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Studies on local communities in a global framework

Margarita Fernández Mier - Luis Miguel Flecha Rebollar

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Special Issue

El medievalismo en un mundo globalizado

Medieval studies in a Globalised World

A cargo de / Edited by

Vicent Royo Pérez - Jesús Brufal Sucarrat

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Studies on local communities in a global framework¹

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Abstract

In the face of the re-emergence –despite their obsolescence– of some traditional medievalist historiographical discourses focused on mythological elements that legitimise nation states, certain lines of research developed in recent decades can be oriented as alternative scientific narratives that, from the vindication of local culture studied from medieval or other historical roots, reclaim political power for the communities of said territories. In this regard, our research group has carried out various research projects that consider the most current trends, as well as sharing the research results in experiences of knowledge transfer with these current communities.

Keywords

Medievalism; toponymics; local communities; peasantry; knowledge transfer

Resumen

Frente a algunos discursos historiográficos tradicionales del medievalismo, centrados en personajes míticos legitimadores de los estados nación que últimamente están siendo recuperados a pesar de su caducidad, en las últimas décadas han aparecido líneas de investigación que generan discursos alternativos que, a partir de la reivindicación de la cultura local estudiada desde las raíces históricas medievales, reclamen otra forma de gestión del territorio para las comunidades locales. En ese sentido, nuestro grupo de investigación ha realizado diversos proyectos de investigación, atentos a los marcos teóricos más actuales, así como a experiencias de transferencia de conocimiento.

Palabras Claves

Medievalismo; Toponimia; comunidades locales; campesinado, transferencia de conocimiento

¹ This research was funded by the Ministry of Science and Innovation of the Government of Spain through the ENCOMI project “In the Name of the Community, Peasant communities in mountain areas: territorial definition, collective management and central places in the formation of local identities” (REF: PID2020-112506GB-C43).

1. Introduction. - 2. Globalisation and the history of nation states. - 3. Localizing processes. - 4. Local communities: study and social mobilisation. - 5. Rural history and agrarian archaeology as tools for new historical narratives. - 6. Bibliography. - 7. Curriculum vitae.

1. Introduction.

Geostrategies all over the planet are being redefined by current world politics and the effects of the global COVID pandemic, resulting in a turning point of such a significance that the role played by the humanities –and history in particular– must be reconsidered. New research lines must be developed urgently along novel narratives in a society of ubiquitous technology that mostly produces them under a market logic that strip the scientific value of the humanities, claiming they lack direct practical implications or the capacity to produce clearly measurable economic benefit with their generated knowledge.

Looking back to the last quarter of the twentieth century, it is evident globalisation has been of the utmost importance, thanks to the breath-taking technological advances and parallel social changes that have homogenised our consumer habits, fashions, and lifestyles all over the world. The globalisation favoured deterritorialization, and the latter meant a political transformation, substantiated in the crisis of the nation state born from the bourgeois revolutions of the nineteenth century –which sought out their legitimating roots in their medieval past–, that brought along the creation of transnational polities in favour of territorial integration and able to overcome political division; the European Union is the most successful example in spite of its problems and contradictions.

There are also concurrent, more local trends, attached to the territory, reacting against globalization, but also withstanding the lack of adequate solutions by the nation states, which aspire to redefine their interrelation with current governance modes and slip through the gaps created by the crisis of these polities, a process some in Latin America have called *lugarización*² (González Cruz, 2004) or neotribalism (Ordoñez Chacón, 2004).

² Which could be roughly used as ‘localization’ in opposition to globalization.

2. Globalisation and the history of nation states

The crisis of the nation states has been a relevant issue for the last decades of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first. It has most likely been originated by the interest of some economic agents to promote less interventionist governance modes of a transnational nature, so goods, capital, and peoples may flow freely, in benefit of a more efficient, seamless economy, according to neoliberal ideals.

As always, historiography has been influenced by the ideas of the time. For instance, the need to legitimise the current European nations has produced an extensive bibliography on the origins of the contemporary State (Hunt 2022). Likewise, the new political reality gradually emerging in the old continent has been bolstered by the search for the roots of European unity in Carolingian times, and the financing of projects by the European Union (Fernández Álvarez et al. 2021). Both are examples of research lines undertaken by European medievalism to answer the legitimacy needs of the main polities of the twentieth century. The early historiographies of the late nineteenth century provided or consolidated the identities of these nation states. Most recently, the narratives of the last quarter of the twentieth century helped to forge a European identity in support of the institutions behind the shaping of the EU.

Some explanatory models, strongly grounded in the previous historical paradigms, appeared in the second half of the past century in parallel to the globalisation processes to explain their multiple. While focused on the genesis of capitalism, they sought its origins in medieval times –and included views of a more global nature– to overcome the older research frameworks of the nation state historiography, but also the new political structures of the European Union. The most productive of these models was arguably Immanuel Wallerstein's world-system theory (1979), which defines the concepts of core and periphery countries, sharing in part the ideas of Braudel (1992) about total history. Other approaches intended to go beyond Eurocentric views, while giving more relevance to the Asian continent (Frank, 2008), or were aware of the need to develop a global history of the medieval period focused on transcultural networks. All of them provided a broader and more complex vision of the period between 500 and 1500 that went beyond the limits of the Mediterranean (Borgolte, 2017).

The idea of nation states was challenged due to the reluctance of these polities to embrace new transnational forms of governance. Medieval Studies were influenced by the resulting juncture, the lack of interest in the great origin

narratives and the loss of concise research lines by experts. Furthermore, the *New Medievalism* developed new critical discussions on how national or personal views had determined the research on Middle Ages, stressing that new topics should transcend the approaches of traditional historiographical trends, like institutionalism in historicism, economy in materialism, or identity in the social movements of the disenfranchised peoples of the last quarter of the twentieth century (Brownlee et al., 1991).

The cascade of crisis in recent times –the global financial crisis of 2008, the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, and the 2022 Russia-Ukraine war– have contributed to reinforce the role of nation states, considering their responsibility on taking measures to aid the economy. More recently, they have dealt with the health crisis, and have been offering increasingly desperate answers to tackle the energy shortage and scarcity crisis of systemic nature (Macías Vázquez, 2017; Turiel, 2020), yet considered transitory, using the Ukraine war as a scapegoat instead of identifying it as a result. Therefore, some authors suggest that nation states are not in their last throes, but they soon could turn into key factors retaining enough autonomy in a multifocal world economy, to unfold the necessary political strategies to meet their needs (Rodrik, 2017).

Another reaction to the globalization processes and the loss of national identities in the last decade is the rekindling of sovereignty claims by far-right movements and politicians, based on glorious national histories–like in Spain, where an old imperial aspiration for the nation’s sovereignty is pitted against globalization. The old medieval history of myths and great figures, already outdated for most medievalists, is newly revisited by political groups with a fresh view, revealing that the ideology of the Franco regime and nationalist historicism are still somewhat present in the minds of many people, firmly rooted in the collective worldview of the origins of the Spanish nation. Thus, some current scenarios and risks for the current Medievalism are explained, with the return of an unscientific history of the Middle Ages that can be exploited by the far-right, rapidly spread through social networks, to reinforce a past of heroes and role models that legitimise certain racist policies, and the glorification of national and catholic values, with no interest in being supported by scientific studies (Elliot, 2017).

The discussion on the role of medievalism and its contribution to contemporary society must therefore stress the need to abandon the lack of criticism in exchange for a social involvement that values scientific dissemination and fights the

unscientific ideas that have become commonplace. Hyperspecialization, the excessive technification and the stark competitiveness of the modern high impact research that follows the tenets of neoliberal productivity, divorced from territory and society, is alien to the social involvement proposed by Marc Bloch in his works; works that maybe should be revisited, particularly considering the knowledge and values we want to pass to our students.

3. Localizing processes

Besides briefly noting the processes involved with globalization and the nation states, the challenge of state policies by local movements that claim new sovereignties, new territorialities, and who demand new ways of relating to the state, must also be considered. These reactions respond in many cases to the impact of globalization in local territories, including the arrival of new technologies, and greater access to education and to services, which in turn encourage the claims for new governance modes of diverse nature –some of them self-managed– all over the world.

The diverse manifestations in Spain go from historical nationalisms that share the political views of the nation states and have produced their own legitimising historiography, to movements of varied nature but defined by elements that generate common identity patterns. One such experience are the claims by rural territories under severe depopulation processes, that witness the loss of traditional labour replaced by economic alternatives linked to proposals of ecologist-productivity or agricultural industrialism nature, aimed to achieve rentability, but with an unintended high environmental impact and the disappearance of traditional productive systems based on sustainability. This calls for management models more involved in territorial policies and linked with state institutions, based on the traditional values and ethnoecological knowledge of local populations.

This work is interested in highlighting such movements for their connection with local communities and with some prolific research proposals within medievalism, rooted in the territorial, local and rural, that have been developed in the last decade. Some of them are greatly involved with the territory and society, producing knowledge transfer models out of the rural history of the last decades of the twentieth century (Fernández Mier, 2018, 2018b).

4. Local communities: study and social mobilisation

The first identity affirmation of people is that of the community they are born in, and the territory it occupies. This environment provides their sustenance, spurs the emergence of specific social relations, prompts rules of dependence, privileges and duties, and generates a worldview shared by all the community, making them participants of the identity whole from the economic to the political and the culture. This primary relationship with the territory is not unique; people who belong to a community are integrated in different supra-local entities, then sharing multiple identities that can only be understood in a more local scope of analysis. To discern individual peculiarities within said entities and of territories within states and globality, multiscale local approaches are necessary to facilitate the dialogue between the different parts.

One key challenge within the EU today is addressing the issue of immigrants integration that suppose a dramatic change for local communities both rural and urban; many research lines of European projects are indeed focused on this social challenge that forces to look back to local governance modes, examining their conflicts, tensions, hierarchies and past, to solve new problems at local level by devising participatory tools that improve coexistence.

Surely the problems communities have in relation with their territory and its conceptualization are different than in the urban case, where a process of deterritorialization can be identified because the operating space –neighbourhoods and residential states– is gradually shrinking despite the increasing size of the cities; however, in the rural environment, codes of use and property contradict the views uphold by the state and also by new polities arisen at the supra-national level that rule over many different local communities with diverse problems, prompting a growing interest in their study, no matter how complex the reality behind the concept.

All the above has led to research lines on local communities with a particular interest on understanding their uniqueness, but also their common elements, often choosing to revive local governments and taking a complex approach to the common estates management, especially since the publishing of the influential work of Östrom (1990) on the commons.

Also important in this regard is the growing interest on sustainable resources management and the undeniable deep climate change due to the global warming. The ideas about access to resources and their use have changed dramatically in the last decade, so much that certain practices of resources management considered

primitive until fairly recently are now better valued as a potential solution to environmental problems, and that includes the ethnobiological and ethnohistorical knowledges of the territory by local communities taken as the starting point for new ways of resource management.

One of the most prolific lines of research is likely that of social metabolism, focused on understanding biophysical limits and biogeochemical cycles based on ecological and political economics. Changes on the way resources are taken, consumed, and the unbridled demand must be analysed to suggest new alternatives, requiring the knowledge of past uses to acquire a wider view of the present, define an interdisciplinary socioecological methodology to understand the ties between society and nature with the different analytical scopes and a diachronic approach (Toledo, 2013).

Local communities have come in the limelight for various present issues of ecological, social, and political nature, rekindling their study by medieval history and archaeology. The main works undergone by certain research groups –like the one the author belongs to³– intend to study the local communities to solve specific problems of the present concerning rural depopulation and discrimination, environmental degradation of some areas, and the land restoration programs advocated by administrative bodies—often downplaying the role of peasantry and local communities on land management and therefore, their place in history.

Given the emergent social and political framework in the shadow of the environmental planetary crisis, the study of local communities from a multifaceted interdisciplinary approach is an essential tool to build new historical narratives for the social groups and communities removed from the great narratives of nation states who have actively overshadowed the role of local rural peoples, as did most of the Middle Ages historiography carried out in the previous century.

5. Rural history and agrarian archaeology as tools for new historical narratives

A work methodology by the name of agrarian archaeology (Alonso González et al., 2018; Fernandez Mier et al, 2023) has been initiated by our research group and carried out in the Cantabrian Mountains (Spain), as well as in other geographical

³ LLABOR research group, <<https://arqueologiaagraria.wordpress.com/>>.

scopes extraneous to the concept of medievalism⁴. We find it worth mentioning as a good example of research in the history field that incorporates new methodologies, theoretical frameworks, and historical questions, while able to delve further into neglected aspects of past studies and focusing on peoples forgotten by history, like peasantry. New narratives about the diachronic changes underwent by these territories can be established as active tools, so they are subjected to complex analysis in the long term. It is possible to delve further into the means of territorial appropriation, the land conceptualization by communities and the farming activities that shape the landscape into an agroecosystem that looks for, and provides, ways to deal with the limits imposed by natural conditions. The means tried for such adaptation can be studied –cultivation methods and water management, terracing systems, supplementary transhumance– to ascertain the farming activities carried out in pursuit of the rational use of ecological niches and the building of sustainable productive systems, provided we accept the use of such concept as a valid category for the past. The environmental information obtained must be a mandatory tool to make decisions on present rural land management.

The social dimension of the historical scientific studies through means of scientific dissemination and knowledge transference that involve local communities is an important aspect to highlight, in line with the citizen science demanded of late in research proposals, but which often turn the intended social actor into a passive agent. We believe it is critical to turn the spotlight on the societies we investigate, carrying out knowledge co-construction programs with them.

The agrarian archaeology proposal is rooted in the rural history developed in the last half of the previous century, resulting in diverse research lines on the dominance mechanisms exerted over the medieval peasantry. The village communities became a preferred research subject due to the interest in peasantry life, focusing on feudalization processes and the characterisation of these peoples in the early medieval centuries. The subsequent analyses were carried out as local studies that prioritised the manorial lordship and considered the peasantry as part of a complex social reality, explored through the social movements that confronted

⁴ The research group recently started a study in the Peruvian Andes led by Patricia Aparicio (2020), using the agrarian archaeology methodology on pre-Columbian agrarian landscapes.

both social groups. The research lines stressed the social aspects, and in particular the economic ones since the scarcity of written documentation obscured the quantification and undermined the dialogue between history and archaeology due to the lack of common questions. The notable French rural history influenced this renewal in historiography thanks to its reinforcement since the 1930s, especially with the work of Marc Bloch (1931), which also weighed on Spanish historiography during the 1970s and 1980s.

The resulting studies developed in the 1990s worked on the territories and landscapes described in the documentation, while questioning about the possible contributions of archaeology to the processes researched and especially to the settling of population in the land –which then became a preferred topic to be analysed in the documentary sources–, and a gradual interest for the information obtained by archaeology on surface surveys (Fernández Mier, 2018). Different new proposals pointed out that it was imperative to study the territory, peasantry and everything related to farming production and the agricultural cycle in the archaeological record, first in the Andalusí case and with some delay, in the feudal one. The research groups further developed the diverse methodologies used to analyse the rural world –landscape archaeology, ethnoarchaeology, place names, deserted village archaeology, backward landscape interpretation, some of which resulted in the establishment of agrarian archaeology lines (Kirchner, 2010)– after the debates carried out on landscape archaeology, a topic of gradual importance in the last decades and essential to understand the development of agrarian archaeology itself:

La arqueología del paisaje es una propuesta metodológica para la investigación de las sociedades antiguas desde su espacialidad. No se trata de una mera ampliación del registro, de un simple cambio de escala geográfica; se trata de una concepción de la historia en la que las relaciones sociales -con sus componentes visibles e invisibles- adquieren el protagonismo y en la que el eje es el cambio social⁵ (Orejas - Ruiz del Árbol, 2013, pp. 201-202).

⁵ Landscape archaeology is a methodology to study ancient societies from their spatiality. It is not just a broadening of the archaeological record or a change of geographical scope, but a historical approach focusing on social relations –both the visible and the invisible– and making social change the main drive.

Starting with reflections from all over Europe, a view of the landscape gradually arises as the space where the different relations of the communities –social, economic, political, and ideological– are fused together. A place in permanent change connecting past and present through its many preserved elements, born in different moments in time, resilient thanks to their changing meanings, until finally shaping the modern landscape.

This interpretation of the landscape demanded the development of appropriate tools to fully decode its meanings. Its complexity required the assistance of many trends and methodologies, each attracted by a different aspect under the influence of the new archaeology and the post-processual archaeology. New work methodologies did arise when techniques from social sciences and humanities – geography, history, linguistics– converged with others from environmental sciences –archaeobiology and archaeogeology–. But despite the desire for synthesis, evident in the newly appearing proposals, the scientific works did focus on distinct elements of the landscape after different methodologies, ignoring its complexity, and divided the research by historical periods until research was fragmented, rarely resulting in well-rounded projects of analysis.

Our research group used this theoretical framework to begin grasping the knowledge of agroecosystems in the Northern Iberian Peninsula by designing a standard operating procedure that takes the village as the basic unit of settlement not limited to the of habitat, but encompassing the whole territory attached to it, and applying micro-territorial studies to two examples with different realities: the mid-mountain village of Vigaña (Balmonte de Miranda) and another located at the bottom of a valley, Villanueva (Santu Adriano), both of them in Asturias. They are settlements of medieval origin that have been occupied up to the present day, making necessary to reflect on the work methodology used in still inhabited villages (Fernández Fernández - Fernández Mier, 2019).

The first stage was an analysis of land plotting with the help of the morphological studies out of the French archaeogeography, by attempting a periodised reconstruction of landscape forms and knowledge of the long-term dynamics that explain their own survival forms (Chouquer - Wateaux, 2013). Based on the analysis of all the historical cartography and the current farm plotting, and starting with aerial photography, the morphological studies made it possible to analyse the shape, orientation and metrics of the plots, and the relationship between them. Thus, plot structures linked to the past settlements studied by the archaeology and present-day villages were identified, establishing relative

chronologies, and defining elements that could have their origin in different historical periods. It was then possible to hypothesise about how these forms are continued, abandoned, or transmitted.

Place names have a particular relevance in these morphological studies; we did acknowledge since the beginning their sustainability from the Middle Ages to the present and so, the possibility to assign a chronology to certain land plotting forms (Fernández Mier, 2006); later we delved into the idea that the perception of the village inhabitants have of the territory they name according to how they perceive it can be approached through the toponymic system; as a social construct, the toponymic system is the outcome of a consensus or a conflict, defines the territory, and is a useful tool for the whole community, therefore it must be accepted and understood by all. Minor place names provide an insight into the peasantry worldview, their etymology can offer information on economic, social, religious and belief issues. In short, it informs us about how people understand the territory and mirrors the dense local ecological knowledge that facilitates the daily management of the territory by community members (Jones, 2016).

This approach based on morphology, place names and documentation, allows a deeper study of the agrarian units that began to take shape in medieval times and were subsequently redefined over the centuries. They have certain forms of appropriation, management and governance modes associated we can use to delve into the internal history of the local communities and their micro-policies to better understand how they operate in the present moment of disestablishment due to depopulation.

The exhaustive knowledge provided by morphological studies led to the planning of archaeological works, from the analysis of domestic units and the habitat places the people navigated through, or where they kept and consumed goods, to productive spaces, focusing at first in cultivation areas, or irrigation and terracing systems, to later extend the study to pastures and woodlands often of joint use. All the above involves excavating parts of agrarian lands to understand the construction of terracing, the stratigraphy developments of crop fields, the gradual deforestation, the appearance of pastures, and the livestock buildings linked to different transhumance types. This set of data contributes to better define the economic activities of peasantry by the introduction of both bioarchaeological and micromorphological soil analyses, which means a better definition and understanding of the forms of production, agricultural or livestock farming activities, fertilisation, development of the vegetation landscape, and types of

cultivation. Small vegetable gardens inside habitation areas, crop fields near villages included in agrarian structures under forms of collective management, and terracing systems were excavated, as well as spaces destined to grazing in areas of communal use and livestock buildings in mountain areas.

The standard operating procedure so defined is still far from homogeneous, but it has already provided qualitative information on the stratigraphic formation of landscapes, especially in the North-western Iberian Peninsula, and let us open a discussion on the appropriate methodologies we need for start researching and obtaining absolute dates for these structures.

The research addresses the study of the village territoriality, but also of the spaces of collective management, generally areas of livestock and forestry, as well as agricultural, use. It is then incorporated into the discussion on the management of commons, a category that encompasses a wide diversity of resources used collectively and semi-collectively, forming the basis of the socio-economic and reproductive dynamics of the local communities as part of an organic economy for centuries (Ortega Santos 2001; González de Molina - Ortega Santos 2000) without a clear dissociation between the private and the public –since private property gives access to the use of collective goods (Izquierdo Martín, 2007)–, and which have been governed by internal institutions of the communities connected to a diversity of social relations.

The commons have recently become a politically relevant issue, invoked by different movements and institutions (Calle 2015); several approaches to them from history, economics and anthropology, have generated a range of conceptual tools and a large volume of information that illustrates the diversity, complexity and conflict in their management, as well as their dynamism throughout history, requiring their study within the socio-economic realities they are integrated in, as well as the analysis of their resignification due to the changes suffered by the socio-economic system and the forms of ownership and use.

Our contribution in this research framework is to consider how they should be studied from an archaeological approach, given that the material record covers a wide range of elements with which to delve into a wide range of issues (Stagno 2017; Fernandez Mier - López Gómez 2021). The archaeobiological analyses have already allowed a first approach to the commons, but other records are beginning to answer questions raised by other lines of research. For example, we must strive to understand the territorialities of the communities, often traced through areas of collective use with multiple elements like the diverse markers perpetuated in the

landscape (cairns, marks) or reusing old settlements as territorial landmarks, endowed with a symbolic and historical meaning incorporated into the identifying values of the communities. On the other hand, the archaeological works in livestock constructions offer a broad chronology that goes back to recent prehistory and shows their reuse, making easy to understand the productive strategies in common areas of communal use in different historical periods that we must interpret within their socio-economic and political realities. The archaeological methodology applied to agricultural structures (agricultural terraces, cultivation fields, irrigation systems, enclosures) is also used to know the design chronology of agricultural units, both those found in commons located on the limits of the territory used by a community, and those close to places of habitat and semi-collective use (Smith 2000; Fernández Fernández 2017), providing qualitative information on the establishing moment of these cultivation sites already discussed at length, especially in the Anglo-Saxon literature (Willianson 2012; Ripon 2008; Ripon et al. 2015; Carvajal Castro 2017).

It is possible to understand from these elements the internal logic, the appropriation, and the use of important resources by the local communities, but they also offer an excellent opportunity for an in-depth study of the role they play as spaces in which converge different political, economic and social views of supralocal nature, best represented by the meeting places located at the confluence of different hierarchical communities, a reflection of the diversity of economic, social and identity elements revolving around these central places. Their study through the archaeological record should eventually provide relevant information to understand them in their complexity, providing chronologies that illustrate a variety of processes yet obscure or only marginally portrayed in the written sources. Therefore, the study of the commons from a material point of view must be accompanied by a re-reading of the documentary sources that should facilitate the identification of collective practices to find out more about the complexity of their use and management throughout the Middle Ages, emphasizing the diversity of solutions and their link with different socio-political frameworks (Martín Viso 2020).

These micro-territorial and multidisciplinary studies have made it possible to obtain dense, long-term information to define in economic, social, and cultural ways the local communities analyzed, as well as to understand them as part of other supra-local action structures, be they parishes, councils or manors, that incorporate them into economic networks of a complex nature. Of course, the

information so obtained prioritize diachronic data with which to outline the landscape use from the Neolithic period to the present day, defining moments of important cultural changes that illustrate how the communities modify it by taking advantage of the ecological possibilities for production, the corrective measures introduced to avoid the depletion of resources and erosion, and also how the territory is conceptualised through the symbolic reinterpretation of prehistoric sites in later times or how it receives a name related to its management. This dense information facilitates the access to the ethno-ecological knowledge treasured by local communities, with its own codes and forms of management implemented over millennia and which need to be revalued to give them a leading role in the decision-making policies of today. It is mandatory to develop a proposal for heritage management rooted in the current situation of the communities studied, since neither historical scientific knowledge, nor the traditional ecological and cultural one, are incorporated into territorial management policies. The idea of exclusive knowledge associated with academic authority must be therefore banished, crossing epistemic and methodological boundaries through an interdisciplinary approach that incorporates local ethnoecological and ethnohistorical knowledge. The success of rural management policies depends on incorporating conceptual frameworks that consider the human dynamics that determine the ways in which the territory is used, the management of natural resources and the conceptualisation of space by those who make use of it (Zalles 2017).

Just as we are finishing these lines, the news echo of the terrible blazes that have ravaged a large part of the Iberian Peninsula in this summer of 2022, burning extensive areas of unpopulated Spain. The scarce local population is clamouring for preventive measures, and more and more voices are calling for the use of traditional practices as a means of prevention. This should be one of the objectives of agricultural archaeology: to revalue the local knowledge accumulated through the experience of millennia to generate narratives that give prominence to these local actors and empower them with the aim of actively recovering the management of the local territory.

The easiest way to fulfil this objective is through education, the reason why our research is complemented by the activation of knowledge transfer projects in which different initiatives have been experimented. One has been the establishing of an experimental laboratory of social and heritage innovation called La Ponte-Ecomuséu, with its own legal personality (social enterprise), based on the principle

of community self-management, that integrates both experts and amateurs, all local inhabitants (Fernández Fernández et al., 2015). In other cases, we have focused our attention on children and youth, promoting knowledge of the rural world they are integrated in, to show them the heritage values of their environment and encourage the creation of identity elements that help to counteract the powerful urban versus rural references. We have then become actively involved with the public schools in the areas studied, setting up a project called 'ConCiencia Histórica' (Historical ConScience) we have used as a bridge to involve the entire educational community in our research, teaching the scientific method by introducing students to the archaeological practice, while achieving a positive and active attitude towards the protection of cultural heritage.

In short, we conceive agricultural archaeology as a scientific practice that not only produces scientific knowledge about local communities in the Middle Ages, but that also should be used as a tool with transformative potential to encourage the scientific culture in rural students, who generally have less access to this type of initiatives, while connecting the past with the present, revaluing local ethnobiological and ethnohistorical knowledge, and generating historical discourses that emphasize the importance of the peoples who perform the management of the local territory (Alonso González et al., 2018; Fernandez Mier et al, 2023).

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7. *Curriculum vitae*

Dr. Margarita Fernández Mier is a current full professor of Medieval History at the University of Oviedo. Her extensive work includes all the possible current approaches to landscape from archaeology to lace names and documentation looking to acquire holistic and comprehensive knowledge of present rural communities through their medieval past as an important contribution to social history.

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