Sandro Carocci

Lordships of Southern Italy

Rural Societies, Aristocratic Powers and Monarchy in the 12th and 13th Centuries

What was the real nature of medieval lordship in southern Italy? What can this region and its history bring to the great European debates on feudalism and aristocratic powers, their structures and evolution, and their social and economic impact? What contribution can the Kingdom of Sicily make to studies of the relationships between sovereigns, nobilities and peasant societies? And can the study of seigneurial powers and rural societies reshape the old arguments regarding the economic backwardness of the Mezzogiorno (the South of Italy) and the central role of its monarchy?

This book offers the first systematic analysis of lordship in southern Italy in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, under the Norman, Staufen and early Angevin kings. It offers new interpretations of the powers of the nobility, and of rural societies and royal policy. It reveals the complexity of interactions between the king, nobles and peasants, and how they occurred and were expressed through laws and violence, feudal relations and economic investments, debates on freedom and serfdom, and the exploitation of people and natural resources. In these interactions a leading role is played by peasant societies – with previously unsuspected levels of dynamism – to set against that of the kings, who were determined to curb aristocratic powers, and of the nobles who were obliged to adapt their lordship in response to powerful rural societies and crown policies. What emerges is a hitherto unseen Mezzogiorno, vital and complex, whose study allows a deeper understanding not only of the affairs of the South but of many other regions of Europe.

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