

II Workshop

ARCHAEOLOGY OF COMMONS



Management, property right and governance.

Oviedo 12 – 13 November 2020

The areas of joint use, known as commons, have been essential for the economy of local communities. Their dismantling, survival or transformation have led to useful historiographical debates in recent years.

Archeology and anthropology have focused lately on their study, developing lines of work to examine how they are used, bring a complex view of the different property and management rights, and qualify institutionalist interpretations. All of these points of view will be discussed in these symposiums.

Programme

12 November 2020

9:30 Greeting from the authorities

10:00 Los recursos de uso comunal en la documentación escrita: la Meseta del Duero (850-1200) - **Iñaki Martín Viso** (Universidad de Salamanca) -

Abstract

En este trabajo, presentamos algunos resultados obtenidos tras la elaboración de una base de datos sobre los recursos de uso colectivo en la Meseta del Duero mencionados en las fuentes escritas entre los siglos IX y XII. Aunque esta información tiene fuertes limitaciones, debidas a su carácter señorial y al interés en legitimar jurídicamente las propiedades de las instituciones cuyos archivos conservaron estos textos, se han podido detectar medio millar de citas que permiten plantear algunas propuestas. Se ha podido realizar una secuenciación cronológica, en la que destacan dos fases de mayor representación de los comunales en el registro escrito: a comienzos del siglo X, coincidiendo con la afirmación de los poderes centrales, sobre todo en León, y en el último cuarto del siglo XI, que coincidiría con la intervención de los señores. Otro aspecto que se trata es el análisis de algunos términos que enmascaran los recursos comunales, como es el caso de las sernas y rengalengos. Se hace igualmente hincapié en la frecuente relación entre territorios supraldeanos y espacios de uso colectivo y en el importante papel de los reyes como garantes superiores de los recursos comunales, lo que debió ser una de las principales vías de afirmación de su dominio a escala local. Todo ello implica una presencia temprana de los comunales, que se visibilizó y formalizó sobre todo a partir de la segunda mitad del XI, frente a una idea de eclosión en el periodo plenomedieval que ha caracterizado a las últimas aportaciones en el Norte de Europa. Finalmente se aborda la capacidad de formación de identidades locales y supralocales a través de la acción colectiva relacionada con estos comunales.

10:30 From sharing practices to marginalisation: the (almost forgotten) social dimension of European mountains (XVIII-XXI sec.) - **Anna Stagno** (Università Degli Studi Di Genova)

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12:00 Reglamentación y usos comunales en la Vall del Madriu-Perafita-Claror (Andorra), entre los siglos XV i XX - **Abel Fortó García and Olivier Codina Vialette** (Patrimoni Cultural d'Andorra)-

Abstract

With an overall surface of 4.247 ha, the Madriu-Perafita-Claror valley is located in the south-east of Andorra, divided among the parishes of Encamp, Andorra la Vella, Sant Julià de Lòria and Escaldes-Engordany. In 2004 it was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List as a cultural landscape, thanks to its exceptional

values, and between 2003 and 2014 it has been the subject of inventory and archaeological surveys carried out by different research teams (ICOMOS, ICAC and Patrimoni Cultural). Thanks to these works, approximately 53% of the territory has been covered and around 1700 structures have been documented, all of them located between 1,300 and 2,500 m high. Besides this archaeological knowledge of the valley, it must be added that there is a significant amount of written documentation for the last five centuries from the communal archives of Andorra la Vella, Sant Julià de Lòria and Escaldes. It is interesting to point out that, nowadays, only 1% of the area is privately owned, while 99% is communal or for communal use. Beyond this communal territory, there have been a set of regulations that have affected the use of the entire space, so that, seasonally, collective uses prevailed over private property and space management. On the other hand, from the 17th century the regulations have been modified and a mechanism for renting portions of the communal space for private use has become general.

A second item that we must point out is the coexistence of a multiplicity of economic activities that have been carried out in the valley through these five centuries. These activities have had a close relationship with the communal land and the regulations of collective uses, in such a way that they have modified the use of natural resources and the landscape. In order of importance, livestock (sheep, equine and bovine) has been the main activity, which has made the most extensive use of the territory, so that it has left a great amount of structures of different kind and from different times. Secondly, we must highlight agriculture, an activity whose territory was fluctuating throughout the period but which has had an outstanding development and has left various structures, especially in the medium altitude mountain (between 1,300-1,600 m), in those spaces known as *cortals* or *bordes*. The third activity that should be noted is the production of iron. Although it was carried out during a relative short time (1732-1832 / 36), it had a significant impact on the landscape, specially due to an associated activity such as charcoal production which, on the long term and combined with other activities, it would end up consolidating new open pasture spaces. Anyway, it was not uncontrolled deforestation, as the communal regulations make it very clear that there was a rational management of communal forests, that guaranteed their continuity and regeneration. However, this regulation ceased at the end of the 19th century, when the use of the forest mass focused on obtaining wood for construction.

Finally, we must emphasize that the crossing of archaeological data with documentary sources allows us to trace an evolution in the management of all these activities, in the types of structures and in the landscape itself.

12:30 Arqueología de los Comunes en el País Vasco - **Aitziber González, Josu Narbarte and Juan Antonio Quirós** (Universidad del País Vasco) -

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16:00 Seasonal production sites – an Iron Age predecessor for the formation of commons - **Andreas Hennius** (Uppsala University) -

Abstract

In Sweden the basic division of land belonging to a traditional farm was the area within the fence (inmark/infields) and the areas outside the fence (utmark/outfields and outlands). Inside the fence was the farm with its buildings and fenced fields and meadows. The infields were privately owned and managed. Outside the fence was the outfield pasture and extensively used lands that were privately owned, although management was subject to the needs and will of the village collective. Outside the privately-owned outfields were the outlands. The division of utmarken, could also be more elaborated and complex, with gradual diminishing property rights further away from the home farmstead. The management of these outlands as commons is accounted for in historical sources and laws already from the 13th and 14th centuries. In the undulating and hilly landscape in northern Sweden, the land sloping towards the village, usually situated in the river valleys and up to the nearest ridge of the surrounding highlands, was considered to be the villagers' forest and land, while the lands on the other side of the ridge were utilised as commons (sw. allmänning). After three years of occupation of a farm, the owner received a share in the village common in relation to the size of the farm. If a villager wanted, he could also establish a new farm at the common. This farm could further be claimed as private property after three years of cultivation, at which point the owner of this new farm also gained a share in the common; however, if the farm was abandoned, it reverted to being a part of the common after three years (Hälsingelagen, Vidbobalken 15–16).

The origin of this system of land division and commons is, however, hidden in dark past where we have to rely on archaeological sources. There are arguments that the division of land into Inmark and Utmark develops during the middle Iron Age in the 4th–7th century in Sweden. During this period, we see a fundamental change of land utilisation, probably due to stricter land regulations, land ownership and the development of the allodium (sw. Odal). Parallel to this, and probably due to similar land-use regulations, there is also the development of seasonal production sites in different parts of the landscape, both forested and mountainous areas but also seasonal fishing and hunting stations along the Baltic coast. The outland sites could be interpreted as a way of claiming land and resources, from the home-farm to the temporary site and a result of migration of people within fixed borders. I would suggest that people started to move from regulated places of settlement to well-defined areas in the outlands that were previously utilised only sporadically. As part of this resource colonisation, stock raising and grazing could be performed in the summer, and hunting, fishing, iron production or other types of raw material exploitation could take place in other parts of the year.

Lindholm et al. (2013), have shown that archaeological and historical remains in the forests, indicative of cooperative forms of natural resource management, appear in clusters, which are not randomly distributed. The clusters usually contain sets of different activities: large game hunting, livestock herding, iron smelting, tar production, mills and remains of roads. The clusters can be characterised as claimed multifunctional activity areas constituted on land use carried out over long time-depths. Furthermore, these clusters, corresponds to "outside the nearest ridge" suggested as commons in the law of Hälsingland

(Hälsingelagen). The clusters contain sites that are presumably both earlier and later than the law, which may indicate that the law formalised already existing land-use practices and furthermore a substantial time depth for the outland commons.

It is possible to argue that the development of multifunctional seasonal sites in the forests should be considered as a manifestation of an orderly landscape organisation and stricter land regulations, comparable to the regulations identified at the settlements. In this paper I will argue that the development of seasonal production sites in the outlands also could be interpreted as a prequel to the commons.

16:30 All animals are equal. But some animals are more equal than others". Crisis communalism in rural communities during the Late Medieval Agrarian Crisis in Scandinavia - **Eva Svensson** (Karlstads Universitet) -

Abstract

The Black Death hit Scandinavia in the middle of the 14th century. The great plague was accompanied by other problems such as climate change. The plague was also preceded by increased social stratification and state organization including introduction of taxation. In many cases, the peasants were the ones to carry the heaviest new burdens. In addition, the older – Viking Age – trade network, from which many groups of peasants had profited, had collapsed and been replaced by the Hanseatic League.

But, peasants in medieval Sweden (including present day Finland) and Norway, still retained a fairly strong position in society as c. half of them still possessed their land. The distribution of landowning, and tax paying, peasants were, however, unevenly distributed. In the southern parts of Sweden, manors and ecclesiastical estates with tenants were more common. In the northern part, with the great boreal forests, the landowning, tax paying peasants formed an almost exclusive social collective. The main, "feudal" representative in these parts of Sweden were the vicars holding estates (often of the same size as a regular farmstead) belonging to the church.

The Late Medieval Agrarian Crisis included a number of transformations of the Scandinavian, medieval society, such as depopulation and an increased animal husbandry. It has been difficult to estimate the mortality rate, not least because it has not been possible to calculate population size in the first place. Previous population calculations have been based on premises, such a settlement pattern dominated by single farmsteads, which has been proven wrong by archaeology. Most likely mortality in Scandinavia was similar to the rest of Europe, for which figures of 30-50% have been suggested. In any case, there must have been a considerable depopulation.

Depopulation in rural areas meant settlement / farmstead desertion, although settlement desertion has – with some exceptions – been hard to detect both in written documents and as archaeological sites. There are only a handful of excavated settlements deserted in medieval times, and most of these studies have focused the individual sites. In general, it has proven difficult to detect why the farmsteads have been too vulnerable to survive or the direct causes of desertion.

It should be remembered that it takes more than a devastating plague to cause permanent desertion of a settlement. There were different reasons for immediate

desertion and remaining deserted, because there were strong population growth after the 15th century and many people looking for land to settle on. Therefore, this paper will look into structural causes for permanent desertion of settlements in the late middle ages. Leaning on political ecology, the focus will be on crisis as a transformative phenomenon opening for as well increased as reduced socio-ecological inequalities, with some people or social collectives able to grab new opportunities whereas other experience increased vulnerability, incapacity and risk exposure.

In a previous study carried out for the region of Värmland, permanent settlement desertion could in several cases be connected to the vicar, as the settlements had ended up belonging to the vicarage estate. As the vicar was the main exponent of feudal power in the region, this process has been labelled crisis feudalism.

In this paper, the region of Jämtland will be investigated. Jämtland stands out as remarkable as there are over 600 registred deserted medieval settlements (in contrast to a handful in most other Swedish regions). In Jämtland it appear to have been the landowning peasants who had decided on keeping settlements deserted, in order to use the land themselves in connection with the growth of animal husbandry and to exclude landless people from obtaining a farmstead. There were two key factors in this process; the rights to the use of the resources in the outlying lands connected to possession of land, and the social representation of peasants as peers and main power in the region. Therefore this process has been labelled crisis communalism.

17:00 The biocultural heritage of the commons. Linking the past with the future in the Scandinavian inland - **Karl-Johan Lindholm** (Uppsala University) -

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13 November 2020

10:00 Cattle and sheep and the political in medieval Castile - **Julio Escalona** (Instituto de Historia CSIC) -

Abstract

Scholars' understanding of medieval commons is strongly determined by a path that can be traced back at least to the eighteenth century. In this period, the commons were a highly sensitive political issue. This is, perhaps, best evidenced in the long, piecemeal process of enclosures that did away with much of the traditional common rights and obligations in England, but it has its own variants in other regions of western Europe. Consequently, a vision of the medieval economic development based upon notions of individual appropriation of land and resources became firmly established. This is especially noticeable in the way that theories about the origins of open-field systems in England tended to explain the phenomenon by departing from a series of individual (households) that, at a certain point, needed to agree to cooperate in order to implement a complex, but more profitable system of agricultural rotations. Private ownership was thus primordial, and collective arrangements only subsidiary to it. Views along these

lines have largely dominated standard approaches to medieval commons until the late twentieth century, when broader comparative, anthropologically informed perspectives made leeway. Current views are thus more sensitive to the primordial role of the commons in shaping community ties even before the definition of medieval villages.

The political dimensions of early medieval commons have been stressed by authors like Faith and Oosthuizen, when exploring the inner articulations of early Anglo-Saxon small-scale polities and territories. This is a fundamental step forward that slots in seamlessly with current visions of the commons in many other European areas. In this paper, though, I aim to draw attention to the strongly dynamic character of medieval commons. Although often the available evidence will not allow for much chronological accuracy, it seems important to bear in mind that many elements of common ownership, rights, and obligations that occur in our written sources are not necessarily ancestral features from the early medieval period or before. Quite contrary, the fact that similar patterns appear in demonstrably late dates is witness to the resilience of the whole notion of the commons and its high relevance for the workings of rural localities both in the Middle Ages and much later, even today, in many regions of Europe, especially in the south. In this paper I will use examples from tenth- to twelfth-century Castile to confront earlier systems of access to common land and resources with later developments induced by either village-to-village negotiations or emerging urban markets acting as attractors for their economic hinterland. My point will be that, while early medieval commons were essential to community definition, many later similar developments were not. Commons not always means community.

10:30 Estratexes llocales pal caltenimientu de los comunales nel Cordal Cantábricu - **Margarita Fernández Mier** (Universidá d`Uviéu) **and Pablo López Gómez** (Universidad de Lleón) -

Abstract

The Cantabrian Mountains are a sort of exceptional laboratory where the evolution of the commons in the long term may be studied. The current importance of wide woodland and pastures for the sustainability of the rural society of North West Iberia can be seen in the requests for legal actions and arbitration called by rural communities regarding spaces managed by different administrative entities under a wide variety of legal forms. The use management and governance institutions may studied nowadays from anthropological and legal points of view, and are the result of long-lasting processes rooted in the Middle Ages. This process shows both the resilience of local communities to defend their ways of sustenance and reproduction throughout history, as well as the dynamism of the commons, due to changes in size and organization mixed up with private, semi-communal and collective ownership formulas.

The written sources have been telling since the late Middle Ages, a time when different social groups with diverse perspectives acted strongly upon the commons, leading to changes in their use that would bring about the restructuring of an increasingly complex agrarian system with the organization of semi-collective and collective practices that require the progressive

implementation of standards and governance systems with great variability throughout the Cantabrian Mountains.

Although the academic literature on these processes isn't scarce, the study of the commons in the Cantabrian Mountains has been carried out mostly through the institutionalist and anthropological points of view in relation to the study of the Vaqueiros de Alzada and the Pasiegos, two separate social groups whose economic practices are linked to livestock activities.

The recent interest of archeology in the study of the commons conveys the wide range of materiality associated with areas of collective use. The territorialization processes related to the commons management can be documented using the marks left in the territory, the setting of landmarks, and even the building of religious establishments linked to the meeting and delimitation places.

This communication presents the archaeological works carried out in two areas of the Cantabrian Mountains, the Andrúas pass in the mountainside of the Aramo range (Quirós), and the braña de los Fuexos (Montouvo); both have allowed us to document on the one hand the use of these spaces in the long term, dating back to recent prehistory; and on the other hand, the strong pressure on the territory since the late medieval centuries that increases the recorded uses that date back to, at least, the High Middle Ages. Using different archaeological methodologies, from prospecting areas of collective use, to excavating livestock settlements (brañas) and areas of agricultural use, we can set the stages to understand the transformation processes of the agrarian system that dates back to the high medieval centuries and is related to semi-collective and collective practices that require the creation of a standard and governance bodies for its management.

12:00 La gestión comunal del agua de origen andalusí en el sur de la Península Ibérica - **Jose María Martín Civantos** (Universidad de Granada) -

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12:30 El estudio de "los comunales": una perspectiva antropológica, jurídica e histórica desde la montaña navarra - **Lidia Montesinos** (Ankulegi, Asociación vasca de Antropología) -

Abstract

Tomando como referencia las etnografías clásicas y los estudios de comunidad, en 2007 inicié un proceso de inmersión lingüística e investigación antropológica en un pequeño pueblo de la montaña navarra. A partir de una indagación sobre las formas de vida en Goizueta y sus transformaciones históricas, centré mi atención en el estudio de la complementariedad entre la apropiación particular de las casas y los usos comunales.

Combinando las técnicas etnográficas con el trabajo de archivo, documenté diferentes conflictos en torno a los usos y aprovechamientos comunales en distintas épocas, lo que me llevó a reconstruir una genealogía de las formas de apropiación en el pueblo, en relación a transformaciones históricas de carácter supra-local. Este recorrido, de larga duración histórica, me ha permitido comprender de forma compleja el uso de los recursos y ecosistemas locales, así como ciertas problemáticas y retos contemporáneos del municipio. Además, he

caracterizado las formas de aprovechamiento comunal y sus diferentes expresiones históricas y jurídicas, poniendo en cuestión cualquier definición cerrada y unívoca de "los comunales".

En este workshop quiero compartir algunas reflexiones teóricas y epistemológicas sobre el estudio de "los comunales", y defenderé la importancia del legado comunal -cuyo punto de partida es la equidad para la subsistencia- para afrontar momentos de crisis, de abusos y desigualdades, como el que atravesamos.

1. Presentación del trabajo de investigación

- *Lugar de estudio: Goizueta, Navarra (España).*
- *Metodología: Inmersión etnográfica, trabajo documental y de archivo.*

2. Perspectivas del estudio

- *Relaciones de propiedad: Conjugan el ámbito de los derechos y la regulación jurídica (la justicia), el ámbito económico (uso de los recursos y ecología) y el ámbito político (formas de gobierno y toma de decisiones).*
- *Antropología jurídica: estudio normativo (leyes y costumbres), perspectiva procesual (estudio de casos, disputas y conflictos), relaciones de poder y pluralismo jurídico (hegemonías y antagonismos), genealogía y perspectiva histórica (continuidades, cambios y memorias).*
- *Materialismo histórico y Genealogía del poder: para comprender el presente se adopta una perspectiva de larga duración histórica, entendida de forma no lineal, ni evolucionista. Se recurre a la Historia agraria, económica, política y del Derecho.*
- *Arqueología del saber: comprender los enunciados del saber-poder en su contexto y en relación a las tensiones que enfrentan. Por ejemplo: legalidad versus legitimidad.*

3. Aportaciones al debate contemporáneo sobre "los comunes"

- *Ontologías del presente: frente al Derecho instituido del Estado se alza, como recurso contrahegemónico, la tradición de un derecho ya perdido, y además malentendido, el de la necesaria complementariedad de lo comunal con lo familiar o doméstico, experiencia histórica cuyo punto de partida fue -y lo sigue siendo en muchas sociedades- la equidad para la subsistencia.*
- *Cuando la población local tiene voz y voto sobre sus recursos se desarrolla una mayor variedad de intereses, y consecuentemente también, de conflictos. Esto supone un cierto freno a los abusos.*
- *En "lo común" subyace una concepción de la justicia como derecho a la supervivencia y a no ser excluidos del aprovechamiento de aquello necesario para la vida: Derecho natural, Derecho consuetudinario y economía popular, Derecho consuetudinario de los pobres, Economía moral, Derechos Humanos...*

16:00 The archaeology of commons in Caramulo mountain range (Portugal): The municipality of Vouzela as case-study. - **Catarina Tente** (Universidade de Lisboa) and **António Faustino Carvalho** (Universidade de Faro) -

Abstract

Available historical sources indicate that commons in Portugal date back to the Middle Ages, though all suggests these forms of collective management of the

landscape may be older in the country. Their mapping shows a higher density coinciding with the mountainous sectors of central-northern Portugal.

At Caramulo, a low altitude (1000 m a.s.l.), north-south mountain range that separates the inner plateaux of the Beira Alta province from the Atlantic coast, there are various types of evidence allowing a first systematic archaeological/multidisciplinary approach to commons in Portugal. The importance of Caramulo is twofold: traditional management of commons (associated to transhumant practices) were at play until very recently (mid/late 20th century), and its archaeology has been subject to systematic survey and inventory after the wildfires that devastated the region's forest cover in October 2017.

There is today a set of evidence allowing the Caramulo commons to be comprehensively studied, specially in the municipality of Vouzela: historical sources, in particular the royal inquiries from the 16th century onwards; oral traditions on aspects of local and transhumant pastoralist practices; Roman and Medieval roads that connected the region with neighbouring territories (namely the Estrela Mountain and its transhumant flocks); detailed maps of commons; and on-going archaeological excavations in Medieval settlements and megaliths (that seem to have been used in medieval times as landscape marks). Two examples illustrate this:

1. The site of Lameiros Tapados (10th century AD) is located at 720 m a.s.l., in a peak adjacent to a track of arable land and near natural paths to the higher sectors of the mountain, where herding may have taken place. Excavations in 2019 identified six rectangular structures interpreted as temporary habitation and storehouse units. This settlement may thus be an early form of seasonal herding and farming exploitation of the highlands to the south, the Pena commons.

2. The megalithic necropolis of Malhada do Cambarinho (early 4th millennium BC) is located at 810 m a.s.l. in a mountain drainage basin, north of the Pena commons. The less fertile land and the presence of megaliths may have been the defining criteria of the Pena common's southern limits. It is not clear yet if agriculture was practiced but surely pastoralism (either permanent and transhumant) and the exploitation of forest resources may have been structural activities for the people inhabiting the nearby villages of Joana Martins, Ventosa and Quintela.

Recently we have submitted to the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology the "STAR project" where the main objective is the study of these sites, their relation with transhumant systems and common lands, and the establishment of deep chronological links with the earliest, Prehistoric occupation of Caramulo. Thus, we will develop studies on: a) the written sources available; b) a comprehensive review and study of available ethnographic surveys; c) extensive archaeological survey and testing of new sites aiming at evidence for built structures (domestic, funerary, agrarian); and d) laboratory analysis aiming at the study of faunal and botanical remains, analysis of phytoliths, radiocarbon dating, and animal mobility.

16:30 Ownership and sharing of the Commons in a high altitude environment: Case studies from the Pyrenees (18th - 19th) - **Christine Rendu** (Université de Toulouse) and **Mélanie Le Couédic** (Université de Pau) -

Abstract

From east to west, the Pyrenees mountain range presents very diverse situations of ownership and use of common land. As part of an archaeological approach to the material traces of high altitude pastoralism, we try to understand the spatial organisation of summer grazing and what it says about the sharing of collective resources. The complexity of this socio-spatial organisation requires us to formalise the relationships between the different levels of appropriation that structure the sharing of common land: ownership, usage rights, and exploitation practices. Working on the contemporary period makes it possible to try formalising these relations in a context that is fairly rich in information, and also to compare the different sources more easily: oral, written (including maps), archaeological.

Based on the Napoleonic cadastre, fiscal lists and plans produced between the 1820s and 1850s, three pieces of information are accessible: the ownership of the summer pastures, the representation or not of the huts on the cadastral plan and, when they are represented, the ownership of these huts. These two levels – land and hut – are only a starting point. The cadastre can also be supplemented by other sources, ranging from the notarial archives when the huts are held in private ownership, to rental leases when they are rented out to farmers, and to grazing regulations or the various conventions that organise compascuity.

Three study areas are presented here: Cerdanya, in the Catalan Pyrenees, Ossau and the Aspe Valley, in Béarn, and Soule and Cize, in the Basque mountains. From one area to another, the ownership of summer pastures allows us to tackle a first level of organisation. From a spatial point of view, these can be included in the envelope of municipal territories or held as external property in the territory of other municipalities. From a legal point of view, these common lands can be held by unions of inhabitants, communes, joint ownerships of two or three communes, and finally valley joint ownerships when they belong to all the communes of a valley. The huts, which materialise the right of access of the beneficiaries, may have statutes that follow those of the common land on which they stand or they may differ from it and be under the control of other owners.

The primary objective of this communication is to describe these different systems according to these elements. It is also to confront them with the concrete practices of exploitation, which constitute a third level of organisation. The management of the hut and the grazing territories it commands can in fact be carried out, in turn, according to different levels of grouping or association. These associations may concern only the hut, or the hut and the grazing territories, or the hut, the territory and production.

The formalisation of this grammar is complex. Moving in this direction aims to systematise the comparison of highland territories at different scales. The objective is also to perceive the role played in this organisation by neighbourhood and compascuity.

17:00 Beni comuni di pianura e indagini di terreno: alcune considerazioni a partire da esempi lombardi del tardo medioevo - **Riccardo Rao** (Università degli Studi Di Bergamo) -

Abstract

This contribution presents the primary changes in the management of the commons and their associated property which occurred in the Po Valley, and particularly in Lombardy, between the 12th and 16th centuries by attempting to trace them on the basis of archaeological markers and geographical features.

Lombardy is a particularly interesting area to reflect on the historical and material traces of the commons and on the possibility of reconstructing medieval land use rights on the basis of the archaeological evidence. This area represents a borderline case where it is difficult to apply the interpretative criteria for the commons in other areas of Europe, which generally revolve around the management of animal husbandry and the communal sharing of land. In Lombardy, the late medieval commons do not really overlap with communal pastures and woodland: both in cities and in the countryside, the commons took the form of pastureland, forests, and agricultural lands that for the most part were leased out to private individuals. On account of this 'privatistic' form of management, so to speak, in many cases the commons can hardly be distinguished, in terms of their material appearance, from estates privately owned by citizens and farmers. Moreover, a significant portion of the commons in Lombardy (also defined as "comunia" in surviving documents) consisted of various facilities: mills, smitheries, ovens, and kilns, which were managed by the local urban and rural communities as public utilities.

Lombardy presents one further interesting feature: the current landscape has been deeply altered by anthropic influence over the last few centuries, to the point that medieval traces have become almost undetectable, particularly in certain contexts. It is thus necessary to reflect on the methodologies, but also limits, associated with the investigation of the commons in this region.

In particular, Lombardy can be divided into three areas:

1) First of all, a mountainous, pre-Alpine and Alpine, area to the north: this is where landscape features have been best preserved. Through an examination of the commons in Valtellina, this paper shows how it is still possible to reconstruct the borders of collective resources in this area. An environmental history investigation can go even further: via 15th-16th century documents, it is possible to study the amount of livestock and the management of resources deployed to contain the risk of hydrogeological damage and landslides. Furthermore, it is still possible to identify some of the communal infrastructures managed via leasing – as in the cases of Bormio, the melting furnaces of Val di Frale, and the mills of the local settlement.

2) This is followed by the northern plain area, where most of the major cities in Lombardy are concentrated, such as Milan, Bergamo, and Brescia. This area is also described as a dry plain because its soil consists of a mix of sand and gravel which does not absorb rainwater. It was only made fertile through an impressive land development project which was undertaken from the 12th century onwards, by digging a network of canals capable of draining water from the rivers that flow across the plain in such a way as to have it flow horizontally across what had hitherto been arid areas. As we shall see in Bergamo's case, urban communes played a crucial role in such changes, which were partly made possible by the

confiscation – based on enquiries (inquisitiones) – of country commons and their transformation into public property complexes. Communes established new villages on these public tracts of land, digging canals and carving up estates into smaller lots, which were then converted from meadows into fertile fields.

3) Finally, southern Lombard hosts an irrigated plain, which is to say clay soil that creates swamps. This area too was reclaimed, particularly from the late Middle Ages onwards, similarly to the northern plain: one example is the founding of new villages in the Lomellina area by the commune of Pavia through the seizing of vast tracts of uncultivated land. However, this paper will also take into consideration other cases, such as that of the Apertole in the Vercelli area, where vast, undivided pasture areas survived for centuries and can still be identified on modern maps. Moreover, throughout this vast, humid region, areas adjacent to rivers play a specific role in terms of the land's collective use: in these ecological arteries, forests and natural pastures long survived any attempt at agricultural conversion and continued to play a key role in the collection of timber, and especially for transhumance from the Alps in autumn and winter. The rivers' high degree of variability, however, has made this area practically undetectable from an archaeological standpoint.

18:00 Conclusions - CarlosTejerizo (Universidad del Pais Vasco) -

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