

contention was the damage inflicted on lands and crops by grazing: an inordinate amount of time and effort had to be invested to demarcate fields from pasture, identify transgressors, calculate losses, determine penalties and secure compensation. Illustrating the delicate balance between inclusion and exclusion, shepherds were often viewed with suspicion and considered less trustworthy than other villagers.

The argument offers numerous further insights along the way. One of the most notable is the substantial stake rural inhabitants held in the island's public affairs. Town-based bodies stood at the pinnacle of the constitution, but each rural district had its own assembly, lower court and legal/fiscal officials plus four constables and a host of field and vineyard wardens, not to speak of ad-hoc additions for particular tasks. While all positions were filled by the large council, the personnel changed every six months, meaning that dozens of men obtained positions of responsibility in each village every year. On some occasions, furthermore, *comes* and court went on circuit to hear cases in the localities (there was a purpose-built loggia next to the church of All Saints at Blato; Figure 5); on countless others, communal officials exercised influence over proceedings held in town; sometimes, rural representatives even petitioned the Venetian doge or senate directly. The surviving volumes of records testify to a remarkable diffusion of at least basic literacy and multilingual capacity way beyond the city walls. Written notes transmitted specific information and instructions from centre to periphery and vice-versa. Alongside, we catch glimpses of oral exchange (e.g. in a series of lawsuits over public insults hurled at the newly wed couple of Marussizza and Radovanus de Craina on 20 August 1459) and the significance of material media (in the form of tally sticks used to record contractual agreements between animal owners and shepherds). In Korčula, therefore, popular participation was extensive and the urban-rural boundary porous indeed.

As acknowledged by the author (pp. 62–3), the biggest and most regrettable thematic gap is religion. The island had its own Roman Catholic bishop and it would have been fascinating to see how ecclesiastical dimensions intersected with the multiple forms of affiliations outlined above. Given an almost total loss of church records, the emerging narrative inevitably veers towards the secular, with very little to say on parochial organization, congregational worship, fraternity life and spiritual practices, all of which must have differentiated the experience of *Gemeinschaft* further. Stylistically, to move to a few quibbles, there are rather too many recapitulations of the same points, some over-elaborate passages packed with quotations

(chapter 2) and tendencies to jump from micro-historical findings to generalizing conclusions (chapter 5).

Overall, Kümmler offers an engaging journey into the world of a fifteenth-century island society. His concluding remarks point to wider comparative potential, be it with other areas along the Dalmatian coast (such as Poljica, where feudal structures lingered more strongly), the *terraferma* around Venice or case studies even further afield. Anyone interested in concepts of community, rural economies and town-country interactions will find *Korčula* a stimulating read.

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FABIEN GAVEAU, *Propriété, cadastre et usages locaux dans les campagnes françaises (1789–1960): Histoire d'une tension légale* (Presses universitaires de Franche-Comté, 2021), 480 pp. €40.

Fabien Gaveau writes about the land from an unusual perspective having managed a family farm on the eastern edge of the Paris basin whilst studying and teaching agricultural history. His book can best be described as a social history of French land law, but one with a message. The message or argument is contained in the sub-title: the history of land ownership and possession reflects a series of long-standing tensions between owners, exploiters, legislators, jurists and real estate professionals (surveyors and public notaries).

By the standards of most European countries, seigneurial lordship over the land ended quite abruptly in France. The Declaration of the Rights of Man of 1789 established the principle of private property and in 1804 the Civil Code defined ownership unambiguously as the 'faculty to enjoy the use of, and to dispose of, things in the most absolute manner' (article 544). Hence the fetishizing of the status of 'proprietor': a word which carries a special resonance in French to this day. In reality, of course, matters were not quite so simple. As the author shows, the slogan belied the reality and it was left to nineteenth-century officialdom to try and bring custom and practice into alignment with the letter of the law. A series of tensions arose which threw into question the rigorously individualistic definition of private property: disputes over collective rights (grazing, gleaning, etc.), stock transhumance, afforestation, land reclamation, marsh drainage, fishing, hydro-electric schemes and so on.

The gap between the vision of administrative elites who wished to make the countryside 'legible' and those who actually lived and worked there was never really bridged, but simply narrowed. Over time (the study extends to the 1950s) the agenda shifted and new issues emerged. The issue of legal ownership yielded – in the

face of productivist pressures – to a preoccupation with actual possession and exploitation. In 1946, for instance, a revised Statut de Fermage which had originally been an initiative of France's Vichy government placed a considerable restriction on property owners: share-crop farmers acquired a right to conventional leases and tenant-farmers a right of pre-emption should their holdings be put up for sale. In more recent decades policies of environmental management have placed further restraints on ownership.

Much of what Fabien Gaveau has to say is encapsulated within the fraught history of the Rural Code. Unlike other attempts at codification by the revolutionaries and by Napoleon, rural law proved stubbornly resistant to standardization. The first effort, in 1791, was wrecked by the inability of legislators to find a viable means of ending collective rights. Not until the final decade of the nineteenth century was a solution of sorts found for the practice of collective grazing, without which the right of landowners to enclose their property remained a dead letter. Even so, an agricultural enquiry of 1898 disclosed that nearly a quarter of rural councils had voted to maintain *vaine pâture*. While a regulation of forests reached the statute book as early as 1827, the long-anticipated Rural Code was not legislated until 1955. It is true that the extraordinary complexity of property structures in France posed a formidable obstacle. The sales of Church- and noble-owned property during the revolutionary decade created around 600,000 new owners, many of whom were micro-proprietors, and in any case much of the arable land surface was heavily subdivided.

The huge task of mapping and registering land holdings was envisaged as a corollary to the abolition of seigneurial lordship in 1789, but it only made significant headway in the early decades of the nineteenth century. These *cadastres* were initially conceived of as fiscal tools: they only evolved into a type of standardized register of land holdings subsequently. Nevertheless, they were nearly everywhere in place in France almost a century before compulsory title registration was introduced to England and Wales. Agricultural historians will probably find the pages relating to mapping and surveying the most interesting feature of the book: how property boundaries were reconnoitred and how disputes between adjacent parishes and municipalities were resolved. After the Revolution the task of defining territory was handed to surveyors with mathematical training whose understanding of space differed markedly from that of those who actually tilled the land.

Throughout his study Fabien Gaveau provides well documented illustrations of the 'tensions' that give shape to his investigation. Indeed, these illustrations

often amount to substantial case studies in their own right. They serve as a reminder that this is not a book for general readers to dip in to. There is simply too much information on offer and it threatens to overwhelm the interpretive structure. From a specialist's point of view, most of the findings are not particularly new: the author synthesizes existing research, adds examples and provides a connecting chronological narrative. His use of the considerable body of English-language scholarship on the countryside in France is rather patchy, and it is a matter for regret that the study draws to a close just as the biggest land reorganization undertaken since the Revolution started to make headway. Confronted with no fewer than 145 million ownership parcels of an average area of 0.33 hectare in 1946, legislators put the authority and resources of the state behind a massive programme of plot consolidation (*remembrement rural*) in the late 1950s and 60s. To date some 15 million hectares of agricultural land has been reshaped and reallocated.

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DANIEL BENSÄÏD (trans. ROBERT NICHOLS), *The Dispossessed: Karl Marx's debates on wood theft and the right of the poor* (University of Minnesota Press, 2021). 160 pp. \$25.

In October 1842 Karl Marx, aged 24 years, became editor of the *Rheinische Zeitung*. Founded a few months before, the newspaper lasted barely fourteen months before the Prussian State closed it down. Under Marx's editorship the paper became one of the most widely read German publications, and he used the newspaper to develop radical critiques of important contemporary issues.

For Marx these were transformative times. As Robert Nichols explains in his introductory essay to *The Dispossessed*, Marx later explained that while editor he

experienced for the first time the embarrassment of having to take part in discussions on so-called material interests. The proceedings of the Rhineland Parliament on thefts of wood, and so on ... provided the first occasion for occupying myself with the economic questions.

The 'discussions' that Marx took part in during 1842–1843 in the pages of the *Rheinische Zeitung* might seem obscure, mark a period of intellectual transition for the young radical. As Nichols says, it was a period that saw 'Marx's break with Hegelian philosophy' and the start of Marx's embracing of socialist ideas and his development of a radical critique of political economy.