

ABSTRACTS

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Deforestation or change of use? A forest on the plains of Parma at the turn of the thirteenth century

The article explores the exploitation of a wooded area on the plains north of Parma between the end of the twelfth and start of the thirteenth century. In particular, the author focuses the analysis on the conflict over what was called the 'common' forest. Its usage was contested between the holders of rights on the one hand (the canons of Parma and the Da Pizzo family), and on the other hand, the inhabitants of the localities bordering on the forest (Pizzo and San Secondo Parmense), who had begun to organize themselves into autonomous communes from the end of the twelfth century. Diverse testimonies from countryside dwellers, resulting from an inquest conducted in 1210 by the local mayor, provide us with details about the different ways of managing the forest and its protection. Local inhabitants principally used the forest to obtain wood for domestic fuel or for sale, and various officials guarded the area. Starting from a discussion of the supposedly indiscriminate deforestation in the late medieval period, the article underlines how the forests in the area under consideration were used sustainably, as well as showing not just their economic importance, but also their symbolic and political value.

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Clearing for Sheep or Preserving for Pigs? Forest Use in the Southern and Eastern Carpathians in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries

This contribution examines the relationship between humans and forests in the Southern and Eastern Carpathians from the mid-sixteenth to the late seventeenth century. During this period, the mountains marked the border between Transylvania on the one side and Wallachia and Moldavia on the other. Following a brief overview of pre-modern forest cover and ownership structures in the region, the article explores the causes of increasing deforestation from the mid-sixteenth century onwards, as well as the various forms of forest use (such as for firewood, timber or pannage). Yet, the forests' multiple functions led to growing conflicts over ownership and usage rights. Hence, the article also analyzes the measures taken to regulate forest use and the motivations behind them. Economic interests and the assertion of property and usage rights played a greater role than concerns about resource scarcity or ecological awareness. The article highlights the competing demands that shaped human-forest relations and turned the forests into political and social spaces.

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Trademarks for Timber in the Veneto region

Dealing with historical timber trademarks demonstrates how relatively small traces can reveal much about the topic under discussion, thereby providing a broader framework for interdisciplinary studies on a regional scale. The results presented in this contribution were obtained from research

into historical buildings, archives and bibliographic sources in the Veneto region of Italy, as well as information obtained through contact with local scholars. After outlining the regional historical context, the text analyzes timber trademarks found in both historic buildings and archival records, with the aim of deciphering their origins and identifying the actors involved in timber commerce. The findings include the names of traders, trademarks ascribed to commercial companies, and other marks not yet ascribed to any specific traders or corporations. In sum, these results provide numerous insights into the movements and dynamics of timber merchants, as is illustrated by the examples of individual companies and, in one case, a consortium of timber traders.

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The grand Construction Sites in the Kingdom of Sardinia during the Eighteenth Century: An environmental Perspective

The following contribution seeks to analyze several large-scale construction sites in the Kingdom of Sardinia (Piedmont) during the eighteenth century by adopting a new perspective, namely that of the territories from which the building materials were extracted. To date, we possess an exhaustive historical literature regarding the most noteworthy examples of royal architecture in Piedmont, such as the royal palace in Turin, the royal theatre, the arsenal, the smaller pleasure palaces, the enormous dynastic residence at Venaria Reale outside Turin, or the hunting castle at Stupinigi. However, historical research has always concentrated on the analysis of the completed architectural works. By contrast, the context for studying the urban building sites is provided by the upper Susa valley in the western Alps, the preferred site for extracting raw materials. Hence, the architectural projects are studied by means of sources giving testimony to the historical actors, territories and processes that are usually excluded from traditional narratives. The research aims to intertwine architectural events with the physical environment and its exploitation, such that the 'energy impact' of the buildings becomes evident, not just in terms of their actual scale but also starting from the extraction of the construction materials themselves.

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Forms of Local Politics and Regional Ecosystems in relation to the Vercelli Barraggia from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Centuries

The article reconstructs the transformation undergone by the baraggia in the area of Vercelli in Piedmont between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. In doing so, the author focuses the analysis on the dynamics of local politics and society, rather than just on technical aspects. The barraggia constituted a type of cultural ecosystem that combined agricultural, woodland and pastoral features. It was managed by rural communities by means of collective practices that were regulated by family consortia. Moreover, the system involved regular rotation in the rights to exploit the land. A case study of the village of Oldenico shows how settlers and transhumant shepherds from the Alpine valleys contributed to the preservation of this special environment, creating an economic and social equilibrium founded upon customary rights. However, the feudal grants promulgated by the Dukes of Savoy and the rise of an intermediate nobility led to the increasing privatization of resources and the dividing up of the barraggia into communal and feudal parcels of land. This process culminated in the abandonment of collective practices and the subsequent conversion of the land into rice-fields.

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The Draining of Excess Water. Attempts at Agricultural Improvement in the District of Hohn as part of the Settlement of Migrants on the Marshes and Heathlands of Jutland Peninsula during the Eighteenth Century

In the 1760s, the Kingdom of Denmark attempted to cultivate the marshes and heathlands of Jutland and Schleswig-Holstein. Over four thousand settler migrants from Southern Germany settled in the area, having been enticed by the promises of farmland announced by King Frederick V. However, before agriculture could be established on the bogs, the land had to be improved. The article takes the district of Hohn (Hohner Harde) as an example of how nature was perceived as a resource for the improvement of humanity. Drainage techniques were applied by self-proclaimed experts, who had been endorsed by the Danish government, with the intention of improving the marshes. However, the initiative was only marginally successful. Despite the objections of local authorities, the Danish government nevertheless continued to support the experts' ideas. In the view of the government, these experts possessed the requisite blend of theoretical knowledge and practical ability to carry out such a project successfully.

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Imperial State Building via Subsidies from the Swiss Federal State? The St. Antönien Valley in conflict between Goat Grazing and Protective Forest

This article examines how the Swiss federal state extended its authority over local forest resources in the St. Antönien valley (Graubünden) from the late nineteenth century onwards. At its core, the article discusses the thesis that, despite its federalist structures, Swiss state building displayed parallels to imperial strategies of European powers. Goat grazing in the valley serves as a comparative analytical lens, because it was criticized both in colonial settings and the Alps. However, unlike colonial powers, the Swiss government was confronted with strong communal property rights that protected traditional practices. In this respect, a flood disaster occurring in 1910 marked a turning point, because federal subsidies for reforestation required the abolition of forest grazing. By the mid-twentieth century, policies of forest protection had prevailed and goat herding largely vanished. In conclusion, the case study highlights the differences between colonial repression and the Swiss practice of negotiation through subsidies.

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Written in Wood. Cultivational and Cultural Legacies behind the Vaia Storm Disaster in the Fiemme Valley

The Vaia storm of 2018 was the most disastrous weather event to affect the Italian Alps in the last fifty years, leaving a deep mark on the regional landscape of Trentino-Alto Adige. The Fiemme Valley alone accounted for one-third of all windthrow in the Autonomous Province of Trento. Yet, the disaster's particular intensity in this territory was a specific consequence of how the Alpine environment had been managed over the long term. This contribution therefore aims to reconstruct the lengthy genesis of the disaster by drawing on both archival documents and ethnographic methods. Silvicultural policies adopted throughout Tyrol since the eighteenth century have remained inscribed into the material composition of Fiemme's forests, leaving a historical heritage of vulnerability to severe windstorms such as Vaia.