

## Book Reviews

Author, Title	Reviewer
Owen White <i>The Blood of the Colony: Wine and the Rise and Fall of French Algeria</i>	Paul Nugent
David L. Thurmond <i>From Vines to Wines in Classical Rome: A Handbook of Viticulture and Oenology in Rome and the Roman West</i>	Paul Nugent
Frederick J. Ryan, JR. <i>Wine and the White House: A History</i>	Knut Bergmann

OWEN WHITE: *The Blood of the Colony: Wine and the Rise and Fall of French Algeria*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge and London, 2021, 336 pp., ISBN 978-0674248441, \$39.95, £31.95, €36.00.

As colonies go, Algeria was singular. It lay just across the Mediterranean Sea from France, and it came to focus on the one commodity that the metropole produced in abundance, namely wine. None of this was supposed to happen. White observes that the initial emphasis lay squarely upon promoting complementarity in which Algeria would deliver up its bounties in the shape of commodities that France needed—like grain, tobacco, and cotton. But efforts to develop alternatives stalled, and Algeria ended up producing prodigious quantities of wine that threatened to compound France’s systemic problem of overproduction. This is a book that handily brings together a history of wine—from unpromising beginnings, through phylloxera and the subsequent surge in production, to the travails of the interwar years and the eventual demise of viticulture—with a history of settler colonialism and all its contradictions.

The book shuttles between two running themes. The first is the relationship between Algeria and France, as it played out in relation to wine. The second is the impact of the wine industry upon Algerians, who provided cheap labor but never a market for the fruit of the vine. As with South America, it was Catholic missionaries who provided the initial impetus, in the shape of the Trappists and Cardinal Lavigerie’s White Fathers. Their success with the vine close to Algiers led to growing numbers of settlers planting their own vineyards—notably in the western

department of Oran and the Mitidja plain south of the capital, but to some extent also in the department of Constantine in the east.

In the interwar years, Algeria became famous (or notorious) for its large wineries, owned both by wealthy individuals and co-operative cellars, which typically concentrated on volume rather than quality. Because Algeria belonged to a customs union with France from 1884, the bulk of this wine was shipped to France through the port of Rouen. Producers and politicians in the Midi, who initially shared common concerns, blamed overproduction on the Algerian colonists and demanded quotas on imports in the troubled 1930s. White demonstrates, however, that Algerian producers had their supporters in France, including those who supplied the colony with manufactured goods, wine merchants, and consumers in parts of the north. Hence, various plans to clip their wings came to nought.

Turning to the second theme, White demonstrates that the vine only found its feet on Algerian soil after a brutal campaign of conquest, followed by the expropriation of lands. The industry initially depended upon migrant workers from across the Mediterranean, but over time it was Algerians who provided the labor—with migrants from Morocco providing additional seasonal workers. Some of the most compelling parts of the book deal with labor struggles in the 1930s in which urban workers (including barrel makers) in and around Algiers, and their counterparts in France, joined forces to combat the efforts of French importers to ship wine in tankers.

These urban labor struggles were separate from those of farmworkers, although efforts to organize rural labor gained traction as well. White indicates that widespread sabotage, which involved the destruction of vines under cover of darkness, was a sign of the growing restiveness of vineyard workers during the mid-1930s. He judges that these actions were driven more by economic grievances rather than anti-colonial nationalism. However, following the acute hardships of the war years, the struggle for the countryside assumed a more overtly political form during the 1950s. Algerians who sought to advance the cause of independence targeted wine estates, which included physical attacks on their owners. As the latter retreated to the safety of the cities, the vine—once the symbol of conquest—seemed to symbolize colonialism in retreat.

White covers the end of colonialism relatively briefly and avoids repeating a story that has already been told in detail. His primary focus is on what happened to the enterprises that were abandoned and what became of the “Euro-Algerians”—his term for a community that was composed of immigrants from across the Mediterranean—who left for France. In a fascinating account, which leaves one wanting more, White notes that abandoned enterprises were turned over to workers in an avowedly socialist experiment with *autogestion*. Other enterprises were nationalized. Given that the vine had such a close association with French colonialism, it is hardly surprising that the newly independent government should be less than enthusiastic about continuing along the same path. But White notes that most vineyards were already very old by the 1960s and would have required reinvestment.

With the loss of the protected market in France itself, replanting vineyards in a thoroughly Muslim country did not make a lot of sense. Indeed, the demise of wine solved a problem both for the French and the Algerians. White notes that even before independence was on the cards, some had already begun shifting their assets to France. Subsequently, some of the wealthiest families acquired prime wine estates in France, such as Chateau Giscours in Bordeaux. The less prosperous ones sought to make a go of production in the south of France and on Corsica. Here they became distinctly unpopular, and in the latter case, bore the brunt of another form of nationalism that drives them from the island. White closes with a brief account of the ambivalence with which the golden age of the vine is viewed in Algeria today.

One strength of the book is the focus on particular families and estates and how they rode the various storms over more than half a century—a story both of bankruptcies and technical innovation. The text is also enlivened by a good number of photographs and illustrations. White avoids the temptation to delve deeply into the technicalities of viticulture and winemaking and does not bombard the reader with statistical details—although an appendix would have been helpful. There are passing references to particular cultivars, and again, it might have been a good idea to have presented whatever data exists in a tabular form. Despite the fact that Algeria was once the world's fourth-largest producer and the largest exporter (Meloni and Swinnen, 2014), it is remarkable that nobody has attempted to write such a book before. White has performed an admirable job and has served up a monograph that is scholarly in the best sense but also a real pleasure to read.

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## Reference

Meloni, G., and Swinnen, J. (2014). The rise and fall of the world's largest wine exporter—And its institutional legacy. *Journal of Wine Economics*, 9(1), 3–33.

DAVID L. THURMOND: *From Vines to Wines in Classical Rome: A Handbook of Viticulture and Oenology in Rome and the Roman West*. Brill, Leiden & London, 2017, 288 pp., ISBN 978-90-04-33458-8, \$132/€120 (PDF e-book \$25/€25).

The esteemed French oenologist Emile Peynaud wrote that before Louis Pasteur's work on fermentation, "good wine was merely the result of a succession of lucky accidents." The reality is more complex. While it is customary to credit the ancient Romans and those they colonized for the wider dissemination of the vine and