

the book extends well into the twentieth century by virtue of the chapters on Bolivia and Japan.

The volume begins with a broad definition of open fields as 'areas of cultivated land in which the intermingled plots of different cultivators, without upstanding physical boundaries, were subject to some degree of communal management in terms of cropping and grazing' (p.1). Such a broad definition is merited by the findings of the subsequent chapters, which amply demonstrate that, while open-field systems functioned in many areas, there were substantial local, regional, and national differences in their operation. These variations and their causes are not always elucidated because chapters mix explanations of technical differences between types of open-field systems with explanations for why open-field farming developed in some areas and not others. In either case, the editors conclude that a range of factors were at play (environmental, agrarian, societal, economic) but that the timing and nature of the development of open-field systems depended on the precise confluence of these factors in certain localities or regions. Individual chapters place varying degrees of emphasis on one or more factors: in chapter 1, Tom Williamson argues for the centrality of environmental factors for explaining regional field systems in England; whereas Erik Thoen, in chapter 7, argues for the crucial part played by power, property, and labour relations in shaping five different types of field systems in Flanders. In chapter 5, Petri Talvitie demonstrates that agrarian differences played a key role in the development of open fields in Finland. Areas dominated by burn-beating and animal husbandry in eastern and northern Finland did not see the emergence of open-field systems, which developed in districts more reliant on arable agriculture. Of course, these agrarian differences are also fundamentally related to the environment.

The volume contains a wide range of approaches drawing on an extensive source base to reconstruct the history of open-field agriculture. The editors acknowledge key obstacles to recovering the history of open-field systems, not least because practices were often rooted in oral custom. The 'retrogressive' approach is applied in many chapters, with authors working backwards from early modern or nineteenth-century sources to recover landscape use and field management practices in earlier times. Alternative approaches are identified by the editors, such as pollen analysis, archaeological field surveys, and geo-archaeology. The inclusion of chapters employing these methods may have led to new and decisive pronouncements on the chronology of open-field development in Europe that cannot otherwise be made from archival evidence.

In general, the individual chapters make convincing and important contributions to our understanding of the development and operation of open-field agriculture. The volume is, however, less successful in organizing these into a cohesive whole. Rather than an overview of the well-known English case, the volume would have benefited from an introduction that clearly set out a) the known forms of various open-field systems and b) where and at what times these have been observed across Europe. Not until chapter 6 is there a direct comparison of criteria for different types of farming system in table 6.1 (this is largely predicated on Joan Thirsk, 'The common fields', *Past and Present* 29 [1964]) and maps of field systems across Europe in figures 6.3 and 6.14 (taken from studies by Rosemary Hopcroft, René Lebeau, and H. D. Clout). Placed in an introduction alongside extended discussion of the history of European open-field systems, these would have gone some way to provide the necessary context to situate the detailed discussions of case studies in individual chapters.

Furthermore, the inclusion of two non-European twentieth-century case-study chapters provide exciting and meaningful comparisons to the volume but render it somewhat unwieldy and unbalanced given the remaining eight chapters are European case studies. Greater consistency between chapters could also have been achieved. For example, chapter conclusions varied between four sentences and two pages. The editors and publishers should be commended for supplying large numbers of illustrations and maps to complement discussion and analysis but there was scope to deploy these even more effectively. In many cases, these were reprints of previously published figures, which are consequently of lower fidelity. Lastly, more care might have been taken with the selection of contributors, as the book contains only one chapter by a female author. These limitations notwithstanding, this volume contains many important contributions that will repay close reading and should prompt further research into this vital topic.

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SANDRO CAROCCI, *Lordships of Southern Italy: rural societies, aristocratic powers and monarchy in the 12th and 13th centuries*, trans. LUCINDA BYATT (Viella, 2018). xv + 622 pp. €95.

The role of aristocratic power and its interrelationship with the State, on the one hand, and rural society, on the other, has often been situated at the centre of the long-standing debates around southern Italy's perceived 'otherness', particularly in the Middle Ages and in

relation to the development of central and northern Italy. A conventional picture which emphasizes the negative dominance of aristocratic authority and the concomitant lack of agency of medieval southern Italy's rural communities undoubtedly requires rethinking as new evidence and interpretative models emerge. It is the sort of subject that needs a comprehensive and holistic assessment, and which Sandro Carocci's book (which was first published by Viella in Italian in 2014 as *Signorie di Mezzogiorno: Società rurali, poteri aristocratici e monarchia (XII–XIII secolo)*); the English edition includes an additional foreword by the author) attempts, very successfully indeed, to do so.

This is a quite monumental study (the main text runs to over 550 pages) which covers an array of interconnected subjects, although it must be noted that, for sound methodological reasons relating mostly to evidence types, the focus rests primarily on the South Italian mainland (but Carocci still offers intermittent and important analysis of developments on the island of Sicily). Carocci's introduction lucidly frames the study and its historiography, carefully questioning and rejecting the traditional master narratives which have both mythologized the South Italian monarchy and which have focused on notions of 'backwardness'. The titles of the book's chapters (which are then divided by numerous sub-headings) offer the clearest insight into the range and ambition of Carocci's study: 'Before the Normans', 'The Normans: Change and Continuity', 'Monarchy and Feudalism', 'Kings and Lords', 'Nobility and Pre-eminence', 'Clientele and Submission', 'Villeins and Serfs', 'Seigneurial Justices', 'Worlds of Exaction', 'Economy, Lordship, the Rural World', 'Rural Societies and Aristocratic Lordship'. There is much thematic overlap and cross-referencing between these chapters, inevitable and necessary given the entangled and complex subject matter and evidence. It does mean though that this study requires careful, painstaking attention. One must regularly move back and forth across chapters to consolidate and clarify the argument as it develops and the sheer quantity of small, but important interpretations can sometimes be challenging. But Carocci is aware of this and expertly signposts and summarizes where possible to guide the reader and to situate a given chapter within the book's most fundamental arguments.

But what are these key arguments? There are many and they are undoubtedly extremely important. Carocci includes a quite wonderful deconstruction of the *Catalogus Baronum* which demonstrates that in the South Italian monarchy's formative years it was far from establishing a fixed set of feudal norms. Instead there was much experimentation and contingency and even

royal opposition to 'formalized serfdom'. Moreover, the monarchy's presence created a 'supralocal' arena from which the State could mediate in disputes between lords and 'subordinated communities', often curbing aristocratic abuses. This situation simultaneously contributed to a trend which often made lords extraneous to peasant society. The lords were thus unable and/or unwilling to exert a significant level of what Carocci calls 'pervasive controls' (p. 53) and generally they extracted less resources from the rural world than many of their counterparts elsewhere in Italy and beyond. A picture of a much more dynamic rural world emerges, one in which we encounter a multitude of invariably fluid forms of dependence and clientele relationships, defined by a varied set of terms (*affidati, angararii, franci, liberi, servi, villani* and so on). Conversely, this also nurtured forms of pluralized and localized power which enabled local 'notables' to exert quite significant agency within village communities and, when necessary, to demonstrate effective forms of resistance to aristocratic power.

This foregoing summary cannot do full justice to the range and depth of Carocci's interpretations, and a close reading of the author's extended conclusion sets out clearly what he believes to be the study's main contributions. For Carocci, 'the South fluctuates between otherness and representativeness' (p. 540); indeed his study shows numerous parallels and differences with other regions of medieval Europe and it consolidates the view established in other recent studies of medieval southern Italy that the region should not be interpreted through the prism of 'backwardness'. Likewise, the Normans could paradoxically bring 'continuity through change' (pp. 89–94) and a dynamic rural world is presented with fluid and contingent connections with aristocratic and royal power. Carocci discerns the emergence of a new reality for the rural and aristocratic worlds in the post-1220 Staufan era, when Frederick II initiated administrative and legislative reforms (such as a general state tax, along with new definitions of clientele relations and of knighthood) which would change and eventually diminish the types of agency and autonomy available to rural communities. This trend would be consolidated and accentuated under the Angevins in the second half of the thirteenth century, such that, for Carocci, 'the lordships of the Mezzogiorno were becoming more normal', in other words increasingly less distinct from those elsewhere in Europe.

In short, Carocci's study is a *tour de force*, though it is not without some minor problems: in places, the entanglement and complexity of evidence and interpretation can be hard to follow. But, setting this

reservation aside, Carocci's book should now stand as the seminal work on medieval South Italian aristocratic power and the rural world. It is a must-read and a quite astonishing achievement which re-shapes our understanding of the field.

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LUIGI LORENZETTI, YANN DECORZANT, and ANNE-LISE HEAD-KÖNIG (eds), *Relire l'altitude: la terre et ses usages, Suisse et espace avoisinants, XIIIe-XXIe siècles* (Éditions Alphil – Presses universitaires suisses, 2019). 338 pp. €29.90 / free open access.

The basic idea of this collection is impressive: it aims to trace the effects of a geographical factor – altitude – on human activity through time. For, according to the implicit hypothesis, even something as immutable as altitude is subject to change in the course of history, to changes of function and meaning.

Admittedly, Luigi Lorenzetti, Yann Decorzant and Anne-Lise Head-König are not the first to tackle this subject. Inspired by the European voyages of discovery and conquest, natural scientists have been studying the effects of altitude since the eighteenth century, and several historical studies using comparative approaches have already been published. Nevertheless, the question of how altitude has shaped (agricultural) economic production methods and social formations in various historical and geographical contexts has not been conclusively answered. Jon Mathieu writes in the foreword to his 2011 survey *The third dimension: A comparative history of mountains in the modern era*, that a global comparative view can only be the beginning, and that many more studies 'in different tones' are needed to understand the complexity and multifaceted development of mountain regions and their societies. And so the editors of the present volume evidently see their contribution to this complex of questions as a renewed focus on altitude, a 'relire'. They focus on Switzerland and mountain regions in neighbouring Italy, France and Austria, from the middle ages to the present.

The book features 11 case studies and one systematic comparison between mountain regions and lowlands. The contributions in French and German examine the effects of altitude on land use systems, on market relations and on political institutions. It is striking that each of the chapters is assigned to one of the three focal points, but that each also uses all three dimensions to explain the developments they describe.

The chosen geographical framework makes it possible to cover the development of the individual regions

over a long period and in a variety of thematic areas. Thus, Lombardy, the French Alps and Switzerland are covered by several articles and are examined from multiple perspectives, showing particularly clearly the changing function and meaning of altitude over time. The transnational perspective also clearly demonstrates the far-reaching market relations between highlands and lowlands. These cross-border connections are described and impressively visualized with maps in the chapter by Mark Bertogliati and Patrik Krebs on charcoal production and trade between the Insubric Alpine valleys and the northern Italian cities in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In the same region and the same period, Luca Mocarelli explores the interconnections and mutual dependences between town and country, plain and mountain. He focuses on grain, but also depicts the diversified economic strategies of mountain households, which are described in other articles too.

The institutions of mountain societies and the widespread practices of collective organization are mentioned several times. They are an explicit theme of Fabrice Mouthon's chapter, which traces the geographical shift of a collective ownership category, the 'mas', in medieval Savoie-Dauphiné. While it disappeared in the valley areas, the *mas* became dominant in the mountain areas. Mouthon also examines how tax regimes and legal practices strengthened collective organization. At the other end of the temporal scale, in the twentieth century, Yann Decorzant, Jean-Charles Fellay and Jean Rochat take a closer look at a 'consortage d'alpage' in Swiss Valais and show how this form of organization combined – and to this day continues to combine – both political and economic action and therefore must be analysed as a hybrid private-public organization.

The great variety of organizational forms that appears in the volume is accompanied by a wide range of land uses and forms of production. The articles by Hannes Obermair and Volker Stamm on Tyrol from the middle ages to the early modern period, by Luigi Lorenzetti on the area around Locarno between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, by Claudio Besana and Andrea Maria Locatelli on Valtellina in the nineteenth century, and by Anne-Lise Head-König about Switzerland between 1750 and 1914 all describe the spatial patterns of cereal growing, cattle breeding, dairy farming and specialized agriculture, like viticulture. Firstly, it appears that altitude was by no means the only factor that influenced a particular form of production at a particular location. Other natural factors such as exposure and slope inclination also played a role. Secondly, in many places there were small-scale patterns and close interdependencies