

Poets, patronage and vintages *Viticulture, wine 'brands' and the literary sources*

By Roderick White

The second century BC saw a massive increase in the extent of the empire and, consequentially, the wealth of Rome. The landed aristocracy who acquired most of this new wealth found themselves with the resources to develop new ways of getting a return on their growing landholdings. Viticulture was one favoured approach. M. Porcius Cato's *de Agricultura*, written shortly before his death in 146 BC, built on Greek texts to provide a manual for wealthy landowners to exploit their agricultural potential.¹ Much of Cato's book is devoted to viticulture, showing that this was already a major focus of interest. While vines had long been grown over much of Italy, the Romans had not really embraced viticulture, and their best-regarded wines at this time were imported from Greece, especially Chios, Lesbos and Thasos. Cato confirms the importance of Greek wines by including two different recipes for imitating them.

Some 25 years later, in the consulship of Opimius (121 BC), a magnificent vintage convinced rich Romans that Roman wine could compete with the Greeks. Opimian wine was still, allegedly, drunk 200 years later, though the name was presumably shorthand for 'top quality'.² In developed wine markets, wines are typically distinguished by their place of origin and the first mention of an individual Roman origin - Falernian - occurs on an inscription dated to 102 BC, while the earliest literary reference (also to Falernian) is by Catullus, written before 54 BC.³

By the time Varro was writing the second surviving Latin agricultural treatise (about 35 BC), he names ten different wine origins; and Columella, in the 1st century AD, mentions twice that number. Clearly, connoisseurship, and awareness and understanding of individual wine origins was growing. The question this article sets out to investigate is how the reputation of Roman wines developed in a society with no mass media and little or no advertising.

¹ Varro (*RR*. 1.8-9) lists some 50 Greek writers who 'might be consulted'. None of these survive as more than fragments, apart from Hesiod's 8th century BC poem and relevant portions of Xenophon's *Oeconomica*.

² See Pliny, *NH* 14.55 (history); Mart. 3.82.4, 9.87.1, 10.49.2 ('Opimian' as shorthand).

³ *CIL* 15.4554; Cat. 27.1. Falernian, and several other leading Roman wines, was grown in northern Campania. For a map of Roman wine origins, see Tchernia (1986). On wine origins generally, see Johnson (1989).

Growing knowledge of wines is reflected in another, non-technical source, poetry, and it is highly probable that the appearance of individual wines in literary sources contributed to their reputations. While Roman wine ‘brands’ are absent from the plays of Plautus and Terence as well as from the philosophical epic of Lucretius, they start to appear in numbers in the Augustan poets: Virgil, Horace, Propertius, Tibullus and Ovid.⁴ Horace in particular seems to have been a drinking man, or at least a drinking man’s poet. He names no less than 19 different brands – most of them favourably, though he is diffident about his own Sabine wine (see below). Martial, towards the end of the first century AD, names no less than 40 origins, one or two altogether scathingly. Martial seems to have been a connoisseur of inferior beverages, and has no good words for *Spoletinum* (‘piss’: Mart 6.89.3), *Vaticanum* (‘poison’, ‘vinegar’: 6.92.3), or *Veientanum* (‘dregs’: 1.103.9) - all wines that are barely mentioned elsewhere. A modern marketing website suggests that Horace and later Martial were practising an early form of product placement, though there is no hard evidence for this.⁵ It is, however, a shrewd insight. As I go on to argue, mentions of wines in poetry (which in today’s marketplace might indeed be product placement) were a significant influence on their popular standing.

In addition to the poets, a major source of our knowledge of Roman wines is medical literature, especially the works of Galen, writing towards the end of the 2nd century AD. Galen was very knowledgeable about wines, though his judgments were coloured by his medical purpose. Wine was important in Roman medicine and the reputations of individual wines were influenced by medical recommendations.⁶

I go on to examine the reputations of leading Roman wines, as reflected in the surviving literature, and then to suggest how these reputations might have been developed among the elite population at large.

⁴ Plautus (c.200BC) names only Greek brands: Chian twice (*Poen.* 697, *Cur.* 79), Lesbian and Leucadian once each (*Poen.* 697). Lucretius completed his poem before 55 BC. The work of the Augustan poets runs from c. 40 BC to the death of Ovid in c. AD17.

⁵ *Product Placement and the Beverage Industry*, 2006 edition, <http://www.beveragemarketing.com/productplacementbw.htm>, retrieved 2/09/2013. Attributed there to J. Hood, *Selling the dream: Why advertising is good business* (Westport CT, Praeger, 2005). He presumably based the idea on two speculative articles, Sage (1915) and Ball (1907).

⁶ Plin.*NH* 14.61 tells how Augustus drank Setine wine for medical reasons. Cf. *NH* 14.65 (*Signinum*), 14.69 (*Lagarinum*).

Wine Brand Images

Content analysis of references to leading brands of wine,⁷ across the surviving literature from 200 BC to c.AD 200, shows remarkable consistency in the way individual wines were described. The analytic process is similar to modern qualitative market research, where the cumulative evidence of words used to describe a brand builds a picture of how consumers perceive the brand's characteristics: in modern terms, its brand image. What follows, based on an analysis of a database⁸ of over 1100 citations of wine brands from Latin and Greek literature, summarises this 'qualitative research'.

By the end of the Republic Falernian, Caecuban and Alban had established themselves as the top Italian wine brands, and the leading Greek brands (Chian and Lesbian) which, the elder Pliny tells us, 'formerly' had the leading reputation (*auctoritas*), were less widely in demand, at least in elite circles at Rome.⁹ Numerous sources quoted in Athenaeus Book 1 indicate that to Chios and Lesbos can be added Thasian, and perhaps Pramnian, which seems to have been a type of wine, not a specific origin.¹⁰ All these wines are categorised by Galen as rich, strong and sweet.¹¹ Pliny writes (*NH* 14.62-3) that Falernian had three sub-regions: *Falernum*, *Faustinianum* and *Caucinum*. In addition, *Massicum* is sometimes regarded as Falernian, though this is really a neighbouring region, except for the apparently unarguable evidence of the amphora label *CIL* 15.1554 - *FAL MAS*. The strength of the Falernian brand is demonstrated by the number of citations in the database (it accounts for 15 per cent of the total). This is confirmed by various comments concerning it, which are full of praise, and the brand was routinely used as a standard against which to measure other wines.¹²

Praise for wines covers several different areas. The main elements include:

⁷ I use the word 'brand' interchangeably with 'origin': in today's marketing jargon, these are 'origin brands', like Cheddar or Champagne.

⁸ An expansion of Appendix 2 of Tchernia (1986), compiled from a variety of sources, primarily the *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* and *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*, as part of my research.

⁹ Plin. *NH*.14.56. Pliny lists in Book 14 some 120 wine brands which had, he said some reputation, two-thirds of these being Italian wines.

¹⁰ Various sources talk of Pramnian wines from Icaria (Athen. 1.30c – Eparchides), Ephesus (Athen 1.30e – Alciphron) and Smyrna (Pliny *NH* 14.54 – see André (1958) *ad loc.*

¹¹ Numerous references, chiefly in 6.801-5, 10.832-5 (Kuhn).

¹² eg. Hor.*Od.*1.20.11 (against *Formianum*); Strabo 5.4.3 (*Surrentinum*); Plin.*NH* 23.36 (*Statanum*); Sen. *Quaest.Nat.* 1.11.2 (*Rhaeticum*); Sil.*Pun* 7.210-1 (*Chium*), etc.

- Physical characteristics: sweet, mellow, smooth (*suavis*), strong (*severus*), warming (*ardens, calidus*), full-bodied, fragrant.
- Attributes: noble (*nobilis*), generous, authoritative, expensive, exclusive, luxurious (*lautus*).
- Context: served at the dinner tables of the rich and powerful, connoisseurship.
- Age: aged (*vetulus, immortalis*), from ancient cellars, long-kept, Opimian.
- Divinity: loved by/planted by/cherished by/ fit for Bacchus; like nectar, *ambrosia*.
- Health: no headaches, easy on the stomach, nourishing, fortifying, healthy.
- Colour (this is more equivocal): dark (*niger*) is favourable in Martial, but tawny (*flavus*, Greek *kirros*) seems more generally appreciated.¹³

For medical writers, different wines had value for specific patients and conditions. A cluster of conditions – chiefly digestive - required relatively thin or light, dry and astringent wines, and a corresponding cluster of brands (e.g. *Signinum, Hadrianum, Marsicum*) met this specification. They were mostly not the wines generally well-regarded by wine drinkers, at least in the late Republic and early Principate. Still less praised were those that Galen classified as weak, thin, watery, but recommends mostly for the frail and elderly.¹⁴

Corresponding to the favourable characteristics, there is a range of abusive descriptions for inferior wines. For wine drinkers, as opposed to the doctors, these are:

- Physical characteristics: dry, harsh (*austeros, ferox*, Greek *skleros*), thin, watery (*aquosa*), vinegary, bitter, dregs (*faex*).
- Attributes: lowly (*vilis*), inferior, miserly, cheap.
- Context: served to inferiors by rich/arrogant hosts, low taverns, poor /miserly houses.
- Age: young, too old.
 - Health: causes hangovers, laxative, astringent, causes headaches.
 - Colour: white is a sign of a thin, watery, diuretic wine.

¹³ Though not in Aulus Gellius (*AN* 13.31.14ff.) where tawny wines are described as a dog's dinner (*caninum prandium*).

¹⁴ 15.648 (Kuhn). Wines such as *Neapolitanum, Tibenum, Titacazenum*.

With these profiles in mind, we can look at how the literary sources talk about the leading brands in detail.

Falernum

Falernian is used loosely at times to describe all the wines of the *ager Falernus*, including Mt Massicus: Pliny's three sub-origins of *Falernum*, *Faustinianum* and *Caecinum*, and sometimes including *Massicum* (see below).¹⁵ Pliny talks of three varieties – *austerum*, *dulce*, *tenue*.¹⁶ Galen is less specific, only mentioning a sweeter, amber-coloured wine and a drier, whiter one.¹⁷

Falernian was always a brand leader in the literature (in spite of Pliny's assertion that *Caecubum* was formerly first) and Falernian is clearly the standard of comparison for comments about wines.¹⁸ As such, it ticks all the quality boxes. The most common descriptors fall into the 'excellent', 'best', 'superior' area,¹⁹ closely associated with comments about age, which was expected of the best Roman wines. Falernian is rare, costly, and associated with the gods and fine, luxurious dining.²⁰ It is strong, sweet, fragrant, and of a good colour – especially for Martial, who several times talks of *nigrum* (or *fuscum*) *Falernum*.²¹ While for Horace the wine is merely *ardens*, Pliny (*NH* 14.61) says it is the only wine that can actually flame (*solo vinorum flamma accenditur*) – a phenomenon explained by Tchernia (1986) as meaning that the wine flares when poured over a flame. Falernian even has a 'founding myth', recounted, and apparently invented, by Silius Italicus:²² a folk tale about an old farmer visited by a disguised Bacchus.

Galen, who is a fan of Falernian, says it is not for those with delicate stomachs or suffering from biliousness. He also comments that it is a wine from a small region, but exported all over the empire, 'so people skilled in this kind of thing doctor other wines to produce fake Falernian'.²³

¹⁵ See André (1958) p.100, Tchernia (1986) Appendix 3.

¹⁶ Pliny *NH* 14.63.

¹⁷ *Glukus/kirrhos* - Galen 6.801 (Kuhn); *austeros/kirrhos-leukos* - Galen 6.275, 11.87 (Kuhn).

¹⁸ Pliny *NH* 14.61-2. Purcell (1985), p.16 says that Pliny puts Alban above Falernian, but it is not easy to see why. He appears to have misread Pliny's remarks about *Faustinianum*, as Pliny clearly says that no wine ranks higher than Falernian: *nec ulli nunc vino maior auctoritas* (*NH*. 14.62).

¹⁹ e.g. Varro *Ant. Rom* 11.1; Hor. *Sat.*2.8.16, *Od.*1.20.10; Tib. 3.6.6; Strab. 5.3.6; Plin. *NH*. 14.62, etc.

²⁰ e.g. Prop. 4.6.72; Hor *Od.* 2.3.8; Petr.*Sat.* 34; Mart.1.71.3, 3.77.8, 11.36.5; Juv.4.138, etc.

²¹ e.g. Mart. 2.40.6, 8.55.14, 8.77.5, 11.8.7, etc.

²² Sil.Ital. *Pun.* 7.162-211. See Vessey (1973).

²³ Galen 14.77 (Kuhn), my translation.

Caecubum

Pliny states explicitly that Caecuban once held the number one position, ahead of Falernian.²⁴ He says that by his time it had been destroyed by the neglect of the grower (singular) and its limited area, but mostly because of a canal dug by Nero to link Lake Avernus and Ostia.²⁵ Nonetheless, it is mentioned several times by Martial and Galen, who uses it as a generic description for a tawny wine that goes fiery with ageing through madeirisation.²⁶ Its survival as an actual wine origin is attested by a Hadrianic amphora.²⁷

Caecuban had an excellent reputation in the early Principate – the first literary reference is in Horace’s second book of *Satires*, and Horace, Strabo and Dioscorides give it high praise, while Columella puts it in his top four wines.²⁸ Caecuban is a wine to be preserved and watched over: it comes from ancestral cellars (*cellis atavis*) and guarded with a hundred keys (*servatum centum clavibus*). It is brought out as an almost sacred offering on feast days and celebrations. Caecuban is proud (*superbus*) and generous (*generosus*). The geographer Strabo, who rarely does more than note the presence or abundance of wine in an area, twice calls Caecuban excellent or ‘best’.²⁹ For Martial, Caecuban is a luxury wine, often of great age, to be mixed with snow, rather than mere water.³⁰

This is a more exclusive image than Falernian’s: Caecuban is a true connoisseur’s wine, to be savoured on great occasions: it is not something to get drunk on – which Falernian might be. In modern terms, this is Pétrus, rather than Mouton Rothschild: a wine so exclusive that it is highly regarded, but not widely drunk - which its relatively low production would not have allowed.

Albanum

Unlike most top Roman wines, which used the aminean grape, Alban was made from the eugenia grape – imported from Sicily, and well adapted to the local *terroir*: it did not do well

²⁴ Plin NH 14.61: *antea Caecubo erat generositas celeberrima*.

²⁵ *ib*: *quod iam intercudit incuria coloni locique angustia, magis tamen fossa Neronis, quam a Baiano lacu Ostiam usque navigabilem incohaverat*. Note the singular *coloni*: this implies a single property, unlike most Roman wine origins, but may merely refer to the principal grower.

²⁶ In ordinary wines, a form of oxidisation – a fault. Madeira wines were deliberately oxidised by heating and cooling during long ocean voyages. See Robinson (2006) 415 ff.

²⁷ *CIL* VI. 9797 – see André (1958), 100.

²⁸ *Hor.Sat.* 2.8.15; *Strab.* 5.3.6; *Diosc.* 5.11.5; *Col.* 3.8.5.

²⁹ *Strab.* 5.3.5, 5.3.6.

³⁰ *Mart.* 6.27.9, 12.17.6 (snow).

elsewhere in Italy.³¹ While Alban wines were highly ranked by Columella (‘one of the top four’) and Pliny (who places it third, behind Caecuban and Falernian), by Galen’s time it had deteriorated: he puts it in the second rank, together with *Sabinum* and *Hadrianum*, neither of which ranks highly with Pliny.³²

In the literature we get a mixed picture of *Albanum*. While it is a luxury wine, expensive, suitable for Maecenas’s banquets, sweet like honey and well-aged, there are hints of roughness (*austeritas*).³³ The later medical writers describe it as thin (*aquosa*) and Galen says it should be drunk young and easily turns to vinegar. Athenaeus calls aged Alban a stupefying drug.³⁴ It seems that the standards of Alban winemakers deteriorated during the 2nd century AD, possibly because they were looking for volume rather than quality for a vintage produced close to the metropolitan market.

Surrentinum

Sorrentine wine enjoyed a vogue in the 1st century AD, due to imperial patronage. Horace, who only mentions it once, was sceptical about it, suggesting it needed to be mixed with the lees of Falernian to be drinkable.³⁵ A clue to its subsequent development may be found in Strabo, who says that it rivalled Falernian once it had been found that the wine could be aged.³⁶

Columella considered Sorrentine one of the top four wines, but Pliny gives it faint praise, and says that the emperors Tiberius and Caligula both called it expensive vinegar.³⁷ One indication of its ambiguous status is that both Pliny and Martial talk of it being presented in its native earthenware.³⁸ By contrast, Statius gives it lavish praise, rating it as better than Falernian, though the context is a giveaway – he is lauding a patron’s Sorrentine villa.³⁹

³¹ Col. 3.2.16. *Terroir* (Fr.): literally = ‘soil’, but used to describe the whole ecology of a vineyard. Judged by experts to have significant effects on wine quality.

³² Col. 3.8.5; Plin. *NH* 14.64 (top rank). Galen 6.275 (Kuhn), cf. 6.334 (second rank).

³³ Hor. *Sat.* 2.8.16 (Maecenas); Dion. Hal. 14.8.12 (honey); Juv. 5.33, Mart 13.109 (luxury); Plin. *NH* 14.64, 23.36 (*austeritas*).

³⁴ Hor. *Sat.* 2.8.16, *Od.* 4.11.2; Juv. 5.33 (feasts). Dion Hal. 1.66.3; Disocor. 5.10.2; Plin. *NH* 14.64 (sweet). Hor. *Od.* 4.11.2; Juv. 5.33, 13.214. (aged). Galen 10.833, 14.15 (*aquosa*). Athen. 1.33a (stupefying).

³⁵ Hor. *Sat.* 2.4.55. Lees: Sediment from fermentation, used to clarify a ‘murky’ wine.

³⁶ Strab. 5.4.3.

³⁷ Col. 3.8.5; Plin. *NH* 14.64, cf. 23.35, 36.

³⁸ Plin. *NH* 14.34; Mart. 13.110. Earthenware was regarded as of low status.

³⁹ Stat. *Silv.* 2.2.1-5, cf. 2.2.98, 3.5.102.

The medical authors, Caelius Aurelianus and Galen, seem to be talking about two different wines: the former describes it as clear, sharp, lacking in body and very astringent; the latter calls it warming and good for the heart, robust, and sweet – though also harsh (*austerum*) and (once) astringent. Galen also reckons it needs at least 20 years of ageing.⁴⁰ The final word must go to Athenaeus, who agrees that Sorrentine wine needs ageing, but says it appeals only to its fans.⁴¹

Massicum

Grown on the mountain overlooking the *Ager Falernus*, Massic could be regarded as a variety of Falernian. It was sufficiently distinct to be mentioned by writers from Horace to Fronto, and Columella has it among his top four wines. Pliny puts it on a par with Alban and Sorrentine, in third place behind Falernian and Caecuban.⁴²

Apart from Silius Italicus's fable of Falernus, who ploughed Mt Massicus with Bacchus's aid, *Massicum* is mostly referred to either as a very superior, connoisseur's wine or as an example of successful viticulture. It is talked about as aged, carefully preserved and generally excellent. The fact that it was grown on the mountain gave it a sacred aura and the association with Bacchus is found in Vergil as well as Silius.⁴³

Setinum

Setine wine enjoyed a period of popularity in the 1st century AD, having been a chosen wine of Augustus, because it was regarded as *digestif*. We find enthusiastic mentions from Strabo (the earliest citation) through to Martial and Juvenal, but there is nothing later than Soranus, around AD 125, though the brand does recur (as *Saiti*) in Diocletian's *Edict* of AD 301 (2.5).

The vocabulary around *Setinum* is limited. It is described as excellent, widely famed and costly by Strabo. Pliny calls it strong and harsh, in a medical context. Martial is the main source, and his comments revolve around quality, age, mentions of Bacchus and mixing with snow (an ostentatiously luxurious practice, otherwise found in connection with Caecuban). In

⁴⁰ Roman fine wines needed considerable ageing to be at their best. See Tchernia (1986), 30ff.

⁴¹ Cael. Aurel. *Acut.* 2.211-2; *Chron.* 4.71; Galen 6.334, 10.831, 11.604, 11.648, 14.15. Athen. 1.26d.

⁴² Hor. *Sat.* 2.4.51, *Od.* 1.1.19; Front. *Ep ad M. Caes.* 4.4.2; Col. 3.8.5; Plin. *NH.* 14.64.

⁴³ Hor *Od.* 1.1.19, 3.21.5; Mart. 13.111; (old). Hor *Od.* 3.21.5; Col. 3.8.5; Mart. 1.26.8, 3.49.1, 4.69.1; Fronto *Ep ad M. Caes.* 4.4.2; (quality). Virg *Geo.* 2.143, 3.526; *Aen.* 7.725 (Bacchus).

Martial and Juvenal, the context is convivial and luxurious: in their day, *Setinum* was a wine to be seen with.⁴⁴

Sabinum

We first meet Sabine wine in Horace's *Odes*. Horace was proud of his Sabine farm and of the local wine: commentators who have taken his description of it as *vile Sabinum* as derogatory have ignored the *recusatio* context - this is the poet himself being 'humble'.⁴⁵ After Horace, we find passing references in Pliny, who was interested in a unique local grape variety, and an unfavourable mention in Martial;⁴⁶ *Sabinum* does not then re-surface in the literature until Galen. Galen gives it almost as much coverage as any leading wine, rating it as a good second rank wine of a lighter type: it is mildly astringent, but light, thin and watery.⁴⁷ This fits the description in Athenaeus as 'very light'.⁴⁸

What emerges from this is an overall consistency of opinion about the leading brands across an extended period, although some individual brands gained or lost prestige or reputation, and possibly were subject to changes in quality or character over time. This coherence implies the development and maintenance of connoisseurship, which Tchernia attributes to the early 1st century BC,⁴⁹ and a continuing discourse about wine among the Roman elite. The question then is how, where and when this discourse took place, in the absence of mass media (let alone mass marketing communication) which we would expect in today's consumer society to support this sort of brand imagery. The answer must lie in what modern marketing theorists call word-of-mouth (WOM).⁵⁰

Spreading the word

To see how WOM might operate within Roman elite society, we need to consider briefly the nature of the elite and the social relations within it. The Roman elite, effectively the

⁴⁴ Strabo 5.3.6, 10; Pliny *NH* 14.61, 23.36; Mart. 13.112(age). Mart. 13.124, 4.69.1, 8.51.19, (quality). Mart.6.86.1, 14.103 (snow). Mart. 13.20.1, cf *Sil Ital Pun* 8.376, (Bacchus); Juv. 5.34, 10.27 (luxury).

⁴⁵ Hor *Od.* 1.20.1. More credible is *Od.*1.9.7, where four-year-old *Sabinum* is described as *benignum*, and capable, as a 'winter warmer', of being drunk neat (*merum*).

⁴⁶ Pliny *NH* 14.28, 38; Mart. 10.59.3.

⁴⁷ Galen 6.275, 334 (quality); Galen 6.807, 10.483-5, 11.87 (thin, watery, etc).

⁴⁸ Athen. 1.27b. (*kouphos*)

⁴⁹ Tchernia (1986), 63.

⁵⁰ Prendergast, G. *et al.*, (2010); Ferguson, R., (2008). Cf. White (1993): 'In a fashion-sensitive society with few facilities for mass communication, word of mouth was one of the most effective means of generating fame, and the leaders of society controlled the networks through which word of mouth was spread', 41.

equestrian order, from which the Senate – a mere 600 members after the reforms of Augustus in 30 BC – was recruited, totalled perhaps 20,000: just two per cent of the population of Rome, but accounting for the vast majority of the personal wealth of the empire.⁵¹ Senators had to show wealth of one million sesterces, *equites* 400,000; but many senators, in particular, were vastly richer and there were also some exceedingly rich freedmen.⁵² Roman elite society was both small and heavily inter-connected. Addressees of Cicero's surviving letters include 15 per cent of all senators, and one study of part of this *corpus* identifies 181 senators and 49 knights with whom Cicero interacted with on paper in the 25 years (68 to 43 BC) covered by this analysis.⁵³ On one occasion Cicero wrote letters to all but one of the senators.⁵⁴

Elite Romans were sociable. In the afternoons they would go to the baths (a great centre for gossip), or the theatre⁵⁵ and then go to dinner parties. While dinners were typically small affairs, apart from the emperor's banquets, they were occasions for political and social gossip⁵⁶ and a variety of after-dinner entertainments. These entertainments were decidedly varied in character, but for the more intellectual host they might include readings from classic literature, extracts from a play performed by the host's own troupe of mime actors, or the recitation of a new work by a favoured poet.⁵⁷

The company could be diverse. While it was normal to invite one's peers or political contacts, a feature of the dinners of the elite was that they invited their socially inferior supporters and protégés, whom we loosely call their clients (*clientela*). The Roman elite operated a form of patronage whereby they provided some financial support and provisions for a train of supporters who were expected to appear at the Big Man's house for the morning *salutatio*, and then accompany the patron as he progressed to the forum or senate for the day's political or legal business.⁵⁸ Some notables had one or more poets among their 'clients': Maecenas (only an *eques*, but very rich and a confidante of Augustus) gathered around him Vergil, Horace, Propertius and others, and the senators Messalla Corvinus (Tibullus, Sulpicia, Ovid) and Asinius Pollio (Vergil, Horace, Fuscus) had similar groups of

⁵¹ Estimates vary. For a recent overview, see Scheidel & Friesen (2009), espec. pp. 75 ff., and references there.

⁵² Scheidel & Friesen, *l.c.*

⁵³ Dénioux (1993), White (2010) (addressees); Alexander & Danowski (1990) (interactions).

⁵⁴ *Cic.Att.* 7.1.8.

⁵⁵ Cicero was a fan of drama – eg *Att.* 2.19.3, 4.15.6, 16.2.3; *Fam.* 7.1.1-3, 9.22.1, etc. For the role of drama see Goldberg (2005) 54-59, 79-96, 123-131.

⁵⁶ Several authors talk of gossip *in circulis et in conviviis* – 'social gatherings and dinner parties' – Liv. 44.22.8; *Cic. Att.* 2.18.2; Tac. *Ann.* 3.54.1.

⁵⁷ For an account of after-dinner entertainment, see Slater (1991)

⁵⁸ A convenient and appropriate term from the anthropological literature: see Sahlins (1963).

literary protégés. The practice goes back at least to the end of the 3rd century BC, but effectively died out in the 1st century AD, by the end of which we find Martial, Juvenal and Statius all struggling to find regular patrons.⁵⁹

By the 1st century AD, *recitationes* – formal recitations - of literary works became a feature of elite Roman life. Some were in relatively large auditoria or theatres, either to invited audiences or even the general public, but often they would be part of after-dinner entertainment. In the latter case it might either be a ‘professional’ poet or author who gave a reading of his own work, or, by the later 1st century AD, an amateur writer: writing poetry became a regular pastime of educated Romans in this period, as we know from the younger Pliny’s letters. Pliny himself was clearly a good, serious amateur poet and his letters are full of references to his own and others’ efforts.⁶⁰ By early in the next century, Juvenal complains that it was impossible to avoid *recitationes*.⁶¹ Serious writers used private recitations to try out new work, and invite suggestions for improvement before they finalised a text.⁶² In addition, both amateurs and more serious poets played versifying games, and poets might be expected to improvise verses over dinner on a topic suggested by their host.⁶³

As we have seen in the preceding section, much of this verse could (and did) contain references to individual brands of wine, and the way in which these brands were described was usually favourable. Just how much exposure individual mentions might get among the elite audience is hard to gauge. Yet Vergil and Horace, in particular, rapidly became part of day-to-day education. Educated Romans were expected to know and recognise quotations from the ‘classics’, and it is evident, from studies of intertextuality in 1st century AD poetry, that professional poets fed voraciously off the material of their predecessors.⁶⁴ There would be little point in Statius or Lucan building on a concept from Vergil if none of their readers had any inkling of what they were doing.⁶⁵ At the same time, we should remember that in

⁵⁹ See Pliny *Ep.* 3.2.1 for the decline in literary patronage. Cf. White (1975) (Martial, Statius); Nauta (2002) 6-15 (Juvenal).

⁶⁰ E.g. Plin *Ep.* 1.13, 7.17, 8.12., and numerous others.

⁶¹ Juv. 1.1-14, echoing Persius 1.18 ff., nearly a century earlier.

⁶² Many references in Pliny: *Ep.* 4.14, 5.3, 7.9, 7.17, 8.21, etc.

⁶³ A practice that goes back at least to Catullus, before 50 BC. See Cat. 12, 13, with Landolfi (1986). Cf. Cic *Arch.* 18, 28, *Or.* 3.194.

⁶⁴ See White (1982),: ‘Leaders of society had studied poetry intensively with their *grammatici*’ 60. On intertextuality see, e.g. Hinds (1998, 2007), Colton (1991), Townend (1973), and now *AJP* 134,1 (2013) for articles and detailed bibliography.

⁶⁵ See Goldberg (2005), 31.

ancient societies, even where literacy was widespread, the ability to memorise simply from hearing a reading was highly developed.⁶⁶

The implication of this is that the language used by leading poets in their frequent references to wines had every chance of becoming the common currency of conversation and quotation. How this could occur in what is, admittedly, a rarified intellectual context is vividly illustrated in the stream of quotations about wine in Book 1 of Athenaeus's *Deipnosophistae*.

Mapping the networks

Clearly, it was possible for a wine to be widely promoted by a combination of gossip and dinner parties. At these parties, good wine would be served with complimentary comments by the host.⁶⁷ It might also be described in glowing terms in an ode recited by a famous poet. Those at the dinner party would mention the brand to their friends; and the poem would circulate, with all the right words to characterise the wine, among those privileged to receive the poetry book. In time, the poem might enter the canon of literature used in schools, as outlined by Quintilian in the 2nd century AD, and so become part of the education of virtually every member of the elite.⁶⁸

What we cannot easily do is join up the dots in this process. While we know a considerable amount about the prosopography of the late Republic and early Empire, our knowledge of the interactions between members of the elite and then between them and the literary world is sketchy. One (limited) attempt to use the letters of Cicero to shed light on his contacts has been referred to above.⁶⁹ While this shows clearly the breadth and depth of Cicero's contacts, it does little to illuminate the relations between different contacts: the network is incomplete, and arguably incapable of completion.

The literary world of Rome was small and concentrated: the younger Pliny famously claimed that almost anyone who wrote was a friend of his.⁷⁰ Peter White identified 'about fifty' literary friends of Pliny, but argued that Martial, Statius and Pliny occupied three

⁶⁶ Harris (1989), p248 (levels of literacy, which were extremely high among the elite). Sen. *Cont.* 10. pr7-8: Cassius Severus is reported to have said when T. Labienus's works were sentenced to be burned that they would have to burn him, too, since he had learned them by heart. The role of memory cannot be ignored in pre- or semi-literate societies (memory).

⁶⁷ Parodied by Petronius in Trimalchio's comic dinner (*Sat.*34)

⁶⁸ Quint.*Inst.* 10.20ff. Much Roman schooling involved learning by heart.

⁶⁹ Alexander & Danowski, (see n. 53).

⁷⁰ *Ep.* 1.13.5: *Erant sane plerique amici; neque enim est fere quisquam, qui studia, ut non simul et nos amet.*

different ‘circles’ in Roman society (with limited overlaps between them). He listed over 30 poets identified as such in Martial’s *Epigrams*.⁷¹ In the same way, we can examine the connections of the Augustan poets, and see interconnections between Vergil, Horace, Propertius, Tibullus, Ovid and many others. Three major literary patrons, Maecenas, Pollio and Messalla, were each involved with several writers and directly linked to Augustus himself. Their circles clearly acted as ‘hubs’ around which the literary world revolved, and they overlapped: Horace and Vergil, for example, were on friendly terms with all three. By way of illustration, Ovid lists half a dozen poets with whom he was closely acquainted, in a single autobiographical poem from his exile, and in total his poems reveal connections with some 30 poets.⁷²

The data does not exist to enable us to conduct an effective formal network analysis even of the Augustan poets’ connections with the wider elite world, and tracing the legacy of these connections over time to shed light on the diffusion of wine brand knowledge is even less feasible. We have widely differing data available for the connections of individual poets, and even for the three major patrons. Indeed, we know much more about the connections of Horace (because of his range of addressees, both for the *Odes* and the *Epistles*) and of Ovid (because of the epistolary nature of the *Tristia* and his *Epistolae ex Ponto*), than of the other three major Augustan poets. We also know more details about Horace’s and Ovid’s contacts than about those of most Roman politicians, apart from Cicero.

What is clear is that the three great Augustan patrons would have had a very wide circle of contacts: Pollio and Messalla were consular senators who had been successful generals in the civil wars of the late 40s and 30s BC, and Maecenas (though only an *eques*) was Augustus’s right-hand man for a long time.⁷³ Under later emperors, the focus of patronage shifted to the emperor himself; although later poets evidently enjoyed some private patronage, yet it was not as systematic as earlier. Arguably, this meant that they had to work hard at building their own contacts and this seems to underlie the complaints of Martial and Juvenal about the demeaning drudgery of client life.

In conclusion, it is impossible to prove how wines gained currency in the Roman world. But it seems evident that a combination of factors helped them. Wine was an essential and

⁷¹ White (1975), pp. 299-300 with nn.50 (Pliny), 52 (Martial).

⁷² In *Trist.*4.10.41ff. he names Macer, Bassus, Propertius, Ponticus, and Horace, says he only saw Vergil, and was too young to meet Tibullus. Others named in his poems include Albinovanus Pedo, Cornelius Severus, Domitius Marsus, Iulius Montanus, etc.

⁷³ From at least 40BC until he fell out of favour in 22BC (Suet. *Aug.* 66).

regular element in Roman dining,⁷⁴ and it is clear from literary sources that diners were especially alert to what vintages were being served.⁷⁵ The social character of the elite facilitated word-of-mouth recommendations and praise (or disparagement) by famous poets helped to characterize the wines. As I have shown, different brands of wine developed clear brand images, which were generally consistent over an extended period, and the currency of the precise language used to describe different wines must reflect a combination of day-to-day conversation and remembered lines from the poets. In this, we can discern an effect akin to that of today's product placement, where the insertion of a brand into an appropriate entertainment can stimulate both brand recognition and word-of-mouth comment. I do not believe that Horace and Martial took money to name wine brands in their poems, but I am sure that what they said about these wines helped to shape perceptions of them among their elite audience.

⁷⁴ Tchernia (1986), 20-22.

⁷⁵ Poets from Horace to Juvenal call attention to hosts who served top-class wines to themselves and inferior vintages to their less important guests, e.g. Hor. *Sat.* 2.3.143-4; Mart 1.18.3, 3.49, 6.92, 9.2, 10.48; Juv. 5.25-34, 7.121. Contrast Plin *Ep.* 2.6.

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