

Good example of the history of bordeaux as a wine region essay

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In an article published by Berry Brothers & Rudd, an included Bordeaux wine timeline indicates that the first recorded mention of wine being produced in Bordeaux is by the Latin poet Ausonius in 350 AD. Further, that he was honored by the Chateau Ausone wine being named after him. That wine is still marketed today (“Bordeaux History” n. d.).

The next significant date on that timeline is 800 years later - 1152 AD - marking the marriage of Henry Plantagenet (subsequently King Henry II of England) to Eleanor of Aquitaine. The marriage brought increased trade between England his lands of Gascony and much of western France (including Bordeaux), which helped establish Bordeaux as a leading source of wine (“Bordeaux History” n. d.).

Henry’s son (King) John established a special trade agreement with the merchants of Bordeaux, exempting them from payment of export taxes for all their ships that sailed out of Bordeaux. As a consequence, their wines sold in England became eminently affordable, creating a close bond between those Bordeaux wines (often called “claret”) and the British people - a bond that still exists today. Due to their high quality, the wines from the top-ranked Chateaux have traditionally achieved the best world prices. That situation led to the first classification system of wines. Napoleon III requested the Bordeaux Chamber of Commerce to rank their best quality wines in accordance with prices. Following on from that 1885 request, 61 of the costliest Bordeaux red wines were graded within five categories called “crus” (growths) (“Bordeaux” 2012).

Just when the Bordeaux region was enjoying tremendous success with its wines, disaster struck in the form of Phylloxera, an insect related to the

aphid, which attacks the roots of vines, ultimately killing the plant.

Indigenous in North America, it was believed to have reached Europe in a shipment of vines from that country, and spread rapidly through France's wine-growing regions including Bordeaux, seriously affecting wine production. In the 1880's, it was realized that American rootstocks were resistant to the Phylloxera, and that European vines could be grafted on to those rootstocks. The Bordeaux wine industry was thus able to recover. Circa 80 percent of European vineyards changed over to these grafted vines. As a temporary measure - to keep wine prices low in France - import restrictions on wine were relaxed. Then, once the industry had recovered from the Phylloxera problem, the import restrictions were restored (Yeamans 2011). In the first half of the last century, Bordeaux experienced a difficult time. After two really good consecutive vintages in 1899 and 1990, it would be another two decades before the next outstanding vintage from Bordeaux. Then there were several good vintages in the 1920s, followed by more poor years, with the problems for growers exacerbated by the depression in the 1930s, followed by World War II when Bordeaux became occupied by the German invaders. As a result, by the time the Second World War was over, many of Bordeaux's vineyards were in a neglected state. Surprisingly then, 1945 produced an excellent vintage. That trend continued, although the vineyards had experienced a severe frost in 1956, which caused many vineyard owners to replant with hardier grape varieties. Then - partly due to an overpricing policy for the 1972 vintage - the Bordeaux wine market crashed. A lean decade followed, until wine writer Robert Parker wrote enthusiastically about the great vintage of 1982. That allowed prices to rise

again, as well as bringing new buyers into the market. Since then, the market changed entirely. Nowadays, it is possible to buy Bordeaux “ futures”, and the estates sell smaller volumes of the best wines, selling much more wine in bulk. Nonetheless, Bordeaux wine “ remains the most popular and sought after”, including in new markets like China (“ Bordeaux Wine History and Description of the Wines” n. d.).

References:

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