

4.6. Commons in premodern Europe: Uses, management and conflicts in comparative view

Panel organiser: Baydal, Vicent, University of Oxford, UK

The process by which commons and woods were privatized by lords, urban groups and peasants is well known mainly in Great Britain and other northern European territories, in which livestock farming was important for the wool industry. However, this was not the case all over Europe, since the commons lasted in many regions until the industrial revolution and the privatization was only partial in others, especially to create arable land in woodlands and to drain wetlands. The purpose of this session is to compare some of these last cases in order to know better the role of the commons in the economic development and to exchange views about their study in different parts of Europe. In particular, we shall focus on three areas: Valencia in Eastern Spain, the Campine in the Netherlands, and Apulia in Southern Italy. In the first case, two papers will analyze the legal framework of the commons and the conflicts among lords, towns and commoners, as well as the specific role of the elites in these conflicts, in the kingdom of Valencia from 13th to 15th centuries. In the second case, another paper will show the type of regulation of the commons in the Campine during the 16th century, with particular attention to the social structure of this area. In the third case a final paper will explore the origins of the inequality in Apulia by studying the collective agricultural system which was carried out there between 16th and 18th centuries. In sum, we shall discuss similarities and differences in the uses, the management and the role of the commons in distinct premodern European regions.

Chair: Aparisi, Frederic, University of Valencia, Spain

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4.6.1. Commons in the late medieval Crown of Aragon: Regulation, uses and conflicts, 13th-15th centuries

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Royo, Vicent, University of Valencia, Spain

A process of demarcation of commons began in the Crown of Aragon from the second half of the 12th century, resulting in the creation of a specific legal term: 'empriu', defining the communal lands that could be used by rural and urban communities. The peasantry began a series of complaints to the King and the lords which crystallizes in achieving pasture and forest commons, stated from the mid-13th century in the general codes of the three political entities that formed the Crown of Aragon, namely the Usatges of Catalonia, the Fueros of Aragon and the Furs of Valencia. They all had a common thread: to decree the freedom to use the commons for all the inhabitants of each territory. But it did not avoid conflicts. For example, on the one hand the city of Valencia defended the freedom of pasture in the whole kingdom, as it was stated in the code of the Furs, but, on the other hand, lords and rural towns, zealous to close their respective lands, made access to commons difficult and tried to use them in an exclusive way. This paper shall analyse the definition and characterization of the term 'empriu' in the different legal codes of the Crown of Aragon, trying to understand its influence on the organization of the landscape. It shall also explore the historical evolution of the use of commons between 13th and 15th centuries.

4.6.2. Managing the Commons: The role of the elites in the uses of common lands in the Midlands of the kingdom of Valencia during the Middle Ages

Aparisi, Frederic, University of Valencia, Spain
Esquilache, Ferran, University of Valencia, Spain

This paper tries to analyse the role of the leading sectors of the communities in the uses and management of the commons from the observatory of the Midlands region in the late medieval kingdom of Valencia. We shall differentiate between lord's and King's lands and, moreover, between Muslim and Christian communities. The Muslim people that populated this area had a large freedom over the common lands and mobility of the livestock, but they lost their rights after the Christian conquest of the 13th century. The lords privatized the use of the common lands, forcing their vassals, either Muslim or Christian, to pay rents. On the other hand, in the King's lands, Christian communities had a major freedom to use the commons. Here the local councils were responsible for regulating their purposes and the elites ruled these institutions, managing the common lands in accordance with their own interests. Because of that, in the towns where livestock activities acquired certain economic importance, the local leading families legislated allowing the presence of flocks in the farming areas. In contrast, in the communities where livestock activities were marginal, the local legislation intensively protected the crops and flocks were banned from stubbles. Grazing areas were maintained not for foreigner flocks but for the local ones. To sum up, in this paper we seek to determine the role of the social structure in the management of the commons in the Midlands of the kingdom of Valencia between the 13th and the 15th century.

4.6.3. The common denominator: The regulation of the community of users within the Campine area during the 16th century

De Keyzer, Maïka, University of Antwerp, Belgium

An obscure genesis is that of the community of users or the commoners within early modern Europe. Who belonged to the community and could profit from the gains from the commons and who did not? Even though countless micro studies have contributed to a map of Europe envisaging millions of different varieties of common pool institutions and communities of users, the causal factors behind the formation of a closed or open type of common, are difficult to grasp. Therefore one specific micro study, namely of a selection of rural communities within the late medieval Campine area, has been conducted to tackle this issue. The Campine area was not only one of the last remaining regions within the urbanised Low Countries, where vast common waste lands and meadows survived until the 19th century, they also retained a remarkable open access regime, despite rising population densities, commercial push and pull factors from the surrounding cities and the presence of large tenant farmers who could have profited from either privatising or monopolising the commons for their own commercial goals. By combining purely quantifiable sources concerning the demographic, economic and social background of this peasant society with juridical records, a perspective on the stakeholder's interests and goals concerning the Campine commons could be deduced. There it will be stated that this type of access regime and use rights were the result of a kind of social equilibrium between the most important stakeholders within the Campine area, the tenant farmers, independent peasants and cottagers.

4.6.4. A new Mezzogiorno? Exploring the diverse and dynamic paths towards the inequitable distribution of property in Southern Italy through an examination of institutions for the collective management of resources in Apulia, 1600-1900

Curtis, Daniel R., Utrecht University, Netherlands

Today Southern Italy is more economically disadvantaged than Northern Italy with some of the poorest social and economic infrastructures in Western Europe. Scholars have for a long time been interested in the causes of this. An older international scholarship of ethnographers and anthropologists up to the 1980s crystallised in place a negative perception of Southern Italy, emphasizing concepts such as latifundia, inequality, a lack of 'civic consciousness', tradition, feudalism, conservatism, and even 'backwardness'. This story has now been challenged by a more recent historical scholarship written mainly in Italian emphasizing how the pre-industrial Mezzogiorno was in fact economically dynamic supported by a diverse array of institutional structures. In this paper the two stories are brought together and shown not to be mutually oppositional. It is suggested that inequality in the distribution of property was both a general phenomenon (especially in the agro-town areas) and had long historical roots in the Mezzogiorno, but there was no one 'Southern' path towards inequality. By focusing on the Royal Customhouse of Naples and collective institutions for managing resources in Apulia, it is confirmed that the institutional roots and origins of this inequality was quite diverse and dynamic – likely varying across Southern Italy and the Mediterranean. On the plains of Northern Apulia, inequality was crystallised in place by a collective agricultural system which served the interests of mercantile elites far away in Naples.

Participants

Aparisi Romero, Frederic

Frederic Aparisi Romero took his BA (2005) and Mphil in Medieval History (2008) at the University of Valencia. He has been lecturer at the Cardenal Herrera University of Valencia (2011-2012) and now is writing his PhD 'From the Countryside to the City. Raising and consolidation of the Valencian Rural Elite (14th-15th Centuries)'. He has written several books on local history and has also contributed the three volumes book 'Hug de Cardona. Col·lecció Documental (1407-1482)'. He has published over fifteen book chapters and papers in different peer reviewed journals such as 'Saitabi' or 'Medievalismo'.

Baydal, Vicent

Vicent Baydal is currently Research Associate at the History Faculty of the University of Oxford and the Corpus Christi College. He presented his PhD thesis on 'Tax systems, relations of power and collective identity in the kingdom of Valencia, c. 1250-c. 1365' at the Pompeu Fabra University in 2011. He has published over thirty book chapters and articles in peer reviewed journals and is author of four books, including the translation into Japanese of the chronicle of James I of Aragon and a monograph on the crusade of James II against Almeria in 1309.

Curtis, Daniel R.

Daniel R. Curtis has spent the past three years at the Research Institute for History and Culture at Utrecht University, where he defended his PhD in 2012 entitled 'Pre-industrial societies and strategies for the exploitation of resources. A theoretical framework for understanding why some settlements are resilient and some settlements are vulnerable to crisis'. He is interested in testing the impact of inequality in the distribution of property and power on societal resilience, and has recent publications in the Journal of Medieval History and Continuity and Change.

De Keyzer, Maïka

Maïka de Keyzer is preparing her PhD thesis about 'The struggle for the commons in the late medieval Campine area' under the supervision of Professor Tim Soens at the University of Antwerp. She is actually interested in the study of rural history, communitarian institutions and the origins of inequality.

Royo, Vicent

Vicent Royo took his BA (2008) and Mphil in Medieval History (2009) at the University of Valencia. He is currently writing his PhD about legal conflicts in the kingdom of Valencia between the 13th and 15th centuries. He has published two books and is author of over twenty articles in Spanish, Catalan and French. He is interested in the organization and the social structures of the rural towns in the later middle ages.