
Questions to pursue

For all the loose talk about ‘community’ in pre-industrial rural societies, group action and group identity are not well understood for the early Middle Ages. In this book we aim to investigate groups and group behaviour in rural societies in western Europe in the period 700–1000, before the development of the tighter community structures of the later Middle Ages. We want to discover how far residential settlements constituted units of social organisation and the degree of social cohesion in such settlements. Our focus is on the interconnections and networks of people who lived side by side – neighbours – and their interactions with strangers from beyond the settlement, using evidence from across insular and continental western Europe.

There are many questions to pursue. Was anyone conscious of membership of the residential group or were those who lived in the same place simply residents? Given that a romantic view of agricultural collaboration and cooperation in this distant era has often been expressed, is that view any more than a reflection of post-industrial nostalgia for a supposed harmonious past? Where agricultural cooperation did occur, did it depend on permanent bonds between members of the group or was it no more than simple ‘task cohesion’, collaboration for the moment? Do surviving source materials suggest the binding force of shared beliefs and values and of formative social memory? How strong was any sense of inclusion and the practice of exclusion? How did a group deal with diversity? How did it deal with intervention from beyond the group? And what was the shape of the residential space – a single settlement, such as a village, or a network of settlements, or a principal settlement with associated hamlets and/or isolated farms, or simply a scatter of farms? We might expect the shapes to vary, depending on climate and terrain: we cannot

assume that the village is the only conceivable model for the residential base.

We have no sympathy with the teleological views that see the early medieval residential group as the prototype of the late medieval and early modern structured community. Such an approach ignores the variety of practice indicated by early medieval sources and the complexity of causation processes: local societies were far from uniform and the processes that made and changed them were far from monocausal. Looking at all potential kinds of evidence of social cohesion in well-evidenced localities in Austria, Belgium, Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Portugal, Spain and Switzerland, our investigation is grounded in the land; it is more concerned with the bottom than the top of the social hierarchy, that is, with the people who lived in the same settlement, and it is concerned, in the first instance, with horizontal rather than vertical relationships. Our interest is in the residential group of inhabitants rather than the single household or family. We know from earlier work that it is possible to see some detail of peasant relationships and interactions in Breton villages in the ninth century and to see elements of the functioning of local societies there: residential groups had a clear identity, recognised by themselves and by outsiders; they met regularly and transacted local business in public; they settled local disputes in village courts, with members of the group acting as witnesses, sureties and judges (see figure 8.1).¹ That being so, are similar mechanisms and the same kinds of cohesion visible in other parts of western Europe? Of course, very few rural groups lived in an isolated bubble: the supra-local agents of landlords and rulers elicited a variety of responses from people at ground level, and they themselves, as regular visitors and as strangers, had a greater or lesser impact on the small-scale residential group.² Likewise, the values, instructions and demands of the wider literate world of Christianity could percolate down to local level through the actions and ministry of a local priest.³ This book is therefore also concerned with the reception of these kinds of external impacts and with their variety and intensity.

1 W. Davies, *Small Worlds. The Village Community in Early Medieval Brittany* (London: Duckworth, 1988).

2 Cf. M. Stoffella, 'Gli ufficiali pubblici minori nella Toscana carolingia e post-carolingia', in M. Bassetti and M. Stoffella (eds), *Gli ufficiali minori in Italia nell'alto medioevo (secoli VIII-XI)* (Spoleto: Fondazione CISAM, forthcoming).

3 Cf. F. Tinti (ed.), *Pastoral Care in Late Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2005).

The problems of addressing an issue such as social cohesion in an early medieval context are well known and have been well treated. Chris Wickham set out the parameters: true comparison is difficult when national preoccupations – such as the Arab impact on Iberia, the Norman conquest of England, urban growth in Italy, varying levels of belief in free peasant proprietorship – dominate scholarly discourse; over-attention to legal history has meant limited attention to actual practice and to the way that societies functioned; and the character of available source material varies enormously across space and time, southern European charters, for example, tending to have much more local detail than northern.⁴ The perspectives of written sources usually derive from an elite – from landowners and their agents, from rulers and their entourages, from the specialised communities of monasteries and episcopal households – but we want to avoid approaching rural society exclusively through the structures of lordship. It is rare to hear the voice of the peasant, so how can we infer peasant social practice from material of this kind?

In fact, despite the dominant written perspectives, more and more aspects of peasant practice are becoming investigable.⁵ The corpus of archaeological data, which has particular relevance for individual settlement size, form and function, and its economic basis, is constantly growing.⁶ Recent attention to the processes that lie behind the production of a written text and its transmission reveal practices that were previously hidden and make audible voices that were previously silent. In the last few years a heightened awareness of the potential of records of judicial disputes has emerged: although many of these records deal with aristocratic quarrels, careful sifting can identify cases of peasant conflict and thereby throw light on intra-group relationships, as Lemesle and Albertoni, among others, have demonstrated.⁷ A new generation of work

4 C. Wickham, 'Problems of comparing rural societies in early medieval western Europe', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 2 (1992), 221–46. The 'legalism' school has been reinstating the social importance of legal formulations in recent years; see F. Pirie and J. Scheele (eds), *Legalism: Community and Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

5 See below, Chapter 2 and Appendix, for detail of written sources available.

6 See below, especially Chapter 3.

7 B. Lemesle, *Conflits et justice au moyen âge. Normes, loi et résolution des conflits en Anjou aux XIe et XIIe siècles* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2008); G. Albertoni, 'Law and the peasant: rural society and justice in Carolingian Italy', *Early Medieval Europe*, 18:4 (2010), 417–45; cf. W. Davies, *Windows on Justice in Northern Iberia, 800–1000* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), especially ch. 8.

on the copying and excerpting of legal texts in the early Middle Ages has shown that they are much less the authoritative utterances of a single legislator but rather the outcome both of selection informed by practice and of complex processes of interaction between rulers and subjects, at times reflecting the experience of delegates in the field.⁸ Recent research has also identified new types of source relevant for the study of local societies, such as the collections of explicatory material made by local priests. These illuminate the local adaptation of ideas which had been developed at, for example, the Carolingian court.⁹ New approaches to the editing of charters, especially private charters, have paid attention to the identity of scribes, thereby revealing that not all charters were the product of institutional scriptoria; rather, some were written by local priests, in close touch with local communities, recording the small-scale transactions of peasant proprietors and tenants; work on the collections of Saint-Gall has been especially influential, but the practice is well evidenced in other collections.¹⁰ In showing that the stories recorded in hagiographical texts – such as miracle collections – may also have originated outside monastic and episcopal centres, new studies have demonstrated the relevance of such texts for investigating local behaviour.¹¹ Recent scholarly developments,

8 D. Liebs, *Römische Jurisprudenz in Gallien (2. bis 8. Jahrhundert)* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2002); S. Patzold, 'Normen im Buch. Überlegungen zu Geltungsansprüchen so genannter "Kapitularen"', *Frühmittelalterliche Studien*, 41 (2007), 331–50; Ph. Depreux, 'Zur Nützlichkeit bzw. Nutzlosigkeit von Kunsttiteln für Kapitularen (am Beispiel der Nummern 134–135, 143–145 und 178 aus der Boretius-Edition)', *Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters*, 70 (2014), 87–106.

9 M. Czock, 'Practices of property and the salvation of one's soul: priests as men in the middle in the Wissembourg material', and C. van Rhijn, 'Manuscripts for local priests and the Carolingian reforms', both in S. Patzold and C. van Rhijn (eds), *Men in the Middle. Local Priests in Early Medieval Europe* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), pp. 11–31, 177–98.

10 R. McKitterick, *The Carolingians and the Written Word* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); *Chartae Latinae Antiquiores. Facsimile-Edition of the Latin Charters*, ed. P. Erhart, B. Zeller and K. Heidecker, 2nd ser., vol. 100–111 (Zürich: Urs Graf, 2006–18); W. Davies, 'Local priests and the writing of charters in northern Iberia in the tenth century', in J. Escalona and H. Sirantoine (eds), *Chartes et cartulaires comme instruments de pouvoir. Espagne et Occident chrétien (VIIIe–XIIe siècles)* (Toulouse: Université de Toulouse-Le Mirail, 2013), pp. 29–43.

11 C. West, 'Visions in a ninth-century village: an early medieval microhistory', *History Workshop Journal*, 81 (2016), 1–16; M. Innes and C. West, 'Saints and

then, in which the contributors to this volume have already been involved, make it viable to look into practice at peasant level.

Contributors to this volume have received their formation in and from different national contexts, although in collaborating across different traditions we have aimed to move beyond national historiographies. However, it remains relevant to address the major themes that have for a century or more dominated discussions about rural society in the early Middle Ages. National historiographical traditions in western Europe have been formed by distinctive national approaches, reflecting the values and preoccupations of the intellectuals of modern states. As Tim Reuter wrote so powerfully in 1997,

what we can know is determined not only by the flavour of the sources, but also by the traditional recipes used to cook them ... there is in this [French] tradition – as equally, of course, in the English, German, Italian and Spanish historiographical traditions, all of which tend to avoid eye contact with strangers – a specific way of looking at things.¹²

The attraction of the early Middle Ages for modern scholars has often been a consequence of the search for origins: interest in the local was subsidiary to interest in the growth of the state and the establishment of its institutions, in its multiple forms. In some countries belief in peasant freedom coloured the quality of the perceived emerging national character and its propensity to develop democratic institutions. In other countries the emphasis lay in top-down relationships, that is, in the vertical links between landowners and workers; notions about peasant freedom had less of an instrumental role. Both approaches surface in the several national historiographies and influence their varying perceptions of the local in different ways.

The German tradition is marked by a strong and sustained interest in political and constitutional history, despite its distinguished and widely influential nineteenth-century work on modes of social organisation. Rural society, however, has been (at least obliquely) a consistent interest because of long-standing debates on the nature and quality of freedom. German-language scholarship of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries generally

demons in the Carolingian countryside’, in T. Kohl, S. Patzold and B. Zeller (eds), *Kleine Welten. Ländliche Gesellschaften im Karolingerreich* (Ostfildern: Thorbecke, 2019), pp. 67–99.

12 T. Reuter, ‘Debate: the “feudal revolution”’, *Past and Present*, 155 (1997), 177–95, at 194–5.

assumed strong, stable local identities for ancient and early medieval Germanic villages. Drawing on Tacitus's *Germania*, rediscovered in the late fifteenth century, and also on English writing by Kemble, it was believed that the ancient 'Germans' had been organised in local and regional associations. In these *Markgenossenschaften*, landowning peasant-warriors of equal status held court and democratically decided all matters pertinent to their community. Noblemen – who are mentioned by Tacitus – were only different from other freemen in respect of their prestige.¹³

This view changed radically in the 1930s, when a new generation of scholars, including Theodor Mayer and Heinrich Dannenbauer, advanced the idea that the 'Germans' had always lived in lordship-based, aristocratic societies, in which a small number of noblemen ruled over dependent peasants.¹⁴ Despite the obvious links to contemporary politics in Nazi Germany, this view of early medieval society – known as the 'Neue Verfassungsgeschichte' – continued to dominate German-language works (with the exception of Swiss and East German historiography) in the second half of the twentieth century. Central to this concept was the notion that there was no distinction between the public and the private sphere, with the king being little more than a powerful lord for his dependants on the fisc, with virtually no ties to other non-aristocrats. Since aristocratic lordship was assumed to have been strong, and the public

¹³ See, for example, G. L. von Maurer, *Geschichte der Markenverfassung in Deutschland* (Erlangen: Enke, 1856); G. Waitz, *Deutsche Verfassungsgeschichte*, vols 1–2 (Kiel: Schwers, 1844–47); W. Hechberger, *Adel im fränkisch-deutschen Mittelalter. Zur Anatomie eines Forschungsproblems* (Ostfildern: Thorbecke, 2005). Through Karl Marx, and especially Friedrich Engels, the *Markgenossenschaft* became an important part of Marxist history; see, for example, F. Engels, 'Die Mark', in K. Marx and F. Engels, *Werke*, vol. 19:4 (Berlin: Dietz, 1962), pp. 315–30. For Kemble, see below, p. 8.

¹⁴ H. Dannenbauer, 'Adel, Burg und Herrschaft bei den Germanen', *Historisches Jahrbuch*, 61 (1941), 1–50, and 'Hundertschaft, Centena und Huntari', *Historisches Jahrbuch*, 62/69 (1942/1949), 155–219; Th. Mayer, 'Die Entstehung des "modernen" Staates im Mittelalter und die freien Bauern', *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte, Germanistische Abteilung*, 57 (1937), 210–88, and 'Adel und Bauern im Staat des deutschen Mittelalters', in Th. Mayer (ed.), *Adel und Bauern im deutschen Staat des Mittelalters* (Leipzig: Koehler & Amelang, 1943), pp. 1–21; W. Schlesinger, *Die Entstehung der Landesherrschaft. Untersuchung vorwiegend nach mitteldeutschen Quellen* (Dresden: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1941); K. Bosl, *Frühformen der Gesellschaft im mittelalterlichen Europa. Ausgewählte Beiträge zu einer Strukturanalyse der mittelalterlichen Welt* (Munich/Vienna: Oldenbourg, 1964).

sphere virtually non-existent, local identities were irrelevant, absent or merely the consequence of a lord's domination. As a result, in German historiography rural life has been framed exclusively through the lens of *Grundherrschaft*, land-based lordship, emphasising the pattern of obligations due from dependants to powerful landlords, with a focus on vertical relationships rather than horizontal.¹⁵ Nucleated settlements with communal institutions and a strong local identity (called 'real' villages by Karl Siegfried Bader) were seen as an eleventh-century innovation – a narrative that resembles that of contemporary studies in French by Léopold Génicot and Robert Fossier, albeit with a different derivation.¹⁶

Since the 1990s there has been a steady decline in the study of large estates;¹⁷ a new interest in, and debates about, ritual and symbolic communication have sustained a focus on aristocratic practice;¹⁸ early medieval local society has therefore until quite recently received little or no attention from historians. Thomas Kohl's work comparing settlements in three regions of Bavaria, however, in cutting across the structures of great estates, shows that a single settlement might be home to the dependants of different landlords, allowing residents sometimes to join together in community action, regardless of the interests of lords.¹⁹

15 L. Kuchenbuch, *Bäuerliche Gesellschaft und Klosterherrschaft im 9. Jahrhundert: Studien zur Sozialstruktur der Familia der Abtei Prüm* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1978); W. Rösener, *Grundherrschaft im Wandel. Untersuchungen zur Entwicklung geistlicher Grundherrschaften im südwestdeutschen Raum vom 9. bis 14. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991); H.-W. Goetz, 'Beobachtungen zur Grundherrschaftsentwicklung der Abtei St. Gallen vom 8. zum 10. Jahrhundert', in W. Rösener (ed.), *Strukturen der Grundherrschaft im frühen Mittelalter* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989), pp. 197–246.

16 K. S. Bader, *Studien zur Rechtsgeschichte des mittelalterlichen Dorfes*, 3 vols (Vienna/Cologne/Graz: Böhlau, 1957–73). See below, pp. 10–11, for Génicot and Fossier.

17 See L. Kuchenbuch's programmatic 'Abschied von der Grundherrschaft – Ein Prüfungsang durch das ostfränkisch-deutsche Reich 950–1050', *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte, germanistische Abteilung*, 121 (2004), 1–99. A useful study is S. Freudenberg, *Trado atque dono: Die frühmittelalterliche private Grundherrschaft in Ostfranken im Spiegel der Traditionsurkunden der Klöster Lorsch und Fulda (750 bis 900)* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2013).

18 See especially G. Althoff, *Spielregeln der Politik im Mittelalter. Kommunikation in Frieden und Fehde* (Darmstadt: Primus, 1997) and G. Althoff, *Die Macht der Rituale. Symbolik und Herrschaft im Mittelalter* (Darmstadt: Primus, 2003).

19 T. Kohl, *Lokale Gesellschaften. Formen der Gemeinschaft in Bayern vom 8. bis zum 10. Jahrhundert* (Ostfildern: Thorbecke, 2010).

While English historiography has been much preoccupied with the existence or otherwise of a precocious tenth-century state, and with the extent of royal control of the land surface in the preceding centuries, attitudes to the local have been heavily influenced by nineteenth-century notions of primitive communalism, as articulated by Karl Marx and Lewis Morgan especially.²⁰ John Mitchell Kemble (1807–57) had suggested that Saxon England was divided into *Marken*, inhabited by communities of free Saxons, associated in the cultivation of the soil and the exploitation of resources under a regime of common property. In his view, the *Mark* ‘is the original basis upon which all Teutonic society rests’.²¹ Rural societies of the early Middle Ages were thus societies of free equals, making rules and decisions for the whole community, rules by which an individual was bound. Paul Vinogradoff, in particular, focused on the detail of late medieval open field systems of the English midlands, arguing that property rights had been communal in earlier times and shares equal, although by the late Middle Ages the system was in transition with the increase of private property and individual rights.²² Echoes of this presumed communalism persisted through the twentieth century, although alternative tracks were more concerned with whether or not free proprietorship was ever a norm and, latterly, with the extent, growth and varieties of lordship.²³ However, Susan Reynolds could still write in 1984 that ‘all the collectivities which abound in the sources of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries drew their cohesion from ideas and values which were already deep-rooted’ and that, in the context of England in the tenth and eleventh centuries, ‘where villages existed, the community

20 For the central arguments on royal control, see E. John, *Land Tenure in Early England: A Discussion of Some Problems* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1960) and *Orbis Britanniae and Other Studies* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1966). For primitive communalism, K. Marx, *Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations*, trans. J. Cohen, ed. E. J. Hobsbawm (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1964) – notes made 1857–58, published as part of *Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Ökonomie* (Berlin: Dietz, 1953); L. H. Morgan, *Ancient Society* (New York: H. Holt, 1878).

21 J. M. Kemble, *The Saxons in England. A History of the English Commonwealth till the Period of the Norman Conquest*, 2 vols (London: Longmans, Green, 1849), vol. 1, p. 53.

22 P. Vinogradoff, *Villainage in England. Essays in English Mediaeval History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1892), especially pp. 28, 209–10, 237, 397–409.

23 For ‘extensive lordship’, see especially R. Faith, *The English Peasantry and the Growth of Lordship* (London: Leicester University Press, 1997).

of habitation [i.e. the residential group] and perhaps of common rights gained some reinforcement from public duties'.²⁴ The notion is especially persistent in archaeological work, up to the moment of writing, late in the second decade of the twenty-first century: archaeologists writing in English characteristically use the word 'community' to describe the residents of a settlement – although this is no more than a convention, it brings assumptions about the relationships between residents and their practices; and some archaeologists argue that agrarian cooperation 'helped generate a distinct social identity'.²⁵ Despite this perspective, the amount and quality of data provided by English archaeologists across the last fifty years on the physical nature and economic base of rural settlements are exceptionally important and make their own significant contribution to the historiography; and this is a corpus of data that continues to grow.²⁶

Recently an entirely different interpretation has come from Chris Wickham's sustained analyses, especially those published in the decade 1995–2005. In dealing with England before 800 he had to construct a hypothetical village society, which he called the settlement of 'Malling' – hypothetical because documentation was, in his view, completely inadequate to investigate the functioning of local groups. He surmised that inequality was 'structural' – because of inequalities between free and unfree and those between wealthier and poorer peasant households; that agrarian cooperation was limited, although residents ran livestock collectively; that free males attended a local assembly of a dozen or so villages; that the head of one of the wealthier households acted as leader of the residential group and his descendants prospered to become petty aristocrats in the long run; but that vertical relationships were unstable and

24 S. Reynolds, *Kingdoms and Communities in Western Europe, 900–1300* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 1, 115.

25 H. Hamerow, *Rural Settlements and Society in Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 99, 163, 166; summarising current views, G. Astill, 'Anglo-Saxon attitudes: how should post-AD 700 burials be interpreted?', in D. Sayer and H. Williams (eds), *Mortuary Practices and Social Identities in the Middle Ages: Essays in Burial Archaeology in Honour of Heinrich Härke* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2009), pp. 222–35, at p. 227.

26 See Hamerow, *Rural Settlements*; R. Jones and M. Page, *Medieval Villages in an English Landscape. Beginnings and Ends* (Macclesfield: Windgather Press, 2006); also H. Hamerow, *Early Medieval Settlements. The Archaeology of Rural Communities in Northwest Europe, 400–900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

impermanent.²⁷ Although he did not use these specific words, solidarity and cohesion were very limited in this new model.

Both in France and far beyond, the influence of French regional studies has been enormous. Building on the legacy of Marc Bloch's *French Rural History*, Georges Duby's work on the Mâconnais, though focused on the eleventh and twelfth centuries, established the parameters of discussions that still continue and that have had major implications for the interpretation of the ninth and tenth centuries.²⁸ In northern France and southern (French-speaking) Belgium, the social cohesion of medieval rural settlements emerged as a research topic in the early 1980s. Historians such as Léopold Gênicot and Robert Fossier focused on the well-developed rural communities of the later Middle Ages, communities that had a clearly defined geographical expression (a nucleated village) associated with a formalised social group that had a legal status and representatives (the village community).²⁹ According to Gênicot and Fossier, these structures only emerged during the later Middle Ages, as a reaction to the development of local lordships and ecclesiastical parishes. They were imposed from above after the year 1000, providing a framework (*cadre, cellule*) within which rural societies were reorganised into cohesive and compact entities – hence the term *encellulement* for the process.

Rural society of the early Middle Ages was essentially defined in contrast to these later, fully developed communities: for the most part scholars emphasised the absence of the features that characterise late medieval

27 C. Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages. Europe and the Mediterranean 400–800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 428–34.

28 M. Bloch, *Les caractères originaux de l'histoire rurale française* (Oslo: H. Aschehoug, 1931); M. Bloch, 'The rise of dependent cultivation and seigniorial institutions', in J. H. Clapham and E. Power (eds), *The Cambridge Economic History of Europe. Vol. I, The Agrarian Life of the Middle Ages* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1941), pp. 224–75; G. Duby, *La société aux XIe et XIIe siècles dans la région mâconnaise* (Paris: SEVPEN, 1953).

29 L. Gênicot, 'La communauté rurale en Belgique jusqu'au XIIIe siècle', in *Les structures du pouvoir dans les communautés rurales en Belgique et dans les pays limitrophes (12e–19e siècle)* (Brussels: Crédit communal, 1988), pp. 17–44; L. Gênicot, *L'économie rurale Namuroise au bas moyen âge, 1199–1429*, 4 vols (Louvain: Bibliothèque de l'Université, 1943–95), especially vols 3 and 4; L. Gênicot, *Rural Communities in the Medieval West* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990); R. Fossier and J. Chapelot, *Le village et la maison au moyen âge* (Paris: Hachette littérature, 1980); R. Fossier, *Enfance de l'Europe. Xe–XIIIe siècles. Aspects économiques et sociaux*, 2 vols (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1982).

rural communities and the absence of cohesion; consequently, early medieval settlement structures were described as dispersed and temporary. Robert Fossier pushed this approach to an extreme, evoking primitive early medieval societies, living on the edge of extinction in precarious settlements. Since early medieval societies were thought to lack all the forms of local organisation that emerged in the later Middle Ages, scholars tended to focus on large estates (*grands domaines*), as a ‘manorial’ system, in order to describe the early medieval countryside. The kind of royal and monastic lordship associated with these estates was perceived as a transition between slavery and feudalism: on the one hand early medieval peasants were no longer slaves because they were tenants, who held land from the owners of large estates; on the other hand, they were not yet submitted to the type of local ‘political’ and ‘judicial’ lordship described as *seigneurie banale*, involving a capacity to punish and demand extra payments, which was to come later, but only to ‘economic’ lordship (*seigneurie foncière*), the power that any landowner exerts over his tenants.³⁰

Since 2000, these perspectives have changed. First, the considerable increase in archaeological data since the 1990s shows that early medieval settlements were much more organised, durable and stable than assumed by previous scholars working from written evidence alone.³¹ Some sort of social organisation may well have existed on a local level.³² Moreover, historians have started to examine from different angles the written evidence that was produced about large estates, paying more attention to the diversity of local groups in terms of legal and social status and to the several actors – such as *iudices* and *villici* – who moved between local groups and the aristocracy. Thereby it begins to emerge that peasants were not a uniform mass of tenants, but a multiplicity of groups and strata over which aristocratic control could be great or negligible.³³

30 See Duby, *La société*; G. Duby, *L'économie rurale et la vie des campagnes dans l'occident médiéval (France, Angleterre, Empire IX–XV siècles)*, 2 vols (Paris: Aubier, 1962).

31 E. Peytremann, *Archéologie de l'habitat rural dans le nord de la France du IVe au XIIIe siècle*, 2 vols (Saint-Germain-en-Laye: AFAM, 2003).

32 R. Noël, ‘A la recherche du village médiéval: hier et aujourd’hui’, in J.-M. Yante and A.-M. Bultot-Verleysen (eds), *Autour du ‘village’. Établissements humains, finages et communautés rurales entre Seine et Rhin (IVe–XIIIe siècles)* (Louvain-la-Neuve: Université catholique de Louvain, 2010), pp. 3–75.

33 See, pre-eminently, J.-P. Devroey, *Puissants et misérables. Système social et monde paysan dans l'Europe des Francs (VIe–IXe siècles)* (Brussels: Académie Royale de Belgique, 2006).

The distinctive political complexion of Italy in the early Middle Ages has attracted historians of Frankish, German and Byzantine empires, as well as scholars whose primary interest has been Italy itself. Moreover, the presence in Rome of many different historical and archaeological institutes, with their nationally based research programmes and approaches, has significantly influenced the way in which historians in Italy have understood and described medieval society. French regional studies had a major impact on Italian historiography, with Pierre Toubert's study of Latium in central Italy an influential landmark, as was Fossier's *Enfance de l'Europe*, translated already by 1987.³⁴ This engagement with the local was hardly new, for it followed decades of Italian concern with rural society in, for example, the debates of the early twentieth century on the nature and origins of the rural commune;³⁵ and the attention to agrarian landscapes, to lower-status freemen and to the socio-economic relationships of cities with the countryside that derived from the studies of Bloch.³⁶ Toubert and many others highlighted the process known as *incastellamento*, as lords were seen to have built castles on hilltops and to have attracted people into new settlements away from their traditional lowland residences in the tenth to twelfth centuries.³⁷ Important contributions to this and other aspects of rural history came from the distinguished body of archaeological work of the last two generations – especially from Riccardo Francovich and the Siena 'school' and more recently from Gian Pietro Brogiolo in Padua and Sauro Gelichi (in Pisa

34 P. Toubert, *Les structures du Latium médiéval: le Latium méridional et la Sabine du IXe siècle à la fin du XIIIe siècle*, 2 vols (Rome: École française de Rome, 1973); Fossier: see above n. 29.

35 Cf. the historiographical chapter in C. Wickham, *Community and Clientele in Twelfth-century Tuscany. The Origins of the Rural Commune in the Plain of Lucca* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 185–241.

36 Bloch, *Les caractères*; C. Violante, *La società milanese nell'età precomunale* (Bari: Laterza, 1953); E. Conti, *La formazione della struttura agraria moderna nel contado fiorentino*, 3 vols (Rome: ISIME, 1965–66); B. Andreolli, V. Fumagalli and M. Montanari (eds), *Le campagne italiane prima e dopo il Mille. Una società in trasformazione* (Bologna: CLUEB, 1985). Cf. L. Provero, 'Forty years of rural history for the Italian Middle Ages', in I. Alfonso (ed.), *The Rural History of Medieval European Societies. Trends and Perspectives* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), pp. 141–72.

37 A. A. Settia, *Castelli e villaggi nell'Italia padana: popolamento, potere e sicurezza fra IX e XIII secolo* (Naples: Liguori, 1984).

and then Venice), as well as some seminal work from the British School at Rome.³⁸

Italian historians, such as Tabacco, Violante and Sergi, contrasted *incastellamento* with new kinds of territorial and political lordships (*signorie*).³⁹ Indeed, much of the historiographical interest of the past two generations has focused on the several and varied transformations of lordly estates (*sistema curtense*) into lordships with associated political powers (*signoria rurale*).⁴⁰ The process is not unlike the suggested French shift from *seigneurie foncière* to *seigneurie banale*, with distinctive Italian dimensions in the much greater use of leases and greater requirement of money rents.⁴¹ But the heart of this change lies in the eleventh century and beyond, when post-Carolingian ruling structures declined and new local solidarities and collective actions were seen to emerge in rural communities.⁴² For the preceding centuries major themes have

38 R. Francovich and M. Ginatempo (eds), *Castelli: storia e archeologia del potere nella Toscana medievale* (Florence: All'Insegna del Giglio, 2000); G. P. Brogiolo, D. E. Angelucci, A. Colecchia and F. Remondino (eds), *APSAT 1. Teoria e metodi della ricerca sui paesaggi di altura* (Florence: All'Insegna del Giglio, 2011); R. Hodges (ed.), *San Vincenzo al Volturno 1: The 1980–86 Excavations Part 1* and *San Vincenzo al Volturno 2: The 1980–86 Excavations Part 2* (London: The British School at Rome, 1993, 1995). Cf. the recent synthesis by A. Augenti, *Archeologia dell'Italia medievale* (Bari: Laterza, 2016), pp. 82–184.

39 C. Violante, 'La signoria "territoriale" come quadro delle strutture organizzative del contado nella Lombardia del secolo XII', in W. Paravicini and K. F. Werner (eds), *Histoire comparée de l'administration (IVe–XVIIIe siècles)* (Zürich/Munich: Artemis, 1980), pp. 333–44; G. Sergi, 'Lo sviluppo signorile e l'inquadramento feudale', in N. Tranfaglia and M. Firpo (eds), *La storia. I grandi problemi dal Medioevo all'età contemporanea*, vol. 2 (Turin: UTET, 1986), pp. 369–94; G. Tabacco, *Sperimentazioni del potere nell'alto medioevo* (Turin: Einaudi, 1993); G. Tabacco, *Dai re ai signori: forme di trasmissione del potere nel Medioevo* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2000). Cf. C. Wickham, 'La signoria rurale in Toscana', in G. Dilcher and C. Violante (eds), *Strutture e trasformazioni della signoria rurale nei secoli X–XIII* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1996), pp. 343–409.

40 B. Andreolli and M. Montanari, *L'azienda curtense in Italia: proprietà della terra e lavoro contadino nei secoli VIII–XI* (Bologna: CLUEB, 1985); G. Sergi (ed.), *Curtis e signoria rurale: interferenze fra due strutture medievali* (Turin: Scriptorium, 1993).

41 Cf. S. Carocci, 'Signoria rurale e mutazione feudale: una discussione', *Storica*, 8 (1997), 49–91.

42 L. Provero, 'Le comunità rurali nel medioevo: qualche prospettiva', in R. Bordone, P. Guglielmotti, S. Lombardini and A. Torre (eds), *Lo spazio politico locale in età medievale, moderna e contemporanea. Ricerche italiane e riferimenti europei*

been the changing status of the peasantry and the growth of large, especially monastic, estates. Historians have tracked both a reduction in the numbers of free peasant proprietors and an increase in tenant obligations across the eighth and ninth centuries,⁴³ while the tenth century saw such a shift in estate management that labour service declined significantly and leasing was extended, although the terms of leases were much reduced.⁴⁴ Rural society has therefore been extensively discussed but has overwhelmingly been viewed in the context of the interests and demands of lords – although peasant resistance has been noted, especially in the ninth century.⁴⁵ Recently the idea that rural communities only existed after the eleventh century has been challenged, especially through the investigation of Carolingian *notitiae placiti* (records of judicial cases).⁴⁶ The questions raised for rural society therefore focus now not only on the nature and character of horizontal relationships between peasants, but also on the different kinds of rural community or ‘collettività locali’.⁴⁷

The past century of historical writing in Spain has been dominated by the fact of Muslim conquest in 711 and its perceived consequences.⁴⁸ In the long term Muslim states were replaced by Christian kingdoms, but scholars nowadays acknowledge that there was plenty of interaction

(Alessandria: Orso, 2007), pp. 335–40; L. Provero, ‘Abitare e appartenere: percorsi dell’identità comunitaria nei villaggi piemontesi dei secoli XII–XIII’, in P. Galetti (ed.), *Paesaggi, comunità, villaggi medievali*, 2 vols (Spoleto: Fondazione CISAM, 2012), vol. 1, pp. 309–25.

43 G. Tabacco, *I liberi del re nell’Italia carolingia e postcarolingia* (Spoleto: Fondazione CISAM, 1966).

44 V. Fumagalli, *Terra e società nell’Italia padana. I secoli IX e X* (Bologna: Università degli studi, Istituto di storia medievale e moderna e di paleografia e diplomatica, 1974); V. Fumagalli, ‘Precarietà dell’economia contadina e affermazione della grande azienda fondiaria nell’Italia settentrionale dall’VIII all’XI secolo’, *Rivista di storia dell’agricoltura*, 15 (1975), 3–27.

45 See Albertoni, ‘Law and the peasant’.

46 T. Lazzari, ‘Comunità rurali nell’alto medioevo: pratiche di descrizione e spie lessicali nella documentazione scritta’, in Galetti (ed.), *Paesaggi, comunità, villaggi medievali*, vol. 2, pp. 405–23.

47 P. Galetti, ‘Paesaggi, comunità, villaggi nell’Europa medievale’, in Galetti (ed.), *Paesaggi, comunità, villaggi medievali*, vol. 1, pp. 1–22, at pp. 13–19.

48 Claudio Sánchez-Albornoz has been central to this historiography: for example, C. Sánchez-Albornoz, ‘Las behetrías: la encomendación en Asturias, León y Castilla’, *Anuario de Historia del Derecho Español*, 1 (1924), 158–336 (reprinted in his *Viejos y nuevos estudios sobre las instituciones medievales españolas*, 3 vols (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1976–80), vol. 1, pp. 15–191).

between north and south long before this happened. In considering internal social and political change within the Christian kingdoms, most Spanish historians of the later twentieth century accepted a basic principle of feudal development.⁴⁹ In short, they accepted the notion that the world came to be characterised by the domination of private lords over the persons, labour and surplus of a largely servile peasant population. Scholars charted the development at different rates within a tenth- to twelfth-century bracket, and pointed to differences between the Spanish experience and that of the classical Frankish model, although the influence of French scholarship has been considerable.⁵⁰ The 1970s and 1980s also saw the emergence, again under French influence, of detailed regional studies, with the systematic analysis of the establishment of great monastic estates – such as the hugely influential works of García de Cortázar on San Millán de la Cogolla and of Mínguez on Sahagún.⁵¹ Younger scholars are now beginning to adopt quite different approaches, however, not only in opposition to the traditional historiography but by using new techniques of analysis and by refusing to take text at face value.⁵²

In the mainstream of Spanish historiography, alongside the dominant notion of Muslim conquest lay the equally dominant notion that the central

49 The essential work is A. Barbero and M. Vigil, *La formación del feudalismo en la Península Ibérica* (Barcelona: Crítica, 1978).

50 See especially C. Estepa Díez, 'Formación y consolidación del feudalismo en Castilla y León', in *En torno al feudalismo hispánico. I congreso de estudios medievales* (Ávila: Fundación Sánchez-Albornoz, 1989), pp. 157–256; R. Pastor, 'Sur la genèse du féodalisme en Castille et dans le León, Xe–XIIIe siècles. Point de départ pour une histoire comparative', in H. Atsma and A. Burguière (eds), *Marc Bloch aujourd'hui. Histoire comparée et sciences sociales* (Paris: École des hautes études en sciences sociales, 1990), pp. 259–70; J. M. Salrach, 'Les féodalités méridionales: des Alpes à la Galice', in E. Bournazel and J.-P. Poly (eds), *Les féodalités* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1998), pp. 313–88.

51 J. A. García de Cortázar y Ruiz de Aguirre, *El dominio del monasterio de San Millán de la Cogolla (siglos X a XIII). Introducción a la historia rural de Castilla altomedieval* (Salamanca: Universidad de Salamanca, 1969); J. M. Mínguez Fernández, *El dominio del monasterio de Sahagún en el siglo X* (Salamanca: Universidad de Salamanca, 1980).

52 Á. Carvajal Castro, *Bajo la máscara del regnum. La monarquía asturleonense en León (854–1037)* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 2017); R. Portass, *The Village World of Early Medieval Northern Spain. Local Community and the Land Market* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2017); S. Barton and R. Portass (eds), *Beyond the Reconquista: Essays on the Politics, Society and Culture of Medieval Iberia, 800–1200* (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming).

plateau of the peninsula was depopulated in the eighth century; and that repopulation by 'free' settlers followed in the wake of the Christian reconquest of the later ninth, tenth and subsequent centuries, bringing a free pioneering spirit reminiscent of the colonisation of the American West.⁵³ It is these 'free settlers' who were long seen to have given rise to a free peasant society in the central Middle Ages, until the enterprise of peasant proprietors was undermined by the growth of lordly powers. The reality of depopulation, however, and therefore of repopulation and colonisation, is very questionable, and has been strongly challenged in recent years. Muslim invasion and campaigning may not after all have sent the Hispanic population of the *meseta* fleeing north into the mountains; most stayed where they were, continuing to farm; and in some parts their settlements were connected through networks of supra-local control.⁵⁴ Whether that population was especially and distinctively 'free' therefore remains an open question, although there is a significant literature on peasant resistance (for the most part focused on the eleventh century and later).⁵⁵ The nature, completeness and development of lordly powers, and thereby the strength or weakness of vertical relationships, remains a prominent interest.

For all the differences in national traditions, ideas clearly travelled beyond political borders, as evidenced by the direct contact between English and German writers of the early nineteenth century: we can see the widespread influence of German writing of the nineteenth century and of French regional studies in the twentieth. There are also some common themes and preoccupations: free proprietorship and personal freedom and their impact (or not) on emerging institutions; lordship and its many varieties, with a tendency to treat the local through the structures and relationships of great estates; the importance of archaeology, with its capacity to bring entirely new kinds of evidence, as well as its characteristic and

53 C. Sánchez-Albornoz, *Despoblación y repoblación del valle del Duero* (Buenos Aires: Instituto de Historia de España, 1966).

54 J. Escalona Monge, *Sociedad y territorio en la alta edad media castellana. La formación del alfoz de Lara* (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2002); I. Martín Viso, *Fragmentos del Leviatán. La articulación política del espacio zamorano en la alta edad media* (Zamora: Instituto de estudios zamoranos, 2002); S. Castellanos and I. Martín Viso, 'The local articulation of central power in the north of the Iberian peninsula (500–1000)', *Early Medieval Europe*, 13:1 (2005), 1–42.

55 R. Pastor, *Resistencias y luchas campesinas en la época del crecimiento y consolidación de la formación feudal. Castilla y León, siglos X–XIII* (Madrid: Siglo Veintiuno de España, 1980).

continuing expansion of the volume of data available; and, more recently, an awareness of the implications of settlement shift and of the significance of nucleation. We need to explore how far those common themes relate to what we now think happened on the ground and we also need to explore which of the issues identified in the several historiographies still have resonance. While primitive communalism and precocious democracy are nowadays unfashionable ideas, we do need to ask about equality, about the free/servile status of rural residents and about social and economic differentiation within the peasant population. Were there many free peasant proprietors or few; were there significant regional differences or just pockets of free peasants here and there? Where there was dependence, what local and regional differences were there and where were there changes in tenant obligations? Lordship may not provide the answer to all aspects of relationships but it cannot be ignored – were vertical relationships always unstable, as argued for early England, or were there regions of long-term stability? And how did different types of lordship impact on neighbours? Nor can we ignore the fact that agricultural cooperation did occur, but we need to explore whether whole groups or subsets of groups were involved in it and whether or not it was characteristic of particular kinds of settlement. Indeed, how much collective action is evident and was collective action community action?

While noting national historiographies and avoiding their constraints, we also want to avoid the master narratives that have largely dominated the study of rural societies until now. This is not to ignore some very fruitful recent work: Chris Wickham's *Framing the Early Middle Ages*, published in 2005, includes plenty of relevant comparative studies of rural societies, but they focus on the earlier period of pre-800;⁵⁶ Wickham's *Community and Clientele* develops an exceptionally coherent model of a shift from patronage networks to community structure across the long eleventh century, but is confined to the single region of Tuscany.⁵⁷ Thomas Kohl's *Lokale Gesellschaften*, which, in comparing settlements in three regions, cuts across the great patronage networks of aristocratic estates, is confined to Bavaria.⁵⁸ Attention to the land between great estates in the Ardennes shows that private landowners

⁵⁶ Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages*.

⁵⁷ Wickham, *Community and Clientele in Twelfth-century Tuscany*.

⁵⁸ Kohl, *Lokale Gesellschaften*.

did exist, but again this is confined to a small area.⁵⁹ We need to explore how far these regional models have a wider application and how far Wickham's European trends apply when we look at the detailed evidence of the ninth and tenth centuries: he argued that community structures in western Europe were on the whole weak before the eleventh century, especially in contrast to those of the eastern Mediterranean – there were no clear boundaries between different units; people shifted from one group to another; there is no sense that any one group cooperated for all necessary functions. Change came in the west at different rates from the late tenth century onwards, with the drawing of physical boundaries, shifts in burial practice and tighter structuring of community. Do we have evidence that community structures were stronger in some regions or that they sometimes developed before the eleventh century?

While we do consider that some background knowledge is essential for understanding the chapters that follow, those who are familiar with the broad trends of political development in western Europe in the early Middle Ages, and with the written source material that is available, may wish to skip the next chapter and go directly to Chapter 3.

59 J.-P. Devroey and N. Schroeder, 'Beyond royal estates and monasteries: land-ownership in the early medieval Ardennes', *Early Medieval Europe*, 20:1 (2012), 39-69.