



Vino Mex

History of Mexican Wines Precolumbian and Spanish age

Chapter 2: The first downturn

The vines from Europe adapted well to their new environment and were so productive that one could make wine and brandy. The development of the industry was nipped in the bud however when Madrid totally prohibited the making of wine in order to protect Spanish home-grown products and in later periods the ruling classes' preference for French wines gave little opportunity for it to reestablish itself.

Perhaps the Cortéz edict to the colonists succeeded too well, and early settlers were judged too enthusiastic about the product. In any event, the Spanish crown abruptly forbade the production of local wines in 1699, dooming early Mexican vineyards and forcing the colonials to purchase the Spanish wines of the day or go without. Catholic missionaries in need of sacramental wines did cultivate vines, however, despite the viceroys' determined interference.

After the Independence, the regulations were modified to protect the national production and the import of wines and liquors was taxed very heavily. Humboldt, some years before, had praised on a particular way the vineyards of Paso del Norte and from the Provincias Internas: they flourished, and besides of the general chaos of the time, they grew up.

The Jesuit priest Father Juan Ugarte, the grandfather of Mexican viticulture, worked his way north from Parras to other missions, planting grapevines as the buildings progressed. When put in charge of the Loreto mission in Baja California in 1701, he promptly planted the first vines on that peninsula as well.

In 1791, Jesuit priests established the "Mision de Santo Tomas" in Baja California, about 90 miles south of present day San Diego. They brought and planted vines and produced one of the first wines in the Californias.

In 1834, Dominican priests founded the "Mision de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe del Norte," about 70 miles south of San Diego. This was the last mission established in the Californias and the one that functioned the least time. But the valley retains the abbreviated name "Valle de Guadalupe." Today the valley produces about 75 percent of Mexico's wines, many winning international recognition. The valley was blessed as one of the rare places in the world where premium wine grapes can be grown.

The road to the present wasn't easy for the valley and its wines. In 1857, after Mexico's War of Reform, the Catholic Church was stripped of its land holdings, which included the missions in Lower California that was left to Mexico after the U.S.-Mexico war. All church property became the property of the state. The government sold the former lands of the Mision de Santo Tomas to a private group, which established the Bodegas de Santo Tomas in 1888.

Since the independence of Mexico, the vine were of French origin and since the Porfirian era, not taking into consideration the period of the Revolution, the French wine started to be assimilated to prestige.

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