

WHEN
Champagne
BECAME FRENCH

WINE AND THE
MAKING OF A
NATIONAL IDENTITY

KOLLEEN M. GUY

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INTRODUCTION

La belle France! . . . What wine! What diversity,
from bordeaux . . . to sparkling champagne! What
variety of white and red, from Petit Mâcon to . . .
Aÿ mousseux!

FRIEDRICH ENGELS,
"Seine und Loire" (1848)

Champagne. The word has found its way into languages far removed from French. People who have never seen, let alone tasted, French sparkling wine use the word as an image. Writers, painters, and musicians, from eighteenth-century *philosophes* to twentieth-century jazz singers, contribute to the ongoing invention of the image by using the wine to denote social status and, more significantly, the glories of France.

Within France, champagne has been seen as an embodiment of the national spirit. The pioneers of French gastronomy in the early nineteenth century, such as Anthelme Brillat-Savarin and Alexandre Grimod de La Reynière, associated the production and consumption of food and wine with the fate of the nation.¹ The medicalization of society over the course of the century gave the early "science" of gastronomy new authority. Scientists and popular writers linked champagne with a unique French personality. "The French, merry and blithe, are much like their wine of Champagne," the famous doctor Léandre-Moïse Lombard concluded in his monograph *Le Cuisinier et le médecin* (The Cook and the Doctor).² "Champagne is the French wine par excellence," Adolphe Brisson declared. "The wine resembles us, it is made in our image: it sparkles like

our intellect; it is lively like our language."³ The French people and their sparkling wine were seen as sharing an animating element.

Popular magazines and books on wine in the twentieth century continued to echo this opinion, calling the discovery of champagne by Dom Pierre Pérignon, a monk at the abbey of Hautvillers between 1668 and 1715, one of France's greatest achievements.⁴ Since 1900, moreover, this sense of champagne's importance to the nation, to French collective identity, has been reinforced by the actions of the French government, which aggressively protects the appellation as a part of the national patrimony. "Champagne" is now preserved as a trademark of France within the European Union. Champagne is "our patrimony and our collective trademark," a spokesman for the French champagne maker's association, the Syndicat des grandes marques de Champagne has stated.⁵ Few in France appear to disagree.

Champagne, some would argue, is "rooted" in soil and history, connected with place, transcending time, and offering a genuine experience of France. Consumption of champagne provides natural access to an authentic, organic France through the intermediary of French *terroir*. A term with no precise equivalent in English, *terroir* has generally been used to describe the holistic combination in a vineyard environment of soil, climate, topography, and "the soul" of the wine producer.⁶ *Terroir* was (and often continues to be) seen as the source of the distinctive wine-style characteristics at the heart of fine champagne. Much like the nation, champagne and its *terroir* are believed to possess eternal, natural qualities. The wine can be seen as an objective manifestation of the French "soul," the guardian of supreme spiritual values. "Champagne remains a symbol, profoundly rooted in French culture," notes one contemporary author, "it magnifies the virtues produced from good peasant soil and the *esprit voltairien*."⁷

Historical narratives of wine and the champagne industry of France reinforce this sense of timeless authentic Frenchness by chronicling the classical origins of French wine and highlighting its various golden ages. In his classic *Histoire de la vigne et du vin en France des origines au XIX^e siècle*, Roger Dion writes that "our elite vineyards," defined as those areas made up of "fine, quality vines" where winemakers use methods elaborated over centuries of practice, are one of the "most glorious expressions of our civilization, bequeathed to us from ancient Greece and Rome."⁸ For Dion as well as many other French historians, to write the history of wine is to write the history of the French people, a history grounded in

an ancient past and a timeless *terroir*, which serves as the repository for the accumulated historical memory of France.⁹ Wine produced from that *terroir* appears as part of the "rich legacy of remembrances," to use the famous words of Ernest Renan, that forges the solidarity of the French nation.¹⁰

Champagne is the subject of the ultimate chapter in Dion's magisterial survey of the history of the vine and wine in France. Its creation in the eighteenth century marked the advent of modern prestige viticulture, and in the nineteenth century its production developed into a large-scale commercial undertaking, "new to the viticultural history of France."¹¹ For much of the period he studies, Dion notes, what is commonly thought of as champagne—sparkling white wine bearing the regional appellation—did not exist. Indeed, the regional still wines of Champagne were not associated with the name "champagne" until the eighteenth century and, even then, the appellation was not widely known.

The natural environment of *la côte de Champagne*, the *terroir* of the region, as Dion foreshadowed in his introduction, made the region "predestined" for fine wine production.¹² The modern *vin mousseux* of Champagne that emerged in the eighteenth century was part of a longer narrative rooted firmly in antiquity. Champagne originated in an ancient "cult of the vine" driven in France from the sixteenth through the nineteenth century by an *amore patrio*. Local wine growers nurtured an "ancestral tradition" of quality still wine cultivation out of a "patriotic obligation."¹³ This fidelity to ancestral traditions of quality wine production built the foundation for the innovative winemaking experiments of Dom Pérignon and the other key "creators" of champagne.¹⁴ The story of the emergence of champagne and its unparalleled reputation in the nineteenth century is, in Dion's narrative, the logical culmination of French history.

In this context, why would anyone bother to reconsider *when* Champagne became French? Indeed, champagne, as a good associated so intimately with the national history of France, has an authority and legitimacy not afforded most commodities.¹⁵ French wines, as demonstrated in Dion's work, are approached much like the French nation itself. Eternal virtues or qualities that are attributed to both France and its wines can, however, disguise what are social and cultural constructs in natural attire. Emphasis on objective factors such as soil and climate, which are at the heart of *terroir*—used to distinguish the excellence of *crus* and the material profile of countries—often blurs the importance of systems of social

values in the invention of both wine and nation. Analogies between wine and nation dominate, creating an artificial determinism within French winegrowing history. A certain circular logic follows from this history, making it possible to use the same words to describe both the qualities of Frenchness and the qualities of French wines. Wines and national identity become so intertwined that it is difficult to invoke the one without eliciting the other.

When Champagne Became French addresses both wine and nation. By examining the historical relationship between champagne, social distinction, and French national identity, this book seeks to go beyond the teleological and self-referential logic that is at the heart of much of the historiography of the French wine industry. Both champagne and French winemaking entered a new era in the nineteenth century with the growth of markets for prestige or luxury wines and the advent of large-scale wine production. Thomas Brennan's masterful study *Burgundy to Champagne: The Wine Trade in Early Modern France* confirms this development, chronicling the half century—roughly from 1775 to 1825—when production of bottled wine became more sophisticated and the export trade became big business.¹⁶ By the mid-nineteenth century, sales of champagne were calculated in the millions of francs, and it quickly became one of France's most profitable exports.¹⁷

Annual champagne sales climbed rapidly after 1870, topping 21 million bottles sold abroad and 4 million bottles sold at home by 1890. New techniques of producing, selling, and distributing champagne emerged in tandem with the increasing dependence of the nation-state on the opinions of ever-broader elements of the population. Luxury prestige wines became a part of the new, mass consumer culture and national consciousness. It was in this era that the French began to discuss champagne's place within their national culture. Defining champagne as French became a highly contentious issue both at home and abroad.

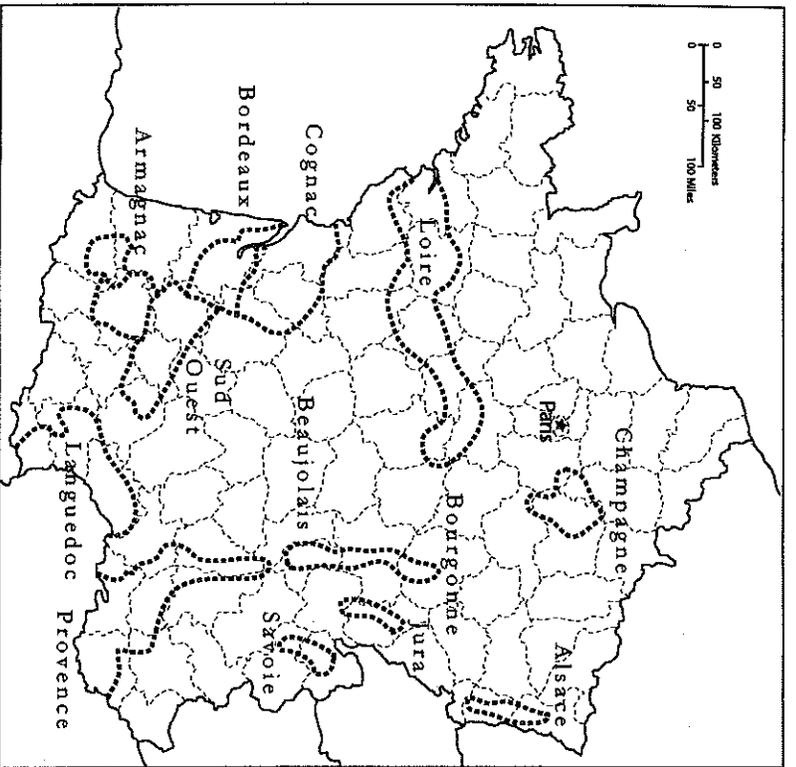
The late nineteenth century was a time of rapid change, including the beginnings of the modern revolution in consumption. Social groups and their environments were dramatically transformed, leading them to search for new devices to ensure or express social cohesion and identity and to restructure social relations. Champagne was central to this process. Used to delineate social boundaries, champagne consumption became a basic ritual for membership within social groups. As an integral part of numerous traditions and rituals, champagne became a subject of mass culture, a centerpiece of bourgeois society. Whereas some of these traditions

were consciously invented and constructed, others evolved more informally with varying degrees of deliberate construction. Whether invented or evolved, these traditions, rituals, and images became a part of what the French sociologist and cultural critic Pierre Bourdieu has termed "cultural capital."

Champagne's investiture with cultural capital resulted from both its linkage to and reinforcement of France's burgeoning reputation as the preeminent capital of the bourgeois world and the wine's own evolving importance as a transnational marker of social distinction. The symbolic significance of the commodity and its use in the ritual symbolism of diverse societies invested those who controlled its production and distribution with a vital element of economic and social control. No single group, agency, or institution had the power to create or consolidate the rituals and images surrounding champagne, but the peasant vine growers (*vignerons*) and merchant-manufacturers (*négociants*) who produced champagne in the department of the Marne found themselves uniquely positioned to profit from cultural attitudes about the wine and its consumption.

With the rapidly evolving consumer culture of the end of the century, "old" images of champagne went through frequent modifications, eliciting efforts by these regional producers to repress unwanted traditions or symbolic readings and encourage "correct" ones.¹⁸ These correct images were also in the interest of the new French republic, which sought to promote France's economic position as a major supplier, not only of quality wines and agricultural products, but also of luxury manufactured goods. By the eve of World War I, some were declaring champagne to be no less than a "Citoyen du Monde entier."¹⁹ The universal citizen, however, was associated with the glories of the French nation. Champagne, for all its worldliness, emerged as a symbol of France.

As part of a new range of social symbols for the aspiring elite, champagne could readily be exploited by those who supplied it. Yet this symbol of the French nation was a regional wine, produced from grapes grown by local vine growers in areas of what had once been the province of Champagne—carved up by the Revolution into the four separate *départements* of the Marne, Haut-Marne, Aube, and Ardennes—and manufactured and marketed by private business interests. Being a regional product but promoted as a national good in advertising and marketing spectacles, champagne gave the community that controlled its production a singular importance within the nation. Beginning with debates over local treatment programs for vine diseases in the 1880s, regional concerns



MAP I. Major wine regions of France

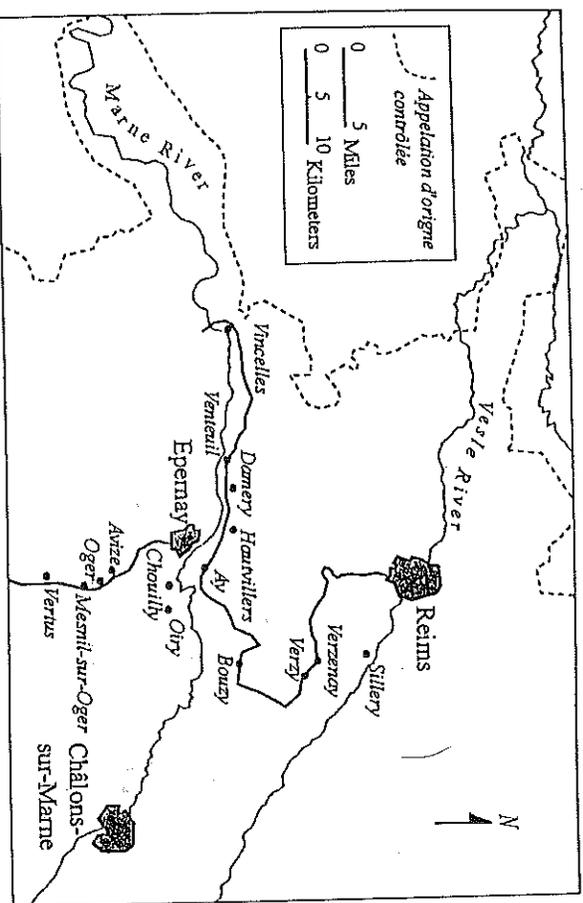
of the peasant grape growers and merchant-manufacturers were increasingly presented as national concerns. By 1900, the champagne-producing community of the department of the Marne had developed a rhetoric of national identity that promoted its own interests as those of the nation. Its ability to successfully mask local interests as national concerns convinced government officials of the need to protect champagne as a national patrimony at both the national and international levels.

Protecting the national patrimony, however, was not a simple matter. Champagne, like the French nation it represented, was perceived as having eternal qualities that disguised social and cultural constructions. Negotiations for protection at both the national and international levels brought into the open the contested nature of cultural representations of champagne and, by extension, the French nation. Efforts by groups within the regional industry and imitators, both in France and abroad,

to profit from the success of champagne on the world market raised a number of issues about the use of regional appellations, the counterfeiting or imitating of brand names, and the delimitation of French wine regions. Challenges from abroad merged with more generalized concerns about French economic performance and French power and prestige in the decades leading up to World War I.

Attempts by the French government and the champagne producers to resolve particular issues affecting the regional wine industry took on a national urgency. As a marker of French identity, both the wine and the region were believed to be under siege, not only from abroad, but also from within, as a result of crises between 1900 and 1911 involving fraudulent production and falling prices. The national response was to create new forms of protectionism designed to legitimate and limit access to the national patrimony. Protective legislation at the local level brought to the surface the conflict that had emerged within the champagne industry, where the vignerons and négociants were engaged in complex social and economic relationships. Each side promoted its positions, its concerns, as those of the nation, demanding a national response. State efforts to appease the various "protectors" of the patrimony stalled in 1911. Arguing that national honor was at stake, the peasants of the champagne industry took to the streets in a bloody revolt, which ended only after nine months of armed confrontation and military occupation. A little over a century after the French Revolution, the Champagne region was the site of fraternal discord over some of the most fundamental assumptions about the French nation.

Events in the wine industry of Champagne demonstrate how private forces and the rural periphery interacted with urban public institutions at both the national and the international levels to shape French identity. Historians of modern France have depicted state efforts after 1870 to integrate the separate *peys* that made up the rural world into the nation as a process akin to colonization. The history of champagne suggests, however, that in questions of nation-building and forging a national consensus, local forces and private companies were pivotal, sometimes working in conjunction with the state but, as the periods of contention highlight, sometimes acting in open opposition to it. Private companies and local peasant organizations promoted their regional specialty, champagne, as a national good, integral to the common imagined past actively promoted by the state. Rather than a construction of "France" as a nation that was imposed by Paris on the periphery, the regional wine community helped



MAP 2. Major towns and cities of the Champagne region

to manufacture a common culture in which local traditions became national and local regions became national territory.

Champagne is asserted to have been granted the first legally recognized *appellation d'origine* in 1908. Today, champagne differs from other sparkling wines by an obligation to conform to certain industry production standards, now part of French law. Current laws regulating the production of champagne are as complex as they are strict. Rigorous controls are used to assure that only grapes from the geographic area delimited as "la Champagne" are used in blending and to assure that the Champenois, both vigneron and négociants, conform to rules regarding vine cultivation and the production of wine. Since 1945, vigneron and négociants have jointly monitored the industry through the Comité interprofessionnel du vin de Champagne (CIVC), which is controlled by the various professional groups within the industry. Ultimately, however, it is the state that assures compliance with laws regulating champagne production. The regulations and interprofessional cooperation that mark the industry today are the result of the struggles between vigneron, négociants, and the state in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries chronicled in this study.

The reader will by now have noted that there are a number of "champagnes." In French, it is fairly easy to distinguish between these variations:

"la Champagne" is the region, the old province; "Champagne viticole" is the vineyard within the region; *le champagne* is the wine; and the Champenois are the people of the region. Translating these into English creates a number of challenges. In order to avoid confusion, I use a lowercase "c" for the sparkling wine ("champagne") and a capital "C" for the region where the wine is produced ("Champagne"). When discussing the "vineyards of Champagne," I am referring primarily to the areas of vine cultivation within the department of the Marne. This is, of course, a highly controversial delimitation, as Chapters 5 and 6 demonstrate. But because most of the area devoted to vine cultivation falls within the Marne boundaries, this distinction is not without some justification. Likewise, when speaking of the Champenois, I refer to those in the department of the Marne who are in some way connected with viticulture, regardless of how tenuous that connection may be in the final analysis. As the following pages will confirm, however, determining what it means to be Champenois, to be connected with champagne, was much more difficult than the French words and their English translations might suggest.

CONSUMING THE NATION

Champagne Marketing and
Bourgeois Rituals, 1789-1914

In *L'Accord fraternel*, a print published at the outset of the French Revolution, figures representing the three estates toast in a moment of revolutionary fraternity, each holding up a glass of wine. The commoner, complete with the celebrated tri-cornered hat, short jacket, clogs, and knee-length breeches, raises a simple goblet commonly associated with ordinary red wine. A member of the clergy, with flowing vestment, lifts the rounded, bulblike glass often used for consuming the wines of Burgundy. The aristocrat, wearing the breeches, ruffled shirt, and adornments of his station, lifts the unique fluted glass created to accentuate the sparkle of champagne.¹ In an era when symbolic expressions were often laden with political meaning, even ordinary objects (like wine glasses) and everyday customs (like offering a celebratory toast) were signs, conveying meanings that could be potential sources of political conflict (fig. 1).

This iconography paired champagne with abundance, celebration, and fraternity. Held in the hand of the aristocrat, champagne signified the opulence and privilege that came with birth in the social hierarchy of ancien régime Europe. Although the advent of the French Revolution brought the representatives of the three estates together in a moment of revolu-

tionary fellowship, it had not eliminated social distinctions. Champagne, a rare, luxury item at the end of the eighteenth century, was reserved for the wealthy. Despite its affiliation with the fraternal gesture, champagne did not represent a social leveling; a radical impetus toward equality. A fluted glass and sparkling wine, much like a liturgical robe or a tri-cornered hat, was part of a complex language of signs that reproduced power structures. Wine symbolically recreated the social hierarchy, while the act of the celebratory toast produced an impression of social cohesion, a sense of restricted equality. Champagne appeared as part of symbolic forms that sought to mix old traditions and social hierarchies with new, revolutionary principles of the nation and rituals of national solidarity.

This complex association of champagne with social distinction and fraternal union evolved as both the center of power and national sentiments shifted in Europe's so-called bourgeois century. New techniques of producing, selling, and distributing champagne emerged in tandem with the advent of republican regimes and nation-states that, throughout the nineteenth century, were dependent on the opinions of ever-broader elements of the population. Champagne continued to appeal to the taste of elite clients who could afford this luxury product, while, at the same time, becoming part of the new, mass consumer culture that emerged after mid-century.

Almost a hundred years after the French Revolution, champagne became an "obligatory adjunct" to the social rituals of the emergent bourgeoisie of Europe. As one clever British observer noted in 1882, "We cannot open a railway, launch a vessel, inaugurate a public edifice, start a newspaper, entertain a distinguished foreigner, invite a leading politician to favour us with his views on things in general, celebrate an anniversary, or specially appeal on behalf of a benevolent institution without a banquet, and hence without the aid of Champagne."² Such remarks point to the centrality of champagne to bourgeois society during the long nineteenth century. Before World War I, champagne became a subject of mass culture, a centerpiece of bourgeois society invested with symbolic capital that paid enormous dividends to the wine-producing community of Champagne.

Regional producers of champagne, the champagne merchant-manufacturers, or négociants, adapted and shaped a mythic present and past for their commodity within these new frameworks. The years after mid-century, in particular, were ones of rapid change, when social groups and their environments were dramatically transformed, resulting in a search

for "new social devices to ensure or express social cohesion and identity and to structure social relations."³ Champagne was central to this process. It was used to delineate social boundaries and create solidarities; it became a common denominator for those claiming membership in various social groups; and it was integral to numerous nineteenth-century traditions and rituals. Whereas some of these traditions were consciously invented and constructed, others evolved more informally, with varying degrees of deliberate construction. Whether invented or evolved, these traditions, rituals, and images became a part of the business of selling champagne.

No single group, agency, or institution had the power to create or consolidate the rituals and images surrounding champagne. The négociants in the department of the Marne who controlled the small to medium-sized champagne firms were, however, in a unique position to profit from and to shape cultural attitudes about the wine and its consumption. Négociants were in the business of selling champagne, a business that, over the course of the century, evolved from dealing in "expensive wine aimed at a luxury market" and a discrete group of privileged clients to systematically promoting champagne and regional brand names among the burgeoning mass of middle-class consumers.⁴ Before the sophisticated advertising and consumer surveys so ubiquitous in the twentieth century, the négociants of Champagne attempted to find a means to strike notes that would resonate with consumers. Although their marketing tactics may seem primitive by today's standards, the négociants experimented with advertising methods that are very much part of a modern marketing repertoire: packaging of the commodity, public relations spectacles, print journalism, and a promotional organization in the form of the *Syndicat du commerce des vins de Champagne*. The négociants had a "direct and intense need to understand and communicate effectively with their audiences" in order to sell their product to the relatively select customers who could afford the luxury commodity.⁵

Communicating with their customer base was a central preoccupation of négociants from the earliest days of the industry. For much of its wine-producing history, the Champagne region was known for its nonsparkling red wines sold in barrels by brokers. In the early eighteenth century, these still red wines were best consumed when young and were much sought after in the Paris market following the fall harvest each year.⁶ Brokers dealing in both popular and elite wines who had strong connections with Paris wine merchants and consumers were best situated to respond to de-

mand. Many of the families who dominated the regional wine trade were "hybrid, with a foot in the very lowest reaches of robe nobility and the highest ranks of the national wine trade."⁷ Correspondence from the period before the French Revolution shows that these merchant families carefully cultivated clients among the "Parisian world of affairs and the elite provincial world of officials and nobility."⁸ Understanding their clients was, thus, made less difficult by the fact that these early négociants held a class position and displayed cultural tastes that linked them closely to their audience.

On the eve of the French Revolution, the region's "markets dominated the economic life of the province and drove the creation of new kinds of wine."⁹ Merchants in the towns of Reims and Épernay had come to control the regional wine trade. While merchants in Reims had a larger geography of customers than those in Épernay, both groups were slowly abandoning the Paris market for ordinary wines as competition led to declining profitability. By the end of the eighteenth century, trade in ordinary wines from the Marne collapsed.

Responding to changes in demand, merchants shifted their attention to offering a select inventory of fine wines. Elite consumers with reputations for refined taste increasingly sought wines that were aged and bottled before shipping, thus solving problems associated with barrel storage over long periods of time. Responding to their clients, Champagne wine merchants moved away from the Paris market and toward more exclusive, cosmopolitan markets in eastern and northern Europe. To assure supply, some merchants bought large vineyards and invested in bottling and storage facilities. What they lost in volume of sales, they more than recuperated by inflating prices.¹⁰ Transforming themselves from mere brokers into merchant-manufacturers, the négociants of Champagne offered their fashionable clientele, not simply a fine wine, but an exclusive, magical elixir—a sparkling, bubbly white wine.

Once shunned as a trick by producers to cover the harsh tastes of bad wines, sparkling wine became fashionable with the trend-setting *grande monde*. Historians now generally agree that "sparkling wine first appeared among the consumers rather than the producers because it was a by-product of conservation techniques rather than the deliberate outcome of winemaking practice."¹¹ The bubbles occurred naturally when wine was made late in the year and the winter cold paralyzed the yeasts that normally turn grape sugars into alcohol. Warm spring weather reactivated the yeasts, and the fermentation began again, producing a carbonic gas

that created a slight "sparkle" in ordinarily still wine. Innovative winemakers simultaneously experimented with improving the quality of the region's blended wines. The result was a pleasant-tasting, effervescent wine that became a passion in rich and elegant circles. While the sparkling wine was expensive and beyond the reach of the vast majority of Europeans, it had acquired enough of a popular reputation by 1789 to make it a powerful symbol in revolutionary literature.

Growing demand for sparkling wines of the region required that négociants build up inventories, improve wine quality, and market their product directly to clients. During the years that straddled the French Revolution, the champagne houses aggressively cultivated new clients through personal relationships. Itineraries for the typical house *voyageur* tell a story of constant travel to England, Prussia, Poland, Austria, Switzerland, Italy, Holland, and smaller states in between.¹² Undoubtedly, noble pedigrees, some acquired during the waning days of the ancien régime and others through loyalty and service to France's new emperor, Napoleon, along with connections to the emerging capitalist elite, facilitated access to customers.

The success of the earliest champagne families—such as the Ruinarts, Moëts, and Clicquot—have become the stuff of legend. Stories of the seduction of the European nobility by dashing négociants abound. Claude Moët is said to have started by convincing Madame de Pompadour, King Louis XV's mistress, that champagne was a necessity to any successful soirée. She, in turn, made it a court fashion by declaring it the only wine the consumption of which left women more beautiful. The founder of the Heidsieck house had numerous bold adventures in Moscow on a white stallion that won the admiration (and the regular business) of the tsar. The Ruinarts became regulars at the court of Charles X, where they were rewarded for their loyalty and regular supply of sparkling wine with the title of *vicomte*.¹³

Thomas Brennan has concluded that "many of the most prominent companies of modern Champagne owe their creation to the half century of growth spanning the Revolution."¹⁴ In France, where fortunes changed quickly in the tumultuous years of revolution, representatives of families like the Moëts moved effortlessly from supplying ancien régime aristocrats to supplying the loyalists of, first, the Napoleonic empire, and, then, the Restoration.¹⁵ While the Moëts quenched the thirst of France, the famous Veuve Clicquot opened new markets in Russia by sending a trusted representative there with a load of champagne in the aftermath of the

Napoleonic wars. Colorful stories describe how the irrepressible Widow Clicquot turned the French defeat into a marketing coup by throwing open her cellars to thirsty Russian troops. Seeing Russian officers freely polishing off bottle after bottle of her champagne, she reportedly exclaimed with a knowing smile, "Let them go at it! They're drinking? They'll pay!"¹⁶ Over the century that followed, Russia became Clicquot champagne's top market, and its brand name became synonymous with sparkling wine there.¹⁷ As the elite shifted their notion of power from a military to a cultural model, the Veuve would be attributed with the "peaceful conquest" of Russia for the industry.¹⁸ French champagne triumphed where Napoleon's Grande Armée had failed.

No less impressive are stories of the brilliance of individual sales representatives selling champagne to the European bourgeoisie in the early years of the nineteenth century. One representative of the Clicquot firm, for example, attracted hundreds of new bourgeois clients in Königsberg with a single shipment—totaling over 10,000 bottles—in 1814.¹⁹ Other firms in Reims and Épernay may have made less spectacular shipments but had equally striking sales figures. Their success can be measured by official statistics from the Reims Chamber of Commerce. Within forty years of the collapse of the Napoleonic regime, these firms were measuring their shipments in millions of bottles: by 1844, for example, approximately 2.2 million bottles of wine were sold in France annually and nearly 4.4 million more abroad.²⁰

The deliberate creation of the sparkling wines of Champagne, Roger Dion observes, marked the "birth of large-scale commerce, new in the viticultural history of France."²¹ Expanding markets were hampered by technical difficulties that plagued the industry in its infancy. Experiments with new processing techniques, discussed at length in Chapter 3, greatly accelerated production in the early nineteenth century, reducing losses and the overall price of sparkling wine. With these improvements in supply, and growing transportation and communication networks, sales no longer had to be limited to face-to-face communications or the bravado of dashing négociants. Moreover, clients were no longer limited to the wealthy circles of court society. As the ranks of the bourgeoisie expanded throughout Europe and North America, so, too, did the pool of consumers capable of purchasing luxury wines from Champagne.

Champagne marketing in these shifting circumstances meant adapting to a new customer base and developing new sales strategies. Wine market-

ing was dependent on cultural factors that could limit the manipulative powers of manufacturers. One challenge faced by champagne négociants was appealing to an audience of diverse consumers in Europe and North America. Historians have highlighted the diversity within the ranks of the bourgeoisie and the varieties of bourgeois experience in the nineteenth century. Indeed, the contours of the bourgeoisie shifted over the course of the century. By the later part of the nineteenth century, ownership of appropriate goods and participation in rituals of solidarity became important for defining class boundaries and membership. Although this diverse group of bourgeois consumers ultimately "spoiled many cultural styles," there was also a certain coherence of response.²² This was the response that the négociants hoped to evoke in new promotional efforts by associating champagne with existing or evolving forms of sociability.

Even with this expansion of potential consumers, the importance of the client relationship remained central to champagne marketing. Branding strategies—creating brand-name identifications—was one method that négociants used to build a client relationship across great distances. Champagne "brands"—simply the family name of the founder of the firm—were used throughout the early part of the century to identify the origin of bottled wines from the region. Rarely, if ever, did the appellation "champagne" appear on a bottle; in keeping with the personalized nature of the market relationship, consumers looked for the family brand as a guarantee of quality.

By mid-century, brands appeared, in simple form, on labels attached to bottles delivered to individual clients. As négociants ceased to court the client directly, the family name on the label took on added importance as a form of personal assurance as to the quality and uniqueness of the product within the distinctive bottle. The price of champagne, the U.S. consul in Reims reported, depended, "principally on the reputation of its manufacturer; wine with the marks and labels of a well-known or celebrated maker sells for double the price of the same wine with an unknown brand."²³ To generate this brand-name identification, and therefore expand into new markets, particularly abroad, financial resources, personnel and specialized skills were required. Robert Tomes, a contemporary observer, noted, "Strenuous efforts were made to give them [brand names] circulation."²⁴ Such strenuous efforts proved successful: of the 28 million bottles of champagne sold by 1900, for example, almost 23 million were sold by established brand-name producers. Sales of sparkling wines soared after mid-century: 5.9 million bottles

were sold in 1850; 8.1 million bottles in 1870; 20.4 million bottles in 1880; 25.7 million in 1890; and 28 million in 1900. The staggering wealth of the main Champagne families and the legendary client relationships of the industry's early years contributed to the enshrining of négociants as the heroes of the industry by admiring contemporaries. Négociants did little to discourage this admiration and, in some cases, actively promoted the mystique surrounding themselves and their firms, much as they promoted sparkling wine itself. These promotional efforts often took the form of official biographies of the founders of individual firms. The British writer Charles Tovey, who went to Champagne to conduct research for a book on the region in the 1860s, reviewed a collection of these biographies and concluded that the négociant families were uniformly portrayed to the public as "a superior race, heroes, or something more, celebrated in song and immortalized in history."²⁵ Tovey highlighted what other commentators also noted: the ongoing process of creating a mythic present and past for champagne brands.

Creating a "mythic" past that linked the wine and a family name to tradition and honor could add respectability and status to a brand. Given the importance of notions of honor and respectability connected to family within bourgeois society of the nineteenth century, it is perhaps not surprising to find the négociants concerned with infusing their brand names with a distinct *heritage*, as the historian Adeline Daumard has termed it—a heritage, legacy, or patrimony.²⁶ One means for the négociants to achieve this was to flaunt their aristocratic titles or, if they could not claim a pedigree from the earlier part of the century, to seek to obtain one through marital alliances with members of the French nobility. Entry into the aristocracy came mainly via marriages between the daughters of négociants and the sons of aristocratic families. Such was the case of the Clignots, for example, who married their only daughter to the comte de Chevigné and gave the couple a magnificent chateau overlooking the family vineyards near Boursault.²⁷ Marital alliances provided négociants and their families with noble titles and links with a venerable past. Increasingly stripped of their former pejorative meaning, noble titles could be adapted by the bourgeoisie, the "new aristocracy, the nobility of the nineteenth century."²⁸

Noble titles served to link wealth and authority in the new bourgeois civil society with the "remaining trappings of honor," in this case, aristocratic standards of consumption, family name, and personal reputation.²⁹ As Norbert Elias has illustrated, the nobility were specialists in elaborat-

ing and molding social conduct, which was, in the course of diffusion to other social strata, modified into a lasting cultural legacy.³⁰ Champagne and the reputable "noble" families whose names appeared as brands on the bottle were linked to "honorable" consumption and tradition, which could bridge the gap between the middle-class ethos of frugality, self-denial, and civic responsibility and the new consumer culture of the late nineteenth century.

For the négociant families, who willingly exchanged their personal wealth for status, obtaining noble titles was a shrewd marketing strategy. Without the vestiges of feudalism, titles and family coats of arms still held a luster of honor and tradition. Both the titles and the symbols of nobility could be added to the firm's name or logo, giving a certain air of distinction and a connection with a preindustrial tradition that could be more comforting than the dizzying reality of the industrial world. By the 1880s, champagne wine labels often featured brand names printed in bold, gold lettering flanked by symbols of royalty such as crowns or lions or accompanied by the family coat of arms. Indeed, gold was the most consistently used color on wine labels in the late nineteenth century.³¹ Along with gold lettering and coats of arms, the use of words associated with nobility—"royal," "marquis," "prince"—and royal images—a double-headed eagle (associated with Russia's Romanoff dynasty) or lions (associated with kings and royalty)—gave even the less-expensive sparkling wines that appeared on the domestic market an air of honor, luxury, and timeless tradition. The firm of Jules Félix Fournier, for example, used a depiction of the Russian royal eagle combined with the brand name "Romanoff" to sell its wine. For the Venoge firm in the same year, the "noble" status of the wine is depicted through the use of a majestic gold lion, presented along with the noble titles of the Venoge family.³² This connection with social exclusivity and status, Leo Loubère observes, constituted a "form of snob appeal," which became the hallmark of champagne négociants' advertising.³³

Négociants and their agents went beyond these displays, however, continuing their legendary maneuvering to have their champagnes literally in the hands—and stomachs—of the rich and famous. Firms jockeyed to become *fournisseurs brevetés* or *privilegiés* (purveyors by appointment) to the royal courts of Europe. On their labels, négociants proudly proclaimed the connections between their firms and royal patrons such as the king of Spain.³⁴ More exotic royal courts could also have advertising appeal: dispensing with the typical symbol or brand name of the firm, one label announced in bold letters that this champagne had been chosen for a celebration by the Khedive of Egypt.³⁵ Champagne was linked to an "upscale"—to use modern advertising jargon—clientele, playing on the desire of bourgeois consumers to distance themselves from the conditions and values of the popular classes. Jean-Paul Aron notes that after the 1880s, the petite bourgeoisie were anxious to detach themselves from the proletariat.³⁶ Gastronomy and fine wines, like champagne, were one means of symbolically distancing themselves from the working classes. In creating this distance, négociants did not invoke the middle-class ethos of frugality and self-denial but rather appealed, by association with the charisma (defined by Max Weber as the possession of "supernatural, superhuman, or a least specifically exceptional powers or qualities")³⁷ of celebrated imbibers of champagne, to bourgeois aspirations to transcend the mundane, day-to-day social realities of what was sometimes called the "bourgeois century."

Association with royalty, nobility, and celebrities was not unique to champagne advertising. As early as 1834, an advertisement in the *Edinburgh Review* for "Mr. Cockle's Antibilious Pills" boasted recommendations from "ten dukes, five marquesses, seventeen earls, eight viscounts, sixteen lords, one archbishop, fifteen bishops, the adjutant-general, and the advocate-general."³⁸ These notables who promoted Mr. Cockle's Antibilious Pills, however, were relatively obscure before the advertising campaign, lacking the charismatic draw of a true "celebrity." What was different in the case of champagne advertising was that the négociants were able to appropriate the acknowledged, social status of known "celebrities" for their commodity. These had symbolic value by virtue of their connection to what Clifford Geertz has called "the active centers of the social order."³⁹ When champagne négociants exploited the images of public personalities, however, they actually enhanced the prestige of those celebrities simultaneously with that of their glamorous product, and champagne's ability to create charisma could then be marketed to the bourgeoisie.

The construction of links to charisma and aristocratic standards of consumption were not exclusively the result of the commercial maneuvers of négociants in Reims and Épernay. Improvements in transport, new processing techniques, and reduced production costs made it possible to market wines and other formerly local specialties of France to an ever-broader group of consumers both at home and abroad. Some of these products—such as roquefort, cognac, bré, and champagne—developed

reputations for excellence that extended far beyond their immediate production area. Taste professionals touted these products as essential to the art of eating and drinking, making them a part of the culture of ingestion, a tradition of superior quality and *savoir vivre* that was often dated back to the Roman era. Champagne's privileged place within the pantheon of French gastronomic quality, as we have seen, however, had a much less distant origin.

The négociants as a group were also relatively new to regional bourgeois society. In Reims and Épernay, much as in Rouen and Lyons, there was a certain antipathy toward "newcomers," whose ranks were swelling as the regional wine market prospered.⁴⁰ Marital alliances between members of champagne families and those of the commercial elite, mainly centered in textiles, were rare. The few prominent exceptions, like the Veuve Clicquot-Ponsardin marriage and the Pommeroy-Greno marriage in the early nineteenth century, gave rise to the notion that an "interlocking directorate" of wine and wool dominated the region. Generalizations about an "interlocking directorate" are, however, based on the marriage patterns of wine merchants in Bordeaux. The Bordelais merchants did tend to marry into local commercial circles, creating a number of interconnected families between industries.⁴¹ Champagne manufacturing, in contrast, was a latecomer to the regional economy and society, where champagne négociants, both large and small, were viewed as *nouveaux riches*.

The proliferation of champagne firms and the meteoric financial success of their négociants were often viewed with suspicion. There was a long history of tension between the champagne négociants and other commercial elites, particularly their counterparts in textiles. Charles Tovey observed with distaste that "the accumulations of enormous profits, are evidenced by the palatial residences, as well as the large possessions belonging to the [champagne] magnates of Reims and Épernay." Fortunes were built on reputation, but Tovey noted that the methods of obtaining this reputation were for many in the region suspect:

advertisements cunningly worded, extra allowance to wine merchants who will promote the sale, bribes to hotel-keepers and proprietors of steam-boats, the same to the managers of public establishments, paragraphs in newspapers that at such a dinner the Champagne was So-and-so's, and was pronounced to be of extraordinary quality; fees to waiters at hotels, and gratuities to stewards and butlers in the service of the nobility. . . . All these manoeuvres are followed up by a well-organized method of touting. Showy labels meet you at railway stations; every-

thing is done that is possible to familiarize the public with the name; and all these combined attractions have successfully brought many a wine into a demand that its real quality did not deserve.⁴²

Given the evolution of French society and the cultural constraints on entrepreneurship, the enormous profits of the négociants and their propensity toward "showmanship" did not correspond to the correct social function demanded of entrepreneurs in France.⁴³

Noble titles were one way to resolve this dilemma. Association with aristocratic tradition could provide a mechanism for achieving at least some level of social approval within the region, perhaps providing contemporaries with a means for dismissing négociants' inappropriate behavior, since being "noble" had not lost all of its former trappings of ostentatious displays. Moreover, noble titles could mask the négociants' public pursuit of economic gain. Money alone was not sufficient to bring them honor and status. Some snickered that "the best blood of France can always be purchased by the heaviest purse," but, by restructuring their past, the négociants had to be dealt with as part of the existing social order, not as mere *parvenus*.⁴⁴

Marriage into a champagne industry family in many ways provided an ideal source of income for nobles. William Reddy discusses the problem of seeking both profit and honor in French society in the nineteenth century in an analysis of Balzac's novel *Père Goriot*, in which Eugène de Rastignac, a young nobleman, wishes "to possess luxuries or gold not for their own sake, but because he could not gain honor except by appearing already to possess the increased honor he sought. This is why it was so important to appear already rich, to act as if one was already familiar with the peculiar customs and expectations of the *beau monde parisien*." With the new *laissez-faire* principles of the postrevolutionary social order, wealth and honor were tentatively linked: money could bring honor to those who possessed it, but sometimes in order to obtain wealth, individuals were forced to dishonor themselves.⁴⁵

The need to demonstrate an old French lineage was complicated by the immigrant origins of some of the most prominent négociant families. Non-Gallic names were conspicuous among some of the region's prestigious brands. The frequency of non-Gallic names among the *grands marques* in particular drew considerable attention from industry supporters and critics alike. "There is, in fact, not a single wine establishment in all Champagne which is not under the control, more or less, of a native

of Germany," Robert Tomes observed.⁴⁶ Names such as Koch, Mumm, Giesler, Heidsieck, Kunkelmann, and Walbaum point to the sizable number of foreigners, particularly Germans, who established themselves in the champagne industry during the nineteenth century. Although most immigrants were German, there were also a number from the Low Countries, Switzerland, and even Britain.⁴⁷ With the largest markets for champagne before 1850 found in the German states, it was not surprising that a number of established firms recruited German-born apprentices or German-speaking sales staff. These foreign apprentices were in an ideal position to establish their own firms, knowing the industry and possessing both the necessary language skills and family networks abroad. For French merchants, however, there seemed something slightly distasteful about those who profited after being initiated into the secrets of champagne making. One French-born négociant grumbled in 1845 that "the unhappy but nevertheless very real French unwillingness to study foreign languages [meant that they had to employ] young German clerks, to whom was confided the care of foreign correspondence. Many of these young persons, who thus found themselves initiated into the secrets of champagne making, well knew, with an intelligence that we are the first to acknowledge, how to profit from the exceptional opportunities they were offered and set up their own businesses."⁴⁸

In a relatively new industry that had few winemaking traditions, advances or innovations in wine production or blending techniques were closely guarded secrets. The establishment of independent firms by these "foreigners"—foreign to the region and to the industry—many of them former clerks or sales staff, rankled some of their competitors. Moreover, in a period when wine and festivity were increasingly associated with a uniquely Gallic inheritance, the "foreignness" of the creators of this French drink was hardly an asset. Aristocratic links masked this foreignness, linking the négociants with Gallic traditions and integrating them into the social fabric of the region. Indeed, the archives provide numerous examples of nobles serving as "silent partners" in champagne manufacturing.⁴⁹

The career of the négociant Mathieu-Édouard Werlé is instructive in highlighting the power of creating a Gallic *héritage*. Werlé, an active participant in the political and social circles of Reims for much of the nineteenth century, is often a central character in industry narratives. His career began in August 1821, when he presented himself at the offices of the Maison Veuve Clicquot-Ponsardin in Reims. He requested a meeting

with the formidable Veuve Clicquot, the legendary widow who, since the death of her husband in 1805, had transformed her family's modest wine house into one of the leading champagne producers in Europe. This bold, self-assured twenty-year-old, the story continues, had traveled there from the town of Wetzlar (in the principality of Hesse) and was determined to obtain an apprenticeship at the Reims office of the famous widow, already well known for launching the careers of several other German immigrants. Werlé impressed Clicquot with his intelligence and his resolve, and she hired him immediately.⁵⁰

By 1831, ten years after knocking on the door of the Maison Veuve Clicquot-Ponsardin, Werlé had advanced from his position as clerk to become a partner in the firm. Five years later, he married into one of the oldest woolen-manufacturing families in the Marne (which fortuitously had close ties to another wine house, Maison Roederer), thus strengthening his economic and social position in Reims and making him a French citizen. The politically ambitious Werlé capitalized on his situation to expand his influence. He became a judge in the Tribunal de commerce in 1838 and subsequently served as president of the court from 1846 to 1850.⁵¹

His rise to political power was as spectacular as his ascendancy at the Veuve Clicquot-Ponsardin wine firm. As one of Reims's leading conservatives, Werlé became a spokesman for the Second Empire.⁵² His loyalty brought him many political appointments, and eventually he became "the most important political figure in Reims."⁵³ His alliances were solidified, and his firm gained an important economic boost through the marriages of his two children to wealthy, aristocratic heirs of families connected with the Bonapartist regime. By the time of his death in 1884, Werlé was one of Champagne's leading citizens; his family had a legitimate noble pedigree and Gallic *héritage*; his firm of Veuve Clicquot-Ponsardin dominated foreign markets and was among the most successful champagne houses in the region.

Immigrants appear to have settled permanently in the region, and by World War I, only a few had failed to take up French citizenship. In the case of G. H. Mumm, for example, failure to become French led to confiscation of the family's firm and property at the outbreak of World War I. Although many négociants were suspect on the eve of World War I, those who had been naturalized or married into a French family were cleared.⁵⁴ Evidence suggests that suspicions about immigrant négociants began to wane in the late nineteenth century as champagne became the common denominator that linked the négociants as a group within the

region and their status as foreigners was sufficiently masked. United by shared economic concerns regarding the wine and its production, négociants focused attention, not on the distinctions and inequities between individuals and firms, but on the relationship of champagne—the wine, the region, and its capitalist, wine-producing enterprises—to the outside world.

With sales of wine lagging because of the global economic downturn after 1870, a small group of firms came together in 1882 to create a powerful, unified négociant promotional organization. Between 1882 and 1900, the Syndicat du commerce des vins de Champagne (now called the Syndicat des grandes marques de Champagne) never included more than sixty firms, all of them adopting the title of *grande marque*.⁵⁵ If there was any lingering resentment within négociant circles toward foreign-born négociants, it was not apparent in the organization of the Syndicat du commerce. Nearly one-third of the membership in 1895 were first and second-generation immigrants.

Integration of négociant families into the social fabric also meant recreating “traditions” that reinforced hierarchical relations within the wine community. This is evident in the industry promotional organization. While the Syndicat du commerce was theoretically open to all “négociants or former négociants of wines from the department of the Marne,” those who considered themselves *grandes marques* did not invite all producers to participate. There were no regulations or written procedures regarding the use of the term *grande marque*. Evolving market practices developed almost imperceptibly into “traditions,” in this case defined by the Syndicat du commerce itself. According to industry literature, the *grandes marques* were known around the world because of their “respect for traditional rules of production.” Respect for tradition and “une grande notoriété mondiale” seem to be the defining criteria for a *grande marque*.⁵⁶ It is interesting to note, however, that the title of *grande marque* appears to have been constructed in ways that are remarkably similar to the construction of the concept of the *grande bourgeoisie*; both were based on a combination of fortune, family, and tradition. By the late nineteenth century, the *grande bourgeoisie* closely resembled the former nobility; its members occupied or had occupied a place in the bourgeois hierarchy for generations, had important ties to the state, and displayed a preference for a certain lavishness and tradition that recalled the “aristocracy.”⁵⁷ Similarly, the group of *grande marque* firms occupied an im-

portant economic position within the regional wine industry for several generations, had long-established ties to the state, and were linked to aristocratic tradition. The hierarchy of firms was structured much like the bourgeois hierarchy of France.

Tradition among the négociants and their firms was increasingly defined by the *grandes marques*-dominated Syndicat du commerce. Calling on the regional heritage, the organization insisted that all wines bearing the name “champagne” be made from grapes harvested in a broad territory loosely defined as Champagne and that all aspects of their handling (*manutention*) be completed within the region. Pamphlets distributed by the Syndicat du commerce highlighted the benefits of this “tradition,” creating an image of harmonious class relations in which all social groups shared in the general prosperity of the wine industry. Most important, these pamphlets stressed the “authenticity” of the products of the region created according to traditional methods. In an age when the public was increasingly focused on the “quality” and purity of wine, this reference to the authenticity of champagne carried a certain resonance.⁵⁸ Authenticity was important, particularly in foreign markets where competitors increasingly employed the label “champagne” for nonregional sparkling wines. Regional producers focused on promoting authentic champagne outside France, where the consumer was “aware of the magic of the “true wine of champagne.”⁵⁹

The emphasis on foreign markets reflected the concerns of the core of the Syndicat du commerce—the producers and firms that were among the largest exporters of champagne—between 1882 and 1914. It should be noted, however, that numerous firms with relatively low levels of foreign trade were also included as Syndicat members. This was the case with the firm of Charles de Cazanova in Avize, for example, whose sales were very modest in comparison with those of Deutz & Geldermann or Veuve Clicquot-Ponsardin. The Syndicat du commerce used this “mixed” representation to its advantage in the early twentieth century, when it was accused of creating a monopoly.⁶⁰ Despite, or perhaps because of, its rather exclusive membership, the Syndicat created the impression of a powerful, unified négociant presence. With the considerable economic power and national and international recognition of its membership, it was generally acknowledged both by those in the industry and by the French state as the representative body of the champagne houses and négociants. Under its auspices, a collective voice for négociants was discernible in public debates. It worked not only to protect the name of

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champagne abroad but also to modify domestic laws and regulations concerning octrois,⁶¹ transport costs, and taxes for the benefit of all manufacturers, regardless of size. The results of its lobbying efforts would be shared, even if membership in the Syndicat was not.

When the Syndicat du commerce was formed in 1882, there was little reason for more modest firms to oppose its exclusivity or efforts. It gave the industry as a whole a powerful means of promoting champagne and deflected any bad publicity directed at négociants. The Syndicat not only kept a file of articles considered detrimental to the industry but often responded to them, officially denouncing the "misinformation" they embodied.⁶² It argued that champagne was a unique beverage, connected with age-old traditions originating in a distinct region within France. Publicity pamphlets stressed that only sparkling wine produced within the confines of the Marne by regional producers should be considered "champagne." This attempt to promote the product category by linking the denomination "champagne" with a region and a group of producers was one of the key goals of the new organization. This is abundantly clear in the pages of the annual accounts of the work of the Syndicat du commerce. Much of the annual discussions are taken up with issues of protecting or reinforcing this link between the wine and the firms of Champagne through domestic and international legislation.⁶³

An important bond was stressed between the wine (champagne), the region (Champagne), and the people (Champenois). This was particularly important as individual négociants pursued a number of long and costly legal battles in the French courts to prevent "champagne" from being used as a generic label for sparkling wines unconnected to their region. In a series of decisions that began in the 1880s and spanned two decades, French courts determined that "champagne" did not fall into the public domain as a generic processing technique. Although other sparkling wine was also the result of a second fermentation technique that produced gaseous bubbles in still wines, the courts ruled, it was ultimately the wine of the Champagne region that gave champagne its unique character. The name "champagne" specifically designated a natural product of the Champagne region that was rendered "sparkling" (*mousseux*) in a second processing phase. It was not a generic term for the second processing technique.⁶⁴

By the late nineteenth century, these legal decisions were seen as only a partial victory. The courts had no authority outside of France, where many of the violations occurred. Producers outside of the region fre-

quently used the name and often adopted the style of champagne labels and packaging.⁶⁵ "The wine of Champagne has suffered the fate of all great discoveries," wrote one négociant, "a multitude of imitations rushed forward, and the leprosy of counterfeits clung to its [champagne's] vogue."⁶⁶ The Syndicat du commerce engaged in a legal and legislative battle to protect the regional appellation from being used as a generic label for sparkling wines and the brand names of regional producers from imitation or counterfeiting at home and abroad. Under the auspices of the Syndicat, the négociants argued that the government needed to take action to protect the name "champagne" as the property of the French nation, guarded by the traditions practiced by the community of producers within the confines of the Marne.⁶⁷ The négociants were singling out champagne for special status among the wines of France, which were already "enriched with national myths about the glory and genius of the French race."⁶⁸

The active defense of the denomination "champagne" by the négociants and the Syndicat du commerce corresponded to an interesting shift in product marketing. Until the 1860s, the name "champagne" was rarely used on wine labels to identify the sparkling wines produced in the region. Négociants did not give the word "champagne" prominence on their wine labels, preferring the name of a prestigious vineyard, or *cru*—such as Ay, Sillery, Verzenay, or Bouzy—followed by the words *mousseux* or *grand-mousseux*.⁶⁹ This is similar to practices in other wine regions where the names of châteaux or villages (for example, Châteaux Margaux or Saint-Julien) were connected with a famous *cru*. Given the complex blending process involved in champagne production, however, it was difficult to link the final product to any particular vineyard. Moreover, with the demise of regional still wine markets, the prestige of a *cru* increasingly had little meaning to a larger audience of consumers.⁷⁰ "Champagne," followed by "mousseux," occasionally appeared in place of names like Ay and Sillery on labels in the late 1860s.⁷¹ By the late 1870s, there was a gradual increase in the use of "champagne" on labels.⁷² And, with the appearance of the Syndicat du commerce in the 1880s and new promotional efforts, "champagne" appeared with the name of the location of the manufacturer rather than the *cru* identification.⁷³

For the négociants who used the regional appellation, "champagne" represented not simply a wine but, more important, a community of producers that contributed to the glory of the French nation. Pamphlets and articles by the Syndicat du commerce reinforced this belief by popular-

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the author

izing the unique genius of both the regional wines and the community by means of a number of myths about the industry and its "founders." Probably the most influential and most enduring concerned the "discovery" of sparkling wine. The largely forgotten monk Dom Pierre Pérignon was resurrected as the inventor of sparkling wine and the founder of the champagne industry. The creation of the myth is generally attributed to Dom Grossard, a former Benedictine monk at the Hautvillers Abbey of Saint-Pierre. Reduced to a simple parish priest after the French Revolution, Grossard was determined to memorialize the great "achievements" of the abbey. He began his campaign in 1821 with a letter to the deputy mayor of the town of Ay, informing him that a local monk had invented champagne. "As you know Monsieur," he wrote, "it was the celebrated Dom Pérignon . . . who found the secret of making white sparkling wine."⁷⁴ In his missionary efforts for public recognition of Pérignon, Grossard attributed virtually all the advances in Champagne viticulture and viticulture to him.

Although there was no evidence to support Grossard's assertions, or the various versions that were subsequently transmitted, the story of the "miraculous" accomplishments of this monk spread over the course of the century.⁷⁵ By the 1860s, authors writing about the region unquestioningly attributed the discovery of the "secret" of sparkling wine to Dom Pérignon, who by now had been transformed into a blind monk who used his highly developed senses of smell and taste to create the finest blend of wines.⁷⁶ But Dom Pérignon's "resurrection" did not have widespread recognition until the Syndicat du commerce began to use it for commercial purposes. At the 1889 Exposition universelle in Paris, the Syndicat provided the public with an illustrated pamphlet that reproduced the Dom Pérignon story, declaring him to have been the "father" of sparkling wine.⁷⁷ After tasting the wines of Champagne, the visitors could carry away this souvenir, sharing the Dom Pérignon story with friends and family in France and abroad. In 1896, the Syndicat produced a pamphlet entitled *Le Vin de Champagne* that unequivocally stated that Dom Pérignon had "discovered" champagne by following "ancient traditions."⁷⁸

International visitors to the Champagne region, familiar with the story of Dom Pérignon, often expressed surprise that there were no memorials erected to the founder of champagne.⁷⁹ Indeed, it would not be until 1910, a year before the bloody revolt in the region, that a statue commemorating Dom Pérignon was erected in Épernay.⁸⁰ The American consul was stunned when he went in search of the famous abbey and local

vignerons explained that it had been "justly" destroyed by revolutionaries.⁸¹ If there were no memorials to Dom Pérignon within the region, however, it did not take away from the drinking public's faith in the Dom Pérignon story. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the legend was established as fact. Visitors to the Brussels Exposition universelle in 1910 could visit an "authentic" reproduction of the "abbaye royale d'Hautvillers," complete with presses and barrels allegedly used by the famous monk.⁸² The success of the legend, however, was best exemplified in the widely circulated *Petit Journal*. In June 1914, the bicentennial of Dom Pérignon's "discovery" was commemorated with a special color-illustrated issue. Under a drawing of Dom Pérignon, looking strikingly like St. Francis of Assisi opening a bottle of champagne, was the caption: "It was exactly two hundred years ago that Dom Pérignon, a Benedictine monk, discovered the art of making the wines of Champagne sparkle."⁸³

If Grossard's efforts to promote the Dom Pérignon story were motivated by a desire to reestablish the prestige of the Catholic Church in France, the myth also served the more secular purpose of seducing the champagne-drinking public. A wine originally associated with dissipation and hedonism was now believed to have been invented by a monk; the holy origins of champagne helped to legitimize a drink originally associated exclusively with aristocratic frivolity and decadence. The story of a simple monk "discovering" bubbles in the region's fine wines encouraged the impression that champagne made within the confines of the Marne by regional négociants was the original sparkling wine; others were not authentic, being simply imitations, which the informed consumer should not accept. The legend supported the claims of the champagne industry to be one of the glories of the French nation—and hence worthy of government protection from the challenge of competing sparkling wine producers both at home and abroad in the late nineteenth century.

Despite the almost industrial techniques used in sparkling wine production, the Dom Pérignon myth distanced champagne from any association with assembly lines, technology, and backbreaking labor. The monk's "simple" invention was cultivated in public relations campaigns to create an image of champagne as being as effortless to create as it was to drink, a symbol of a balance between old-world traditions and the "good life" of the modern period.

Champagne and wine brand names offered consumers a sense of continuity. In the face of the complexities of the new social world of the late

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nineteenth century that made the individual consumer feel incompetent or insecure, the timeless tradition of champagne offered reassurance that one was upholding the highest standards of social intercourse, thus reinforcing the individual's sense of membership in a civilized community. This is most apparent from the labels that adorned champagne bottles from the period. What is striking about these labels is that, unlike modern ones, they tend to include elaborate pictures and written texts, signs meant both to instruct and to appeal to the individual client. A public register was created in 1859 to record the trademarks and labels used by the champagne négociants and their firms. Although firms were not required to register their labels, many took advantage of the recording mechanism, which provided them with a legal basis for pursuing counterfeiting cases in court. Hundreds of labels, now carefully preserved in the Archives départementales de la Marne in Châlons-en-Champagne, were entered into the register between 1859 and 1902. This record, combined with surviving promotional pamphlets and posters, provides a substantial database for analyzing marketing trends.

Wine labels, posters, and pamphlets, of course, present many of the same interpretive problems as conventional texts. Historians cannot determine how the public received these advertisements, but, as Roland Marchand has noted in his study of American advertising, "neither can we prove the effects of religious tracts, social manifestos, commemorative addresses, and political campaign speeches on their audiences."⁸⁴ The goal of the champagne négociants was to sell their wines; they would not have chosen or continued using messages that failed to achieve this goal. Thus, the choice of soothing words such as "pure," "special," and "love," which frequently appeared on labels, must have had substantial appeal, perhaps providing a certain nurturing reassurance and sense of belonging that the négociants, themselves, had long sought (fig. 3).⁸⁵

Champagne could be used as a sign of class membership in public space. The emergence of restaurants and public banquets, bringing formerly private rituals into the public sphere, shifted gastronomy, including fine-wine consumption, to a central place in social life.⁸⁶ Consumption was a status symbol, and material goods were a visible symbol of rank. As Jean-Paul Aron has stated, it was "*à table* that the nineteenth century began to define itself, it is *à table* that business deals are made, ambitions declared, marriages arranged," and, in this way, food, drink, and their consumption became a part of emerging nineteenth-century rituals.⁸⁷ Bars and restaurants became focal points for public consumption, and

manufacturers launched new brands at fashionable restaurants, like Maxime's in Paris. The "temple of champagne" was the rue Royale in Paris, home of Maxime's. Created in 1891 by Maxime Gaillard, this restaurant became the model for chic restaurants at the turn of the century. Launching a new brand of champagne at Maxime's was a way for champagne manufacturers to associate their wine with pleasure, wealth, and fashionable society.⁸⁸ Honor and status, embodied in fine-wine consumption and champagne brand names, were displayed in more visible, public ceremonies at the turn of the century. Champagne was deemed the chosen wine of princes and gentlemen.

Champagne was meant to project a class image. This class image, however, did not necessarily reflect the consumer's socioeconomic status with any fidelity. The objective was to sell champagne, and this meant setting the wine apart from the mundane realities of daily life. Négociants attempted to associate their wines with scenes of higher status, placing the product in upscale settings, linking wealth with honor, reassuring consumers that they were part of a community that was removed from the conditions and values of the popular classes. By the end of the nineteenth century, one contemporary food and wine expert wrote, at all bourgeois social events, champagne was "not a wine, it is *the* wine."⁸⁹

The appearance of champagne at the fashionable nightclubs that sprang up during the Belle Époque did not appear to tarnish champagne's respectability and use in upper- and middle-class rituals; paintings and posters from the Belle Époque attest to the importance of champagne in the new music halls of the era. Using the symbol of champagne in such a way caused conservative critics to lash out at its inclusion in the new culture of entertainment. "It is perhaps a mode," wrote one critic, "but it is surely a heresy; champagne at the *cafés de nuit* is an invention of the devil."⁹⁰

Although the wine could lead to excesses and misfortunes, it did not appear to be associated with the baseness of ordinary drink or public drunkenness that were so offensive to a collective bourgeois morality. Common wines and alcohol were part of public debate about alcoholism and public morality throughout Europe, but neither middle-class social drinking and excesses nor champagne figured in these discussions.⁹¹ Wine, particularly in France, was viewed, in the words of a contemporary, as "good for one's health and good for the nation."⁹² The connection between wine and health is probably most vividly revealed in the language of the late nineteenth century. Fermented drinks—wine, cider, beer—

off Champagne
new labels
1903-1918

were not designated in the French language under the word "alcohol" (*alcool*) and, thus, were not associated with discussions of alcoholism (*alcoolisme*) or excessive alcoholic consumption. Wine was termed, even among temperance organizers, a *boisson hygiénique*, a healthy drink.⁹³ Commercial interests in Champagne bolstered the linguistic association through marketing and legislative efforts. Specialty wines were marketed as a form of hygiene, such as "Grand vin de santé" or "Vin de Champagne diabétique." Meanwhile, health professionals at the Grande Pharmacie on the boulevard Haussman in Paris sold a house brand of "Médical Champagne" for a range of ailments.⁹⁴ Public drinking in the modern music halls might have been associated with decadence and moral decline by some critics, but for many bourgeois consumers, taking their cues from the medical community, champagne remained linked to the vigorous, saintly Dom Pérignon.

Throughout the Belle Époque, the middle classes increasingly embraced public amusements and the consumption that often accompanied them, but "only after dressing them with respectability in the guise of civic donation or charity."⁹⁵ In this guise, champagne was incorporated into a wider variety of celebratory rituals (fig. 4). Négociants actively promoted the association of the sparkling wines of Champagne with social gatherings, expanding the images of the wine's functions. "Mythic historic events," as Erving Goffman called them, or junctures and turning points in life, were celebrated by the opening of a bottle of champagne, marking the event as above the mundane. Wine labels increasingly suggested that religious events—such as baptisms and marriages—were occasions for secular celebrations.⁹⁶ Indeed, champagne could be used to mark many of the main events of the life course: *fiancé champagne* for engaged couples, *champagne nuptial* for newlyweds, and *bébé champagne* for new parents (figs. 5 and 6).⁹⁷ If there were doubts about when to serve the wines, the labels provided examples: On the label "Bouquet of the Bride Champagne," for example, the happy couple are shown as recipients of a celebratory toast offered by the guests at an elegant wedding banquet.⁹⁸ Champagne became a central part of these social occasions. Newspaper advertisements, particularly near holidays such as Christmas and New Year, associated family gatherings with champagne.⁹⁹ One observer noted in 1881 that the increased use of champagne at festive gatherings was "a charming fashion that is beginning to be more common."¹⁰⁰

Champagne was part of new "traditions"—like nuptial banquets and secular baptisms—some of which were decidedly "modern." At the turn

of the century, transport became a symbol of progress, modernity, and luxury. "Christenings" were extended to the launching of ships or first flights of airplanes. One of the more famous christenings came in 1902. George Kessler, Moët & Chandon's agent in the United States, created an enormous stir in both the American and European press when he managed to substitute a bottle of his firm's champagne for a bottle of German sparkling wine at the highly publicized launching of the German emperor's new yacht, the *Meteor*, in New York.¹⁰¹ For weeks following the event, the international press devoted front-page coverage to this famous christening, focusing attention on both the ritual and the symbolic importance of the wine.

Airplanes became one of the more important symbols of luxury and progress among the French bourgeoisie in the latter part of the Belle Époque. Adeline Daumard has noted that these symbols of luxury were so popular that bourgeois couples, who would never experience air flight, often arranged to have their photograph taken in front of airplanes.¹⁰² Négociants worked to associate their wines with flight, creating aviation festivals and christening airplanes. Only a few years after the first flight, a French magazine cover featured a handsome couple on the wings of an airplane, toasting with champagne in the moonlight (fig. 7). The caption of the 1905 picture declared: "It is you Clicquot, Mumm, Roederer, Moët, and Pommery who triumph in the air! All the French *cogs* sing in the fields: the best motor is the wine of champagne."¹⁰³ By the eve of World War I, flight and champagne seemed intimately connected.

Champagne also became associated with leisure activities and sporting events. Labels featured pictures of horse races, sportsmen hunting and rowing, and healthy young people on bicycles (fig. 8). These advertisements suggested that social drinking, particularly drinking champagne, was an essential element of these leisure activities.¹⁰⁴ And champagne became a regular feature at "clubs" and at stylish outdoor events. Brilliant posters created by artists such as Pierre Bonnard and Leonetto Cappiello featured fashionable men and women, champagne glasses raised, celebrating the Belle Époque at clubs, picnics, or derbies. By 1900, the *Wine Trade Review* attested to the success of these efforts, declaring that champagne was "easily holding its ground as pre-eminently the popular wine for festive gatherings of all kinds."¹⁰⁵

By the end of the nineteenth century, the champagne entrepreneurs had learned that one of the best ways to sell their commodity was to sell an

ideology—an ideology of nation (from national identity embodied in monarchy to imperial expansion in Africa and Asia). *Négociants* responded to nationalist sentiment by creating wine labels that appealed to a sense of patriotism at home and abroad (fig. 9). Symbols of the nation—flags, battles, and soldiers in uniform—were central images on these labels. Special champagnes were produced and promoted as a way to mark contemporary political events, like the Franco-Russian alliance of 1893, or historic national events, and Columbus's "discovery" of America.¹⁰⁶ Firms promoted labels to mark the centennial of the French Revolution, featuring the famous Tennis Court Oath. One firm offered a different kind of revolutionary remembrance by creating a label that featured the name of Marie-Antoinette splashed across the tricolor flag.¹⁰⁷

By the 1890s, wine labels began to reflect a general shift toward a more conservative nationalism. For the French market, one firm set out to appeal to anti-Dreyfusards during the Dreyfus Affair with the label of "Champagne Antijuif" (fig. 10).¹⁰⁸ Other firms appealed to French nationalists with images of Joan of Arc and words such as *Dieu* and *patrie* prominently displayed.¹⁰⁹ With European imperial expansion, champagne producers sought to capture the nationalist fervor of the scramble for overseas empire by creating commemorative labels such as "Champagne d'Orlent" and "Champagne of India," featuring soldiers in exotic locations, or "Grand vin imperial," featuring two scantily clad "natives" holding large clubs. In an attempt to keep up with the patriotic fervor on the eve of World War I, one champagne firm simply modified the soldier and flag featured on its standard wine label—changing the color of the soldier's uniform and flag depending on the final destination of the wine.¹¹⁰ Champagne had become a "resilient totem" able to support these "varied mythologies" about nations without having to account for contradictions.¹¹¹

John Gillis has observed that in the rapidly changing environment of the late nineteenth century, there was "a profound sense of losing touch with the past."¹¹² No brand name or title could create a better sense of continuity with the past and a certain nurturing reassurance than the world *veuve*, or "widow," which appeared on the labels of all female *négociants* in Champagne. While men were "designated carriers of progress," women were seen as belonging more to the past as "keepers and embodiments of memory."¹¹³ The "widow" as a genuine mother and a dedicated wife could provide consolation to those who feared becoming rootless in the new world of the late nineteenth century. Labels that appeared on

champagne bottles after 1880 show a marked increase in the appearance of the title *veuve*. This did not mean that there was an increase in the number of firms headed by widows. For the most part, these new widows could best be described as "fantasy *veuves*," fictional widows from fictional champagne families. The firm of Mercier, for example, introduced the wines of *Veuve Damas* of Reims, a purely fictional widow, in 1885.¹¹⁴ Mercier was one of the more innovative marketers within the region, with a well-established brand name. There are no records of what motivated the directors at Mercier to adopt a *veuve* label. But we can assume that the *négociants* at Mercier were attempting to create an advertising message that was more or less shared by their audience. Other male-owned firms followed the Mercier example, creating labels that featured the names of other fantasy *veuves*.¹¹⁵

In their capacity as wives and mothers, women frequently appeared on champagne wine labels. In 1887, the year of Queen Victoria's first Jubilee, champagne *négociants* attempted to use her charisma to promote their product.¹¹⁶ Victoria provided upscale appeal, but she was commemorated mainly as a wife and mother. Her name and her image, in black mourning dress, appeared on labels of champagne bottles, much as they did on other commodities of the era. Other women appeared as allegories, such as Joan of Arc, a symbol of national identity.¹¹⁷ The history of these "real women," much like the real *veuves* of the champagne industry, was systematically forgotten. As Gillis has noted, "Women and minorities often serve as symbols of a 'lost' past, nostalgically perceived and romantically constructed, but their actual lives are most readily forgotten."¹¹⁸ The deeds of these women were not what gave them a marketing appeal. It was as a "genuine mother, attentive and devoted"—whether "mother" of a country or of a family—that these women acquired symbolic importance that could be exploited in the new commodity culture of the late nineteenth century.

Négociants attempted to increase the appeal of champagne to an ever-broader group or "mass" of consumers, male and female, young and old. Wines were, for example, produced and marketed for tourists at the Exposition universelle of 1878 in Paris, and for students celebrating academic success.¹¹⁹ For these new consumers, the *négociants* introduced different qualities of sparkling wine. The wine house of Dufaut, for example, produced seven different quality wines: Grands vins de réserve, Carte blanche, Bouzy, Fleur de Sillery, Grand crémant, Royal Sillery, and *Aÿ mousseux*. Numerous wine houses used the term *carte*, associated with

various colors—*or, blanche, verte, bleue, noire*—intended to denote the quality (and price) of the wine. Champagne firms with relatively unknown brand names tended to use terms like *royal, supérieur, spécial, or extra* along with *champagne* to give their wines added attraction. The least-expensive sparkling wines of the region were usually designated by the euphemism *flour or petit champagne*.

With champagne's appeal to an ever-broader group of consumers by the turn of the century, a number of the grandes marques firms appeared to shift their marketing strategy, moving away from a presence in multiple markets to increasing market shares in countries where they already enjoyed brand-name recognition. Other négociants discovered that they could augment sales in the competitive foreign market by selling off-brands under the name of the importer. There are no accurate figures on the number of off-brands sold. With a certain lingering stigma attached to "cheap" champagne on overseas markets, few producers admitted creating these off-brands. Records indicate, however, that they were growing in popularity at the turn of the century. In the British market, for example, where nearly half of all exports were consumed in 1896, the Victoria Wine Company, one of the pioneers of off-brand champagne marketing, ran an advertisement listing twenty-three brand-name champagnes along with seven "house" champagnes at considerably lower prices.¹²⁰ Without the costs of distribution, marketing, and salaries for an overseas sales staff, these wines did not carry the elevated price tag of the more prestigious brands. An economist at the *Revue des deux mondes* estimated in 1894 that the average négociant made approximately 1 Franc on each bottle sold for between 6 and 8 francs on foreign markets. It was, above all, he calculated, the costs of distribution that elevated prices.¹²¹ Improvements in transport and the advent of large-scale distribution networks by 1911 lowered prices for off-brand champagnes, now generally selling for between 2 and 4 francs per bottle (compared with 8 to 12 francs for brand-name champagne in 1911), making them increasingly available for families of "modest means," particularly in France.¹²² Although these off-brand wines were lower in quality, they were associated with the distributor or importer and did not jeopardize the reputation of the champagne house or the négociants that produced them.

With more sophisticated processing techniques, firms created new champagnes, such as "dry" and "extra dry," to appeal to the tastes of specific markets. By the exposition of 1889, for example, the Mumm firm featured three qualities of wine: Carre blanche (sweet); Extra-Dry (dry); and

Cordon rouge (very dry).¹²³ Dry wines were particularly popular in foreign markets and, despite being attributed to the wine-making genius of a single woman, these were generally associated with male consumers. Sweeter wines were generally popular in France, Germany, and Russia.

Sweet wines were deemed particularly appropriate and respectable for "ladies" to drink. Fashionable women in Britain often served champagne along with afternoon tea.¹²⁴ The success of this popular association is captured in a drawing by John Leech featured in *Punch* in the 1890s. A bourgeois family is gathered at the dinner table with glasses of champagne. The young son, returning from boarding school, is asked, "Now, George, my boy, there's a glass of Champagne for you. Don't get such stuff at school, eh?" The young man responds, "F'm! Awfully sweet. Very good sort for ladies. But I've arrived at a time of life when I confess I like my wine dry" (fig. 11). Symbolically, the young man was indicating his transition into the world of adult males through his rejection of the sweet champagne of his mother and the other ladies gathered around the table. Popular etiquette books in France went even further, forbidding the drinking of anything but the driest champagne at meals at which women were not present.¹²⁵ Men were instructed to envision a new bottle of champagne as a "beautiful woman" who after a voyage "needs to rest a little in order to present herself with all her advantages."¹²⁶ Centuries after Madame de Pompadour deemed it the appropriate wine for ladies, champagne remained a gendered beverage.

Négociants helped to fashion champagne as a consumer product not only through advertising and specialized products but through spectacle as well. Representatives and agents of champagne firms, individual négociants, and the Syndicat du commerce, with their publicity stunts and advertising efforts, acted as modern minstrels for champagne in the expanding marketplace. The bravado of champagne agents or the exploits of négociants at well-publicized events or international exhibitions generated enormous publicity for the industry, creating sensational news items and great "theater." For the Exposition universelle of 1889, for example, Eugène Mercier commissioned the largest barrel in the world, decorated with elaborate sculptures by the artist Navlet. Containing nearly 200,000 bottles of wine, the transportation of this barrel to Paris by twenty-four white oxen and eighteen horses received coverage in newspapers from Hungary to San Francisco. For three weeks, press reports focused on the progress of the barrel, keeping "champagne" and "Mercier" in the public eye.¹²⁷ Even those who could not afford cham-

pagne could delight in these stories and participate through name identification and popular imagery. By the beginning of the twentieth century, "simply the names of these wines became household words."¹²⁸

Although négociants marketed to a broader group of consumers, there was no suggestion in advertising or promotional materials that the regional sparkling wines were intended to be "democratic," consumed by a clientele from a broad range of economic and social classes (figs. 12 and 13). Champagne represented "restricted equality"—the desire or demand for it might be democratic, appealing to the mass of consumers, but those who could afford to participate in its rituals and consumption were limited to an exclusive group of clients. As one observer noted, "the respectable négociant demonstrates that it is impossible to sell the real products of the Champagne vineyards at a low price."¹²⁹

While intellectuals like economist Paul Leroy-Beaulieu reminded the elite on the eve of World War I that it "was not a crime" to drink cheap champagne, particularly at *banquets démocratiques* or family gatherings for those of "modest means," no one should pretend that these wines were anything but *faux champagne*. There was an assumption that cheap sparkling wine was not authentic, since "it could hardly claim to be made with grapes from Reims or Épernay."¹³⁰ This served as ample justification for dismissing the popular consumption of champagne in cabarets. It was a given that authentic champagne had to be expensive, setting apart the wine and those who consumed it from less-affluent consumers of common wines.

On the eve of World War I, champagne was an essential part of social life among the European bourgeoisie. The sparkling wines of Champagne were part of a repertoire of symbolic devices that were used to delineate social boundaries, in France and abroad, distancing the bourgeoisie from the popular classes. In the changing world of the late nineteenth century, brand names and material goods denoting social status became particularly important for creating a sense of group identity. Commodities such as champagne could be employed in new rituals and "traditions" of membership that took the place of routines, customs, and structures that were increasingly obsolete or irrelevant. During this evolution, the "old"—whether noble titles or aristocratic standards of consumption—could be refashioned and reinvented to create something "modern" that offered a sense of continuity and a reassuring connection to a mythic past. The ability of the champagne négociants to formulate a unique style of mar-

keting that would attract a select group of elite buyers as clients and, at the same time, mold potential new clients out of the growing middle classes proved a healthy adaptation to the market conditions and consumer culture of the period.

Advertising and promoting the product category of "sparkling wine," which began under the Second Empire in France, became more specifically national with the Third Republic. Desire was created within a nascent public in France and abroad who associated the wine with specific French producers, mainly through brands, and an ambiguous yet understood region, mainly through use of the appellation *champagne*. By capturing traditional symbols, like those used in champagne ads, as Aaron Segal has demonstrated, "advertising transferred authority and legitimacy to brand name goods defined as products characteristic of France."¹³¹ Efforts to advertise and promote champagne spread common symbols and turned the particular into the national. What were once regional specialties became national goods. It was the success of these efforts that assured that champagne was a crucial part of a transatlantic consumer culture, and, in the words of Raymond Poincaré, a part of "the [French] national fortune."¹³²