

*El medio natural en la España medieval* (Actas del 1 Congreso sobre ecohistoria e historia medieval), ed. J. Clemente Ramos (Caceres: U.P. de Extremadura, 2001; pp. 498. N.p.).

Since the special number of the *Anuario de Estudios Medievales* in 1980, there have been a number of gatherings of Spanish medievalists understandably concerned to explore ecological change in the peninsula during the medieval period. The subject is rich enough to justify such attention and it is not

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surprising that the most recent such gathering has found some of the plums already spoken for; we need to bear in mind work published elsewhere (for instance by Utrilla on the southern tributaries of the Ebro and Furio and Lairon's collection of essays on la Ribera) if we are to acquire the complete picture suggested by the title. The collection as it stands is a rich one and the editor has striven valiantly to hold it together, although different regional approaches and different disciplinary backgrounds must have made that a challenge. As is customary in Spain, the volume includes both essays intended to fix the present situation on broad fields, and specialist reports on current research. Of the former, Antoni Furio on Valencia and Antonio Malpica on Granada have important stories to tell and succeed in adding insights to the familiar. There is inevitably some overlap between Malpica's study of daily life in Granada in the new edition of the Menendez Pidal *Historia* (vol. viii-4 (2000)) but the approach here is different. Sesma's essay on the use of timber in southern Aragon and J. Perez-Embid on deforestation in the Sierra Morena are parallel adventures by historians best known in other contexts and can usefully be read together. The local studies naturally give weight to the Extramadura itself, but it would not be sensible to file the collection under regional studies. If it has a centre of balance it is to be found in woodland rather than the irrigation about which we hear so much elsewhere; it was in context of fears that the stock of timber was in danger that concerns which we would describe as ecological begin to appear in the regulations of Spanish municipalities; as usual the precise date at which a permanent regulation was introduced and the extent to which worries in one place reappeared in borrowed regulations elsewhere require some caution. A number of these essays approach the issues from refreshingly unexpected angles. Sonia Haro Pozo for instance has taken on the technical analysis of charcoal residues at Castell D'Ambra in Alicante province to suggest changing patterns of tree-cover in the Marine Alta. Morales Muniz considers the development of the idea of protected game and its consequences; the arrangement by which Carthusian monks were allowed to go out fishing in all the streams of Diego Hurtado de Mendoza's lordship overnight raises unexpected questions about late medieval attitudes. The value of this collection lies more in these sidelong glances than in any unrealistic attempt to produce a synthesis and more scholars than may expect to will find nuggets for their own use.†

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