

#### 4 CONCLUSIONS

Même si M. Federico Castellucci, le Directeur Général de l'OIV, a pu déclarer, à l'occasion d'une dégustation organisée par le Koshu of Japan au siège de l'OIV : « Les vins de Koshu expriment d'une façon magnifique les caractéristiques de son terroir », la protection juridique des terroirs viticoles au Japon reste insuffisante par rapport à celle assurée par les pays membres de l'Union européenne. Néanmoins, la situation s'est beaucoup améliorée grâce aux initiatives

syndicales. Surtout, il nous semble que le lancement de négociations pour l'enregistrement d'une indication géographique est essentiel pour la reconnaissance de la notion de terroir viticole et sa protection au niveau juridique.

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## “Everything else, it's work”

### Socio-cultural dimensions of terroir among Bordeaux winemakers

« *Le reste, c'est un travail* »

### *Dimensions socioculturelles du terroir chez les vitiviniculteurs bordelais*

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#### ABSTRACT

In 2010, the OIV adopted a resolution that defines 'terroir'. The OIV definition understands terroir as the result of the interactions between the physical specificities of a space and human labor, with an emphasis on the subsequently produced collective knowledge (OIV-VITI 333-2010); by doing so, it alludes to the social and cultural dimensions of terroir. On the basis of ethnographic fieldwork with winemakers in France and the United-States, our paper discusses some of these socio-cultural dimensions by focusing on specific vitivincultural practices (pre- and post-harvest, such as irrigation, the use of fertilizers, fermentation, filtration, etc) and on the ways in which they intersect with winemakers' conceptions and beliefs related to the space in which they work, to their profession, and to the good they produce, i.e. wine. This focus on meaningful practices, i.e. on the social and cultural dimensions of vitivincultural practices, will help us understand the different dimensions of terroir, informed not only by science and technique, but also by the various (and often mixed) ways in which winemakers conceive of their professional activity.

**Keywords:** *Terroir, Vitivincultural practices, Bordeaux, Sociology.*

**Mots-clés :** *Terroir, Pratiques vitivincules, Bordeaux, Sociologie.*

#### 1 INTRODUCTION

In 2010 the International Organization of Wine adopted a definition of terroir that includes both physical and symbolic dimensions, and emphasizes the 'collective knowledge' linked with a specific place. Terroir is thus understood as a specific geographical, physical, and cultural ensemble, rather than solely a physical or biological ensemble. From a sociological point of view, several questions arise from the OIV definition: What is collective knowledge? How is it produced? Does cultural specificity arise out of physical specificity? And how do we define 'place' to start with?

In this essay, we narrow down our questioning to conceptions of terroir among Bordeaux winemakers, on the basis of fieldwork with winemakers who control their production from the grapevine to the bottle. With other scholars of material culture, such as anthropologists Maurice Godelier (1) and Philippe Descola (2), we start from the premise that goods and practices have an equally material and symbolic life,

and focus on the relationship between vitivincultural practices and the symbolic processes that surround them, i.e. conceptions of terroir.

#### 2 MATERIALS AND METHODS

##### 2.1 Data collection

Ethnographic fieldwork (including participant observation, open-ended and semi-structured interviews) with vitivinculturists in the Bordeaux winemaking region (left and right bank) who control their production from the vineyard to the bottle. As is customary in ethnography, a lengthy phase of qualitative data collection started in 2011 and is ongoing. Our primary focus on the field is with vitivincultural practices (e.g. what winemakers do, what choices they make), which leads us to the symbolic texture of practices (e.g. what winemakers think). Hence participant observation (in the vineyard and in the cellar with winemakers) and interviews are equally important methods in our study.

## 2.2 Qualitative data analysis

Collected data (interviews, fieldnotes) are indexed and coded, using inductive coding and descriptive categories rather than semantic vehicles for the coding scheme.

## 3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Early findings point out to a series of tensions in the ways winemakers understand terroir, in between physical/biological and cultural/social notions of terroir, as follows:

### 3.1 Terroir as the physical specificity of space vs. work as the magnification of terroir

Winemakers primarily use a physical notion of terroir. When they speak of terroir, they first and foremost think of soil, and of the possibilities a given location opens up or precludes. Hence the physical environment is a canvas that sets limits to human activity. In relation to this understanding of terroir, winemaking is viewed as a magnification of terroir: a good winemaker is someone who, through labor, skills and care, produces the best wine possible in a given environment and reflects or expresses the qualities of this environment in the wine thus produced. The winemakers we work with all agree that, in Bordeaux today, skills and knowledge are high across the board: “we all know how to make wine.” When asked about what makes the difference in quality between two wines, then, they insist upon two levels: the physical terroir (which you do or do not have, and cannot change), and human labor. Human labor is not viewed solely in terms of knowledge or skills, and neither is it viewed as genius: in a situation of leveled skills and knowledge, the difference made by human labor comes primarily from care, as in the “attention to details” emphasized by a Médoc winemaker or the “common sense” a right bank one speaks of. For all the winemakers we work with (of whom only one is certified organic), care is also fundamentally linked to “natural” practices in the vineyard: they avoid using pesticides or herbicides, spend a lot of time in the vines, do most of the work by hand. As one Saint-Emilion winemaker asserted, in reference to foreign visitors, “I was happy that they recognize the great advantage that terroir is. Everything else, it’s work.”

### 3.2 Micro-terroir vs. macro terroir

The idea of terroir as a specific physical space is mostly applied at the micro-level, parcel by parcel. Winemakers speak of such and such parcel as being “better” or “good” (for instance: “this is graves, it’s a really good parcel here,” showing a specific part of their land). But they also use a broader notion of terroir, which is infused with culture and participates in the definition of an identity. Distinctions are especially made between Bordeaux and other winemaking regions (e.g. Burgundy, the U.S., Corbières...) or within the region (e.g. left and right banks), and the distinction is as much cultural as it is physical or geographical. For instance, one Médoc winemaker has the desire to grow Syrah, which he likes very much and would like to use to make wine, yet he is reluctant to do so not because of commercial reasons (the wine thus produced could

be sold as table wine, outside of the appellation, and he believes it would indeed sell) but because it is “not Bordeaux” and the cultural specificity of the region is important to him. Hence it is not just physical terroir that places limits on the wine that is made: a cultural understanding of terroir also places limits on innovation in winemaking.

### 3.3. Average terroir vs. outstanding terroir

One might think that everyone wants a terroir of exception, in the most prestigious AOCs, precisely because of the acute acknowledgment that the physical qualities of place limit or open up the possibilities of making good wine. Yet this desire (shared by most winemakers) is tempered by the fact that the financial rentability of outstanding terroirs also precludes innovation. In fact, it is on cheaper land (and “inferior” physical terroir) that winemakers innovate, have fun, and try new things out. A vivid example is found with one right bank winemaker, who makes wine both in Bordeaux Supérieur and Pomerol AOCs. In the land he works in the former AOC, he is planting new varieties. “In Pomerol I cannot afford it. But here I can, and so I’m having fun, I try to make a garden of sorts out of it, of the things I love, and, and yes, to use it to make the wine I love, that’s the idea.” In large, wealthy vineyards on the left bank, he explains that high financial stakes, the division of labor, and boards of directors make it difficult for innovation: “there is no place for dreams, (...) for the pleasure to make your own wine.” A Médoc winemaker also points out that prestigious vineyards are “scrutinized” and “watched” for mistakes, using the example of Pontet Canet, which gradually switched to organic and biodynamic winemaking in the past decade. So what is physically an average terroir (understood as placing limits upon the quality of the wine than can be produced) is socially a valuable terroir that allows for individual agency in winemaking.

## 4 CONCLUSIONS

The winemakers we work with use both a physical and social notion of terroir, and they also reject both the ideas

That terroir is everything. There are absolute and insurmountable qualitative differences between terroirs, e.g. there is a mechanical relationship between the physical terroir and the wine produced.

Or that terroir does not matter at all. With sufficient science and technique, equivalent wines can be produced almost anywhere.

It is well known that the two aforementioned ideas intersect with two distinct ways to conceive both of winemaking and of wine, often referred to as an opposition between new and old worlds (3, 4) or “modernists” and “terroirists” (5). Banks and Overton have called for a reconceptualization of these “flawed” categories, which they argue are disrupted by “globalization.” We would like to make a slightly different claim: a better understanding of the notion of terroir as it used by vitiviniculturists, and of the relationship it entertains with broader conceptions of their profession and the good they produce, shows that

the “terroir/no terroir” distinction is both pertinent and much more complex than presented in the media. Terroir has indeed been variously considered a cultural specificity, a social construct, a political object, an economic tool, an imperialist regulation, or a scientific fact. What Josling (6) calls a “war on terroir” has been fought not only at the economic level (from marketing practices to difficult bilateral trade agreements to the European Commission and World Trade Organization) but at the cultural and social levels, where terroir becomes emblematic, in turn, of better food production or of the restriction of freedom. And it could be said that the notion often in fact stands for something else, producing what Ricoeur calls a surplus of meaning (7). Conceptions of terroir intersect with, reflect, and influence, broader ones: for instance, the ways in which winemakers define their activity, the meaningfulness (or lack thereof) of the production process, the value of work, or the definition of product quality. The early findings we presented in this essay will lead us to a deeper exploration of practices and representations among vitiviniculturnists, and in

particular to an analysis of the intersections between technique, science and art in winemaking, of the value of work, and of the notion of vocation in wine production.

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## **Vignobles sur les pentes en Bourgogne : l'aube d'un nouveau modèle de l'Antiquité au Moyen Âge** *Vineyards on slopes in Burgundy: dawn of a new model from Antiquity to Middle Ages*

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#### RÉSUMÉ

La découverte d'une vigne gallo-romaine en plaine à Gevrey-Chambertin (Côte-d'Or) constitue un point important pour la compréhension de la construction des terroirs viticoles de Bourgogne. Sa situation en plaine constitue pour nous le point de départ d'une large réflexion sur la mise en place du modèle de viticulture de coteau qui prévaut en Bourgogne et sur les facteurs de ce changement de norme de qualité viticole. Les sources mobilisées pour cette approche interdisciplinaire et diachronique sont géomorphologiques, archéologiques et textuelles.

Par de nombreux points, la plantation de vignes de Gevrey-Chambertin est analogue, quant à sa situation, à de nombreux autres vignobles antiques fouillés (Midi de la France, région parisienne, Angleterre). Dans la même région, le célèbre panégyrique à Constantin daté de 312 ap. J.-C, déplore les dévastations d'origine naturelle et humaine qui ont chassé la vigne de la plaine insalubre et restreint sa culture en certains endroits. En même temps, l'évocation des vignes plantées sur les collines est un thème littéraire particulièrement joué par les auteurs de la fin de l'Antiquité qui évoquent les vignobles de Trèves sur la Moselle ou de Bordeaux sur la Garonne. Pour la Côte bourguignonne, on retrouve le même thème chez Grégoire de Tours au VI<sup>e</sup> siècle, décrivant Dijon « ... du côté de l'occident sont des montagnes très fertiles, couvertes de vignes... ». Les premières mentions de dons de vignes (vers 630) et la datation des sols viticoles des versants placent à partir des années 800 et en général à partir du Moyen Âge, la grande mise en culture des coteaux. Ainsi, c'est dans la période charnière de l'Antiquité tardive et du haut Moyen Âge, entre le IV<sup>e</sup> et le VI<sup>e</sup> siècle, que se situe ce changement important et qui est peut-être général en Gaule devenue chrétienne. Plusieurs facteurs (climatiques, socio-économiques, culturels et politiques) concomitants sont discutés pour interpréter ces changements.

**Mots-clés : non renseignés**