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“Storia Moderna del Vino Italiano” – Modern History of Italian Wine by Walter Filiputti

Is it necessary to write a book on the modern history of wine in Italy? My answer is an emphatic “yes”. In my opinion, Filiputti’s text is extremely useful as a sufficiently complete and manageable volume, with several opportunities for further learning and profiles of the people who made that history. *Storia Moderna del Vino Italiano*, published by Skira, is a well-organized text on how Italy has managed to adapt and modify its approach to wine in the last 50 years. This is the unfortunate fact: As I see it, only once we recognize that we’re decidedly behind our transalpine cousins can we begin to “attack” French wines. If, on one hand, we can certainly boast qualitatively valid wines in line with their French counterparts, on the other we can’t even compare with the widespread quality in some areas or the average price of those labels.

It’s easy for Filiputti to cite the protagonists in the world of Italian wine, the storied names: Antinori, Frescobaldi, Tachis, Veronelli, Incisa della Rocchetta, Boncompagni Ludovisi (to name a few). No one can doubt them, and no one discussing Italian wine should forget them. A text such as this would be remiss not to mention these fundamental references, also because many of those who followed in their footsteps only emulated their “forefathers”. The text also contains references to research, to the importance of autochthonous varieties, and to must-attend wine fairs. There’s Simonit, Sirch, and the Fondazione Edmund Mach, and references to the importance of Italian cuisine in the world and of the sommelier as a “wine intellectual”.

The book is comprised of three sections: Renaissance of Italian wine; Italian wine – Innovation; geography of Italian wine. The most important chapter in the first section is dedicated to the “men who changed history” – those cited above; in the second, researchers and wine experts who have “spread the word” of Italian wine are featured; and in the third, ample space is dedicated to those products – subdivided in decades and geographical areas – that represent “excellence in Italian wine from the 1960s to the present”.

I only have two minor critical comments on the text. The first is simply a formality, but concerns the title itself. Rather than “modern” history, perhaps “contemporary” is more suitable, given that the history begins in the 1960s and 70s. The problem may be – as mentioned above – Italy’s delay in producing top wines on a par with the French. Talking about modern history may be imprecise, but it can also lead to the conviction that we’re “older” than we think we are, and, as we know, knowing how to age a wine properly is a good thing. My second concern may be a personal impression – and far be it for me to undermine the importance of what is perhaps Italy’s most important and renowned wine producer – but I find the book slightly “Antinori-centric”. Beyond the choice, necessary from a schematic standpoint, to pinpoint the birth of Tignanello as the turning point for Italian enology, I noted a minor error with regard to the evolution of the “Fiorano” brand, as well as disproportionate emphasis placed on Piedmontese wines. If, as is the case in this book, Italy’s wine Renaissance takes place in the 1960s and 70s, we would do well to recall that exceptional Barolos precede those years considerably, without losing sight

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of the fact that that same area is also the most advanced in Italy in terms of zoning (another distinctive trait of top wines, which in Italy continues to lag).

This book is a pleasure to read, to highlight, to memorize in certain sections – thanks to expert contributions on several themes, but above all to Walter Filiputti, who edited the text alongside Mario Busso, Davide Rampello, Attilio Scienza and Angelo Solci. I consider it suitable for wine enthusiasts and experts alike, precisely because of its rich details of a history that, we can only hope, may only improve in the future.

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