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William Kavanagh. *Villagers of the Sierra de Gredos: Transhumant Cattle-Raisers in Central Spain.* Providence, R.I.: Berg Publishers, 1994. xxiv + 149 pp. $44.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-85496-320-1.

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William Kavanagh's ethnography of La Nava de San Miguel documents what he calls the "end of an era," as economic, social, and political forces in contemporary Spain encroach on and irrevocably alter "traditional" village life. This work, however, reads as an almost timeless characterization of a seemingly homogeneous peasant community that, in spite of its relations with the outside world, seems largely self-contained and relatively unaffected by the world beyond.

The chronology of Kavanagh's research, conducted over sixteen years from 1976 to 1992, provides an important context in which to interpret the account, because its long duration both adds to and complicates the description of village life. Kavanagh conducted field research during summer vacations and holidays and on weekends because of teaching obligations in Madrid where he resides. He completed writing the bulk of the ethnography in 1985, the year he uses to indicate the "ethnographic present," although research continued. In 1992 when he completed the manuscript for publication, he decided to add an Epilogue that summarizes changes since 1985 rather than to rewrite the work to integrate new information and his more recent perspective. As a result of these different time frames and writing strategies, the research often appears to lie somewhere in between salvage ethnography and a history of change in a peasant village.

Kavanagh initially poses the question of how "such a tiny, apparently isolated community, which one would have thought should show the worst effects of the massive abandonment of the land which has been a constant in Spain for the past thirty years or more, should appear so full of life..." (p. ix). He focuses his response on the cooperative organization of economic activities and social relations and on community values that emphasize mutual assistance. He divides his account into four chapters, describing the physical setting, village institutions, transhumance, and ritual and symbolic dimensions of village life, as well as relations with the world beyond.

La Nava de San Miguel is located high in the Sierra de Gredos, which lie at the southern edge of the province of Avila, adjacent to Extremadura. Although politically the village belongs to Avila, villagers have recurring and intensely significant relations with Extremadura, which they conceive of as an "earthly paradise." One of the major factors contributing to these relations seems to be the ecological extremes on different sides of the mountain range. Winters in the Sierra are long, cold, and snowy, and summers are short; this cold climate typifies the northern slopes, while the south side enjoys an early and warm spring. The short growing season in La Nava de San Miguel permits villagers to grow only

limited subsistence crops, but their collectively owned mountain pastures enable them to focus their primary economic emphasis on raising goats and cattle and, in the past, sheep. Because of the long, cold winters, however, villagers seek out the early spring pastures of Extremadura on which to graze their cattle. Through ties established with the owners of latifundist estates, they engage in transhumance until late June, when pastures are available at home. These relations of ecology and economy inform the cognitive and symbolic characterizations with which the inhabitants of La Nava de San Miguel characterize their community in contrast with Extremadura, which they idealize.

One of the reasons for the apparent timeless quality of the ethnography may be Kavanagh's emphasis on the social structural components that integrated the population of La Nava de San Miguel into a cohesive cooperating unit in 1985. Some 131 persons distributed in thirty-seven houses constituted the total permanent resident population; twenty-two of these households consisted of nuclear families, while fifteen contained empty-nesters, stem families, and unmarried or widowed individuals and pairs (often siblings). Participation in village institutions centered around utilizing mountain pastures held in common and cooperative rotation of significant economic tasks. Residents of La Nava de San Miguel acquire rights to the Sierra de Socios through birth or marriage; the Junta de la Sierra, consisting of four elected residents who make decisions by consensus, is responsible for overseeing and collecting fees for pasturing animals owned by villagers in the Sierra. Tending animals, however, is governed by another system.

Until 1971 villagers owned sheep, goats, and cattle, but most households had gotten rid of their sheep because they had become unprofitable when wool prices fell. Kavanagh uses the example of the goats to illustrate the village's cooperative institutions. The villagers' 360 goats were divided into two flocks during the summer; some 300 of them were sent to graze in the Sierra, and 60 "coffee goats" were kept near the village for milk. These coffee goats were pastured each day by resident males who alternated taking turns in the "torno," a cyclical system of collective labor that begins with houses at the top of the village and ends at the bottom, returning to the top again. Similar systems of the "torno" are used to organize four other village institutions–irrigating gardens, communal work, pasturing the sierra goats, and tending cattle kept in common.

Kavanagh notes that until the 1930s the goatherd and water guard were specialist occupations, each of which employed a man year round; thereafter, these occupations were replaced by the "torno," in a kind of modern adaptation of a traditional principle of village cooperation, because no one was willing to do the work for the minimal salary offered. Kavanagh argues that the "torno" and other expressions of mutual assistance are not only customary practices but constitute the village ideal. Villagers speak of friendship and attempt to "demonetize" aid when rendering mutual assistance, and they strive to treat everyone equally by adjusting individual contributions in collective enterprises to the proportion of participation.

In spite of the communitarian strengths of village life in La Nava de San Miguel, residents characterized the local environment as cold, dark, and lacking in fertility; they contrast it with the qualities of warm climate and abundant vegetation of nearby Extremadura, where the men pasture their cattle each February. Transhumance involves individual men and groups from La Nava and other communities in contracts with estate owners established independently of village institutions; the cattle are cooperatively tended by the contracting group, allowing men to alternate in spending time in La Nava pursuing other economic interests. Nevertheless, on the first night out and the last night on the return trip, all the men accompany the cattle on foot as a way of celebrating their freedom from village life and the control of women. Kavanagh attributes villagers' pursuit of the greater specialization in cattle raising to the availability of Extremadura pastures and portrays it as a rational preference for the lower labor investment required to raise cattle compared to goats and sheep, although the latter eat anything and a buyer is almost always guaranteed. In addition, the villagers seem to prefer cattle, considering them more noble. Kavanagh speculates that raising cattle at least provides a valid reason for villagers to travel to Extremadura each year–to escape–which the other animals do not.

Kavanagh's descriptions of other village institutions such as the feast day of St. Michael and wedding celebrations indicate a reduction in overall ritual elaboration, which supports his contention that village life has been changing, losing its "traditions," if ever so slowly. Although villagers do not read newspapers, some younger people are beginning to watch television and to become aware of the world outside. Kavanagh also describes the influx of tourists, who have begun introducing villagers to more cosmopolitan but shocking behaviors (nudity, for example).

Kavanagh argues that the isolation of La Nava has begun to break down, but it is also clear that not all villagers have had the same level of familiarity with life beyond the local community. A kind of "sexual geography" scheme, associating women with home and village, men and women with areas immediately surrounding the town, and men with the local bar, the Sierra, and Extremadura, clearly reveals these differences. Yet Kavanagh has an annoying practice of referring to men as "villagers," especially when discussing cattle or transhumance (e.g., p. 75), but women seem to be "women." In fact, Kavanagh often generalizes for the entire community with "villagers say…" or "villagers consider…," presenting an overly homogeneous portrait of village life. One wonders if Kavanagh's exclusion of women from his category of "villagers" might also extend to other categories reflecting generational or wealth differences. Indeed, Kavanagh's tendency to generalize may stem from his emphasis on what appeared in 1985 to be the communitarian strengths of La Nava, but it also tends to mask the variability and other complexities that would better explain changes while also presenting the village in a less monolithic form.

Kavanagh's efforts to integrate and make sense of changes in La Nava de San Miguel since 1985 appear in his Epilogue. This brief chapter reiterates themes introduced earlier but casts their interpretation in a slightly different light, taking advantage of the additional seven years of research to understand the long-term implications of the villagers' earlier decisions. Spain's entry into the European Community, anticipated as a great economic advantage, has in fact brought more competition and lower prices for cattle since 1989. The specialization in raising cattle has brought economic worries to La Nava, and the increasing monetization of the economy has contributed to the decline of egalitarian ideals and practices of mutual assistance. Individuals have purchased equipment, obviating the need for cooperative labor and shifting more work to wage labor arrangements.

Further, because of the increased emigration of young people, families cannot be assured of an heir to participate in the "obligatory" cooperative relations of the "torno," so it too has been dropped. Kavanagh notes that the participation in cooperative institutions in the past was not a type of involvement that would predispose villagers to participate in a modern cooperative association–one that constrains the economic autonomy of the household. Thus, many people are ready to leave La Nava to seek a life elsewhere; others may be ready to move back at retirement, along with the increasing numbers of outside visitors. A move to declare the Sierra a national park to preserve it may ultimately undo some villagers' plans to sell a bit of the "worthless meadows" for housing developments and to retire rich somewhere else.

Anthropologists working in Europe have made increasing use of historic archives such as census and church records to reconstruct the past life of the communities they study, but Kavanagh uses historic materials largely to set the context for economic and political institutions such as the Sierra de Socios and relations with larger cities. On the other hand, Kavanagh's own history of involvement with La Nava provides a valuable perspective from which he is able to explain in some detail the logic of local decisions and collective values, and the cumulative effects of change upon them. While anthropologists have sometimes included materials from return visits in subsequent publications of an original work, or written an original monograph after a subsequent restudy of a community, this type of long-term and continuing research is less common and harder to write about because change is continuous. Kavanagh's work is, however, important because it provides a time dimension often missing in ethnography, and it can serve as a reminder of the hazards of generalizing based on shorter stays. It is a different model of research, but one not available to everyone.

In addition, Kavanagh's ethnography is largely a descriptive one. Although he cites much of the relevant literature on Iberian ethnography, he does not choose any particular issue to problematize and explore with theoretical rigor. Rather, this is a descriptive monograph whose appeal may be limited to specialists working in Iberian communities, but it would also serve well as reading for students in courses on European cultures or changing peasant communities. Moreover, it is a valuable record for understanding the rapid changes in Iberian or European peasant cultures during the last twenty-five years.

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