

**Jordi Planas, *Viticultura i cooperativisme. La comarca d'Igualada, 1890–1939* (Barcelona: Publicacions de l'Abadia de Montserrat, 2013). Pages v + 411. €21 paperback.**

During the nineteenth century, viticulture underwent an important expansion in Catalonia, as a result of growing population pressure, domestic market integration and growing international demand. In some districts, the process of specialisation in viticulture took place via a particular form of contract known as *rabassa morta* ('dead vine'). In *rabassa morta*, the landowner ceded to the tenant (*rabassaire*) a plot of waste or wooded land for the plantation of vines. In return, the tenant gained use-rights over the land for as long as two-thirds of the vines remained alive, rights that could be passed down to heirs. Spain's liberal political transformation aimed to consolidate capitalist property rights, and thus brought owners and cultivators in these districts into direct conflict in the last third of the nineteenth century. In addition, the arrival of phylloxera plague in 1879 devastated the vineyards and brought about a profound economic and social crisis in the sector.

Jordi Planas is one of the main experts in the history of agricultural unions and co-operatives in Catalonia during the second half of the nineteenth and first third of the twentieth centuries, and the author of numerous books on the subject. In this most recent volume, he focuses on the relationships between social conflict, economic crisis and the co-operative movement in the Anoia district, one of the principal viticultural areas.

In the first chapter, Planas discusses the mobilisation of vinegrowers in order to form a common front against the crisis. Here, he emphasises that before the end of the nineteenth century, agricultural unionism had made little headway, until the social conflicts characteristic of certain viticultural districts prompted landowners to co-ordinate a unified response to the crisis on the part of the agrarian sector. The most important organisation to come out of this was the *Unió de Vinyaters* (Vinegrowers' Union), founded in Barcelona in 1910. The *Unió* presented itself as a unified organisation that cut across class divisions and, indeed, in its campaigns to defend viticultural interests it did enjoy the support of some agricultural workers' organisations, although its leadership remained firmly in the hands of large property owners.

In a second chapter, Planas focuses on the *Cambra Agrícola d'Igualada* in the capital of the Anoia district. This institution provided chemical fertilisers, pesticides and other inputs for its members (and also set up a mechanised threshing service for its corn-growing members, the only organisation of its kind to do so). The *Cambra's* main activity, however, was the distillation of spirits. Its leaders were conspicuously members of the land-owning class, and they attempted to respond to the crisis on two fronts: first, by improving the position of the vine-growers *vis-à-vis* the market through co-operative distilling, an attack on adulterated wines, and pressure on the government to reduce competition; and second, by avoiding social conflict within the sector. The landowners' interest in unified action was engineered to ensure the co-operation of the cultivators and to prevent the formation of an independent union, which could have posed a threat to the landowners' class interests. Planas's contention is that the success of such an all-embracing attempt at co-operation was entirely dependent on the services

provided for cultivators: when these did not work efficiently enough, the peasants withdrew their support.

The third part of the book analyses the development of agrarian co-operatives in the first decades of the twentieth century. Planas emphasises that unions and local co-operatives began to proliferate across the region from the turn of the century. In part, this proliferation was helped by the *Llei de Sindicats Agrícoles* (Agricultural Union Law) of 1906, but, much more so, by the severe impact of the First World War, which made the procurement of fertilisers and other necessary chemicals very difficult. The majority of the co-operatives were founded between 1915 and 1921. Of particular interest is the dual co-operativism that Planas identifies in two townships of the Anoia district, where the conflict between landowners and *rabassaires* had become entrenched. In both these localities, two co-operative wine cellars were founded simultaneously: one organised by the owners (the cellar 'of the rich'), the other by the tenants (the cellar 'of the poor'). This dualism extended to all aspects of social life, including clubs and mutual societies. The author concludes that a single co-operative would have been much more efficient at reducing the costs of investment and administration, and would have allowed for bulk purchases and thus cheaper prices of goods acquired for members.

Also revealing is Planas's study of co-operative wine production in the fourth chapter. He highlights various factors which contributed to the failure of most attempts to set up co-operative wine cellars: investment costs for buildings and machinery were high and difficult to meet without external credit, whether private or public; the production and commercialisation of wine was more complex to organise than other activities undertaken by co-operatives; and, finally, without the technical and particularly the financial support of public administration, building these cellars was problematic.

Catalonia was a pioneer region in that more co-operative cellars were founded here in the first decades of the twentieth century than anywhere else. Instrumental in this was the *Mancomunitat* (a regional body, created in 1914, with autonomous powers in some areas of public administration), which offered support in the form of specialised technical knowledge. By 1930, there were already some 80 co-operative cellars and distilleries, the majority in the province of Tarragona. Most of these had very little capital and unsophisticated commercial practices, and faced serious financial problems.

In the case of the Anoia district, Planas has studied the sources generated by the *Sindicat de Vinyaters d'Igualada* (Igualada Winegrowers' Association), created by small landowners in 1921. The richness of the sources and the work undertaken allow for a detailed study of this association: including its origins; its political relationship with the local republican movement and with the *Caixa d'Estalvis Municipal* (Municipal Savings Bank), which helped overcome the problem of finance; rapid construction of the co-operative wine cellar; the internal organisation of the co-operative; and diversification of the services it provided.

The final chapter focuses on the social conflicts of the 1930s, emphasising the fact that some town councils in the Anoia area, as in many other wine-growing villages in Catalonia, were run by members of the *Unió de Rabassaires* who had stood under the

auspices of *Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya* (the left-leaning republican and nationalist political party). This party embraced the peasants' fight for a more equitable distribution of land rent and ownership, a political stance that played a decisive role in its electoral victories and its control of the *Generalitat* (the autonomous government of Catalonia) during the 1930s. However, the programme of agrarian reform that the Generalitat wanted to implement in the countryside came into conflict with landowners, who had also begun to organise in defence of their interests. They did so under the auspices of the *Institut Agrícola Català de Sant Isidro* (St Isidro being the traditional patron saint of farmers). In the Anoia district, this took the form of creating a new, right-wing, group, *Acció Agrícola* (Agrarian Action), which engaged in an important campaign against the republican legislation.

The book ends with the study of agrarian conflict in the early 1930s and agrarian co-operatives during the Civil War. On the last point, Planas analyses the fusion of the different winegrowers' unions in the Anoia district into one single institution, the *Sindicat Agrícola d'Igualada* (Igualada Agricultural Union). During the war years, agricultural co-operatives and consumer co-operatives became more closely related than ever, to the extent that, in many cases, the same co-operative supplied products for domestic consumption and for agricultural production. At the same time, Planas shows how these co-operatives struggled to function in wartime, facing problems of supply of raw materials and the need to accommodate demands from the front line.

In summary, Planas's book is one which, given the range of sources from various associations studied and its in-depth analysis of contemporary newspapers, is required reading for anyone wishing to understand the development of agrarian associations in early twentieth-century Catalonia.

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