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When Champagne Became French: Wine And The Making Of A National Identity (The Johns Hopkins University Studies In Historical And Political Science)





Synopsis

Winner of the Outstanding Manuscript Award from Phi Alpha Theta, this work explains how nationhood emerges by viewing countries as cultural artifacts, a product of "invented traditions." In the case of France, scholars sharply disagree, not only over the nature of French national identity but also over the extent to which diverse and sometimes hostile provincial communities became integrated into the nation. In *When Champagne Became French: Wine and the Making of a National Identity*, Kolleen M. Guy offers a new perspective on this debate by looking at one of the central elements in French national culture—the luxury wine—and the rural communities that profited from its production. Focusing on the development of the champagne industry between 1820 and 1920, Guy explores the role of private interests in the creation of national culture and in the nation-building process. Drawing on concepts from social and cultural history, she shows how champagne helped fuel the revolution in consumption as social groups searched for new ways to develop cohesion and to establish status. By the end of the nineteenth century, Guy concludes, the champagne-producing provinces in the department of Marne had developed a rhetoric of French identity that promoted its own marketing success as national. This ability to mask local interests as national concerns convinced government officials of the need, at both national and international levels, to protect champagne as a French patrimony.

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Customer Reviews

"Excellent book." (Harry W. Paul *Journal of Modern History*) "The denouement of Kolleen Guy's fascinating book is the violent explosion known as the 'revolution of Champagne' in 1911. How the revolt occurred is the heart of this skillful study of a region's economy and society and its relationship to the nation state." (Thomas Brennan *Journal of Social History*) "A strong contribution to our understanding of the processes by which French national identity was constructed." (James. R. Lehning *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*) "[Guy] convincingly describes how the circumstances surrounding the evolution of this regional beverage explain changes within French society... Students writing research papers in the fields of gastronomy would find this an excellent model of how they should approach similar topics." (Massachusetts Beverage Business) "Guy's fascinating book... traces in extensive detail the forces at work to transform this formerly regional product into a world-recognized symbol of French patrimony, elitism, and spirit. In lively style, Guy chronicles the history of champagne production in France and, in turn, the history of France itself through eras of industrialization and war. All readers will find this book absorbing: history buffs, novices to the bubbly, and full-fledged experts." (Janine Sutherlin *France Today*) "A fascinating study of champagne in the years before the Great War... Guy makes us consider the current popularity of products which, like champagne, have a strong regional identity and their increasing centrality to contemporary France's sense of identity." (*Times Literary Supplement*) "A fascinating book... [Guy] demonstrates how a region with few environmental advantages for grape and wine production was able not only to succeed but to become synonymous with grace, style, and joyful gatherings." (Choice) "The first modern scholarly study of the production, consumption, and representation of champagne. Guy's prose is both inviting and accessible, deftly integrating theories from sociology, anthropology, philosophy, economics, and cultural history in a coherent, persuasive, and analytical narrative. *When Champagne Became French* is both scholarly and readable." (W. Scott Haine, Holy Names College, California) "Guy's illustrated book is a well-researched look at one of France's proudest achievements." (Lori D. Kranz *Bloomsbury Review*)

Kolleen M. Guy is an associate professor of history at the University of Texas at San Antonio.

As bubbly as its subject matter, a heady and informative jaunt through the history of Champagne, wine in general, and the Europe that gave it its genesis. An amazing, fun read.

In light of persistent international debates over whether and how nations should protect geographical indications, I found *When Champagne Became French* a useful read. Guy tells the

story of the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century conflicts over the definition of champagne and, in part, the definition of Frenchness as something connected to but distinct from the different parts of France. The concept of terroir, something like the soul of the soil, that supposedly gives certain foodstuffs their unique qualities was much up for debate during the period, whereas currently the EU and France in particular give unquestioned legal protection to terms like "champagne." Guy points out that, although often understood as a fight between capital and labor, the at-times violent disputes between vine-growers and winemakers in the Champagne region were more complicated than that. Vine-growers in the core areas of the Marne were opposed both to bottlers who wanted to use grapes from other places to make champagne and to fellow vine-growers in those other places who benefited from that practice. Meanwhile, Marne bottlers also argued that the designation champagne should be legally protected, but they wanted to limit the definition to sparkling wine bottled in the area, regardless of the source of grapes. Guy's story thus highlights champagne as an industrial product - not just because it requires a second processing to add the famous bubbles, but also because its production and consumption were profoundly affected by changes in transportation and modern advertising that helped make champagne the beverage of celebration and of Frenchness. The book is marred by repetitions of phrases, as if a series of journal articles had been simply stitched together, though I don't think these chapters were in fact published elsewhere. Nonetheless, I learned a fair amount about the social construction of terroir, a concept that supposedly represents a natural and immutable connection among an area of land, its inhabitants, and the products they produce.

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