Transhumance

Papers from the International Association of Landscape Archaeology Conference, Newcastle upon Tyne, 2018

Edited by Mark Bowden and Pete Herring

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Cover: Summer hut first erected in 1520 in the Litschen valley, Axalp, Switzerland, now rebuilt at the Ballenburg museum, Brienz (photo: Pete Herring).

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Contributors

Bolette Bele is a researcher at the Norwegian Institute of Bioeconomy Research (NIBIO), Department of Landscape and Biodiversity. Her main research interests are traditional and ecological land-use aspects of cultural landscapes. More specifically, she focuses on intangible and biological heritage in landscapes, traditional land use practices, and the restoration and management of semi-natural nature types for maintaining biodiversity. She is involved in several national and European projects and has extensive experience in the field.

Mark Bowden joined the staff of the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England in 1986 and subsequently worked as a Senior Archaeological Investigator at English Heritage and then Historic England until he retired in 2020. His research interests include landscape archaeology, hillforts, castles, designed landscapes, common land and the history of archaeological survey. He has published widely on these and related issues and has contributed to guidance and training courses on archaeological survey and investigation. He was Chair of the Landscape Survey Group from 2014 to 2021.

Michael R. Coughlan is a faculty research associate at the University of Oregon's Institute for Sustainable Environment. He received his doctorate from the University of Georgia in 2013. His research interests center broadly on human-landscape dynamics and the long-term interplay of land use and management, social institutions, and human agency through an approach that combines qualitative and quantitative methods informed by theory and method in cultural anthropology, archaeology, landscape ecology and geospatial science (GIS). He has topical interests in landscape fire (both 'wildfire' and 'prescribed fire'), sustainable forest management, and the long-term sustainability and conservation of soils and water.

Davide Cristoferi is FWO post-doctoral researcher in Economic and Social History at Ghent University and *maitre d'enseignement* at the Université Libre de Bruxelles. His research studies economic inequality by focusing on different mechanisms of expropriation, management and redistribution of land and land revenues across Tuscany and, in a comparative perspective, Western Europe in the late Middle Ages. In this regard, he studied the development of transhumance and the public management of common land in late medieval Southern Tuscany during his PhD at the University of Siena (2016).

Michele De Silva is a historical geographer and landscape archaeologist. Since 2000 he has taught different courses at the University of Florence and at the University of Siena, in the fields of geography, archaeology and digital humanities. He is technical manager of the LiEC (Laboratorio Interdisciplinare sulle Eredità Culturali -Interdisciplinary Lab for Cultural Heritage) at the Department of History, Archaeology, Geography, Fine and Performing Arts (SAGAS) University of Florence. He has developed GIS studies and historical geography research on rural landscapes and on the transhumance phenomenon in Tuscany since 2003. He is involved in the TraTTO project since 2015 and is responsible of the GIS management and historical cartography.

Judie English was engaged for many years in medical research during which time involvement with rescue excavation was replaced by a fascination with landscape archaeology. She completed a doctoral thesis on Bronze Age field systems under the supervision of the late Peter Drewett and has undertaken a number of analytical surveys of monuments in Surrey and Sussex.

Ted L Gragson is professor of Anthropology and Head of the Department of Anthropology at the University of Georgia. He previously served as IdEx Chair at the Université Toulouse and retains a collaborator appointment at that institution with the Laboratoire TRACES. He received his doctorate from The Pennsylvania State University in 1989. His research focuses on millennial landscape transformation during the Holocene (past 10,000 years) with a particular interest in how humans

manipulate and shape the landscape through their use and management activities. His recent research has centered on the Southern Appalachian Mountains of North Carolina and Georgia, USA, the Pyrenees Mountains of southern France, and the Ebro River Basin of Spain.

Pete Herring is a widely published landscape archaeologist and historian whose work began with examination of Brown Willy and Bodmin Moor in Cornwall for post-graduate research. Twenty-five years of landscape survey, research and characterisation in Cornwall were followed by 11 years working for Historic England in their Characterisation and Assessment teams. He returned to Cornwall Council to draft a Heritage Strategy for Cornwall before retiring in 2020. His interests range from Mesolithic flint scatters, Bronze Age stone rows, Iron Age cliff castles, medieval open fields and commons, deer parks, turf-cutting, tin mining and granite quarrying to suburbia. But transhumance remains a special passion.

David Lea, after a career in aviation, became involved in many excavations in Sussex and Hampshire, completing a Certificate and Diploma in Archaeology followed by an MA in Field Archaeology at the University of Sussex. He then moved on to landscape archaeology and involvement in analytical surveys of field systems and hillforts in Sussex and Surrey. David was a founding member of the Landscape Survey Group. Sadly, he died shortly before this book went to press.

David S. Leigh is a professor of Geography and the Director of the Geomorphology Laboratory at the University of Georgia. He received his doctorate from the University of Wisconsin in 1991. His research focuses on the geomorphic and stratigraphic expression of environmental change during the late Quaternary period (past 130,000 years) with complementary emphasis on geoarchaeology and site formation processes. His recent research areas include the Mixteca highlands of south-central Mexico, the Pyrenees Mountains of southern France, and the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina, USA, where he examines millennial-scale effects on landscapes and soils caused by changes in land-use practices.

Almudena Orejas is a researcher in the Department of Archaeology and Social Processes (Institute of History), belonging to the Spanish Council for Scientific Research (CSIC). Her research focuses on landscape archaeology, particularly on ancient mining and agrarian landscapes. She has chaired several national and European projects and has contributed to more than 200 academic publications. She is involved in programmes oriented towards the promotion of cultural landscapes as heritage.

Marinella Pasquinucci was full Professor of Ancient Topography and Professor of Maritime Archaeology, Professor for Doctoral courses in Classical Archaeology and in Ancient History (University of Pisa). She teaches ancient topography for specialized courses in archaeology (University of Florence). Her main research interests are landscape archaeology, western Mediterranean trade, and archaeometry of Roman pottery. She was a member of several European projects (ESF, Human Capital and Mobility, INTERREG, Culture 2000, ERASMUS, etc.) and of international research groups (Roman Craft and Trade [Leuven]; Le monde insulare en Méditerranée [CNRS]; Espaces intégrés et gestion des resources naturelles dans l'Empire romain [Quebec, Université Laval]). She is a member of the Comité de lecture of Mélanges de l'École française de Rome; an editorial board member of Agri centuriati; Saguntum; Studi Liguri; and an advisory board member for the European Journal of Archaeology (2016–2019; 2019–2022) and for the THEMES in Contemporary Archaeology monograph series (2019–2022).

Giovanna Pizziolo is senior researcher in Prehistory, Department of History and Cultural Heritage, and Director of the Master Degree course in "Geotechnologies applied to Archaeology" at the University of Siena. Her research focuses on prehistoric landscape and intrasite analysis of prehistoric dwelling and funerary contexts in Italy (from Mesolithic to Bronze Age). During several field survey activities

carried out also abroad (Europe and Africa) she developed different methods for the analysis of prehistoric settlement strategies and exploitation of natural resources. Her research studies deal also with questions related to prehistoric "hidden landscapes" in Italy. She proposes comparative studies on the assessment of archaeological potential at intrasite and intersite levels including the application of predictive modeling. Since 2015 she has been involved in the Tratto project and is responsible for prehistoric issues and field survey activities.

José Antonio Ron Tejedo is an archaeologist trained at the University of Oviedo. He specialises in ethno-archaeology, archaeological survey, and excavations, focusing on rural and mountainous areas in northern Spain. He is also a specialist in cultural heritage assessment and historic roads. He is a member of the IVGA project team, and he has been coordinator of the Network of Ethnographic Museums of Asturias.

Véronique Karin Simon Nielsen is a researcher at the Norwegian Institute for Cultural Heritage Research (NIKU), Department of Heritage and Society. Educated as an architect and a landscape researcher, she has professional and academic experience in architecture, cultural landscape approaches, and cultural heritage issues. Her research interests are topics related to heritage and landscape values in sensitive environments, localised geographical practices, and citizens' participation. She is involved in several national and EU-funded research and innovation projects.

Dick Tapper after a career in finance and volunteering on various excavations, completed a Certificate and Diploma in Archaeology at the University of Sussex, writing a paper on Bronze Age hoards. Dick then spent two years at the Institute of Archaeology, London, obtaining a Masters degree in Practical Archaeology. He then returned to Sussex where he obtained his Doctorate re-excavating Black Patch, a Bronze Age site in Sussex.

Nicoletta Volante has been a Researcher since 2005 at the Department of History and Cultural Heritage of the University of Siena. She deals with prehistoric archaeology of the Neolithic and Metal Age periods in Central and Southern Italy, with particular attention to the relationship between man and the environment, focusing on the reconstruction of archaeological contexts and on natural resources and their exploitation. She is interested in ancient technology and methodological issues applied to the typological and technological analysis of artefacts (ceramic, stone and metal). She practices experimental archaeology in archaeological research and in public engagement.

Andrea Zagli is Associate Professor of Modern History, University of Siena, Department of History and Cultural Heritage, Director of the Master's degree in 'History and Philosophy' and scientific manager of the TraTTo Project. His research fields are rural and environmental studies, and the social and economic history of the Early Modern Age. In the last decade, his research interests have widened to Florentine patrician private archives (Niccolini and Serristori in depth). He has published several works about the modern history of Tuscany. Since 1987 he has been a member of the Editorial Board and Scientific Committee of the historical review *Ricerche Storiche*.

Preface

This volume stems from a Conference session at LAC2018, the fifth biennial Landscape Archaeology Conference organised by the International Association of Landscape Archaeology, which was held at the Universities of Newcastle and Durham in September 2018. The session was organised by the Landscape Survey Group and chaired by the editors.

The themes we asked our contributors to consider in the conference session were how transhumance in the British Isles (and elsewhere) might have:

worked in a practical sense, within households and communities;
originated, developed and declined;
impacted social practice;

and what material and environmental impacts were left by transhumant practices on the landscape – i.e. what is the archaeological evidence?

In the event they approached these already rather broad questions rather widely – geographically, chronologically and methodologically – but we didn't think that this was a bad thing on the whole. Our starting point is that, though transhumance has been widely, deeply and well studied in other parts of Europe and the wider world, its study is still in its infancy in Britain – and especially in England – so a broad approach is justified. This volume could therefore be regarded as contributing to setting up the scene and themes for future work.

Not all the papers presented at the conference session are included here. Eugene Costello (on the ethnoarchaeology of the experience of young women in summer settlements in Ireland, Scotland, and Scandinavia), Andrew Fleming (on transhumance as a persistent cultural practice that can be modelled and found in later prehistoric central and southern England) and Karen Milek, with Alexander Oehler and David Anderson (on the material and environmental imprints of current and recent multiple human-animal communities in the extreme north of Eurasia) decided not to publish their papers here on the grounds that they were already published, or due to be published, elsewhere. The reader is referred to these works (Costello 2017; 2018a; 2018b; Fleming forthcoming; Kupiec *et al.* 2016; Kupiec and Milek 2018).

In the end two other contributors were also unable to contribute due to pressure of other work. They are Adrian Chadwick (on the archaeological evidence for later prehistoric and Romano-British transhumance that exploited seasonal availability of grazing in floodplains in England) and Igor Kulenović, with Šime Vrkić and Neda Kulenović (on regarding the landscape of the Velebit Mountain in Croatia in terms of the embodied practice of transhumance, where movement, and the tracks, hamlets and graves associated with it are not simply related to means of transportation but form an ontologically constitutive element of everyday life). On the other hand an extra paper, by one of the editors (MB), which had been withdrawn from the conference proceedings due to time constraints has been added here. Sadly, David Lea, the lead author of paper number 6 in this collection, died shortly before the book went to press.

The reader may wish to note that in papers dealing with Britain elevation measurements are expressed as metres OD, meaning above Ordnance Datum. Elsewhere elevations are expressed as m.a.s.l., or metres above sea level. There is effectively no difference between the systems.

The editors are extremely grateful to all the contributors to the conference and especially to those whose work appears here despite the unconscionable delays in publication caused by circumstances

beyond the editors' control, or which they failed to control. They also thank the LAC 2018 Organising Committee, especially Graham Fairclough and Sam Turner, and two anonymous referees whose thoughtful comments were responded to constructively by all authors. The book has been laid out and typeset by Phil Newman.

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1. Introduction: the recognition of transhumance in Britain

Mark Bowden *and* Pete Herring

This paper introduces the volume and addresses the main themes that are covered by the following papers. It discusses definitions and the practice of transhumance.

Key words: *Britain, transhumance, shielings*

As editors we come to the subject of transhumance, the seasonal grazing of marginal grasslands, scrublands and wood pastures, mainly by cattle and sheep, usually accompanied by people, from different standpoints. MB's personal interest in the topic of transhumance stems from knowledge of the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England's work in northern England (e.g. Ramm *et al.* 1970) and numerous unconnected encounters with traces of the practice in the Lake District, in the Howgill Fells on the borders of North Yorkshire and Cumbria (e.g. Bowden 1996: 5, figure 4), in the Gloucestershire Cotswolds (see e.g. Dyer 1996), on the Malvern Hills (Bowden *et al.* 2005: 24, 32) and on the uplands of south-west England (e.g. Newman 2011: 117). It was further stimulated by research into the various uses of common land in England, starting from the perhaps unpromising subject of urban commons (Bowden *et al.* 2009). But the more he found out about the practice of transhumance the more he realised that he knew nothing about it and it was this ignorance that stimulated his interest in organising this session. He was also aware, from attending conferences in other European countries, that transhumance was a lively area for research in many places (e.g. Collis *et al.* 2016; Costello and Svensson 2018), whereas it seemed to be rather a minority niche interest in Britain.

In this respect MB was fortunate in falling in with PH, who comes to this topic from a totally different direction, as someone who has long been involved with the study of transhumance, and has written extensively on the subject, mainly about early medieval Cornish transhumance (e.g. Herring 1996; 2012). Surveying and interpreting the small sub-rectangular huts on Bodmin Moor in Cornwall (Figure 1.1) affected his inner compass, attracting him always to the seasonal and the communal. This drew him up to interview and record the material culture of the 'Mediterranean' transhumants herding and milking white cattle high on Monte Mare (for which see Baker 1999 and 2006), when his attention should have been on the eighth-century monastery down below at Castel San Vincenzo (Figure 1.2). And so it has continued, in Ireland and England, and alpine France and Switzerland, where the sound of cowbells and the sight of tracks leading inexorably towards the mountains have always encouraged him to seek out the archaeology and the life of the booley, shieling and *alpage* (Figures 1.3 – 1.5).

His interest includes the ways that 'Alpine' transhumance contributed to shaping much of Europe's historic landscape, extending from the uplands and wetlands themselves to the core farmland where summertime management could be made better organised and more intensive by the livestock's removal. He recognised how the administration and policing of rights to and responsibilities on the commons and the ways to and from them threw light on early political structures (Herring 2016: 197-198; 2011).

MB was asked to give a paper at a Prehistoric Society workshop in 2017 on the subject of upland and lowland archaeology. This started him thinking that instead of studying what we perceive – in our

Figure 1.1: Group of ruins of sub-rectangular huts on the eastern slope of Brockabarrow Common on Bodmin Moor, Cornwall. Analysis and interpretation of sites like this contributed to a reappraisal of early medieval Cornwall (Herring et al. 2011). (Photograph: Pete Herring)

Figure 1.2: Archaeologists from the University of Sheffield, including Peter Herring (front right), meet and discuss transhumant life with Pietro Romano (in hat) in August 1982 outside his baracca, summer dwelling, on Monte Mare, Molise, Italy. His bed took up half the interior; the rest divided between storage of cheeses (1 or 2 made each day), food and wine, and a little space to sit, eat and drink. Cooking was done on an outdoor fire (behind screen to left of door). Pietro took 150 cows, 500 sheep and 15 horses up each year (June to September), overwintering them c. 30 kilometres to the south at San Pietro Infine, near Venafro. (Photograph: Richard Hodges)

Figure 1.3: The archaeology of transhumance takes many forms. On the southern slopes of Spitzhoren, a middling mountain near Gimmelwald in the Bernese Oberland, Switzerland, is this scatter of stone clearance heaps, apparently created to improve the productivity of summer pastures. Nearer is the track that links the summer dwelling (a short way to the left of the shot) with the winter home (a long way to the right). When followed, this includes ramped causeways across soft ground and terraced tracks along precipitously steep rock faces, all carefully made to accommodate the c. 1.5-metre-wide wagons on which the summer's cheesemaking equipment was hauled (see also, Figure 3.3). (Photograph: Pete Herring)

blinkered, urbanised, 21st century view – as the differences between upland and lowland, perhaps we need to concentrate on what unites upland and lowland – of which transhumance is a major, perhaps *the* major, component.

The Cumbrian shepherd James Rebanks has said: 'if you stand in the sandstone villages in the fertile plain at the bottom of the Eden valley, you might think you are simply in a lowland area, a place for arable farming or dairy cattle, a place disconnected from the mountains in the distance. But it isn't – it is bound to the mountains through the movement of the sheep downwards each autumn. The fells and the wide lush river valley are all part of one ancient inter-connected farming system' (2016: 46-7). This is not transhumance: the animals move from farm to farm and there is no migration of people, but it is probably the descendant of a transhumant system – shieling huts have been recorded in the Cumbrian Fells (Ramm *et al.* 1970: 35-9, map 2).

The practice of transhumance is historically well attested across Britain and Europe, and in many other parts of the world, but it is a topic which we think has been understudied in Britain generally. There may be many reasons for this. It is possibly because in many areas of Britain transhumant practice died out at an early date, and is now only encountered in a modified form in only a few special areas, such as the Cumbrian Fells that James Rebanks works. This may be coupled with the early urbanisation and industrialisation of the British landscape, which has led to a general habit of ignoring the rural, except as a romantic 'other' encountered only through poetry, novels and landscape painting. British academics and researchers are not naturally focused on the realities of rural history, though there are many honourable exceptions. In other parts of the world transhumant practices continue, albeit perhaps in a muted form, and are therefore still in the eye of the research community.

Figure 1.4: This summer hut, now rebuilt at the Ballenburg open-air museum at Brienz, Switzerland, was first erected in 1520 in the Litschen valley, Axalp at 1850 m. (6070 feet) a. s. l. It had no internal divisions, and the sleeping chamber was in the projection over the entrance, which created a sheltered space beneath, where a cow could be milked. The archaeological signature would be a simple rectangular stony bank. (Photograph: Pete Herring)

One might also suggest that that the practice of transhumance in Britain, though it involved whole communities, was built around women's work in particular, and has therefore been side-lined by studies which have been more likely to focus on a perceived 'masculine' experience of industry and heavy labour. As Svensson has said – though speaking of Scandinavia – 'Mainstream archaeology and antiquarians were simply more interested in chieftains in great halls than in women and cattle in distant forests and mountains' (2018: 16).

Figure 1.5: Interior of the Litschen Valley summer hut shown in Fig 1.4, showing the simplicity and flexibility of arrangements, which were focussed on the fire and the copper cheese-making kettle on an arm fixed to a rotating spindle that allowed it to be swung over and away from the heat. (Photograph: Pete Herring)

If so, they were not just excluding a major and influential part of rural society, but were also denying themselves a closer understanding of how the ways that transhumants accessed and used the commons reveal much about the very basis of our society and civilisation. Our common laws and customs developed, in part, from the administration necessary to manage and regulate communities and individuals as they drew from society's shared resources, like the undivided summer pastures (Oosthuizen 2013, 1-16).

As we will see, transhumance is also less simple than it may first appear. It is remarkably varied, and the fortunes of any one transhumance system ebb and flow as they reflect and influence changes in the wider rural society and economy.

Definitions

Transhumance can be defined as the movement of animals and their keepers to new pastures at different seasons of the year, irrespective of distance; generally it involves the crossing of township boundaries and overnight dwelling of the keepers; it does not include the movement of animals to market or turning them over to a grazier, which is droving – one way movement to point of sale – which does not give rise to seasonal settlements. Conversely, some seasonal settlements are not related to transhumance; coastal fishing sites and the dwellings of those involved in woodland industries (Fox

1996b; Bowden 2000: 25-8; Bowden 2004: 166-8) were seasonal. Dwellings associated with mining, quarrying and construction sites (e.g. Jessop and Whitfield 2013: 60-3; Cardwell *et al.* 1995) could be seasonal as well. Nevertheless the terms 'shieling', 'shiel', 'scales', originally applied specifically to the shelters of transhumant pastoralists, were later applied in some areas to miners' huts, for instance, and thence to any small hut or temporary shelter (Ramm *et al.* 1970: 1), leading to some confusion.

Two types of transhumance have been identified.

The 'lesser transhumance' or 'Alpine transhumance' involves relatively small numbers of animals and short distances; animals and their keepers move to higher (or lower) pastures in spring or early summer. This is closely related to cultivation – the need to clear the lower slopes and valley bottoms, especially for fodder crops and hay. So, in the lesser transhumance the movement is not so much about searching for available pastures but about the greater usefulness of the lower ground for crops – it is a function of arable agriculture. There are numerous British examples.

The 'greater transhumance' or 'Mediterranean transhumance': this is driven by the relative lushness or desiccation of pastures in different regions at different seasons – the lower pastures are parched in summer, while the higher pastures are moist; the higher pastures are inhospitable in winter, while the lower pasture lands revive. This leads to the complex mass movements of large herds and flocks, often over several hundreds of miles. This latter style of transhumance is not so common in Britain but a form of 'greater transhumance' was practiced in Britain historically, where landowners with holdings in different *pays* moved their herds from manor to manor; even some peasants could use the system where intercommoning was available or where they could acquire access to distant pastures (Fox 1996a: 2-4, 10-11; 2012).

The latter form of transhumance is a system of interdependence between regions, with social and economic repercussions at both ends of its linkages (Fox 1996a: 12-15) but the former also, on a smaller scale, must have had considerable social and economic impact (Herring 2009, 47).

A number of different terms are used in different parts of Britain and Europe for the physical elements of the transhumance system – the huts, the pens, the routeways, the grounds themselves. For simplicity we use the term 'shieling' as a catch-all here.

The practice of transhumance

The two forms of transhumance defined above are subject to debate (Costello and Svensson 2018: 3-4) and mask considerable complexity. Transhumance could be undertaken with different types of animals, different combinations of animals and could involve different social groups. It could take place in a wide variety of different landscape types. In some cases transhumance might involve almost the whole of a community going to the summering grounds initially, to clean, repair or re-build the necessary structures, with the majority then returning to the parent settlement and leaving a small group – often young females but sometimes also older women and boys – to tend the animals. In other areas, and particularly in southern Europe, transhumant herding was predominantly a male practice. Most forms of summering seem to have involved dairying activities and therefore required fairly substantial numbers of people to undertake the daily tasks (e.g. Gelling 1963: 170; Herring 1996: 39) but this need not always have been the case. Other non-agricultural tasks, such as crafts or extractive industries, might also take place at the shieling grounds. Secondary movements might take place from a 'heimseter' – a shieling ground close to the main settlement used for short periods in the spring and autumn – to a more distant summering ground; even shorter distance movements involved diurnal rather than seasonal movement and cannot be considered as transhumance at all (see Higham 1996: 56, 57-9). Or

a secondary movement might take place from the main shieling ground to a more distant one for part of the summer. Meanwhile contact was sometimes maintained between the shieling grounds and the parent settlement by individuals or small groups, often, excitingly, by the community's boys and young men (Herring, this volume; Costello 2018). Towards the end of the summer some people at the shieling grounds might return to the parent settlement to assist with harvest before the end of the summering season, leaving a smaller group to bring back the flocks and herds at the onset of autumn.

In some cases entirely different social groups were involved by tradition in the practice. In the borderlands of England and Scotland in the early 17th century shielings were organised by surname, so that small lowland communities were fragmented in the summer as men from a single settlement went to different shieling grounds according to their surnames and one shieling ground would be occupied by people who the rest of the year lived twenty miles or more apart from each other (Dixon 1972: 251). And in this case it was whole communities who went to the shieling grounds, leaving the parent settlements all but deserted (Ramm *et al.* 1970: 3).

This variety and complexity supports the conclusion that transhumance is a concept better to discuss than to define (Costello and Svensson 2018: 2).

Recent work sets aside romantic notions of European transhumance's 'timelessness', emphasising instead the particularity of each recorded system, in terms of place and historical context. The often rapidly changing economic and social conditions of the communities that practiced transhumance affected its practice (e.g. Collis *et al.* 2016; Costello and Svensson 2018).

We asked contributors to the conference session to address a number of related topics (see Preface): how transhumance worked, how it changed, how it impacted society and what evidence for the practice remains. This they did, with the results, a collection of discussions, recorded in the papers that follow.

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