French wine - no World Heritage?

25 Jan 2013 by Jancis Robinson & Yohan Castaing

In a terse press release yesterday the French Ministries for Ecology and Culture announced that the two French wine regions that had been shortlisted for UNESCO's World Heritage listing have been removed from this year's application.

Les Climats de Bourgogne (the magical mosaic of vineyards of Burgundy) and Les Maisons et Caves de Champagne (the houses and cellars that produce champagne) were the two contenders which, according to some observers, were very likely to be selected. The Climats had garnered 50,000 signatories for its application. There is no shortage of wine-related World Heritage sites such as the Douro valley in Portugal.

Unfortunately however the French government has withdrawn its backing. Could this be linked to the fact that for several years wine has incited increasing suspicion in France? Lobbyists and health workers have done their bit to create negativity around the subject, even though wine is France's second most important export after aircraft, and of course the wine sector is one of France's main employers.

Instead of backing either or both of these wine-related contenders, the French government has chosen instead the alcohol-neutral Grotte Chauvet (ancient cave) in the Ardèche and the volcanoes of the Auvergne as its 2013 contenders for World Heritage site status.

Although Burgundy's campaigners are deeply disappointed, Aubert de Villaine of Domaine de la Romanée-Conti who has done so much to advance the cause of the Climats de Bourgogne (but who admitted to finding it very tiring and time-consuming when I asked him last November), hopes very much that this is a mere postponement. The application will be resubmitted next year in the hope that it will be presented to UNESCO in 2015.

For the story according to Les Climats de Bourgogne, see here.