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H-France Review Vol. 4 (January 2004), No. 1

**Kolleen M. Guy**, *When Champagne Became French: Wine and the Making of a National Identity*. Baltimore, Md. and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003. xi + 245 pp. Illustrations, appendix, notes, bibliographical essay, and index. \$39.95 U.S. (cl). ISBN 0-8018-7164-6.

Review by Bertram M. Gordon, Mills College.

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In April 2003, the *New York Times* reported that a French government consultant had suggested that wine exports might be increased if labels indicated the name of the grape rather than the area of origin.<sup>[1]</sup> Not surprisingly, this suggestion aroused controversy in France, where the denomination, or "delimitation," of wine regions, has become a highly prized economic commodity and a significant part of national identity discourse. *When Champagne Became French* is Kolleen Guy's account of the transformation of champagne<sup>[2]</sup> from a still red wine to the bubbly white that became part of the contemporary French *patrimoine* during the period from the 1789 Revolution to World War I. Guy writes in her conclusion that:

This book has focused on the process that transformed champagne and France's regional terroir into national possessions. The intrinsic belief that French wines deserved special status in the global marketplace came from both a popular shift in attitudes toward wine and its meaning and, in no small part, from the successful marketing of regional specialties as national goods. Wine appeared as something exceptionally French, to be protected against global marketing shifts (p. 188).

Indeed, Champagne still wines had a long history before the sparkling varieties caught on. Fizzy wine bubbles, Guy notes, at first were considered a trick by producers to hide the taste of bad wine (p. 13). The shift to a more positive association with the bubbly took place in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. During the seventeenth century, Champagne and Burgundy wines, made from the pinot noir grape, were rivals, competing for the export market to the Low Countries. To more successfully compete with their rivals, Champenois vintners developed new wines of a variety of colors which Voltaire extolled in "Le Mondain" in 1736. These wines appear to have gained popularity among fashionable circles in Paris and in the export market and are said to have been introduced into England by the Marquis de Saint-Évremond, a *Frondiste* exiled from France in 1682.<sup>[3]</sup> By the eighteenth century, sparkling wine had become popular among English and French royalty and aristocracy, but its production still made up only 10 percent of the Champagne's wine, largely because the technology of bottle production had not yet produced a bottle that would consistently withstand the carbon dioxide pressure of the effervescent wine. Broken bottles were a continuing problem. The transition from still to sparkling wines took the better part of the nineteenth century and was not complete until after the phylloxera epidemic at the end of the century.

That sparkling champagne was well established by the early nineteenth century is suggested by the gastronome Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin (1755-1826). Brillat-Savarin, who by profession was a lawyer and, from 1796 to his death, held a post at the appeals court, was more an amateur attempting to make a science of gastronomy than the "taste professional" depicted by Guy (p. 42). "Champagne [he wrote] is exciting in its first effects and stupefying in its later ones, in other words it acts exactly like the carbonic acid gas it contains."<sup>[4]</sup> In 1842, however, the English traveler Sefton Glossmore, describing a meal at the Frères Provençaux restaurant in Paris, described a dessert course as an epergne laden with "horrible

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indigestibles": *biscuits à la cuillère*, *macarons*, and *massepains*, with four *compotes*: *fromage à la reine*, *poires de martin sec*, *pommes de reinette blanche*, *marrons au vermicelle*; accompanied by a red Champagne *non-mousseux*, which the author preferred to the English custom of serving port at the end of a meal.[5]

Paralleling the arguments of Eugen Weber's *Peasants into Frenchmen*,[6] Guy focuses on the manipulation of the Champagne sparkling wine image during the period from the Franco-Prussian War to World War I in which she sees a periphery versus central authority issue where local *négociants* [merchants who often owned vineyards] and *vignerons* [wine growers] managed to convert a peripheral or regional item of value, Champagne's sparkling wine, into a national icon (pp. 128, 185). By the Belle Époque, this icon came to symbolize both the good life in France and the lifestyle of an international elite. Part of the development of the champagne tradition in the nineteenth century was the creation of a myth around the largely forgotten monk Dom Pierre Pérignon, depicted in 1821 as the inventor of Champagne's sparkling wine, that was popularized during the 1889 Paris Exposition (p. 28). The re-creation of the Dom Pérignon tradition is reminiscent of the revival of Joan of Arc and her promotion to national iconicity during the same period.

Guy's book focuses on several apparent paradoxes in the development of champagne in the nineteenth century. One such irony was the way in which *négociants* and *vignerons* worked, sometimes in harmony and sometimes in opposition, to transform their product from merely one of many local wines to national iconic status, considered traditional for many occasions around the world. The regional became the national, which was used in turn to promote the regional. The concept of *terroir*, which worked so well for the champagne industry, was enhanced by French writers including the geographer Paul Vidal de la Blache, the historian Ernest Lavisse, and the chef and cookbook author Auguste Escoffier, all of whom argued for a "personality" of France built upon the seemingly unique blend of geography and history of each of its regions (pp. 136-37). Wines were an integral part of this brew. Not surprisingly, setting the borders for delimitation, the legal designation of the area allowed to call its wine "champagne," was highly controversial. A 1905 law setting up the *zone d'appellation* was revisited in 1908, and again, following a local *vignerons'* revolt, in 1911 (p. 166).

Two additional ironies that Guy highlights are the promotion of an artisanal myth while mechanizing the wine production process and the role of Germans in the development of a national French icon. While the "Dom Pérignon myth" (p. 29) was being revived and images of the *veuve* Clicquot (and other *veuves*) were evoked to sell champagne (p. 35), by 1900 tourists were visiting the region to marvel at the "factories" turning out the sparkling wine (p. 69). The development of champagne as a French national icon was fueled in large measure by Rhineland German families, such as Mumm, Roederer, Planckaert, and Bollinger, who became *négociants* during the course of the century but were later vilified as anti-German sentiment grew and boiled over with the invasion of 1914 (p. 84).

Integral to Guy's account are the phylloxera plague of the late nineteenth century and the 1911 revolt in Champagne. Phylloxera struck the area in the late 1880s, later than in southern France, and not all observers agreed either on the causes of the epidemic or its seriousness. Through their syndical association, *négociants* generally favored the replanting of the affected vineyards with phylloxera-resistant American rootstock, but this process was expensive and the smallholder *vignerons* resisted in the belief that the *négociants* wanted to drive them out of business and take over the vineyards. As the plague worsened, the *vignerons* appealed for government protection against the fraud they believed was being committed by *négociants*, sometimes stigmatized as German, who sold as "champagne" wine produced from outside the region (pp. 104-106). Tension increased with sporadic violent protest by the *vignerons* from 1892 through 1894 when the syndical association, the target of vigneron hostility, was

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dissolved following renewed violence. Nonetheless, the phylloxera continued; more vineyards were replanted; and many of the poorer *vignerons* were obliged to sell their vineyards in the early 1900s (p. 113). Those who remained, faced with the cost of replanting, became ever more strident in their calls for government support. By its anti-German invective and its focusing on the *terroir* as a national good during the phylloxera crisis, vigneron activism, according to Guy, was a major factor in the evolution of champagne into an item of national *patrimoine* and in the eventual delimitation laws.

Tension continued, and, despite the passage of the 1908 delimitation law, the *vignerons*, not trusting the government to protect them from what they charged was the sale of "outside" wine as "champagne," in 1911 vandalized wine shipments of *négociants* they believed guilty. Although Jean Jaurès saw the 1911 action as a class revolt, Guy maintains that it was instead a patriotic action, calling on the state to protect the national *patrimoine* according to the concepts of Vidal de la Blache (pp. 160-61) or "to protect the emotional tie between Frenchmen and the soil," in the spirit of Maurice Barrès (p. 173). *Vigneron* discourse, she writes, "was less about class than it was about protecting the *patrie* and the rural community," incorporating a romantic nationalist Left with deep roots in French political culture (p. 181). Although many of the protesting *vignerons* were punished, their victory was complete and French wine protection laws became so axiomatic that they served as the basis for similar European Union legislation at the end of the century (p. 194).

Reading *When Champagne Became French* is a bit like being a thirsty drinker of that effervescent wine who wants more after the first sip. When Guy emphasizes the rise of champagne, primarily during the Belle Époque, as a conceptual model, she unfortunately does not parallel it with other foodstuffs that were contemporary nor does she address the meaning of wine in France prior to the rise of champagne, when the white wines of north-central France, centered around Paris, including the famous vineyards at the top of Montmartre, were already a viable cultural marker in the Middle Ages. These wines have been replaced by the champagne of today, identified only as of a certain district. Another measure of the pre-champagne wine world of France is the œnological geography of François Rabelais.[7]

Guy also does not address the absence of the beer industry as a competitor for wine in general and champagne in particular during the Belle Époque. Champenois wine producers had progressively solved the problem of sealing champagne bottles with technological advances in bottle caps from the 1820s through the 1880s. The crown bottle cap, a metal enclosure with a cork lining, for beer, and later soda, was not developed until 1892, weakening beer's ability to compete with wine in the 1890s. Beer was available only from a keg in a tavern. Beer also needed refrigeration, not available on a large scale until later in the twentieth century, whereas wine could travel without it. A British traveler, dining in the Réserve restaurant in Marseilles in 1872, was served a soft cake soaked in Kirsch with an un-iced dry Roussillon's *carte d'or* champagne.[8]

The unrest in the Champagne region from the 1890s through 1911 was driven in large measure by the international demand for the wine, a third factor in the champagne story too insufficiently addressed by Guy. By the end of the nineteenth century, Europe had a new patrician class with substantially more available capital than before, not tied to land, that could be mobilized for spending. The period between 1880 and 1930 was the age of the magnate wealthy classes, addressed by Thorstein Veblen and Werner Sombart, in both the United States and Europe.[9] Industrial wealth flowed into Europe closely following the development of railroad transport and fed by the influx of wealth from the colonial empires. Labor historians often discuss the accretion of surplus value, based on the exploitation of labor, but there has been far less study of those who actually received the surplus and the kinds of wine they bought to satisfy their quest for status. The coming of the railway to Nice in 1864, for example, brought increasing numbers of affluent British, Russians, Italians, and Germans for the winter season on the

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Riviera,[10] where they undoubtedly bought champagne, a taste acquired in Russia through the energetic efforts there of the *veuve* Clicquot in the aftermath of Napoleon's defeat (pp. 14-15).

Champagne's acceptance in the later nineteenth century is part of the development of a dining and drinking style that could be termed Franco-Continental in the great trans-Atlantic luxury liners and hotels, which came increasingly to resemble one another in the 1880s. In 1912, the liner "France" contained an American-style bar.[11] The Belle Époque, when an affluent elite could afford to popularize expensive wines, was personified in the grand hotels of César Ritz and the Franco-Continental fare produced by his associate and chef, Escoffier.[12] The champagne ritual was but one of a number practiced by the Belle Époque elites. Another was the post-dinner brandy snifter, cigar ritual. Cognac was now named for Napoleon--Courvoisier was said to have created a special *Cognac de Napoléon* upon the Emperor's visit to the company in 1811--although the Cognac region received its legal delimitation only in 1909. Additional patrician rituals were the French dinner service that required two to five wines served in series, and the dessert service accompanied by sauternes or port. The sherry aperitif and French kir also became part of a ritual that was more international upper crust than French.

The transformation of champagne into a French national icon hardly ended the producers' problems as World War I brought renewed devastation to the region, the Bolshevik Revolution destroyed the Russian market for fine wines, and Prohibition nearly did so in the United States. By the 1920s, the competition of beer and, later, soft drinks, began to be felt. The French still struggle to control the use of the term "champagne," and prevent its use by American and Australian wine producers.

*When Champagne Became French* will, hopefully, be a step toward the investigation of who was drinking what and when. Future research on the Belle Époque should look to establish how much champagne was consumed on trans-Atlantic liners, Continental railroads, hotel properties, and in elite social rituals, including New Year's Eve; how much champagne was still being drunk in the old manner of French dining, as if it were the still pinot noir of earlier times; and how much of it was used as potlatch investment, meaning that the bottles were never opened, sometimes until the present. Often champagne and other fine wines were bought and stored for status and value by hoteliers to serve or otherwise impress the still wealthy Americans and foreigners arriving from all over the world. Assuredly, the process of investment in champagne helped drive the vintners to ask for legal status in 1908. It also explains the worldwide interest in the word "champagne" in the later nineteenth century. The choice of the subject, dust jacket picture, and illustrations of *When Champagne Became French* are good examples to show how gastronomy may be studied for any time period or culture. Guy has also included a bibliographical essay that thoroughly discusses the relevant sources and literature. Even though one might wish for a broader, Braudelian, treatment of champagne's development in the directions indicated in this review, this book is to be honored for raising an important problem in the history of French cultural hegemony, namely, why *la grande France* had its great age of cultural tourism in exactly the same period as its peak champagne era.

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## NOTES

[1] Jacqueline Friedrich, "A 'Heretic' Ruffles Feathers in France," *New York Times* (2 April 2003): F10.

[2] I have followed Guy in capitalizing "Champagne" in reference to the geographic area and using lower case in reference to the wine.

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[3] Nicholas Faith, "Champagne," in Jancis Robinson, ed., *The Oxford Companion to Wine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994): 210.

[4] Jean-Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, *The Physiology of Taste*, trans. by Anne Drayton (London: Penguin, 1994 [original French edition, 1825]): 147.

[5] Sefton Glossmore, "French Cookery," *Bentley's Magazine*, 11 (1842): 101.

[6] See Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976). For discussion of the embourgeoisement of the peasantry before World War I, see Weber, pp. 493-94, and for the embourgeoisement of peasant clothing styles, see Annie Moulin, *Peasantry and Society in France since 1789*, trans. by M. C. and M. F. Cleary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press and Paris: Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 1991): 121-22.

[7] See François Rabelais, Gargantua and Pantagruel, chapter 3, LII.

[8] "French Home Life, No. IV. Food," *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 111, 626 (February 1872): 132-33.

[9] See Alain Corbin, "Du loisir cultivé à la classe de loisir," in Corbin, ed., *L'Avènement des loisirs, 1850-1960* (Paris: Aubier, 1995): 58-59. See also Christophe Bouneau, "La Construction et les mutations de l'économie touristique pyrénéenne du milieu du 19e siècle au second conflit mondial," in Laurent Tissot, ed., *Construction d'une industrie touristique aux 19e et 20e siècles, Perspectives internationales/Development of a Tourist Industry in the 19th and 20th Centuries, International Perspectives* (Neuchâtel, Switzerland: Éditions Alphil, 2002): 131.

[10] André Rauch, *Vacances en France de 1830 à nos jours* (Paris: Hachette, 1996):19-20.

[11] Corbin, "Du loisir cultivé à la classe de loisir,": 67.

[12] See Bertram M. Gordon, "Going Abroad to Taste: North Americans, France and the Continental Tour from the Late Nineteenth Century to the Present," in *Proceedings of the Western Society for French History; Selected Papers of the Annual Meeting* (Greeley, Colorado: University Press of Colorado, 1998): 166-67.

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*H-France Review* Vol. 4 (January 2004), No. 1

ISSN 1553-9172