

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

wine itself, skepticism abounds about the quality of what was produced, given the absence of fundamental scientific knowledge. Thurmond's treatise is refreshing because it eschews the condescension of the present and seeks to credit ancient knowledge about all the stages of the wine-making process. This is less a history of wine in the ancient world than a dialogue between what ancient commentators wrote and the author's distillation of what we know now. The bottom line is that those who planted/tended vines and made wine actively experimented were keen observers of cause and effect and actively shared their accumulated wisdom. Lucky accidents happened, to be sure, but Thurmond also reveals that there was a great deal of design and active learning.

The book begins with an overview of the early origins of viticulture and winemaking based on the current archaeological and botanical evidence. This covers some familiar ground about the domestication of *vitis vinifera vinifera* in trans-Caucasia and its subsequent dissemination southwards and westwards along both shores of the Mediterranean. The overview covers the dissemination of wine under Roman rule, typically along the contours of the principal river systems in western Europe. As the vine entered more northerly climes, the author suggests that the vines were deliberately crossed with those that could cope better with the climatic conditions. At this point, Thurmond turns to a detailed discussion of viticulture, which was evidently a subject very close to the heart of the ancient Romans. He engages in a back-and-forth dialogue with Roman authors—notably Columella, Cato, Pliny the Elder, Virgil, and Varro. The bottom line is that while the advice was occasionally misplaced, imperial Romans understood the foibles of the vine very well, and much of the distilled wisdom remains with us today. Thurmond indicates that while the ancients may have lacked the basic science, they were close observers of what we would now call *terroir*. Columella was, for example, clear about the need to match particular vines to soil types. Thurmond notes that the Romans had names for around 200 cultivars, although the same vine evidently bore more than one name. For historians of wine, the challenge has been to link these to the varieties we know today. Although he leaves the door open in terms of the ancient origins of Cabernet franc, DNA evidence would seem to suggest a large gap between what was planted and the cultivars we are familiar with. Thurmond provides a detailed account of approaches to the planting of vineyards, typically through digging trenches or holes; the propagation of planting material through the selection of cuttings or “layering” in the vineyard; the training of vines to trees and stakes; the art of grafting; the practice of seasonal pruning; the use of cover crops and manure; and careful water management. Many of these practices persist to this day. This discussion establishes without any doubt that Roman viticulture was highly sophisticated.

One might anticipate a greater gap between vinification and storage practices of ancient times and those of the present, given that the winemakers had no knowledge of the microbes that can turn wine into vinegar. Again, Thurmond holds ancient practices up to the light of modern wine science and finds that, by and large, it was based on sound knowledge. There is a detailed discussion (among other things) of wine

presses, yeasts, racking, fining, and storage. Ancient winemakers understood that while oxygen was often their friend, it could also lead to spoilage. Although they did not use bottles—though they did use glass for drinking vessels—the various earthenware vessels were effectively sealed. The ancients also distinguished between wine that was made for immediate consumption and that which could be cellared.

The concluding chapter of the book deals with how wine was marketed and consumed. Much of the discussion concerns the receptacles that were perfected to store, age, transport, and dispense the wine. Thurmond is alert to the range of practices that distinguished the wine-drinking experience of the masses from those of the elite. At the top end, he notes that close attention was paid to vintage and provenance. Many of the details were inscribed on the necks of the amphorae. He also indicates that something like a ranking of regions (and associated varieties) emerged, linked to some conception of varying quality. There is also evidence that both resinated and *appassimento* wines were highly prized. The adding of wine to hot water might strike the modern consumer as odd, but some of the methods used to chill wine do not strike the contemporary wine drinker as unusual. Ancient Rome no doubt has its fair share of wine snobs, but what we do not have is a clear sense of whether there was anything like arbiters of taste, whose opinion might have influenced the choices made by others—except, of course, through ostentation and emulation.

For anybody interested in wine today, this book provides an invaluable service. It reveals how modern viticulture has built on millennia of active experimentation and good old-fashioned trial and error. It also demonstrates that while tastes certainly change, and wine drinkers look out for different things when they raise a drinking vessel to their lips, there are some constants in terms of practices that have been considered conducive to quality. On Thurmond's reading, the ancients were much closer to us than much conventional wisdom would have us believe. At a more basic level, the book underlines how integral wine has been to the shaping of western European and Mediterranean culture and society. The only shame is that the cost of this book will set the reader back to the cost of a third-growth Bordeaux.

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FREDERICK J. RYAN, JR.: *Wine and the White House: A History*. White House Historical Association, Washington DC, 2020, 456 pp., ISBN 978-1950273072, \$55.00 (hardcover).

It starts with the good old days: In a cartoon from 1953, the Republican elephant and the Democratic donkey are peacefully toasting each other. The next illustration