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Book Reviews



SCALE AND SCALE CHANGE IN THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES: EXPLORING LANDSCAPE, LOCAL SOCIETY AND THE WORLD BEYOND. Edited by Julio Escalona and Andrew Reynolds. Pp. xi and 316, Illus 33. Brepols (The Medieval Countryside, 6), 2011. Price: £85.00. ISBN 978 2 503532 39 4.

While the series this book belongs to is centred primarily on the period AD 1000–1500 and on regional studies, *Scale and Scale Change* not only looks back to the early medieval centuries, but, in its subtitle at least, looks out much further than just the countryside itself. The volume comprises six studies covering Spain / Iberia, with another two on England and one on Italy. The contributions are the fruits of a series of seminars and workshops, funded by the Spanish government, and entitled ‘The foundations of the European space: community, territory and political system in early medieval Europe’. These were held between 2004 and 2008, with each paper ‘jointly debated and [with] particular effort... directed towards an overall conceptual focus’ (p. 2). This co-theorizing is targeted at exploiting archaeological evidence to show and interpret ‘scale’ and ‘scale-change’, whether growth, de- / centralization, fragmentation or decline, and to explore socio-spatial processes. Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages are, for Western Europe, and for former Roman provinces, periods and territories that witnessed significant social, economic, institutional and habitative modification: scales of power shrink, even if political authorities might remain vocal; the mobility of people and goods appears more restricted; and more localized settlement networks emerge in fractured economies. The papers here tackle a range of contexts and contests to identify how and why scale matters.

The book begins with a comprehensive introductory review by Escalona, who investigates how the concept of scale is used in other disciplines, how it is socially constructed and how scale-change denotes responses by individuals and groups. The rest of the book is split into three main parts. In Part 1, ‘Territories, Landscape, and Settlement’, Reynolds usefully asks how we might interrogate early medieval community cemeteries and boundaries in England. The two other papers in this part examine north-west and north-central Iberia: Fernández Mier explores settlement and community types evolving in a gold mining area after Roman demise; and Vigil-Escalera Guirado and Quirós Castillo examine archaeological contributions, notably from rescue work, for observing rural responses to the villa-system breakdown, assessing these for form, organization and trajectory. In Part 2, ‘Local Society and the World Beyond’, Chavarría Arnau compactly addresses Italian rural change AD 400–800 and concentrates on Church roles but also those of the military elites. The latter played a prominent role in ninth- and tenth-century Castilian northward expansion, with concomitant reactions by local rural communities and individuals in the Duero valley, with variable status display (Escalona and Reyes). Finally, Part 3, ‘Large-Scale Systems in Local and Regional Perspective’, features papers on tax and money both

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at a state level, with Castellanos on sixth-century Visigothic ideology, as well as at a regional one in Vîso's exploration of new networks of power in north-west Iberia, which is a strong contribution to the volume. Astill also offers a convincing exploration of evolving aristocratic roles in pre-Norman England.

All told, many papers here offer interesting research and new routes to interpret their data; certainly they force one to think more of individual and group actions and needs, and less of broad-sweep or lord-led acts. However, I must admit that reading the words 'scale' and 'scale-change' so many times rather dulled my understanding of these; exploiting each paper individually is a better route to get the most out of this volume.

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