BOOK REVIEWS

Edited by NEIL CHRISTIE

Archaeology and History of Peasantries 2. Themes, Approaches and Debates. (Documentos de Arqueología Medieval, 16). Edited by Juan Antonio Quirós Castillo. 21 x 30 cm. 236 pp, 70 b&w pls, figs and tables. Bilbao: Universidad del País Vasco/ehupress, 2021. ISBN 978-84-1319-370-9. Price: €20.00 pb.

This volume is the second in a series examining pre-industrial peasant communities across Europe, with a particular focus on the Iberian Peninsula. The series springs from the project 'Peasant agency and socio-political complexity', which ran between 2018–21, and was funded by Spain's Ministry of Science and Innovation. While ostensibly interdisciplinary in nature, Volume One focused on archaeology, whereas this volume meets that objective more readily, with contributors drawing on history and sociology in addition to archaeology in a variety of forms. A supplementary focus for this volume is 'to explore … new theoretical and methodological approaches' to the study of pre-industrial peasant society across Europe.

The volume contains eleven papers plus an Introduction, arranged within three key themes: 'Peasant Societies', 'Encompassing Societies and Peasantries' and 'Peasant Societies in the Longue Durée'. Eight of the papers (including the Introduction) are in English, three in Spanish and one in Italian; all have English abstracts. The papers within the first themed section focus predominantly on theoretical matters; those in the second on peasant communities' relationships with other status groups and the wider hinterland and its associated socio-economic structures; and the final section addresses the subject diachronically, here keying into a call made by the editor, Juan Antonio Quirós Castillo, in the first volume. This review will focus on papers relevant to the theme of medieval settlement and landscape.

In the introductory chapter, Quirós Castillo identifies several recent trends in the study of rural landscapes and peasant communities: the emergence of a greater focus on rural landscapes as a result of the increase in rescue archaeology – more commonly known as developer-led archaeology in the UK; how scholarship on the subject is developing at different paces across Europe; the increasing importance of theoretical approaches; and a common theme that peasant communities are not homogeneous, but demonstrate evidence of hierarchy. In terms of the issues highlighted, he suggests that the concept of 'marginality' needs to be questioned, something that British scholars will be aware of, having been first noted in the UK in the late 1980s by Mark Bailey.

João Pedro Tereso offers an archaeobotanical analysis for southern Europe, suggesting that, in this region hitherto, studies of medieval agriculture have usually drawn upon written data, within which, the author argues, rural communities remain largely invisible. Focusing on sites ranging from the south of France to Spain and Portugal, he notes that some cereal varieties, such as naked wheat, were more demanding than hulled wheat, barley, millet, oat and rye. Rye and oats appear as the main crops in areas of poor soil, and barley and wheat in fertile zones. In 2000, Bruce Campbell determined that in England from the thirteenth century, while rye was hardy, barley was generally favoured for cropping on poorer soils, and this contrast might have been usefully explored, although Tereso's dataset was from earlier, pre-thirteenth-century contexts.

Ros Faith explores the longevity of the peasantry as a social form by looking at modern isolated farms that have endured from the Middle Ages in Provence and England. She suggests that the reasons for resilience include an ability to adapt to changing market and environmental conditions, and the importance of the household, bound by the values that governed and structured social relationships – the 'moral economy'. She identifies that 'household' in this context did not necessarily mean biological family, but extended groups including non-family members with one 'leading' member; and that, partly because of this, the reciprocal arrangement in which obligations to work were rewarded by entitlement to food helped to ensure longevity.

In another diachronic essay, Carlos Tejerizo García compares two case studies in the Valdeorras region of north-western Iberia in the period immediately after the collapse of the Roman West and again in the post-Francoist era. Like Faith, he concludes that resilience and adaptation were key to peasant communities' long-term survival. The region was a connective hub between mountains and coast, resulting in ongoing political and territorial conflicts well into the modern period. He notes several phases of elite control, with initial reoccupation of hillfort sites after *c.* 450, followed by their abandonment by the eighth century, after which there emerged a new network of farms and villages. Despite their relative distance from peasant communities in this phase, he argues that elites enforced control through church, state and parish administration, which for the most part limited peasant autonomy, with isolated farmsteads proving an exception.

Finally, Eva Svensson focuses on the region encompassing northern arboreal inland Scandinavia (within modern Sweden and Norway) between 1000–1500. Her study, a largely excellent interdisciplinary paper, was conceived following unexpected pollen results which showed an increase in cereal cultivation during the late medieval agrarian crisis of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. While agrarian settlements were apparent from the earliest centuries AD, these adapted as settlement expanded onto poorer soils to encompass farmstead, shieling and outland. From the seventh century, the outland became the focus of industrial activity. In the eighth and ninth centuries, a strong

market for industrial products such as bloomery iron, soapstone and tar developed, requiring communities to increase the scale of production. Influenced through urban trading networks, this in turn led to innovations in vernacular dwellings, also leading to more hierarchical, status-driven communities. A downturn in the thirteenth century meant that peasant communities adapted their outlands back toward an agrarian focus, explaining the unusual pollen results.

Despite evidence of editorial errors (or lack of careful checks) throughout, this is an interesting volume, containing some extremely good scholarship on medieval rural settlement and landscape and covering an interesting range of case study areas and sites.

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Peasant Perceptions of Landscape. Ewelme Hundred, South Oxfordshire, 500–1650. By Stephen Mileson and Stuart Brookes. 19 × 25 cm. xx + 363 pp, 93 b&w and colour figs, 11 tables. Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2021. ISBN 978-0-19-289489-2. Price: £85.00 hb.

In recent decades, peasants have gradually emerged from the historical shadows to take their place in the forefront of our perceptions of the past – a growing visibility that has been accompanied by an increased emphasis on mentalities. This word, or at least its French equivalent, is firmly associated with Emmanual Le Roy Ladurie, notably his inspirational study of Montaillou, a work showcased in the introduction to Mileson and Brookes' engaging book on Ewelme Hundred. Together with Susan Kilby's publications, peasants' engagement with, and sense of, their surroundings has become a key feature of recent research. These refreshing evocations of landscapes and their meaning reflect the richness of the archaeological and documentary record and the meticulous yet innovative ways in which these forms of evidence are being analysed and combined.

The two introductory chapters explore the book's themes, its chronological and geographical focus, and the evidence on which the work is based. For readers of this journal, the thematic emphasis on the layout of settlements and their agrarian resources, and on deciphering how the use of space affected interactions between inhabitants, will be particularly rewarding. So, too, will the long perspective that is offered: subsequent chapters cover two Anglo-Saxon periods (500–1100), two medieval periods (1100–1530) and an early modern chapter that takes the story up to 1650. The region, Ewelme hundred, spans clay vale to the north and west, dominated by villages and fields, and the Chilterns to the south and east, characterised by woodland, early enclosure and dispersed settlement. This region is well-served by archaeological, architectural and historical evidence, providing – apart from anything else – an abundance of place-names, field names and bynames.

Each chapter is divided into 'Structures and structural change' and 'Perceptions', the latter including 'social space', 'making meaning in the landscape' and 'belonging'. In the Anglo-Saxon chapters, structures that are discerned include trading contacts that are visible in the spread of pottery and emerging distinctions between lowland and upland villages and their fields. In terms of perceptions, discussion in these chapters includes the significance of commemorative landscapes, with features such as 'Ceolwulf's tree', 'hostage's ridge' and 'victory dene', and the importance of routeways, meeting places and lookouts.

For me, the pivotal chapter is that covering the years 1100 to 1350: a significant increase in documentary evidence in this period brings greater detail and clarity to the analysis. Differing daily routines are distinguished in different settlements, against a backdrop in the vale of the abandonment of isolated Anglo-Saxon sites, the infilling of settlements, the amalgamation of strips and the expansion of demesnes. An impressive aspect of the book is the sensitivity to language, enabling the building up of 'a richer picture of the way village social relations were embodied and expressed in settlement plans' (p.199). Areas such as 'bovetown' seem to have been occupied by free tenants, while the middling sort inhabited more regularly laid-out plots, leaving comparatively marginal spaces for poorer peasants. Field names are also used to bring meaning to the landscape in fascinating ways, some with historical and supernatural overtones, generating a much sharper sense of peasants creating 'what geographers would call a cultural landscape' (p.229).

The final two chapters assess how the Black Death and the Reformation changed peasant perceptions of landscape. The growing seclusion of housing and the developing fixity of names for homesteads are highlighted, as well as more familiar themes such as increasing farm size. Social space is usefully analysed in terms of the orientation of houses: most were originally broadside on to the road, encouraging access rather than privacy; but, increasingly, houses were set back and built gable-end on, aping the status and privacy sought by higher social classes. Another intriguing layer in the analysis is the use of church bells to develop a medieval and early modern soundscape for each settlement.

Many further examples could be highlighted that, together, reveal the landscape of Ewelme hundred as a 'collectively understood mosaic' (p.318). The examples I have picked out are those that carry particular meaning for me in the landscape in which I am situated. As this suggests, this thought-provoking book encourages you to examine documents, maps and artefacts afresh and to perceive the landscape with renewed attention. In the introduction, the authors express the hope that the book will 'stand as a model for future research in different regions and landscapes' (p.9). They have succeeded admirably in this aim, combining painstaking research with inventive means of exploring the landscape forged by, and in turn influencing, the peasants of Ewelme hundred.

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