



Burgundy to Champagne: The Wine Trade in Early Modern France (The Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science)

Professor Thomas Brennan

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"The history of wine in France," writes historian Thomas Brennan, "cannot be understood without the wine trade." Perhaps more than any other members of rural society, the wine growers of early modern France depended on markets. Those who controlled these markets, whether through enterprise, wealth, influence, or simple ruthlessness, could gain enormous power. This is the story of the provincial brokers who gained such power, rising in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century from positions as minor functionaries to world famous negotiants who exercised unprecedented control over the wine trade and wine growers.

After an initial examination of France's viticultural society and the process of creating wine, Brennan turns his attention to the wine trade, the process of finding the buyers who would make the vines bear economic fruit. Drawing on remarkably revealing statistics from Champagne, Brennan clearly establishes the crucial role played by brokers in this trade. He also examines the role of the brokers in the early eighteenth century, both nationally and in the provinces of Champagne and Burgundy. And he analyzes the wine growers' response to the brokers' innovations and growing power, interpreting the language of judicial, political, and silent protests to illuminate the emerging views of the market's role in society.

Brennan concludes with a look at the internationalization of the wine trade, as commercial ties grew to knit most of France together in the late eighteenth century, and certain provinces moved to thrust themselves into a wider, European commercial world. The end of the old regime was a time of commercial difficulty for the wine trade but also a time of crucial innovation for the brokers who would lay the groundwork for their triumph in the following century.

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