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Marion Demossier, *Burgundy: A Global Anthropology of Place and Taste*. New Directions in Anthropology, Vol. 43. New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2018. ix+267 pp. Illustrations, bibliography, glossary, and index. \$135.00 U.S. (hb) ISBN: 978-1-78533-851-9; \$19.95 U.S. (pb) ISBN 978-1-78920-627-2.

Review by Nicole Dombrowski Risser, Towson University.

The results are interesting when the anthropologist turns her lens on her own community. Marion Demossier's study of landscape, wine production, and its local and global meaning in *Burgundy: A Global Anthropology of Place and Taste* benefits from her position as Burgundian insider, as well as world traveler. Having participated as a consultant on Burgundy's application to UNESCO for World Heritage status in 2015, Demossier situates her study of a place that claims a hermetically sealed historical, climatic and cultural status within the changing global framework of winemaking and wine tasting. For lovers of wine, the result is a textured study filled with information about the French AOC/AOP wine classification system, vocabularies and grammars that structure discussions of winemaking and wine selling, and analysis of the impact of those structures on producers and consumers. The surprising twist in Demossier's study is that it begins, understandably, with the hundreds of Burgundian wine growers, but ends in New Zealand with the producers of Pinot Noir in Central Otago. That trajectory is what allows Demossier to explore one of her central questions, which is what remains of the specificity of place and taste as defined by *terroir* and *climat*—place-specific designations of distinction—when the plants and processes of those geographically specific areas are exported for reproduction and consumption abroad.

Concerned with the period roughly between 2008 and 2016, Demossier's study focuses on the present practices of Burgundian wine makers, but also takes into account, as the region's UNESCO application required, the nearly 4,000 years of the region's agricultural history. Organized into eight densely packed chapters, the book traces the various appropriations of the ideas of *terroir* and *climats de Bourgogne* within France, Asia and New Zealand, delivering on the author's promise to explore the globalization of the brand. As an historian, I appreciate the methodological crossovers Demossier, the anthropologist, applies, historically contextualizing her topic. But I find that historians borrow perhaps more of the vocabulary of Demossier's discipline than is true in the reverse, creating certain limitations for this reviewer. Assessing the study's contribution to anthropology seems obvious to a rural historian, but Demossier indicates that her own disciplinary practitioners have shown skepticism, even resistance, with regard to the legitimacy of the study of wine as an anthropological topic when divorced from its relation to ritual and religion (p.12). Demossier acknowledges their concerns and speeds forward with

her convincing argument that wine matters for our understanding of where it is made as well as for understanding the present and future direction of our global economy.

In chapter one, “Wine Landscapes and Place-Making,” Demossier looks at the fragmentation of the Burgundian vineyards, discussing how since the creation of the AOC system in the 1930s, growers have been hemmed into a system that at once creates value and limits creativity. Within the AOC system, however, powerful, wealthy growers as well as smallholders have more recently found ways, in the expanding global wine market, to reposition the region within a new “global hierarchy of values” (p. 10) around taste and place. In particular, the region’s application for World Heritage status through UNESCO allowed wine producers, wine sellers and affiliated sectors like tourism to reconsider the long history of the region and to repackage it, emphasizing Burgundy’s unique heritage and landscape, while at the same time adapting their wine to the changing tastes of a growing group of middle-income consumers, the latter seeking to distinguish their own social position by association with the consumption of an old, valued, aristocratic product. In this chapter, Demossier discusses, as one of the core Burgundian distinctions, the growers’ claims to work their own vines: *aller à la vigne*. But she also indicates the mirage this claim depends upon, which hides the labor of a vast number of temporary workers. I’d like to have learned more about these transients.

Chapter two, “Wine Growers and Worlds of Wine,” further develops the argument about the role of elite growers in defining the standards of quality, which have earned the industry its distinction even among French wines. Real obstacles of inherited property, family transmission of *savoir-faire*, and expensive preconditions for embracing the newly fashionable ecological approach to growing wine continue to limit entry into the prestigious circle of Burgundian growers, and even limit expanded success for long-time small growers. The trend is unsurprising, and is one taken up by Venus Bivar in *Organic Resistance*, her study of increasing consolidation of land in fewer and fewer farmers’ hands.[1]

Chapter three, “The Taste of Place”, tackles questions of authenticity and the shaping of perceptions of taste-attributes with a claim to historical specificity. Interestingly, Demossier shows the power of different towns to exert influence as well as leadership determining the norms of taste now and in the past. But she goes beyond elite insiders and examines the role of intermediaries, such as local societies and wine writers, like Hugh Johnson, who address global audiences and thus determine desires within and beyond the region. The AOC industry is one of these crucial intermediaries which has more recently fostered the role of wine experts, to establish the technical criteria for scrutinizing taste and emphasizing the specific natural and geological characteristics of a vineyard, as opposed to the more traditional qualities focusing on a final regional product. In this way, the wine market has been adjusted by intervening experts who claim their own role in defining what should sell and at what price. Regrettably, Demossier does not engage historians’ recent work, which shows how manipulation of the concept of the French “wine tasting tradition”[2] was used by the wine industry, as Joseph Bohling’s work shows, to exploit the idea of disappearing tradition in order to beat back health advocates’ crusade against wine alcoholism. Some 1960s French women’s magazines championed “Health-Sobriety,” as a modern alternative idea to traditional wine tasting, which they believed contributed to alcoholism. Tradition had its opponents as well as champions.[3]

Chapter four, “Winescape,” returns to history and explores how Burgundians sought to claim the region as the birthplace of wine. Burgundian elites in particular are revealed to have actively

distributed their wine to a broad sector of European elites to create prestige and to place at the pinnacle of the regions' many wines a few labels that were out of reach for the average consumer. Wines only mentioned in James Bond movies--labels like Romanée Saint Vivant, Corton and Puligny-Montrachet--entered the vocabulary of the well-heeled, and reinforced what Demossier calls, "ideas about lifestyle and class" (p. 68) identified with success and power. Here Demossier focuses on the triumphant story of Burgundian *grands crus*, the category of highest excellence, which became required vocabulary for a set of developing transnational elites eager to assert their own cultural distinction through knowledge of Burgundian wines.

Chapter five, "Beyond Terroir," offers a sophisticated analysis of how the concept of what can be boiled down to "locally grown," has at once gained a hegemonic influence (that risks homogeneity, insisting upon rootedness and perhaps stifling innovation) while at the same time offering growers a way to cling to their uniqueness in an increasingly competitive global market. Who is Burgundian and what are the exact limits of Burgundy's influence and territory? This point was comically brought home to me in my own experience on the borders of Burgundy some years ago. I was riding as a passenger in the car of two friends, both octogenarians from Saint Maurice, located firmly in the Côte-du-Rhône Villages region. Their grandson, who had grown up in Lyon, was marrying a young woman from around Asne (Rhône), located about 9 kilometers south of Mâcon, perhaps the southernmost point of Burgundy. The grandfather was a bit nervous, as we had just come from the civil ceremony in Lyon, and were now expected at the church ceremony in Asne. As a life-long *compagnon de route* of the PCF, the grandfather was not excited about an afternoon "sous le Curé." We missed our exit and ended up out of our way in Romanèche-Thorins, a town certainly in the Beaujolais region, but questionably in Burgundy. The driver, upon seeing the sign shouted, shaking his head incredulously, and disapprovingly, as though this was the final straw of a joyous but culturally challenging day, "That's it. Now we've fallen into Burgundy!" It could not have been worse if we'd ended up in the Court of the Duke of Burgundy himself. My driver's wife, however, adamantly disagreed, scolding and correcting, "Ah non, J.P. C'est Beaujolais Villages ici, on n'est pas du tout dans la Bourgogne!" Her reference was to wine and not place. What was agreed upon by both of my friends was that we weren't in Côte du Rhône anymore! The implications, as Demossier suggests, were cultural, social, and gastronomical and, for my friends, a frustration.

Chapter six "Translating Terroir, Burgundy in Asia," dives more deeply into how marketing strategies have generated global fantasies about Burgundian wines. Perhaps the most anthropologically-determined chapter in terms of Demossier's deployment of disciplinary jargon and linguistic analysis, "Translating Terroir" nevertheless offers an interesting look at the meaning of place and taste that Asian connoisseurs create and nurture about Burgundy. They base their concept of place on the *grands crus* model and in the concept of terroir, which tends to obscure small growers and labels located lower on the pyramid of prestige. Looking at Japan, Demossier suggests not only how non-French consumers create "multiple interpretations and imaginings" of Burgundy (p. 137), but also how such imaginings become a tool of European economic power, which at the same time democratizes global wine consumption. The story is one of success and stability as recounted here, but with an awareness of the problematic "quasi-religious" (p. 175) cult-like encounters wine tasting can produce among its enthusiasts.

Chapter seven, "Creating Terroir, Burgundy in New Zealand," offers an interesting meditation on cultural exchange. Examining the plantation of Pinot Noir in Otago, New Zealand, Demossier identifies an arrogance among Burgundians, "who believe they have nothing to learn" (p. 20)

from New Zealanders. By contrast, the New Zealanders, Demossier finds, are not constrained by the AOC system and therefore are much more at liberty to innovate, as compared to the upcoming generation of young French vintners, who have occasionally dared to advance criticisms of the hegemonically powerful lieutenants of the AOC system and its regulations.

Chapter eight, “From Terroir to the *Climats de Bourgogne*,” ends with Burgundy’s application for UNESCO World Heritage status for the *climats de Bourgogne* recognition. Interestingly, Demossier sees this campaign, and I agree, as an effort “to serve the definition of specific micro identities to counter globalization” (p. 20). Burgundy seeks global recognition of its distinct regional position in order to enhance its global hegemony. Here Demossier is both actor and analyst. Having contributed to the definition of *climats de Bourgogne*, which she acknowledges as “an ill-defined term... that is embodied in imagined notions of an enduring and thus authenticated social configuration (the wine and its terroir)” (p. 232), she also traces the development of local opposition to the term, which some growers felt homogenized the region to the benefit of elite Burgundian growers.

Overall, the book delivers on its promise to excavate the layers of meaning that have contributed to defining and redefining a region, its product, and its land. This is both the strength and weakness of Demossier’s book, and the fork in the road at which the historian departs perhaps from the anthropologist. There are very few people in Demossier’s book. In part, this is methodological. Indeed, Demossier refers to the people from whom she obtains much of her information from as “informants.” Towns are sometimes coded so as not to reveal their identities, a form of respect the anthropologist accords her subjects. As a historian, the absence of developed biographies and analysis of key players leaves me yearning a bit for peopled places, accountable individuals, and protesting protagonists; structures and associations stand in their stead. These are disciplinary distinctions that I’m able to tolerate in order to move without passport into the very inviting, if ever changing places of Demossier’s Burgundy, a region distinctly modernizing, and globally plotting its future success by mining and deploying its rich and tasty past.

NOTES

[1] Venus Bivar. *Organic Resistance: The Struggle over Industrial Farming in Postwar France* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2018). For a similar discussion of how French farmers are using the *bio* designation to create value see: Nicole Dombrowski Risser, “In Provence, a Woman’s Quest to Resist Industrial Farming and Transform and Preserve the French Family Farm,” Venus Bivar & Tamara L. Whited eds., *Special Issue: Industrial Food and its Critics, Modern & Contemporary France*, 28:2, 209-229.

[2] Joseph Bohling, *The Sober Revolution: Appellation Wine and the Transformation of France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018), 145.

[3] Ibid.

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