Burgundians have made claims concerning the quality and reputation of their wines since harvesting their first pinots in the 1370s. King Philip the Fat’s Ordinance of 1395 pronounced that Burgundy produced the “best and most precious wines imaginable for the nourishment and sustenance of human creatures.” Considering them worthy of the popes and kings they entertained, the Ducs of Burgundy inaugurated a politics of taste. Their strategy has proven essential—especially in a day when the chemical properties of fermentation remained more mysterious than understood or controlled—for marketing and selling regional vintages well into the early twentieth century. “Even in a nation with a rich democratic tradition,” Kolleen Guy observes concerning the production of Champagne, all wines were not… equal. Indeed, there were two distinct types of wine production in France: one that created expensive wines deemed to be of high quality that had a hierarchical classification system, and another that created cheaper, mass-produced wines that were deemed to be of lesser quality.

Promoting an agenda of quality over quantity in 1924, Claude Chauveau (1861-1940) reminded vintners and merchants that they were “too modest in their dreams and demands.” As the senator for the Côte-d’Or (1910-1940) and briefly Minister of Agriculture in 1932, Chauveau knew it was in the regions interest to produce quality wines that could attain high prices. Even Joseph Marie Capus (1876-1947), the Senator for the Gironde (1930-1941) and one-time Minister of Agriculture in 1924, who loudly and famously opposed any A. O. C. strategies based on terroir that might undermine Bordelais labeling practices, argued that successful marketing depended on quality originating at the level of “disciplined production.” He was rewarded for his efforts by being nominated President of the National Institute of the Appellations d’Origines from 1941 to 1947. In Burgundy, Claude Chatelus reminded readers of the Terre de Bourgogne that they could only compete with new competitors benefiting from equally good bio-physical milieu provided that producers focused on transforming the uniqueness of their terroir—rather than producing “fantasy labels” into quality wines.” After his initial reluctance—motivated by important connections with Bordelais estates and merchants throughout France—Raymond
Badouin, the editor of the prestigious and very influential *Review of French Wine* (*Revue du vin de France*) joined in favor of A. O. C. legislation in 1931 when he asserted that “[w]e are defending French vintners against ‘fabricators.’ We enlighten consumers about the qualities of our country’s different varieties, on the methods practiced in the vineyards, and the quality of the vintages.”

Before this could happen, however, France’s wine industry first had to contend with a dizzying variety of challenges between the military defeats of 1871 and 1940. These included the phylloxera (particularly between 1863 and 1900), mildew (1884), black-rot (1898) blights; a gradual recovery (aided by the use of sulfur and copper as fungicides and the grafting of French vines onto American roots) followed by decades of overproduction; increasing production costs compounded by lowered profits; the oenological mastery of fermentation, stabilization, and preservation; growing international and colonial competition; competing small proprietor and corporate interests; innovatively fraudulent trade practices; the contested development—between 1905 and 1935—of the *Système d’apellation d’origine contrôlée* (AOC); vintners revolts (in 1907 and 1911); cooperative and union activism; American and Scandinavian prohibition(ism) (1920s); high foreign import taxes; and the global economic depression of the 1930s. Economic conditions in early 1937 were still such that vintners wondered whether or not to tear out their vineyards and turn to farming. This and reasons explored below help explain why many Burgundians remained hostile to A. O. C. implementation right through the 1930s.

Despite some exceptional vintages, these problems were nowhere more evident to Burgundians than in their own cellars. An advocate of “fermented grape juice in its multiple forms” and member of the Medical Friends of Wine Congress, the Doctor Foveau de Courmelles lamented, “when [at the turn-of-the-century] wine, far from respected, was… hated and blamed for all of our problems.” Even the economic recovery of 1925 provided little relief; Richard Bichet, the Secretary-General of the Confederation of Vintners Associations of Burgundy, declared that “ordinary Burgundian wines” suffered from a “grave crisis” with sales and profits so low that *vignerons* (vintners) were loosing money. A local anecdote humorously alleged that desperate and cunning wine merchants read obituaries in order to fill fraudulent orders. “More than ever,” the vintner Gaston Roupnel wrote during the subsequent global economic downturn, “discomfort and misery in the vintners’ modest homes results from poor wine sales.”