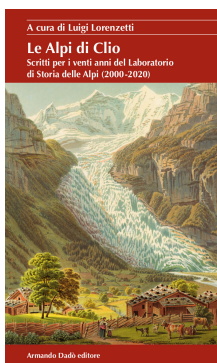


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Luigi Lorenzetti (ed.)

Le Alpi di Clio

Review by: Niccolò Caramel



Editors: Luigi Lorenzetti

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The work edited by Luigi Lorenzetti – a professor at the Academy of Architecture of the University of Italian Switzerland – and produced for the 20th anniversary of the Laboratory of Alpine History, of which Lorenzetti serves as coordinator, constitutes a further and important addition to the already wide and varied strand of studies on the history of the Alps, which in recent decades has occupied a place of absolute prominence in historiographical debates. The work is notable for its short but dense essays, devoid of archival references and with a reduced number of footnotes, so as to make it easily accessible to a wider audience than just experts, who are thus offered the chance to delve inside many of the topics that have been the area of debate among historians of the Alps for decades.

A common thread that ties together many of the sixteen essays – as well as the introduction – collected within the volume is the relationship between the thrust of the great transformations that have occurred on a continental and global scale and the specificities of Alpine communities. On the other hand, no forced dialogue is sought among the essays, thus managing to respect and reflect the changingly composite nature of the Alpine world.

In the volume's introduction, Lorenzetti outlines the educational intentions pursued by the Laboratory and traces the stages that led to its birth and development. From Lorenzetti's feather, it is possible to understand how the Laboratory became over time a veritable point of reference for all those scholars who were independently devoting themselves to historical research on the Alps and who shared research themes that crossed the scientific and geographic boundaries of the Alpine region to touch on focal issues within the international historiographical debate.

The first section, entitled *Time and Transitions*, opens with an essay by Jon Mathieu focusing on the problem of the historical periodization of the Alpine region. By adopting a perspective that transcends Alpine space and proposing an excursus of the historiographical debate – enriched by influences from other disciplines – around the temporal structure of the past, the author modifies traditional chronology to provide a more appropriate synthesis of Alpine history. The second essay by Stefania Bianchi is focused on the different perceptions and interpretations – in relation to the attitudes of the inhabitants, the activities carried out and the specificities of owning and managing resources – of space and time in the Alps and the plains during the 16th-18th centuries. The section concludes with some considerations by Luca Mocarelli on the impact that the transitions experienced by Europe and Italy in the last century in the demographic, economic, environmental and political-institutional spheres had on the Italian Alpine area.

In the second section, focusing on the theme of “Departures and Returns”, Alessandro Pastore explores the different types of Alpine migrations and points out that Migration Studies concerning the Early Modern Age, influenced by the chapters of Fernand Braudel’s book *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (first edition 1949, second revised edition 1972-1973) devoted to migratory itineraries, centered more on the movements from mountain to city and from mountain to mountain than on those directed to smaller villages in the highlands: a direction that mainly involved religious transfers and profoundly affected not only the migrants but also the communities of arrival. Pier Paolo Viazzo focuses on the changes in the historiographical debate within the field of Alpine studies that occurred in the ten years between the first and second Italian editions of his book *Upland Communities: Environment, Population and Social Structure in the Alps since the Sixteenth Century*, which were released in 1990 and 2000, respectively. He highlights that the collaboration between history and anthropology, undermined at the dawn of the new millennium by the epistemological anxieties that emerged, during the previous decade, from the advent of postmodernism, is fundamental to understanding the many questions posed by the new Alpine socio-demographic scenarios. Viazzo’s “Alpine Paradox” which arose in opposition to Braudel’s Alpine paradigm—which sought in misery the reasons for the exodus from the mountains to the plains—is taken up in Anne-Marie Granet-Abisset’s essay to analyse the demographic and economic dynamism that has characterized the Alpine territory since the mid-1970s, particularly in relation to the social and cultural phenomena related to the encounter and coexistence between local populations and migrants arriving in the mountains for a longer or shorter period.

The volume draws attention to another important theme, the one about *Inequalities and Fractures*, presented by Claudio Lorenzini with an essay on the link between witchcraft and the Alps. He considers as a case study a 1601 trial for *maleficio* in Canale del Ferro – a community between the Republic of Venice and the imperial territories of the Valcanale – to discuss the issue of marginality and social, economic, and cultural inequality in Alpine communities. Anna-Lise Head König’s essay is tended to show how, between the 19th and 21st centuries, the bourgeois municipality (*comuni patriziali*), communal guilds (*corporazioni comunali*) and *comunità di godimento*, a term that defines those individuals (usually natives) who hold rights of use over a given resource, despite differences in their institutional paths, their patrimonial situation and the variety of rights enjoyed by their members, managed to survive in Helvetian territory by moving between tensions and accommodations of various kinds.

In the fourth section, titled *Economies and Territories*, Aleksander Panjek examines the historical parabola of the Alpine and pre-Alpine peasant economy of pre-industrial Slovenia to investigate the relationship between population and resources – which has always been a fundamental issue for mountainous areas – to problematize the supposed secular immobility and immutability of the Alpine economy and society. Andrea Bonoldi delves into the public debate that arose in the historical Tyrol following the 1848 opening of the Baumwoll-Spinnerei Bozen cotton mill in the southern part of the region (today’s South Tyrol). The author profiles the dialectical conflict that arose from the advent of industrialization in Tyrol – in which economic and technical reasons were mixed with political, sociocultural, and environmental arguments – using it as a key to analyze the dynamics of localization and relocation in the Alpine area of economic activities in connection with the changes taking place on a broader scale and the local factors of attraction and repulsion. Manfred Perlik also devotes his essay to the Alpine industry, but with the intention of asserting the economic role played by the Alps over the past 150 years in acquiring new functions for the benefit of society, which were at the same time limited in their opportunities and potential for development.

The *Images and Landscapes* section begins with an essay focused on the writer, poet, professor, naturalist and mountaineer Eugène Rambert (1830-1880), a key figure in the birth of Swiss-Romand literature. Author Laurent Tissot emphasizes the dedication to the Alps that emerges from Rambert’s works, particularly regarding the need for Alpine regions to coexist with tourism to preserve them from impoverishment. Rambert thus does not demonize tourism but highlights the need to rethink it in such a way that it provides for the protection of the Alps and becomes respectful of the characteristics of local populations. Nelly Valsangiacomo introduces an essay focusing on sounds and their historicization, the subject of interest in recent years by sound ecology, the history of sensitivities, and Sound Studies. She proposes to use the interpretive grid employed for sound studies addressed to cities and urban regions as a key to be applied for the Alpine space, with the aim of pondering some of the main challenges of today’s society: land fragility, climate change, and the coexistence between human activity and nature.

The last section, titled “A Space of Planning”, opens with Antonio De Rossi and Laura Mascino’s essay, in which they question the logics of the patrimonial paradigm that underlie the management and transformation practices of mountains and inland areas, historic villages and marginal places. The two authors highlight how heritage enhancement follows development logics and ideas focused on projects with tourism purposes, rather than on the economic, cultural and social growth and innovation of local communities. Simona

Boscani Leoni's contribution proposes a reflection on the historical perception of nature and landscape and their contribution to the study of the Alps, as well as the importance of some modern approaches in the field of the social history of knowledge and science and cultural history. Special attention is paid to the usefulness of three types of historical sources (Early Modern period works devoted to natural history, correspondences, and travel reports) in providing Alpine history with useful and ever-new research impulses. The last essay in the volume is written by Roberto Leggero and focuses on the issues, objectives and results of two important conferences with the Alps as their subject, the first held in Milan between October 4 and 9, 1973 and named *Le Alpi e l'Europa*, and the second held in Lugano between March 14 and 16, 1985 and also called *Le Alpi e l'Europa* to explicitly recall the previous one.

Characterized by different themes and perspectives, the essays succeed in expressing the richness and variety of historical research on the Alps, often taking up old questions that have been left unresolved or that deserve to be examined anew in the wake of modern scientific acquisitions or with the help offered by interdisciplinary approaches.

Processes at the social, political, economic, and cultural levels and the transformations that have taken place in the Alpine area are analysed by placing them in the national and international context, in particular by exploring the impact of the transitions that have crossed the Western world in the last century. The need for the Alpine valleys to reconcile their needs with those of the cities continually emerges from the fruitful confrontation with the urban world, as, for example, to pursue the interest of the industrial companies established on their territory, but also with a view to rethinking the tourism profile of the communities. The volume suggests a reading of the past that substantiates the complex, dynamic, and anything but the simple and monotonous history of the Alpine world, which can offer keys to interpreting the present and facing the challenges of the near future: from the complex and varied logics of incoming and outgoing migratory flows to the relations between the hundred and the periphery; from climate change to the energy transition; from population decline to the growth of social and economic inequalities. The intent with which The Institute of Alpine History (later to become the Laboratory) was born, namely, to rediscover and value the role of the Alps in Swiss and European history, is entirely centered by this volume, which succeeds in paying tribute to an intense two decades of activity that has provided the important impetus and new conceptual approaches to international debate and has problematized the content that has traditionally characterized the rich and surprising historiography on the Alpine world.