

Rosa Congost and Pablo F. Luna (Eds.)

**Agrarian Change and Imperfect Property: Emphyteusis in Europe (16<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries)**

Turnhout, Brepols (Rural History in Europe, 15), 2018, 311 pp.

It is fitting to begin this review on a celebratory note: this is the fifteenth book in what is already a remarkable series, Brepols's Rural History in Europe, now in its tenth year. Along with the European Rural History Association, this book series is a major outcome of COST Action *Progressore*, headed by Gérard Béaur, who still directs the series at the head of an editorial board, issued of the Action co-ordination team. Be it by design or by accident, *Agrarian Change and Imperfect Property* even follows the lead of the first book in the series (though not actually the first one to be published) (Béaur *et al.*, 2013). Besides being a well-deserved tribute to Gérard Béaur's decades-long commitment to the collective endeavour of rural history, this fifteenth book in the series is also a token of the productivity of European networking programmes such as COST, often outlasting their short-term "deliverables".

The book consists of fourteen chapters. The first, "Emphyteusis: A practical question?" (p. 11-38), by Gérard Béaur, Rosa Congost and Pablo F. Luna, stands in-between an introduction and a concluding synthesis. The remaining thirteen chapters, which for expediency's sake I shall henceforth call "empirical", are as many historical studies or review essays on regions in what are nowadays five European countries, predominantly, although not exclusively, in southern Europe. The contents are arranged geographically. Two chapters concern northern and central Italy: "Some points on emphyteusis in Central-Northern Italy between the end of the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Age" (pp. 39-51), by Giorgio Chitollini, and *What the dominia could do: Enfiteusi and other forms of divided property rights in Lombardy from the fourteenth to the twentieth centuries* (pp. 53-73), by Michela Barbot. Three are about

France, dealing with northern regions and a national overview: “The many faces of emphyteusis in France: An overview, with a case study from the Meaux region (1600-1800)” (pp. 75-96), by Gérard Béaur; “*Erblehn* and *Hoflehn* in Germanic lands: Disguised forms of ownership? The Alsatian countryside in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries” (pp. 97-112), by Jean-Michel Boehler, and “Emphyteusis in practice in eighteenth-century Normandy: Why choose the *fief*?” (pp. 113-31), by Fabrice Boudjaaba. Five are about different regions in Spain, two of which on Catalonia: “More than just access to land: Emphyteusis and the redefinition of property rights in North-East Catalonia (eighteenth and nineteenth centuries)” (pp. 133-54), by Rosa Congost, Pere Gifre and Enric Sagner; “The origins and evolution of the *rabassa morta* contract in Catalonia: Was it an emphyteusis?” (pp. 155-81), by Llorenç Ferrer-Alòs and Belén Moreno; “From ‘feudal’ to ‘common’ emphyteusis in rural Mallorca, eighteenth to twentieth centuries” (pp. 183-206), by Antònia Morey and Gabriel Jover; “*Foros*: Land tenure as a source of income and conflict in early-modern Galicia” (pp. 206-35), by Pegerto Saavedra, and “From *foro* to renting (and back?): Emphyteutic tenure at the Asturian monastery of San Pelayo during the Old Regime” (pp. 237-62), by Pablo Luna. One is about the Portuguese insular region of Madeira: “The *colonia* contract: Ambiguity between sharecropping, fixed rent, and emphyteusis” (pp. 263-85), by Benedita Câmara. And two are about islands in different Greek archipelagos: “*Emphyteotic* practices and rela-

tions of power: An approach of social conflicts in the Greek Archipelago” (pp. 287-96), by Eleftheria Zei, and “Agrarian practices and their social and ideological ramifications in the Ionian Islands during the Venetian domination” (pp. 297-311), by Efi Argyrou and Sevasti Lazari. Almost all empirical chapters look at the early modern period, often glancing back at the late Middle Ages; only the one by Câmara is mainly focused on the nineteenth century. Several of them follow developments up to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and the one by Morey and Jover up to our days. On a formal note, even though the occasional glitch does no serious harm, several chapters could have done with more attentive linguistic and typographical proofreading.

It is impossible in this review to do full justice to the richness in this book’s content, and to discuss the different contributions in any degree of detail. As is often the case in books grown out of conference papers, the empirical chapters differ in their aims and scope. That being said, the first chapter offers a quite effective keynote, providing an underlying thread that does help readers look at the diverse cases as pieces of a common historical puzzle. Béaur, Congost and Luna set out in this initial chapter to elaborate a working definition of emphyteusis, to outline the questions to be asked, and to organize the main lessons they have learned from the empirical chapters.

The authors clearly state their rationale for exploring the intriguing subject of “imperfect property”: *The present book focuses on emphyteusis in the early modern period.*

[...] *To focus on emphyteusis is to draw attention to one of the possible contractual forms by which agrarian structures and systems of cultivation were transformed. Although historians have devoted considerable attention to short-term contracts [...] much less has been said about the uses, advantages and disadvantages of long-term contracts, as if emphyteusis were a survivor or an eccentricity left over from an earlier period. This interpretation can no longer be maintained* (p.11).

Their primary aim is, therefore, to challenge a shortcoming in recent literature on the early modern and modern periods, concerning this specific kind of ownership and contract and the property relations around it. Emphyteutic contracts, the authors sustain, continued to perform during the modernization of European rural societies, even up to this day, and not necessarily as a hindering factor. This also echoes the claim that Rosa Congost, in particular, has long upheld for concrete historical analysis of practice in both the institutionalization and the appropriation of property rights, against the abstract and normative narrative of the triumph of “perfect property” as the hallmark of agrarian modernization.

Read in this light, the adjective in the first chapter title may convey a double meaning. On the one hand, the question of emphyteusis is a practical one because it raises issues that remain very much alive. On the other hand, it is a practical question *in theory* as well. As most empirical chapters show in their own different ways and instances, interpreting historical processes involving this kind of split *dominia* con-

tracts requires an understanding of how different actors and groups might take advantage, in everyday practice, of their rules and the ambiguities surrounding them, in order to contest or encroach on the other parties’ *dominium* and eventually become the full owners, or to turn *de facto* possession into *dominium de jure*.

Briefly summed up, the main point of the argument, which the empirical chapters amply support on the whole, is that such forms of divided ownership in perpetual or long-term contracts proved “versatile” and “flexible” enough to adjust to different uses and to be appropriated in creative ways, which in turn explains the resilience of emphyteusis in the face of economic and social change. Therefore, both the prevalence and the economic and social outcomes of such contracts are contingent on historical contexts and processes. Instead of dismissing emphyteutic rules and practice as being, by definition, archaic and adverse to agrarian change and economic growth, detailed historical analyses like the ones included in the book are required for those outcomes to be identified and their variation explained.

A second, broader aim of the book is to look beyond the name and define the ideal-typical characteristics that set this type of ownership and contract apart from others, in order to identify commonalities of institutions and practices around which to organize the empirical variety of changing forms and vocabulary. The two defining characteristics are, firstly [...] *the existence, when the contract was signed, of shared rights in the same land*, including those to

sell and bequeath, and secondly *the long-term nature of the contract* (p. 15). This conceptual operation is then used to assert that emphyteusis is more widespread, geographically as well as chronologically, than often is assumed, and the three chapters on France fully demonstrate the comparative potential in that claim. Contracts sharing those two typical features are unveiled, which had so far remained hidden underneath a variety of names and details, and which were far from irrelevant even where common historiographical wisdom would not expect to find them. Possible motivations are discussed for their choice and use, from the supply and the demand perspectives, and the role such contracts played in the dynamics of property relations is explored – all of this in quite comparable ways to those shown in the chapters on the more commonly acknowledged “cultural area” of emphyteusis.

The questions and the conclusions in the book certainly invite further work in this comparative direction. However, this is the result of a conference built up around one particular research network, and the uneven geographical representation certainly reflects this circumstance. It is unfortunate that the historical cases could not cover a wider area, namely further to the North and the East, but also further south in Italy and France. Furthermore, the two small chapters on the Greek cases, which read like conference paper drafts rather than edited chapters, fall rather short of the book’s overall achievements, which is especially disappointing because what they do tell us is quite promising.

My only general criticism concerns the terminology used in chapter one to elaborate on the second ideal-typical trait of emphyteusis, *divided property rights* (p. 18, my emphasis). This term, which is replicated in chapter one and across several other chapters, risks understating a crucial feature of emphyteutic property – of which, however, the authors are well aware. The specificity of emphyteusis is not simply about a division of property rights. Actually, according to the “property rights paradigm”, all kinds of contracts, such as leases, divide or subdivide the bundle of rights subsumed under “full property”. Even long-term, tacitly or coercively renewable lease contracts did not, however, afford lessees as full and sure a physical and economic command of the assets as did a *dominium utile* – along with, in the case of land, the landowner status that could prove all-important in achieving social mobility. What is at stake in emphyteusis is therefore not just a division of property *rights*, but rather the division of legal or *de facto* ownership of the land and/or related assets. This involves not just the appropriation of much wider property rights than a lease, but also a qualitatively different property “regime” or “system”, the *Dominia*, as Barbot put it (pp. 53-4).

Granted that this is mostly a wording issue, and that most authors in the book seem fully aware of this difference when using “property rights” instead of, and sometimes interchangeably with, “ownership”, it is nonetheless meaningful. It is the real division of ownership, not the contractual division of property rights, that sets emphyteusis apart,

and therein lay the “imperfection” of emphyteutic property as looked upon from the ideological standpoint of one absolute and singular right of property. Emphyteusis came *halfway between sale and renting* (Béaur *et al.*, p. 76). As a sale, it created (at least) two distinct ownerships over the same asset. As a tenancy, it afforded the tenant real, albeit partial, land ownership. It was this duplicity that made emphyteusis so versatile and flexible to interpretation and appropriation, and therefore so prone to dispute and change, as the collected studies widely document. It facilitated land buying when capital and credit were in short supply and allowed to adjust it to the family life-cycle; it bolstered supply in the real estate market by making the *dominium utile* saleable while the *dominium directum* remained in commons, in entail, or in mortmain; it provided an incentive for investing in land

improvement, as well as a means for social mobility and for creating or consolidating new landowning groups, adapting from “feudal” to “common” (Morey and Jover) as societies and economies changed.

All in all, this is a compelling book to read, above all an invitation to further research and discussion on this fascinating historical topic, and a quite worthy volume of the Rural History in Europe book series.

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#### REFERENCES

- BÉAUR, G., SCHOFFIELD, P. R., CHEVET, J.-M., & PÉREZ PICAZO, M. T. (Eds.) (2013). *Property Rights, Land Markets, and Economic Growth in the European Countryside (Thirteenth-Twentieth centuries)*. Turnhout: Brepols.

### Herbert S. Klein and Francisco Vidal Luna **Feeding the World: Brazil's Transformation into a Modern Agricultural Economy**

Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2018, 468 pp.

**T**oday, Brazil is one of the world's leading exporters of agricultural and livestock products, competing with and surpassing countries with a long tradition such as United States, Canada, Russia and Australia. The ascent of Brazil as a net food exporter in the global market is a recent phenomenon. Although it started in the 1960s, it has gained momentum in the last decades. Brazilian agriculture radically transformed during this period, which

witnessed an extraordinary modernization of the sector as a result of introducing new crops, using more land and the latest agricultural technology, and developing research programs. Klein and Luna explain the causes of this modernization or agricultural “revolution” in a lengthy book that seeks to answer how and why Brazil went from extensive agriculture (based on exports of a few products and directed at few markets) to intensive agriculture (based on exporting

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more than 36 agricultural products and sub-products, and linked to international market dynamics).

The authors reconstruct the historical process of agricultural modernization of the sixth largest country in the world through a multivariable and transareal analysis. They focus on three periods that are key to understanding the Brazilian countryside's transformation: 1) military dictatorships (first phase of modernization), characterized by strong government intervention in agriculture between 1965 and 1984; 2) the economic crisis in the 1980's, which led to radical restructuring of agricultural policies and credit systems; and 3) market liberalization (second phase of modernization), characterized by a series of adjustments that caused commodities chains to rebuild since 1995. In their analysis they consider the critical and favorable conditions of the international and domestic markets, agricultural policies (federal or state-level), the role of public and private institutions in agricultural extension and research programs, the changes of the technological packages and the chemical industry, and the economic impact of agricultural modernization.

Through qualitative/quantitative analysis and through the elaboration of different data series that consider a plethora of variables (economic, political, institutional, social, demographical, technological and market access) the authors explain the transformation in Brazilian agriculture. In short, subsidized credits, guaranteed minimum prices per harvest, protective tariffs, improved infrastructure (bridges, roads,

irrigation channels), agricultural research, technical assistance programs and scientific education were the basis of the first phase of modernization. From a critical point of view, the authors note that there were important regional differences. In this regard, it is worth stressing that credit was mainly given to commercial farmers, since small farms did not benefit as much from having better technology, and until 1970 there were no actions taken against the concentration of property and hence the power of conservative rural elites went unquestioned. Likewise, although prices were stable in this period, thereby reducing uncertainty for producers and consumers, the military government's support policies created distortions as regards to resource distribution.

In Brazil, the farming sector grew during the first phase of modernization, but this growth accelerated during the second phase. A detailed analysis of the production structure which took into account the number of farms, land ownership, cultivated area, types of crops, increases in productivity and output, the value of agricultural and livestock production, job market composition, agricultural technology and materials, and the weight of exports on the international market allowed the authors to conclude that not even the critical circumstances of the 1980's seemed to halt it. They attribute this to the fact that Brazil had already achieved a significant production increase, developed several agroindustries within the context of Import Substitution Industrialization (ISI), and had begun to penetrate the international market with a wide variety of products. The fiscal

crisis, rampant inflation and the advent of neoliberalism, caused profound changes in the previously designed agricultural policies. They marked the end of subsidies and protections, and the beginning of new lines of credit and financing options (banks and commercial firms, supermarkets, co-ops). Rising productivity in Brazilian farming can be largely attributed to technological innovation, as well as a change in public and private policies. In Brazil, the largest growth in the agricultural technological park and in the chemical industry occurred in the context of the Green Revolution. The military governments funded certain producers in order to acquire modern technology, and also launched research and extension programs. The Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation (EMBRAPA), established in 1973, played a fundamental role in the sector's modernization through the generation, adaptation and transfer of technology. Education was also stimulated with the creation of universities, agronomical institutes and technical centers. With liberalization, agricultural research fell into the hands of private companies, which currently control the markets for materials, technologies and seeds. Brazil is currently one of the highest consumers of fertilizers in the world (175 kg per acre), surpassing the United States, France, Spain, Italy, Australia, Canada and Argentina, but behind China, Germany, the United Kingdom, Chile or Colombia, and at roughly the same level as India.

Employing the Total Factor Productivity (TFP) measurement, the authors conclude that Brazilian agriculture's performance

has been exceptional since 2000 (3.5% annual growth between 1975 and 2011, and 5.6% between 2010 and 2017). Nonetheless, they emphasize that this performance is regionally uneven. Analyzing five regions (North, Northeast, Southeast, South and Center-West) and considering a series of physical, demographic, economic and human capital variables, the authors show how these differences have become more acute. The SE, S and NE regions are the most densely populated. In the N and NE we find the largest concentration of poor rural population. Life expectancy has increased on a national level, but the S and SE regions are where the highest longevity is registered. Fertility rates have fallen in the whole country (they went from 6 children in 1970 to 2.2 children in 2002), but the decrease was gradual in the N, NE and Center-West. In 2010, 91% of the Brazilian population was literate, and the S and SE reported the highest literacy rates, in contrast with the N and NE.

In Brazil there is huge inequality linked to land tenure. Land reform, a subject pointed out by the authors, is still a pending task. In the N and CW regions large estates dominate, while in the NE, SE and S medium and small farms are more common. During the "agricultural revolution", the N and CW regions have experienced the largest growth in cultivated land, while in the NE, SE and S a decline has been reported. Seasonal crops experienced notable growth in all regions and went from representing 77% of cultivated land in 1970 to 93% in 2016. The seasonal crop that presented the highest growth has been soy.



Its sowing started in the S, but spread to the rest of the country rapidly. The CW and SE regions control beef production, the S leads in chicken and pork production, and the SE and S lead in milk and egg production.

Within these regions we also find important differences, or at least this is one of the main conclusions of the authors when they analyze agricultural modernization in Mato Grosso (CW), Sao Paulo (SE) and Rio Grande do Sul (S). In Mato Grosso commercial agriculture took off at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the area of El Cerrado (within the Amazonas, and one of the most important biomes in the world): there was a significant internal migration, the predominance of large and technological farms dedicated to cattle and soy, cotton and sunflower cultivation, and a large presence of multinational companies. In Rio Grande do Sul commercial agriculture began in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century: there was significant external migration, and small and modern property was encouraged through the logic of mixed agriculture (rice, wheat, corn, fruit, soy, tobacco, potatoes, pigs, chickens, milk and eggs), agroindustry was early boosted, and they hold the largest co-operative organization in the country. In Sao Paulo commercial agriculture began during the colonial period: there was significant internal and external migration, permanent crops are predominant (coffee, oranges) although seasonal crops have also been boosted (rice, sugar cane, soy, fruit, legumes, vegetables). It is the largest producer and exporter of sugar cane and orange juice in the world, and holds its position as

the main agricultural, industrial and financial state in Brazil.

In the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Brazil had already established as a leading agricultural producer and exporter, becoming the world's largest exporter of processed meat and chicken, orange juice, sugar cane, coffee and soy; the second largest exporter of corn (after the United States); while other exports are also on the rise. Although farm size has recently decreased and production has concentrated in medium-sized, yet modern, farms, the regional or spatial dimension is still relevant. In this regard, the Brazilian agricultural revolution only reached a portion of the rural world. According to the authors, most of the farms and a high percentage of the rural population live in conditions similar to the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: low productivity, low value-added production and very low incomes, which are not enough for families to subsist on. Lack of education, and poor credit access and infrastructure, hinder the transition from subsistence farming into modern agriculture.

Having said that, it seems clear that the authors are defenders of the second phase of agricultural modernization, despite the social and environmental impact it has. They point out that agricultural growth stopped being at the cost of forest grounds, and that production increased through the implementation of technological change, old land was rejuvenated through modern technology, credits allowed production increase, latifundia were replaced with large modern farms that use machinery, seeds, fertilizers and pesticides, and agricultural

business owners capable of responding to the sector's modernization emerged. The environmental impact of the agricultural "revolution" is a subject that the authors prefer not to delve into. Rather than debating or discussing this issue, they just point out a few strategies implemented by farmers to mitigate the effects of the agricultural "revolution" on the environment (direct sowing –without the use of a plow–, biological nitrogen fixing and intercropping). The social conflict is a subject that the authors warn you early on that they will not be discussing. Future studies will have to assess the effects of the agricultural "revolution" on several dimensions such as the loss of biodiversity and territorial connectivity, and the growing tensions and conflict over land and in defense of natural resources.

The book reviewed could interest researchers who study commodities chains, agrarian and regional history, agricultural

policies, production structures, technological changes or international trade. Regardless of whether or not you agree with the authors' views on the advantages of agricultural modernization, this is a serious, well-constructed, empirically solid and intriguing investigation. Although it does not contribute much at the theoretical level, it does it at the methodological level through a deeply review of primary and secondary sources, and the elaboration of data bases at a regional and state level. It is a really good written book that catches the attention of the reader since the beginning. It is a work that boasts the virtue of making the reader at times validate it, and at times question criticize it. It is highly successful in sowing the seeds of curiosity and interest in the subject.

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### **Red Meat Republic: A Hoof-to-Table History of How Beef Changed America**

Princeton / Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2019, 368 pp.

**T**here is perhaps no other food commodity that screams more American than cattle's meat. Beef has played a major part in the construction and reproduction of an American national identity. Yet, *America made modern beef at the same time that beef made America modern* (p. 2); this is historian Joshua Specht's central claim in *Red Meat Republic: A Hoof-to-*

*Table History of How Beef Changed America* (2019). The author examines the consolidation of the "cattle-beef complex" in the United States stemming from the conquest of the American West throughout the nineteenth century when the region was accommodated for ranching purposes to the rise of the midwestern meat-packing industry in the early twentieth century.