

There's even a number of initiatives that have been essential to this conservation:

The application for craft production of Amphora Wine to be considered Intangible Cultural Heritage by UNESCO, brought to life by more than twenty municipalities;

The production of Amphora Wine by renowned homesteads, such as *Herdade do Esporão*, that started their production back in 2014, when the need of the technique's preservation became clearer;



Fig.6 Amphora Wine by Herdade do Esporão.



Fig.7 Amphora Wine by Herdade Honrado.

With the appearance of new projects, such as *Adega Honrado*, which started in a humble cellar, where António Honrado had a small wine production, and has grown to be a larger project with a modern intake, thought for the world right now, with a renewed branding, with all the fundamentals in place, specifically regarding the respect for the Past.

4. Conclusions

From the theoretical approach carried for this study, in the author's research project *BARRO, Um pedaço de tempo na alimentação*, it seems to be possible to conclude that nourishment is of the utmost importance, regarding symbolism, in current societies, in which traditional bonds were broken. Maybe the success of regional cuisine resides, nowadays, in the reaffirmation of its own place of belonging to those who still live in the birth-place of these traditions and to those who were forced to leave their hometown and comfort zones and bring the tradition to other places, creating a connection in those new places through gastronomical myths.

Along with the research project, an amphora was made, with the final aim to make available to everyone to make their own wine; this is as important in our Mediterranean-featured cuisine (bread, wine and olive oil), either in the countryside or in the big cities.

This was, at the researcher's sight, a homage to those who were here before and to those who kept and respected all the knowledge.

As the project grew, another objective became clearer: we need to contribute to the making of more healthy food - in this particular case, the making of preservatives-free and sulphites-free wine. To strengthen the case of using red clay in the making of utility tableware, we can look at its organic matters and its porosity, all of which seem to outstandingly influence the results of the final products; this is extremely significant to deepen and investigate, more-so in what concerns the product design industry and its new products and trends.

Given the importance of obliging the - Portuguese norms and regulations, regarding

food safety and, having being created recently a new national norm regarding utility tableware (NP 4555-1:2018 - *Louça Cerâmica Utilitária*), that reviews all the technical requirements that utility tableware has to have, we can gather that ceramic products that go outside this norm, but have an historical or cultural importance should be considered the exception to the rule and should be kept in mind in a future revision of said norm, by the qualified entities.

5. Quotes

(1) *in*: Venâncio, F. (2017) *BARRO, Um pedaço de tempo na alimentação* p. 114

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