

Chenin (s)

in Anjou

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For more than twenty years, I have read and thought about chenin, trying to link professional practice and historical understanding. But, winemaker above all, my work on chenin is first of all to make wine! This communication is therefore, by no means exhaustive. I hope that this work opens up avenues; makes winegrowers, researchers want to pursue it through more comprehensive work on the history - and the future - of the chenin variety, especially in Anjou.

In Anjou: chenin, pineau, plant d'Anjou, blanc, doux

Comme nous l'avons vu, Rabelais parle "chenin" dès 1534. "Plant d'Anjou", "pineau de la Loire"... Benoît Musset nous explique les incertitudes d'une identification ancienne de ce cépage... Mais dans son article La consommation des vins d'Anjou, des années 1600 aux années 1820, il nous fournit deux indications : au XVIII^{ème} siècle, les vins d'Anjou étaient blancs à une écrasante majorité, **et "doux", et ce dès 1550-1600.**

Et en 1765, Drapeau cite le chenin comme plant dominant en Anjou. Dans le Nouveau cours complet d'agriculture théorique et pratique en 1809, Bosc indique : "Les vins d'Anjou croissent dans les schistes. Ce sont des vins blancs, que leur caractère sucré et pétillant approche beaucoup de ceux de Côte-Rôtie, de St-Perray et autres voisins. On ne cultive en général dans le département de Maine-et-Loire que le pineau blanc". On peut penser que cette domination apparente du pineau blanc, qui semble bien être du chenin, ne s'est pas établie en un clin d'oeil : **la vigne est dans les temps longs.** L'ancienneté de ces deux caractéristiques : blanc, et "doux", liée aux termes plant d'Anjou, pineau de la Loire, et chenin me semble une piste sérieuse.

As we have seen, Rabelais mentions "chenin" as early as 1534. "Plant of Anjou", "pineau of the Loire" ... Benoît Musset explains the uncertainties of an earlier identification of this grape ... But in his article *The consumption of Anjou wines*, from the 1600s to the 1820s, he provides us with two indications: in the 18th century, the wines of Anjou were white to an overwhelming majority, **and "sweet" from 1550-1600.** And in 1765, Drapeau cites the chenin grape as the dominant plant in Anjou. In the *New Comprehensive Course of Theoretical Agriculture and practice* in 1809, Bosc says: "The wines of Anjou grow upon schist. They are white wines, and their sweetness and bubbiness is close to those of Côte-Rôtie, St-Perray and other neighbors. In general, in the department of Maine-et-Loire, only pineau blanc is grown." One might think that this apparent domination of the *Pineau*, which seems to be chenin, did not simply appear in the blink of an eye: the vine **has a long history.** The antiquity of these two characteristics: white, and "soft" relating to the terms plant d'Anjou, pineau of the Loire, and chenin seems to me a serious line of investigation.

Furthermore, when Thomas Bohier, lord of Chenonceaux, planted multiple grape varieties at the beginning of the 16th century, "nine acres of vineyards, (...) that come at great expense from Orléans, from Arbois (?) from Beaune and from Anjou" (Guillory) ... Only the plant of Anjou had survived a century after.

At the same time, his brother-in-law, the abbot of Cormery, began his own similar experimentation, from his small manor of...Montchenin.

We can follow this trail of chenin more precisely from the second half of the 19th century with Bouchard in 1876 in his essay on the history of the culture of the vine in the Department of Maine-et-Loire: "*The wines of Chenin blanc are characterized by a fruity taste and generous bouquet, which is one of their charms ... The wine of chenin makes, by itself, wines capable of long ageing that remain straight and solid in their old age. Schistose, siliceous-claystone or stony soils ... it was there in the regions of the Layon, the right bank of the Loire and the Saint-Barthélémy group, the most distinguished and the best bouquet wines were harvested.*"

In the 1925 publication by Dr Maisonneuve, *Anjou: its vines and its wines*: "the wine of Anjou is the [sic] white wine made with chenin or pineau de la Loire. An age-old use has established this term, and when one speaks of "Anjou wine", it is very clear what is being referred to. Before the phylloxera outbreak, while the chenin adapted to most terrains, it is in the schistous and silico-clay soils that its wine is of the highest quality. The soil and the Anjou climate are very suitable. Transported to warmer regions, it does not give products of such a perfect quality."

Observation 1976 2014

We now arrive in 1976, and an impertinent journalist, Pierre Marie Doutrelant, felt entitled to write in his book "Good Wines and others", a chapter on Anjou, entitled: "But where are the Anjous of yesteryear! Today we say with a grimace: Anjou, this sweet rosé, which gives one a headache! In times gone by, they exclaimed, "What a great white wine, and so old!"

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The statistics of the last harvest in Anjou-Saumur, 2014, clearly demonstrate: at least 70% of wines from Cabernet, rosés representing 50% of the total production in Angers, and 73% cabernet. The wines from Chenin represent without doubt less than 30%, of which 5% dry, 6% sweet, 19% sparkling - some uncertainty concerning the sparkling wines being not 100% chenin, far from it ... And if we look at the area planted, chenin in Maine-et-Loire covered 9 000 ha (when??), 5 000 in 2011, and around 4 500 in 2014. Cabernet franc, during the same period, went from 880 to 8 700 ha, from 3 to 43%. While all these authors cite chenin wines as wines of quality, identity of Anjou, how can we understand these figures, this evolution? By furthering our investigation with these texts and these elements.

Red and white wine in Anjou

As Benoît Musset points out in the article already cited, there are the widely marketed wines and the wine of the countryside. The "common" wines, made in the region, "constitute the overwhelming majority of production, have generally left very little trace." Bosc certainly indicates that in Maine-et-Loire, "there is always five to six times as much white wine as the ordinary red known in the region." In his book *Red and white wines in the Maine-et-Loire*, An older Guillory delivers an exciting historical research, which on several occasions indicates the presence of black grapes: "Bordeaux plants" in 1060, black grapes during the visit of Francis I at Angers in 1518; yet when he describes the wines it appears to be rather white wine and "clairet." He pointed out in his introduction that "the documents we have rarely give the designation of the the color of grapes and wine, and for want of being able to distinguish them, one is reduced to apply them indistinctly to the vine ... ," pointing out that "this [red vine] crop is fairly new to many of us."

There has therefore probably been a majority of white wines, but not an exclusivity, with the same relative ratio of chenin among the white grape varieties. And with the phrase "clairet" indicating red vines. But on the other hand the wines of the "wider market" seem to have been very early on, before the Dutch traders, sweet white wines, with a strong assumption that chenin was the main grape variety?

The turning point of 1850: "the red is set"

As Audiard would have said ...

Before this turning point, vineyards in the Anjou region had suffered severe crises that had greatly impacted the viticulture.

Crises

des coteaux du Layon et de la rive droite de la Loire." C'est pourquoi la révocation de l'Edit de Nantes par Louis XIV en 1685 porte un coup à l'économie du chenin en Anjou.

Celle-ci repart mais arrive le XVIII^{ème} siècle. Conséquence des

guerres, diminution du commerce avec les étrangers, crises de surproduction, puis terrible gel fin 1788 - début 1789 : "les vignes de la vallée de la Loire sont entièrement arrachées. Celle du Layon résistent mieux". (Le Theule).

The great trade of "fine wines" in the 17th century was largely the work of the Dutch. Joël le Theule, who was then minister, wrote in 1951 a very detailed work on the Layon vineyards: "Also in the time of Colbert, on average each year 10 000 units of white wine are sold at 40 pounds, a high price for the time, coming from the Layon valley and the right bank of the Loire." This is why the revocation of the Edict of Nantes by Louis XIV in 1685 is a blow to the Chenin economy in Anjou. **This one starts again but arrives the XVIIIth century.** Consequences of wars, reduced trade with foreigners, overproduction, then terrible frost at the end of 1788 - early 1789: "the vineyards of the Loire valley are completely ruined. Those in the Layon resist better." (Le Theule). Then came 1793. "The vineyards are devastated and will need decades for their surface area to regain that of 1789."

"One of the consequences of the Vendée war is the sorely felt lack of labor "(Le Theule). Then "the wars of the Empire completely cut off trade in northern Europe." (Le Theule)

It is during this first reconstitution of the Anjou vineyards that an important turning point is reached, particularly in the Layon.

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It is a manifesto for red vines that an older Guillory writes in 1861. For fifteen years he experimented with a multitude of red grape varieties over three hectares at La Roche aux Moines. In this book he describes the sending of thousands of plants of the vine most esteemed in Bordeaux, by Richelieu to his intendant in Touraine, Abbot Breton, between 1631 and 1635. This origin is contested, the presence of "Breton" in Touraine is thought to be earlier, already mentioned by Rabelais.

But this book by Guillory is indeed the symptom of an upheaval in the course of grape varieties in this part of the Loire. Not without reticence. He himself indicates that "the white wines of Anjou have been since ancient times one of the glories of our country." The rapporteur of the Imperial Society of France who writes the introduces to the book says, "But, let us repeat it here, that one is careful not to change anything in the cultivation of the hillsides which give the distinguished wines of the Maine-et-Loire." But he also indicates that "the taste for red wine seems to be spreading more and more." Guillory gives compelling reasons to plant red vines: "the need to grow reds is rising, for so too is the consumption and generalisation of red wine." And a health reason; he cites a Bordeaux winegrower: "white wines bear on the nerves," "the more and more widespread use of red wine (..) is indeed the result of a regime recommended by medical world and the precepts of hygiene." Jules Guyot confirms: "the action of white wines, diffusible stimulants of the nervous system, is short in duration, on the contrary (..) red wines are long-lasting, stimulating tonics for the nerves, muscles, digestive functions, etc ..."

But Guillory writes, "the production of red wines were about a fifth of the harvests of Anjou;" and, "the red vine was cultivated in Anjou (...) especially in the Saumurois." He spent a fortune in multiple trials but he himself concluded: "our efforts should be directed mainly towards the growing of grape varieties that produce superior quality wines, such as Breton and Carmenet [sic] Sauvignon (..) so well acclimatized here, and whose remarkable products are on a par with the wines of Bordeaux." The red vines then took off at that time: "These new plantations have evidently been planted in communes where the cultivation of white vine already existed, and even in our most renowned vineyards, such as Martigné, Rablay, Faveraye, la Roche aux Moines [on Guillory's land], Beaulieu, Saint-Barthélemy, Rochefort (...)" Le Theule remarks that "from 1850, the introduction of red grape varieties into the Layon valley created serious competition for white wines." However, if one considers that the establishment of these red vines, we note that it is especially on the left bank of the Layon. And though planted to meet the demand for red wine, they produce ... rosés: these grape varieties (Breton and Sauvignon) are have been planted in the region of Tigné, Aubigné, where they quickly produce excellent rosés."

There was another very profound cause of the advance of red wines, to which we shall return, which gave rise to another article by Guillory in 1862 in the Maine-et-Loire industrial society newsletter: "the white wines of Maine-et-Loire in bad years," it is precisely the sensitivity of white grape varieties to these "bad years." "If our white wines in the good years are excessively sought after, they are a little less easy to place in mediocre years, and sales are very poor in the bad years." It is also necessary to know the reality of yields of the time. In the 18th century, the right bank of the Layon: about 5 hl/ha. Left bank: around 18 hl/ha. In the first half of the nineteenth century, yields went up, in an average year, to 15 hl / ha for whites, 20 for reds. Except there are the bad years, and many of them. In 1853; 3hl/ha in Beaulieu, 2 in Faye ... (Le Theule). However, despite many difficulties, winemakers in

Angers replanted, sought solutions. This momentum was broken by terrible climatic conditions, combined with three diseases which followed one after the other, the last of which destroyed the vineyards.

Three (or four) end-of-century scourges

In 1855, powdery mildew made its appearance on the left bank of the Layon, causing serious damage in 1863. July 1878, powdery mildew, "it is a catastrophe" (Le Theule). In 1879, the frost (-21°C): 40 to 60% of the vinestocks are destroyed. The harvests are only 10% of previous years. Then in 1886, mildew, a new disease also imported from America, destroyed much of the harvest. Enter phylloxera, in June 1883, is first reported (in Anjou) in Martigné-Briand. It spread gradually, reaching all the Anjou vineyards in 1890, the year which "marks the general collapse of the Layon vineyards."

Post-phylloxeric reconstitution: the choices

Right bank of the Loire,

Before the phylloxera outbreak, according to Guillory, published in 1860, there were "the white wines of Anjou and Maine-et-Loire the vineyards of the right bank of the Loire." 1,334 ha, extending from Bouchemaine to Ingrandes. "Mainly planted with chenin," and producing two kinds of

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white wines, with an average yield of 9.3 hl / ha. The wines with a "taste of fruit, sweetness and mousse," "early bottling in February or March;" and "dry and light wines, not bottled before September." In 1925, Dr. Maisonneuve, in his reference work, *L'Anjou its vines its wines*, gives the figure of 1 032 ha planted on the right bank of the Loire, for a yield of 11 hl / ha in 1921, a mythical vintage, when Savennières produced a very beautiful, sweet wine at 10.7% and with 173 g / l of residual sugars (Maisonneuve). But today only the appellation Savennières remains on the right bank, regrouping the majority of these vines, over 136 ha ...

The Layon: This is where the upheaval begun before the the phylloxera resumed with force, and completely remodeled the vineyards, the renown and the wines of chenin. For the same reasons described above: to respond to the nagging problem of bad years, yields, red vines, the growing red wine market - not of red in reality, but rosés - thanks to the vines of cabernet, in the conditions of northern and schistous vineyards.

What is the origin of *La douceur angevine*?

Here, we must address a fundamental factor of viticulture in the Loire, an essential key to understanding its long history with chenin: it is about its terroir, soils and climates. We have noted previously that Anjou has for a long time the reputation of producing "sweet" wines. Benoît Musset quotes an author who in 1583 writes that the wines of Anjou "hold the first rank in kindness." They are

"almost all white, and the majority are sweet." B Musset: "we have here a very interesting remark, leading us to believe that the wines of Anjou were all rather sweet. While this does not mean dessert wines, one can nevertheless note this as a distinctive element in a French winegrowing region where light and acidic wines were sovereign. (...). There is no doubt that it was not the Dutch who introduced sweet wines to the region. Anjou wines from the years 1550-1600 were already sweet, though it is impossible to say to what degree."

Indeed, I have always thought, without wishing to offend the Dutch, that they did not invent botrytis, and that the presence of this small fungus in this part of the the Loire, capable of being the worst or the best of things with chenin, could not be a recent phenomenon, or even of the sixteenth century. The presence at 100 km from the Atlantic Ocean, the Loire Valley, the end of the Armorican massif (550 million years), the Layon fault line, the exposure (often south-west), the landscape and contours of the Mauges, everything that makes our microclimate, both very dry (average under 600 mm / year) but sometimes wet, especially in the fall, are very old geo-climatic data ...

Which can also be a decisive factor in acclimatizing chenin, both for these geo-climatic reasons and for market opportunities. But it is also its Achilles heel. Certainly the ancients knew for a long time, sorting the grapes, waiting

for them to rot to "profit," that is to say, to harvest what had begun to be concentrated by the botrytis, to obtain this "softness" ...

But then there is the question of bad years, much more dangerous for those seeking botrytization, the source of this "softness." As long as the market was there, and only part of the vineyard was farmed in polyculture, the risk could be manageable. But it is amplified with the evolution of the structure of the vineyards during the reconstitution: an increase in acreage of domains, investments (planting, but also the beginnings of mechanization), viticulture specialization, all these factors potentially weakening the company further in the event of an unfavorable year.

An aggravating commercial factor, addressed by Benoît Musset, "a sort of new age of sweet wines was developing, in which the wines of Sauternes served as a new reference in a true race for sweetness."

In the face of these complex economic challenges, the Angevin viticulture would make two choices, ultimately complementary, but which gradually led to the marginalization of the large Angevin chenins of hillsides and terroir in the world of the "wine trade," while giving Anjou wines a relatively stable economic basis to the present day.

The battle of chaptalization: the white is ready! When white powder becomes cheap ...

Dr. Maisonneuve, writing in *Le Vigneron Angevin* in 1928, devotes a paragraph to chaptalization in wines. He explains that this technique, although often "secret" has been known for a long time. But the high price of sugar represented an "unacceptable price increase." Everything had changed by the end of the 19th century: the industrial extraction of beet sugar at the end of the 19th century opened up the market for cheap sugar.

¹ "Le sucre de betterave et l'essor de son industrie : des premiers travaux jusqu'à la fin de la guerre de 1914-1918" In *Revue d'histoire de la pharmacie*, 87^e année, "Beet sugar and the rise of its industry: from the first production to the end of the war of 1914-1918," In *The History of Pharmacy journal*, volume 87, n° 322, 1999. pp. 235-246.

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Opposition

This new possibility unleashed much conflict in the Angevin vineyards. The *Revue de viticulture*, Volume XXIII, No. 580 of March 16, 1905, lists all the protagonists and all the arguments. "We do not agree in Anjou on the role of sugar, neither from the technical point of view nor from the economic point of view." Mr. Bacon, professor of agriculture at Saumur: "only wines from vines grown on plains may benefit from chaptalisation. Except in unfavorable conditions, white chenin wines are still fairly high in alcohol in the proportion of 8 to 10% on average. The free use of sugar ... would be to encourage longer vine length, premature harvesting ... (would) be a terrible blow to local viticulture." However, Mr. Moreau, director of the oenological facility of Maine-et-Loire, highlights the usefulness of sugar: "Is it preferable to provide our fellow-citizens, on the pretext that it is natural, a drink more acidic than alcoholic? "Another quite illuminating controversy: a certain Mr. Convert published a prominent article which read: "Sugar is a necessity to which one could only escape by partly sacrificing his crops. (...) Almost everywhere sugar is required, even in good years." To this, a winemaker named Mr. Colosseau replied that the left bank and the right bank do not at all have the same yields. "So on the left bank, sugar is required. The right bank on the contrary (...) cannot benefit from adding sugar as the yields are too low, and it would drive the price of the wine down to a point where no profit could be made. (...) I thought it was necessary to say very loudly that Anjou could still make sugar-free wine."

The Winegrowers' Assembly of France, held on 19 February 1905 at the town hall of Angers, voted to authorize chaptalization. This put one more nail in the coffin of the Anti-sugar Association which had been created in 1896 by wine growers of the Layon, in Rablay. Adding sugar to wine met with strong resistance from winegrowers and consumers. "The winemakers would never have gone, on Sunday morning, to play cards in a cafe where the wine was sweetened" (Anjou, Ed Bonneton, 1985). Janine Brouard, in *Les vigneron en Anjou*, in 1989, states that "brokers were pushing for chaptalization to boost sales, (but) the common mortal, he remains distrustful, particularly regarding the wine-growers who had considerable yields. Thus in the years 1937-38, winemakers often had falls in sales (...) because the customers assumed that those who had much wine to sell were chaptalizing their wines. The winegrower in this case would sell his surplus to cafes and bars."

The laws of the market

We also have an indisputable testimony on the issues of sweetening in the thesis presented at the Angers Agricultural School in 1924 by Jean Boivin, great winegrower from Thouarcé, one of the founders of the Bonnezeaux appellation. In his thesis entitled *Factors affecting production of botrytis wines in Sauternes and Anjou* (Layon), all the chenin issues are very clearly addressed, and of a burning topicality. (Cf A small saga of the Layon, Patrick Baudouin, 1997). Jean Boivin writes that the conditions of concentration by noble rot is very different between Sauternes and Layon. "While Sauternes is obtained roughly regularly every year with the help of noble rot, it is not the same for Anjou, because the overly cold of this climate of the region, the lack of precocity of chenin does not always allow the establishment of botrytis cinerea. In the Layon, we do not obtain musts of a density as high as in Sauternes. It is indeed rare to obtain musts in Anjou of 20° and even

15° baume. Most often, they only reach 13 to 14°. The climate is sometimes too humid, (...) which ends in terrible disasters (gray rot)." And in this same document, Jean Boivin makes a comparison between the two wine-growing economies of the Layon: dry production, and production of sweet wines. His conclusions: the production of sweet wines in Anjou is more profitable. It seems apparent that Anjou should therefore be aiming more and more towards obtaining sweet wines." But these conclusions reflect the torments of this turning point in viticulture in Angers. On the one hand J. Boivin insists that we should not try to copy Sauternes. "That would result in a definite failure." He comes back to bad years: "we must not be under any illusion. (...) It is enough to have just one or two bad years, where production is zero, or roughly, that the little profit a winemaker has been able to make to be engulfed with the most frightful rapidity. In his conclusions, not a word about chaptalization. He insists on the need for qualitative work, in the vineyards and in the cellar. But with this objective: "moving towards regular production of a good sweet wine." It is the squaring of the circle, with the conditions he had exposed beforehand... How to break this circle? He explains it in the previous chapters. He writes: "Before the 1876 re-enactment, the vine seemed to give rather effortlessly, a reputed wine, but depending on the vintage the wine was dry, sparkling or sweet. We were not looking at that time, to make an already determined type of wine. But from that moment, (...) little by little, the idea of trying to produce very sweet wines every year grew and grew. An idea pushed by the merchants themselves, driven by the taste of the consumer for sweet wines."

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Aided by science

The chapter on chaptalization gives the solution to this climate / economic dilemma. J. Boivin: "the sweetening of wines(...) is therefore logical and scientific. It seems to be the only solution to address the shortage of our sugar must in years when weather conditions are unfavorable." And to conclude this chapter: "chaptalisation has long been rebuked by the old winemakers as an unworthy and unattractive process, natural wine was the goal we had to aim for. However, since the war, (...) the use of chaptalization has become widespread and today this process of correcting the musts is used almost everywhere (...) increases value and makes it easier to sell. But it should be noted that this process is less perfect than that of nature, which in the good years has our endows our wines of Anjou with a particular charm."

White in the red = rosé

The two complementary choices of viticulture in Angers at the beginning of the 20th century were to accentuate and regularize the "sweet" potential of chenin, and to develop red grape varieties, mainly Cabernet Franc, but to produce essentially sweet rosés. These choices were based on the economic, technical and, subsequently, regulatory possibilities of chaptalisation. They of course lead to changes in the equilibrium between the left and right banks of the Layon. I quote Jean-Marie Doutrelant again: "on the impulse of trade, white Anjou rapidly has become pink. Since 1950 the areas planted with vines of this color have more than doubled in Maine-et-Loire, while those of white wines have decreased by half. Economic necessity makes the law, it could be said. However, why have we chosen to favour the production of sweet rosés when fashion was already tending toward dry wines?" And he continues with the response from a major actor, Mr. Rémy, a trader near Saumur. "Oenological reasons. The terroir gives rise to slightly overly acidic wines whose tartness must be attenuated by a little gentleness." Doutrelant adds, mischievously: "A bit like we put sugar to improve a lemon juice."

White without false pretence ... sweet: The "Noble Grape" years

We must do justice to the Anjou Wine Federation which, from the 1970s, led a courageous struggle, not always easy, against what is called "surchaptalization" which sometimes reached memorable peaks. But it was in the 1980s that this economic model, operating fairly well, began to be questioned. On the fringes, a handful of rebellious Layon winemakers, challenged themselves to get more concentrated sweet wines, using less, if any at all, chaptalization. From Concourson-sur-Layon to St-Aubin-de-Luigné via Beaulieu-sur-Layon, in the Layon, the search for authenticity was first applied to the sweet and medium-sweet wines. Marked by a return to selective harvesting, specifications, checks, tastings. After many episodes, working with the INAO in Angers, helped by the very beautiful vintages 1989, 1990, then by the trilogy 1995-96-97, the mention "Noble grains selection" was included in the decrees of the appellations Coteaux du Layon and Coteaux de l'Aubance in 2001. An official mention very little used today, but practiced, and we can say that we still find this required level of natural concentration in the botrytis at Quarts de Chaume, which has gone on to become the first "grand cru" of Val de Loire wines. But the question of the regularity of obtaining this level, i.e. in bad years, always arises, and the elevation of this level of requirement has not, by waving a magic wand answered the question of cost-effectiveness and marketing of these Chenin sweet wines. We will return to this.

Dry whites: the pioneers of Savennières and "Loire Renaissance"

As early as the 1970s, pioneers in qualitative research, the winegrowers of Savennières, weary from cheating with the vintages to obtain "sweet" wines from poor quality, opted for the development of dry wines from this terroir. This has now established their renowned position as leaders in the dry white wine from Angevin terroir. In the Layon a few other pioneers began a similar movement, working to the same requirements to produce fine dry chenin. Isolated at first, it became collective under the trademark "Loire Renaissance," which from 2000 onwards brought together winegrowers from Layon, in part the same as those who had launched the "Noble grains." A specification requiring a selection of parcels, manual harvesting, high maturity, reduced yields, fermentation, barrel ageing, bottling one year after harvest, a minimum price and a shared distribution channel, made way for exploring the potential of dry, terroir chenin. The brand flopped, but the winemakers that had initiated it, continued the process, which has since been emulated and its fundamental approach has been repeated in the Anjou blanc appellation. These vine-growers' approaches were able to rely on pioneering work by the Research Unit on Vine and Wine at INRA in Angers. A project to meticulously catalog the features of the terroir in 29 vinegrowing areas culminating in the concept of Basic Terroir Unit, bringing together: soil, subsoil, hydrogeology, climate, plant material, choice of the winemaker, the search for the expression of terroir in the wines... Without forgetting the formidable *Rendez-vous du chenin* in Fontevraud in 2003 and 2004.

2014 : The turning point for Angevin chenin

Chenin now makes up 1% of French vines. After a sharp fall between 1950 and 2011 in Anjou-Saumur, its principal terroir in France, its surfaces seem to have stabilized, subject to the analysis of the ratio of chenin/other grape varieties in sparkling wines. Because indeed, much of the volume of dry whites and residual sugars go into the production of sparkling wine. But once again the overall conditions of viticulture in Anjou is changing profoundly, and chenin will face new vital challenges.

Europe imposed a significant limit (no enrichment of a must from 15% potential) on the chaptalization of wines from the 2015 harvest, despite numerous attempts by several French wine appellations with residual sugars to call this decision into question. The use of other techniques, e.g. must subtracting, will not fundamentally change this new deal, which challenges an economic model that has existed for almost a century.

The sweet wine market is difficult. With the sociological evolution of the overall ratio of sugar in food; wine consumers rejecting wines judged "too sweet;" growing numbers of customers looking for authenticity... The causes are complex, but the fact is there: the market is no longer what it was! The world white wine market is steadily increasing: not only for sparkling, but also for dry whites. The sparkling market is certainly growing, but in Anjou margins are low and competition is high. The demand for rosés is also rising significantly, but it is also very competitive.

In the Anjou region, west of Anjou-Saumur, the market for red cabernet is rather low, and does not give signs of considerable growth. There is another significant part of the market: a non-negligible number of consumers are looking for more authentic, traceable, "healthy" wines. The "health" dimension, which has always been present on the wine market, is back in force. In terms of production conditions, everything is also changing: climate change, planting rights, wood diseases, environmental pressure of civil society and the State.

Anjou, in particular western Maine-et-Loire, still relies on a viticultural economy that is, for the time being, rather stable on increasing market volumes, although very competitive. Chenin has found a place mainly in the segment of sparkling wines. But the right bank of the Layon finds it difficult to find its way; between ever-changing sweet wines and premium dry whites with poor market visibility, that are barely profitable - or worse. The dry chenin of Savennières, positioned earlier in this segment, are also lacking recognition in the marketplace; while their production costs have exploded, a consequence of a particular search for quality. History and identity at the heart of Angevin chenin are in trouble ...

The challenge to come for viticulture in Anjou is probably already here. A mutation is underway, an economic model to evolve, if not be reinvented. Without an overall view, there is no viable long-term solution. That chenin of terroir are a minority is not a problem, have they not always been? But if they disappear, it will be the economy and the identity of Anjou wines that are threatened. One of the avenues currently being explored, following Quart de Chaume and the "Loire Renaissance" attempt, is the creation of white Anjou *crus*. Another is the evolution of Coteaux Du Layon also in this direction, and towards greater authenticity. Let us not forget that the first decree of 1950 of the Coteaux du Layon appellation made no stipulations on the levels of residual sugar levels, and was above all about geographical delimitation, chenin, a level of maturity, and grape selection. This is, of course, a major subject of debate, a work in progress, but the path of rebirth of the chenin in Anjou, responding to the demand for authenticity of the market, should be the valorization of its versatility on each of its terroirs, which must be seen not as a handicap,

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but as an advantage: its exceptional nature allows for making fine dry whites, to sparkling, to the finest sweet wines; on the condition that we do not force the terroir, nor the vintage (we have recently had some "bad years" again for the sweet wines). Is that not what consumers are asking for more and more?

I will conclude by citing one last time Benoît Musset: "Jules Guyot stated that it was a well-established fact that it does not suffice to produce an exquisite wine to acquire and deserve commercial recognition: a region must produce many good wines, so as to constitute a market base." Thinking about what he considered an under exploited potential, (..) he highlighted this factor more social than "natural" and technical: the meeting of a wine

and its consumers, creating (or not) what we would today call a fantasy. From the end of the 18th century, the vineyards of Anjou, confronted with downgrading and competition, had clearly begun a quest for a new identity."

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