

Alpine vernacular architecture and the so-called pastoral revolution

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For a long time, the rural architecture of the upper valleys of the Alps has been perceived through a single glass: are the buildings made out of wood (the so-called chalet) or out of stone? This difference in the building materials was the main point of focalisation for researchers since the early XXth century, starting with the work of Jakob Hunziker for whom it was an indication of the linguistic affiliation of the populations (German versus Romance), to which Richard Weiss answered with his explanation phrased out in terms of ecological determinations. However, for the anthropologist, this debate overcomes the amazing unity of this architecture that offers a combination of three basic functions — living quarters, cowshed and haybarn — but declines them in many variations in regard to spatial arrangements in a matter that might be structurally analyzed. It is also tricky to observe the historical circumstances of the emergence of this rural architecture that seemed to occur approximately between the end of the XVIth century and the middle of the XIXth century depending on the respective areas. Then, a hypothesis arises: this architecture is directly connected with the so-called pastoral revolution, or in other words, with the implementation of a system mainly oriented to cattle-breeding for milk production. This orientation is aimed at a better rationality in exploiting natural resources, since it allows to maximize the potential resources in relation with the disponible manpower, thanks to the terracing of the landscape that partially loosens the seasonal imperatives of a grain harvest, so crucial in traditional agricultural systems in plains. The relevance of this hypothesis has two main implications: what is the place — and its historical fluctuations — left for cereals in these new systems? What kind of circulation does it require either for men (a good proportion of the population did not spend the winter in the upper valleys), either for the goods (the milk production is usually bound to be exported), either for capital (building houses and acquiring cattle means investment) and either for ideas (the building technics are nothing but archaic)? Such a reflexion is also open to a discussion of the implications for the Alpine area of the two great principles of inheritance that prevail in Europe (impartibility or egalitarian repartition) and of the role of the state in that matter. The question of the influence of religion (catholics versus protestants) on the development of these original systems may too be addressed. All these points have to be discussed historically. All paper proposals in that field are welcome.

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The Rural History 2019 Call for Panels can be found in [RHN 70/2018](#).