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A True Revolution? Quality Wines in the Languedoc on the Long Run (19th-21st Century)

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Abstract

For several years now, the specialized press as well as the general media have been discussing the renewal of the Languedoc vineyard in terms of the question of the qualitative revolution that would seem to be underway in one of the world's largest wine-producing areas. Indeed, since the 1850s, Languedoc viticulture has been associated with mass production of poor quality wines, destined to be drunk at best by the working or underprivileged classes. It was also used to enhance the wines produced throughout the country, which were very low in alcohol content and color. In other words, it was a wine without identity for the public in France. For nearly 150 years, Languedoc wines were thus equated with mediocre wines, with pejorative nicknames, at best "pinard", at worst "vinasse", and even "piquette". This reputation defined the Languedoc vineyards until the end of the 20th century, when a general movement pushed local producers to transform their practices and techniques. Thus, in this context, the new reputation of Languedoc wines can indeed appear as a real revolution. This paper aims to question this conception and to put into perspective both the reputation of Languedoc wines over time, and also the practices or discourses seeking to establish or promote quality viticulture in the Midi of France since the middle of the 19th century. We then realize that the reality is more complicated than the historical shortcuts suggest and that there was a real qualitative trend in Languedoc as soon as the end of the 19th century, unfortunately drowned under mass production, making its presence invisible.

Keywords: wine, Languedoc, reputation, quality, market

I. Introduction

In recent years, many articles have emphasized the mutations the Languedoc vineyards experienced over the last decades. For instance, *La Revue du vin de France*, one of the main online journals of the sector, pointed out in August 2019, the “metamorphosis” of the region thanks to “a revolution initiated thirty years ago”.¹ This paper was no exception, and similar articles were written in the 2010s, underlining the transformations that changed the face of a region once exclusively oriented towards the production and the sale of wine. Indeed, from the last quarter of the 19th century, the domination of wine in Languedoc was so overwhelming that many studies described the region as “the largest winegrowing area of the world”, depicting the vast plains of the Hérault, the Gard and the Aude as “a sea of vineyards” and discoursing on the “civilization of viticulture” in the Languedoc.²

As a matter of fact, in the three departments that are the geographical space of this study (doc. 1, “The Gard, Hérault, Aude in Languedoc”; source: the author), wine played a key role in the economy and in the social life from the 1850s. The Languedoc became then a wine-oriented region, with a wine-oriented economy and a wine-oriented society, supplying the rest of the country with its products, which represented in some years up to 50% of the national production, and during most of the period between 30 and 40 %. The Languedoc became the wine cellar of the country, providing wine for daily consumption (called “*vins ordinaires*” until the 1940s then “*vins de consommation courante*”) and “medicine wine”, used in blending to enhance wines from other regions, too poor in color or alcoholic content.³

As a result, the reputation of wines from the Languedoc was a petty one, with a diminished and tarnished identity (when it existed), blurred by the malpractices of merchants, retailers and even winegrowers themselves. Thus, until the 1970s, the Languedocian wines were assimilated to “*piquettes*”, plonk wines.⁴ It’s then no surprise to hear and read that the quality wines from the region praised nowadays appeared to be part of an economic and cultural revolution.

Yet, a viticulture of quality always existed in the Languedoc and an ideal of producing fine wine and vintage crus has always been promoted by operators from the sector.

In these circumstances, the aim of this paper is to give an overview of this ideal and of the efforts made by some to endorse and advocate the quality pattern and its standards from the 1860s up to the 2000s. It will not discuss the concept of quality itself, a concept shifting in time and from one person or region to another but it will aim to show how the revolution described in recent years,⁵ even by academics,⁶ is in reality a longer and deeper process, beginning as early as the 1860s. This paper therefore highlights the discourses, the involvement, the efforts of an active minority of persons in the region and the reasons why they stayed a minority for so many decades.

¹ “Tout savoir sur le vin du Languedoc,” accessed 2020/08/24.

² Geneviève Gavignaud-Fontaine, *Le Languedoc viticole, la Méditerranée et l'Europe au siècle dernier*, pp. 13-5. For further details on the topics, see Prof. Gavignaud-Fontaine bibliography.

³ Stéphane Le Bras, “No More Credits: Languedoc Wines Facing Their Reputation (1850-1970),” pp. 93-117.

⁴ Jean Matouk, “La Bibine ou le cercueil.”

⁵ Gilbert Garrier and Rémy Pech, *Genèses de la qualité des vins. L'évolution en France et en Italie depuis deux siècles*.

⁶ William Genieys, “Le retournement du Midi viticole,” pp. 7-25.

II. Quality Concerns and the Booming Wine Industry in the Languedoc (1860s-1910s)

Commissioned by Napoleon III to draw up the panorama of what was already one of the main agricultural sectors of the nation, French scientist Jules Guyot presented the vineyard of the Gard as follows:

The vine plays [...] a great role, if not the first, in the agriculture of the Gard. All the hilly côtes du Rhône and the vast plateaus that surround them offer very good vineyards [...]. Some, such as those of Chusclan, Tavel, Lirac, Saint-Geniez, Beaucaire, Cantepèrdrix, are, quite rightly, highly valued as ordinary wines and even as entremets wines.⁷

Here, Guyot only confirmed the study of winemaking pioneer André Jullien, who evoked the wines of the Languedoc in these terms:

The red wines of Languedoc generally have a lot of body and spirit; there are very fine ones and they could be included among the great wines, if they combined with these qualities the bouquet that characterizes those of Burgundy and Bordeaux. Liqueur wines, and especially muscat, occupy a distinguished rank [...], and even support the comparison with most of those which are bought at great expense from foreign countries.⁸

Like Guyot, Jullien also noted that wines from the Gard were renowned “for their quality”. For Jullien, several vineyards of the department (Chusclan, Tavel, Lirac, Saint-Geniez) stood out in the quality of their production, although below that of Burgundy, as he noted.⁹ Jullien and Guyot therefore both underlined the tradition of quality that existed in the region, with nuances and disparities of course, but which was genuine.

This strong concern for quality was also clear in commercial correspondence and advertising materials. For example, in October 1884, Alcide Cardaire, owner and merchant in the region of Montpellier, specifies in his brochure:

I have the honor to renew my offers of services to you [...]. Since the harvest was carried out this year under exceptional conditions, the new wines are very good and much superior to those of last year. I guarantee good quality wines and you can refuse them at the station if this quality should not meet what you are entitled to expect.¹⁰

The text continues, insisting on the “irreproachable” quality of his products, of which it was impossible to find “better” ones.

⁷ Jules Guyot, *Étude des vignobles de France: pour servir à l'enseignement mutuel de la viticulture et de la vinification françaises*, Tome I, *Régions du Sud-Est et du Sud-Ouest*, pp. 215-6.

⁸ André Jullien, *Topographie de tous les vignobles connus: suivie d'une classification générale des vins*, p. 238.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 242-4.

¹⁰ Letter from Alcide Cardaire, October 1884, Personal archives.

Even more revealing of the importance given to quality concerns, Cardaire's wines are ordered by type ("*table*", "very beautiful", "Fitou", "old Saint-Georges", "*gourmets*") and by quality ("*Ordinaire*", "*1^{er} choix de côtes*", "*Supérieur de côtes*", "Saint-Georges vrai" for the red wines) or, a very rare notion in the Languedoc at that time, by years of aging ("2 to 5 years" or "6 to 8 years" for the wines of Saint-Georges).

Ten years later, Etienne Courty, owner in Saint-Georges-d'Orques (doc. 2, "An Advertising for E. Courty, Saint-Georges-d'Orques, late 19th century"; source: *RDV*, 1894), does the same by highlighting the quality of his wines in a national magazine, *La Revue de viticulture* (hereinafter referred to as *RDV*). Cardaire, like Courty, was not an isolated case, and the performative value of this commercial discourse must not be overestimated.¹¹ It is undeniable that the credit assigned to quality was an essential key for some actors of the wine sector in the Languedoc.

Indeed, at the same time, Paul Coste-Floret, engineer at the School of Arts and Manufactures, winemaker in Servian, near Béziers, and member of the Société centrale d'agriculture de l'Hérault (SCAH), considered as a "theoretician and practitioner of daily wine production",¹² also pointed out the importance of the search for quality, both for wines from the hills (designed for the middle-class clientele) and wines from the plain (for the popular classes). In 1894, he specified what the conditions to exist on a competitive market were, and in particular the value of the choice of grape varieties and of a modern and adapted vinification, allowing a better conservation.¹³ Coste-Floret, in his writings as well as his interventions at the SCAH, was the popularizer of a simple idea: to thrive, winegrowers had to adapt to the market and its conditions, especially through focusing on the quality of the wines.¹⁴ His arguments were all the more relevant since winegrowing incomes became highly unstable after 1893, in a market overwhelmed by fraud and overproduction (whose causes were excessive local yields and the emergence of Algerian production): short periods of strong prosperity followed intense sales crises ("*mévente*") that depressed prices and undermined the ecosystem that had developed in the region, now exclusively based on the wine industry.¹⁵

The combination of this hazardous context and the quality ideal led to the collective projects in the 1900s. Indeed, in order to cope with the recurring risks that weakened the Languedoc wine sector, several projects of collective groupings appeared. In 1901, the "Augé project", named after Jules Augé, an MP from the Hérault, sprung out in the midst of a terrible wine crisis. Its project was simple: to relieve congestion on the market, the market needed to be cleaned up and thus rid of the "small wines", those poor quality wines that draw prices down and damage the reputation of Languedoc wines.¹⁶ If the "Augé project" was never enacted, it influenced the following plans, especially those in the world of cooperation. Indeed, it was now

¹¹ On the notion of quality and the discourses that support it, see Stéphane Le Bras, *Négoce et négociants en vins en Languedoc*.

¹² Jean Clavel and Robert Baillaud, *Des vins en Languedoc*, p. 79.

¹³ Paul Coste-Floret, *Procédés modernes de vinification*.

¹⁴ Paul Coste-Floret, *La Production et le marché des vins*.

¹⁵ On this topic, see Rémy Pech, *Entreprise viticole et capitalisme en Languedoc Roussillon du phylloxéra aux crises de mévente*.

¹⁶ Jules Augé, "Augé Project," pp. 691-2.

a shared opinion that collective efforts and pooling tools would improve the quality of the wines, as Degrully points out in his study of the wine market:

Not only does the collective vinification of small productions make it possible to achieve a considerable saving [...], but still it provides wines of better quality and more assured conservation.¹⁷

Thus, this concern was the base of the statutes of the first Languedoc winegrowers' cooperative in Maraussan. Indeed, in an unstable economic climate, bringing the winegrowers together was vital for small and medium-sized ones, in order to better resist the vicissitudes of the market. Logically, when it was founded in 1901, the purpose of the Maraussan *coopérative* was:

Art 1: to group the winegrowers of Maraussan and its region to directly supply the consumers, by the removal of all useless intermediaries, with the products of their soil, exclusively harvested by them;

Art 2: to distribute at the lowest prices wines guaranteed of natural origin;

Art 3: to seek the quality and unity of vinification by the constitution of a large common cellar with necessary tools.

The milestones of a collective movement, based on direct sale (Art. 1), fairness, honesty and loyalty (Art. 2), solidarity and quality (Art. 3), were then laid. The *coopérateurs* were now able “to deliver [...] directly to consumers [...] excellent wines [and] well-rated.”¹⁸

In addition to this general movement,¹⁹ the recently created *Confédération générale des vignerons* (CGV) introduced a quality label in 1908. It was then, in a context of fraud and commercial denaturing of the wines (which meant mainly wines sold under other names than their origin), a strong measure to ensure that the wines of the Midi, guaranteed by the CGV label, were of quality and “natural” (which meant then not fraudulent). Clearly, the objective was here “to give to the Southern wines their true statute, from which they are often dispossessed”.²⁰

However, overall, the reputation of Languedoc wines deteriorated during this period, despite the efforts of theoreticians like Coste-Floret or the instigators of the statutes of the Maraussan *coopérative*. In 1894 for example, *RDV*, in a broad overview of the wines produced during the 1893-1894 campaign, pointed out about the wines produced in the Yonne, Indre-et-Loire, Rhône or Loire-Inférieure that “these wines are far superior in quality to most of those harvested in the Southern departments.”²¹ Indeed, in a campaign placed under the sign of abundant yields, the mediocrity of Languedocian wines were indisputable. The reason was simple: in the region, the primacy is the one of abundance, an “ideal of quantity”, well described by Charles Albert d'Arnoux dit Bertall in his studies on French vineyards:

¹⁷ Paul Degrully, *Essai historique sur la production et le marché des vins en France*.

¹⁸ Louis Tarbouriech ed., *Les Vignerons libres de Maraussan. Naissance de la coopérative vinicole (1901-1918)*.

¹⁹ Before 1914, 73 wine *coopératives* were created in France.

²⁰ Jacques Lauze, *La Confédération Générale des Vignerons (du Midi) de sa création à sa fin*, p. 132.

²¹ C. Michaut, “La mévente des vins et la viticulture du Centre,” p. 119.

As one moves towards the South-East, the quality decreases at the same time as the production increases, which becomes prodigious. In Carcassonne and in the Aude begins the country of the “blue”. Here no famous or elaborated wines, but streams, torrents of wine. The climate and the particular conditions of the soil may give hope for something better from a quality point of view, but that is the quantity that is being pursued. Because quantity is wealth.²²

Bertall wrote this in 1878, while post-phyloxeric reconstitution had not yet imposed the hybrid or high-yielding varieties everywhere in the region. Fraud was still very limited, without any comparison with that which emerged in the 1890s and destabilized the market in the following decade.²³ The problem was that these fraudulent practices were by then assimilated to Languedoc wines, blurring a reputation already tarnished by the post-phyloxeric reconstitution with large hybrid grape varieties, with high-productivity but low quality features.²⁴ Besides, the Languedocian people lacked tools for vinification and conservation. Also lacking capital, they were pressed by their obsession to deliver quickly and in large quantities wines of poor quality, in order to be compensated as quickly as possible.²⁵ As a matter of fact, the Languedocians have a large share of responsibility for the degradation of their wines’ reputation. As Bertall pointed out in 1878, they responded to a market demand, that of the “*gosiers populaires*”,²⁶ by producing a wine of poor quality, but adapted to the budgets of the less well-off classes.²⁷

Furthermore, what undermined Languedocian wines was that in large part wine merchants bought the Midi wines to be used as blends, to bring up the wines of other regions of France that were too clear, too low in alcoholic content, especially during the years of bad harvests outside Midi.²⁸ In addition to this, other merchants or retailers of places of consumption sold so-called “Midi” wines which were largely trafficked and did not reflect the real quality of Southern wines.²⁹ Conversely, good Southern wines were sold under the name “Petit Bordeaux” or “Petit Beaujolais”,³⁰ denying and making invisible the real identity of wines from the Languedoc. Thirty years after Bertall, the observation by *RDV* is incontrovertible: Languedocian viticulture does not know in which direction to go,³¹ lost between the imperatives of quantity and quality, one ultimately crushing the other, making its image more opaque and blurred, lost between quality ideals supported by a few and massively contrary practices.

III. The Uncertain Pursuit of the Quality Effort (1920s-1930s)

On May 6, 1919, a law instituted the process of labeling wines in France, aiming to protect their origins of production (*Appellations d’origine*). This law was a further step in the involvement of the State in the wine market since the end of the 1880’s (Griffe law, laws of 1905 and 1907).

²² Charles-Albert Bertall, *La Vigne, voyage autour des vins de France*, p. 472.

²³ Alessandro Stanziani, *Histoire de la qualité alimentaire (XIX^e-XX^e siècle)*.

²⁴ Lucien Daniel, *Épilogue de l’Affaire du Times*.

²⁵ Michel Augé-Laribé, *La viticulture industrielle du Midi de la France*, pp. 138 et sq.

²⁶ Charles-Albert Bertall, “Lower classes’ throats.”(See *La Vigne, voyage autour des vins de France*)

²⁷ Paul Degrully, *Essai historique sur la production et le marché des vins en France*.

²⁸ “La situation viticole du Midi,” p. 533.

²⁹ J. Jallabert, “Porte-greffes et producteurs directs,” p. 221.

³⁰ Jacques Lauze, “La Confédération Générale des Vignerons (du Midi) de sa création à sa fin,” p. 132.

³¹ *Ibid.*

It was a way, through State control, to ensure good behavior, to fight against fraudulent practices, and to define and guarantee the quality of the products. This was what Olivier Jacquet and Gilles Laferté called this “the progressive republican control of the market”, allowing its “legislative regulation” and making the origin of the production a guarantee of quality,³² certified by law and justice. Very clearly, for the legislator, it was a question of protecting the reputation of wines by avoiding then current fraudulent abuses.³³ The parliamentary debates indicate noticeably that the law was conceived for the extra-southern regions with a solid reputation for several decades or centuries now (mainly Champagne, Bordeaux and Burgundy – although Languedocian wines were massively imported to Bordelais and Bourgogne when their production was insufficient or to upgrade their color and alcohol content). On the contrary, the Languedoc appeared as a counter-example, that of a “country of ordinary wines which possesses high-yielding vines”, a model opposed to regions producing vintage wines.³⁴

However, some vineyards and certain operators tried to stand out or even get out of this depreciative determinism at these times. Right after the war, the Béziers Chamber of Commerce, for example, examined the “solutions to improve wine prices”. One of its members, Paul Araou, during a debate on the congestion of the market, stigmatized the small wines. He urged local merchants not to sell or buy them any more: although these mediocre wines were sold easily because of their low cost, they dragged prices down, giving a negative image of the biterrois market.³⁵ This idea of clearing the market by controlling the quality of wines became one of the main concerns of the Chamber of Commerce throughout the interwar period, especially under the leadership of its president Félix Gaillard.³⁶

At the same time, *L'Action Méridionale* (the journal of the regional trade union for the Southern merchants) published an article by André Granaud, entitled “How to get our wines a reputation.”³⁷ Granaud’s statement was harsh but lucid: the wines of the Midi “have, both in major consumer centers and abroad, the reputation of being of very mediocre quality, and thus very unworthy of appearing on the tables of upper-class or even on simple bourgeois tables.” Like Araou (and Jules Augé before them), he recognized the need to take the mediocre wines that alter the reputation of the Languedoc wines out of circulation. Granaud, while acknowledging that “in the end, the good ones pay for the bad ones”, acknowledged that the quality wines were made invisible by those of poor quality, produced in much greater quantity. This, despite the existence of quality wines in the Languedoc which “carefully selected, are likely to make a very honorable competition with the good wines,” citing the wines made on the hills of the Minervois and the Corbières.

These two wine-growing territories were not mentioned by chance: they were the first two – and the only ones then – vineyards to have seized the opportunity of the 1919 law (doc. 3, “The Minervois and Corbières *Appellations d’Origine* in 1923”; source: the author). For both

³² Olivier Jacquet and Gilles Laferté, “Le contrôle républicain du marché. Vignerons et négociants sous la Troisième République.”

³³ Chambre des députés, “Projet de loi ayant pour objet la protection des appellations d’origine.”

³⁴ Chambre des députés, *Débats parlementaires*, p. 2147.

³⁵ Archives départementales de l’Hérault (ADH from now on) 8 M 230, Fonds de la CCB, PV de séance, CCB, Rapport Araou, 3 February 1921.

³⁶ ADH 8 M 230, Fonds de la CCB, Commission des vins, Rapport Gaillard, September 1925.

³⁷ André Granaud, “Comment faire connaître nos vins.”

of them, it was obtained in 1923 as a result of the action of the local winegrowers unions.³⁸ Henceforth, any winegrower harvesting in the area defined by the courts and recognized by the law could ask for all or part of his production to be labelled and sold in this way. To obtain the approval of the local winegrowers unions, the wines had to fulfill certain obligations: frank color, well constituted, chosen type of vines, minimum alcoholic titration. The first stages of a quality viticulture in Languedoc were now established and guaranteed by the combined action of the legislators, the administrative services (in particular the Service of the Frauds) and professional organizations. *Le Petit Méridional*, in the summer of 1923, celebrated this certification by honoring the wines of the denomination Corbières:

Around each locality, on a slim strip of land, some root-stocks line up, all of which together give in early autumn this wine so much prized by gourmets, highly-alcoholized and universally renowned. These few scattered vineyards give the wine of the Corbières which can compete in all points of view, except perhaps the fancy ones, with the best *crus* of France.³⁹

In the Minervois, the labelling process was accompanied by the establishment of a pricing commission in Olonzac in 1921, under the leadership of the city's mayor, former deputy, Charles Caffort.⁴⁰ In a restructuring market after the war, this is an important sign of differentiation. By being priced on the spot and no longer in Béziers, the wines of the Minervois appellation now had their own identity, with better prices and thus more profits. Thus, the pricing commission as well as the label valued the identity of the wines of the Minervois, whose prices were now higher than those of the ordinary red wines of the region: in December 1924, for example, a hectoliter of 10° red wine was rated 6 F at Béziers versus 6F75 at Olonzac. In this regard, the action of Caffort, who chaired the *Syndicat professionnel pour la délimitation et la défense du cru du Minervois* from 1922 onwards, was fundamental. Through its legitimacy, its activism and its networks, he gave to the wines of the Minervois a singular status in Languedoc. This situation was welcomed by *RDV* in 1923. Mentioning the labeling process, it indicated that this new step was the “safeguarding of the winegrowers”.⁴¹

However, the global situation had not really improved regarding the overall reputation of the Languedoc wines. This was highlighted by *RDV*, reporting the 1930 campaign and stating: “With the sun, which the other regions do not have, we must have superior wines and rebuild the reputation of the wines of the Midi”,⁴² meaning that this reputation and quality were not that good. A few years later, oenologist Michel Flanzy commented on this bad reputation:

There are unfortunate prejudices [...]. When we talk about Midi wines, too many people cry out “Ho... the poor wine of the Midi!”[...] Such prejudices contribute to a very bad dynamics [and are based on] legends.⁴³

³⁸, *Vignobles et vins du Midi, Grands crus et vins de France*, pp. 51-3.

³⁹ “Autour des Corbières.”

⁴⁰ Stéphane Le Bras, “Les négociants et les commissions de cotation de l’Hérault dans les années 1920-1930.”

⁴¹ O. Sarcos, “La délimitation des Corbières,” p. 378.

⁴² E. E. , “Situation viticole et vinicole du Languedoc,” p. 236.

⁴³. Michel Flanzy, “Sur la qualité des vins du Midi,” pp. 477-8.

The problem was that quality vineyards in Languedoc were ignored or disregarded: they were not sufficiently known and recognized. This problem was already pointed out by Granaud in 1925. He explained that in order to get a better position on the market, it was necessary that “[the Languedocian] products go to battle with a label that inspires confidence”. He then proposed that all Languedocian wines be marketed under the same name, that of “Languedoc”, as was done in Bordeaux or in Burgundy. According to him, it was this prerequisite that would obliterate the depreciated image of the wines of the Midi. But he added that it was mandatory also to abandon certain practices, especially those of “winegrowers who are too inclined to seek only very large production by all means and at the expense of quality.”⁴⁴

Here André Granaud raised a problem that was never solved during this period. Indeed, ten years later, in the special issue of the *Grands crus et vins de France* dedicated to the Languedocian wines in 1934, Maurice Sarraut, senator of the Aude from 1919 to 1932, recalled that “there are exquisite wines produced by the plains and *garrigues* of the beautiful province of the Languedoc.”⁴⁵ And to list the crus which, in his opinion, made the reputation of the region and which, he regretted, are too little known. In the same publication, François Pétrier, then president of the *Syndicat régional des vins en gros du Midi*, agreed with him, believing that Languedoc had become the champion of popular wines, a daily drink “that comforts and rejoices and that has its place every day on the most modest tables.”⁴⁶ That discourse was not new. Ten years earlier, *Le Petit Méridional*, welcoming the arrival of a mission of Belgian merchants, advocated the diversity and quality of the Languedoc wines, before concluding with what was then a reductive slogan: “Daily wine has only one country: the Mediterranean Languedoc.”⁴⁷

Thus, whether in the 1920s or the 1930s, while the labelled wines enjoyed a certain recognition on the international market,⁴⁸ the identity of the Languedoc sector remained attached to the production of wines for daily consumption and of wines for blending. And when a superior new label was created in 1935, the *Appellations d’origine contrôlée* (AOC),⁴⁹ the Languedocian wines, except for some white wines (muscat of Frontignan since 1935; Limoux from 1938), were left aside.

As an indication, the publications aimed at bourgeois and middle-class customers that appeared during the interwar period confirmed this situation: in *Monseigneur le Vin*, published by the “Nicolas” wine-stores in 1927, in *Comment boire nos bons vins de France*, published by the “Caves Félix Potin” in 1934, or in Pierre Andrieu’s guide *Les vins de France et d’ailleurs* (1939), the Languedocian wines occupied a reduced part, when they were present at all. In Andrieu’s book, only three pages were allocated to the Languedoc, in a reductive development

⁴⁴ André Granaud, “Comment faire connaître nos vins.”

⁴⁵ *Vignobles et vins du Midi, Grands crus et vins de France*, p. 15.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 7-9.

⁴⁷ “La Mission belge dans le Languedoc.”

⁴⁸ In 1938, during the Köln Wine Fair in Germany, wines from the Corbières and Minervois were much appreciated, especially compared to the Italian and Chilean concurrence (Michel Flanzky, “Contribution à l’étude du programme viticole de la France,” p. 338).

⁴⁹ See Florian Humbert and Serge Wolikow, *Une histoire des vins et des produits d’AOC. L’INAO de 1935 à nos jours*.

where the only productions presented with rewarding terms are the blanquette of Limoux and the muscat of Frontignan, the two AOC.

But it must be said that in the Languedoc, despite the involvement of some, practices were still very far from the qualitative discourse. Here is a good example: when the prices of the appellation wines in the Corbières or Minervois decreased in the 1930s, the Languedoc *vignerons* who produced them began to re-sell non-labelled wines, less demanding and less expensive to produce, and which were just as profitable.⁵⁰ This situation, already denounced by Granaud in 1925, or even Coste-Floret in the previous century, continued despite the efforts of some to orient the sector towards quality. But the market's fluctuations, as well as the demanding and challenging long-term efforts required, nullified (or almost) these attempts. They were too scattered in a Languedoc winegrowing industry still severely handicapped by the lack of modern tools and facilities to age the wines, by drained finances in uncertain periods of *mévente*. Moreover, the "culture of quantity" was still, in the region, shared by a vast majority of operators.

IV. The First Tangible Steps towards a Quality Winegrowing (1940s-1970s)

During World War II, in 1943, several decrees introduced an exception in the regime of rationing and regulating the daily sale of wines in France; they concerned "quality wines not benefiting from the *appellation contrôlée*."⁵¹ Thus, from that date, like the AOC, certain wines would no longer be included in the system of taxation regulating the disposal and the tariffs of ordinary wines ("vins de consommation courante" or VCC), a system set up by the Vichy regime to deal with the conditions of a market disturbed by the war and its shortages. In the Languedoc, these wines were those whose "reputation greatly exceeds the region of production", namely the Corbières, Minervois, Clairettes, Saint-Georges-d'Orques or Costières du Gard (near Nîmes).⁵²

After the war, on the basis of this status obtained during the conflict, winegrowers unions from these territories joined together in December 1944 in the *Fédération des syndicats de vins de crus du Languedoc-Roussillon*, established at the initiative of Philippe Lamour, a French lawyer, senior civil servant and deputy of Jacques Bounin, Commissioner of the Republic in Montpellier. And a significant detail: Lamour was also a winemaker in Bellegarde, near Nîmes.⁵³ A rather drastic regulation was then enacted, setting out all the conditions to integrate the *Fédération* and benefit from its new label, the *Vins délimités de qualité supérieure* (abbreviated as VDQS): geographical delimitation, ancient reputation, choice of grape varieties, limitation of yields, minimum alcoholic titration, tasting; all of this being supervised by a control commission.⁵⁴

The objective, echoing the arguments already advanced in the 1940s, was clear and presented in an article of *La Voix de la Patrie* in 1944: fight against the bad reputation of

⁵⁰ Jean Branas, "Éléments pour servir à l'orientation de la production viticole française," p. 12.

⁵¹ ADH 92 J 88, compte-rendu de l'intervention de Ph. Lamour devant la session inaugurale de la FNVDQS.

⁵² Roger Chaminade, "Les vins de qualité," p. 345.

⁵³ ADH 92 J 88, PV de séance de la Fédération du LR, 22 December 1945.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, Règlement de la Fédération du LR.

Southern wines, promote regional quality wines, reach profitable prices for properties with low yields, allow the lower-class citizens to “have on their table inexpensive but quality wines”.⁵⁵ In March 1945, as a result of Lamour’s efforts, the *Fédération nationale des vins délimités de qualité supérieure* was born, bringing together the Languedoc wines and other local unions (coteaux du Loir, Lot, Vienne, Auvergne, Madiran, Cahors, etc.).⁵⁶ This was an important first step which, thanks to the unifying action of one man, Lamour, and his powerful networks within the French administration and political world. Eventually, it made it possible to achieve the ideal promoted by the supporters of quality viticulture in the Languedoc for several decades now, thanks to the new label.

Complementary to to this effort, the publications of those years emphasized the quality of Languedoc wines as well as the need to change practices. In December 1945, *RDV* described the harvest of the year in the Midi as “of excellent quality”, stating that the degree, fixed and volatile acidities, color, body, and bouquet met the standards of a wine of high quality, while indicating, an innovation in the region, that the wines harvested “deserve the honor of aging”. It continued:

The winemakers of the Corbières, of the Minervois and the other quality regions have asked that part of their harvest be left to them to make it age and to make it acquire the special qualities that characterize these crus [...]. It is to be hoped, despite the production deficit, that they will be satisfied in the interest of the reputation of these wines.⁵⁷

Articles supporting this idea followed in 1946. In August, *RDV* reviewed the Corbières and Minervois Wine Exhibition held in Lézignan on June 29. It recounted the words of Pierre Benet, President of the Southern CGV, which ostensibly associated the quality policy and the price revaluation that winegrowers, after five years of conflict, advocated.⁵⁸ The following month, it was Michel Flanzzy, then director of the oenological station of Narbonne, who, for his part, considered it necessary to generalize the model of the Corbières and Minervois wines, namely the development of a production of quality wines of daily consumption, which he symbolically called the “ordinary crus”.⁵⁹ Opportunities offered by the exports of these wines (both of quality and cheap) were even discussed, especially in order to regain historical markets which have been abandoned in recent decades, Switzerland and Belgium for example.⁶⁰ The prices of the year 1946 confirmed the potentialities of this new qualitative orientation: if the VCC were sold on average 1400 F/hl, the VDQS oscillate between 2000 and 3100 F/hl according to their quality and their name.⁶¹

The possibilities, after the difficulties and restrictions associated with the war, were now broadened. Unlike 1919, it could rely on men who were committed and united for a common

⁵⁵Pierre d’Oc, “Viticulture de qualité.”

⁵⁶ ADH 92 J 88, CR de réunion, 15 March 1945.

⁵⁷“Échos du Midi,” p. 43.

⁵⁸“Exposition des vins des Corbières et Minervois,” p. 318.

⁵⁹ Michel Flanzzy, “Contribution à l’étude du programme viticole de la France,” pp. 336-9.

⁶⁰“Échos du Midi,” p. 222

⁶¹ Conseil supérieur de l’Agriculture, *La production viticole française en 1954*, p. 214

purpose, supported by a collective structure recognized by the State, and innovative precepts (such as aging) to conquer new markets, both national and international.

Yet the movement struggled to succeed. In two articles in *RDV*, agricultural engineer Roger Chaminade, editorial secretary of the *Moniteur vinicole*, explained the reasons why. The first one concerned the difficulties of ageing in Languedoc. If Chaminade started by being enthusiastic and explaining the importance of this concept, in particular its psychological dimension, which associates it with the quality in the general public, he demonstrated that its implementation in the region was difficult because of the lack of well protected and well isolated cellars, making aging difficult under good conditions.⁶² The second article pointed out the responsibility of winegrowers for the temporary failure of this qualitative enterprise. Indeed, in 1947, the market became free again, without any regulation by the State. This deregulation favoured low-level wines intended for blending with Algerian wines, whose importation was massively increasing. The VDQS were then no longer valued by merchants and for winegrowers, once again as in the 1930s, it was more profitable to sell small wines than quality ones. Above all, Chaminade incriminated the winegrowers unions: these had granted the label too easily and therefore many wines earned it without having the qualities required, degrading both the reputation and the prices.⁶³ In the Aude, for example, out of a total production of 2.6 million hl, more than one million was labelled in 1946, which was way too much. With the end of the taxation that artificially protected the prices of these wines, the immediate consequence was the collapse of prices in 1947, resulting in the loss of the financial privilege that VDQS could grant to their producers.⁶⁴ The situation was dramatic for those who invested in these practices. They were experiencing “an unfavorable and even miserable situation”,⁶⁵ mainly because of a poor market valuation.

If the statute of the VDQS, thanks to the efforts of Lamour, was saved by the law of December 1949 that recognized them officially, affixing them to the National Institute of the Labels of Origin (INAO),⁶⁶ and thus confirming the existence of this intermediate label between VCC and AOC, the situation remained moribund for several years. In 1954, a report to the Higher Council of Agriculture was not very optimistic. Like Chaminade, it denounced the attitude of the unions who granted the label too easily, blinded by the immediate search for profit.⁶⁷ It stated that “VDQS [were] in a difficult situation, both economically and psychologically”. On the one hand, it recognized that VDQS could “be, as suggested, popular quality wines, inexpensive, suitable for family celebrations”, but on the other hand that “there are already popular AOC.” In other words, the VDQS must face fierce competition, in the Languedoc region itself where the AOC label was awarded to several vineyards (Fitou in red wines in the Aude in 1948; Bellegarde in white wines in the Gard in 1949).

Nonetheless, in a delicate situation for Languedocian quality wines, but also for the national wine sector which was experiencing a new period of major market crisis in the early 1950s, the action of quality players was decisive. In fact, they continued to profess and spread

⁶² Roger Chaminade, “Le vieillissement des vins dans le Midi,” p. 263.

⁶³ Roger Chaminade, “Les vins de qualité,” p. 345.

⁶⁴ Conseil supérieur de l’Agriculture, *La production viticole française en 1954*, p. 214.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 215.

⁶⁶ Loi n°49-1603, p. 12198.

⁶⁷ Conseil supérieur de l’Agriculture, *La production viticole française en 1954*, p. 215.

their faith in a positive future provided the qualitative orientation was really set in motion (doc. 4, “‘Quality will Save the Viticulture!’ *Le Moniteur vinicole* headline, 1952”; source: *Le Moniteur vinicole*, 1952). Thus, in 1951, Jean Branas, professor at the *École d'agriculture de Montpellier*, explained that the only solution to get out of the slump in which the region was plunged (because of the strong competition that was made by Algerian wines and small wines produced in other regions) was the production of quality wines. Branas believed that in this context, VDQS appeared as “a beneficial action”, supporting a quality viticulture.⁶⁸ Roger Chaminade advocated on his side a greater emphasis on tasting.⁶⁹ Chaminade believed that taste was now a fundamental element of appreciation because “a wine may [...] comply with the usual conditions [to be sold] and reveal, at tasting, only a secondary quality, or even one very different from the usual and notorious characteristics of the appellation.” In the Languedoc, the question of quality was now grasped from a new angle, which was not solely the technical aspects anymore but the taste dimension as well. The challenge was tremendous, though: quality wines had to get out of the mass production of common and VCC without identity and try to stick as much as possible to the inclinations of consumers whose conquest “can only be done by flattering their current tastes”.⁷⁰ With this in mind, in 1956 the *Conseil interprofessionnel des vins of Fitou, Corbières, Minervois, Clape and Quatourze* in the Aude was founded.⁷¹ One of its objectives was to “carry out studies concerning the production and marketing of wines [...] and to play a consultative role with the public authorities on all issues relating to wine policy”. In 1966, Jacques Montlaur, president of the *Syndicat du cru Corbières*, published an article in *La Journée viticole* where he explained that since 1962, his union has decided to suspend labelling for any producer still cultivating hybrids,⁷² an essential step towards a better controlled and legitimized labelling.

Thereby, the VDQS statute created by the Languedocians and dominated by them,⁷³ ended up paying off in the medium and long terms as several elements indicated. First of all, a better choice in grape variety, encouraged by Lamour or his close collaborators,⁷⁴ allowed producers to reconfigure the vineyard: the aramon, a high productivity variety that enabled large but mediocre productions, which represented more than 60% of the Languedoc vineyard around 1950, was now surpassed in 1968 by the carignan, a more qualitative vine than the aramon, recommended by the law of 1953 that reformed and supervised the market.⁷⁵ For its part, the retailing sector was beginning to integrate the Languedoc products into its high-quality wine offerings. At the end of the 1950s, the wine catalogue of the mass-market retailing group “Casino” included Languedocian VDQS: Château de Paraza (Minervois), which was also listed in the end of the 1960s as a “fine wine”. In a memorandum the group addressed to its managers in December 1973 and concerning the strategies to enhance the sales of wine products, the Corbières wines, along with the ones from Bordeaux or Burgundy, were presented. They were described as “the best red wine in the Languedoc; it is rich, colorful and makes well as it ages;

⁶⁸ Jean Branas, “Éléments pour servir à l’orientation de la production viticole française,” pp. 10-27.

⁶⁹ Roger Chaminade, “Les vins de qualité,” p. 345.

⁷⁰ Ministère de l’Agriculture, “La production viticole et son évolution,” p. 6.

⁷¹ Loi n°56510 du 27 février 1956, pp. 2075-7.

⁷² E. J. Dauphin, “Lettre de M. Jacques Montlaur.” *La Journée Viticole*, 17 October 1966.

⁷³ In 1952, out of 1.5 Millions of hectoliters of VDQS in France, 1,1 Millions were from the Languedoc (and 50 % of those from the Corbières).

⁷⁴ E. Nègre for example, professor at the *École d’agriculture de Montpellier*.

⁷⁵ Robert Badouin, *L’économie des marchés vinicoles*, p. 209.

it is particularly suitable for meat.”⁷⁶ Here, one of the gambles of the promoters of quality viticulture in the Languedoc paid off: to allow a modest clientele (the bottles are the cheapest of this range in the Casino catalogue) to have occasional access to quality wines. The other goal was also reached: VDQS prices remained relatively stable between the 1960s and 1970s, but they increased their gap with the VCC. In 1963, the difference was 1F per degree-hectoliter; in 1973, it was 1F80. Henceforth, as Henri Pestel, director of the INAO, hoped,⁷⁷ for part of the Languedoc winemakers, quality paid off. It was still only for a minority, but it was a strong base and could serve as an example for a paradigm shift.

V. The Necessary Change (1970s-2000s)

In many respects, the 1970s marked a major break in the history of Languedoc wine. As *Le Monde* points out in an issue of its *Dossiers et documents* dedicated to “Le Vin en France”, “since 1970, there has been no campaigns which have not been followed by demonstrations”. Those were motivated by one main worry, showing a sign of persistent discomfort in the industry: “how to ensure the income of winegrowers when the harvest exceeds consumption needs?”⁷⁸ This economic malaise, coupled with social ill-being, reached its climax in Montredon, in the Corbières, in March 1976: during a demonstration, a winemaker and a CRS were shot to death.⁷⁹ This drama, in the very heart of one of the vineyards supposed to be the symbol of the qualitative renovation in Languedoc, was emblematic of the limits of the quality measures taken so far. The cause was quite simple: in the continuity of previous periods, highlighted by an article of the *Revue vinicole internationale* in 1977, the Languedoc VDQS, especially in the Corbières and Minervois, were “prisoners” of the first region of mass production of VCC. The result was, overall, a general policy of wine-making and marketing that was neither bold nor original on the markets, and quality wines still way too invisible on them. To be sure, producing VCC was safe and certainly regular, but not really lucrative or profitable.⁸⁰ The economist Robert Badouin, a great specialist in wine markets and more particularly in the Languedoc, agrees in this sense: “For decades, the attitude of the winemakers was one of renunciation. The idea was to get rid of a strenuous and tedious operation, vinification”. The *coopératives*, which then concentrated the overwhelming majority of the production, took care of this vinification, but they offered a standard product, without identity, often intended for blending with other metropolitan or European products (Spanish or Italian wines having replaced Algerian ones, blurring and invisibilizing even more the Languedoc identity). Winegrowers, in their vast majority, were focused on tonnage and sugar content, and little attention was paid to grape varieties, the quality, or the complexity of wine making.⁸¹ It was the perpetuation of the search for quantity, already denounced a century earlier by Bertall and recognized by two other economists, Alain Berger and Frédéric Maurel in 1980: they believed that “the system of collective selling [through *coopératives*] had moved the winegrower away from the market; he no longer need to observe market prices to sell his wine”.

⁷⁶ Archives municipales de Saint-Etienne, Fonds Casino, Documents commerciaux, 1950s-1970s.

⁷⁷ Henri Pestel, “La qualité,” p. 3.

⁷⁸ Alain Giraud, “Le vin en France,” p. 1.

⁷⁹ Andrew W. Smith, *Terror and Terroir. The Winegrowers of the Languedoc and Modern France*.

⁸⁰ Jacques-Henri Luc, “Languedoc Roussillon: Bientôt de nouveaux AOC?,” pp. 26-9.

⁸¹ Robert Badouin, *L'économie des marchés vinicoles*, p. 212.

Far from the market, winegrowers lost interest in the way the wine was disposed of and consumed, becoming simple employees of *coopératives*.⁸²

However, both structural and local efforts were noticeable. In 1973, Jacques Chirac, then Minister of Agriculture, launched a vast plan to renovate Southern viticulture. Called the “Plan Chirac”, it introduced “measures to raise the general level of quality through the development of a customized wine production”, with the ambitious goal of 100,000 ha of vineyard renovated in 10 years.⁸³ These measures were relatively simple and generalized the practices already adopted in the labelled vineyards in the Languedoc: modification of grape varieties, more attentive care to the vinification, close collaboration with the merchants for a better involvement in the market. The ambition was to generalize and extend what was being done in the Minervois, the Corbières or the Costières du Gard, in a new context, that is the “Europe of wine”. Indeed, since the establishment of the Common Market for wine in 1970, France had entered a new economy, with new resources offered by European agricultural aid, but also new competitors and standards. Now, on this new European market, “at equal or neighboring prices, it is quality that decides.”⁸⁴ This notion, despite all the nuances and subtleties that could be attached to it, was therefore the governing principle leading to the renovation of Languedoc viticulture.

In this context, the wines already labelled were also looking to step further. First, the winegrowers of the Corbières, Minervois and Fitou brought representatives of the retailing system (wine retailing chain “Nicolas” for example) into their Interprofessional council, in order to get a better understanding of the marketing issues. Then, they formed together a technical production management company in 1972. In 1973, they also decided to create a commercial company (“Les Vignerons des coteaux occitans”, based in Lézignan) responsible for promoting and selling a new range of wines. Presented in a very careful manner (with a bottle created for the occasion, the “Occitan bottle”), these wines were part of a strategy aiming to offer products with a new and singular identity. The objective was to create a “rewarding brand image” of the two VDQS (Corbières and Minervois), proving here in negative that this was still not enough the case, twenty years after the birth of the two VDQS, fifty after obtaining the appellation.⁸⁵ The strategy was at first global, towards restoration, mass distribution, grocery stores, etc. In 1976-77, they re-focussed on a more targeted strategy: Parisian and provincial restoration was aimed at, thanks to an active network of departmental representatives. At the end of the 1970s, the effort was quite limited (4 to 500,000 bottles), but it increased every year. The effort also targeted exports, which then totaled 10% of the volume produced; for this purpose, a grouping was settled with other Audois wine operators, such as the Coopérative de la Blanquette de Limoux. The techniques, especially of vinification, were also refined, mainly to compensate for the deficiencies of carignan, the then major type of vine in the territory. Furthermore, in a generalized climate of changes and greater attention paid to grape varieties, carignan share was tending to reduce, like the aramon it had replaced one generation earlier. Thus, while carignan and aramon accounted for 45% and 15% of cultivated areas in the 1979 census, these figures continued to decrease, reaching 25% and 10% in 1988.

⁸² Alain Berger and Frédéric Maurel, *La viticulture et l'économie du Languedoc du XVIIIe siècle à nos jours*, p. 100.

⁸³ Jean-Pierre Laporte and Jean-Marc Touzard, “Deux décennies de transition viticole en Languedoc-Roussillon: de la production de masse à une viticulture plurielle,” pp. 26-47.

⁸⁴ Roland Pisani, *Le vin en France à l'heure de l'Europe*, p. 111.

⁸⁵ Jacques-Henri Luc, “Languedoc Roussillon: Bientôt de nouveaux AOC?,” p. 27.

For their part, the improving and qualitative grape varieties increased sharply: 40% for the “Rhodanians” (syrah, grenache, cinsault) while the Bordeaux grape varieties appeared: cabernet, merlot, sauvignon. All this was supported by the financial aid granted by the Chirac renovation plan and then by European aid as of 1978 (20,000 F/hectare converted until the 1984-85 campaign). During this course, according to the estimation of R. Badouin, more than 50 % of the converted vineyard in France was in the Languedoc. At the same time, the staff of the *coopératives* improved, better trained and using more modern equipment, leading to a better vinification.

In this context, the 1980s saw a sharp and distinct rise in the range of Languedoc wines. While only the AOC Fitou in red had the label, the decade saw the multiplication of the highest national label in the region: Saint-Chinian (1982), Faugères (1982), Minervois (1985), Corbières (1985), and Costières “du Gard” then “de Nîmes” (1986). In these vineyards, whose size was reduced compared with that of the VDQS (but with the same name), the concern for quality was basic. AOC was now the new goal and quality model, in order to meet customers’ expectations in a “drink less but drink better” context,⁸⁶ while maintaining a strong southern typicality. Uncultivated land were recovered, especially on the hillsides, to meet a demand for quality wines that was in constant growth and to produce low yield wines with strong personality, pleasing to consumers. In 1985, the AOC Languedoc, a global label, was recognized, bringing together 121 municipalities in the region and gathering some of the existing AOC (which still continued to exist under their own name). The market was booming at the time, with very strong sales growth of the Languedoc AOC (16% in 1985-86, 10% in 1986-87). To enhance this dynamic and ensure a greater visibility, a “*Hôtel des vins du Languedoc*” was open in Montpellier (90 meals served daily, accompanied by local wines), followed in 1989 by a “*Maison des vins du Languedoc*” in the suburbs of Montpellier. Local wines were then favored by the national and international press: in September 1989, *Gault & Millau Magazine* published an article presenting one of the flagship wines of the Minervois, that of the property of Jacques Maris. The latter, interviewed, insisted on the importance of qualitative practices, choice of grape varieties, and careful vinification. He presented his latest project: a semi-buried cellar in order to better age the wines.⁸⁷ The wines of Maris, praised by *Le Point* or *The Daily Telegraph*, embodied the mutation that the Languedoc experienced: customization of the product, primacy given to caring and qualitative practices, complexity of the confection. In 1989, the Minervois AOC comprised 18,000 ha and involved 44 cooperatives and 170 particular wineries, a phenomenon which increased sharply, as did exports (26% of volumes in 1984, 46% in 1988).⁸⁸ Without attaining the fame of the Bordeaux and Burgundy AOC, the wines of Languedoc were coming out of their anonymity, as evidenced by an article in *La Cuisine de Madame Figaro* in March 1988, insisting on the quality of these decently priced wines.⁸⁹ In a context of profound socio-economic changes in the region (reduction of the winegrowers, of the vineyard and of the share of winegrowing in the regional GDP),⁹⁰ quality was obviously a lifeline.

⁸⁶ See Joseph Bohling, *The Sober Revolution. Appellation Wine and the Transformation of France*.

⁸⁷ J. D., “Jacques Maris. L’homme courageux du Minervois,” p. 133.

⁸⁸ “AOC Minervois,” Promotional document, 1989.

⁸⁹ Chantal Lecouty, “Feuille de vigne.”

⁹⁰ Geneviève Gavignaud-Fontaine, “L’extinction de la ‘viticulture pour tous’ en Languedoc, 1945-1984,” pp. 57-70.

However, the 1990s did not meet the high expectations. Reconversion concerned only a minority of the actors (about a third) and even less in terms of production (10%).⁹¹ In addition, because of its recent implementation, this conversion was confronted with several problems, two of which were major: very strong competition from wine-producing territories with precedence and therefore much more fundamental legitimacy (Bordeaux for example); and vines still young and not expressing their full potential. Robert Badouin explained in the mid-1990s that during the holiday season in December, while the sales of quality wine were increasing, those of the Languedoc AOC were stagnating. On the contrary, at the “Wine Fairs”, those of the AOC of the region were increasing very clearly.⁹² In the minds of the French, Languedoc quality wines were therefore clearly associated with cheap wines, which one would buy when one wanted to make a good deal. They were not the quality wines of exceptional moments and remained confined to a relatively low price range in the hierarchy of quality wines.⁹³ In addition, in a newly hazardous context of the wine market in the 1990s,⁹⁴ the great diversity and variety of Languedoc wines and their absence of collective typicality were evident drawbacks.

But the trend changed at the turn of the 2000s. While the vines planted in the second half of the 1970s and in the first half of the 1980s were beginning to express their full qualities, Languedoc wines were increasingly positioned in the middle and top of the range on the national market.⁹⁵ Changes in consumer behavior were also directing them more naturally towards Languedocian products. Indeed, the search for local, short and organic food circuits or for authenticity, no longer made it necessary to exploit a regional typicality. It was now replaced by the legitimacy of a small territory (so-called “terroir”) or small winemaker whose AOC label ensured the promotion and certainty of very strict specifications. Under the influence of the unions, the pricing policy was also revised upwards, allowing a response to a psychological equation on the wine market, combining price and quality.

The problems were not all solved, though, because, as Jacques Lauze explains, the trend did not benefit everyone, and, overall, only 20% of regional production was labelled in AOC.⁹⁶ It was an impressive figure compared with the situation twenty years before, but still with room for improvement. (doc. 5, “Wine distributions by labels in Languedoc”; source: FranceAgriMer, “La filière viti-vinicole en Languedoc-Roussillon”, 2014).

But from now on, a very large part of the production was in IGP (*Indication géographique protégée*; PGI in English: Protected Geographical Indication), formerly known as “*Vins de pays*”, an intermediate label created in 1968, aiming to enhance, once again thanks to strict specifications, quality wines that could not benefit from the AOC or the VDQS certifications. Responding to a pattern that reminds one of the VDQS – and even surpasses them in some ways, for example the attention paid to the grape varieties that become for these IGP wines the

⁹¹ Robert Badouin, *L'économie des marchés vinicoles*, pp. 207 et sq.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ In 1994, a bottle of AOC from the Languedoc was 9-10 F versus 32 F for a Bourgogne one. Bulk prices were following the same patterns: 400-500 F/hl for the Languedocian AOC, 600 F for the Côtes-du-Rhône.

⁹⁴ Robert Badouin, *L'économie des marchés vinicoles*, pp. 27-74.

⁹⁵ “Les AOC du Languedoc - Bilan de campagne 1999/2000.”

⁹⁶ Jacques Lauze, “L'évolution des prix des AOP du Languedoc. De l'expansion à la spirale dépressive des prix sur le marché mondial (1985-2010),” pp. 111-27.

true reference,⁹⁷ they were the proof, from the 1980s when they take a real extension,⁹⁸ of the consolidation of the idea of quality in Languedoc viticulture.

VI. Conclusion

Without any doubt, the Languedocian wine sector experienced tremendous mutations in the last three decades, what *Le Monde* called once “the narrow paths of quality.”⁹⁹ They were necessary, in a context of “change or perish”, in a market facing important shifts: globalization with new competitors, decrease of production, new consumers and habits.

This took time and was done at the cost of many sacrifices for a large part of the Languedoc winegrowers, but it was done under the undeniable influence of a concern for quality, even for second-class wines (IGP). Thus, in the second half of the 2000s, while the situation was still uncertain for winegrowers,¹⁰⁰ it was undisputable that the notion of quality was shared by the overwhelming majority of its operators.

Yet, is this really a “revolution”? On a short term, yes, since the transformation has been deep and quite spectacular, and the shift between VDQS to the AOC model was swift. In the long run, not really. Indeed, the situation in the 2000s and the 2010s is the consequence of long-term effects of efforts and endeavors initiated as early as the second half of the 19th century. For decades, they were persistent yet in minority, invisibilized by the mass-production and its easy-to-reach market. For decades, quantity was favored instead of quality, but the ideal of quality, supported and advocated by some winegrowers, merchants or politicians, continued to exist. Step by step and slowly, it thrived, gaining popularity and consciousness in the Languedocian winegrowers’ minds. And the deep crisis of the 1970s that finally helped to take the plunge and exploit the fruitful resources of the Languedoc.

As a closure and in a bend of time, it’s clearly evident that today’s winegrowers are fulfilling Coste-Floret, Caffort, Granaud or Lamour’s visions.

⁹⁷ FranceAgriMer, “La filière viti-vinicole en Languedoc-Roussillon: chiffres-clés et représentations. Focus sur la production, ses acteurs et marches,” p. 4.

⁹⁸ Yuna Chiffolleau, “La ‘Révolution qualité’ en milieu coopératif viticole languedocien,” pp. 111-24.

⁹⁹ Jean-Claude Ribaut, “Le Languedoc sur les chemins étroits de la qualité.”

¹⁰⁰ Jacques Lauze, “L’évolution des prix des AOP du Languedoc. De l’expansion à la spirale dépressive des prix sur le marché mondial (1985-2010),” p. 123.

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