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Korporativ denken, genossenschaftlich organisieren, feudal handeln: Die Gemeinden und ihre Praktiken im Bergell des 14.–16. Jahrhunderts [Thinking Corporately, Organizing Cooperatively, Acting Feudally: Communes and Their Practices in Val Bregaglia in the 14th–16th Centuries]. By Prisca Roth

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Source: Mountain Research and Development, 42(3)

Published By: International Mountain Society

URL: https://doi.org/10.1659/mrd.mm275

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Mountain Research and Development (MRD)
An international, peer-reviewed open access journal
published by the International Mountain Society (IMS)
www.mrd-journal.org

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Zurich, Switzerland: Chronos, 2018. 427 pp. Hardcover: € 58.00. ISBN 978-3-0340-1447-2. E-Book (PDF): free, https://doi.org/10.33057/chronos.1447.

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The dominant themes of social science research on mountain areas focus on the issues of outmigration and inmigration, and on functional changes under the impact of changing consumer demand and locational conditions. In this context, the majority of work probably shares the approach of path-dependent development, which assumes that local experiences and practices can explain the specific development of mountain regions today. In spite of this, within the mountain research community, less appears to be known regarding these trajectories in concrete terms. This is often a topic of research carried out by historians and social anthropologists but is rarely known outside their own discipline, largely due to their limited microlevel research field and lack of international comparisons. Knowledge of such work is necessary, however, both to understand the contemporary lines of conflict between uplands and lowlands as well as to question the idyll of supposedly low-conflict agrarian societies.

Swiss historian Prisca Roth did just that: She analyzed territorialization and socioeconomic differentiation processes using the example of Val Bregaglia, an Italian-speaking mountain valley in the southern Alps of the Grisons, Switzerland, for the period of around AD 1300–1600. The agricultural economic areas extend from the valley bottom to the alpine pastures that encompass an elevation gradient between 700 and more than 1800 m. In addition, traffic over the Septimer Pass at 2300 masl played an important role.

Roth investigated cases of conflict between the different municipalities within and between the 3 different hierarchic levels of municipalities (several local municipalities within the 2 large municipalities of Sottoporta and Sopraporta, all part of the valley municipality Val Bregaglia). This research was done on the basis of handwritten notarial records preserved in the municipal archives, which she painstakingly transcribed.

The documents (mainly notarial records, but also other administrative texts) were written in Italian, Latin, local Italian dialect, and German. The sources cited are partly translated into German, whereas for smaller sentences, a basic knowledge of Italian is assumed. The work is written in German, which limits its dissemination. Nevertheless, I think it makes sense to discuss it here, since it addresses fundamental questions of social differentiation in alpine settlement areas that might be fruitful for the study of other mountain areas as well. German language skills and an engagement with agrarian societies remain necessary, although translation machines have made things much easier.

The analysis of everyday legal disputes may seem anecdotal to some, but systematic analysis, in the long run, makes it possible to assess important questions of a general character that are also of interest for other mountain areas, such as regulation of the commons (especially the use of alpine pastures) or the autonomy rights of the local municipalities towards the two higher levels of municipal organization.

The book is divided into 6 parts based on social fields that Roth depicts as relevant for the organization of social life and the local economy in the period covered. A first introductory part, which serves to clarify terms, is followed by a description of the significance and organization of the areas of agricultural use, that is, the alpine pastures, village meadows, and forests. In the third and longest part, the regulations of economic life are described and discussed; in the fourth part, the local political institutions and the roles of their representatives are presented. The fifth part looks at the role of the Church and the parish, including interlocal disputes (eg over the location of a church) and the clerical landscape of Val Bregaglia in the spheres of influence of the 2 bishoprics of Como (Lombardy) and Chur (Grisons). In the sixth part, the author discusses the question of social inclusion and exclusion, which is based on the sociological models of Niklas Luhmann. The book, conceived as a microanalysis of local history, does not provide an overall concluding synthesis, but it delivers a separate conclusion for each part. An appendix documents the sources used. Factors of particular note are two short inserts showing a fictional working day in the life of a fictional local patrician in AD 1572, both as a comic strip and in a written-out description. This is a very useful approach to illustrating this microhistory.

The findings and interpretations obtained from the painstaking, detailed work provide impressive insight into the constant negotiation processes and power struggles between the dominant local gentries (mainly 4 family clans, who served as vassals of the Prince-Bishop of Chur, and also a notary family active over several generations). The conclusions can be summarized as follows: The expansion of

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the power of municipalities was driven less by accumulating territorial ownership, but rather by the enlargement of options and intensifications of their use. The disputes over forest, agricultural land, and pastureland served to increase productivity in order to counteract population pressure. However, this did not occur within the framework of an often-idealized municipal autonomy based on democratic processes. Rather, the dominant family clans sought to permanently strengthen their position of power as local decision-makers and in their relationship to the governing prince-bishop. They did this by strengthening (one could say instrumentalizing) the institution of the municipality, and successfully so, as they maintained their power over centuries. At the same time, the valley community benefited from a relative distance to the power center of the prince-bishop. Over the decades, in the course of differentiation and intensification of land use, cooperative structures were abandoned—as elsewhere—in favor of private-sector models of farming.

The period under investigation falls into the time of the Reformation. The author describes the adoption of the "new faith" (introduced by Italian protestant missionaries) as a comparatively tolerant process; the feudal power allowed the local municipalities to decide, and the 4 gentry families adopted the "new faith" at different times. However, this does not change the fact that, in the following century, Grisons experienced years of extremely bloody religious struggles parallel to the Thirty Years War, known as the *Bündner Wirren* or "Grisons disturbances" (not a subject of this book).

Overall, I gained considerable detailed knowledge from Roth's investigation, which is of great importance for the regional history. For mountain research, it offers a broad range of material to picture different trajectories of social practices in a steep and vertically structured settlement area. To me as an economic geographer (and nonstudied historian), the work is important because it provides new knowledge on territorially anchored logics that explain regional actor relationships and decision-making processes up to the present day and illustrate why areas classified today as peripheral areas are important for the understanding of territorial statehood as well as for urban–rural relations in today's larger spatial context. The development of Val Bregaglia shows that these logics are sometimes accompanied by cooperation, but also by explicit competition, in both cases in search of access to the best resources. This can also be read as a message for today's conflicts of use in mountain areas: They are always about access (of individuals or groups of actors) to material resources, even if today these often have an intangible character, as in the conflicts between landscape aesthetics and recreation versus agricultural production, revealed today in the dispute between the defenders of wild-living wolves and sheep farmers. The book shows that functioning territorial municipal institutions are crucial for conflict regulation; at the same time, it provides a counterargument to an overstretched and instrumentalized idealization of municipal autonomy.

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