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Timothy Jenkins, *The Life of Property: House, Family and Inheritance in Béarn, South-West France*. New York, NY: Berghahn Books, 2010. ix + 181 pp. Bibliography and index. \$60.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-1-84545-667-2.

Review by Daniel Ringrose, Minot State University.

In this inventive interdisciplinary work, Timothy Jenkins studies the cultural function of property transmission in shaping rural identity in southwestern France. The object of his study is a question that has been asked by scholars since at least the mid-nineteenth century: what will become of the rural countryside in the face of urban modernity? Jenkins's study focuses on the evolution and definition of the Pyrenean family in Béarn, a region he selected for its vibrant tradition of regionalism and its well-preserved local dialect. While Jenkins describes the initial motivation for his project as an ethnographic study of persistent local languages, the resulting study offers the reader far richer explication of how rural families shaped and continue to shape their place in a modern commercial and industrial state.

Extensive fieldwork, interviews, and archival study of property and notarial records lie at the heart of *The Life of Property*, which studies the form, persistence, and changing fortunes of agricultural 'houses' in a Pyrenean village across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Jenkins's work examines the social and political position of families in Béarn, placing particular emphasis on how property was transmitted and its effects on family structure. Across the seven chapters of this tightly argued and theoretically informed volume, Jenkins develops the argument that Béarn farm families remained committed to, and were shaped by, inheritance and marriage practices that ensured preservation of farm property across generations by willing it to a single heir. Marriage strategies of various sorts are hardly a new subject of study, but Jenkins's approach recasts the institution of property or, the 'house,' in Béarn as a family structure and cultural priority that proved flexible and adaptable well into the twentieth century.

Jenkins begins *The Life of Property* with an examination of Frédéric Le play's "discovery" of the Pyrenean family. Jenkins draws on Le Play's work to show how the tradition of transmission of property to one inheritor in the next generation created a single family authority responsible for the 'house,' a concept that included "the family property—not only the house, the land and its wealth, but also such less tangible goods as authority, reputation and status..." (p. 8). As he walks the reader through Le Play's study of families in the Hautes-Pyrénées, Jenkins demonstrates that the connection Le Play drew between orderly transmission of property (undivided family land) and preservation of social structure and authority in the Béarn also came to inform Le Play's national efforts at social reform. In short, Le Play argued that the Civil Code's introduction of an inheritance divided evenly among siblings threatened the stability of rural families and would inevitably cause their decline, a social malady Le Play claimed in his national writings would also extend to workers and their families. Jenkins highlights the enduring influence of Le Play's classification of family types and emphasis on family strategies, but disagrees with Le Play's dire prognosis for rural families, arguing instead in subsequent chapters for a more nuanced and flexible understanding of the mode of property transmission practiced in Béarn.

Chapter two examines regional legal texts and practices from the third to the fourteenth centuries to present customary and written law related to property transmission as layered and flexible, allowing the concept of the 'house' to emerge as a family strategy that passed on land undivided to one heir while allowing dowry rights to remain with the non-heir in a marriage partnership. Marriage triggered selection of the heir and ensured the integrity of house lands. Jenkins is admittedly selective in his chronological tracing of the evolution of these practices, but his intent appears less to demonstrate continuity across this vast span of time than to show that such practices survived after the introduction of the Civil Code, persisted throughout the 1940s, and were still present in the late twentieth century.

Chapter three explores this last era in detail, using a focused study of land registers, census and civil records, and fieldwork in one Béarn village to trace stable houses and those that dissolved or were reconfigured through the 1980s. Jenkins's research on sixty houses reveals farm families that demonstrated remarkable flexibility in seeking to preserve landholdings at the same time as siblings established non-agricultural careers. He shows how family members acted to protect 'house' interests, even as those who did not inherit land sought other pursuits. Jenkins's examples reveal deliberate efforts to compensate siblings who did not inherit land with other comparable goods or resources that might permit schooling, professional careers or non-agricultural enterprises. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the supposed imminent decline of the rural countryside. Here Jenkins takes issue with Le Play, Pierre Bourdieu, and Eugen Weber, among others, for predicting rural society's decay or for simplifying its transformation. In response, Jenkins echoes Le Play's rhetorical question, "where do the citizens for modernity come from?" (p. 63), but his optimistic answer, argued convincingly, is that the active choices of family members to maintain established land transmission patterns signal a rural population acting to sustain agriculture as a viable profession within a modern society. This is predominantly true of the larger, more affluent houses, in which the emphasis on preserving land integrity shaped the agricultural and non-agricultural choices and careers of their family members.

Larger houses in Jenkins's study also engaged extensively in local and regional politics, the focus of chapter four. Although commercial and suburban expansion around Pau led to land purchases for non-agricultural growth, Jenkins shows that very little of the land came from failed large farms. Rather, large houses protected their domestic interests by seeking elected office and using that influence to design farm-friendly zoning and land-use policies. Jenkins finds that medium- and large-sized farms produced leaders with political influence. This underscores his larger argument that rural farmers played an active role in shaping their version of modernity by mapping the cultural values of the house onto regional society. While this does not appear to have been the case for the smaller houses, his overall findings offer a nuanced analysis that includes peasants as actors shaping a future alongside and in conjunction with, rather than in opposition to, modern commercial activity. This finding has significant implications for understanding contemporary rural politics, particularly since in Béarn there is evidence that domestic cultural ideals that protect the house extend to and shape regional identity and potentially, national policy. On this last point Jenkins is rightfully careful to note the limitations of an anthropological study designed to highlight patterns, but he suggests the potential for the Pyrenean house and regional politics to influence national and EU social policies.

Jenkins closes the book with two detailed case studies. Chapter five offers an analysis of a little-known Béarnais novel by Simin Palay. Written in Béarnais Gascon, the novel presents a sketch of Béarn culture that Jenkins reads as "an expression of local particularity" rather than as the product of an external, metropolitan viewer (p. 125). The novel explores the collapse of a noble family and by extension the house associated with it. As such, its author incorporates all the major themes Jenkins identifies in chapters three and four. These include protection of farm property, marriage strategies, a mutual family commitment to preserving the house, anxieties about loss of land and lineage, and a strong sense of regional identity. Literary texts offer certain analytic challenges, but Jenkins's ethnographic reading is nuanced and exposes the extent to which the life and culture of property were embedded in Béarn society when this novel appeared in the early twentieth century.

Chapter six takes as its case study a close reading of Pierre Bourdieu's fieldwork and writings on Béarn culture, a theme Bourdieu returned to multiple times during his career. Jenkins meticulously traces the evolution of Bourdieu's thinking on concepts that underpin the particularities of Béarn families: actors as shaped by collective interests of the house, transmission of property, authority and gender relations, dowry and avoidance of *partage*, marriage strategies, and differences between large and small houses. In addition, and perhaps more significant, Jenkins identifies these concepts as the precursors to some of Bourdieu's most influential contributions to the sociological canon: "habitus, strategy and interest, field and symbolic capital" (p. 136). Given the geographic and cultural focus of *The Life of Property*, the inclusion of this final case study is hardly surprising, although it clearly could stand alone as a separate article on the basis of its analytical and theoretical complexity.

Overall, Timothy Jenkins's *The Life of Property* offers an approach to the study of rural culture that historians will find rewarding and provocative and that anthropologists and sociologists will find familiar. Although Jenkins's reliance on select illustrative examples will likely leave social historians wishing for more details on the families studied in chapters three and four, he is careful to acknowledge the limits and scope of this elegant study. As a study of Béarn, this book highlights the centrality of property and inheritance strategies to its distinctive regional identity. The book's structure as an ethnographic study framed by theoretical explorations into Le Play and Bourdieu creates a commendably clear presentation of Jenkins's argument that the persistence of patterns of property transmission created opportunities for agricultural families to chart their own course in contemporary society. In a national context, Jenkins's work theorizes and argues for a complex understanding of the decisions and actions taken as local actors contributed to creation of the modern nation.

To conclude, this book is marked by at least three distinctive features. Jenkins ably demonstrates that property, when thought of as the collective house encompassing family and land interests, has its own distinctive life. Whether one views the life of property as an independent historical actor or as bounding the choices of family members, it stands as a collective force that shaped family and regional identity. In this respect, it bears a striking similarity to the "lives", actions, or bounding effects that environmental historians attribute to rivers and other environmental features. Second, Jenkins's work articulates a rich theoretical framework that informs the study of regional identity and the place and motivations of rural actors in provincial modernization. It is intriguing to consider how this approach might be applied to other distinctive regions of France. Finally, this project's ethnographic focus on families in late twentieth-century Béarn places it at the forefront of a growing number of historical studies of France in that period. As these works are increasingly interdisciplinary in nature, Timothy Jenkins's *The Life of Property* offers a clear model that scholars can appreciate.

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