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Peer reviewed

The Social World of the Abbey of Cava, c. 1020-1300. _By G.A. Loud.

(Woodbridge: Boydell Press. 2021. Pp. xxxiii, 456. \$135. ISBN: 9781783276325.)

This is an important and extremely valuable book. It is also the generous gift of a senior scholar in southern Italian medieval history to a younger generation of historians in this field and to those who will come after them. In addition to providing an updated history of this eleventh-century foundation and the monastic congregation it inspired, Loud's *Social World of the Abbey of Cava* contributes key research tools, bibliography, and archival citations to inspire and enable future studies.

The first third of the monograph traces the origins and growth of Cava from an encampment of hermits just north of Salerno in the 1020s to a reforming monastic congregation of over a hundred dependent abbeys across southern Italy. This section documents the transformative impact of the patronage of the Norman conquerors of the south and the key role that purchases of property by the monks played in building Cava's prodigious patrimony. The abbacy of Peter I (1079-1123) is highlighted in these developments. Part I concludes in an important and judicious appraisal of the problem of forgery in the defense of this patrimony that should interest historians of monasticism beyond southern Italy.

The rest of the book places the economic development of the monastery in its environmental, social, and political contexts arguing persuasively that Cava played a highly significant role not only in the region's agriculture but also in its

dynamic market economy. Loud emphasizes the abbey's relations with its peasant cultivators and demonstrates some upward social mobility through a detailed analysis of the fortunes of two families. He also reconstructs the monastic congregation's administrative systems, its officials, and its practices across the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, arguing that its abbot closely supervised Cava's many dependencies. Loud's nuanced treatment of the abbey's territorial lordship—examining the immunity its holdings enjoyed, the extent of its exercise of justice, and its relations with vassals—is especially valuable, particularly in the contrasts drawn with Montecassino's lordship. While some readers may lament the very limited attention given to the monastery's religious life, Loud rightly emphasizes the social and economic structures that made that life possible for an elite minority. Cava's property management—particularly the transition from renders in kind to monetary rents as well as the importance of labor services into the thirteenth century—bears on the more significant historical problem of the origins of modern southern Italy's under-development. On this issue, Loud's assessment of the impact of the papacy's mobilization of the Angevins against Frederick II's heirs, compounded by the warfare following the 1282 Sicilian revolt, provides additional evidence that southern Italy's economy remained vibrant and its peasant communities dynamic into the late thirteenth century.

The research tools provided in this volume, moreover, constitute significant contributions to medieval Italian history. The book includes a concise

description of the organization of Cava's archive, our richest surviving collection of medieval documents in southern Italy. It also provides overviews of the region's dating conventions and its medieval currencies, weights, and measures; a list of Cava's abbots and their dates; seven detailed maps; and the genealogies of eight families that figure prominently in the abbey's social world. An appendix also presents data (with archival citations) on Cava's purchases and expenditures. Additionally, the volume's annotation guides the reader to the most important scholarship on Cava, and on monasticism in the south more generally, and provides numerous citations to individual documents using the archive's present numeration scheme.

Other contributions are the author's salutary critical readings of *The Lives of the First Four Abbots of Cava*, a work all too frequently invoked uncritically. Loud also leverages his knowledge of other institutions and regions in southern Italy to contextualize developments at Cava in particular, and in the Salerno region more generally. The contrasts he draws between developments at Cava and at Montecassino are especially valuable, as are those he makes between environmental and agricultural conditions in the Salerno region and those in Apulia.

Throughout, the author's disciplined presentation of developments and the evidence buttressing them is clear and accessible. The detailed descriptions of individual transactions may not beguile every reader, but those who enjoy notarial documents will appreciate Loud's discussions of fish traps, the capture

and raising of edible pigeons, the use of buffalos, different chestnut cultivars, and lively reports of the threats uttered in anger against the abbot by disgruntled dependents. The author's inclusion of the Latin terms used in these south Italian documents to describe types of land and leases, agricultural products, personal statuses, and offices is also immensely helpful to those more familiar with other regions of Italy and Europe.

In the introduction, Loud characterizes his book as a "preliminary and indicative, rather than definitive, study" (9). The reader should keep this in mind. When mounting his interpretations, Loud's assertions—such as, "there is no doubt that, like Cluny, the Cava congregation was centralised and very much under the direct control of the abbot" (241)— could be understood as definitive. Such broad statements should, rather, be understood as invitations to debate—and Loud has provided the historian willing to take up the challenge numerous starting places in his annotation. One can only hope that many historians will engage and test his interpretations. In this important volume, Loud has unquestionably made an enormous contribution to the abbey's history and to the future development of historical research on medieval southern Italy.

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