

Book Reviews

Ruth Mostern, *“Dividing the Realm in Order to Govern”: The Spatial Organization of the Song State (960–1276 CE)*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2011. Pp. 396. \$49.95 (ISBN 978-0-674-05602-2).

doi:10.1017/S0738248013000126

By exploring the “spatial organization” of China’s Song Dynasty, Mostern’s new monograph adds important twists to the voluminous scholarship on local administration in Imperial China. First, whereas scholars typically treat the provincial bureaucracy as a monolithic whole, Mostern distinguishes between “distinct fiscal and military geographies” (20). She can distinguish between the two because—during the Song Dynasty—prefectures oversaw military units, while their subordinate counties supervised revenue extraction. Second, although the county-to-population ratio has long been deemed a measure of the state’s ability to influence local society, Mostern argues that the rate of jurisdictional changes more closely reflects state power. The Chinese historical record contains rich data tracing the abolition, creation, and redistribution of counties and prefectures over time. Finally, Mostern’s work constitutes one of the first large-scale applications of geographic information system (GIS) technology to the study of Middle Period China. Through the use of GIS—which allows researchers to develop maps linked to a database—the author has provided abundant cartographic evidence in support of her model of China’s spatial transformation. She should be commended for providing free access to much of her raw data in the form of the downloadable “Digital Gazetteer of the Song Dynasty.” Mostern’s data supersedes version 4 of China Historical GIS in its coverage of North China during the Song Dynasty.

After a discussion of methodology (Chapter 1) and an overview of the organization of Song local administration (Chapter 2), Chapter 3 provides a useful discussion of how administrative territory was conceptualized. Mostern makes the important observation that Chinese political culture expected the well-governed state to undertake jurisdictional adjustments in response to changing local conditions. For anyone interested in Song era map-making, Mostern’s overview of cartographic and textual methods for describing and defining territory is a must read. Chapters 4–6 then survey three stages

in the development of Song local administration. The first stage (Chapter 4) involved the extensive jurisdictional reorganization spanning the half century after the founding of the dynasty. After decades of political disunity, an important goal involved recreating a “standardized imperial geography” (131). This process included dismantling the military infrastructure of the pre-Song regimes, abolishing vast numbers of jurisdictions in poorly populated parts of the south, and—to satisfy both military and fiscal priorities—establishing more prefectures along the frontiers and more counties in the wealthy southeast.

In the second stage (Chapter 5), jurisdictional reorganization became the tool of the important eleventh century reformers Fan Zhongyan and Wang Anshi. Both men sought to eliminate unnecessary jurisdictions in order to enhance the efficiency of government and improve the empire’s fiscal health. In addition, under Wang Anshi—ever skeptical of the reliability and trustworthiness of local officials—the surveillance capacity of the central government was enhanced by expanding a system of supraprefectural circuits. The final stage (Chapter 6) began after the Song court fled south in the wake of the Jurchen invasion of North China in the 1120s. During the warfare prior to the Song–Jurchen treaty of 1142, the Song regime was forced to deal with the loss of territory, the annihilation of frontier populations, and much higher population densities following the influx of northern refugees. By contrast, there was far less jurisdictional reorganization after the mid-twelfth century, as the state took a less active role in local society, reflecting the “localist” turn described by Robert Hymes and others. Mostern provides numerous examples of more assertive local elites stymying attempts by the state to reorganize local administration. Finally, according to Mostern, the “end of the Middle Period spatial cycle” came with the fall of the Song to the Mongols in the 1270s, as the Mongol Yuan dynasty employed a fundamentally different approach to managing its empire.

Some readers will be left with lingering questions. For example, Mostern alludes only briefly to the “haltered and bridled” jurisdictions on the frontier. To what extent did these jurisdictions adhere to administrative patterns prevalent elsewhere in the empire? Mostern also makes numerous intriguing assertions about cartography: “the border with Western Xia was . . . periodically refined . . . through the exchange of maps and the creation of maps on the Song side” (156); “dueling maps, map guides, and gazetteers characterized all of these discussions” (167). She does not, however, provide footnotes to support these tantalizing claims. Finally, some scholars may wonder to what extent the “growing field” of “spatial history” (8) does more than merely reiterate well-established concepts. Especially when dealing with strategies of bureaucratic restructuring applied uniformly empire-wide (e.g., the abolition of pre-Song military provinces and the creation of provincial circuits), Mostern does not stray in fundamental ways from methodologies used decades earlier by Wang Gungwu, Winston Lo, and others (although she does apply

their methodologies to a broader sweep of time). More innovative is Mostern's study of regional variations, whereby she exploits GIS-generated maps to show how Song centralization followed different patterns in different parts of the empire. Overall, this book is an important contribution to the field, providing a good account of the role of jurisdictional change in Song governance.

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Ruth Mazo Karras, *Unmarriages: Women, Men, and Sexual Unions in the Middle Ages*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012. Pp. 304. \$49.95 (ISBN 978-0-812-24420-5).
doi:10.1017/S0738248013000138

In *Unmarriages*, Karras challenges the modern notion that “traditional marriage” was the only acceptable sexual relationship between a man and a woman, and the only alternative to a life of solitude in the Middle Ages. The purpose of the study is to uncover the many other variations of opposite-sex unions that existed outside of a church-sanctioned, legally recognized marriage in medieval Europe. Chronologically and geographically, the investigation could not be wider in scope as it dips back into the legacy of ancient Rome up to the Protestant Reformation, and spans from Iberia to Scandinavia. This is an impressive and complex undertaking; however, I think it was a necessary one, because the question at hand is so pertinent in today's society. In effect, Karras has produced a work that liberates the Middle Ages from the misconception that the premodern world was a simpler, and by extension, better, era for marriage.

The introduction of the book offers an extremely helpful analysis of the traditions (Biblical, Roman, and Germanic) that shaped the concepts of Western marriage, and it demonstrates that the Middle Ages never inherited a clear-cut definition from its ancestors. Instead, all of these influences were fairly ambiguous or restrictive in their terminology, rituals, and law codes. From there, the discussion falls into a series of thematic chapters. Chapter 1 addresses the ways in which the Catholic Church attempted to assert its authority over marriage. Here we gain some sense of a historical narrative, in that Karras traces the evolution of the church's policies toward marriage from late antiquity through to the twelfth century; however, much of her attention is placed on specific cases of marital disputes that required the involvement of the clergy. This latter portion includes recognizable figures such as Abelard and Heloise and Philip Augustus and Ingeborg of Denmark. Chapter 2 explores groups of men and women who could not legally marry; what she calls “unequal unions”