



HAL
open science

Organizations as Carriers of Status and Class Dynamics : A Historical Ethnography of the Emergence of Bordeaux's Cork Aristocracy

Grégoire Croidieu, Walter W. Powell, Stewart Clegg, Michael
Grothe-Hammer, Kathia Serrano Velarde

► **To cite this version:**

Grégoire Croidieu, Walter W. Powell, Stewart Clegg, Michael Grothe-Hammer, Kathia Serrano Velarde. Organizations as Carriers of Status and Class Dynamics: A Historical Ethnography of the Emergence of Bordeaux's Cork Aristocracy. *Sociological Thinking in Contemporary Organizational Scholarship*, Emerald, 141-173 p., 2024. hal-04717620

HAL Id: hal-04717620

<https://hal.science/hal-04717620v1>

Submitted on 2 Oct 2024

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

ORGANIZATIONS AS CARRIERS OF STATUS AND CLASS DYNAMICS: A HISTORICAL ETHNOGRAPHY OF THE EMERGENCE OF BORDEAUX'S CORK ARISTOCRACY

Grégoire Croidieu^a and Walter W. Powell^b

^aemlyon Business School, France

^bStanford University, USA

ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to understand how a new elite, known as the cork aristocracy, emerged in the Bordeaux wine field, France, between 1850 and 1929 as wine merchants replaced aristocrats. Classic class and status perspectives, and their distinctive social closure dynamics, are mobilized to illuminate the individual and organizational transformations that affected elite wineries grouped in an emerging classification of the Bordeaux best wines. We build on a wealth of archives and historical ethnography techniques to surface complex status and organizational dynamics that reveal how financiers and industrialists inter-mediated this transition and how organizations are deeply interwoven into social change.

Keywords: Research paper; class; status; social closure; historical ethnography; Bordeaux wine

Sociological Thinking in Contemporary Organizational Scholarship
Research in the Sociology of Organizations, Volume 90, 141–173



Copyright © 2024 by Grégoire Croidieu and Walter W. Powell. Published by Emerald Publishing Limited. This work is published under the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY 4.0) licence.

Anyone may reproduce, distribute, translate and create derivative works of this work (for both commercial and non-commercial purposes), subject to full attribution to the original publication and authors. The full terms of this licence may be seen at <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/legalcode>

ISSN: 0733-558X/doi:10.1108/S0733-558X2024000090006

INTRODUCTION

The origins of any institution are often contingent. They reflect not only the social context at the time of emergence but also struggles among parties with different degrees of power and status.

A central feature of institutional persistence is that these historically contingent origins become obscured; those who are on the winning side are often able to erase the alternative arrangements that were once considered possible (Stinchcombe, 1968). Our work seeks to undercover how and why this process occurred in the context of Bordeaux, France, by studying the formation of a new elite, known as the cork aristocracy,¹ that subsequently played a critical role in the maintenance of a wine classification system that became frozen in time (Croidieu et al., 2018).

Today, Bordeaux holds a commanding position as one of the world's most venerated wine regions, if not the most sacrosanct, famous for its red wines and *châteaux*, with its coveted veneer of aristocracy and history (Coates, 2004; Robinson & Harding, 2015). This unique position owes certainly much to the prestige of Bordeaux' most renowned wines, whose ranking originated in 1855. The second universal exhibition held in Paris that year provided an opportunity to draw a temporary list of the best Bordeaux wines, which eventually became the best-known wine classification globally and came to define the Bordeaux social order. None of the classified wine owners, largely landed aristocrats (60%), were asked if they wanted to be on the list.² Yet, 75 years later, the classification persisted, unchanged, baked in a seemingly immutable aristocratic tradition and drawing a consequential line between those on and off the list. A provisional ranking drawn by just four men became an entrenched status hierarchy, even though ownership turned over dramatically (90%).

Underneath the seeming stability of the Bordeaux wine hierarchy were massive social changes and power struggles. Aristocratic families, once dominant landowners, were uprooted by wine merchants, bankers, industrialists, and politicians. These new owners, however, celebrated rather than tore down the aristocratic legacy, embracing aristocratic paraphernalia, constructing grandiose *châteaux* (e.g., castles, the traditional aristocratic home³), and ennobling existing buildings. This remarkable transformation raises several empirical puzzles: how did aristocrats as a social group fall while their social status and tradition remained exalted? How do seemingly lower status owners, merchants, and others, move in without diluting the 1855 classification's prestige, while embracing a tradition that excluded them? In this paper, our goal is to understand how power struggles over 1855 estates ownership led to the formation of the cork aristocrats, who participated in the later persistence⁴ of the 1855 list.

Classical sociology offers competing insights into this question. Class and status notably provide two distinctive lenses to understand how power struggles lead to elite formation (Weber, 1978). Ownership change is first a material transformation, in which social classes struggle to control the means of production (Marx, 1867). From this perspective, this competition over property reflects the age of capital arriving in Bordeaux, with its old feudal order in a losing battle with a rising capitalist class. These societal forces not only swept England and its industries but also France and other nations (Hobsbawm, 1975/2010). Ownership

shifts also have a social meaning, as new owners join a community and develop social relations (Weber, 1978). From this perspective, owning an 1855 estate is a symbolic token that conveys the owner's social standing and honor. Once a status hierarchy is developed, these associations become consequential, and status frequently co-occurs with differences in property and power (Arnold & Foureault, 2024, *this volume*; Ridgeway, 2019; Sauder et al., 2012). Ownership change is then interpreted through the politics of association that status competition triggers. Thus, class and status offer rival material and symbolic accounts of the power struggle shaping elite formation, a core social stratification process with deep consequences for resource distribution and institutional persistence, which shapes who is included or excluded and how (Khan, 2012; Mills, 1956). These lenses also differ in how they understand organizations as either nested in hierarchical social systems or embedded in place-based communities (see Laryea & Brandtner, 2024, *this volume*).

Both class and status dynamics rely on a process of social closure. Closure refers to the drawing of social and symbolic boundaries, which results in the appropriation of economic or social rewards by an insider group that excludes others, accruing its power and bounding a group (Weber, 1978). A Marxian perspective on closure emphasizes exploitation. A usually well-connected elite controls valuable resources, such as the means of production, from which they derive rewards, excluding others from the value they contribute to (Grusky & Sørensen, 1998; Tilly, 1998, pp. 86–91). Exploitation typically unfolds in labor relations, yet also applies to inheritance or succession. A Weberian account, in contrast, highlights opportunity hoarding, where elite or non-elite groups close off opportunities to outsiders, which weakens competition, eases the harvest of rewards, and hence increases insiders' power (Parkin, 1979; Tilly, 1998, pp. 91–95).

We study these competing accounts by analyzing a host of primary and secondary archives as a historical ethnography. We first gathered authoritative directories of Bordeaux wine estates and documented the social identities of all the 1855 owners we found, including social class, status, occupations, families, or location, by combining materials from multiple other archives. We completed this dataset by collecting additional archives on the buildings located on the 1855 estates. By assembling this information in a panel dataset between 1850 and 1929, we systematically documented changes in ownership, for example, who entered and who exited, when, which families, but also social closure dynamics, for instance, who bought from whom or where in the classification. We then connected these changes to the changes in owners' social identities and their building practices. We deepened the analysis of aggregated patterns by studying individual cases, often collecting new archives, and interpreted the results iteratively with the lenses of class, status, and closure. Last, we consulted a broader set of sources to embed our interpretation in the tumultuous context of this study. This immersion in the archives afforded us deep insights about the obscured power struggle at the apex of Bordeaux wine. Our study is thus an ethnography in the archives (Merry, 2002), in which we “elicit structure and culture from the documents created” (Vaughan, 2004, p. 321).

Our historical ethnography retraces the transition from a landed aristocracy to a cork aristocracy by contrasting a class with a status perspective. First, unlike

preexisting accounts of the change in power in Bordeaux (e.g., [Butel, 2008](#); [Faith, 2005](#); [Ulin, 1996](#)), our findings underscore that the merchants did not wrest power from the hands of aristocrats or single-handedly build an aristocratic wine tradition: financiers and industrialists cushioned this transition. With the arrival of different kinds of capitalist owners, Bordeaux underwent a massive material transformation, yet the formation of a cork aristocracy is only partially explained by a class-based account. Second, we show that complex and unforeseeable status and organizational dynamics account for the formation of this new elite. Merchants did not buy out aristocrats but, rather, sought to join them by purchasing 1855 estates from non-aristocratic owners, for the arbitrary classification mattered initially as high-status aristocrats populated its ranks. As a status competition started and raged, aristocrats, elites from the industrial revolution, and merchants, among other owners, participated in the ennoblement of Bordeaux wines, a symbolic race merchants finished on top in the 1920s. In this ennobling process, an aristocratic tradition switched camp, values were transposed from an Old Regime enclave to a modern wine world, and the 1855 list persisted. As a consequence, an 1855 estate bestowed high status to its owner and became a membership card into the new cork aristocracy. Third, with its fixed number of seats, 1855 has always been about closure. In a patrimonial wine economy, one could expect closure to unfold through successions within families, as dynasties. Surprisingly, only four families retained their property throughout the period. Instead, status closure prevailed as owners kept changing and competed over lifestyles.

We contribute to this volume by (re)connecting organization studies with core themes in sociology. We reintroduce classic concerns with status, class, and social closure to organizational analysis in two ways. First, the status feedback loop we uncovered, from landed aristocrats to estates and then from estates to new owners (the cork aristocrats), offers an opportunity to analyze how organizational dynamics intersect with social stratification processes and elite formation. On the one hand, organizational scholars have showed how organizations are both sites and drivers of social actions as they interact with their environment ([Barley, 2010](#); [Powell & Brandtner, 2016](#); [Stinchcombe, 1965](#)). On the other hand, social scientists have shown how institutional persistence, such as in the case of the Nigerian constitution or the German vocational training system, relied on classifications and individual-level elite structures ([Laitin, 1986](#); [Thelen, 2004](#)). The feedback loop our case unravels links these separate multilevel dynamics. These complex status and organizational processes suggest that organizations are more deeply interwoven into the social fabric than previously thought. Organizations carry and alter social processes, in addition to sheltering or triggering social actions ([Perrow, 2002](#)). Second, our cork aristocracy case differs from the typical social closure process, where the old elite maintains the status quo. In this view, closure fosters institutional persistence through elite reproduction and value maintenance ([Stinchcombe, 1998](#); [Tilly, 1998](#)). As in many wine regions, one would have expected the aristocratic class to maintain power through family succession, with dynasties retaining elite wine in the realm of an aristocratic world. Our findings unravel obscured status and organizational dynamics where those initially excluded by a tradition came to espouse and glorify its values and maintain,

rather than tear down, the 1855 status order. Ownership of an 1855 estate allowed merchants and others to become an aristocratic-like elite with no bloodline, with the privilege of a wine estate supporting their social influence. Our case links closure with persistence through elite change and value transposition. In so doing, we contribute to closure and boundary studies as the porosity of symbolic boundaries resulted in the tightening of new social boundaries (Grodal, 2018; Lamont & Molnar, 2002). Lastly, we take advantage of this paper to describe and explain how we used historical ethnography. This method, pioneered by organizational scholars such as Diane Vaughan (1996), allowed us to combine the study of biographies with organizational and group formation dynamics, a multilevel analysis that unraveled obscured processes that shed new light on elite formation. We hope these insights will inspire others interested in archival work and interpretive methods.

A HISTORICAL ETHNOGRAPHY: CONTEXT, DATA, AND METHODS

Context

This study is part of a series of papers on the persistence of the 1855 classification and focuses on the power struggles among classified estate owners in the first 75 years of this list. The Bordeaux Chamber of Commerce proposed this classification to present its “best” wines to the universal exhibition held in Paris that year. The exhibition was organized under the imperial patronage of Napoleon III to showcase France’s industrial and agricultural achievements. This list ranked estates producing red wines into five ordered categories, the first being the best. This ordering was unusual because most prior classifications listed four tiers. At that time, wines from the Médoc subregion (oddly with one estate from the Graves sub-area, Haut-Brion), on the left bank of the Gironde River, were regarded as constituting the elite. The ranking was a pedagogical device to guide attention at the exhibition. Although historians are unsure how exactly the four Bordeaux wine brokers who drew the list proceeded, we know they were at least partly guided by market prices (Markham, 1998). As best as we can tell, there was little outcry among those left off this list. Several estates showed their wines independently at the exhibition, and many received prizes.

Wine production has been both remarkably constant and altered since 1855. In terms of work organization, wine estates differ from many organizations we know today, in the sense that contracts were – and still are – not the primary means to manage tasks, relationships, and boundaries (Powell, 1990). The smaller estates were run within the family, with limited external labor involved (e.g., Féret, 1898, p. 53). Medium-sized estates were run by the owner, who typically cultivated his land with owned or rented horses, while supervising servants or *prix-faiteurs*, who were farm workers paid for tasks such as plowing, manure, or pruning (but not the harvest) on an annual basis. Larger estates combined employed servants and *prix-faiteurs* with different layers of intermediary staff, such as *régisseur*, *maître*

de chai, or maître de culture, who supervised the whole estate, the winemaking, or the viticulture. These managerial occupations within the estate typically passed from fathers to sons. Temporary workers joined most of these estates during the harvest. The larger estates were also more vertically integrated; some had schools like the one shared by Lafite- and Mouton-Rothschild or a hospital for Mouton (Pijassou, 1980). The post-1890s witnessed social unrest and the emergence of unions in the commune of St-Estèphe. Nevertheless, jobs in these leading wine estates were envied as these owners provided pensions for their key staff and covered medical expenses for all the workers, years before these social advances became mandatory (Pijassou, 1980). Even though the legal footing of wineries has changed since the 19th century, many of these work arrangements survive until today in Bordeaux, California, and elsewhere.

If the division of labor of wineries remained stable, Bordeaux' wines experienced a quiet revolution between 1850 and 1929, and the Médoc area was at its forefront. With three bouts of pestilence devastating its vineyards, Bordeaux' winegrowers welcomed newly minted chemists in their fields. Their many innovations often provided a relief and contributed to the doubling of vineyard yields (Roudié, 1988). In the case of phylloxera, botanists succeeded where chemists failed because only grafting American roots suppressed the aphid's destructive appetite. As many vines died between the early 1850s powdery mildew crisis and the 1880s when both the downy mildew and phylloxera plights culminated, owners sought new grape varieties to replant. During that period, Médoc shifted from predominantly mixing white grape varieties, cultivated "en foule," without trellis, to red grape varieties trained and pruned along posts. Cabernet sauvignon replaced malbec as the dominant red, while varieties like camerouge, chalosse, graput, folle, or boutignon lost ground. Scientific progress also remade winemaking as fermentation came to be understood and controlled, while countless experiments tested the most suitable wood type to age wine (Pijassou, 1980; Roudié, 1988). These changes not only altered the rich variety of viticultural and winemaking practices in Médoc, they also standardized them. For instance, the Bordeaux barrique came to be strictly defined as a 225-liter container, while the nonlocal syrah grape was expelled to the benefit of merlot and petit verdot, which are now part of the typical Médoc grape varieties. Similarly, estate-bottling became a widespread, and later compulsory, norm, which replaced the merchants' practice to mix estate wines in their cellars and sell these "assemblages" in barriques (Croidieu et al., 2018). This uniformization foreshadowed the Appellation Contrôlée legal system that emerged from the 1910s onward and codified typical local uses. Over 80 years, these combined changes resulted in a complete metamorphosis of the taste of Médoc wines, while the new owners facilitated, if not funded, the implementation and diffusion of these changes.

Even though the 1855 list was supposed to be temporary, and wine production, markets, and the soil have changed dramatically, the classification has persisted until today, with only one change⁵ (Croidieu et al., 2018). The grip of the classification on the world of wine may be somewhat less firm today than it was throughout the 20th century, as upstart Chinese and other foreign owners have barged in, but its importance cannot be understated. As our analysis focuses on

the shift in power from aristocrats to new owners, we attend to a specific slice of our data: ownership changes between 1850 and 1929, a period of ferment during which the once arbitrary and temporary 1855 list became established as a taken-for-granted institution embodying elite wineries.

Data Sources

To document the ownership of the classified estates, we relied on the Féret wine directories as our primary archive. Féret is a leading publishing house in Bordeaux, and its local wine directories have been equally used by professionals and historians (Pijassou, 1980; Roudié, 1988). These directories have been irregularly published since 1850, and until 1929, Féret published nine editions, in 1850, 1868, 1874, 1881, 1893, 1898, 1908, 1922, and 1929. To space the panels as regularly⁶ as possible, we focused on six editions published in 1850, 1868, 1881, 1898, 1908, and 1929 that will constitute our panels. We use the other editions as complementary sources. The directories allow us to obtain consistent information on the names of the growths,⁷ their location, the name of the owner(s), aristocratic titles, or the size of the estate. They often provide additional information, including pictures of the estate building, owner's occupation, historical information on the estate, or the family of the owners, and events such as participations in exhibitions, awards, and new buildings. This first analysis notably revealed the number of 1855 estates, though fixed, keeps changing as the organizations split, merge, cease, or resurge. The 1855 list initially comprised 57 organizations and, in total, we identified 62 distinctive classified organizations until 1929. We also learned that 81% of the classified estates had a single owner, though a few had as many as four. Only one organization was listed as an owner, a bank, for only one Féret panel. All the other owners were individuals, investing their own money.

For every Féret panel, we listed the owners and their social identities. We extracted the relevant information available in Féret, complementing it with another primary source – the Bordeaux directories of merchants, which describe the name and address of all the wine merchants and brokers in Bordeaux. We focused on the 1850, 1870, 1880, 1890, 1900, 1910, 1920, and 1930 editions for our analyses and coding. These two primary sources were matched with a host of other sources, which we use to triangulate and further document these identities (Mayrl & Wilson, 2020). Our archival efforts relied on many public and private archives in France (Bordeaux, Paris) and abroad (USA, England), as well as online archival sources such as Gallica.

With these primary archives, we constructed an unbalanced panel dataset to track changes in ownership across estates and over time. The 6 panels and 62 organizations resulted in 357 observations. Only a single organization is present but once, the Dubignon estate in 1868. This classified growth ceased existence in the early 1870s; the name was never claimed, and the vineyard sold to multiple owners. We excluded from the 1855 sample one first growth, Haut-Brion, as it was geographically not in the same area as the other classified growths. All the figures and tables we present are extracted from this panel dataset.

Coding and Measurement

To track class, status, and closure dynamics at the individual and organizational levels, we coded several indicators based on ownership, occupations, aristocracy, and different markers of honor. To measure ownership, ownership change, and family change, we relied on the six F eret panels described above. Every time we noticed the name of a new owner or the addition of one, we coded a change in ownership. To capture family changes, we relied on ownership changes, and every time a surname changed, we looked for family ties through different sources. If the names changed because of a marriage (for instance, properties owned by wives were often declared as their husband's estates), we coded no family change. When there was no family relationship, then we coded family change. When in-laws took over, we coded a family change. When the *Caisse Hypoth caire* bank took over the Palmer estate, we coded a family change.

We track class dynamics by looking into the occupations of the owner(s). The coding of occupations relies on multiple sources that changed from one case to the other. The Bordeaux merchant directories are our primary source. For the other occupations, we turned to additional sources. First, F eret expanded its directories from the 1880s onward by adding a lot of text and images that provide occupational information for new owners. We also use a series of Bordeaux year-books, such as the *Annuaire du tout Sud-Ouest*. We consulted several editions published at the turn of the 19th century, which give biographical notes for owners. Historians (and geographers) have also written extensive organizational histories of some 1855 estates or biographies of owners that proved useful to glean additional information. For instance, Pijassou (1980) dug into the Latour archives, while Paul Butel (2008) portrayed dynasties in Bordeaux. We cross-checked and triangulated many similar secondary sources to collect this information. Digitally, the abcdvin website (www.abcdvin.com), run by Sylvain Torchet,⁸ proved to be well and thoughtfully documented, though sources are not systematically listed.

We were able to collect occupational information for all owners, often gathering information about family ties and location in the process. One problem we faced was the variety of occupations: genealogist, king's prosecutor, painter, lawyer, liquorist, medical doctor, perfumer, retired military, etc. There is no standard classification of 19th-century occupations; in contrast, the Bordeaux wine trade has become organized between wine merchants (*n gociants*), brokers (*courtiers*), and owners (*propri taires*). We recoded our list of occupations to both reduce the number and preserve some granularity to make the analyses tractable and meaningful.

As we sorted the occupational data, we tried several codings, settling for a four-category scheme distinguishing merchants, financiers and industrialists, law professionals and politicians, and owners. In the merchant category, we included all the Bordeaux merchants and brokers systematically identified through the directories, as well as the shipowners (*armateurs*). We also coded as merchants all those not from Bordeaux who distributed wines, whether in Paris, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, or Germany (they mostly entered the dataset in the early 20th century). This group is largely understood as the trade in the wine

world. We coded all the financiers (mostly bankers) and industrialists (across many industries) together as they are, with one exception, not from Bordeaux and reflect the growing economic class spearheading the French industrial revolution. Law professionals and politicians (either members of parliament (MPs) or mayors) who have no other occupations were grouped together. In his “Class, Status, Party” chapter, Weber distinguishes social and economic power from political power. For this reason, we kept this category “pure” and separate. For instance, merchants, like Pierre-François Guestier, mayor of Saint-Julien, or brokers like Armand Lalande, who held positions as mayor of Bordeaux, MP, and president of the Chamber of Commerce, typically occupied political positions while remaining active in the wine world. We coded them as merchants and not politicians.

Our last occupational category is owner, literally someone whose sole or main occupation is owning an 1855 estate. Owner is not a well-bounded occupation, unlike merchants and brokers, who are registered professionals at the Chamber of Commerce. Only the title deed defines the owner occupation. It is hence the category sheltering the highest diversity of occupations. Owner, for instance, includes all owners with an aristocratic name and no clear occupation (a minority, like the de Bethmann family, are, for instance, merchants: they were coded both merchant and aristocrat). This subgroup represents 88% of the owners in 1850, declining to 25% in 1929. The genealogist, painter, retired military, or medical doctor occupations also fall in this owner category as their occupations do not clearly intersect with the power struggle at the top of Bordeaux. To our understanding, they only participate in this contestation as 1855 owners.

Two subgroups of owners, however, possess multiple ties with the Bordeaux wine world, which go beyond the sole ownership of an 1855 estate. First, several estates have an administrator, who runs the daily operations (*régisseur*). Few of these administrators managed to become 1855 owners like Théodore Skawinski or Armand Feuillerat. Second, some individuals, and then families, came to own several estates, including one or more 1855 growths. The Castéja is one of these families. These new owners with vested interests in the Bordeaux wine world largely emerged at the turn of the 19th century. We note their increasing presence, yet we are not able to identify clear patterns, for instance, whether they came to wine first and then to 1855 or the contrary.

Aristocracy is not an occupation, however, it relates to both class and status, and, as a result, its coding is subject to debate. For Max Weber, aristocracy is an inherited source of honor and social standing, whereas from a Marxian perspective, aristocrats in Bordeaux were primarily landowners controlling the means of wine production. Aristocracy is widely understood as a remnant of a feudal order, which was overturned with the French Revolution. Yet, the extent to which the fall of the Bastille reshuffled the social order is open to much discussion (Tocqueville, 1859). Social scientists nevertheless agree that the prevalence of aristocrats in the French economy and society sharply declined after World War I (Coulmont, 2019; Daumard, 1988). Thus, most of our case falls during the historical period where measuring and interpreting the role of aristocracy is contested.

The history of French aristocracy is even more confusing than its social theory and determining who is from aristocratic ascent is also controversial. Until 1789, aristocrats were a separate legal category of “citizens,” whereas aristocratic distinctions became purely honorific from 1814 onward when the title was restored. As the legal category disappeared, many aristocrats added to their name a nobiliary particle (*de* such as in Eric de Bethmann), in a logic of social distinction.⁹ This signaling spread as a widely understood sign of aristocratic ascent (Beaumaine, 1953, Bordeaux, 1861). A particle is, however, not proof of nobility; it only implies someone is seemingly aristocratic (Beaumaine, 1953; Coulmont, 2019; Daumard, 1988). Signifying a particle originated in a controversial pre-revolutionary practice when nobles expanded their family names by adding the name of the place where they came from, as if the authors of this paper added “de Lyon” or “de Palo Alto” to their family names. Of course, with the legal blurring of this category and the honorary benefits that it suggested, usurpation spread. The practice was decriminalized in 1832, and more joined in, contributing to the growth of the purportedly aristocratic social group in the first half of the 19th century (Tudesq, 1988). This expansion was also enabled by marriages and novel ennoblements, as France morphed into different kinds of empires and royalties before settling into a *république*. This expansion stopped in 1858 when usurpation became sanctioned and aristocratic membership was codified (Bordeaux, 1861).

This pre-1850s growth of the aristocracy contributed to its lasting influence up until WWI. There is, however, little doubt that the meaning of nobility changed during this period, and that 1780 and 1890 noblemen had a different ethos and practices (Daumard, 1988). For instance, historians narrate how noblemen left Paris and went back to the countryside from the 1830s onward, while managing their patrimony in bourgeois terms, as the fragmentation of land that Napoleonic primogeniture laws triggered put pressure on their revenues. Many also entered the job market at that time. Different kinds of nobility also started competing, as a lower status yet moneyed nobility emerged, such as the Rothschild bankers. Partly for these economic reasons, intermarriage, a rare practice restricted to Paris before the 1850s, spread nationally. Daumard (1988) sums up this transformation by pointing out that nobility became less about social origins and more about who claims the honor. Consequently, aristocracy is more than a class in our analysis as noblemen entered a status competition with laymen like merchants.

Given this history, we code for aristocracy using the *de* particle in the owner’s family name as an indicator. We regard the particle as an appropriate status marker because this symbol was widely understood and patrolled during most of our observation window, and it is easily observable. Looking at names is also a reliable source as many of the landowners indicate their titles, like “marquis” or “baron,” providing a second cue of aristocratic membership. Féret is our main source, triangulated with many others.

We track status through multiple other indicators, following Weber’s (1978) guidelines. In addition to hereditary prestige (aristocratic surnames and titles), we look at lifestyle (buildings construction and enhancements), associations (Sauder et al., 2012), position in a cultural and status hierarchy (Gould, 2002; Ridgeway, 2019), and status competition (Podolny, 2005). Buildings and estate

enhancements are tracked through Féret, which published some images between 1850 and 1881, then was quite systematic from 1898 until 1929. This source was completed by the work from contemporaries and historians (e.g., Boyé, 2001; Danflou, 1867; Déthier et al., 1989; Galard, 1823–1825; Guillon, 1866–1869; Lorbac, 1868; Ribadieu, 1856). Associations, hierarchies, and status competition are derived from comparing the behaviors of each social group we identified, the ties they created or not, or the practices they emulated or not.

Closure can also be appreciated with different measures. Occupation, professions, property inheritance, bloodline, or dynastic succession are conducive carriers of exclusionary dynamics and can facilitate closure in the context of ownership change (Parkin, 1979; Stinchcombe, 1998; Weber, 1978). Following Parkin (1979), we also distinguish the exclusionary practices from insiders barring others to join from the usurpatory practices from outsiders attempting to join.

Analysis and Interpretation

We analyze our data as a historical ethnography. Historical ethnography is a method used by sociologists, anthropologists, and organizational scholars (e.g., Merry, 2002; Vaughan, 1996, 2004; Zipp, 2021) that allows the study of systems of representations of past societies and cultures (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1992). The core assumption is that distance in time is akin to distance in space, generating a comparable experience of otherness. As the past is a foreign country, the historian and the ethnographer share the same methodological concerns of analyzing estranged symbolic practices (Lévi-Strauss, 1963, pp. 16–17). In our case, we seek to understand how 19th-century aristocrats wielded power to retain their control over their wineries, while new owners gained a foothold, which interrogate what these estates meant and afforded.

The texts that survived time and that ended in the archives are the only medium to access this past. Historical ethnography is hence essentially an ethnography of the archives (Merry, 2002), where the researcher immerses him- or herself in documents to grasp past systems of representations. Historical ethnographers have, for instance, used legal texts to study marginalized groups, who tend to leave little textual footprints along their trail (Merry, 2002) or procedures and meeting notes that are constitutive of decision-making or safety processes in many organizations (Vaughan, 1996, 2021). Historical ethnographers recommend constructing your own archives that espouse the specifics of the phenomenon a researcher studies, within, across, and beyond official sources or archival funds one can get access to. Tabulating systematically the numerous and diverse sources of information is also key to navigate the archives and iterate, “passing from text to context and back again, until [one] has cleared a way through a foreign mental world” (Vaughan, 1996, p. 61).

Historical ethnography differs from other methods using texts as sources, such as case studies, content analysis, or the archival work historians do. Historical ethnographies are systematic yet interpretive analyses of the corpus of texts available. They are not thematic analyses that focus on the content of the text as the unit of analysis. They also analyze multiple archives, primary or secondary,

rather than dig one or two primary archives with secondary sources in the background.¹⁰ Historical ethnography also differs from ethnography, where participant observation is central to the method (e.g., Dumont, 2022). An immersion in the archives cannot grasp what the observation of small group interactions would. Yet, the diversity of archives affords to track and straddle multiple levels of analyses, between individuals, social groups, organizations, and their environments (Vaughan, 2021), which is central to the analysis we conduct. Historical ethnography is a method of choice to study biographies and how they relate to the formation of new groups and collective identities (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1992).

This method is also fitting for our study as we can only interpret the power struggle and varied meanings 1855 estates owners held over time. This historical ethnography of ownership is the outcome of this analytical journey, “a social history that reveals how participants interpreted actions and events” (Vaughan, 1996, p. 282). As we build on a large, heterogenous body of archives, we faced concerns about how to draw inferences. There are several ways of using archival data, and of course, researchers sometimes combine approaches (Mayrl & Wilson, 2020; Ventresca & Mohr, 2002). One strategy is to analyze a defined set of materials, perhaps all annual reports over a fixed amount of time, and search for patterns. This has the benefit of comparability and can be easily replicated by another researcher, even as it leaves valuable sources of information untapped. An alternative is to collect as many kinds of archival data as can be found, which affords the possibility for a researcher to get much closer to the phenomena. This approach, however, leaves open the questions about the author’s interpretation and can make replication difficult. Our analysis combines these two approaches, yet ultimately rests on our interpretations of the archives we pieced together.

Our ethnographic interpretations are also both enabled and constrained by our theoretical question on how power struggles lead to elite formation. We use the class, status, and closure concepts to enlighten but also discipline our analysis (Vaughan, 2004). Yet, other avenues could have been pursued. For example, we do not interrogate the roles gender may have played in this transition.¹¹ We also have some evidence that marriage, political, and religious affiliations mattered, as many of the rising merchants investing in 1855 held political mandates (MPs, mayors, etc.) and/or lived in the Bordeaux Protestant community. Further studies should address these limitations.

FINDINGS: THE FORMATION OF A CORK ARISTOCRACY

Our historical ethnography investigates the struggle over the ownership of the 1855 estates and the rise of a cork aristocracy as a result, during the first 80 years of the classification’s imprint. If, on the surface, 1855 looks immutable and Bordeaux’s aristocratic veneer smooth and pristine, our analysis uncovers a decline of aristocratic owners beneath this apparent continuity and the ascendance of a cork aristocracy. How did aristocrats fall while their status remained, and how did lower status merchants and owners move in and acquire 1855 estates without diluting the classification’s prestige?

*A Material Transformation: The Fall of the Old Regime and the
Ascendance of the New*

The analysis of F eret directories reveals a constant, profound churning of 1855 owners, both in terms of individuals and families. Ownership change between 1850 and 1929 occurred inevitably through a demographic process. Our 79-year observation window approximates three generations, borrowing from sociologist Karl Mannheim (1952), who argued that a generation once lasted 25 years. We counted 196 ownership changes within the 62 different entities we track, an average of 3.16 individual owners per estate, which is a slightly higher, yet not significantly different from the number of generations. The *x*-axis of Fig. 1 captures the frequency of ownership change, which varies between 0, the case of Dubignon, who ceased early in the 1870s, and 5. The distribution is close to normal, and our data reflect this natural demographic transition. This turnover, however, is an undercount of the true number of changes, because of our non-continuous measures, suggesting this churning is greater than a natural demographic change.

We next looked at family changes, reported on the *y*-axis of Fig. 1. Wine estates have often harnessed the power of family to create a tapestry that builds on the legacy of their predecessors. A wine connoisseur might expect that old families and dynasties hold onto estates for generations. We nonetheless counted 111 family changes, which point to the impressive amount of churning in Fig. 1.¹² Excluding Dubignon, only four families, Barton at Langoa-Barton, Cast eja at Duhart-Milon, Duroy de Suiduraut at Grand-Puy Ducasse, and Pichon de Longueville at Biron-Pichon, remain the sole owners throughout this period, while Latour remained in the hands of the same families. These exceptions aside, there is a 90% change in family ownership. This is quite striking as winegrowing

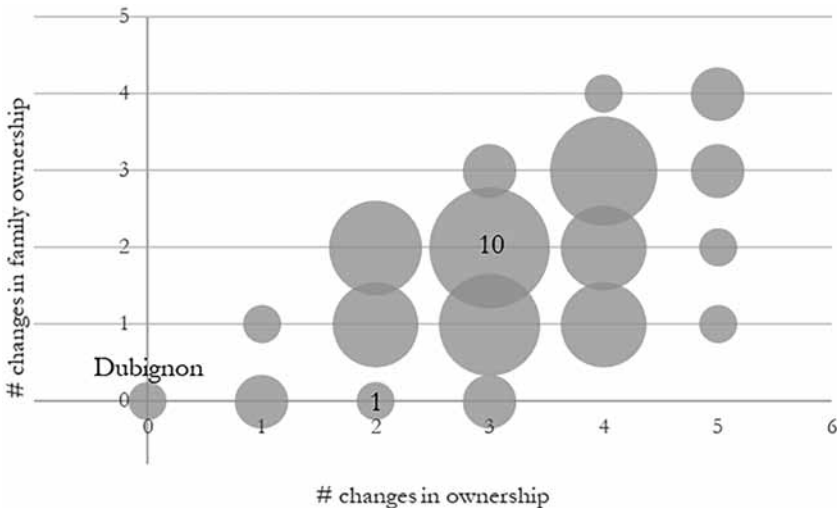


Fig. 1. 1855 Ownership and Family Changes, 1850–1929.

Source: F eret directories, 1850–1929, joint distribution.

Note: The size of the bubbles varies from 1 to 10 estates.

and winemaking has long been a family business. Yet, here in the most acclaimed wine region in the world, we find family has a modest pull. Even though organizational membership in the 1855 classification became fixed and enduring on the surface, beneath its ownership was neither monolithic nor invariant.

What is driving this change and how could it happen? If Bordeaux has an image of continuity, this silent churning implies the status quo was disrupted, vested interests upset, pressures escalated, and, potentially, the grip of institutions unfastened. How did an apparently conservative community change and allow new people in? We start by inquiring who the old owners were, what these estates and 1855 meant for these families, and how they lost control.

Wine ownership in 1850 Bordeaux is remarkably akin to the image one has of the Old Regime landed gentry. Aristocratic ownership had been a feature of the Bordeaux wine trade since the 18th century (Forster, 1961; Pijassou, 1980). By the 19th century, this social group owned land throughout Bordeaux and Médoc (Figeac, 1996). Our analysis of detailed 1838 data from *Le Producteur*, a journal dedicated to the struggle of owners against the trade revealed aristocrats represented 12% of all the owners in the Médoc region, while accounting for 24% of the volume and a higher fraction of the sales value (in *francs*). In 1850, aristocrats owned 60% of the future 1855 estates (Féret data), adding evidence of mid-century aristocratic entrenchment among elite wineries. By 1929, only 16% of the 1855 estate owners had an aristocratic surname or a title. This trend parallels the declining presence of nobles within French society's elite positions, whether among MPs, magistrates, entrepreneurs, or clergy (Coulmont, 2019). This transformation unfolded somewhat more slowly in Bordeaux, as respectively 48% and 42% of the owners were still aristocratic in 1881 and 1898. Their decline accelerates after 1908 (35%). Thus, for most of the 1850–1929 period, 1855 was essentially an aristocratic club rather than a dynastic list. Yet, by 1929, aristocratic owners were no longer the dominant social group, and their presence was marginal, a trend that continues after 1929. Table 1 details this change.

The ownership data clearly depict a notable decline in aristocratic ownership. Although this decline in status occurred across France, what factors contributed to the declining fortunes of the aristocratic owners in Bordeaux? Why did families have so little pull and were not able to control their succession and preserve their estates? One of the most scientifically progressive owners, Armand d'Armailhacq (1855, 1867), has written a revealing chronicle of this era. We draw on it and other sources to provide insight into the forces behind the demise of the old regime.

Table 1. Aristocratic Ownership Among 1855 Estates.

	1850	1868	1881	1898	1908	1929
# estates with owners with an aristocratic surname	33	26	29	25	21	10
Total # estates	55	61	60	60	60	61
%	60	43	48	42	35	16

Source: Féret directories, 1850–1929.

Aristocratic owners invested massively in vineyards from the early 18th century onward (Pijassou, 1980), which led to the creation of countless new estates. For instance, in the commune of Pauillac, three aristocratic entrepreneurs, Pontet, Brane, and d'Armailhacq, bought land in the 1720s from the powerful Ségur family in the neighboring hamlets of Canet, Poulayet, and Mouton. These three owners founded three new estates, Pontet-Canet, Brane-Mouton, and Mouton d'Armailhacq, adding their family names to the name of the place where their estate was located. These properties were then handed over from generation to generation until a new family moved in or the estate was disbanded. Many families built homes on these estates, especially after the 1830s when aristocrats moved out of cities to live in rural areas (Figeac, 1996).

Four main factors altered this situation and weakened the grip of aristocratic families on their estates. First, if the 18th century was the golden age of wine investment, the first half of the 19th century was far less amenable and the commercial situation of the Médoc was dire until the late 1850s. The Napoleonic wars triggered bans and prohibiting tariffs, which stalled exports, a traditional outlet for Bordeaux wine for decades. Thanks to the newly arrived train,¹³ Paris and the rest of France became more accessible, yet high transportation costs, city tariffs, and lower prices than on international markets slashed margins. In these conditions, winegrowing was a “ruinous” activity, weakening the grip of families over estates (d'Armailhacq, 1855, pp. ix–xii). Mouton d'Armailhacq, for instance, went bankrupt in 1843, and the family had to sell 10 hectares of renown vineyards to its direct neighbor to keep the property.

Second, vineyards required increasing investments during these years, which further burdened the estates. Scientific progress changed the way vines were grown, requiring new vineyard structures. Progress in chemistry yielded effective yet costly vine treatments, and some owners started investing in higher quality varietals, such as cabernet sauvignon. Cabernet was easier-to-grow than existing reds and gave a distinctive and seductive *sève* and *velours* (sap and velvet) texture to the wines (d'Armailhacq, 1855; Saint-Amant, 1855). The Bordeaux wine community struggled between 1852 and 1858 with the “horrible” powdery mildew disease that “devours the vines,” halts production, and “spreads desolation” (Saint-Amant, 1855, pp. 99–100). Two other vine diseases, the phylloxera and the (downy) mildew, further afflicted Bordeaux before 1929, a period also marked by the 1890 great depression and WWI (Roudié, 1988). Estates spent fortunes to fight these plagues, at a time they also had to finance the construction of homes and face unruly markets.

Third, another factor that eroded aristocratic presence was the end of primogeniture laws and the rise of the Napoleonic code, which ensured all children equally inherited from their parents' estate. Many vineyards had to be sold to allow such an equal split. Of course, families were also the theaters of personal drama that affected their wineries. For instance, Pichon Longueville split into Pichon Comtesse and Pichon Baron when the Pichon son and daughter feuded irreparably about the inheritance of the family estate. As the daughter kept the existing building, the son built a brand-new château for his newly created estate Pichon Baron, facing his sister's residence across the road. Fourth, the boom in

wine and then in estate prices during most of the 1855–1890 period, what the late historian Philippe Roudié (1988) called *une pluie d'or* (a shower of gold), also whetted the appetite of neighbors and newcomers, who made offers many owners could not refuse.

Most aristocratic owners resisted change. For instance, Armand d'Armailhaq (1855) pioneered many techniques to run his estate at a lower cost and sought grants and prizes to fund his discoveries and property. The owner of Mouton d'Armailhaq also fought with his new and deeper-pocketed neighbor, the Baron de Rothschild, who claimed the exclusive rights over the Mouton name¹⁴ (d'Armailhaq, 1867). When Armand passed away in 1868 without any heir, his sister convinced her husband, the Comte de Ferrand, to buy the family property. Later, their son launched a wine trade business to further finance the estate, an unusual activity for an owner. To grow his activity, he partnered with the Baron de Rothschild's heirs. Yet, this effort was not sufficient and, in 1933, the Baron de Rothschild took over Mouton d'Armailhaq, later named *château d'Armailhaq*.¹⁵ Technological innovations, external funding, marriage, legal contestation, new venture creation, or partnership were some of the solutions owners employed to resist change. Much ingenuity went into keeping endeared family estates, controlling succession, and maintaining closure.

Yet, despite this resistance, the arrival of new owners is dramatic, with the merchants' ascent into 1855's ranks perhaps the most striking aspect. As a seaport, Bordeaux developed an extensive trade community in the 18th century following the granting of royal privileges to the city (Pariset & Higounet, 1968). The merchants' economic success led them to acquire wine estates, and by 1850, they were the second-largest group of (future) 1855 owners with 33% of the classified estates. By 1929, merchants increased their presence to 41%, becoming the leading ownership group (Table 2).

While their increased presence is notable, merchant dominance is reflected more in how they climbed the status order. In 1850, 9 of the 18 estates owned were ones that were designated in 1855 as the fifth category, 5 were in the third category, and 2 in the fourth and second classes (Table 3). The first category was 100% owned by aristocrats. By 1929, one shipbuilder owned a first growth,¹⁶ Margaux, and 10 of the 25 estates owned by merchants belonged to the second

Table 2. Occupation and Ownership Among 1855 Estates.

	1850	1868	1881	1898	1908	1929
Owners	32	26	27	31	30	24
Merchants	18	23	21	17	17	25
Financiers and Industrialists	4	10	10	9	9	9
Law and Politicians	1	2	2	3	4	3
Owners %	58	43	45	52	50	39
Merchants %	33	38	35	28	28	41
Financiers and Industrialists %	7	16	17	15	15	15
Law and Politicians %	2	3	3	5	7	5

Source: Occupational dataset.

Table 3. Merchant ownership among 1855 Estates.

Merchant ownership among 1855 estates	1850	1898	1929
1st rank	0	0	1
2nd rank	2	6	10
3rd rank	5	4	6
4th rank	2	1	4
5th rank	9	6	4
Total	18	17	25

Source: Merchant and F eret directories.

category. Merchants also owned six estates in the third, and “only” four in the fourth and fifth categories. The rise of merchants from the bottom to the top of the classification signals their accrued economic power, and the climb clearly signals a marked status gain.

Other non-aristocratic owners also joined. First, financiers and industrialists invested in 1855 estates (and throughout the M edoc). There were only four in 1850; they more than doubled by 1929 with nine estate owners. These financiers and industrialists were outsiders who were attracted to invest in M edoc during the boom period between 1850 and 1890, rather than in Champagne even though it was closer to Paris. They included famous, powerful bankers including the two branches of the Rothschild family, the P ereire brothers, and the Comte d’Erlanger, the governor of the *Banque de France*. These newcomers were some of the wealthiest people in France. Yet they were of a lower social standing than aristocrats, even if they were ennobled like the Rothschild family or the Comte d’Erlanger. They were considered money aristocracy, not proper aristocracy (e.g., Daumard, 1988). Second, the industrialists were also nonlocal and included prominent figures like Gustave Roy, the founder of Haute Ecole Commerciale (HEC) business school, and Jean-Baptiste Rigaud, a famous Parisian perfumer. These *arrivistes* move to Bordeaux, and their uneasy fit with both merchants and aristocrats could be the stuff of many novels. As far as we know, most of the financiers and industrialists did not live in Bordeaux or on their estates. They usually appointed a *r egisseur* to manage the estate, be it a merchant, an owner, or a professional. To the locals, they embodied the new industrial elite.

Lastly, two other groups expanded their ownership position between 1850 and 1929. First, several new owners held political positions, as mayor of a M edoc commune, as a Bordeaux city council member, or in a few cases as MP. Some held positions at the Chamber of Commerce and later at the 1855 union, created in 1905. These political roles were, in most cases, combined with other occupations, while a subgroup was composed of law professionals.

Second, there is also a group of owners for whom we could not identify a specific occupation beyond being an owner, and, for most cases, being a manager of the estate. Armand d’Armailhacq is one of these “owners” listed in Table 2, which are known locally and in the wine sector as *la propri et e* (*Le Producteur*, 1838). This occupational group includes both aristocratic landowners and non-aristocratic owners. We listed 32 of these “owners” in 1850, which will decline by a quarter by

1929. Yet, 28 of these 32 owners in 1850 had aristocratic surnames (88%), while only 6 had such a family name in 1929 (25%). The non-aristocratic “owners” include many figures that became well known in Bordeaux, such as Théodore Skawinski, Léonce Récapet, or Armand Feuillerat. These local figures almost exclusively bought estates listed in 1855 in the early 20th century. Some of these new owners already owned some estates in Bordeaux. Others had ties with estate suppliers like Skawinski, who was *régisseur* at Léoville-Las-Cases, a second growth, while his brother ran a business providing sulfur and other chemical vine treatments. Still others, like Récapet, had commercial ties with the wine world as a liquorist.

In sum, in 1850, the hamlet of Poulayet and its surroundings were a typical aristocratic neighborhood among many in Bordeaux. By 1929, all the neighbors of the descendants of Armand d’Armailhacq’s in-laws had departed and new owners arrived: the Lafite vineyard on the west was now owned by one branch of the Rothschild family, on the north, stood Mouton-Rothschild (another branch), and in the south Pontet-Canet was now the property of the powerful Cruse merchant family. New capitalist elites took over Poulayet, and a similar transformation prevailed throughout the Médoc. Even though d’Armailhacq and his aristocratic in-laws preserved their estate until 1933, most aristocratic families did not. The social composition of 1855 owners changed drastically over these 80 years. The owners with new occupations were no longer tied to the Old Regime social structures, and place and land were far removed from their identities and inheritance. Their wealth, earned through trade and industry, helped unlock the doors of these châteaux. Money and prestige replaced land and locale.

To a large extent, this transition from an aristocratic-dominated community to a capitalist-dominated group looks like a class struggle. This struggle has deep roots in the Bordeaux wine trade. Given their position in the supply chain, estate owners and merchants (*la propriété et le négoce*) compete over prices and wine allocation, which led to stark oppositions over time between the two groups. For instance, the journal *Le Producteur*, run by Lecoultrre de Beauvais, an aristocrat, between 1838 and 1841, was created to foster awareness and collective action to defend the owners’ interests against the merchants. Another example comes from the early 1900s with the rise of the cooperative movement and peasant revolts, in the wake of murderous events in Champagne and Languedoc regions, to provide either an alternative or a counterweight to the merchants. In addition, back then even the leading estates rarely bottled their wines. Merchants oversaw these operations; many used a merchant label instead of an estate one. In the process, wines were often adulterated with other wines. As a result, estate bottling of 1855 wines turned into a bitter fight between owners and merchants that was only resolved in the 1920s (Croidieu et al., 2018).

Yet, despite the aristocratic resistance and closure, the new capitalist elite gained dominance, introducing many changes. With their wealth, they invested massively in their estates, renewing and extending the vineyards and the buildings. The Rothschild family for instance built a brand-new château on their Mouton property in 1880. They changed the estate names and they also harnessed ongoing technical progress in winemaking like the barrel, while improving viticultural techniques to fight disease and grow production.

In summary, the material¹⁷ transformation of ownership between 1850 and 1929 led to an almost complete replacement of the original families by new classes of owners. Aristocrats declined from the dominant group to a marginal one. Wealthy, but lower status, owners moved in, buying the aristocrats out. The newcomers included both old and new merchant families, elite French capitalists from Paris, rising local bourgeois politicians and lawyers, and other non-aristocratic owners. Looking at these transformations through a material lens is fundamental to document the path through which 1855 evolved, as it sheds light on how the struggles among groups with different degrees of power shaped the renewal of the Bordeaux wine elite.

A Symbolic Transformation: The Transposition of Aristocratic Codes into the Wine World

A material perspective, however, falls short in explaining how aristocrats retained their prestige as they exited as owners, and why the 1855 classification rose so markedly in prestige as lower status owners became associated with it. This demise of aristocratic owners was curiously combined with a cultural celebration of aristocracy, as the new entrants both adopted and created lavish symbols and lifestyles. By 1929, all but one 1855 of the estates was named with the “château” (castle) prefix, a direct reference to the traditional housing of old regime nobles. The previous geographic convention for naming estates after place gave way to ostensible grandeur as names were changed and labels greatly embellished (Croidieu et al., 2018). In addition, between 1850 and 1929, new owners built nine new château-like buildings, with grandiose towers, parks, and elaborate dining halls. Meanwhile, countless château-like enhancements were fitted to existing buildings (Lorbac, 1868). While aristocratic owners declined, the status of their estates remained, as the 1855 growths were renewed by owners who appropriated aristocratic codes. The new arrivals’ growing stature in the life of Bordeaux led them to be nicknamed the cork aristocrats.

Even though merchants grew in dominance rather late in the process, they did not create a mercantile world. They absorbed the aristocratic lifestyle, and once in, they protected it. Like so many new victors, they could have flipped it, and yet they acted as custodians. A class analysis of ownership does not account for this transposition of values. Also, the aristocratic wine tradition resulted from uncoordinated actions of different kinds of owners. This cultural invention is not the sole product of a dominant class, be it aristocrats, bankers, or merchants. We argue an alternative symbolic lens, grounded in status dynamics (Weber, 1978), is needed to understand the meanings that guided these actions. Reading this archival material as a class-based power struggle illuminates as much as it obscures deeper motivations and forces at play in the rise of the cork aristocracy.

Since 1855 was initially an aristocratic club, we suggest that the increasing involvement of merchants and financiers is motivated by their desire to mingle with aristocrats. When these new owners bought 1855 estates, they did not want to kick aristocrats out, they wanted to stand next to them and elevate their own social status. Merchants are wealthy and powerful individuals, living locally, with

longstanding reputations in Bordeaux. Across wine regions and historical periods, merchants have shown little interest in producing wines; their trade is to sell wine. Owning an 1855 estate became then a means to look like peers with the revered aristocrats, very much like participating in horse racing allowed merchants to sit in the same grandstand as aristocrats. By joining 1855, merchants became neighbors and members of the same club; the politics of association is what mattered to them then.

Status is a cultural schema for organizing social relations. High-status actors receive deference and honor from lower status ones. As merchants aspired to climb the social ladder and close the status gap with aristocrats, they not only bought into the 1855 aristocratic club but also mimicked and emulated the lifestyle, often in lavish ways. The purpose of this cultural appropriation was not to buy out aristocrats and steal their clothes but rather to join their club and blend in. Whether unintendedly or not, this mimicry helped preserve aristocratic social standing. To claim social esteem (Weber, 1978, p. 305), merchants ennobled the buildings located on their 1855 properties. First, they fitted grand, noble, or *château*-like enhancements to existing buildings, the *château* embodying the aristocratic house. For instance, Nathaniel Johnston (IV), a prominent Bordeaux wine merchant, who became an MP, and who owned a stud-farm and pioneered horse racing in Gironde (Faith, 2005, p. 115), actively imitated aristocratic housing codes. The Johnston family owned the Dacruz estate before it became classified in 1855 as a fifth growth. Nathaniel Johnston acquired the second growth Ducru-Beaucaillou in 1866 through his first wife, Lucie Dassier. While Dacruz had an elegant *chartreuse*¹⁸ building on its property (built prior to 1850), Ducru-Beaucaillou's building was a neglected *château*, close to dereliction. Instead of investing in his family-owned Dacruz's estate and enhancing Dacruz's building, Johnston spent a small fortune to renovate the newly acquired Ducru-Beaucaillou and turn it into a grandiose *château* (Féret, 1898, p. 197, see Fig. 2).



Fig. 2. The Enhancement of *Château* Ducru-Beaucaillou, Saint-Julien, Médoc.

As we coded the images of 1855 buildings, we found that merchants, at a minimum, made 31 major costly enhancements to their estate buildings, between 3 and 7 enhancements during each panel. In contrast, financiers and industrialists made only eight such enhancements. Not surprisingly, those lesser in status, and with less money, played the symbolic card more strongly. Second, merchants also built noble, grand, or *château*-like buildings like Alphonse Delor for Durfort-Vivens (a second growth), or Armand Lalande at Brown-Cantenac, a third growth. Our coding revealed five new grand buildings between 1868 and 1929. Merchants went a long way to emulate aristocrats.

Of course, merchants' claims of social esteem went beyond their 1855 estates, as Johnston, Eschenauer, and Guestier competed in various sports and shared memberships in different clubs and salons (Faith, 2005, p. 114), akin to conspicuous consumption (Veblen, 1899). After the premature death of his first wife, Nathaniel Johnston married Marie Caradja, princess of Constantinople. An unintended effect of these status-claiming behaviors is that merchants participated in the construction of a symbolic order, where 1855 became ennobled in an Old-Regime aristocratic fashion. From then on, *châteaux* and *château*-like buildings mushroomed in Médoc.

As merchants acquired higher status, aristocrats competed with them and, even though outnumbered, matched their efforts to upgrade estates. As part of this competition, aristocrats made 37 grand or *château*-like enhancements to their preexisting 1855 estates. These efforts were concentrated in the 1850–1898 period and subsequently declined. They also built five new *châteaux* during that period. This aristocratic “reclaiming” fueled a status competition, which declined in the 20th century as merchants ascended to dominance.

This status competition was heightened because the 1855 list has a fixed, limited number of seats, without mobility within the classification. A place in the 1855 classification was a positional good, creating a zero-sum social order. This feature is consequential in many ways, notably with closure strategies attempted by aristocrats. First, aristocrats rarely co-own 1855 growths with non-aristocrats. If prior research showed business partnership mattered in transitioning from one regime to the other (Padgett & Powell, 2012), it was hardly the case in Bordeaux. Out of the 68 cases of multiple owners, 53 (78%) were exclusively between aristocrats or non-aristocrats. The 15 remaining cases of co-ownership across this divide are split among seven estates, which mean these associations are both limited and temporary. Second, sales of estates across the status divide were rare. Out of the 111 family changes, only 8 transactions went from aristocrats to merchants (7%), the two dominant social groups (Margaux, Durfort, Lascombes, Comtesse, Giscours, St-Pierre, Cantemerle, and Alesme), and a mere 5 transactions flowed from merchants to aristocrats (Camensac, Lynch Bages, Pédesclaux, Haut-Bages Liberal and Alesme).

Third, the two groups seldom overlap. Very few aristocrats were merchants, the de Bethmann and de Sarget families being two notable exceptions. Also, merchants could be ennobled, such as Pierre-François Guestier, yet they were rare cases. Only four transactions occurred between these “hybrid” owners and either aristocrats or merchants. Although five estates remain aristocratic throughout the

period (Lafite, Latour, Pichon Baron, d'Armailhacq, and Grand-Puy Ducasse) and only one remained merchant owned (Langoa-Barton), the transition from aristocracy to merchant occurred largely through financiers, industrialists, and new owners. These new owners were the middlemen between these two groups, as aristocrats preferred selling their family estate to nonlocal strangers rather than handing over to familiar local merchants. In sum, aristocrats were cautious not to be associated directly with merchants and carefully maintained their distance, aiming at drawing and tightening a boundary between these two groups and excluding merchants.

Though stringent, these aristocratic closure practices did not prevent the new owners from buying in and joining 1855 and its aristocratic assembly. The new owners, however, had to go a long way to overcome these growing barriers, and they achieved their goals through different means. We briefly list examples of these usurpatory strategies new owners employed to enter the well-guarded 1855 club. First, money was a necessary ingredient. The inflation in the 1850–1890 estate and wine prices reflect the rising costs of joining the aristocratic club (Roudié, 1988). Second, as Nathaniel Johnston's case showed, marriage was central to ascent into these circles, as it gave access to a broader network of opportunities. Third, relationships between merchants and aristocratic owners were multiplex. For instance, if the aristocrats reluctantly sold their estates to merchants, they, however, gladly sold them their wine. And merchants negotiated fiercely to ensure the supply of the best wines. The *abonnement* practice, where the price of a leading estate, like Lafite, is kept constant over a decade or so in exchange for an exclusive predefined volume and price for wine, is an example of these complex ties, where economic transactions become relations. In these occasions, merchants were able to turn tables as gatekeepers of market access and hence could apply pressure on owners. Differently, some merchants also took managerial, *régisseur*, positions in leading estates to help new owners, which gave them valuable information about these estates and their neighbors. Fourth, there is also evidence of scams and lawsuits, as some new owners crossed legal lines to acquire estates. Fifth, merchants were not only competing for the best wines, but some also organized themselves collectively to improve their position. We have found evidence in our data, the literature, and our interviews with a late broker, of a Protestant merchant cluster of marriages within this group (e.g., Faith, 2005; Pacteau de Luze, 1999). For example, Herman Cruse, the owner of Pontet-Canet, married his two sons to Sophie Lawton (a broker's daughter) and Suzanne Baour (a merchant's daughter). Finally, playing with names and joining the political network were also certainly parts of the strategies new owners deployed to reach their goal of ownership and respond to the tighter closure imposed by aristocrats.

Our review of these closure strategies reveals that merchants did not simply buy out aristocrats and replace them. Aristocrats instead lost their prominence through complex organizational and status dynamics, as they embellished their homes, fought the entry of merchants, and partnered with new types of owners to forestall their eventual exit. An unintended consequence is the formation of a new symbolic order, which associated wine with aristocracy. Unlike other cases of symbolic transposition where resources were converted into new political

power or the creation of new industries (Clemens, 1997; Padgett & Powell, 2012), the transposition of aristocratic trappings into the wine world initially served no practical purpose other than making status claims under the disguise of mimicry. This emulation created a symbolic order that, as it spread, acquired a high-status patina as the status competition raged. Put differently, the declining aristocrats had little leverage to resist the economic changes, but they accepted them in a manner that normalized the shift in power. The transformation preserved the positive identity of 1855 estates. We have shown elsewhere how owning 1855 estates became prized (Croidieu et al., 2018). For example, in subsequent wine competitions at international fairs, the 1855 designation did not initially translate into prizes. Non-classified wines that were exhibited in 1855 and 1862 performed equally well. But by the 1890s, every wine from the 1855 classification received awards. In this sense, status became translated into economic clout.

This competition eventually solidified the elevation of 1855 at the pinnacle of Bordeaux, creating a status hierarchy both within and outside of Bordeaux that wine growers worldwide aspired to climb. If we borrow from Balzac, in 1929, “there is no nobility anymore” in the 1855 classification, “there is only an aristocracy left,” and it was a cork aristocracy.

DISCUSSION

The 1855 classification is a fascinating case of persistence, in which an idiosyncratic ranking remained unchanged for more than 160 years and grew in importance 40–50 years after its creation and came to assume worldwide veneration. This list came to define an elite in the wine world, which, beneath this apparent stability, transitioned from a landed aristocracy to a cork aristocracy between 1850 and 1929. By examining the dramatic yet obscured ownership changes that occurred, this case of elite formation offers an opportunity to ask how power struggles led to the rise of a new collective stamped with a new identity. Our analysis of this tumultuous period, with three bouts of pestilence, two wars, and a major economic depression, reveals a remarkable transformation, where an old regime of aristocratic families, rooted in place and land, declined and came to be supplanted by merchants, with new families erecting grandiose buildings. These newcomers built the past in the present, adding invented layers to the region’s history.

We first presented occupation and ownership data that capture an economic struggle between these two contenders, umpired by new capitalist elites who rose with the industrial revolution, and were freshly arrived in Bordeaux. Although this class perspective illuminates and reinforces the profound material transformation that historians of Bordeaux have documented (Pijassou, 1980; Roudié, 1988), we also uncovered a notable symbolic shift as we considered 1855 as a status community and analyzed organizational dynamics within 1855 estates. Instead of purging Bordeaux of its aristocratic past, the new entrants surprisingly adopted and celebrated the trappings of nobility. These new owners created a new version of Bordeaux, with transposition, cultural appropriation, and invention

of symbols and buildings. In terms of social closure, this new status community became even more tightly policed than was the old. A cork aristocracy was born out of a landed aristocracy.

Consequently, our account of the remarkable transformation that the Bordeaux wine world underwent rests on an analysis of status dynamics. The 1855 classification initially was an aristocratic club and remained so until the turn of the century. Within this club, the individual status of aristocrats spilled over to the newly formed 1855 estates. Merchants and other capitalists were drawn to it as they aspired to belong to this “noble” club. Decades later, as 1855 became a status hierarchy, new owners were drawn to it as a closed, prestigious club. Owning an 1855 estate granted exalted status to individuals. These two distinctive forces help explain both the formation of a new elite and the transposition of the tradition of the old elite into the new elite world, even though this tradition initially excluded them. Our analysis reinforces [Stinchcombe’s \(1968\)](#) point that the rise of a new elite often obscures prior arrangements.

For someone familiar with Bordeaux, the transition from aristocrats to merchants is not surprising. Bordeaux as a wine region has been extensively commented upon since the 18th century, and the bibliography of work is immense (e.g., [Gabler, 2003](#)).¹⁹ Regarding the transformation we describe, it is widely acknowledged that aristocrats invested in Bordeaux vineyards in the 18th century and controlled its production, whereas by the 1930s, the merchants had become the leading figures of the wine trade. The 18th-century Bordeaux merchants were often foreigners and largely lived together in one district by the river, *les Chartrons*, that was originally outside the city walls. Aristocrats and merchants were socially and spatially segregated in a heavily stratified Old Regime city. After the French Revolution, these boundaries persisted, and the two groups hardly overlapped; nevertheless, aristocrats’ revenues declined as the new century unfolded. The dominant interpretation in the Bordeaux literature is that merchants took over, or even seized power, thanks to growing trade revenues, that allowed them to buy out and replace aristocratic landowners as proprietors of leading estates (e.g., [Brook & Latham, 2001](#); [Butel, 2008](#); [Coates, 2004](#); [Faith, 2005](#); [Penning-Rowell, 1967](#); [Réjalot, 2007](#); [Ulin, 1996](#); [Unwin, 1991](#)).

Although this extant account captures the main storyline, we revisit it for several reasons. First, the accepted account is not systematic. Only a few authors acknowledge the role of bankers, industrialists, or even politicians in this transition. Second, these analyses insufficiently connect changes in ownership to changes within the properties. The existing literature assumes a continuity of 1855 estates, in terms of their names, labels, location, and buildings. Apart from the description of the diffusion of the *château* label by Philippe [Roudié \(1988, 2000\)](#), we are not aware of any systematic study that examines the transposition of aristocratic codes into the wine world. In contrast, we observe the creation of an invented tradition ([Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983](#)) that massively transforms these properties, what they looked like, what they meant, and what they offered. We think these organizational transformations are key to understanding ownership change. In our view, the strength of historical ethnography is to analyze changes at multiple levels ([Vaughan, 2021](#)) and how new owners’ biographies

relate to the rise of a new collective identity. Specifically, the transposition and borrowing of an aristocratic lifestyle by the bourgeois merchants lead us to go beyond the material struggle that prior work highlights and attend to complementary status dynamics. Third, we think the temporality of these co-occurring processes is essential to interpret this change, even though it has received little attention. The 1855 classification evolved sharply, and the reasons to join 1855 differed over time and across actors. Although we learned from and build upon the abundant literature on Bordeaux, our work is a sociological exposé, where “the sociologist [...] looks beneath the obvious surface that preoccupies the other social sciences” (Perrow, 1986, p. 177).

As the 1855 list came to embody first an aristocratic club forged by ascription, and later a cork aristocracy, our case is akin to the Ivy league, which persisted, seemingly unchanged on the surface, first a sports club about class, then as an academic club about educational achievement, both equally marked by excellence and social reproduction albeit through different mechanisms (e.g., Cappello, 2012; Goldstein, 1996). Similarly, the 1855 list persisted during that period under different disguises, not through elite reproduction and value maintenance, but through elite renewal and cultural invention, which usually predict institutional change (Stinchcombe, 1998; Tilly, 1998).

To account for this unusual path to persistence, one needs to look more closely at closure. We showed how the 1855 list triggered early on closure as the aristocrats that composed the list kept new owners at bay; when the classification became consequential, closure dynamics changed (e.g., Bowker & Star, 2000). Categories have received considerable attention in organizational research, emphasizing how audiences patrol boundaries and discipline behaviors (e.g., Grodal, 2018; Lamont & Molnar, 2002; Rao et al., 2003; Zuckerman, 1999). Closure processes, however, largely remain in the background of these conversations, whereas they play a complementary disciplinary role, central to the formation of the cork aristocracy category. Interestingly, our case reveals how symbolic boundaries proved to be incredibly porous as the status competition led to the transposition of the aristocratic tradition, while this process resulted in a new collective, the cork aristocracy, with tighter social boundaries.

As 1855 shifted from an aristocratic club to a cork aristocracy, the classification gained force through social closure that first prevented the merchants from buying in and gaining power over aristocrats but instead attracted them to the old regime. Because of closure, merchants aspired to join aristocrats, not kick them out. These same dynamics of closure meant aristocrats were loath to sell to Bordeaux merchants, even when their backs were against the wall. They instead favored strangers, Parisian financiers, or French industrialists, and let them in their family homes to own the places that bore their names. We do not know whether these strangers were perceived as more “honorable” than merchants, or if aristocrats were reluctant to sell to merchants, but sales to rich outsiders were regarded as less of a status degradation. Once these new owners were admitted into these social circles, closure triggered transposition and imitation. The merchants did not bulldoze the aristocratic heritage, unlike so many winners in history, they gladly elevated, and expanded it.

If these first new owners bought their way in an aristocratic club, they most likely did not know it would become something larger than a club, a status community, that would take on a life of its own. In terms of status dynamics, the entry of lower status members into a high-status club should have diluted the prestige of 1855. Yet, 1855 rose in status, attracting more new members, who then kept imitating and expanding ongoing practices. The rise of the 1855 listing in status was certainly unexpected. In that sense, buying an 1855 estate in the 1870s, instead of its non-1855 neighbor, was akin to a lottery. Even though phylloxera and other plagues brought enormous uncertainty, owners most likely had a sense of which were the good estates. Yet, which estate would become enshrined was most likely undecipherable until later. Our data on all the classifications of the best (Médoc) wines (not presented here) clearly show membership and ranks kept changing until the late 1800s, while exhibition data show 1855 estates only became consecrated at a similar time. By the turn of the century, 1855 was taken for granted and widely understood as Bordeaux' pinnacle. External audiences certainly had a hand in shaping the cork aristocracy, yet status closure completed this process by ordering the category early and, later, amplifying the audience's consecration.

Closure is not the only classical sociology concept we combine with our organizational analysis. Status and class trace back to the founders of sociology as a discipline, notably Karl Marx and Max Weber. Both continue to be crucial touchstones in contemporary sociology but have often been elided in more recent organizational research. To be sure, status has been treated as a signal or marker that organizes markets in economic sociology (Podolny, 2005), but organizations themselves are seldom seen as the embodiment of status, and aside from work on elites, social class rarely falls within the scope of organizational analysis (Khan, 2011).

Our findings on the status feedback loop, from aristocrats to estates and then from estates to cork aristocrats, notably informs a growing line of work on how inequalities and organization intersect (Amis et al., 2018, 2020; Powell & Brandtner, 2016). We suggest the study of inequalities and organizations could be advanced by building on earlier work on social structures and organizations (Stinchcombe, 1965) and unpacking how they are enmeshed. The unanticipated complex status and organizational dynamics that our historical ethnography uncovered link individual mobility with societal change through changing organizations, which durably shaped the Bordeaux economy. Our case shows organizations not only sheltered or triggered social actions but also altered them as they carried complex social processes. Sewell (1996) argued that events are consequential when they transform social structures. The power struggle at the top of Bordeaux wine cascaded into the redrawing of class and status, which marginalized the pre-revolutionary agrarian political economy and resulted in the formation of a cork aristocracy headed by ennobled merchants. The 62 wine estates were pivotal in this process.

We could speculate that had the merchants not prevailed, Bordeaux would have certainly looked much more like Burgundy, a vast wine territory fragmented into tiny estates that melt away over time, like a *peau de chagrin*, as families

pursue their desires to maintain control over their estates yet cannot afford to do so. Merchants were key in building Bordeaux as we know it today, by opening international markets and preserving most of the value created locally. Our historical ethnography suggests they assumed a pivotal role in funding the elite estates, preserving and ennobling large-scale properties, inventing a tradition, and elevating and maintaining 1855. As the classification rose, merchants become the new power holders in Bordeaux (Croidieu et al., 2018). Bordeaux became a merchant world, rather than a winemaker world. Today, you know a Bordeaux wine by the name of the estate, whereas in many other wine regions, the winemaker is more central.

But unlike some historical accounts (Faith, 2005), 1855 is not a merchant coup. Vested interests to champion 1855 were limited; indeed, the 1855 union emerged only in 1905, and we have shown how different merchant dynasties competed over the 80 years we studied. Only the Bartons survived this churning, and merchant coordination occurred much later (Croidieu et al., 2018). That said, Marxian scholars could argue that our status account is in fact a beautiful illustration of a mystification process, where a dominant elite manipulates the past to disguise their interests and legitimize their ascendancy. Merchants bought their way in by inventing a wine tradition, culturally appealing to the then powerful aristocrats, creating an aspiration for others. The 1855 classification is clearly an invented tradition, as defined by Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983). Yet, this appealing mystification account falls short in accounting for the politics of association that fueled the remarkable transformation we described. If merchants were 1855 champions and custodians, the invented tradition also starts before the merchants assume power, in a distributed manner. This mystification account also fails to explain how the complex status dynamics we depicted were tightly intertwined with multigenerational organizational changes within the estates.

Classical sociologists could also object that what we describe as a failed merchant coup, in the sense merchant dynasties keep changing, is oblivious to “invisible” reproductive mechanisms we fail to report. To a large extent, the merchant class does not survive on 1855 ownership. Merchants maintained power through trade alliances between merchant families, the transmission of trade businesses within merchant families, and the formation of endogamous marriages across merchant families, knowing the same families met on Sundays at the horse track after attending the mass at the temple together – dynamics for which we have only tangential evidence (e.g., Butel, 2008; Faith, 2005). From a Bourdieusian perspective (1984, 1986), merchants achieve social distinction by converting economic capital, accumulated in commerce, into symbolic (e.g., cork aristocrats), social (e.g., marrying a princess), and even political capital (e.g., becoming a MP). In that sense, 1855’s persistence would be a *nouveau riche* story, with a rising elite buying its way in, thanks to favorable conditions, and smartly converting its new money in different capitals as it sought to transmit its power. From this lens, owning an 1855 estate could even be understood as a fluid economic capital. Which family owns them is irrelevant as long as the merchant class maintains its grip.

This powerful account falls short, however, in accounting for the whole transformation. Some merchant dynasties certainly grew throughout the period, yet

these dynasties were largely renewed, and the dense merchant familial network we noted is rather a product than an antecedent of this transition. Similarly, the 1855 ranking looks at its beginning like a translation of the social order, with the aristocrats owning the top estates, then the financiers, and then the merchants, yet this ordering is reshuffled dramatically while the tradition emerges later. The aristocratic wine tradition is a symbolic transposition, not a social translation. Also, the merchant habitus would predict they overturned the aristocratic codes, whereas they emulated them. Merchants acted as owners when building and ennobling expansive homes. Likewise, financiers and other new owners largely broker this transition between aristocrats and merchants, yet fail to imprint their codes: many such as the Rothschilds settled and blend in. The rise of the cork aristocracy results from complex status and organizational dynamics that social reproduction can only partially account for.

There is a thriving current literature in organization studies that chronicles how firms in a number of sectors (wine and spirits, fine art, mechanical watches, etc.) have creatively reinterpreted their history or even re-imagined their past to create a new contemporary brand (Delmestri & Greenwood, 2016; Khaire & Wadhvani, 2010; Kroezen & Heugens, 2019; Raffaelli, 2019). We also see new brands in the food products field attempt to tie themselves to an older, purer agrarian tradition (Weber et al., 2008). Even in the wine trade, contemporary enthusiasm for natural wines is an illustration of this category purity process by tying one's products to the past. In our view, these are excellent cases of brand categorization processes, where status is invoked strategically. The persistence of the 1855 classification is not such a market niche strategy but rather a social and economic upheaval, in which wine estates became the vehicles for changing the class structure of Bordeaux. Elite control of Bordeaux wine was the product of this struggle.

We have argued, following Sewell (1996), that events resonate in history when they create ruptures in (elite) social structures, be they class or status. The persistence of 1855 is the consequence of the transformation of status orders in Bordeaux. Our account more quietly highlights the pivotal role organizations played in this process. As 1855 emerged, capitalism arrived in Bordeaux, and this societal transformation influenced the Bordeaux community, which, as a place, gained a new identity. As the Western world became capitalist and market economies rose, Bordeaux, the port dominated by aristocrats, adapted, and found its place in this new world by becoming the world's leading wine region; at its head were merchants navigating new markets. This story is not only about the individuals and the winds of class and status change. Our historical case reveals that organizations, the wine estates, carried much of the status dynamics so central in our story. The chateaux, the wine, and their trappings became the cultural materials that merchants, financiers, and politicians used to claim their control. Organizations scholars have long argued that society is shaped by its organizations (Perrow, 2002). We extend this perspective by showing that organizations are also the carriers of status and class dynamics, a major cog in the wheel of societal change.

NOTES

1. Cork aristocracy is an expression *François Mauriac*, a laureate of the Nobel Prize in literature from Bordeaux, coined in a 1924 novel, whose main characters navigate the boundaries of the Bordeaux merchant world. The expression spread widely afterward.

2. We interchangeably use 1855 classification, list, ranking, or status hierarchy to refer to the focal institution of our study.

3. The word *château* is a physical building but also came to signify a wine estate in Bordeaux as the label diffused widely (Croidieu et al., 2018; Roudié, 1988). Also, many 1855 estates, but not all, have a chateau-like physical building on their property, which adds to the confusion. We use *château* with both meanings in this manuscript and insert markers to signal whether we refer to the building or the estate.

4. We define institutional persistence as the temporal continuity of an institution, where prior characteristics of any social system affect its long-term state. If the 1855 list is the institution we focus on, the wine estates classified in this list are the organizations owners struggle over.

5. The sole exception was the promotion of Mouton-Rothschild from the second to the first tier in 1973, more than a century later.

6. Regularity in panel spacing facilitates comparisons over time, especially as we study individuals and generations of owners, whose life events affect the estates. See Blossfeld et al. (2019) and Wooldridge (2002) for a discussion of panel data structures, spacing, and the underlying random sampling assumption.

7. Wineries in Bordeaux were historically called *crûs*, translated as growths, which has remained, despite the growing use of the *château* label (Roudié, 1988, 2000). We use estates, growths, or organizations interchangeably to refer to these wineries.

8. Sylvain Torchet is a French postman, whose passion and dedication to cataloging wine knowledge gained him recognition in the wine community, very much like amateur historians, scientists, or artists (e.g., Croidieu & Kim, 2018).

9. The French “de” is distinctive from the Spanish “de,” which denotes to whom one got married.

10. See, for instance, Ventresca and Mohr (2002) for a discussion of different kinds of archivalism.

11. The owners in our sample were mainly male (81%), yet wives, widows, sisters, daughters, or mothers, all hidden under owner change but no family change, often played an important role in the transformations we tracked. For instance, the powerful merchant Johnston was able to buy Ducru-Beaucaillou thanks to his wife’s family network. Armand d’Armailhaq’s mother recapitalized the family estate of her husband when it went bankrupt, while we will discuss later the pivotal role his sister played in preserving the estate.

12. Fig. 1 plots the joint frequency of family and ownership change. As with turnover in owners, family changes are close to normally distributed. On average, an 1855 estate shifted hands almost twice during that period (average = 1.79), and a few changed as many as four times (Malescot, Kirwan, and Cos d’Estournel).

13. The rail spread throughout France in multiple steps (Dobbin, 1994): the first train circulated in 1827, while the full Bordeaux-Paris line was completed in 1853.

14. Brane-Mouton became Mouton-Rothschild when acquired in 1853.

15. The orthograph of d’Armailhaq varies greatly over time.

16. Until today, the sale of 1855 first growths is a very rare event. A tentative explanation would be that these world famous organizations, some much larger than other classified estates, are less sensitive to market changes as they remain exclusive with higher prices and hence benefit from a greater economic stability. Haut-Brion is also excluded from our sample.

17. By material, we refer to class-based economic power as a source of change, as in Weber (1978), such as newly moneyed elite buying estates from old families. Although buildings, place, and physicality matter in our case (see also our multimodal analysis in Croidieu et al. (2018)), we do not mean material as materiality and, instead, show that the material buildings are indicators of a lifestyle and status dynamics.

18. A chartreuse is a typical one-storey building you find in the Bordeaux countryside.

19. Our bibliography lists more than 200 books by academics, critics, trade professionals, enthusiasts, etc. In addition, there is a large academic literature (e.g., Fourcade, 2012; Malter, 2014; Ody-Brasier & Vermeulen, 2014) and (wine) press publications.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors thank Oliver Alexy, Miriam Bird, Christof Brandtner, Bruce Carruthers, Stewart Clegg, Guillaume Dumont, Michael Grothe-Hammer, Joachim Henkel, Brayden King, John Padgett, Madeleine Rauch, Kathia Serrano-Velarde, Diane Vaughan, and an anonymous reviewer, as well as the participants in the 2022 EGOS subtheme on Doing Sociology in Organization Studies in Vienna and in a Technical University of Munich seminar for their insights and supportive comments. Usual caveats apply.

REFERENCES

- Amis, J. M., Mair, J., & Munir, K. A. (2020). The organizational reproduction of inequality. *Academy of Management Annals*, 14(1), 195–230.
- Amis, J. M., Munir, K. A., Lawrence, T. B., Hirsch, P., & McGahan, A. (2018). Inequality, institutions and organizations. *Organization Studies*, 39(9), 1131–1152.
- d'Armailhacq, A. (1855). *De la culture des vignes de la vinification et les vins dans le Médoc avec un état des vignobles d'après leur réputation*. P. Chaumas.
- d'Armailhacq, A. (1867). *De la culture des vignes de la vinification et les vins dans le Médoc avec un état des vignobles d'après leur réputation* (Deuxième édition). P. Chaumas.
- Arnold, N., & Foureault, F. (2024). Status in socio-environmental fields: Relationships, evaluations, and otherhood. In S. Clegg, M. Grothe-Hammer, & K. Serrano Velarde (Eds.), *Sociological thinking in contemporary organizational scholarship* (Research in the Sociology of Organizations, Vol. 90, pp. 109–140). Emerald Publishing.
- Barley, S. R. (2010). Building an institutional field to corral a government. *Organization Studies*, 31(6), 777–805.
- Beaumaine, F. (1953). Exposé historique et juridique de la particule DE comme preuve de noblesse. *Revue Internationale D'onomastique*, 5(1), 31–44.
- Blossfeld, H. P., Rohwer, G., & Schneider, T. (2019). *Event history analysis with stata*. Routledge.
- Bordeaux, R. (1861). Review of Code de la noblesse française, ou Précis de la législation sur les titres, épithètes, noms, particules nobiliaires et honorifiques, les armoiries, etc. *Deuxième édition. Revue Historique de Droit Français et Étranger (1855–1869)*, 7, 193–202.
- Bourdieu, P. (1977). Distinction: A social critique of the judgement of taste.
- Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital. In J. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education* (pp. 46–58). Greenwood.
- Bowker, G. C., & Star, S. L. (2000). *Sorting things out: Classification and its consequences*. MIT Press.
- Boyé, M. (Ed.). (2001). *Le patrimoine des communes de la Gironde*. Flohic.
- Brook, S., & Latham, G. (2001). *Bordeaux: People, power, and politics*. M. Beazley.
- Butel, P. (2008). *Les dynasties bordelaises: Splendeur, déclin et renouveau* (Éd. réactualisée). Perrin.
- Cappello, D. (2012). *The Ivy league*. Assouline Publishing.
- Clemens, E. S. (1997). *The people's lobby: Organizational innovation and the rise of interest group politics in the United States, 1890–1925*. University of Chicago Press.
- Coates, C. (2004). *The wines of Bordeaux: 1952–2003*. University of California Press.
- Comaroff, J. L., & Comaroff, J. (1992). *Ethnography and the historical imagination*. Westview Press.
- Coulmont, B. (2019). Dupont n'est pas du Pont: Sociographie de la noblesse d'apparence. *Histoire & Mesure*, XXXIV(2), 153–192.

- Croidieu, G., & Kim, P. H. (2018). Labor of love: Amateurs and lay-expertise legitimation in the early U.S. radio field. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 63(1), 1–42.
- Croidieu, G., Soppe, B., & Powell, W. W. (2018). CRU, GLUE, and status: How wine labels helped ennoble Bordeaux. In M. A. Höllerer, T. Daudigeos, & D. Jancsary (Eds.), *Multimodality, meaning, and institutions* (Vol. 54B, pp. 37–69). Emerald Publishing Limited.
- Danflou, A. (1867). *Les grands crus bordelais: monographies et photographies des châteaux et vignobles*. Librairie Goudin.
- Daumard, A. (1988). Noblesse et aristocratie en France au XIXe siècle. *Publications de l'École Française de Rome*, 107(1), 81–104.
- Delmestri, G., & Greenwood, R. (2016). How Cinderella became a queen: Theorizing radical status change. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 61(4), 507–550.
- Déthier, J., Melvin, A., & Centre Georges Pompidou. (1989). *Châteaux Bordeaux*. Mitchell Beazley.
- Dobbin, F. (1994). *Forging industrial policy: The United States, Britain, and France in the railway age*. Cambridge University Press.
- Dumont, G. (2022). Immersion in organizational ethnography: Four methodological requirements to immerse oneself in the field. *Organizational Research Methods*, 26(3), 441–458.
- Faith, N. (2005). *The winemasters of Bordeaux*. Carlton Books.
- Féret, E. (1898). *Bordeaux et ses Vins Classés par Ordre de Mérite* (7ème édition). Editions Féret.
- Figeac, M. (1996). *Destins de la noblesse bordelaise, 1770–1830*. Éditions Mimésis.
- Forster, R. (1961). The noble wine producers of the Bordelais in the eighteenth century. *Economic History Review*, 14(1), 18.
- Fourcade, M. (2012). The vile and the noble: On the relation between natural and social classifications in the French wine world. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 53(4), 524–545.
- Gabler, J. M. (2003). *Wine into words: A history and bibliography of wine books in the English language* (2nd ed.). Bacchus Press Limited.
- Galarud, G. de. (1823–1825). *Album bordelais, ou Caprices*. M. de Galarud.
- Goldstein, R. (1996). *Ivy League autumns: an illustrated history of college football's grand old rivalries*. St. Martin's Press.
- Gould, R. V. (2002). The origins of status hierarchies: A formal theory and empirical test. *American Journal of Sociology*, 107(5), 1143–1178.
- Grodal, S. (2018). Field expansion and contraction: How communities shape social and symbolic boundaries. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 63(4), 783–818.
- Grusky, D. B., & Sorensen, J. B. (1998). Can class analysis be salvaged? *American Journal of Sociology*, 103(5), 1187–1234.
- Guillon, J. M. (1866–1869). *Les grands vins de bordeaux*. Société de l' "Annuaire de la Gironde," Delmas, Bordeaux.
- Hobsbawm, E. J. (1975/2010). *Age of capital: 1848–1875*. Orion.
- Hobsbawm, E. J., & Ranger, T. (1983). *The invention of tradition*. Cambridge University Press.
- Khaire, M., & Wadhvani, R. D. (2010). Changing landscapes: The construction of meaning and value in a new market category – Modern Indian art. *Academy of Management Journal*, 53(6), 1281–1304.
- Khan, S. (2011). *Privilege: The making of an adolescent elite at St. Paul's school*. Princeton University Press.
- Khan, S. (2012). The sociology of elites. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 38, 361–377.
- Kroezen, J. J., & Heugens, P. P. M. A. R. (2019). What is dead may never die: Institutional regeneration through logic reemergence in Dutch beer brewing. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 64(4), 976–1019.
- Laitin, D. D. (1986). *Hegemony and culture: Politics and religious change among the Yoruba*. University of Chicago Press.
- Lamont, M., & Molnar, V. (2002). The study of symbolic boundaries. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 28, 167–195.
- Laryea, C., & Brandtner C. (2024). Organizations as drivers of social and systemic integration: Contradiction and reconciliation through loose demographic coupling and community anchoring. In S. Clegg, M. Grothe-Hammer, & K. Serrano Velarde (Eds.), *Sociological thinking in contemporary organizational scholarship* (Research in the Sociology of Organizations, Vol. 90, pp. 175–200). Emerald Publishing.

- Le Producteur*. (1838). Journal des intérêts spéciaux de la propriété vignoble du département de la Gironde (1838–1841). Bordeaux.
- Lévi-Strauss, C. (1963). *Structural anthropology*. Basic Books Inc.
- Lorbac, C. de. (1868). *Les richesses gastronomiques de la France les vins de Bordeaux*. Illustré par C. Lallemant.
- Malter, D. (2014). On the causality and cause of returns to organizational status: Evidence from the Grands Crus Classés of the Médoc. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 59(2), 271–300.
- Mannheim, K. (1952). The problem of generations. In P. Kecskemeti (Ed.), *Essays on the sociology of knowledge. Collected works of Karl Mannheim* (Vol. 5, pp. 276–322). Routledge.
- Markham, D. (1998). *1855: A history of the Bordeaux classification*. Wiley.
- Marx, K. (1867). *Capital: A critique of political economy*. History of Economic Thought Books.
- Mauriac, F. (1924). *Préséances*. Flammarion.
- Mayrl, D., & Wilson, N. H. (2020). What do historical sociologists do all day? Analytic architectures in historical sociology. *American Journal of Sociology*, 125(5), 1345–1394.
- Merry, S. E. (2002). Ethnography in the archives. In J. Starr & M. Goodale (Eds.), *Practicing ethnography in law* (pp. 128–142). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Mills, C. W. (1956). *The power elite*. Oxford University Press.
- Ody-Brasier, A., & Vermeulen, F. (2014). The price you pay: Price-setting as a response to norm violations in the market for champagne grapes. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 59(1), 109–144.
- Pacteau de Luze, S. (1999). *Les Protestants de Bordeaux*. Mollat.
- Padgett, J. F., & Powell, W. W. (2012). *The emergence of organizations and markets*. Princeton University Press.
- Pariset, F.-G., & Higounet, C. (1968). *Bordeaux au XVIIIe siècle*. Féd. Historique du Sud-Ouest.
- Parkin, F. (1979). *Marxism and class theory*. Columbia University Press.
- Penning-Rowsell, E. (1967). *The wines of Bordeaux* (3rd revised ed.). Penguin.
- Perrow, C. (1986). *Complex organizations: A critical essay* (3rd ed.). Scott-Forbcs.
- Perrow, C. (2002). *Organizing America: Wealth, power, and the origins of corporate capitalism*. Princeton University Press.
- Pijassou, R. (1980). *Un grand vignoble de qualité: le Médoc*. Jules Tallandier.
- Podolny, J. M. (2005). *Status signals*. Princeton University Press.
- Powell, W. W. (1990). Neither market nor hierarchy: Network forms of organization. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 12, 295–336.
- Powell, W. W., & Brandtner, C. (2016). Organizations as sites and drivers of social action. In S. Abrutyn (Ed.), *Handbook of contemporary sociological theory* (pp. 269–291). Springer International Publishing.
- Raffaelli, R. (2019). Technology reemergence: Creating new value for old technologies in Swiss mechanical watchmaking, 1970–2008. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 64(3), 576–618.
- Rao, H., Monin, P., & Durand, R. (2003). Institutional change in Toque Ville: Nouvelle cuisine as an identity movement in French gastronomy. *American Journal of Sociology*, 108(4), 795–843.
- Réjalot, M. (2007). *Les logiques du château: filière et modèle viti-vinicole à Bordeaux, 1980–2003*. Presses Universitaires de Bordeaux.
- Ribadieu, H. (1856). *Les châteaux de la Gironde*. Justin Dupuy et Comp.
- Ridgeway, C. L. (2019). *Status: Why is it everywhere? Why does it matter?* Russell Sage Foundation.
- Robinson, J., & Harding, J. (2015). *The Oxford companion to wine*. Oxford University Press.
- Roudié, P. (1988). *Vignobles et Vignerons du Bordelais*. Presses Universitaires de Bordeaux.
- Roudié, P. (2000). Vous avez dit «château»? Essai sur le succès sémantique d'un modèle viticole venu du Bordelais. *Annales de Géographie*, 109(614), 415–425.
- Saint-Amant, S.-A. (1855). *Le vin de bordeaux: promenade en médoc 1855*. Chaumas.
- Sauder, M., Lynn, F., & Podolny, J. M. (2012). Status: Insights from organizational sociology. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 38(1), 267–283.
- Sewell, W. H. (1996). Historical events as transformations of structures: Inventing revolution at the Bastille. *Theory and Society*, 25(6), 841–881.
- Stinchcombe, A. L. (1965). Social structure and organizations. In J. G. March. (Ed.), *Handbook of organizations* (pp. 142–193). Rand McNally.
- Stinchcombe, A. L. (1968). *Constructing social theories*. University of Chicago Press.

- Stinchcombe, A. L. (1998). Monopolistic competition as a mechanism. Corporations, universities, and nation-states in competitive fields. In P. Hedstrom & R. Swedberg (Eds.), *Social mechanisms* (pp. 267–305). Oxford University Press.
- Thelen, K. (2004). *How institutions evolve: The political economy of skills in Germany, Britain, the United States, and Japan*. Cambridge University Press.
- Tilly, C. (1998). *Durable inequality*. University of California Press.
- Tocqueville, A. de. (1856). *L'Ancien Régime et la Révolution*. Michel-Lévy frères.
- Tudesq, A.-J. (1988). L'élargissement de la noblesse en France dans la première moitié du XIXe siècle. *Publications de l'École Française de Rome*, 107(1), 121–135.
- Ulin, R. C. (1996). *Vintages and traditions: an ethnohistory of southwest French wine cooperatives*. Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Unwin, T. (1991). *Wine and the vine: An historical geography of viticulture and the wine trade*. Routledge.
- Vaughan, D. (1996). *The challenger launch decision*. University of Chicago Press.
- Vaughan, D. (2004). Theorizing disaster: Analogy, historical ethnography, and the challenger accident. *Ethnography*, 5(3), 315–347.
- Vaughan, D. (2021). *Dead reckoning: Air traffic control, system effects, and risk*. University of Chicago Press.
- Veblen, T. (1899). *The theory of the leisure class*. MacMillan.
- Ventresca, M. J., & Mohr, J. W. (2002). Archival research methods. In J. A. C. Baum (Ed.), *The Blackwell companion to organizations* (pp. 805–828). Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- Weber, K., Heinze, K. L., & DeSoucey, M. (2008). Forage for thought: Mobilizing codes in the movement for grass-fed meat and dairy products. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 53(3), 529–567.
- Weber, M. (1978). *Economy and society* (G. Roth & K. Wittich, Eds.). University of California Press.
- Wooldridge, J. M. (2002). *Econometric analysis of cross section and panel data*. MIT Press.
- Zipp, D. Y. (2021). Chinatowns lost? The birth and death of urban neighborhoods in an American city. *City & Community*, 20(4), 326–345.
- Zuckerman, E. W. (1999). The categorical imperative: Securities analysts and the illegitimacy discount. *American Journal of Sociology*, 104(5), 1398–1438.