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Bankers and their wines

A journey through the 19th and
early 20th centuries

The world of wine in the 19th century

A picture painted around the turn of the 20th century by the artist William Pape (1859-1920) portrays a banquet being held at the house of Ludwig Leichner (1836-1912), an opera singer and manufacturer who has gone down in history as the inventor of lead-free greasepaint make-up. Pape wanted to capture the atmosphere at a Berlin soirée – a select group of guests enjoying some glasses of wine with their dinner.

Banquet at the house of Leichner,
painting by William Pape, 1899-1900



Adolph von Menzel, Supper at the Ball, 1878

Each place setting at the table features several glasses of various shapes. Immediately recognisable are champagne flutes as well as several glasses for red and white wine. The guests do not appear to be drinking in any specific order. Nonetheless, the glasses have not simply been arranged randomly. They follow a certain choreography. What exactly this looks like is not clear from the painting. We have to examine other artefacts and consult other sources to discover the importance attached to wines at such banquets.



The custom of using different glasses for different wines was certainly not restricted to the private sphere. More than 22 years before William Pape painted his picture, the Berlin-based artist Adolph Menzel (1815-1905) had followed his many works on Frederick the Great by painting one of his most beautiful, fascinating, colourful and vibrant pictures: Supper at the Ball. Menzel captured the sort of scene that would have been observed in central Berlin's Hohenzoellern palace, which is currently being rebuilt. Supper at the Ball shows proceedings at an advanced stage of the evening – around 11 pm – as people are fuelling themselves for the night ahead. Prominent individuals – civilians as well as high-ranking naval officers dressed in ball uniform – are standing side by side, some of them conversing while another wolfs his food down. In their hands the ball guests are holding either white-wine glasses or champagne flutes. But what do they do when the plates have been cleared and the glasses are empty? Just put them on the nearest unoccupied chair! Despite – or rather because of – his small stature Menzel was an extremely accurate observer. He has left to posterity scenic events of truly photographic precision.

But balls in conjunction with the consumption of fine wines were not unique to the Wilhelmine period or – as Menzel's friend Theodor Fontane has the character of Count Barby comment in his late novel *The Stechlin* – "now that we've become Kaiser and Reich". Wine had for centuries been an integral

part of European courtly and aristocratic culture. One of the duties of the court factors in those days was to finance the purchase of wines and to organise their often costly and time-consuming transportation.

This role already becomes tangible in the early modern period, for example in the person of Wallenstein's banker, Hans de Witte (1583-1630). Whereas the latter had to procure wine from Bohemia, Austria, Italy, Switzerland and France for the generalissimo's court banquets and camp meals, the world of wine had consolidated by the end of the 18th century. The wines served on festive occasions could be reduced to four basic types. No less than Johann Wolfgang von Goethe described this quartet in his play *Urfaust*, thereby giving it political connotations.



In Auerbachs Keller around 1840

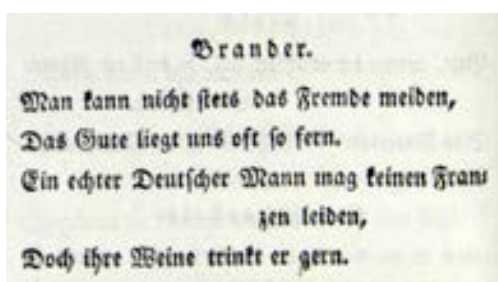
The Auerbachs Keller tavern in Leipzig is the meeting place for a small group of rowdy, boozy students who are shortly to be joined by Mephistopheles. Frosch is the first of them to order: "Good, if I have my choice, the Rhenish I propose; for still the fairest gifts the fatherland bestows." The tendency to imbue Rhine wines with a sense of patriotism – a trend that continues throughout the 19th century and then, during the German Empire, turns these wines into a symbol of cultural equality with, or even superiority over, France as the 'fatherland of wine' (Pückler) – can be observed at a very early stage here.

The second pillar of this wine culture – after still white wine – is sparkling white wine, i.e. champagne. In Auerbachs Keller it is favoured by Brander, who remarks: "Champagne's the wine for me; right brisk, and sparkling let it be! What foreign is one always can't decline, what's good is often scattered far apart. The French your genuine German hates with all his heart, yet has a relish for their wine." Here, again, Goethe does not spare us his subtlety. At a time when France was about to undergo a revolution, he gives free rein to Germans' ambivalence towards everything French: champagne and the French red wine included in 'their wine' are cultural achievements that Germany simply cannot match.

Fourthly, and finally, sweet wine is requested: "I like not acid wine, I must allow, give me a glass of genuine sweet!" says Siebel. To which Mephistopheles promptly replies: "Tokay shall, if you wish it, flow without delay."

Goethe uses just a few broad brushstrokes – albeit with incomparably brilliant subtlety – to sketch a parallelogram of wine culture in the late 18th century: Rhine wine, champagne and red wine from France, and sweet wines, as exemplified by Tokay from Hungary. Thanks to its variable geometry, which was to prove its worth when the wine list for the ingeniously thought-out sequence of dishes customary in service à la russe was being compiled, this quartet wraps itself like a frame around the long 19th century.

Snippet of Faust. A Fragment published in 1790



But, more than that, even the great seminal catastrophe of the 20th century, the First World War, could not really undermine this symbolic order. Although it is true that courtly wine culture – one of the key pillars of this order – perished in Germany too during the tumultuous days of November 1918, the wine culture of the educated and industrial middle classes, which had already emerged back in the mid of the 19th century, had in the meantime aligned itself with courtly and aristocratic culture. Wine culture, as an expression of this symbolic order, thus survived the social and

political upheavals – especially in the form of the wine culture developing among bankers.

Bankers in the Bordeaux region



Corkbrand and other trademarks of Mouton Rothschild, 1904

The year is 1920. A book entitled *Clarets and Sauternes* – the English name for French red wines and the sweet white wines from the Bordeaux region – is published in London. This naturally explains the classifications of red Médocs from 1855. There are only four Premier Grand Crus: Lafite, Margaux, Latour and Haut-Brion. The second vintages are headed by Mouton Rothschild, followed by a list of the third, fourth and fifth Grand Crus Classés, with a few Crus Bourgeois bringing up the rear. But did someone say 'Mouton Rothschild'?



James de Rothschild around 1850

The emerging importance of wine to the (French) Rothschilds – who go back to James Mayer Rothschild, who was actually born in Frankfurt am Main – had become evident as early as 1853, when Nathaniel de Rothschild purchased Château Brane Mouton. James's nephew and son-in-law did not miss the opportunity to document the new arrivals' integration into the French aristocracy by renaming the vineyard Mouton Rothschild. From 1868 onwards, however, the Rothschilds owned not just one but two of the world's most prestigious vineyard estates: James had acquired Château Lafite at auction just a few months before he died. The Rothschilds had arrived at the pinnacle of French society.

By the beginning of the 20th century the Rothschilds were no longer the only representatives of the financial aristocracy to have acquired vineyards of world renown. In the meantime a second banking dynasty had invested in a Grand Cru Classé. *Clarets and Sauternes* states that the grand vin Château Desmirail, a Troisième Grand Cru Classé, belongs to the German banker Robert von



Corkbrand and other trademarks of
Château Desmirail, 1904

Mendelssohn. But you have to be careful with these and many other such sources. The information provided in this publication had not kept up with the ownership situation: Robert von Mendelssohn had already been dead for three years by the time this book was printed, and his descendants would never again see their father's property – or what remained of it.

Under the headline *Les Allemands et nos Crus de Médoc* the French newspaper *L'Est Eclair* reported in September 1914 that the French rural population had set off to take possession of the wine which rightly belonged to the French, but had been bought up by rich German bankers who never even showed their faces, and then carried it in a triumphant procession out of the cellars and distributed it among the local population. However, they plundered not only Château Desmirail but also Château Chasse-Spleen (Moulis), which belonged to the Bremen-based wine merchants Segnitz, and Château Smith Haut Lafitte (Graves), which since 1906 had been owned by Reidemeister & Ulrichs, another firm of wine merchants from Bremen.

From Wallenstein to the First World War: brief episodes such as these are intended to provide at least a flavour of the fact that the history of viticulture and the wine trade reflects many aspects of political, economic and social history. And, conversely, through wine we can observe the history of the 19th century as if peering through a keyhole. Again and again we find bankers appearing in this picture.

Adapting courtly wine culture

The affinity with wine in the far-flung Mendelssohn family started with Joseph (1770-1848), the eldest son of the Berlin-based Enlightenment figure Moses Mendelssohn. In 1815, Joseph and other bankers took on the task of organising the transfer of the financial compensation that France had to pay to Prussia after the end of Napoleonic rule. For this reason he often travelled to Paris. While returning from one of these journeys in 1818, Joseph bought a country estate with extensive land in Horchheim near Koblenz. He subsequently supplemented this estate by purchasing further land, including wine-growing areas. In doing so he reportedly amassed a total of 70,000 vines covering an area of at least seven hectares. This would have made the Mendelssohns the owners of the largest vineyard in that region, although the fairly sparse contemporary literature contains no references to this – or none of which I am aware, anyway.

Members and friends of Joseph Mendelssohn's family were often to spend the early autumn by the Rhine over the following decades. Famous guests visited, such as Alexander von Humboldt and the Boisserée brothers. Joseph's nephew Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy completed his second piano concerto in Horchheim on 5 August 1837.

Today this idyll has long been consigned to the past. In the mid-19th century the Mendelssohn estate was dissected by the railway line running along the right bank of the Rhine, which was an irony of history because the Mendelssohns' wealth derived largely from the placement of bonds issued to finance the railways. Today a four-lane highway runs across the area where the

Joseph Mendelssohn



Mendelssohns used to spend time by the Rhine. No memories of the wine itself remain either. Far more vines than now used to stand on the right bank of the river. The fact that wine-growing has survived in only a few places here is not just because many areas have for some time now no longer been used for agricultural purposes and have been built on. The wines themselves were nothing special. The Mendelssohns are unlikely to have produced anything more than an ordinary table wine in such flat locations unsuited to growing quality wine.

Only by virtue of their origin would the Horchheim wines have passed as the 'Rhenish' sort mentioned in Auerbachs Keller. Ever since the Middle Ages, all wines transported across the Rhine had been classified as 'Rhenish' – even in the 19th century, although in the Anglophone world they were known under the name of 'Hock', which originated from the trading centre of Hochheim am Main.



List of wine auctions by the Duchy of Nassau domain at Kloster Eberbach in 1836

In the 18th century there were, of course, already wines that stood out from the usual Rhine vintages, predominantly from the Rheingau, like Rüdesheimer, Steinberger and Marcobrunner. In the 19th century they achieved world renown as the white counterparts of the Grand Crus Classés from Bordeaux. Those who owned property in these locations – not just the clergy and secular gentlemen but, even from an early stage, normal citizens – possessed enormous wine-cultural capital and could hope to earn a considerable profit on this capital in good years.

In order to derive the maximum benefit from the reputation of both the producer and certain vineyard locations, prestigious wines were, if possible, not sold just after completion of the fermentation process but were stored in 'cabinet' cellars and auctioned as matured wines. The Rheingau wines, for example, owe at least part of their reputation to the characteristic that – unlike most other white wines as well as red wines – they were able to age without becoming undrinkable. The oldest wine, which was put up for auction by the Duchy of Nassau domain in 1836, had been produced by the Cistercians. It dated from 1706, when Kloster Eberbach monastery was still an abbey. The famous 1811 vintage, which is frequently mentioned by Goethe and went down in history as the comet wine, was also up for auction in 1836 – almost a young wine by the standards of the day.

It is hardly surprising that at this time – which has gone down in European history as the period of the restoration and the Vormärz – when following the course of the Rhine we come across traces not only of the Mendelssohns but also the Rothschilds. Mayer Amschel Rothschild (1744-1812) who, like Goethe, hailed from Frankfurt am Main and was the founder of the dynasty, had made his fortune from financial transactions – which included securing various wine shipments – while acting as court factor to the landgrave of Hesse-Kassel. Once Schloss Johannisberg castle in the Rheingau region had fallen to the Austrian foreign minister Prince Metternich after 1815, the Austrian Rothschilds were ready and waiting. In 1822 they signed an exclusive agreement with Klemens Wenzel Lothar von Metternich (1773-1859) – a native of the Moselle region and the architect of Europe's political and territorial reorganisation – which gave them the right to market Schloss Johannisberg's wines in Great Britain. Why?

Compared with the quantity of wines that the British imported around the end of the 18th century from France, Spain, the Canary Islands, Portugal, Madeira and the Cape of Good Hope, Rhine wines played only a minor role. Nonetheless, their status was equal to that of the best French wines: quality rather than quantity was the motto. Like fine porcelain, expensive fabrics and exotic objects for all sorts of cabinets of curiosities, they were one of the status symbols par excellence of that period.

These wines were therefore among the very few to belong to a symbolic sphere that employed a transnational code. Speaking the 'language' of these wines and, in doing so, accumulating symbolic capital was possible for anyone who possessed the financial resources to acquire these goods. How this game worked and the role that banks and bankers played here is illustrated – as are so many other things – by the life of Prince Hermann von Pückler-Muskau (1785-1871). In 1839, while staying in Constantinople where he was returning from several years of travelling around the Orient, Pückler ordered 100 bottles of 'well-corked' champagne to be delivered to the Prussian embassy in Vienna. At the same time he ordered 100 bottles of Bordeaux to be sent to the same address. One of the two preserved handwritten letters reveals that payment for the deliveries was handled by the Paris-based banking house of de Rothschild.



Prince Hermann von Pückler-Muskau
around 1840

But what did Pückler want with 200 bottles of wine in Vienna? To impress women? That would be typical of him. It is surely the case, however, that he again wanted to present himself as a true connoisseur of gastronomy. The late 18th century and early 19th century had seen a particular kind of revolution take place at the royal courts of Europe. Until then it had been the custom to serve the food and wine *à la française*, which involved putting everything to be consumed on the table in an artistically decorative way. Although the result was a feast for the eyes, from a culinary perspective it was disappointing. The dishes were wonderful to look at but had all gone cold; the wines sparkled in their carafes and glasses but did not match the food.

Encouraged in particular by the Congress of Vienna, at which many European heads met and competed with each other not just in terms of power politics but also through symbolic politics, *service à la russe* became the accepted custom. This involved bringing the individual dishes to the table sequentially and – ideally – serving the right wines with each course. Because the guests no longer saw all of the food together at the same time but, if they were lucky, managed to memorise the precisely specified sequence of courses, they were now informed of the individual dishes and the accompanying wines in writing. The menu had been born and, over the course of the 19th century, became a genre in its own right. Nowadays such menus can often be found in the single-leaf collections of many libraries and museums.

Where these are available as a serial source – as is the case at the Berlin State Library, for example – we can see that the history of the 19th century is reflected in its menus. A typical dinner party, such as the one hosted by Prince Karl of Bavaria on 9 February 1858, comprised seven or eight consecutive courses, with each course in turn being divided into several dishes. Whereas the menus used at the Wittelsbach courts were initially handwritten, they were



Menu of a dinner party hosted by Prince Karl of Bavaria on 9 February 1858

subsequently – at least for especially opulent occasions – artistically printed. Not always, but often, they listed not only the food but also the accompanying wines. The dinner party held in 1858 began with Sauternes and Madeira, followed by a dry champagne, then Château Lafite, Steinberger Kabinett, more champagne, followed by red port, white port, Crown Tokay and, to finish off the meal, a classic Mediterranean wine. At the German and British banquets held in aristocratic and courtly circles, no menu was complete without a fine Bordeaux and a top-quality wine from Germany. The same applied – in somewhat simpler form – to the breakfast banquets held in those days which, because they were served in the late morning, corresponded more to a modern-day brunch rather than a traditional breakfast, which is why the repeatedly asserted claim that Wilhelm II drank wine for breakfast is misleading.

What is, however, correct is that when his grandfather King Wilhelm I was visiting Prince Pückler at Castle Branitz near Cottbus on 8 July 1862, the king and his entourage were served a déjeuner dinatoire. Because of the high-ranking status of the guest, however, this banquet was unsurpassed in its opulence. Approximately twelve different dishes and no fewer wines were served. The whole thing then continued in the evening with supper.

Understandably, culinary delights of this kind required quite a few wines and an excellently stocked wine cellar. But how would this be achievable for someone who lived near Cottbus in 1860? Pückler frequently ordered wines and other delicacies from trusted merchants in Berlin and Hamburg, but he also often ordered directly from wine merchants in Bordeaux, who bought the wines directly from the vineyard and then exported them, already bottled, around the world. Pückler wanted to ensure that the wines he had ordered had not been adulterated or diluted en route to their destination, as happened to most of the wines traded in those days.

And, equally, just how important the German market was for the Bordeaux wine merchants who dealt with the entire output of Crus Classées is clear from the letters of notification sent by the highly renowned Bordeaux-based wine merchants Duffour-Debarte Fils in the 1850s. When communicating with their no doubt fairly affluent German clientele, for example, they wrote these letters not in French but in their best German.

The thread of this story could easily end at this juncture, but it unexpectedly leads back to the Mendelssohn family, which by now had become far-flung. By 1861, Duffour-Debarte Fils had been taken over by, among others, a partner named M.P. Biarnez (1798-1874). He supplied Prince Pückler in Branitz and went down in wine history not only because of his poem about the grands vins of Bordeaux but also because of his daughter Enole, who met the German banker's son Adolph Mendelssohn in Paris in the revolutionary year of 1848.

History has yet to reveal under what circumstances the Prussian with Jewish roots and the southern French catholic found each other. But as the years went by, the courtly wine culture also increasingly appealed to those citizens who, by applying their knowledge and expertise, were helping to transform the economic order into an industrial society without wanting to revolutionise the social order. Personally liable private bankers played a key role in this process.



M.P. Biarnes, a poet and wine merchant (chalcography)



Dining room in the club of Berlin, the meeting place of bankers and industrialists, in 1892

By managing the issuance of government bonds and railway bonds they rose to the top of the European financial establishment without neglecting their traditional personal financial relationships. The Mendelssohns were equally as active in Russia as they were in the management of Clara Schumann's assets.

But how could the emerging financial and industrial elites aspire to join the world of the established elites? The aristocracy and monarchy were protected by social barriers, and so ennoblement and, thus, acceptance into courtly circles were a very remote goal – if desirable at all. It was, however, possible to imitate courtly culture and adopt its social and status symbols – especially its wines.

Being an integral part of courtly culture, wines provided proof of material wealth, social distinction and cultural refinement. Anyone who aspired to participate in this world had to acquire these wines – and maybe even earn a material return on this cultural capital. This was the Rothschilds' strategy when they purchased Château Mouton and then ten years later invested in Château Lafite.

The private bankers in turn were to act as role models for the conduct of the employed bank managers who ran the public limited banks that were mainly created around the time the German Empire was established. One of these banks, which was founded in 1870, was called Deutsche Bank. It saw its main mission as being to finance foreign trade and also, soon afterwards, to finance industry, infrastructure and governments.

It is hardly surprising that the board members and directors of these banks, through their outward conduct and personal behaviour, sought to emulate the sophisticated lifestyles of the Rothschilds, the Mendelssohns, the Arnholds and the Bleichröders – including in the sphere of wine.

In 1871 – just one year after it had been founded – Deutsche Bank opened its first branch outside Berlin in Bremen, which was the hub of the red-wine trade for northwestern Europe. Bremen-based wine merchants such as Segnitz, Eggert & Franke and Reidemeister & Ulrichs had long been major international players in the trade in Bordeaux wines. The wine was purchased in large quantities in the Bordeaux region and was then marketed worldwide from Bremen, which did not join the German Customs Union until 1888.

The first members of Deutsche Bank's Management Board took advantage of this benefit, asking the directors of the branch in Bremen if they knew of any good sources of red wine. The branch manager, Ferdinand von der Heyde, was able to assist them in this respect: "I can certainly help you out with red wine as my brother-in-law runs the wine merchants Joh. Eggers Sohn & Co, who have been operating here for 50 years or more, and he maintains a substantial warehouse in the Customs Union (Verden), from where he can supply any orders for you tax free. I pay him around 8 silver groschen for normal table wine. Just tell me roughly what it is you want so that we can send you a small trial consignment." (15 January 1872, HADB, F1/166)



Extract from the anniversary sheet to mark Deutsche Bank's 10th anniversary celebration in 1880

The first Management Board spokesman at Deutsche Bank was Georg Siemens, who was to run the bank for 30 years. Marking the bank's 25th anniversary, a Berlin-based journalist remembered his first encounter with Siemens, which was pertinent to our topic: "It was in the early 1870s on a lovely summer evening and during a long summer night that we helped a young member of parliament to drink a barrel of Rudesheim wine. The politician was Georg Siemens, who at the time was rumoured to have recently taken on a second job as director of a new bank. The Rudesheim wine was fantastic, a fiery 1868 vintage, not a fancy 'dessert wine', no, it was natural and very drinkable. I don't think I have found anything comparable since. It was also rumoured that the wine had been acquired from the donor's initial reserves. This type of use and the selection made meant that we were optimistic about the fate of the new bank." (Berliner Tageblatt newspaper, 7 April 1895, HADB, NL48/1)

Siemens had, indeed, demonstrated good taste. The 1868 wines – like those of 1811, 1863 and, subsequently, 1893 – were among the greatest vintages of the 19th century. Anyone who aspired to be something special, who wanted to treat their friends or to win new friends had to make status symbols such as these an integral part of their lifestyle. In 1898, Siemens and his former Management Board colleague Hermann Wallich each ordered 'blind' 50 bottles of Forster Jesuitengarten at a price of 10.95 marks, and Siemens then enquired of his co-buyer: "I myself have not yet tasted the wine. Perhaps you can let me know whether it is good." (28 March 1898, HADB, SG1/83)

This was how people celebrated in private, and the same applied to business dinners. Various menus have survived, such as the one marking the celebrations for the 25th anniversary of Deutsche Bank's branch in Bremen in 1896. 13 different wines accompanied the menu on this occasion: Pommery champagne, sherry, Château Latour, Trarbacher Schloßberg, Château Rausan, Liebfrauenmilch (a quality wine in those days), Château d'Yquem, Château du Tertre, Château Cantenac, Château Margaux Schloßabzug, Heidsieck Monopole and, finally, port and Madeira.

Deutsche Bank's London branch, however, which two years later was celebrating its first quarter-century of business activity, managed with a very modest range of wines. One sherry, one Liebfrauenmilch, Deutz and Geldermann champagne, plus one Bordeaux. Getting by with just five wines in London in 1898 was certainly a major achievement in terms of thrift.



Menu to celebrate the 25th anniversary of Deutsche Bank London Agency in 1898



A different perspective on this culture of banquets, dinner parties and indulgence was provided by a woman who in 1850 swapped her life in Bordeaux for one in Berlin: Enole Mendelssohn (1827-1889), the daughter of the aforementioned poet and Bordeaux-based wine merchant M.P. Biarnes. Her marriage to the banker Adolph Mendelssohn lasted only briefly, as did the life of their son Stephan. Adolph died in Pau in 1851, while Stephan – barely one year old – passed away in Bordeaux at the beginning of 1852. In 1856, Enole married Adolph's younger brother Franz (1829-1889, ennobled in 1888), who in 1854 had succeeded Adolph as a partner in Mendelssohn & Co.



Enole (von) Mendelssohn

Enole Biarnes must have been an extraordinary sight: educated and highly musically talented, she ran a salon in Berlin's Jägerstrasse for the most highly regarded artists and remained in personal contact with many of them, such as the violinist Joseph Joachim. Enole did not really enjoy the social life of the Prussian capital, in which her husband had to participate, as she subtly recorded. "Next Wednesday there is another boring gentlemen's dinner party – that's such a nuisance. Fortunately it's the last one. What's more, Berliners behave like scalded cats, and I think that Bismarck's city is becoming the most frivolous in Europe. All you ever hear is talk of dinners, parties and balls, and you always have in mind the remark made by Ms Schüssler, who mistakenly said: 'they all want to vomit' instead of 'they all want to outdo each other'."

The German literature on the Mendelssohns to date has unfortunately taken very little note of Enole Biarnes. A French collection of biographies of prominent individuals from the Bordeaux region mentions that during the Franco-Prussian War of 1870/71 Enole Mendelssohn did absolutely everything she could and spent lots of her own money to take care of French prisoners of war in Berlin. What self-confidence must this daughter of a French wine merchant and wife of a banker of Jewish ancestry have had in the Berlin of the German kings – and, soon, emperors – that enabled her to withstand anti-French tirades and nationalistic outbursts by providing humanitarian assistance to her compatriots? It is quite possible that Robert von Mendelssohn, the son she gave birth to in 1857, at least partly had this aspect of his mother in mind when he purchased Château Desmirail in the Médoc region in 1903.

Wine from the Moselle

When we have so far mentioned German wines as one of the status symbols of the 19th century, we have always been talking about Rhine wines. But was it not Moselle wines – rather than Rhine vintages – that were literally weighed in gold around the turn of the 20th century?

Until the mid-19th century there is no mention of Moselle wines on menus. A producer from the Moselle, who in 1842 informed the Lord Chamberlain to King Friedrich Wilhelm IV: “I have a wonderful Zeltinger here,” received the reply: “We don’t drink that at court.”

The rise of Moselle wines to become the fashion of the late German Empire period started at the end of the 1850s with several good or excellent vintages in succession. Then came the Franco-Prussian War of 1870/71, which for the first time brought tens or even hundreds of thousands of Prussian soldiers into contact with the wines from the far west of the Empire. But it was only after the opening of the so-called ‘cannon railway’, which ran from Berlin via Koblenz and Trier to Metz, that it became feasible to transport large quantities of Moselle wines to the big wine markets of northern and eastern Germany. It was the Moselle itself that had made it difficult for its ‘own’ wines to access markets. The river was only navigable for a few months of the year. For a long time, therefore, Moselle wines were unable to truly compete with those from the Rhine.

However, the growing success of Moselle wines cannot be attributed solely to their better availability. Although this was a necessary condition, it was certainly not a sufficient one. The reasons why Moselle wines became fashionable relate largely to a characteristic of the late 19th century, which even its contemporaries described as the ‘age of nervousness’ (Joachim Radkau).

Viticulture on the Middle Moselle in 1898



It is a truism that the predominant attitudes of each generation influence their wine preferences and, consequently, the styles of wine produced. The high-quality Rhine wines that became the prototype for the Rhine wines of the late 19th century were very mature, honey-to-ambercoloured, alcoholic and often extremely sweet. Moselle wines embodied a different style and even a new type of wine (which Goethe had possibly been vaguely familiar with a hundred years previously but had not considered it worth mentioning).

Maximilian Ripper, an Austrian who attended the German viticulture congress in Trier in 1898, perfectly summarised the connection between wine and time: “Firstly, Moselle wine is increasingly in tune with today’s tastes and – I would almost say – with the current zeitgeist. Just like the latter, it is more fleeting, more superficial.” Ripper articulated the fin-de-siècle attitudes of broad sections of society. At a time when things are generally accelerating, heavy wines in large glasses – such as those shown in Menzel’s *Supper at the Ball* – symbolise what has passed and has had its day. What is wanted instead is sparkling wine for everyone – as well as racy, light and lower-alcohol wines. This is the key factor in the phenomenal rise of the German sparkling-wine industry and Moselle wines in the late 19th century.

Transformation of wine culture in the 20th century

How did wine culture change in the early 20th century? The Horchheim chapter in the Mendelssohns’ lives came to an irrevocable end. In 1902 the family donated what was left of its summer residence to the Kaiserswerther Diakonissen social welfare organisation, which converted it into a convalescent home. The Mendelssohns now focused all of their energies on Berlin, where the political climate was changing. Most of the menus used at court were now being written in German script. And the Lord Chamberlain to Empress Auguste Victoria complained that French champagne was highly popular at the German imperial court. Talk of the arch-enemy became a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Menu for the wedding guest „Miss Lieschen Müller“ in 1904

The courtly wine culture that had long been adapted by the financial, industrial and intellectual elites continued to become democratised. The menu for a wedding of the time, for example, contains the name of a guest who, one might think, could only really exist in the imagination of some literary figures: Miss Lieschen Müller.

However, the turn of the 20th century was also the high watermark of wine fraud. Since the early 1870s the vine pest (phylloxera) imported from America had destroyed millions of hectares of vineyards as it spread like an epidemic throughout southern Europe. The reconstruction of these vineyards using grafted vines took a long time for several reasons. Some of the wines sold under renowned French names were soon coming from Spain, especially the Rioja region, and then from Italy. When these were no longer sufficient, the French bought wines from Austria and Hungary. Even Algerian wine had to help plug the gap. The Grand Cru Classés are not likely to have avoided this emergency, especially as bottling at the château did not become mandatory for Bordeaux until 1972. Until then, most Bordeaux wines were bottled either by French merchants or by the importers in Bremen, Brussels or London and were then



adjusted accordingly to suit the respective national markets. This meant that a Bordeaux in London, for example, was usually a darker colour and contained more alcohol than a wine served under the same name in Berlin. As early as the late 19th century the top German wine-growers aimed to eliminate this risk to the reputation and taste of their wines by introducing their 'estate-bottled' designation. The wines that were marketed under their names as 'natural wine' had to have left the producer's cellars already bottled.

The First World War had a devastating impact on winegrowing. The courtly wine culture of the 19th century was never to re-emerge in this form. For German wine-growers the 1920s became one of the worst periods they would ever have to live through owing to the loss of foreign markets, hyperinflation, the world economic crisis and a series of poor vintages. The term 'wine-growers hardship' became a common expression.

In the 1930s the situation was exacerbated by political turmoil. Deutsche Bank was not the only financial institution at which the Jewish directors and members of staff were forced to leave soon after the National Socialists had seized power – and none of them was given the sort of formal farewell party at the famous Hotel Krone in Assmannshausen that a non-Jewish director at the Frankfurt branch was given in 1934.



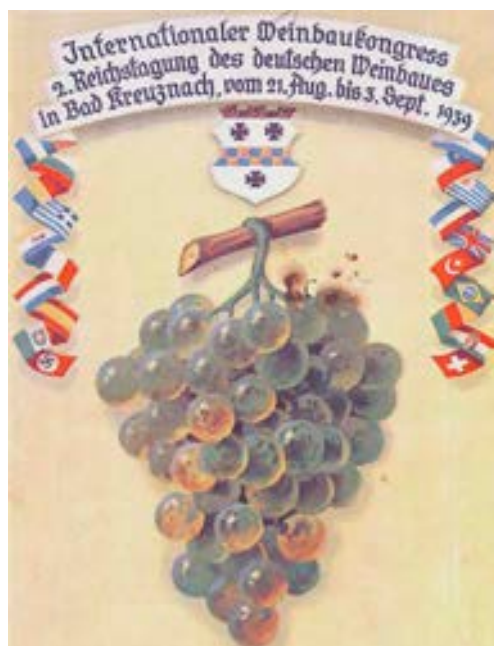
Farewell party of director Heinrich Mehl at the Hotel Krone in Assmannshausen in 1934

Albrecht Mendelssohn Bartholdy (1874-1936), a grandson of the composer and one of the foremost experts in international law of his time, was forced to retire from his post at the University of Hamburg and died in exile in the United Kingdom in 1936. He had owned a vineyard ever since he had worked as a university lecturer in Würzburg. A few years ago this vineyard came via a circuitous route into the possession of the highly renowned Schmitt's Kinder vineyard estate in Randersacker. A 'Mendelssohn wine' preserves a unique link between the eponymous family and German wine culture right up to the present day.

The 144-year history of the Mendelssohns' bank came to an end at the end of 1938. The bank's ongoing business and its non-Jewish employees were taken on by Deutsche Bank. Its Jewish partners emigrated. Robert von Mendelssohn (1902-1996), who was classified as one-quarter Jewish, survived the Third Reich in Germany. He decided not to reestablish the bank after the war.

Whatever had happened to their former business partners, friends and drinking companions with whom they had shared a harmonious and pleasant time

together did not appear, during those dark years, to unduly concern the remaining members of the Club of Berlin, where Berlin's businessmen, industrialists and bankers had been meeting for decades. It was now called the German Club of Berlin. As the wine list from 1939 shows, the members continued to enjoy the finest vintages – and not only at the Club but also, after having ordered them, at home as well.



Poster of the International Viti-culture Congress in Bad Kreuznach in 1939

National Socialist Germany remained highly regarded in the international wine community despite its policies of Aryanisation and expulsion of the Jews. In August 1939, just a few days before the Second World War began, the representatives of all of the world's wine-growing countries gathered in Bad Kreuznach to celebrate themselves and the Nazis at a major international viti-culture congress. The Frenchmen Léon Douarche (1883-1966), in his capacity as director of the Paris-based International Wine Office, and the socialist politician Édouard Barthe (1882-1949), as its president, were full of praise for the Germans' scientific contributions to the rebuilding of the European wine industry in the wake of the vine-pest crisis. The event was terminated prematurely owing to the threat of war. On 28 August everyone said goodbye to each other at Rheinfels Castle near St. Goar.

Supplies of wine for the German population gradually collapsed during the war. The years after 1938 witnessed one poor wine harvest after another, and a large proportion of whatever had nonetheless managed to grow was set aside as supplies for the army. But good connections still counted for something even in these circumstances. In May 1944 the manager of the Deutsche Bank branch in Neustadt wrote to Walter Tron (1899-1962), the director of an affiliated subsidiary in Vienna: "I was wondering why you hadn't ordered anything from me for some time. I can supply you with more wonderful Deidesheim wines." (9 May 1944, HADB, V2/60) This may appear totally absurd when viewed from a distance of 75 years and what happened just one year later in Germany. But who would presume to pass judgement on the survival strategies used amid the horrors of war?

When the war was over, the question facing the international wine community was similar to the one posed after 1918: who would still want to drink German wine after everything that had happened? The answer came not from the politicians but from the wine connoisseurs. André Simon (1877-1970), a Frenchman, a participant in the First World War and in London a wine expert who was regarded as an institution, soon published a short series on the wines of the world. 1953 saw the publication of a small volume on 'Hocks and Moselles', the name given to wines from the Rhine and Moselle regions. This contains the line: 'The finest Hocks, perchance the greatest still white wines in the world ...'

And as a wine list from the London luxury hotel The Dorchester from the same period reveals, Hocks such as Rauenthaler Steinmächer Auslese and Deidesheimer Herrgottsacker Auslese in the mid-1950s cost just as much as Margaux, Lafite, Haut-Brion, Latour and Mouton Rothschild. It is therefore not true that the last time the best German wines were equally as prestigious and equally as expensive as the best Bordeaux wines was at the turn of the 20th century: this happened barely half a century ago.

BORDEAUX

1920	1919	1918	1917	1916	1915	1914	1913	1912	1911	1910	1909	1908	1907	1906	1905	1904	1903	1902	1901	1900	1899	1898	1897	1896	1895	1894	1893	1892	1891	1890	1889	1888	1887	1886	1885	1884	1883	1882	1881	1880	1879	1878	1877	1876	1875	1874	1873	1872	1871	1870	1869	1868	1867	1866	1865	1864	1863	1862	1861	1860	1859	1858	1857	1856	1855	1854	1853	1852	1851	1850	1849	1848	1847	1846	1845	1844	1843	1842	1841	1840	1839	1838	1837	1836	1835	1834	1833	1832	1831	1830	1829	1828	1827	1826	1825	1824	1823	1822	1821	1820	1819	1818	1817	1816	1815	1814	1813	1812	1811	1810	1809	1808	1807	1806	1805	1804	1803	1802	1801	1800	1799	1798	1797	1796	1795	1794	1793	1792	1791	1790	1789	1788	1787	1786	1785	1784	1783	1782	1781	1780	1779	1778	1777	1776	1775	1774	1773	1772	1771	1770	1769	1768	1767	1766	1765	1764	1763	1762	1761	1760	1759	1758	1757	1756	1755	1754	1753	1752	1751	1750	1749	1748	1747	1746	1745	1744	1743	1742	1741	1740	1739	1738	1737	1736	1735	1734	1733	1732	1731	1730	1729	1728	1727	1726	1725	1724	1723	1722	1721	1720	1719	1718	1717	1716	1715	1714	1713	1712	1711	1710	1709	1708	1707	1706	1705	1704	1703	1702	1701	1700	1699	1698	1697	1696	1695	1694	1693	1692	1691	1690	1689	1688	1687	1686	1685	1684	1683	1682	1681	1680	1679	1678	1677	1676	1675	1674	1673	1672	1671	1670	1669	1668	1667	1666	1665	1664	1663	1662	1661	1660	1659	1658	1657	1656	1655	1654	1653	1652	1651	1650	1649	1648	1647	1646	1645	1644	1643	1642	1641	1640	1639	1638	1637	1636	1635	1634	1633	1632	1631	1630	1629	1628	1627	1626	1625	1624	1623	1622	1621	1620	1619	1618	1617	1616	1615	1614	1613	1612	1611	1610	1609	1608	1607	1606	1605	1604	1603	1602	1601	1600	1599	1598	1597	1596	1595	1594	1593	1592	1591	1590	1589	1588	1587	1586	1585	1584	1583	1582	1581	1580	1579	1578	1577	1576	1575	1574	1573	1572	1571	1570	1569	1568	1567	1566	1565	1564	1563	1562	1561	1560	1559	1558	1557	1556	1555	1554	1553	1552	1551	1550	1549	1548	1547	1546	1545	1544	1543	1542	1541	1540	1539	1538	1537	1536	1535	1534	1533	1532	1531	1530	1529	1528	1527	1526	1525	1524	1523	1522	1521	1520	1519	1518	1517	1516	1515	1514	1513	1512	1511	1510	1509	1508	1507	1506	1505	1504	1503	1502	1501	1500	1499	1498	1497	1496	1495	1494	1493	1492	1491	1490	1489	1488	1487	1486	1485	1484	1483	1482	1481	1480	1479	1478	1477	1476	1475	1474	1473	1472	1471	1470	1469	1468	1467	1466	1465	1464	1463	1462	1461	1460	1459	1458	1457	1456	1455	1454	1453	1452	1451	1450	1449	1448	1447	1446	1445	1444	1443	1442	1441	1440	1439	1438	1437	1436	1435	1434	1433	1432	1431	1430	1429	1428	1427	1426	1425	1424	1423	1422	1421	1420	1419	1418	1417	1416	1415	1414	1413	1412	1411	1410	1409	1408	1407	1406	1405	1404	1403	1402	1401	1400	1399	1398	1397	1396	1395	1394	1393	1392	1391	1390	1389	1388	1387	1386	1385	1384	1383	1382	1381	1380	1379	1378	1377	1376	1375	1374	1373	1372	1371	1370	1369	1368	1367	1366	1365	1364	1363	1362	1361	1360	1359	1358	1357	1356	1355	1354	1353	1352	1351	1350	1349	1348	1347	1346	1345	1344	1343	1342	1341	1340	1339	1338	1337	1336	1335	1334	1333	1332	1331	1330	1329	1328	1327	1326	1325	1324	1323	1322	1321	1320	1319	1318	1317	1316	1315	1314	1313	1312	1311	1310	1309	1308	1307	1306	1305	1304	1303	1302	1301	1300	1299	1298	1297	1296	1295	1294	1293	1292	1291	1290	1289	1288	1287	1286	1285	1284	1283	1282	1281	1280	1279	1278	1277	1276	1275	1274	1273	1272	1271	1270	1269	1268	1267	1266	1265	1264	1263	1262	1261	1260	1259	1258	1257	1256	1255	1254	1253	1252	1251	1250	1249	1248	1247	1246	1245	1244	1243	1242	1241	1240	1239	1238	1237	1236	1235	1234	1233	1232	1231	1230	1229	1228	1227	1226	1225	1224	1223	1222	1221	1220	1219	1218	1217	1216	1215	1214	1213	1212	1211	1210	1209	1208	1207	1206	1205	1204	1203	1202	1201	1200	1199	1198	1197	1196	1195	1194	1193	1192	1191	1190	1189	1188	1187	1186	1185	1184	1183	1182	1181	1180	1179	1178	1177	1176	1175	1174	1173	1172	1171	1170	1169	1168	1167	1166	1165	1164	1163	1162	1161	1160	1159	1158	1157	1156	1155	1154	1153	1152	1151	1150	1149	1148	1147	1146	1145	1144	1143	1142	1141	1140	1139	1138	1137	1136	1135	1134	1133	1132	1131	1130	1129	1128	1127	1126	1125	1124	1123	1122	1121	1120	1119	1118	1117	1116	1115	1114	1113	1112	1111	1110	1109	1108	1107	1106	1105	1104	1103	1102	1101	1100	1099	1098	1097	1096	1095	1094	1093	1092	1091	1090	1089	1088	1087	1086	1085	1084	1083	1082	1081	1080	1079	1078	1077	1076	1075	1074	1073	1072	1071	1070	1069	1068	1067	1066	1065	1064	1063	1062	1061	1060	1059	1058	1057	1056	1055	1054	1053	1052	1051	1050	1049	1048	1047	1046	1045	1044	1043	1042	1041	1040	1039	1038	1037	1036	1035	1034	1033	1032	1031	1030	1029	1028	1027	1026	1025	1024	1023	1022	1021	1020	1019	1018	1017	1016	1015	1014	1013	1012	1011	1010	1009	1008	1007	1006	1005	1004	1003	1002	1001	1000	999	998	997	996	995	994	993	992	991	990	989	988	987	986	985	984	983	982	981	980	979	978	977	976	975	974	973	972	971	970	969	968	967	966	965	964	963	962	961	960	959	958	957	956	955	954	953	952	951	950	949	948	947	946	945	944	943	942	941	940	939	938	937	936	935	934	933	932	931	930	929	928	927	926	925	924	923	922	921	920	919	918	917	916	915	914	913	912	911	910	909	908	907	906	905	904	903	902	901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