LA VALLEE PERIGOURDINE DE LA VEZERE

Lavaud, O. 1931. La Vallée Périgourdine de la Vézère. Annales de Géographie, 40e Année (224): 144-152.

Vézère descends from the Montagne limousine (traditional area at the center of Limousin) and enters the Perigord region at Terrasson. Parts of the valley open into larger fertile plains and other parts are squeezed between tall limestone cliff-faces.

Band of Jurassic limestone at Condat-sur-Vézère.

Major plains: Terrasson, Montignac, Saint Léon, Le Bugue.

Wheat, corn, tobacco, walnut groves.

Vignards on shallow slopes; truffle oaks on rockier soil and steeper slopes; abrupt cliff-faces house crows.

Pine, chestnut, and oak coppices on plateaus; plantings include vignards and fruit trees (protected from frost).

Valley soil formed from the weathering of Cretaceous and Jurassic rocks that make up the underlying geology; in some places there are fragments of the overlying Eocene deposits.

River and its tributaries leave alluvial deposits that act as rich fertilizing silt.

On the plateaus and the cliff sides the calcereous soils are not very deep, especially those of the Jurassic oolithe.

These soils are very arid and permit meager vegetation of either pines or truffle oaks; however, well exposed slopes can support vineyards.

Tertiary terrains comprised of Perigordian sand and Eocene siderolithiques are favorable to woods.

Sandy clay supports pines.

Clay-siliceous supports heather and chestnut trees.

They can also support grain and forage crops, and it was here that many of the vineyards were replanted after being destroyed by phylloxera in the late 19th century.

Rich soils in the valley from alluvium; also receives through erosion the calcereous soils from the plateaux containing sand and clay.

3 zones of fertility in the plains:

1st closest to river so rich it doesn’t need fertilizers produces cereals, tobacco, and forage crops.

2nd intermediate zone poorest?; lowest? because it does not receive the rich alluvium nor the erosion from above.

3rd often the zone of walnut trees, gentle slopes leading up the plateaux.

Winter and Spring very rainy (Rainfall average between 850-1000 mm).

Summers very dry (especially June—climate change has definitely happened then).

Not a good area for raising large amounts of livestock because few natural meadows and artificial pastures don’t have high yields.

Often sources dry up in the summer in the smaller valleys (Plazac, Thonac, Journiac) and the inhabitants must use cisterns.

Soils require farmers to farm a little bit of land in each zone to exploit fully and gain all their requirements (valley for farming; cliff sides for walnuts, plateau for vignards and fruit trees; and woods and heather for heat and grazing).

Most land small plots worked by the owner themselves (2/3).

Last third of larger plots 9/10ths farmland worked through sharecropping.

Tenant farming rarer (not part of the tradition and requires more financial upkeep upfront).

Old forms of tools often used because the valley topography and nature of the soil does not lend itself to machinery.

Cows are the working animal of choice rather than horses; horses used more for transport along with donkeys and mules.

Cultivators

Large amount of wheat (not a large return per hectare).

Tobacco (only on the most fertile areas of the plain especially in the lower region around Bugue).

Fruit trees numerous (pear, prune, apple, and cherry dominant).

Chestnuts grow mainly on Eocene soils rich in silica; they grow together in large spaces or in thickets and are exploited every 5 years for wood.
chestnuts as food replaced by potatoes and cereals and primarily used as animal feed

at Condat, a factory for plant and pulp extraction established in 1908

walnut exploitation commerce born at the end of the 19th century

at the beginning of the 20th century walnut wood industry

large number of vineyards destroyed by phylloxera between 1885-1890; planting of new species grafted with more resistant american ones moved vineyards from dry calcereous slopes to Tertiary plateaus and in the plain at the foot of the slopes (since the grafted plants could not cope with dry soils)

truffles grow around holm and Kermes oaks around Terrasson and on the plateaus; gathered during the last weeks of November

truffles encourages the raising of many barnyard fowl, but most livestock raising left to Limousin and les Causses

primary barnstock in Perigord is pigs

largest pop. around industrial villages (Saint-Lazare, Terrassson); smaller populations in communes on plateaux where cultivation is not rich (Fanlac)

depopulation of region from 1803-1926; both depopulation of rural communes, and agglomeration around urban and industrial villages

depopulation recent: phylloxera; railroads; abandonement by young people

immigration of Bretons wanted by the State and organized by agricultural syndicates of Brest

right side of river better exposed

Terrasson situated in a natural amphitheater on the left side of the river

legend says it was founded by Saint Sour in 560 AD

importnat nut and truffle market

Montiganc was the capital of the counts of th Perigord during the middle Ages

nut market and industrial center

Le Bugue known for winter fairs of nuts, truffles and fat chickens