

It is by focusing on the evolution of urban areas throughout the centuries that we realize how mutually pervasive the interaction between man and water is. So pervasive, in fact, that it touches every aspect of human endeavor. Leonardi's interdisciplinary effort, performed on two different yet surprisingly similar contexts such as Catania and Freiburg, has been described as a rare and virtuous example of "total history" (v), and rightfully so. It offers a vivid and precious picture of the many geographic, environmental, and cultural factors that shaped the intricate relationship between urban societies and water in Europe from the thirteenth to the sixteenth centuries.

Francesco Luzzini, *Max-Planck-Institut für Wissenschaftsgeschichte*

*La crescita economica dell'Occidente medievale: Un tema storico non ancora esaurito.* Centro Italiano di Studi di Storia e d'Arte di Pistoia.

Atti 25. Rome: Viella, 2017. ix + 488 pp. €33.

---

Is it still possible to debate for the distant centuries of medieval Europe a theme that permeates our daily lives and that has bounced back into the news in recent years? Is economic growth still a topic worthy of historical discussion? And, most importantly, does medieval economic growth deserve a more accurate analysis and explanation than previously offered in several theories, making use of recent ideas and interpretations? The answer, of course, is yes, it is possible; and it has been successfully done, as the twenty-fifth biennial meeting organized by the Centro Italiano di Studi di Storia e d'Arte in Pistoia in May 2015 illustrated: the economic growth of medieval Europe is precisely a historical theme that still has something to contribute, and that has been highlighted in all its possible aspects by the twenty-two contributors to this volume, who are among the most renowned historians of this period (David Abulafia, Mathieu Arnoux, Marc Boone, Elisabeth Crouzet-Pavan, Laurent Feller, Amedeo Feniello, Franco Franceschi, Giampaolo Francesconi, Antoni Furió, Alberto Grohmann, Antonio Iacobini, Paulino Iradiel, Patrizia Mainoni, François Menant, Alessandra Molinari, Roberta Mucciarelli, Paolo Nanni, Enrica Neri Lusanna, Paola Orecchioni, Luciano Palermo, Gabriella Piccinni, Chris Wickham).

As Franco Franceschi points out in his dense introductory essay, from Adam Smith onward the quest for a theory of growth involved both economists and historians for a long period, but a clear-cut definition is still difficult to achieve. In historical terms the concept of growth has proved easier to discuss in the context of the impact and the origins of industrialization than in the medieval economic world, with the added difficulty in quantifying phenomena for those centuries. It is firmly established that growth took place in the decades between the end of the tenth century and the beginning of the eleventh, and that this dynamism came to an end toward the late thirteenth century or the early fourteenth (well before, it seems, the Black Death, which acted as a catalyst for a crisis

interrupting the process); however, the relatively brief time span of 280 to 340 years has been challenged by the theorists of an early growth that could be dated even further back, to the Carolingian period. The many factors shaping the growth, and their geographic spread, are debated in the essays in this volume, questioning the Malthusian-Ricardian paradigm of a growth limited by the availability of (agrarian) resources. Growth is now linked to the environment, to institutions, to trading networks; medieval growth, above all, is related to the agrarian world, to the links connecting peasants and the owners of land, to the increase in labor productivity in the countryside and its several causes. The economic geography of medieval growth, and its effect on the standard of living (moving from growth to progress) is also emphasized in this volume: the long expansive period had different outcomes in different European regions.

Along these very general lines, contributors analyze and dissect, using a historiographic and theoretical approach first to debate the models that have been connected to the concept of economic development in the framework of the Western Middle Ages, and then to challenge the (mostly) neoclassical framework that economic historians tend to adopt in studying growth. The authors discuss the definition and measure of medieval economic growth and its phases and spaces, tackling climate variability and the forms of societies, the progress in agrarian production, the varied textile manufactures, the idea of a medieval industrious revolution, and demographic change. They debate commercial infrastructure and the diffusion of means of payment, the enlargement of cities and the dynamics of consumption, the relationship (also in terms of energy) between center and periphery, the existence of social inequalities (in medieval Italy), the perception of growth in contemporary sources, and the setback in the mid-fourteenth century. Further, in the case study of medieval Pistoia, the connection between visual arts and growth, competing empires in the Mediterranean area, and the influx of Byzantine artists completes the economic framework. In his final remarks, Alberto Grohmann comes full circle: quoting economists such as Robert Solow, he looks back, stressing the importance of economic thought that the authors chose instead to bypass. Readers will judge, but the book holds a very precious quality indeed—it helps us to think.

Isabella Cecchini, *Università Ca' Foscari Venezia*

*Cities and Solidarities: Urban Communities in Pre-Modern Europe.*

Arie van Steensel and Justin Colson, eds.

Routledge Research in Early Modern History. London: Routledge, 2017. xv + 276 pp. \$105.

---

Since the cultural turn, social and economic history has taken a backseat to more fashionable approaches such as entanglements, migration, and symbols. Long considered one of the hallmarks of the post-1945 historiographic shift away from big-men history,