

Paul Warde

**The Invention of Sustainability: Nature and Destiny, c. 1500-1870**

Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2018, 416 pp.

In this book Paul Warde presents the history of the idea of sustainability from c. 1500 to the late nineteenth century. He introduces how major scientific discourses across Europe dealt with sustainability problems *avant la lettre*. To this end, he defines sustainability as an *environmental problem* (p. 5), that is the challenge to continuously provide resources without degrading the conditions under which they regenerate. The issues at stake thus range from perceptions of scarcity (in land, in nutrients, in labour), to ideas of overuse. Drawing on rich material from Western Europe, each chapter identifies, for different periods and specific resources (notably, wood or food), the scientific rationale with which contemporaries approached sustainability challenges, and the particular topics of that discourse. The book is compelling in content and style, though at times challenging for non-En-

glish native speakers, and presents an impressive overview on a timely but previously hardly studied topic.

Chapter 1 focuses on agricultural production in 1500-1620, and describes major issues including tillage and enclosure, livestock husbandry and manuring, as means to avoid or mitigate “dearth”, that is shortage in resource provision. During the same period, a more conscious management aiming at securing natural resources for posterity is described for the use of woods in chapter 2, centuries before the scientific discipline of forestry emerged, or, for that matter, an actual large-scale shortage of wood. Chapter 3 introduces ideas of “improvement”, prevalent from the late sixteenth century through the mid-eighteenth century, as issues of sustainability. In contrast to tillage, where the focus was largely on the territory (enclosure), here the focus was on management aiming at increasing

rents. The “state” as a new concept emerged in the sixteenth century, and it is the focus of chapter 4 (“Paths to Sustained Growth, c. 1650-1760”), where sustainability questions are discussed as a matter of public institutions, culminating in the science of cameralism in the mid-eighteenth century. Debates revolved around feeding the population and providing the economy with resources, be it through domestic production or import. Chapter 5 is something of a discourse into assessing and measuring the availability of –forest– resources from the late seventeenth to the early nineteenth century. Theories of circulation are the topic of chapter 6, in which the focus turns from political economic discourse and practice towards natural sciences and their interest in understanding life-sustaining chemical processes and establishing this knowledge in new scientific initiatives. Chapter 7 returns to political economy, and to the role of natural resources in those debates in late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Here, Warde argues that *political economists [did not] harbor [...] a fantasy of no limits. Rather, the idea of the limit was not seen as very relevant to the issues that did preoccupy them* (p.266). In the last chapter (“History and Destiny”) early ideas of collapse and scarcity are explored.

The book offers a formidable overview on how ideas of what is currently subsumed under the term *sustainability* shaped major scholarly discourses in past centuries. It provides counter narratives, *e.g.* against overly simplistic concepts of “sustainable” resource use in preindustrial times, against the negligence of scarcity problems and

against assumptions that resource conflicts emerged only in the course of the industrial revolution. By its broad perspective, encompassing discourses on political, economic, and biological questions, the book serves as a role model on how sustainability questions should be framed, touching upon all three pillars of sustainable development. The chapters on wood are particularly brilliant, synthesizing much of the previous extensive work by the author (*e.g.*, Warde 2006, 2007).

Two major conclusions of relevance to current sustainability debates will be stressed here, one made throughout the book, the other in the conclusion. Firstly, Warde describes how throughout much of the period covered in his book, sustainability was perceived as a problem of lacking labor, diligence –virtue even– or technology, rather than a problem of resource scarcity or overuse. Well into the nineteenth century, nature appeared as an abundant source of resources, and institutional and political efforts towards sustainability almost exclusively focused on tapping this potential. In other words, until the fairly recent past, the thought of scarcity or overuse of nature was, in Europe, not part of mainstream scientific discourses or political agendas. This insight may be of explanatory value for the current political and institutional challenges of governing sustainability problems.

Secondly, Warde conceives of sustainability as something that is being made, or “invented”, as the book title states, rather than something that has to be, has ever been, or can ever be discovered. This pers-

pective, though seemingly in conflict with the “environmental” nature of sustainability introduced early on in the book, enables Warde to highlight the different disciplinary and topical approaches to the issue as equally valid and relevant in response to their particular spatio-temporal context. Warde’s perception of sustainability thus may inspire current sustainability debates by calling for a “re-invention” of sustainability that addresses the historically unique dimensions of global sustainability challenges today.

We now highlight two issues addressed in the book which we hope will inspire future research in environmental history. Firstly, the geographical focus is, as the author states in the introduction, on Europe: the book tells *largely a European story, and the narrative focuses on particular parts of Europe: England and Germany, moving later during the eighteenth century to Scotland and France* (p.12). Warde indeed cites authors from even larger parts of Europe. While this provides relevant insights as such, it opens questions regarding the generalizability of the findings to other parts of the world. How do the European ideas presented compare to those in other world regions? In particular, this refers to the Global South, where an extensive and influential body of literature –beyond Carolyn Merchant– demonstrates the existence of debates and collective practices on the conservation of nature. For example, in the influential book *Memoria biocultural*, Toledo and Bassols (2008) elaborate pre-industrial sustainability discourses and practices. Comparative analyses of historical

sustainability discourses in Europe and other world regions appear as fruitful future research topics.

Secondly, as material environmental historians, we observe that Warde clearly chooses a discursive focus on historical sustainability challenges, though he does not entirely neglect their biophysical dimensions, *e.g.* stressing that *these things do matter* (p. 59). Given the author’s extensive experience in quantifying historical resource use (*e.g.*, Warde 2019), it is somewhat surprising that he resisted the opportunity to connect the intellectual birth of the idea of sustainability with existing empirical biophysical evidence. Instead, by providing a comprehensive overview on European scholarly debates relevant to sustainability challenges, the book offers substantial material for future work linking discursive and material perspectives on the historical emergence of and shifts between specific sustainability challenges. For example, future environmental history could inquire if, and to what extent, the lack of labor or the lack of land discussed in expert literature corresponded –or not– to actual material sustainability challenges in particular periods and places.

Overall, we find that the book offers a great overview on the history of the idea of sustainability. It is an important read not only for environmental historians, but also for historians of science and all scholars interested in the historical emergence of a currently seemingly ubiquitous concept. As we laid out, the book not only brings together in a highly skilled manner a broad array of otherwise rather disjointed debates,

contributing to sustainability thinking over a period of 400 years. In addition, and perhaps even more importantly, we believe that the book will inspire –not only– environmental history in the years to come, both by offering a solid reference on a previously under-researched topic, and by opening new grounds to build future research on. We highly recommend the read and look forward to using it in future research and teaching.

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## Jesús Fernández Fernández and Margarita Fernández Mier (Eds.) **The Archaeology of Medieval Villages Currently Inhabited in Europe**

Oxford, Archaeopress Archaeology, 2019, VIII + 119 pp.

**T**his short book contains some of the papers given at a conference held in Oxford in 2016. The meeting was an initiative of the ELCOS project, and one of the editors, Professor Fernández Mier, is the principal investigator for the project. The book consists of five papers (illustrated in colour) with a brief introduction and conclusion. The theme of the conference, repeated a number of times by different contributors, is that archaeological research into medieval rural settlements began with the study of abandoned village

sites, and that the time has come for investigation of places that survived, and are therefore still inhabited. A small minority of medieval settlements were deserted, and only study of existing places will reveal the characteristics of settlements as a whole. Deserted sites represent failures, and we risk distorting our interpretations by focusing on them. We ought to be defining the roots of resilience and explaining what factors contributed to the survival of villages.

The authors of the papers explore the theme in five European countries, giving an

contributing to sustainability thinking over a period of 400 years. In addition, and perhaps even more importantly, we believe that the book will inspire –not only– environmental history in the years to come, both by offering a solid reference on a previously under-researched topic, and by opening new grounds to build future research on. We highly recommend the read and look forward to using it in future research and teaching.

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The authors of the papers explore the theme in five European countries, giving an

overview of the whole subject, but often focussing on particular sites which have been well investigated. Lewis writes about a technique for sampling dating evidence (pottery) in English villages, by means of digging small test pits in gardens and open spaces. She presents an extended study of the village of Pirton in Hertfordshire, which from the evidence of more than a hundred test pits emerged in 850-1200, expanded in the next two centuries, and then shrank in size. Peytremann provides a comprehensive survey of research in France over recent decades, giving particular attention to the contribution of “preventive” excavations, that is work carried out in advance of the destruction of a site by modern development for housing or road building. There is more about methods and approaches to research than actual results, but she does examine Fossier’s argument that the French village began c. 1000, and finds a much extended chronology of village development, stretching from the Neolithic to the present day. A team from the Netherlands are discussing the “preventive” excavations which have led to “Malta driven research” or a surge in information gathering which they call the “Valletta harvest”. These are references to the Valletta treaty of 1992 which established the principle in Europe that developers should pay for the costs of excavation. They present an overview of data from many sites, but also show that particular villages such as Warnsfeld in Guelders have been the subject of focussed academic research with many small-scale archaeological interventions. Researchers are pursuing general factors in village for-

mation, such as manorialisation. Oye, presenting research in Norway, is troubled by the focus in his country’s research tradition on the farm rather than the village, and he agonises over the appropriateness of applying the term “village” to the “agglomerations of farms” which he studies in a district of western Norway. He seeks to explain the settlement pattern in terms of social power and the exploitation of resources, and sees parallels in these factors in other parts of Europe. The essay on Spain has been contributed by the two editors of the book, drawing on their research in upland districts at Vigaña in the Cantabrian mountains, and Villanueva in Asturias. They have carried out a number of small-scale excavations, demonstrating the multi-period character of occupation, in which prehistoric and medieval sites coincide. Their research extends into the fields and is concerned with the villages’ methods of using local resources. They make much use of environmental evidence. They seek to connect their academic work with the local community, and in this respect their work has some similarities with Lewis’s involvement with local inhabitants in her work in villages in eastern England.

Chris Wickham provides a useful conclusion in which he advises against defining villages in terms of a cluster of houses, but instead the village should be seen as a territory that provided resources for its inhabitants. He notes the capacity of these settlements to change, which invalidates too much reliance on modern maps as evidence for earlier forms of settlement. He is impressed by the villages presented in the

book which are sited on or near prehistoric monuments, but wonders if that tells us about continuities, as they could be cases of coincidence. Perhaps medieval people were attracted to settle near prehistoric religious sites which excited their curiosity. He picks up the point made by some contributors that the church provided a focus for settlement and served as an anchor that helped to fix the village in the landscape in subsequent centuries.

While it is very understandable for researchers to embark on new projects to claim novelty for their methods, and to promise fresh insights from developing a neglected branch of learning, it is only right to remind ourselves of the value of research on abandoned settlements. When work began on deserted villages in the 1950s and 1960s the research questions that justified the excavations were basic and unsophisticated. The pioneers wished to demonstrate that “lost” villages had once existed and their remains could be identified. That was relatively easily accomplished. They aimed to learn more about the desertion process: why was a village abandoned, and how was it removed? Archaeology was not the best way of addressing those questions, and they still remain only partly resolved. The third research priority was to investigate the material culture –as we would now call it– of the peasantry, finding out more about houses, possessions, the rural economy and so on. Houses were certainly revealed and studied, but the wider questions still need more research, and in subsequent decades more evidence is being investigated using scientific techniques, for example by analy-

sing environmental material such as human and animal bones, and plant remains. While the investigation of peasant life was progressing slowly, the burning research question through the 1970s and beyond related to village origins, which meant that research focussed on early periods, in which archaeological evidence was not always abundant. These avenues of enquiry took into account such matters as settlement planning, which was supposed to reveal the role of lords and the state in the creation of villages. It also became a goal to understand more about regional differences, as it was necessary to explain why in one area villages were created, often in a regular and orderly fashion, while elsewhere people lived in straggling and undisciplined hamlets and farmsteads.

All of these developments emerged from the investigation of deserted settlements, and with good reason. A village abandoned in *c.* 1450 presents opportunities for research. Here the settlement’s plan has been preserved for us to photograph, survey and analyse. Of course the abandoned skeleton of the village represented the last phase, and its plan might have changed radically in previous centuries –but that can be discovered by excavation or geophysical survey. The settlement has not been covered by centuries of modern buildings and alterations which obscure the medieval past. Large scale open excavation of parts of a deserted village can lay bare the foundations of buildings, and ranges of pottery, artefacts and environmental samples are recoverable. The ambitious archaeologist can gain a full view of the peasants’ living and

working space. Much of the work in modern inhabited settlements resembles key-hole surgery, in which a complete house, farmyard, or smith's workshop will rarely be visible. More advanced questions about the sociology, mentality and technology will be addressed with difficulty if the evidence is confined to the fragments of data derived from small-scale work in surviving settlements.

It is also alleged that deserted settlements are giving us a false picture of settlement forms and material culture because they represent failure. This is very difficult to prove. Archaeological work on the final phase of a deserted village have problems in identifying signs of decline; indeed, the last stage of occupation often seems to show a better quality of buildings and signs of prosperity. Of course we know that some places were closed down by their lords, or fell victim in times of war, so that they experienced no slow decline, and may not have suffered from inherent weaknesses.

This book offers an overview of new trends in settlement archaeology. It would be more fully convincing if some authors were less preoccupied with the bureaucratic processes of "preventive" archaeology, and if they could convince us that work on inhabited settlements could answer important and well-defined research questions. Archaeological theory is now so ambitious and comprehensive that every change in the past can be seen to have multiple explanations and implications, leaving the reader without clear guidelines for understanding the subject. Fossier's statement that villages began *c.* 1000, in a particular set of

social, economic and environmental circumstances, receives sharp criticism here, yet he provided a bold and useful point of reference which clarified our thinking.

Wickham ends his conclusion with the point that we do not need to choose between research into deserted and surviving medieval villages. Investigations of all types of settlement, regardless of whether they are now occupied by modern houses, should be welcomed because they have the potential to extend our knowledge of the subject and answer the many questions about the medieval rural past.

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Giacomo Bonan

## **The State in the Forest: Contested Commons in the Nineteenth Century Venetian Alps**

Winwick, The White Horse Press, 2019, 229 pp.

**T**his book addresses the intervention of the State and the conflict that occurred around common forests in the Cadore region, located in the Venetian Alps, on the border between present-day Italy, Austria and Germany, during the first six decades of the nineteenth century. The area is interesting because it had an enormous natural wealth (especially in forestry) and was traditionally one of the natural routes between central Europe and the Mediterranean. On the other hand, the period chosen for the study is especially eventful. The first decades of the nineteenth century witnessed the final erosion of the Old Regime and the consolidation of a liberal society in many parts of Europe. Those changes intersected in the Cadore region with the succession of three different administrative regimes: the final disappearance of the Venetian Republic by the Napoleonic conquest in 1797 and the establishment of a French rule in the area; the annexation of Cadore to Austria with the Restoration that emerged from the Congress of Vienna in 1815; and, finally, the ascription of those territories to Italy with the unification of that country in 1866. In this geographical and chronological context, the author places a historical study of great interest, which explores the relationship between administrative modernization inherent to the consolidation of liberalism and its effects on the use of na-

tural resources.

During the whole period, wood maintained an enormous importance as a raw material for the construction of ships –essential for naval power and long-distance trade– as well as providing materials and energy to the local population. This makes the timber trade an especially interesting subject to combine the study of local problems with aspects of much wider spectrum. In this context, the book's perspective is at the intersection between environmental history and the history of institutions, and it combines analysis of the political and legislative changes that affected the region with analysis of the abundant conflicts that arose with the attempts to apply the new rules. The book is divided into five chapters that are roughly organized in chronological order. Each chapter introduces complementary aspects of the complex puzzle that constitutes the relationships between institutional change, use of natural resources and conflict. An added value to the work is the introduction in the text of personal stories of some individuals who played important roles in the conflicts.

The prologue (Chapter 1) dates back to the period in which the region was under the power of the Republic of Venice (1420) and begins with a detailed description of the local institutions that managed the use of the abundant common forests. It was a pyramidal organization that had its base in

local assemblies (*regole*), which were later grouped into a higher level of representatives (*centeneri*), who elected the General Council as the highest board of the community. This traditional structure that managed the use of resources on the ground had to overlap the legislation that emerged from the power of Venice, whose merchants were especially interested in disposing of the area's timber resources for the construction and maintenance of their ships. In this context, there were constant tensions between different local interests and those of the commercial elite of the Republic. These tensions led to the differentiation between two types of commons (*beni comunali* and *beni comuni*) depending on the greater or lesser rights granted to the Republic on the one hand and to the local communities on the other. This traditional structure collapsed at the beginning of the nineteenth century, with the administrative reform launched after the French conquest of the territory. According to the Napoleonic Code, municipalities were considered the only legal entities at the local level and, therefore, communities were not recognized as subjects of the law. The approval in 1811 of a new forestry law that sought to impose scientific management on forests triggered the conflicts that would occur in the area in the following decades.

Chapter 2 draws an overview of some socio-economic variables of the region between approximately 1810 and 1870. In general terms, it can be said that the dynamics of the region responded to a typical model of European mountain economies, which despite having very little arable land

had high population growth rates supported by the development of complex economies. The exploitation of natural resources (forests, pastures, water), temporary immigration networks, and varied commercial traffic (which also involved livestock transhumance) granted the communities access to other resources that could not be obtained in the local area. Perhaps the most distinctive issue in the Cadore region was the enormous importance that the timber industry had in that economic framework. In fact, the felling of the forests, the first transformation in local sawmills, and the transport by water courses to the centers of consumption, composed a good part of the economic activity of the area.

Chapter 3 explains some of the disagreements that took place surrounding the specific forms of exploiting resources as administrative modernization was put in place. For instance, it analyzes the different understandings of the appropriate time to cut down trees, which in traditional forestry was based on the phases of the moon, something not recognized by the new scientific exploitation of forests. It also explains the differences between traditional and new official accounting methods, and the opportunities that provided local managers to conceal capital from the forest administration. Another example is the different importance granted by locals and forest administration to goats, which had traditionally played an essential role in the reproduction of domestic economies ("the cow of the poor"). The new forms of management wanted to reduce their use because they were considered harmful for the forest.

These examples all together allow us to clearly perceive different conceptions of forest management, and also allow the author to make arguments about sustainability as a relative concept in historical perspective.

The rest of the book (chapters 4 and 5) focuses on the conflict that surrounded the Austrian authorities' attempts to privatize the commons once the territory came under its jurisdiction after the Napoleonic defeat. As in other parts of Europe, legislation referring to the privatization of the commons had a complicated consolidation. In the case at hand, it was not until 1839 that a privatization law was passed that fully affected Cadore. This law granted full ownership of the commons to the municipal administration (eliminating the traditional distinctions between *beni comuni* and *beni comunali*) and forced the indebted municipalities to sell their commons. It also allowed the privatization of those commons by a possible buyer by municipal agreement. According to the author, the approval of this law was combined with two other processes that complicated its application. On the one hand, since the beginning of the century the changes in the composition of municipal power (once the community ceased to be recognized as a subject of the law) had given a growing prominence to the popular classes in mountain areas. On the other, the expenses of the municipalities had grown substantially due to the cost of the road that crossed the territory from north to south, which was built beginning in 1819.

The combination of these elements elicited protests in several villages of Cadore, which called for the distribution of the

commons among the members of the communities, basing their claims on the traditional forms of management under the *regole*. These protests involved popular revolts, military interventions and arrests. They coincided with the approval of the aforementioned law (1840), the revolutionary process that took place in Europe (and especially Milan and Vienna) in 1848, and the Unification process that would integrate the Veneto (including the Cadore region) into the Kingdom of Italy.

In addition to violent outbursts, there were many illegal uses of the forest because of a lack of recognition of the new rules. The collusion of local forest guards as well as some members of the clergy with the offenders made the phenomenon endemic. In the municipality of Sappada, a young man (son of a timber merchant and nephew of the parish priest) impersonated the prophet of a new religion and defended the distribution of common forests among residents. Although tensions of one kind or another abounded, there were hardly any effective changes in property rights in Cadore during the entire period considered. The conflicts give the author an opportunity to reflect on the nature of the protests, which he places in an ambiguous territory between traditionalism and revolution, both in the 1848 episodes and in the Unification process. The adscription of the Cadore region to the Kingdom of Italy did not end with the forest conflicts. The end of the "wooden age" and the development of the railway network in the late nineteenth century reframed the question, but this could be object of a new future research.

To sum up, Bonan's book is an interesting study that provides valuable historical information on political and institutional change and its effects both on society and on its relations with the environment. It is missing, perhaps, a greater support in the literature on the commons, which has been lately very prolific. The use of this historiography would have given a useful theoretical support to the case analyzed. The comparison with similar cases from other mountain areas in Europe would also have been useful, as many aspects described in

the book have strong similarities with other cases shown in the Spanish common forests, for example. These questions do not tarnish the value of a very interesting book, very well documented and written which, through a case study, addresses some key issues to better understand the complex processes of historical change.

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Rosa Congost, Jorge Gelman and Rui Santos (Eds.)

### **Property Rights in Land: Issues in Social, Economic and Global History**

New York, Routledge, 2017, 212 pp.

**T**he dual relationship between property rights and economic development is one of those big topics that are well suited for coming up with stylized models and grand narratives. Unfortunately, many of those attempts lack the detailed historical knowledge necessary to ground those theories on the empirical reality of past societies. This book, edited by Rosa Congost, Jorge Gelman and Rui Santos, constitutes a welcome contribution that challenges and qualifies some of the assumptions contained in those general accounts of how modern economic growth came to be, especially regarding the distinction between “good” and “bad” institutions. In particular, instead of only focusing on rules, norms and beliefs –as well as on the agency of state and elite organisa-

tions–, the articles contained in this collection frame their discussions around the social structures –and actual social practices– that surrounded those –more formal– institutions that governed property rights in land. By doing so, they stress the complexity of the dynamics between institutions and the social relations surrounding them. In addition, the wide regional and temporal coverage of the nine articles gathered in this volume successfully portrays the diversity of the historical arrangements around these issues.

The first chapter, “Migration and accommodation of property rights in the Portuguese Eastern Empire, sixteenth-nineteenth centuries”, by José Vicente Serrão and Eugénia Rodrigues, looks at the interaction between the Portuguese colonial state and

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The first chapter, “Migration and accommodation of property rights in the Portuguese Eastern Empire, sixteenth-nineteenth centuries”, by José Vicente Serrão and Eugénia Rodrigues, looks at the interaction between the Portuguese colonial state and

their subjects (both settlers and aboriginal) in India, Ceylon and Mozambique between the sixteenth and the nineteenth centuries. The implementation of land policies and the redefinition of the institutional framework constituted an ongoing learning process that varied across time and space, thus stressing the individual and collective role of the different players involved. Although initially attempting to impose a universal arrangement regarding property rights, the different local contexts and the subsequent adaptive evolution resulted in very different outcomes, including the incorporation of native elements into the institutional reconfiguration.

The long-term evolution of property rights in Scandinavia is the subject of the second essay. In “Alternative uses of land and re-negotiation of property rights: Scandinavian examples, 1750–2000”, Mats Morrell clearly shows how changes in land use and the underlying balance of power continuously shaped the institutional arrangements and their implementation from the end of the eighteenth century to the post-industrial society existing today. The compatibility of different kinds of property and use rights and how land is actually used creates conflicts, externalities and solutions in a path-dependent way. In this regard, this co-evolution was not necessarily linear and was fundamentally delineated by what past institutional forms allowed for.

The third chapter, “Innovation in property rights and economic development in Lombardy, eighteenth-twentieth centuries”, by Andrea Locatelli and Paolo Tedeschi, shifts the focus to Italy to provide

evidence of how changes in property rights in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century were conducive to economic growth. Interestingly, this example conforms to the conventional narrative depicted by new institutional economics, but seems to be contingent on the local context: an agrarian system that coexisted in Lombardy with a dynamic urban economy. Crucially, the existing cultural values stemming from the late medieval period legitimized social behavior based on self-realisation and thus helped these transformations. The authors indeed argue that the same reforms failed in Southern Italy due to its different socio-economic context.

The next chapter, “The shift to ‘modern’ and its consequences: Changes in property right and land wealth inequality in Buenos Aires, 1839–1914”, by Julio Djenderedjian and Daniel Santilli, turns the relationship between property rights and economic development upside down. Studying the province of Buenos Aires in Argentine during the nineteenth and early-twentieth century, the authors show how changes in land values, arising from a strong economic growth, pushed the landed elites to secure their ownership rights, thus resulting in growing inequalities. They use the neighbouring province of Santa Fe to stress how these developments were heavily context-dependent. Although the institutional framework and the administrative tools were the same in both provinces, critical differences between both regions produced very different results.

Similarly, in “Taming the platypus: Adaptions of the *colonia* tenancy contract

to a changing context in nineteenth century Madeira”, Benedita Camara and Rui Santos also stress the importance of the existing socio-economic environment on shaping how property rights evolved despite the establishment of new formal rules. The different players, constrained by their respective bargaining power, both adapted to and influenced the new institutional regime so as to secure the reproducibility of the system and their own interests. This essay also shows how the system resilience resulted from an adaptive process that was highly dependent on initial conditions.

The sixth essay, “Demithologizing and de-idealizing the commons: Ostrom’s eight design principles and the irrigation institutions in eastern Spain”, by Samuel Garrido, addresses how land and water property rights were connected within irrigation communities. In doing so, the author qualifies the interpretative framework provided by Elinor Ostrom for designing institutions governing the commons. Relying on rich empirical evidence, the article shows that, although these institutions did not always conform to the model depicted by Ostrom, they nonetheless effectively managed the commons. The essay also stresses the need to not over-idealise the commons because they were compatible with exclusionary practices and high levels of social inequality.

Framed within the land reform promoted by the Spanish Second Republic in 1931-34, the article “Hopes of recovery: Struggles over the right to common lands in the Spanish countryside, 1931-1936”, by Iñaki Iriarte and José Miguel Lana, analy-

ses how local councils and workers’ associations reacted to the possibility of recovering the commons that had been privatized in the course of the liberal reforms of the nineteenth and early-twentieth century. Relying on a large body of complaints filed by Spanish villages, the authors shed light on long-term disputes around the use of collective resources and the underlying social conflict regarding access to land. The article powerfully stresses that the local agents did not only respond to material interests but also to the perception of illegitimacy and abuse.

Similarly, in “Hurdles to reunification: Cultural memories and control over property on post-socialist rural East Germany”, Joyce Bromley and Axel Wolz also bring to the front the importance of the cultural memory of expropriation and appropriation. In this regard, the German reunification policies in the 1990s had to take into account the competing claims made by different interest groups which were very much based on collective narratives of cooperation and conflict. The resulting agrarian structure therefore was very different from what the initial policies have initially envisioned.

In the last essay, “Property rights in land: Institutions, social appropriations and socio-economic outcomes”, the editors discuss how the different pieces of this collection fit into their theoretical framework. In accordance to the spirit of the whole volume, Rosa Congost, Jorge Gelman and Rui Santos highlight that institutional arrangements do not live in a vacuum but are fundamentally shaped by the context in

which they operate. They are seen as social constructions that reflect the interactions and power relations between the different actors, both at the local, regional, national and international level, as well as by processes of path dependence. Overall, this volume not only provides much needed empirical evidence on how property rights

evolved in their particular historical contexts but will also serve future scholars as a useful source of inspiration.

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Alessandro Carassale, Claudio Littardi and Irma Naso (Ed.)  
**Fichi: Storia, economia, tradizioni / Figs: History, Economy, Traditions**

Ventimiglia, Philobiblion, 2016, 382 pp.

In 1996, one of today's most important Italian songwriters, Francesco Guccini, published an old song of his for the first time (*D'amore, di morte e di altre sciocchezze*, EMI), written in 1976 and titled *I fichi* ("figs"). It is a cabaret song, a genre which Guccini has mastered, and it is an adaptation of a song by another well-known songwriter, Ivan Della Mea, titled *I crauti* ("Sauerkraut"), itself a humorous ironic song, about a humble and popular product. The song *I fichi*, also about a cheap and popular fruit, starts like this: *I don't understand people / that don't like figs / even the ancients said / yes to figs and no to cream puffs*. Later, it continues: *Figs are good for vision / birds eat plenty of them / and... almost none has glasses, / but this is a little secret*, demonstrating that even in 1976 people ascribed beneficial and therapeutic qualities to figs. This belief was discussed at length in medieval medical-dietetics literature, as shown by the essay by Irma Naso in this book ("Ficus ceteris

fructibus laudabilior est...'. Un frutto speciale nella letteratura medico-dietetica del tardo medioevo", pp. 169-84). As birds knew well and kept secret, the consumption of figs can even heal and preserve vision.

This is a small, but meaningful anecdote that attests to figs' relevance. It proves that even today, stories about figs can elaborate and convey ancient and culturally profound motifs. The book edited by Alessandro Carassale, Claudio Littardi and Irma Naso deals with these traditions, together with the history and economy of figs. It includes 18 essays and four interventions that resulted from a roundtable held at a conference that took place in Sanremo (Bordighera) on 22-23 May 2015. That conference, like the book, was divided into four sections: production and conservation; markets and consumption; literary, artistic and linguistic testimonies; and botanical and genetical diversity in the Mediterranean region.

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Among the many qualities of this book, it is worth mentioning the index of fig varieties, which extends through seven pages (pp. 345-51) and which includes approximately 460 items. This exceptionally high number is explained in this book by two essays on botanical and genetic variation by Claudio Littardi (“Contributo alla conoscenza di alcune varietà di fico coltivate nel Ponente ligure”, pp. 267-97) and Mohamed Ben Salah (“Le figurier en Tunisie: Diversité, répartition et usages locaux”, pp. 299-314). The two texts report on the two sides, Northern and Southern, of the Mediterranean region, to which all essays in the book refer. This region reveals itself as an extremely meaningful context characterized by a diversity in crops and culture, very well represented by figs throughout their millenary history.

The first section of the book focuses on the production-preservation binary, typical of all grown fruits, but especially relevant to figs. It opens with an essay by Alessandro Carassale, which is based largely on the statutes of Liguria and Piedmont from the late Middle Ages and the beginning of the early modern period (“Il fico e i fichi negli statuti della Liguria e del Piemonte (secoli XIII-XVI)”, pp. 11-37). The fact that aspects related to the production, transformation and marketing of the product could become part of the norms regulating community life demonstrates the great importance of figs in that area. An important recurring feature in the book is the harmonious coexistence of figs with grapevines, and to a lesser extent with olive trees. A contribution related to this landscape

scenario is written by Francesco Aimerito (“Brevi note sul fico nei bandi politici e campestri del Piemonte sabauda”, pp. 67-71), which addresses the measures adopted in Savoy-era Piedmont to punish those who would break the law (theft, above all). The topic of transformation and preservation as a precondition for the marketing of figs is the focus of Paola Pirillo (“Il podere con i fichi secchi. Fornaci da fichi nelle campagne fiorentine (secoli XIV-XV)”, pp. 39-48) who, through a thorough analysis of early documentation, describes the spread of furnaces for drying figs in the countryside around Florence in the late Middle Ages. The investment for this stage of manufacturing was covered through the sale of the final product. Additionally, Islamic heritage as a factor in the spread of fig cultivation in the Crown of Aragon is one of the themes discussed in the broad essay by Antoni Riera i Melis (“Producción y consumo de higos en la Corona de Aragón durante la baja edad media”, pp. 49-66), in which the increasing production of figs during the fourteenth century, linked to their exportations (especially to Italy), came to characterize the landscape of this region in the long run.

The essay by Enrico Basso (“Fichi e frutta secca dal Mediterraneo ai mari del Nord (secoli XIII-XVI)”, pp. 75-96), which opens the second section of the book, revolves around the mercantile issue. Dried figs were marketed by Genoese traders throughout all of northwestern Europe at least from the end of the thirteenth century. Their dockings in the Southampton harbour (1428-48) together with Florentine

traders are significant. The smaller-scale marketing of figs in the Ligurian hinterland can be traced back earlier, as demonstrated by Marco Cassioli (“Produzione e commercio dei fichi nell’estremo Ponente ligure: Ventimiglia e il suo entroterra nei secoli XIII-XVI”, pp. 97-104). Gabriele Archetti (“‘Dulcissimaficus comedere’: Note sparse dalle fonti monastiche”, pp. 105-18) goes back to even more ancient times to reconstruct the symbolic-religious meaning of figs, using a wide review of biblical sources reconstructed by the Eastern monastic culture of the ancient and upper Middle Ages. This is linked to the recurrence of figs in pharmacopoeia, which highlights how thin the line was between food and medicine during the Middle Ages. This is further demonstrated by Expiración García Sánchez (“El consumo de los higos en al-Andalus: entre la farmacopea y las normas sociales”, pp. 119-33) on the basis of a broad analysis of medical, culinary, and agrarian treatises of Arabic origins that spread in Andalusia. Alessandro Giacobbe’s essay (“Dalla statistica imperiale francese al Novecento: microstoria del commercio di fichi in Liguria”, pp. 135-146), on the agro-forestry-pastoral survey of the Mentotte District (Savona) carried out in the early nineteenth century, describes the production, consumption and marketing of figs, for which the inquiry established a specific classification and nomenclature that is still used today.

The third section, which deals purely with cultural aspects, opens with an essay by Angela Lanconelli (“I fichi nella letteratura agronomica: Da Catone ad Agostino Ga-

llo”, pp. 149-67), with an exceptional review of agronomic sources on figs from ancient history to the Renaissance period (Catone, Varrone, Columella, Plinio; Palladio, Pier De’ Crescenzi, Corniolo Della Cornia; Camillo Tarello, Agostino Gallo), that amply demonstrates the western interest towards this fruit, both for its variety and its consumption (both fresh and dried). In the late Middle Ages it was also appreciated for its contribution to a healthy diet –already emphasized by Irma Naso–, well described in the culinary treatises by Michele Savonarola and Bartolomeo Sacchi ‘il Platina’. The essay by Francesca Stroppa (“Frutto proibito o albero della vita? Note intorno alla fortuna medievale di un tema iconografico”, pp. 185-212) deals with the iconographic themes of figs, linked mainly to Genesis, with special attention to miniature production for bibles. Tiziana Zennaro (“Un frutto dal significato ambiguo e complesso: Il fico nella pittura italiana di Cinque-Seicento”, pp. 213-31), focuses on Italian paintings produced during the Counterreformation, when the sinful interpretation of figs prevailed over the nurturing one. The essays by Fiorenzo Toso (“Il fico come blasone dei poveri: I figù della Riviera di Ponente: stereotipi, migrazioni, sopravvivenze linguistiche”, pp. 233-38) and Enos Costantini (“Il fico in Friuli: Diffusione, storia, aspetti linguistici e letterari, produzioni”, pp. 239-49) revolve around the linguistic and literary dimension, from Ligurian West to Friuli, and assess the toponomastic, onomastic and literary impacts of the production, consumption and systematic spread of this fruit.

The last section of the book, which is of rather agronomic nature, has already been mentioned at the beginning of this book review. It also contains the essay by Paolo Luzzi (“Il fico: fertilità e maledizione”, pp. 253-65) which, again on the basis of biblical sources, tests the meanings of fertility and prosperity connected to the production and consumption of figs.

The book ends with a roundtable (pp. 315-25) that includes the reworked short interventions by Michel Balard, Ivana Ait, Giovanni Panjek and Pinuccia F. Simbula given at the aforementioned conference in Sanremo.

The broad and diverse contributions herein collected certainly represents an important achievement for a better understanding of the economic, social, cultural and agronomic meanings of figs. The itinerary traced by the essays, between and within the sections, is consistent and well interwoven. The attention to ancient and medieval ages –including biblical sources– is balanced by many contributions dedicated specifically to the modern and contemporary eras. In sum, when we look at figs, rather than an opposition between “cooked” and “raw”, we face a dichotomy between “fresh” and “dry” determined by its consumption. This was a threshold that was crossed as soon as the fruit was picked from the tree, in order to be consumed for lasting periods in contexts where it was not grown. From northern to east-central Europe, figs were synonymous with Mediterranean, exoticism, and health, and recalled the populations that cultivated them since the ancient ages.

In conclusion, and to emphasize the ambiguous symbolic play between the fruit’s fertility and the ephemerality of humanity’s capacity to take advantage of it, two features emerging from this valuable book are worth mentioning. The first relates to Saint Augustine’s comment (*Orationes*, sermon 89) on the parable of the fig’s curse (Matthew 21, 18-22), recalled by Gabriele Archetti (pp. 114-15). God abandons the one who does not want to give good, thus a fig tree full of leaves which does not bear fruit gets immediately dried by Christ. Augustine gave an anti-Semitic interpretation to this story: the empty words pronounced by Israel’s people in synagogues (the leaves) were the antithesis of the Word pronounced by God on earth (the fruits), Jesus, that Jews did not want to collect. This is a famous example of a political-religious utilization of metaphors that figs collected and condensed in them, and which can be transferred also on a material, solid level, such as the long-lasting practice of planting figs trees on the property boundaries, as Alessandro Carassale recalls (p. 28). Because of the fundamental characteristics of this plant, extending its long roots in depth and also with a broad foliage which could overshadow the neighbors’ crops, figs proved to be a weapon, for both defense and attack.

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Sandra Kuntz-Ficker (Ed.)

## **The First Export Era Revisited: Reassessing its Contributions to Latin American Economies**

Cham, Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, 348 pp.

**A**mérica Latina se insertó en la economía de la primera globalización principalmente como una región exportadora de productos primarios. Su peso en el comercio mundial creció sustancialmente a lo largo de ese periodo. Los resultados, desde el punto de vista del crecimiento económico y el bienestar de su población, fueron bastante variados, aunque pueden señalarse dos ideas principales: en primer lugar, la mayor parte de los países de la región, en el contexto de la Gran Divergencia, permaneció en el bloque de países de bajos ingresos con una brecha creciente frente a los países europeos industrializados o a las llamadas Nuevas Europas; en segundo lugar, la diversidad dentro de la región fue notable; así, mientras Argentina o Uruguay pueden situarse en el grupo de las Nuevas Europas, con un fuerte crecimiento de su ingreso por habitante y con niveles próximos a los de los países más ricos del mundo, muchos otros países latinoamericanos experimentaron crecimientos muy modestos de sus ingresos.

Desde finales de la Segunda Guerra Mundial, las nuevas corrientes de pensamiento económico hegemónicas en Latinoamérica, sucesivamente el estructuralismo y el dependantismo, valoraron de forma muy negativa ese papel como exportadores de productos primarios para su desarrollo económico. En este contexto, el objetivo de este libro es justamente una

reevaluación de esa experiencia. Frente a una literatura muy ideológica, con poco énfasis en el análisis factual, especialmente en el caso del dependantismo, este libro tiene como objetivo declarado en la introducción por su editora, Sandra Kuntz-Ficker, la verificación de hipótesis empíricamente contrastables. Esta es una música que debería ser muy del gusto de los historiadores económicos, como son los autores de este libro: reconstruir series macroeconómicas específicamente relativas a la experiencia exportadora de estos países, para luego analizarlas, contrastarlas y obtener resultados.

Para ello, Kuntz-Ficker propone la construcción de indicadores sobre los resultados de las exportaciones que permitan ese tipo de análisis. En concreto, el programa marcado por la editora señala, en primer lugar, la necesidad de contar con series anuales de exportaciones, en términos nominales y reales, que permitan además calcular la contribución de las exportaciones al crecimiento del PIB. En segundo lugar, se piden series de términos de intercambio, un indicador que fue clave para Prebisch en su análisis sobre la era exportadora. Por último, también se plantea la obtención de una serie anual de tipo de cambio real, como un indicador de competitividad. Es importante destacar que, del enorme esfuerzo de reconstrucción cuantitativa realizado por los diversos au-

tores, en este libro solo se muestran los resultados, pero no las dificultades ni los procesos desarrollados para lograrlo. A ello se dedicó un monográfico de la *Revista de Historia Económica-Journal of Iberian and Latin American Economic History* en marzo de 2018, con artículos sobre el conjunto de América Latina, Argentina, Bolivia, Brasil, Honduras y México. En diciembre de 2018 aparecieron dos artículos más sobre Perú y Chile.

Posteriormente, la editora también señala para los autores de los diversos capítulos unos parámetros comunes de análisis que son: los efectos directos de las exportaciones sobre la economía nacional; el valor retenido de las exportaciones; la evolución del poder de compra de las exportaciones; las externalidades positivas de éstas y su inducción a la inversión en otras actividades; los efectos de arrastre hacia delante, especialmente sobre la industria; y finalmente su impacto sobre la transición hacia energías modernas.

Este programa sirve de marco metodológico para los estudios de caso que siguen, con el objetivo de captar los rasgos generales y las especificidades de cada país. Así, Argentina (Kuntz-Ficker y Rayes), Bolivia (Pérez-Cajías y Carreras-Marín), Brasil (Absell y Tena-Junguito), Chile (Badia-Miró y Díaz-Bahamonde), Colombia (Ocampo y Colmenares), México (Kuntz-Ficker) y Perú (Zegarra) son estudiados, ajustándose en general con bastante precisión a esa metodología. El estudio de los países es enormemente rico, con una aportación muy valiosa de datos para ellos y con análisis sumamente interesantes sobre el

impacto del modelo exportador en las diversas economías. Todo ello permite, sin duda, poder debatir sobre la experiencia exportadora mucho más allá de lo que era posible hasta ahora. Leyendo estos trabajos no queda duda que nos encontramos ante genuina historia económica.

El libro se cierra con un capítulo en el que la editora hace un balance preliminar de los resultados logrados comparando los diversos casos, lo que es posible en gran medida gracias a la metodología común adoptada, aunque en algunos de ellos la falta de datos lastra este ejercicio comparativo. Quizás la principal conclusión obtenida es que teniendo en cuenta el punto de partida en el que se encontraban los países latinoamericanos al inicio de la primera globalización, es decir, partiendo de sus condiciones iniciales, la apertura al exterior y el aprovechamiento de la demanda de productos primarios desde los países del centro industrial eran las únicas opciones viables, y que la experiencia no fue negativa en general, aunque los resultados variaron mucho de país en país. El libro concluye lanzando un auténtico programa investigador que profundice en la línea seguida.

En conjunto puede decirse que ésta es una aportación muy importante para la historia económica de América Latina y que sus resultados deberían tenerse en cuenta a la hora de valorar sus modelos de desarrollo hacia fuera, en un debate que hasta ahora ha estado más sesgado por las discrepancias ideológicas que por el análisis empírico. Por otro lado, aunque el propósito del libro era la verificación de hipó-

tesis contrastables, este objetivo se consigue parcialmente. Aunque las nuevas series son un gran paso adelante y el análisis basado en la estadística descriptiva también, no se logra una verificación de hipótesis con el rigor que exigiría la metodología científica más estricta. No es un demérito del libro, sino un camino a seguir próximamente.

Creo, además, que en el futuro, más allá de confrontar estos resultados con las prescripciones del estructuralismo o el dependientismo, sería interesante reorientar la pregunta hacia lo verdaderamente crucial. Es decir, ¿por qué, en general, el modelo exportador no fue capaz de generar, más allá de casos como Argentina o Uruguay, un crecimiento económico más rápido? ¿Dónde se concentraron los problemas más relevantes para ese crecimiento? ¿Fueron claves las condiciones iniciales, y entre ellas

la herencia colonial, o el desarrollo institucional de las jóvenes repúblicas? ¿No fueron los efectos de arrastre demasiados débiles, y en particular como señaló Bulmer-Thomas, el de la demanda final como consecuencia de unos salarios que pudieron mantenerse en niveles muy bajos a pesar de no ser entonces estos países ricos en fuerza de trabajo? En definitiva, el modelo de crecimiento dirigido por las exportaciones parece ser que era el único viable en aquellos años, pero sus resultados, aunque los calificamos de positivos, también podríamos señalar que fueron claramente insuficientes, especialmente para buena parte de los países de la región.

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### **Histoire rurale de l'Europe, XVI<sup>e</sup>-XX<sup>e</sup> siècle**

Paris, Éditions de l'École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 2019, 336 pp.

**E**l libro objeto de esta reseña es una colección de textos, firmados por dieciocho especialistas, que giran alrededor del tema del crecimiento de la producción agraria en la Europa moderna y contemporánea. La definición del objeto de la obra no está en el título, como es evidente, sino en la presentación y en la introducción. Esta última está vertebrada por un análisis, en perspectiva comparada, de la evolución en las últimas décadas de la historiografía ruralista francesa. Herment nos hace partícipes de su visión de que el rura-

lismo francés ha experimentado una paulatina pérdida de relevancia en el escenario historiográfico internacional. Atribuye en buena medida esa evolución a una tendencia a la atomización de la investigación y a la ausencia de diálogo entre los historiadores franceses que, especializados en regiones, períodos u objetos concretos, se muestran en su mayoría poco dispuestos a participar en debates fértiles para la historiografía y para las ciencias sociales. Ese es el diagnóstico del que parte *Histoire rurale de l'Europe*, que pretende desplegar ante el

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lismo francés ha experimentado una paulatina pérdida de relevancia en el escenario historiográfico internacional. Atribuye en buena medida esa evolución a una tendencia a la atomización de la investigación y a la ausencia de diálogo entre los historiadores franceses que, especializados en regiones, períodos u objetos concretos, se muestran en su mayoría poco dispuestos a participar en debates fértiles para la historiografía y para las ciencias sociales. Ese es el diagnóstico del que parte *Histoire rurale de l'Europe*, que pretende desplegar ante el

público especializado francés diversas formas de abordar la cuestión del crecimiento a largo plazo, como muestra de por dónde camina y puede seguir caminando una historia de la sociedad rural que sea una historia guiada por problemas y no por erudición histórica.

Como nos señala la propia introducción, hay cuatro tipos de cuestiones en los capítulos que integran la obra: las relativas al significado que otorgamos en nuestros relatos al concepto de *crecimiento* y su relación con nivel de vida, crecimiento demográfico y valor de la producción; las que se centran en cómo se debe medir el crecimiento, a través de qué indicadores o tasas diversos; las que indagan las causas del crecimiento y en especial el papel de la tecnología y de las instituciones; y finalmente las que tratan de las dimensiones temporales y geográficas del crecimiento. No se abordan asuntos de tanta enjundia de modo sistemático, puesto que, en palabras de Herment, *no se trata de hacer comparativismo, sino de dejar a cada autor la libertad de desarrollar sus propios problemas a fin de multiplicar los puntos de vista sobre el crecimiento agrícola en diferentes países europeos* (p. 22).

Con la excepción de este capítulo inicial, del de Ulrich Pfister, que presenta el método de la estimación indirecta de la producción agraria a través de una función de consumo y analiza los resultados de su aplicación a la Francia preestadística, y del de Maurice Aymard, que aborda lo que viene a ser un balance de los debates sobre el crecimiento en la Europa moderna, los restantes capítulos del libro tienen como

rasgo común esa mirada libre al crecimiento en espacios regionales o estatales en períodos largos. Y no todos, pues Rosa Congost dedica su texto a explicar lo que llama *realismo*, es decir, al examen desde abajo y, por lo tanto, desde la diversidad social y geográfica y bajo el prisma de sus heterogéneos resultados finales, de los procesos de transformación de los derechos de propiedad sobre la tierra en la España del XIX. Congost no ofrece un relato propio sobre lo ocurrido con los derechos de propiedad de la tierra en el siglo XIX español ni sobre cómo afectó al crecimiento (sobre todo extensivo), sino que se centra en la tarea previa de combatir lo que considera lugares comunes de la historiografía al estudiar la transformación de la propiedad de la tierra, que ella atribuye a una excesiva dependencia respecto a los discursos de quienes apoyaron la reforma agraria liberal.

Los capítulos de Pfister y Congost y los otros diez capítulos están organizados en tres partes, bajo los títulos de «La diversidad de las vías de desarrollo agrario», «La renovación de la historia cuantitativa» e «Instituciones y motores de crecimiento».

En la primera, Piet van Cruyningen, Giuliana Biagioli, Anne-Lise Head-König y Llorenç Ferrer Alòs estudian vías regionales de desarrollo a lo largo de períodos amplios en cuatro espacios, definidos por ser unidades estatales en la actualidad: los Países Bajos, Italia, Suiza y España. Piet van Cruyningen contrapone la dinámica de la agricultura surgida de las obras de desecación y drenaje en el suroeste de los Países Bajos, financiadas desde la Baja Edad Media por la burguesía urbana, con la del

norte holandés, donde los trabajos hidráulicos no se acometieron hasta el siglo XIX, porque no existían dispositivos institucionales capaces de efectuarlos. También la comparación interregional organiza el capítulo de Ferrer Alòs, que confronta la interacción entre crecimiento agrario, acumulación de capital e industrialización en Galicia, Cataluña y el País Valenciano, entre los siglos XVII y XIX. Ferrer destaca tres respuestas diferentes al crecimiento demográfico en las tres regiones (la introducción de nuevos cultivos en Galicia, la expansión de la vitivinicultura en Cataluña y el desarrollo del regadío valenciano) y establece vínculos entre esas respuestas –motores de crecimiento agrario–, las estructuras sociales y las desiguales consecuencias en términos de industrialización de las tres regiones. La comparación interregional, en su caso entre la Suiza alpina y el País Medio (la meseta situada entre los Alpes y el Jura), es también el ejercicio que lleva a cabo Head-König. La historiadora suiza explica las razones institucionales y los factores de demanda que hasta mediados del siglo XIX aseguraron el mayor crecimiento relativo de las zonas de montaña, especializadas en productos lácteos, y el proceso que llevó a que el País Medio primero convergiera y luego adelantase a la región alpina, gracias a cambios institucionales a finales del XVIII y comienzos del XIX y a sus mejores condiciones agroecológicas, crecimiento desigual que se mantuvo en el segundo tercio del XX, no obstante la crisis agraria que siguió en Suiza a la Gran Guerra. Cierra la primera parte un capítulo sobre Italia, en el que Biagioli cuestiona la te-

sis de las dos Italias, la del norte y el centro, con una agricultura y, más en general, una economía dinámica, y la del Mediodía, caracterizado por el arcaísmo, la pobreza y la incapacidad para el desarrollo. Frente a esta imagen dualista, la autora sostiene que los análisis regionales de escala menor permiten apreciar muchas vías de desarrollo de las zonas rurales, a partir de la observación de los factores económicos y de las interacciones entre los actores locales. Biagioli sintetiza algunas de las grandes aportaciones que han revolucionado la visión de la agricultura lombarda, en sus diversas comarcas, y que han descubierto el pluralismo del Mezzogiorno para centrar, por último, su mirada en la evolución de la agricultura toscana entre el siglo XIV y el XIX, y subrayar el papel de las economías urbanas en las transformaciones toscanas desde la Baja Edad Media hasta la conversión de la región en el *jardín de Italia*.

La segunda parte, intitulada «La renovación de la historia cuantitativa», incluye además del ya mencionado capítulo de Pfister, un capítulo sobre el despegue del crecimiento en la región sueca de Escania entre 1702 y 1864 (Matts Olson y Patrick Svenson), otro sobre las vías de crecimiento agrícola en España entre 1800 y 2000 (Ernesto Clar, Miguel Martín-Retortillo y Vicente Pinilla) y un tercero sobre las consecuencias de la evolución en tijera de los precios textiles y los agrarios en el interior de Flandes, entre los siglos XVIII y XIX (Wouter Ronsijn). En el primer texto, Olson y Svenson recurren a fuentes decimales para construir índices de la producción agraria y pecuaria. Las series resultantes

permiten constatar no solo la evolución de la producción según el estatus de los campesinos, sino el crecimiento gradual desde aproximadamente la década de 1780 y la incidencia de cambios institucionales ligados al reparto de comunales y el acotamiento de las fincas, que aparentemente aceleraron y consolidaron esa trayectoria expansiva en el primer XIX. El trabajo sobre España explota información cuantitativa diversa a fin de ofrecer una valoración global del crecimiento de la producción agraria y sus causas y limitaciones en la contemporaneidad, con especial énfasis en las restricciones medioambientales, los cambios tecnológicos y las transformaciones de la demanda. El relato resultante es sólido en sus fundamentos teóricos y en sus bases estadísticas, y capaz de dar cuenta de las transformaciones agrarias españolas en los últimos doscientos años. El último capítulo de esta segunda parte, el de Ronsijn, estudia y cuantifica las economías familiares en el interior flamenco, distinguiendo entre las posiciones polares de familias dependientes para sus ingresos de la producción textil a domicilio y familias con explotaciones suficientemente grandes para vivir de la producción agraria. Ronsijn afirma que la evolución de los precios relativos de los paños y los productos agrarios, que siguieron movimientos en tijera en el siglo XVIII y XIX en dos ciclos sucesivos, junto con la estructura social y las relaciones de poder, explicarían el aumento de las familias con tierra a finales del siglo XVIII y comienzos del XIX, y la crisis de la sociedad rural a mediados del siglo XIX que favoreció el éxodo a las ciudades.

La tercera parte, «Instituciones y motores del crecimiento», incluye cuatro capítulos: uno relativo a las instituciones señoriales en Sajonia (Martina Schattkowski); un segundo, dedicado a las vías de crecimiento de la agricultura danesa (Ingrid Henriksen); un tercero que cuestiona la existencia de un modelo de crecimiento agrario francés (Gérard Béaur y Jean-Michel Chevet); y, finalmente, el ya mencionado de Rosa Congost. El capítulo de Schattkowski efectúa el seguimiento de los cambios temporales en los señoríos de la región y concluye que el modelo de dos regímenes señoriales (el *Gutherrschaft* y el *Grundherrschaft*) en Europa, con su frontera en el Elba, debe ser matizado por las variaciones regionales y la existencia de zonas de transición. El capítulo de Henriksen parte de tres modelos historiográficos sobre la relación entre cambio demográfico y crecimiento productivo para, a través de un análisis de largo plazo, inclinarse por el que sostiene que fue el aumento de la población el que dio lugar a cambios institucionales que, a su vez, generaron transformaciones tecnológicas y el aumento de la producción en la Dinamarca de fines del XVIII. Finalmente, el capítulo de Béaur y Chevet presenta una versión sintética de la contraposición, muy habitual en la bibliografía histórico-económica anglosajona, entre las estructuras agrarias británica y francesa a final del Antiguo Régimen y, sobre todo, tras los cambios institucionales derivados de la Revolución francesa, como factor clave en las dos vías económicas hacia la modernización que se postula que existieron a ambos lados del canal de la Mancha.

A partir de ese punto, Béaur y Chevet tratan de desmontar elemento a elemento esa contraposición entre las dos agriculturas, para negar la existencia de una vía francesa y una vía británica, al menos en lo que al sector primario se refiere.

De este repaso y de los propios comentarios que realiza Aymard (en un posfacio que sintetiza los debates sobre la agricultura moderna y lo que el libro puede aportar), se desprende que esta obra tiene gran interés para comprender cómo se ha desplegado la historia del crecimiento agrario en los últimos años, y el tipo de conclusiones y propuestas teóricas que puede ofrecer a la historiografía rural y general. Gran parte de sus capítulos son aportaciones sintéticas que nos aproximan al estado actual de los conocimientos sobre determinadas regiones y países, y a las tendencias de la teoría y la investigación: en ese sentido merece la pena leerlos. Pero el libro tiene también sus defectos, más allá de que la libertad a los autores de la que hace gala el director constituya una puerta abierta a la desigualdad de los textos incluidos.

Cuatro son, a mi entender, los pasivos de esta obra colectiva, todos ellos relacionados con las intenciones que sintetiza el título. El libro no es una historia, un relato unido, sino una suma de estudios: no hay referencias cruzadas entre capítulos, ni una bibliografía común, ni pautas de estructuración de los capítulos. No trata tampoco de la sociedad rural: se limita a algunos aspectos, sobre todo económicos, de la vida rural. Tampoco habla de Europa: fuera quedan la Europa Oriental y los Balcanes. Finalmente, pese a la relevancia de que

reúna estudios por lo general de largo plazo, no todos sus trabajos se mueven en el marco cronológico de los siglos XVI-XX. Las aportaciones efectuadas son valiosas y juntarlas en un volumen es una decisión acertada porque nos devuelve una mirada actualizada y compleja sobre el crecimiento productivo en la agricultura europea. Una historia rural de la Europa moderna y contemporánea puesta al día, que revise muchas de las representaciones predominantes en la historiografía económica y general, y que ofrezca una narración coherente y bien fundada de su evolución, sigue constituyendo sin embargo una tarea pendiente, a la que esta y otras obras de gran interés no pueden sustituir.

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