

BOOK REVIEW

A History of Italian Wine: Culture, Economics, and Environment in the Nineteenth through Twenty-First Centuries

**by Manuel Vaquero Piñeiro, Paolo Tedeschi and Luciani Maffi,
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Brian J Griffith 

California State University, Fresno, CA, USA

Email: brianjgriffith@csufresno.edu

In *A History of Italian Wine*, Manuel Vaquero Piñeiro, Paolo Tedeschi and Luciani Maffi explore the transformation of Italian winemaking from a backward, regionally constrained system of production during the years immediately following the country's political unification in the 1860s to the modernised, globally embedded industry that oenophiles everywhere know and love today. Although focused largely on the political economy of Italian viti-viniculture between the late nineteenth and early twenty-first centuries, with special attention being paid to regulatory partnerships between specific classes of winegrowers and institutions associated with the Italian state, *A History of Italian Wine* casts fleeting glances at other aspects of winemaking in Italy, specifically the environmental, cultural and foreign tourism dimensions. Despite its analytical and typographical blemishes, which I return to below, the monograph serves as a significant contribution to the existing Italian-language historiography on grape vine cultivation and winemaking in Italy, the majority of which has tended to focus on specific (sub-)regions within the peninsula. By accounting for the development of the winegrowing industry as a whole, the authors provide their readers with a historical analysis of the socioeconomic dynamics, as well as political influences, which collectively 'made' the Italian viti-viniculture industry during the period in question.

Organised thematically, each of the monograph's five chapters explores a different aspect of Italian winemaking between the late 1800s and the early twenty-first century. Chapter 1 provides a historiographical and methodological justification for the study's contributions. 'The wine arriving on the market' during the years under examination, Piñeiro, Tedeschi and Maffi explain, was 'the result of the choices made by producers and public institutions' in Italy (p. 7). By focusing on the interplay between viti-viniculture and the Italian state on a national as opposed to a regional scale, the authors illuminate the 'actors who influenced the evolution of the productive and retailing systems' implicated within the winegrowing industry, which during the twentieth century spurred 'Italian wines to progressively conquest the international markets [sic]' (p. 7).

The second chapter analyses 'the first jolts of oenological "renewal"' during the *fin de siècle* and the 'great turning point of the second half of the twentieth century' (p. 11).

Influenced by the challenges posed by the phylloxera crisis, along with the disastrous consequences of a ‘tariff war’ with France during the late 1800s, Italian winemakers began innovating new partnerships, methods of cultivation and production, and community-based institutions – such as professional oenological schools, the modernisation of agricultural, fermentation and bottling equipment, and a wide range of working partnerships between winegrowers and the Italian state – that collectively brought about the modernisation of Italian viti-viniculture (pp. 40–41). The top-down diffusion of state-of-the-art winemaking practices, the authors contend, influenced the ‘creation of a national oenology, which progressively increased the quality of Italian wines and their reputation in the world’ (p. 12).

Chapter 3 explores the birth of the so-called ‘*enopoli*’, or co-operative wineries, at the end of the nineteenth century, largely as a response to the ‘excessive division of producers’ brought about by the appearance of large numbers of peasant winegrowers within the Italian viti-viniculture industry during the preceding decades. Co-operative wineries, the authors demonstrate, enabled small-scale producers to pool their meagre financial and material resources and allowed them to have ‘modern caves and productive system [s]’ as well as ‘an efficient retailing network’, which empowered them to compete, with varying degrees of success, with ‘the greatest Italian wine companies’ (p. 12).

The fourth chapter focuses on ‘the changes concerning the Italian wine productive system’, as well as the ‘changes in customers’ taste and consumption and the related wineries’ reactions’ (p. 14). Stemming from a combination of a half century or so of concerted investment and development, the financial assistance brought about by the Marshall Plan and ‘new European policies’ during the 1950s, all of which contributed to a ‘great increase of the Italian wine quality [sic]’ and a ‘good quality/price ratio’, Italian wines began experiencing a significant increase in popularity among international consumers, which helped wine exports become ‘one of the material (and also immaterial) pillars of the success of the “made in Italy”’ brand so familiar to Italophiles and wine aficionados in today’s global marketplace (p. 136).

Finally, Chapter 5 examines wine’s relationship with fashion and international tourism in Italy. After casting a few glances in the direction of the Fascist dictatorship’s various mass mobilisation campaigns, Piñeiro, Tedeschi and Maffi explore ‘the insertion of food and beverage in the attractions for tourists’ along with ‘the landscape, art, and cultural cities’ during the Cold War decades and beyond (p. 192). They emphasise the new ‘wine routes’ that began appearing in the early 1990s in order to attract oenophile tourists to Italy’s grape-laden hillsides and winemaking villages, especially those declared as UNESCO heritage sites (pp. 204–206). In the chapter’s concluding section, the authors examine the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on Italy’s viti-viniculture and hospitality industries, as well as the various ways in which industry figures have attempted to respond to those unprecedented commercial challenges (pp. 223–225).

Several critiques should be pointed out here. The attention paid to winemaking during Benito Mussolini’s 20 years in power, for instance, is insufficient. Instead of taking the dictatorship’s influences on Italian politics, economics and culture seriously, Piñeiro, Tedeschi and Maffi have opted for a kind of Crocean analysis, which views Fascism as ‘a parenthesis in the history of Italy’ as opposed to a deeply influential contributor to the shaping of modern Italian society and culture. One example of this analytical blind spot, for instance, would be the way in which the authors (mis)characterise the innovation, as well as the intended objectives, of the National Grape Festival. The ‘Fascist regime’, they contend, ‘imposed the “grape festival” with the declared aim of encouraging the consumption of table grapes’ (p. 202). Although the dictatorship did sponsor the National Grape Festival in 1930, no mention is made here of how the annual harvest festival was, in fact, the winemaking industry’s initiative.

Criticism of the authors' analyses aside, I must dedicate some space to discussing the monograph's poor production quality. The manuscript is riddled with countless spelling and grammatical errors, which make reading its chapters cumbersome and challenging. These typos and errors, of course, reflect poorly on Palgrave Macmillan, and not the authors, as copyediting and polishing are the responsibility of a scholarly publisher. When one considers the monograph's decidedly unaffordable price point of \$129.99, as well as Palgrave Macmillan's recently adopted policy of denying complimentary physical copies of their volumes to scholarly reviewers, one questions how such a poor production quality on the part of the publisher was paired with such a prohibitively costly retail price.

Nonetheless, Piñero, Tedeschi and Maffi's *A History of Italian Wine* offers its readers a comprehensive political and economic analysis of the modernisation of Italian viticulture between the 1860s and the contemporary period – albeit with the absence of any serious engagement with the Fascist *ventennio* – which will be useful to scholars interested in the history of wine specifically, but also in the political economy of modern European agricultural modernisation between the Second Industrial Revolution and the twenty-first century.