FROM ECOTYPES TO SOCIOTYPES: Peasant Household and State-Building in the Alps, Sixteenth–Nineteenth Centuries

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ABSTRACT: *Ecological arguments have long been used in research to explain the forms of peasant households. In the rich family literature concerning the European Alps they hold a particularly prominent position. Using alpine macro- and microdata, the article shows that the proposed ecological models do not hold up under scrutiny, and that sociopolitical approaches are more effective. An investigation of three regions from different parts of the Alps indicates that accelerated state-building started a process of differentiation in the sixteenth century. Relations between the private and the public domains took on specific forms, and this development affected domestic power relations in peasant households.*

Ecological arguments have long been used in research to explain the forms of peasant households. In his classical 1966 study on peasants, Eric R. Wolf mentions two areas that account for the different inheritance and family patterns: "The ecological context, involving the relation between technology and environment, and the hierarchical social context, involving the relation of the domestic group to other, superordinate political and economic institutions and mechanisms." To illustrate the significance of the ecological context he cites the preference for impartible inheritance in European mountain regions. There, he points out, a viable homestead depends on the availability of meadows, pastures, forests, and fields—an optimal resource combination that would be threatened by subdivision. "At the same time, such a unit cannot support more than a given number of people" (Wolf 1966, pp. 74–75).

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At the time of his peasant study, Wolf was working on a monograph about two mountain communities on the border of Southern Tirol and Trentino, which deals extensively with issues of family and inheritance (Cole and Wolf 1974). In the last 20 years, family studies focused on the European Alps have multiplied and attracted some attention in the international debate. The works of Michael Mitterauer, in particular, covering the Austrian Alps, found considerable resonance among experts (Mitterauer 1990). The abundance of alpine family studies is partly due to the peripheral status of this large mountain range set in the middle of a highly developed area with research capacities to match. This combination attracted anthropologists from all over, and historians who were increasingly embracing anthropological perspectives soon followed suit.

With environmental arguments playing a role in general literature, it comes as no surprise that in the literature pertaining to the Alps they are prominent to the point of eclipsing sociopolitical arguments. In this article, I would like to show that a different emphasis might make more sense in a field like ours. My main concern is with the influence of state-building on peasant household formation, and with demonstrating that the assessment of environmental influences needs to be placed in a historical perspective and stated in more precise terms. To this end I will be using some macrodata, and will then concentrate on three regions, including a set of microdata. First, however, we need to take a closer look at the ecological approaches under critical review.[1]

ECOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO FAMILY HISTORY

Ecological theories can be categorized into "hard" and "soft" approaches. In the latter, environmental circumstances appear not as direct and ubiquitous factors, but as mediated and differentiated variables. The studies of Mitterauer and Wolf clearly belong to the soft category, which make them particularly interesting for historical purposes.

Using concepts developed by Scandinavian scholars, Mitterauer proposes a model of family-historic "ecotypes" which he uses to interpret Austrian sources from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries. He points out that the historical economic zones in Austria, corresponding to the country's soil and climate, were marked by strong contrasts. Although variations existed to some degree, most mountain farmers were primarily engaged in cattle raising—unlike their counterparts in the pre-Alps and in the lowlands. By its continuous work requirements, cattle raising favored the steady employment of farmhands and, according to the author, led to the emergence of a kind of alpine "farmhand society" (*Gesindegesellschaft*). He therefore concludes that the ecotypological approach—mediated through a specific form of labor organization—has a considerable potential toward explaining historical family forms. With regard to modes of inheritance, however, he concedes that its applicability is restricted to wine-growing whose intensity makes it possible for a family to make a living on a very small homestead. In almost all wine-growing regions of Austria partible inheritance was the predominant mode (Mitterauer 1986, 1992).

Wolf also points out this relation between mode of inheritance and agricultural intensity. With co-author John W. Cole, he stresses that the rules of inheritance in the two mountain communities covered by the study—and probably in many alpine communities—are to be considered as ideologies. Ideas of inheritance as recorded among peasants during the 1960s show considerable variation. While the people in one village placed a high value on impartible inheritance benefiting a single son, their neighbors in the next village were in favor of distributing the family estate equitably among all the children. This contrast had considerable influence on the social structure and the distribution of power in the private and the public sphere, and was attributed by the authors to differences of historical integration into the larger political units. In the actual inheritance practice, however, this difference seems to have hardly mattered. In the village that had professed to be in favor of partibility, for instance, farms were frequently passed to the next generation without being broken up. According to Wolf and Cole, this similarity in practice results from an adaptation to the harsh realities of the mountains whose higher reaches permitted only extensive cultivation. As the region's ecological potential had been exhausted long ago, selection among siblings—regardless of social ideas—had become a simple necessity (Cole and Wolf 1974, pp. 175–205).

In the most recent literature, a growing emphasis on differences between alpine regions tends to undercut the absoluteness of ecological influences (Fontaine 1992; Viazzo 1989). The most exhaustive study has been produced by Dionigi Albera (1995) who presents detailed data from Piemontese valleys and situates them in a large sample of family studies from the entire alpine area. For his purposes, he develops three family-historical ideal types: (1) "agnatic" type: inheritance shared evenly among sons; daughters paid off with dowry; patrilocal residence, and later often coresidence of married brothers; examples from the Italian Alps; (2) "bourgeois" type: inheritance shared evenly between sons and daughters; bilateral kinship concepts; public standing of men not determined by their role as head of household but by their local citizenship; examples from the Valais; (3) "bauer" type: social relations centered on the homestead and its head (*Bauer*); undivided transfer of homestead with attendant downgrading of other family members; farmer's authority based on links to landlord and state; examples from Southern Tirol, Austria, Slovenia.[2]

Taking a relational approach, Albera views these types merely as an orientation aid, without claiming an immediate fit with reality. He uses the study of Cole and Wolf (1974) to compose an ideal type, but questions the authors' ecological argumentation because, among other things, their study of inheritance practices lacks chronological depth and does not permit safe conclusions to be drawn. Albera's is no doubt the most important study about our subject. Its weakness, in my opinion, is the uneven and offhand treatment of the relations between the family and the sociopolitical environment. This pertains particularly to the "agnatic" type which is discussed under the perspective of an open, migration-oriented economy only. More clearly these relations emerge in the case of the "bauer" type where Albera makes reference to Herman Rebel's (1983) study on Upper Austria.

In the argument that follows, then, several ecological questions will have to be addressed: does cattle raising generate a "farmhand society" and large peasant

households? Did the partibility of alpine homesteads jeopardize optimal resource combination? Was there a link between agricultural intensity and mode of inheritance? Albera's (1995) investigation will be useful in matters of orientation, but it will have to be reviewed critically with regard to problems of state-building.

MACRODATA FROM THE ALPS

Today, the Alps constitute a border region between different European states, and a statistically informed historiography of the entire area is only in its beginnings. Through a combination of regional and other data, however, it is possible to get an overview of certain aspects of demographic, agrarian, and urban development.

The alpine population seems to have almost tripled between the sixteenth and the nineteenth centuries, from an estimated 2.9 million in 1500, within a certain range, to roughly 7.9 million in 1900. Demographic growth and high agrarian rates suggest that agricultural production increased significantly during this period. Agrarian intensification came about through increased frequency of cropping and through changes in livestock and crop selection (more cattle instead of sheep, introduction of maize and potatoes). New, land-saving forms of cultivation were generally more labor intensive. Many forms of intensified agriculture only came into use as population pressure increased consumption levels and labor capacity (Mathieu 1998, ch. 3).

This development was by no means uniform across the alpine area. A simplified map indicates that around 1900 the Alps included agricultural forms of vastly varying intensity (Fig. 1). There were strongly wooded regions where a burn economy was still practiced to some extent (symbol 3), regions with extensive sheep transhumance (symbol 5), regions specialized in cattle raising (symbol 2) and a large inner-alpine area with a mixed agro-pastoral economy (symbol 1). Agriculture was particularly intensive on the southern slope of the Alps and in low-lying river valleys where chestnuts, maize, vines, and other plants were cultivated (symbols 4, 6, 7).[3] After 1700, this link between agricultural intensity and elevation became more and more important. In the sixteenth and seventeenth century the growth difference, both between high and low regions and between alpine and neighboring areas, was considerably smaller than in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. While in the first phase some mountain regions had higher growth rates than the adjacent flatlands, the second phase was marked by a generally faster and accelerated flatland growth. Thus, the influence of altitude on development became more notable with intensification. Shorter vegetation periods at higher altitudes, for instance, emerged as a critical factor only in the context of a stepped-up cropping frequency (Mathieu 1998, chs. 2 and 3).

This is not to say that the ecological potential was exhausted by then. An important variable to be considered in such matters is urbanization. Around 1500, Upper Italy was the urbanized region par excellence. Besides Venice and Milan with approximately 100,000 inhabitants each, there were four more cities with a population around 50,000, and a great number of lesser urban centers. The countries on the other side of the Alps were unable to match this pace except maybe for the Rhone valley in the west (Marseilles and Lyon with a population of 45,000–50,000

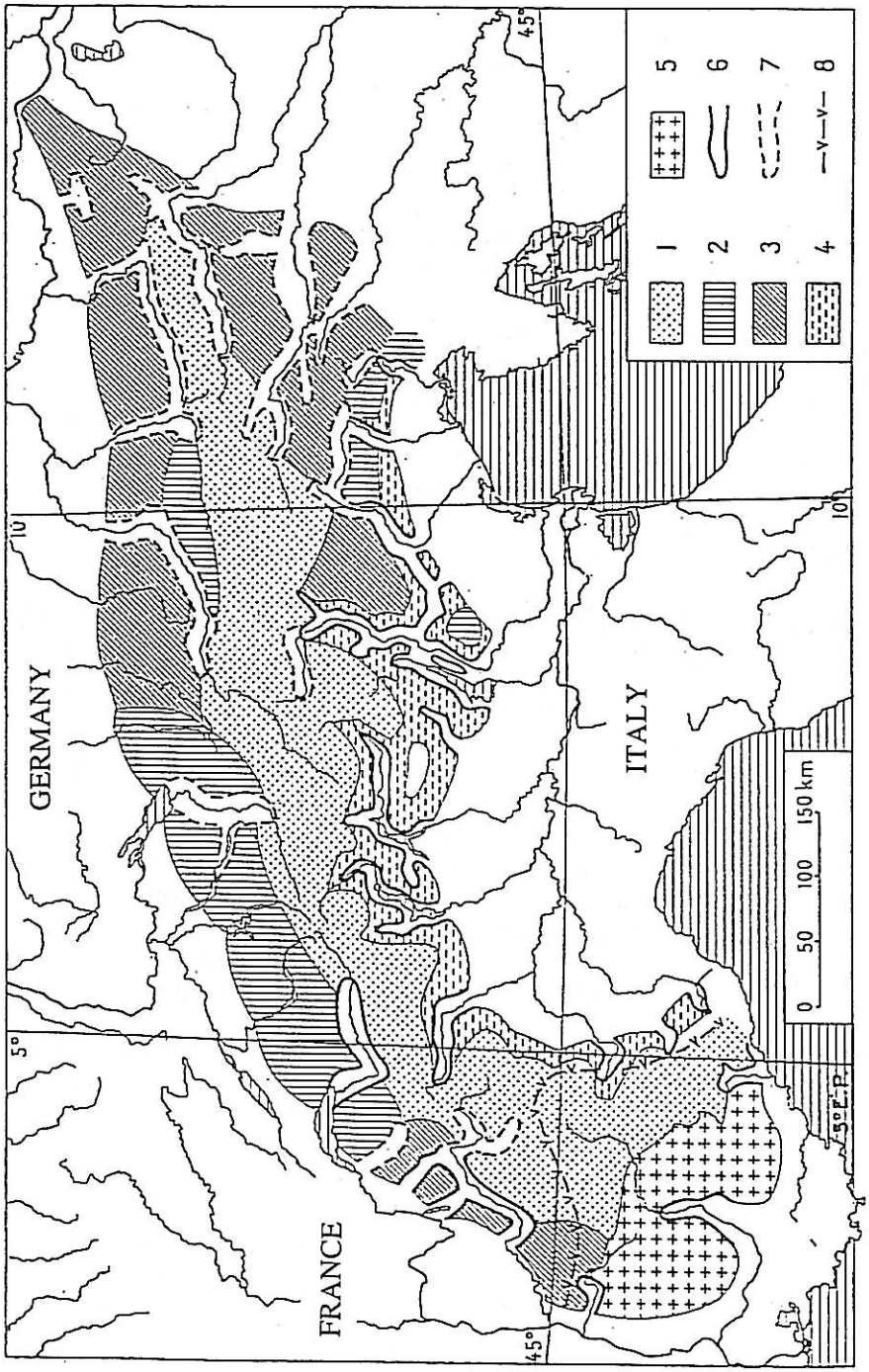

FIGURE 1
Forms of Agriculture in the Alps after Martonne, ca. 1900

each), and in the actual mountain regions urbanization had barely begun. As urbanization progressed, the development in the south and in the north converged while the difference between the alpine regions and the surrounding areas increased. Around 1800 and especially around 1900, the Alps had many more urban centers than at the beginning of the modern era, yet the imbalance in the distribution of urban populations between the Alps and surrounding areas was greater than ever (Bairoch, Batou, and Chèvre 1988; Mathieu 1996).

One tradition of thought (that also influenced Cole and Wolf) views emigration from the mountains as an effect of scarce resources: at the beginning of the modern age, according to this tradition, population levels in many regions began to exceed available resources and thus inevitably set in motion a process of emigration that was to last for centuries. Our data, like other modern studies, suggest a change in interpretation. Considering the fact that the alpine population could increase by a factor of nearly three between 1500 and 1900 even though agriculture continued to play an important role throughout the period, it is hard to see how the scarcity of resources around 1500 should have been the main reason for emigration. What is often ignored on a general level is the fact that the surrounding regions were much more populated and, especially, far more urbanized than the Alps. This context underlines the importance of pull-factors in migration processes.

Another process of social change that followed urbanization since the Middle Ages was the spread of literacy and an educated legal culture. More immediately exposed to urban influences, the southern and western Alps were caught up in this development much sooner and more thoroughly than the north and the east. Notaries, nearly unheard of in some northern and eastern areas, became an important feature of rural life in the south and the west. As we shall see, this difference was to have a considerable influence on rural inheritance practices and public administration (Ridder-Symoens 1996, p. 151).

Finally, we need to mention an aspect that can only be evaluated at a late date: farm size. According to agrarian statistics, around 1900, typical farm sizes varied considerably from region to region. In Salzburg, for instance, 49 percent of all farms had ten or more hectares of land (they might be called medium and big farms) while small holdings with an acreage under five hectares accounted for 37 percent of the farms. In the Trentino, on the other hand, small holdings made up 91 percent while only three percent were medium and big farms. In Fig. 2 I have considered all administrative units (departments, cantons, etc.) with at least three-fourths of their territory located in the Alps. There, the entire northeast, from the middle of Tirol to Styria, appears as an area dominated by larger farming operations to an extent that clearly sets it apart from all other regions. Factors such as the number of farmhands and the rate of illegitimacy have very similar distribution patterns. Unlike the smallhold-dominated alpine west and center, the big farm country of Austria had large numbers of farmhands and numerous illegitimate births—the latter quite closely related to the former (Mathieu 1998, Tables A.2–5; Mitterauer 1990, pp. 233–287).

This constellation provides the framework for Mitterauer's aforementioned eco-typological model. He cites the dominance of cattle raising and its continuous work routine as the primary cause of high farmhand employment. However, Figs. 1 and

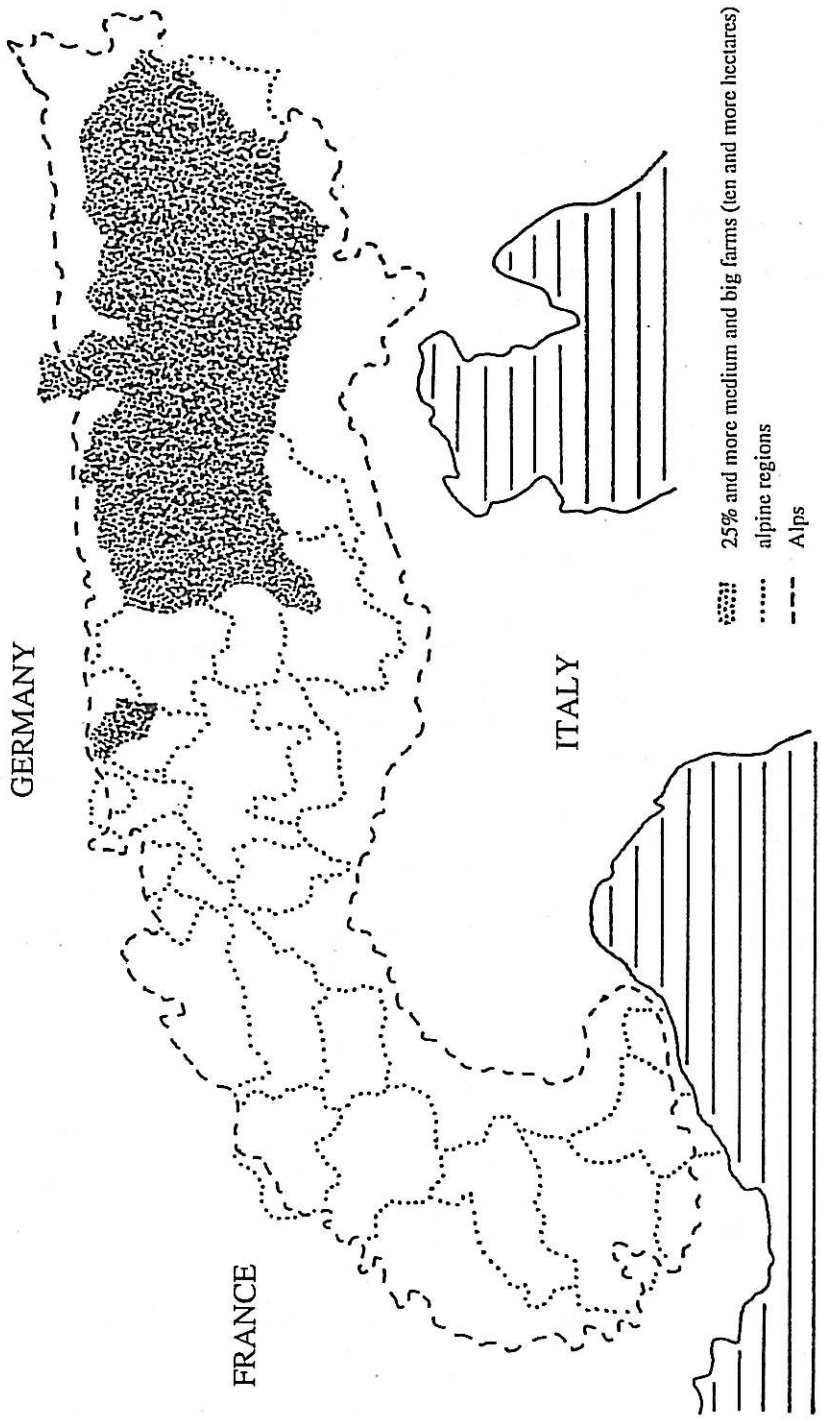

FIGURE 2
Medium and Big Farms in the Alps, ca. 1900

2 do not bear out his thesis in the context of the entire alpine area. There were numerous regions in the west with a smallhold structure where cattle raising was the dominant or even exclusive mode of peasant economy. Farm size, far more than the seasonal distribution of work, determined the level of farmhand employment—for a small herd of cattle the small family workforce was sufficient.

PEASANT HOUSEHOLD AND INHERITANCE

For a closer look at some questions of household formation and state-building we now turn to three regions: Savoy in the west, the Grisons in the center, and Carinthia in the east of the alpine arc (Fig. 3). The Duchy of Savoy covered roughly the territory of today's French *departements* Savoie and Haute-Savoie and, until the nineteenth century, was part of the Savoy-Piedmont state. The Grisons formed the independent Freestate of the Three Leagues during the early modern period, comprising today's Swiss canton of the Grisons plus a subject territory to the south. The Duchy of Carinthia, an *Erbland* of the House of Habsburg, is now an Austrian *Bundesland.* In terms of size, the three territories were comparable, each measuring between 10,000 and 11,000 square kilometers. In their structural development, however, they diverged considerably, as we will see.

A virtually inexhaustible source of information for Savoy is its notary records. Especially since the beginning of the modern age even the common population often used the services of the notary—for credit deals, land transactions, marriage agreements, wills, etc. Many of these records point to a gendered mode of inheritance. As a rule, women received a dowry (*dot*) from their families, usually in the form of money and often payable in installments. The male members of the family were made the principal heirs, mostly on a more or less equitable base. Some wills contained elaborate instructions for the substitution among the *héritiers universels.* For instance: the two sons of the testator are the main heirs; should one of them die without leaving a male offspring, the other succeeds him; should both die without male offspring, they are succeeded by the line of the testator's brother. To promote the joint use of the family homestead by all male heirs, some wills also contained clauses stipulating that the share of the party seeking to divide the inheritance be reduced (Pérouse 1914, p. 330).

David J. Siddle has pointed out the significance of such forms of familial coherence in his detailed studies about the commune of Montmin. Like many Savoyard settlements, Montmin, located near Lac d'Annecy at 1,000 meters above sea level, consisted of several hamlets. Between the households numerous kinship relations existed and in the households the estate of the former *chef de famille* often remained undivided. Eighteenth-century records mention few divisions, and these refer more often to divisions involving cousins or uncles and nephews than brothers. This tight patrilinear cohesion among kin and family did not rule out conflicts, but it enabled the household members to react flexibly, and occasionally led to long periods of joint economic operations (Siddle 1986).

In 1561, 16 percent of Montmin households consisted of several related families (e.g., two married brothers) and 22 percent included relatives outside the immediate circle of married parents and children (e.g., a nephew). Although household compo-

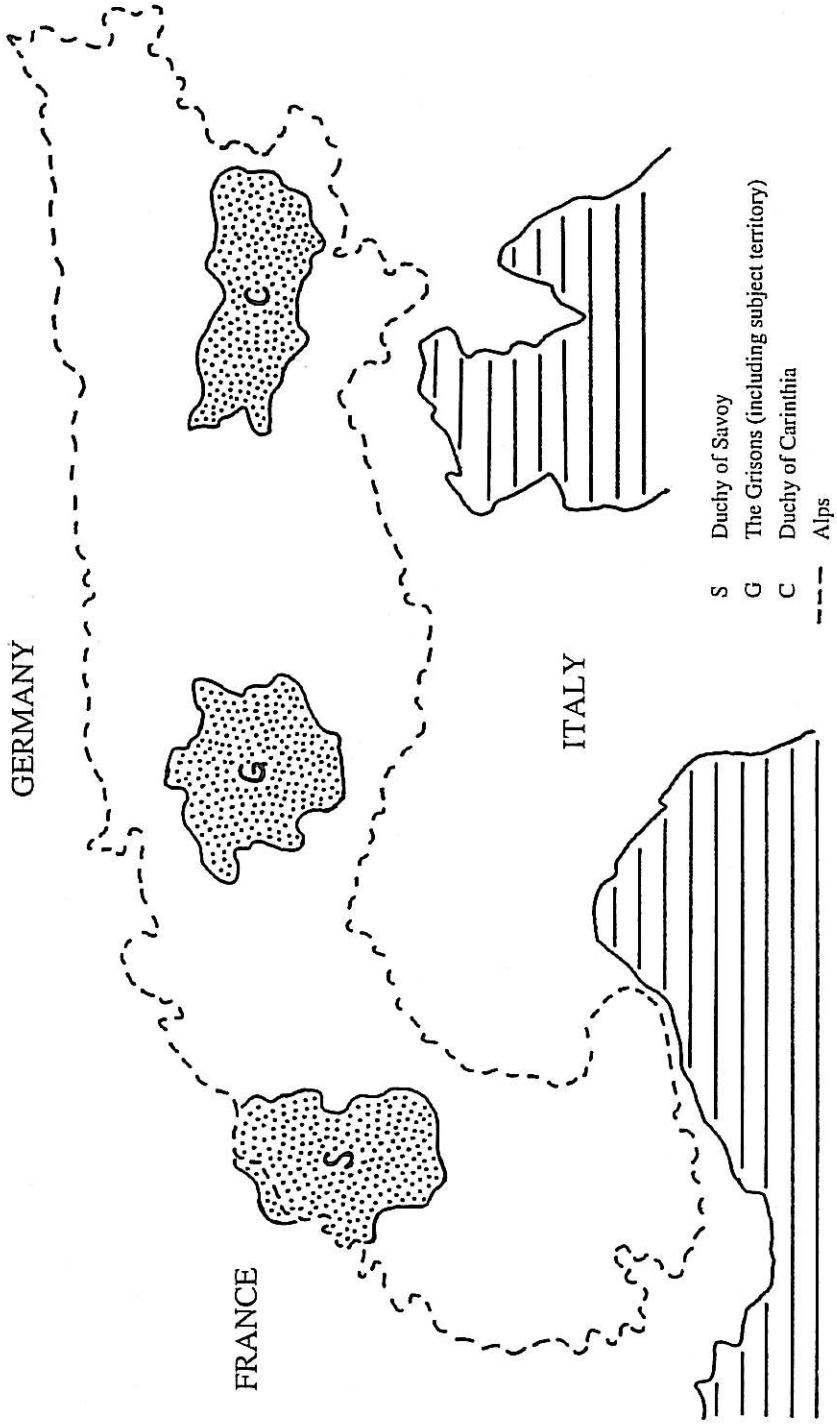

FIGURE 3
Savoy, the Grisons, and Carinthia (18th century)

TABLE 1
Household and Family in Savoy-Piedmont and in the Grisons, 1561–1832

Region, Place, and Year	*Percentage of Households*							
	1	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	*1–5*	n	ø
Savoy-Piedmont	2	3	56	22	16	100	131	5.5
Montmin, 1561								
Montmin, 1832	4	4	55	29	8	100	124	5.2
Chevaline, 1561	0	0	49	39	12	100	41	5.3
Chevaline, 1778	0	5	40	35	20	100	20	5.4
Chevaline, 1832	7	0	54	25	14	100	28	6.1
Alagna, 1734	14	9	43	20	14	100	189	4.7
Alagna, 1778	7	7	52	16	18	100	184	4.8
Pontechianale, 1826	5	4	56	18	18	100	245	4.7
Casteldelfino, 1830	0	6	42	23	29	100	220	5.9
Grisons	14	13	57	14	3	100	95	4.0
Lostallo, 1665								
Lostallo, 1757	7	15	54	20	3	100	59	4.0
Tarasp, 1670	4	9	64	19	4	100	69	5.3
Tarasp, 1705	14	4	68	13	1	100	79	4.0
Tarasp, 1750	6	4	62	27	0	100	77	4.0
Müstair, 1762	5	7	71	13	5	100	126	4.5
Alvaneu, 1767	5	8	73	11	3	100	73	3.9
Tujetsch, 1768	8	8	81	3	0	100	217	4.1
Savognin, 1823	6	8	76	6	3	100	62	4.9

Notes: Based on the Laslett classification: 1 = solitaries; 2 = no-family households; 3 = simple-family households; 4 = extended-family households; 5 = multiple-family households; *n* = number of households; ø = mean household size.

Sources: Siddle and Jones (1983) and personal communication; Viazzo (1989, Table 9.1); Albera (1995, ch. 9, Tables 1–5); *Handbuch der Bündner Geschichte* (2000), article by Mathieu, Table 3, and Gemeindearchiv Lostallo (Kirchenbuch 1641–1819), Pfarrarchive Tarasp (Kirchenbuch 1610–1716), Müstair (Familienregister 18. Jh.), Alvaneu (Status animarum 1763–1859), Savognin (B 4/5a, without S. Martin).

sitions fluctuated considerably over time, available statistics indicate that multiple family household phases were a common occurrence. In 1561 and 1778, in the neighboring commune of Chevaline, 12 and 20 percent, respectively, of all households included multiple families. The distributions in other villages were on the same order (Devos and Grosperrin 1985, p. 254). In this pattern one easily discerns similarities to the "agnatic" type as described by Albera (1995) for Piedmontese and other Italian alpine regions. For a quantitative impression of the similarities check the Piedmontese examples in Table 1 (Alagna, Pontechianale, Casteldelfino).

Unlike the Savoyards, people in the Grisons rarely used written records in family matters. Here, the statutes of the early modern age turned against the freedom of the testator and emphasized the equal treatment of the children. Such inheritance clauses were often put down for concrete reasons. In the Lower Engadine bordering on Tirol, the sixteenth-century communal statutes contained no clauses pertaining to inheritance, but by the seventeenth century some list elaborate rules, while others merely include guidelines for special cases which were updated in the eighteenth century to account for new circumstances. An examination of inheritance practices is difficult because verbal proceedings were so widespread, yet by all indications the quite egalitarian division of real property among male and female siblings was

the common mode of transmission. In the Lower Engadine like in many other valleys of the Freestate, settlements often consisted of sizeable villages. This facilitated the generalized practice of real division since the land holdings of husband and wife from the same village could be recombined into viable homesteads. In theory, this system would appear more exposed to the dynamics of land subdivision than a purely male system of partibility but in practice it was determined by a variety of mostly demographic factors and did not necessarily lead to increased fragmentation (Mathieu 1987, pp. 41–44, 174–176).

Demographic developments and modes of demographic behavior were also crucial in determining farm size. Available evidence concerning the number of unmarried people show that heirs did not regularly use their share of an inheritance to start a new household. As old singles they increased the number of households with extended families and, in the long term, slowed the erosion of the estates. In Table 1 I have listed some data from the Grisons on households and families. They demonstrate that the percentage of households with extended families varied greatly according to the demographic situation—for example, in Tarasp, between 13 percent in 1705 and 27 percent in 1750. But unlike in Savoy-Piedmont, multiple-family households rarely occurred in the Grisons. One important reason for this is no doubt the practically gender-neutral mode of inheritance that emphasized the claims of the individual children and accelerated the division process. The immediate economic link between male family members was not perceived as an embodiment of family continuity. Households thus had a limited growth potential.[4]

In Carinthia the term *Erbrecht* (right or law of inheritance) did not refer to the form of inheritance so much as to the actual right of being allowed to bequeath agrarian property in the first place. This right had to be acquired from the landlord through payment of a purchase price wherefore it was sometimes referred to as *Kaufrecht* (right of purchase). Much more common until the arrival of state reforms in the late eighteenth century was the so-called *Freistift*—an arrangement whereunder the landlord determined the successor and charged a sum of money for this *Bestiftung* (endowment). Peasant families and landlords shared a common preference for placing the sons ahead of the daughters in succession to the farmstead. Yet, the daughters had a chance of being preferred to the sons, if they found a well-off husband who would submit a particularly lucrative offer to the landlord. A precondition for this was a lord's strong profit orientation in negotiating the succession tax. Although in extreme cases the transfer of a farm property took on the characteristics of a general auction, heritability without right of inheritance was the most common mode of transmission (Fresacher 1950–1955, vol. 2, pp. 55–104).

Division of the farmstead was also considered, occasionally, since the mere existence of landlordships did not preclude such arrangements as a matter of principle. Given the degree of economic control exercised by the landlords in Carinthia, this process always involved two parties—peasant family and landlord—thus increasing the number of obstacles to subdivision. An important reason for the general aversion to this solution may have been the fact that many farm estates consisted of single homesteads forming a more or less closed territorial complex. In any case, the admission of new smallholds on little used and often communal land seems to have been more common than the breaking up of old farms. Despite such ways of

TABLE 2
Household and Economic Status in Carinthia and in the Grisons, 1750–1798

	Percentage of Households					
Region, Place, and Year	*SV*	*IM*	*RA*	*SW*	n	ø
Carinthia	87	37	4	6	133	8.2
Feistritz, 1757						
Gradenegg, 1757	57	38	5	31	42	7.5
Liemberg, 1757	52	33	4	48	27	7.3
Obermühlbach, 1757	75	52	8	18	231	9.5
St. Lorenzen i. d. R., 1757	77	55	10	22	96	9.6
Sirnitz, 1757	64	39	6	32	196	7.4
Zweinitz, 1757	55	29	16	31	89	7.1
Zweinitz, 1770	62	41	9	32	93	7.2
Zweinitz, 1786	47	39	17	40	94	6.5
Zweinitz, 1798	50	39	17	29	94	6.8
Grisons	0	0	3	61	77	4.0
Tarasp, 1750						
Lostallo, 1757	2	0	2	73	59	4.0
Müstair, 1762	3	0	2	70	126	4.5
Alvaneu, 1767	8	0	1	74	73	3.9
Tujetsch, 1768	0	0	2	—	217	4.1

Notes: SV = with servants; IM = with inmates; RA = with retirement arrangements; SW = with small workforce (less than four persons of at least 13 years); *n* = number of households; o = mean household size.
Sources: Vienna Data Base on European Family History, Institut für Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte der Universität Wien; Grisons see Table 1 (inmates unknown; parents not mentioned first are considered to be retired; Tujetsch, without indication of ages).

increasing the number of holdings, big homesteads retained their central position throughout the period, aided to some extent by the practice of awarding unoccupied farms to wealthy peasants (Pickl 1981, p. 131).

To understand the composition of rural households in Carinthia, a family-centered classification such as the one we used for Savoy and the Grisons makes little sense. In fact, many households in Carinthia typically included a fair number of persons outside the family and ranked by economic status. Table 2 provides us with a range of data from the Gurktal Alps in the second half of the eighteenth century. They show that the majority of households—as many as 87 percent in one parish—included servants. Somewhat less common were households including *Inwohner* (inmates), that is, rent-paying lodgers who worked on the farm as day laborers during work-intensive periods. Often these inmates were former servants who had changed their situation for reasons of age or because of the birth of children. Unlike servants and inmates, the peasant couple had legal rights for life and thus certain guarantees for old age. After the death of husband or wife, in particular, quite a few spouses appear to have been inclined to hand over the farm and accept a formal retirement agreement. According to the sample, in any case, the proportion of households including retirees could go as high as 17 percent at one point in time.

On the average, the households included a large number of persons and thus had considerable labor potential. Not counting children up to 12, only a minority of them included less than four persons. Such households, in Carinthia almost always lower class, constituted a clear majority in the smallhold-dominated Grisons,

as shown in the second part of Table 2. An important factor in accounting for the differences between individual households and between different alpine regions were the servants, male and female. In 1757, according to our sample, the average household in the Gurktal Alps had 2.7 servants, some large households had as many as ten, 15, or even 25. Here, as well as in other parts of the country, between a quarter and a third of the population were farmhands. By contrast, the Grisons sample for the period from 1750 to 1768 has servants accounting for barely one percent of the population.[5]

Overall, we can say that household and family forms in the three regions fit into the framework developed for the alpine area by Albera (1995). In Savoy and in the Grisons "agnatic" and "bourgeois" family patterns predominated (with both male and gender-neutral forms of partible inheritance), whereas Carinthia stands for the "bauer" type (with impartible transfer of farms). From an analytical perspective we may remark that a correlation did exist between household structure and form of settlement: in the first and, particularly, the second region the settlements were clearly more agglomerated than in the third region which was dominated by single farms. This is significant in view of our initial question regarding the threat posed by farm divisions to optimal resource combination. In areas of agglomerated settlements, pastures and forests were frequently integrated into the community as collective property and thus excluded from subdivision. On the other hand, individually-owned land parcels such as meadows and fields could be recombined in a multitude of ways. There is no evidence for a general risk to resource combination through such modes of inheritance.[6]

ASPECTS OF STATE-BUILDING

Obsessed by "absolutist" states such as France and Prussia, historical research has long relied on unilinear models of state-building, viewing the progress of centralized power and power claims as the standard measure of the political process in Europe. Modern studies, by contrast, tend to emphasize actual practices and the diversity of state developments (Blockmans and Genet 1993). One leading advocate of such open approaches is Charles Tilly. He suggests that European state-building, in the long run, was a curvilinear process. During the first phase existing structural differences between regions were deepened; the second phase was marked by an international convergence resulting in a host of relatively similar national states. Among the causes for specific regional paths, Tilly lists the fact that earlier steps constrained later ones. Idealized objectives of individual rulers played a limited role in state-building. Innovations had to be negotiated and implemented within the framework of the actual balance of power (Tilly 1992).

In the three alpine regions under consideration, divergent developments were an outstanding feature. In the sixteenth century, a rapid consolidation of territorial institutions set in everywhere; locally, however, this process was shaped by different forces: in Savoy, by the prince; in the Grisons, by the communes and their elites (resulting in centralist and localist structures, respectively); in Carinthia, by the intermediate social force of the nobility. These differences were reflected in a selective and nonsimultaneous constitutional development. Levies and taxes paid

to rulers or the establishment of mapped cadasters are cases in point. In Savoy, the regular state tax dates back to 1561 and the famous *Cadastre Sarde* was established in 1728–1738. In the Grisons, direct cantonal taxation was only introduced in 1856 and, to this day, no universal cadaster exists; on the other hand, most feudal levies were abolished as early as the sixteenth century when the Savoyard "seigneurs" were still firmly in the saddle. *Herrenforderungen* (claims of the lords) proved particularly long-lived in Carinthia. In this Habsburgian Duchy, princely taxes were not levied on an independent basis as in Savoy, but by the rural nobility, a fact which greatly increased the public influence of the manorial system.[7]

The balance of power between princely, noble, and communal forms of organization at the beginning of the modern age gives an important clue for the respective paths of development. Wherever one of the forms clearly prevailed at that time, chances were it would extend its influence and dominate the other forces in the process of state-building. In other words, the political dynamics of the period generated a process of differentiation within and between the regions. A convergence between the three regions only came about in the nineteenth century through the development of large national states. We will now consider some aspects that were crucial for peasant household formation. Among these, the nature of the connections between the more private and the more public domain merits particular attention.

As we have seen, Savoy was one of those alpine landscapes where new urban forms of written and legal culture had come into widespread use since the Middle Ages. The notarial institution was regulated by the sovereign in the thirteenth century, experienced a significant upswing in the late Middle Ages, and was an important social force in the modern age. In the course of state-building, the judicial system underwent an intense professionalization. In the fifteenth century, the dukes appointed new judges for large parts of the country and, in the sixteenth century, the senate, a court for the entire duchy, was institutionalized. In 1700, Savoy counted roughly a thousand *hommes de loi.* University-educated lawyers claimed the higher offices and were often appointed on a permanent basis. More important in terms of numbers were the notaries who—dispersed throughout the country and present even in small places—installed themselves at the crossroads of law and economy, of family and public life, of power, administration, and the local population, often managing to gain considerable influence. As the state of Savoy-Piedmont became more centralized it increasingly integrated the practitioners of the law into public administration (Nicolas 1978, vol. 1, pp. 72–84).

Praxis-oriented family researchers like Albera point out that wills and marriage contracts express a variety of interests reflecting particular circumstances of the parties involved. They contradict legalistic interpretations that consider familial property transfers as mere executions of traditional or written laws (Albera 1995). While these observations are no doubt accurate, I nevertheless think that certain family issues remain obscure unless we include the public order in our considerations. By this I do not mean individual laws so much as the social history of the legal field that we have sketched above. Inasmuch as families and notably their male heads in Savoy used the written form and the help of the notary in property transactions, they aligned themselves with the brokers of a public and increasingly

state-defined authority. Evidently, in doing so, the *chefs de famille* also increased their own authority and decision-making power. An absolutism of wills (or other records) it certainly wasn't, but clearly these documents did carry a weight in the discourse about the future family economy. The scope of decision-making may also have had some bearing on the gendered mode of inheritance. While peasant interests and tactics, then, played a significant part, we must not forget that they did so within a social framework and with the instruments provided by it.

One look at the Grisons where justice remained nonprofessional for much longer makes this very clear. In this localist state, the main requirement for prospective judges was a social position within the commune rather than a juridical qualification. The institution of the public notariate was so undeveloped in most parts of the country that legislation could not rely on it even during the reforms of the nineteenth century. Only the southern territories of the Freestate were influenced by Italian legal culture in the late Middle Ages. The first notaries came from the territories of Como and Milan, since the thirteenth century native scribes and practitioners of law are also on record. In the early modern age, their authority was superseded by the new communal order. In this locally structured state, the independent law profession, particularly its scholarly forms, seems to have been perceived as useless if not downright dangerous and parasitic. Many property transactions within the family were thus handled verbally and without recourse to representatives of public life, which lessened the impact of the state hierarchy on the decision-making process. Inheritance norms were only defined in a general way by the emerging communal legislation.[8]

In Carinthia, the relation between the more private and the more public sphere was different once again. It was embedded in a system of landlordship which, in its turn, was influenced by the politics of the Habsburg princes. After the middle of the sixteenth century, many landlords pursued a strategy aimed at turning property successions within their domain into negotiable deals. As most levies were fixed, landlords could only increase their revenue (or recover possible inflation losses) through a premium known as *Verehrung*, that is, a sum paid by new holders on taking possession of the farm. Especially in periods of high population pressure and large demand, the right to choose the successor, claimed by the landords, was a source of substantial gains. The urbarial records became more precisely worded and supplemented by regularly updated *Ehrungsbücher*. Written inventories of the subjects' chattels in the event of an inheritance became commonplace since landlords had a vested interest in the assets of the successors and levied a fee on the property fallen to ceding and leaving heirs (Dinklage 1966, pp. 99–142; Fresacher 1950–1955, vols. 2 and 3).

One reason for the introduction of these modern control measures was the steadily growing financial needs of the Habsburg princes, which led to new administrative practices and new taxes affecting the entire duchy. Part of the landlords' power rested precisely on the fact that larger tax sums could only be collected through their manors and through their estate organization. This meant that the prince was forced to engage in tough and ritualized negotiations with the nobility, on a case-to-case basis, to justify and impose his tax needs. In the second half of the sixteenth century taxation became permanent. Like other Austrian territories,

Carinthia had to fulfil a certain quota, and within the country quotas were assigned mainly by landlordships. Large-scale and small-scale interests of the prince and the nobility were tightly interwoven in this system. While the prince gained fiscal access to the regional population through the estates, the latter—by virtue of association with the sovereign—increased their authority over their population (Fräss-Ehrfeld 1994).

Much like the prince haggled over taxes with the nobility, the landlords or their stewards haggled with their subjects over the conditions of rural property succession. Through the *Verehrung*—due on taking possession of a property—the succeeding peasant acquired a position, almost a kind of office within the domain. This privileged relation to the lord created a considerable distance between the successor and the excluded family members who had been paid off with chattels and found themselves diminished to a status of near-servants. Unlike in Savoy, the nature of the alliance between the heads of households and the emerging state was public and institutionalized, thus increasing the imbalance of power within the farm. The state reforms of the eighteenth century turned the variable *Verehrung* into a standardized premium and diminished the controlling authority of the landlord. In the years after 1848, properties were released from all obligations to the landlordship; peasants assumed full property rights of the holdings and became citizens of the Austro-Hungarian state. What remained as a regional characteristic was the remarkable power of the head of the household. As late as the second half of the nineteenth century, even working family members—and not only the numerous servants—were officially referred to as *Dienstleute*.[9]

This brings us around to the question of how forms of inheritance and agriculture were connected. What can we say about the thesis that holds agrarian intensity to be an important cause of partible inheritance and for the emergence of a smallholder society? The argument rests on the general premise that pre-industrial agriculture was inelastic and allowed divisions only after an increase in production due to external influences (e.g., the introduction of high-yield cultures such as wine or potatoes) had been accomplished. Based on more realistic assumptions of agricultural potentials (Boserup 1981), however, one could argue that partibility was, in fact, the motor for such intensification processes. Yet this argument, in its turn, needs an important qualification: partible inheritance as an institution was not synonymous with increasing fragmentation of peasant holdings, it was a form of power distribution within the family. For fragmentation to occur, other conditions had to be fulfilled—notably, demographic growth. Thus, if one version rests on questionable economic assumptions, the other one has to be completed by additional assumptions. On the empirical level, the problems with the intensity thesis can be judged by the known distribution patterns around 1900. Agriculture in the Alps by then constituted a mixture of forms with different intensities (see Fig. 1), while the primary modes of inheritance manifested a west-east distribution that extended into the surrounding lowlands.[10]

Equally popular, judging from the literature—and for better reasons, I should say—is the view that agglomerated forms of settlement tended to promote partible inheritance. While the intensity thesis is based on assumptions concerning the potential for division, the settlement thesis rests on conceptual and practical links.

Unlike farmsteads in dispersed settlements, village farms with mixed and parceled fields formed no territorial units whose preservation could be used as an argument in inheritance discourses. After each inheritance, parcels and houses could be recombined without decreasing the size of the farm or creating additional transport difficulties (Mathieu 1992, pp. 66–73). I think this correspondence between settlement and succession gives a clue for the entire alpine area if we place it in a historical perspective: state-building with its various side-effects freed the rules of succession from local tradition and allowed them to become an autonomous agent in the evolution of settlements. In Carinthia, for instance, the farm system described earlier might never have come about if the landlords in their modernization phase had encountered village structures. Once the farms were firmly under control of the new system of levies and taxes, however, the landlords exercised considerable influence on subsequent developments.[11]

CONCLUSIONS

Of the two contexts—ecological, the one, and hierarchical-social, the other—which, according to Eric R. Wolf, hold the key to understanding differences in family structures, the latter is far more important. This holds true even in the Alps where Wolf and other authors underline the importance of environmental factors. Environmental factors require a precise localization, they have played a changing role in the historical process. None of the theses that we have reviewed is borne out by our data from the alpine area between the sixteenth and the nineteenth century. Ecologically-reasoned connections between peasant households and cattle raising, resource combination and agricultural intensity remain inconclusive.

Sociopolitical approaches appear more efficient. Looking at three regions—one each from the west, the center, and the east of the alpine arc—we have shown that accelerated state-building since the sixteenth century has lead to a process of differentiation. The connections between the more public and the more private domain have each assumed specific forms and influenced domestic relations. Different configurations on the lower and higher levels of society left their mark on regional paths of development. Clearly then, "families have to be understood within a field of power" (Sabean 1990, p. 427).

NOTES

1. This article is based on a larger study: Mathieu (1998), in particular, chapters 6–8. It was made possible by a grant from the Swiss National Science Foundation.

2. I have abbreviated the description of the ideal types; Albera (1995) also includes elements of habitat, household delimitation, social difference, etc.

3. Explanation of map symbols (after Martonne 1926, pp. 154–166). 1: Cattle raising, meadows, supplemented by cereals and potatoes. 2: Specializing in cattle raising, meadows. 3: Large forests figuring prominently in the rural economy. 4: Mixed economy with important chestnut culture; wine, maize; higher population density. 5 and 8: Sheep predominance south of line (8), especially marked in the cereal-growing region (5). 6 and 7: Marked agricultural variety with maize and other cultures in low-lying river valleys; high population density; significant viticulture in regions (6), receding or nonexistent in regions (7).

4. In the Grisons, kinship relations did play an important role, possibly even increasing in the long term, but they followed an open, bilateral conception.

5. Regarding the categories in Table 2 see Meyer (1993, pp. 157–177) for SV and IM; Held (1982, pp. 227–254) for RA; Mitterauer (1986, pp. 242–244) for SW; *Unterschichtenindex* (index of lower classes) with same definition as in Table 2 but with diverging values, partly because his numbers in several parishes refer to partial populations only.

6. Partible inheritance is also explained in ecological terms by some authors because it led to a physical scattering of fields and thus contributed to risk reduction—to what extent this aspect actually determined peasant decision-making processes remains unclear; see, for instance, Netting (1981, p. 17), a study on an Swiss mountain village that contains several "ecosystematic fallacies" (as the author later called it) but has been useful in promoting discussion (Albera 1995; Viazzo 1989).

7. Standard works for the three regions are Devos and Grosperrin (1985); *Handbuch der Bündner Geschichte* (2000); Fräss-Ehrfeld (1994); for a survey with additional literature see Mathieu (1998, ch. 7).

8. As mentioned earlier, Albera (1995) couples the "agnatic" ideal type with an open and migration-oriented economy; between Savoy and the Grisons, however, there existed no basic differences in this respect; the estimated rates of migration were on the same order.

9. See population census of 1869: *Bevölkerung und Viehstand der im Reichsrathe vertretenen Königreiche und Länder, dann der Militärgränze. Nach der Zählung vom 31. December 1869, hg. von der k.k. Statistischen Central-Commission* (6 Hefte), Vienna 1871–1872.

10. According to investigations dating from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the areas marked by a predominance of impartible inheritance roughly coincide with what were then regions dominated by larger-scale farms (Fig. 2); both extended north toward the Bavarian and Upper-Austrian area of the Danube.

11. Some authors emphasize that impartible inheritance was enforced by strong landlords. It seems to me that functional assumptions about the connections between specific power structures and specific family structures are less convincing than the assumption of chronological links: to a considerable extent, development depended on what configurations were actually dominant on the lower and higher levels of society in the process of state-building.

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