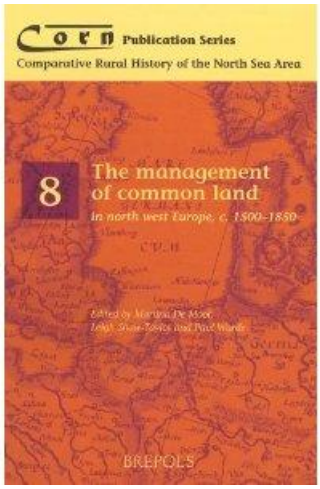
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The Management of Common Land in North West Europe, c. 1500–1850

De Moor, Martina, Leigh Shaw-Taylor, and Paul Warde, eds.



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De Moor, Martina, Leigh Shaw-Taylor, and Paul Warde, eds. *The Management of Common Land in North West Europe, c. 1500–1850*. Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2002. Garrett Hardin's persuasive "tragedy of the commons" theory has tended to make us assume that any communally managed resource must inevitably have been managed inefficiently, a view which echoes the opinions of many commentators in the past. Yet this is often demonstrably a biased perception. Perhaps immediately prior to enclosure many commons were indeed mismanaged and overgrazed, but a longer-term perspective relating to their functioning is needed to form a more balanced judgement. The book develops a more positive view of the role of commons in supporting the poorer elements in rural societies. An editors' introduction and concluding chapter sandwiches eight regionally focused chapters which examine the management of common lands as integral parts of the agricultural systems in northern and southern England, the Netherlands, Flanders, France, Sweden, and north western and south western Germany. While commons were mainly developed on poorer quality land, they were far from being accidental survivals of completely "natural" landscapes but were carefully regulated multipurpose resources which were integrated with other elements in local and regional economies, and for which sustainable management was a reality rather than an ideal. Each chapter tackles the same basic set of questions: how extensive

were the commons and how important were they in the rural economy? What was the legal basis for common rights, who owned the commons, who used them, what institutions regulated them, and how successful were their activities? The editors conclude that the idea of the "tragedy of the commons" should be put to rest as a model for the commons, but they emphasize that more detailed empirical and comparative studies are still needed to clarify the picture. (Text adapted from an H-Net review by Ian D. Whyte .)

Further readings:

- Hardin, Garrett. "The Tragedy of the Commons." *Science* 162 (December 1968): 1243-8.

Related links:

- H-Environment, H-Net Reviews, reviewed by Ian D. Whyte
  http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php
- Brepols Publishers featuring this book
  http://www.brepols.net/Pages/ShowProduct.aspx

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