

“They are discovering a cornerstone of Western civilization.” —BRENDAN FOLEY

# Italians taught French to make wine

Archaeology suggests Etruscans brought the grape to Gaul

By Cristy Gelling

French winemakers learned their art after developing a taste for wines made in Italy, a new study suggests.

Archaeologists have found traces of grapes on a stone platform (right) dated to 425 to 400 B.C. from a site in southern France. The traces suggest that people used the platform for stomping on the fruit to make wine. The researchers also found wine traces at the same site in older, imported amphorae, the pottery shipping containers of the ancient Mediterranean.

The wine press provides the earliest molecular evidence for wine-making in France and the traces in the amphorae support the idea that local wine-making was inspired by trade with Etruscans

from Italy, researchers report June 3 in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*.

Researchers think the first wine industries in France started in the sixth century B.C., but did not have chemical evidence for ancient wine production.

So Patrick McGovern of the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology and colleagues analyzed samples from merchant quarters in the ancient French port of Lattara, south of Montpellier, where researchers previously found grape seeds. The samples came from Etruscan amphorae dated to around 525 to 475 B.C. The team detected tartaric acid, a molec-



ular fingerprint of grapes, in the samples.

The French taste for imported wine eventually led to a local industry, McGovern and his colleagues think. The team tested a limestone platform from a fifth century B.C. courtyard. The platform has a spout, resembles wine presses depicted on Greek vases and could have held a basket in which a person stomped on grapes. The researchers detected tartaric acid on the platform as well.

Because wine played such a central role in the religion, politics, medicine and art of the ancient world, the researchers' work is important, says Brendan Foley, an archaeologist at Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution in Massachusetts. “They are not merely tracing the introduction of an agricultural product in Italy and France,” he says. “They are discovering a cornerstone of Western civilization.”

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