

History of the Champagne vineyards revealed

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Pressing residues from the Place de la Libération site, Troyes (Aube). The plant remains have been preserved in water because they came from the base of a well. Grape seeds, pedicels, skin and leaf fragments can be seen. Credit: Véronique Zech-Matterne/AASPE

Although the reputation of Champagne is well established, the history of Champagne wines and vineyards is poorly documented. However, a research team led by scientists from the CNRS and the Université de Montpellier at the Institut des sciences de l'évolution de Montpellier has just lifted the veil on this history by analyzing the archaeological grape seeds from excavations carried out in Troyes and Reims.

Dated to between the 1st and 15th centuries AD, the seeds shed light on the evolution of Champagne wine growing, prior to the invention of the famous Champagne, for the first time. According to the researchers, 'wild' vines were cultivated throughout the period studied. Domestic varieties, coming from the south of Gaul, appeared as early as the 1st century and became the major grape varieties of the 2nd and 3rd centuries. This archaeological series was uninterrupted until around 1000 AD, when the wild vine and the southern varieties made a strong comeback.

This period corresponds both to intense economic and societal changes and to [global warming](#) spanning a few hundred years. Northern grape varieties, more adapted to the cold, appeared more than 300 years later at the beginning of a colder climatic period, supplanting the southern [grape](#) varieties. Published in *Scientific Reports* on January 27, 2021, these results pave the way for further global analysis that will allow a better understanding of the [history](#) of viticulture by combining biological, archaeological and historical data.

More information: Vincent Bonhomme et al. Seed morphology uncovers 1500 years of vine agrobiodiversity before the advent of the Champagne wine, *Scientific Reports* (2021). [DOI: 10.1038/s41598-021-81787-3](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-021-81787-3)

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