

CORN Publication Series

Comparative Rural History Network

18 Inequality in rural Europe.

(Late Middle Ages - 18th century)

Edited by Guido Alfani and Erik Thoen

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CORN is a research network founded in 1995.
It is composed out of different research units
that preliminary want to study long term
developments of the rural society from the
Middle Ages to the 20th century from a
comparative and interdisciplinary point
of view.

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Studies dealing with inequality in European societies have multiplied in recent years. It has now become clear that pressing questions about the historical trends showing both income and wealth inequality as well as the factors leading to an increase or drop of inequality over time, could be answered only by taking into account preindustrial times. Therefore, this book deals with inequality in the long-run, covering and comparing a very long time span, starting its investigations in the later middle ages and ending before the nineteenth century, the period that marks the beginning of most available studies.

Hitherto, urban distribution of income and wealth is much better known than rural inequality. This book intends to reduce this gap in knowledge, bringing rural inequality to the fore of research. Since at least until the nineteenth century the majority of people were country men, looking at the rural areas is crucial when trying to identify the underlying causes of inequality trends in the long run of history.

The book consists of nine original papers and deals with a variety of topics about inequality covering no less than eight different countries in Europe. The majority of the studies published in this book are the result of teamwork between European universities where a range of research centres are currently exploring different aspects of income and wealth inequality in preindustrial times.

Guido Alfani is Professor of Economic History at Bocconi University and fellow of Dondena Centre for Research on Social Dynamics and of IGIER (Innocenzo Gasparini Institute for Economic Research), Milan (Italy). He is specialized in economic and social history and historical demography. He published extensively on inequality and social mobility in the long run, as well as on a range of other topics such as the history of famines and epidemics and systems of social alliance.

Erik Thoen is Professor of History at Ghent University (Belgium). He is specialized in economic and social and agrarian history of the preindustrial period, historical geography and environmental history. He is co-founder of the CORN network.

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