

## BOOK REVIEW

Ignacio García-Pereda. *Sacadores de Corcho – Tiradores de Cortiça: Uma Memória Oral*. Lisboa: Caleidoscópio/Euronatura, 2022. 304 pp.

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Portugal is home to a third of the global area of cork oak forests and is the world's largest producer of cork. This treated cork is transformed into wine bottle corks or various other items, such as wallets, shoes, hats, and the most varied artifacts, to such an extent that Portuguese industry also became a leader in its transformation into products. The remaining cork pieces are reboiled and repurposed into products like flooring, insulation, and message boards. However, and despite its recognized importance for Portugal's wealth, identity and memory, it has received scant attention from historians.

Therefore, this book is a welcome contribution to the research made on this topic, after the same author's earlier work *Dicionário Ilustrado da Cortiça*, published by Euronatura and the Casa de Bragança Foundation in 2016. As a researcher affiliated to the same research center as the author for several years and as someone who collaborated with him in an unrelated research project, I consider the perspective adopted in the book under review an excellent choice. García-Pereda looked at the experience of people on the ground, the usually invisible

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actors to whom he gave voice. He demonstrated that their expertise is above all an expertise of effort, and that their survival relies on the social dynamics that unites them.

For the past two centuries, cork harvesters who are manual workers dedicated to the extraction of cork, have been gradually improving their technique as craftsmen of forest work to such an extent that a legacy inherited from this practice gave rise to techniques that are scientifically upgraded today. The cork tree only gets its first cork bark at the age of twenty-five years, and then the tree needs to grow for another nine years before getting the first good cork yield. Every nine years, the bark from the cork tree can be removed, an operation requiring utmost care to avoid damaging the inner new layer of the tree.

To highlight this tradition, the author carried out interviews in villages across Spain and Portugal, namely Aliseda, Higuera de la Sierra, Cortegana, Coruche, Évora and Mora. The collection of testimonies from the artisan cork harvesters holds immense value for history and future historians, as it represents a segment of history that generally does not leave any written documentation. Moreover, the author also interviewed an anthropologist from Seville and an association leader from Jimena. Therefore, although one could have wished to find a greater variety of voices, oral history methodologies become crucial here to gather information and data that could not be obtained nor preserved otherwise.

In this way, the author, with patient and empathetic work, was able to win over a closed community and enter the cork harvesters' universe in a way that not only allowed him to understand the techniques used, but also their level of expertise and the rules of their corporative work. The author was also able to highlight the social dynamics and the importance of gender issues in these jobs from which women were practically excluded until recently.

The author interviewed cork harvesters of varying ages and found that they constitute a close-knit group characterized by a high level of corporatism, where new members are only accepted if they have been trained by a master, similarly to the guilds of the Middle Ages. One is only recognized as a professional after working alongside another professional for three years. Additionally, there is an age beyond which it is considered too dangerous to work in this field.

The data from cork harvesters gathered in this book stands as a milestone not only for itself but also as a contribution for what we know about artisanal epistemology, usually addressed by historians of science and technology interested in the early modern period. The author has chosen not to approach the industrial process cork undergoes after being harvested, but the manual work, one that cannot be replaced by machines, at least for the time being.

In linguistic terms, the book did not undergo standardization. The interviews that were conducted in Portugal were left in Portuguese, and those conducted in Spain were left in Spanish. Thus, it is not a Portuguese-Spanish bilingual book. Unfortunately, the quality of

the edition does not match the importance of the content gathered here. The book appears to be an amateur publication, where the revision, design, and all formal aspects do not reach the standard which the originality and importance of the content should deserve. This research merits a reappraisal through a more in-depth inquiry exploring the author's contribution to the field of artisanal epistemology to be published by an internationally renowned publisher. Such a book in English could reach the wider interested audience. The present book, here under review, is nevertheless of great interest and useful for historians of science and technology, as well historians interested in agricultural and rural studies, and social history.