



People and Space in the Middle Ages, 300-1300 (Studies in the Early Middle Ages)

Peter Davies, Guy Halsall, Andrew Reynolds

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This book is about the relationship between populations, territory and community membership in the Middle Ages in western Europe. The contributors compare community definition, the ways that changed, and the reasons for the changes in the temperate zones of southern Britain and northern France with the starkly contrasting regions of the Spanish meseta and Iceland. The existence of local communities is fundamental to the organization of human societies in the pre-industrial world; they had a crucial role in supporting their members and regulating their relationships, as well as a role in a wider society. There is plenty of scholarly literature on the subject but it has limitations: geographical and biological work on territoriality is very good but it is rarely time-specific and lacks wider social context; most of its premises are too simple for the interdependencies of the early medieval world. Historical work, on the other hand, has a weak sense of territory and no sense of scale; like much archaeological work, it is also riddled with confusions about the distinctions - and relationships - between kin groups, neighbourhood groups, collections of tenants and small polities. The contributors to this book believe that a strong awareness of land and landscape in the present is essential to understanding the relationships between people and territory in the past. They will address such issues as: what determined the size and shape of communities in the early historic past? Did communities leave markers on the ground, to be picked up and traced centuries later? What were the roles of the environment, of labour patterns, of the church, of the physical proximity of residences, for example, in determining community identity? What about social exclusion within discrete populations - in what circumstances was the community an elite body, and what stimulated change in community structure? There are also major issues surrounding the relationships between the local and the governmental: did the larger polity depend on building blocks of pre-existing communities? Or did the needs of the government in effect call local communities into being?

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