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Monica Ferrari, Gianpiero Fumi and Matteo Morandi (Eds.)

**Formare alle professioni: I saperi della cascina**

Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2016, 272 pp.

This volume, edited by Monica Ferrari, Gianpiero Fumi and Matteo Morandi, is part of a series supervised by Egle Becchi on the history of education and bears the title, common to all books in the series, *Formare alle professioni* (“educating professionals») beside the subtitle *I saperi della cascina* (“knowledge of the Lombard farm”). This series, consisting so far of 7 volumes on specific professions and one introductory volume entitled *Pedagogical history of professions*, is very tightly knit and covers the history of a great number of professional spheres, from the highest officials of the state to army officers, the medical professions, and finally the professions related to farming. It inscribes itself in a flourishing literature on the history of professions, akin to the work of Maria Malatesta and others (see especially Malatesta, 2011). This literature follows a somewhat standard scheme, describing how a specific group of workers separated itself from a number of workers

with competing specializations and knowledge, how it organized itself or was organized by the state, how it got official recognition and how it established educational standards and criteria for the recruitment of new professionals.

All the individual volumes in the series have been preceded by workshops held at the Collegio Ghisleri in Pavia, and this one is no exception, originating from a seminar held in May 2015. As it is often the case, the chapters that result from conference papers are quite short and they are grouped into three parts of unequal length with an additional section of comments by Egle Becchi and Monica Ferrari. The volume deals first with the evolution of professions connected with agricultural activities, then with the intermediation of knowledge in rural areas, and finally with the study and preservation of the material documents of the agricultural civilizations. It covers approximately three centuries of rural development, from the seventeenth century to

the first half of the twentieth. Despite short detours in the Middle Ages and into the second half of the twentieth century, the papers are largely devoted to the first of two transitions that agriculture underwent in the Po plain, the modernization of agriculture over the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (the second transition being that of the post-war period). A geographical determination, implicit in the reference to the *cascina*, the farm house of northern Italy, unifies the contributions.

The first and the second parts of the book, in contributions of uneven quality, deal with two possible meanings of “professionalization” which can describe the process of acquisition of the professional know-how through training and education or the historical process by means of which a group of individuals came to be recognized as professionals of a certain kind. This second meaning involves the study of various forms of official recognition but also issues of demarcation between theoretical and empirical knowledge, between mere experience and experimental science. For this reasons, textbooks, exams and curricula play a central role in the chapters of this book, with some of the contributions focusing especially on the processes that led to the social ascent of specific groups and the standardization and formalization of their professional knowledge (this is especially the case of Petracco’s chapter). In many of the contributions, therefore, emerges a significant but potentially contested distinction between empirical and educated farmers (Vaquero), between contextual and expert forms of knowledge (Pazzagli). But such

issues of demarcations –despite a now established literature on these problems (from Brian Wynn to Thomas Gieryn)– are examined in this volume mainly from the point of view of those groups who confided their strategy of social advancement to professionalization.

The first part of the volume is particularly concerned with these processes, since it focuses mostly with the career paths of professionals who operated –also– in the rural world. It is true that Franco Cazzola, who sketched the evolution of farm-related skills since the late Middle Ages, briefly evokes *peasants*, as bearers of a tacit, contextual knowledge, but peasants never really organized as a profession with statutes and established curricula in the Italian case (it was different elsewhere, for instance in Switzerland) and they play a small part in the book, their context-dependent and informal knowledge remaining beyond the scope of this book. Rossano Pazzagli deals instead with agronomists and veterinarians, showing how the ability of these two groups in getting social recognition and demarcating their area of expertise differed. Floriana Petracco ambitiously follows the establishment of curricula of land surveyors and water engineers in Cremona. This study delves in the emergence of a specific technical knowledge as witnessed by the appearance of scientific treatises on water management in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, but it also analyzes how a society of engineers and surveyors got established and marked its member social advancement from little more than manual workers to respected professionals almost on par with notaries.

Manuel Vaquero studies the role of the Royal Schools of Agriculture, which were established in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and how the fascist regime granted professional recognition to the schools' graduates in its strive for an authoritarian modernization of agriculture. Farm managers with long careers but without the appropriate diploma from a school of agriculture were forced to seek a formal recognition of their status. The brief discussion of the career resumes that they submitted to the schools to have their career achievements officially sanctioned constitutes the most interesting part of the chapter and derives from Vaquero's book *Da fattori a periti agrari* (2011). In contrast with the two preceding contributions and with the last one of this section, Giampiero Fumi discusses a highly specialized figure with little or no formal recognition: the milker. This is the only chapter that deals directly with the *cascina* and in an exclusive way with a manual farm worker. It describes the evolution of the profession of milker under the pressure exerted by the milking machine and new conceptions of hygiene since the 1930s. Alessandro Porro concludes this section with a short chapter on obstetricians and rural physicians in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

In this first part of the book, the focus on formal education, understood as the transmission of a set of notions and as an established canon of knowledge, implies a neglect for popular knowledge and informal transmission of know-how. Despite occasional claims of the contrary, the countryside appears mostly at the receiving end of new knowledge coming from the city or

the outside world. The technological and economic evolution appears in most chapters (with the partial exception of Pettracco's chapter) as almost entirely exogenous to the countryside, for instance in Fumi's contribution: the production processes of the milk industry are imposed from the outside by economic competition, new regulations, especially those relating to health and hygiene, and technological innovations. While the book seems to ignore discussions on the agency of farmers, most notably the issues raised, among others, by Jan van der Ploeg (1993; Stuver, Leeuwis & Van der Ploeg, 2004), it also ignores stepwise, incremental innovation that escaped formal education but is often recognized as crucial in studies of Italian industrialization. Surprisingly there is little space for one of the institutions that characterized the modernization of the Italian countryside and was in particular dedicated to improving farmers' knowledge: the itinerant teachers of agriculture (*cattedre ambulanti di agricoltura* (see Failla & Fumi, 2006)).

Two of the four contributions forming the second part of the book seem to break with this scheme and interestingly focus on the agency of some actors in the countryside. Egle Becchi's contribution on largely utopian projects for the education of shepherds is a fascinating read. While shepherds remain also in this case the target of training programs, rural landowners, such as Vincenzo Dandolo and Pietro Paravicini, emerge as agents of innovation, through observations and experiments. The rural world is not just the receiver of edu-

cation but also the site of new knowledge production that enters the world of books and educated discussions.

Maurizio Piseri explores the vocal debates on the choice of teachers inside the rural communities of Lombardy. Referring to his previous work, he briefly recalls the internal dynamics and partisan decision-making process concerning rural teachers. Piseri discusses the scheme put forward by François Furet and Jacques Ozouf in *Lire et écrire* (Furet & Ozouf, 1977), to sketch the difference between villages of the Lombard alps and of the Po plain. The latter were utterly passive with respect to education, while the former –in contrast with the scheme of Furet and Ozouf– were able to express a real demand for educational services.

In this group of contributions, teachers appear as cultural mediators between established knowledge and the rural population: the community had a say in their choosing –as Piseri underlines– but “real” knowledge clearly came from the outside, as it is made evident by the adoption of the teaching methods of catechism (discussed by Matteo Morandi) and by the approach of late-19<sup>th</sup> century school inspectors (discussed by Monica Ferrari). As declared by the editor Matteo Morandi, books dominate this section dedicated to the relationship between “high” and “low” culture. Somewhat disappointingly, this observation may be extended to the whole volume, with the exception of Tullio Kezich’s solitary chapter, which deals with the material correlates of the “low” culture, the material documents that embodied the tacit knowledge of rural dwellers.

The volume contains a number of interesting contributions that often summarize previous and more extensive work by the same authors on the same subjects. Given the small size of the chapters, the reader’s curiosity is awakened but not always satisfied. The bibliography is there at hand and refers the readers to the broader literature. It is therefore especially useful as a survey of the ongoing research on the history of professions and professional education in the Italian countryside. A reader, nevertheless, could wish that the book really engaged with the ambition expressed of the subtitle. The *cascina* as a site of creation, dissemination and reproduction of knowledge never really comes into focus. The physical shape of the farm, of the farming tools, their disposition with respect to one another, the fields, the outside world, despite a host of literature on sites of knowledge and on the entanglement of knowledge and material objects (see Livingstone, 2003; Hodder, 2012), are almost entirely ignored. There is very little even concerning the peculiarities of this type of agricultural operation, the *cascina* –which is a mere metonymy for the rural society of northern Italy. *I saperi della cascina* turn out to be knowledges and know-hows broadly relating to the countryside.

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Franco Cazzola

### **Contadini e agricoltura in Europa nella prima età moderna (1450-1650)**

Bologna, CLUEB, 2014, 376 pp.

**F**ranco Cazzola ha sido profesor de Historia Económica en la Universidad de Bolonia hasta el año 2011 y, en su larga trayectoria, ha desarrollado sus investigaciones en las sociedades rurales europeas, con una particular atención al área mediterránea y específicamente a España. Con una base sólida en historia agraria, ofrece en este libro una historia de la agricultura europea durante la primera Edad Moderna, y lo hace con una profundidad, tanto geográfica como temática, que permite ejemplificar los numerosos problemas abordados, caracterizarlos de una

manera específica y analizar los aspectos particulares de cada área. Tal y como declara el autor, es un volumen a medio camino entre la historia de la agricultura (que se centra principalmente en las técnicas, los sistemas de cultivo, las producciones y las relaciones entre las empresas agrícolas y el mercado) y la historia agraria (más orientada hacia la investigación del conjunto de las relaciones sociales en el medio rural, el campesinado y sus sistemas agrarios).

Un primer reto de este libro es centrarse en el área mediterránea, la cual no ha sido casi abordada por las síntesis de his-