

***The Pyrenees in the Modern Era: Reinventions of a Landscape, 1775–2012* (London, Bloomsbury Academic, 2018). By Martyn Lyons. 165 x 234 x 17.53mm. ix + 267pp. 3 b/w maps. ISBN 9781350024793. Price: £85.00 hardback; £91.50 eBook.**

Landscape, as W.G. Hoskins once noted, is our ‘richest historical record’. Much can be gained from reading it if we ‘know how to read it aright’. Such reading requires both fieldwork and deskwork. It demands, in other words, combining approaches associated with environmental history, on the one hand, and social and cultural history, on the other.

Few landscape histories keep an equal footing on both sides of this divide. Most prioritise either the study of landscape itself or the study of the human conventions that shape the identities landscapes are made to fulfil. Martyn Lyons’s *The Pyrenees in the Modern Era* deals with both subjects but emphasises the latter.

As the subtitle of Lyons’s book suggests, his purpose is to document how the Pyrenees ‘have continually been reinvented’ over the course of the modern era (p. 193). We may be inclined to think of mountains as immobile. But as Lyons avers, ‘human perceptions’ of the world’s uplands have evolved throughout history, and the Pyrenees provide a ‘significant case study’ for understanding this process (p. 1).

Lyons’s focus in this context is mostly on outsiders. Occasionally, he considers the perspectives and experiences of the communities who make the Pyrenees their home. But his history is chiefly concerned with the international community of travellers and tourists who have tried to make sense of the mountains and their inhabitants. The bulk of Lyons’s sources are French, but attention is also given to Spanish commentators as well as to North Americans, Britons and other Western Europeans. The result is a colourful history that reflects both the ‘cultural and linguistic diversity’ of the Pyrenees and the various roles that the mountains have played in the ‘European geographical imaginary’ (p. 1).

The twelve chapters of Lyons’s book address successive phases in this history. Lyons does not subdivide these chapters into sections, but his introductory chapter indicates that they can be regarded as forming four groups.

The first group, which includes chapters two through five, considers the changing ways visitors envisioned and encountered the Pyrenees during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Here, Lyons mainly focuses on documenting how the scientific travellers of the Enlightenment, whose ‘self-appointed task was to analyse geological formations’ (p. 23), were succeeded by the sentimental tourists and travel writers, whose ‘romantic contemplation of the landscape’ helped to stimulate the rise of mass tourism in the region during the railway age (p. 47).

Lyons’s second chapter group, which comprises chapters six and seven, builds on this consideration of tourism by delving into the ‘Grande Époque’ of mountaineering and cycling in the Pyrenees, respectively. Of particular interest in this context is Lyons’s discussion of the incorporation of the mountains as part of the of the Tour de France in 1910 and of the way such competitions transformed the mountains into an arena for patriotically charged forms of ‘masculine competition’ (p. 92).

In his eighth and ninth chapters, Lyons turns to the complex social and political history of the Pyrenees. In chapter eight, he surveys the ethnic and linguistic landscape of the mountains, noting how the historic isolation of many Pyrenean communities ‘reinforced their independence’ both ‘from the centralizing monarchies’ of Spain and France as well as ‘from each other’ (p. 128). In chapter nine, Lyons extends this discussion of the Pyrenees’ transnational geography by examining the role that the mountains played as passageways for dissidents and refugees during the Spanish Civil War and WWII.

In the final three chapters of the book, Lyons adopts a more anthropological focus to reflect on the changes and challenges that have defined contemporary views of the Pyrenees. Here, Lyons draws attention to topics including both the influence of scholars such as Le Roy-Ladurie on the perception of Pyrenean village society and the conflicts between the mountains’ agro-pastoral communities and the conservationists who view the Pyrenees as a ‘mountain wilderness’ in need of protection (p. 200).

Although Lyons dedicates more attention to social and cultural history than environmental history, his study does afford several insights into the way human interactions with the Pyrenees have affected the mountains. These interactions range from deforestation to pollution to recent efforts to

bolster the mountains' once-depleted bear population. Lyons's treatment of these topics adds additional depth to his book, and this reviewer would have welcomed more engagement with these sorts of issues. This remark notwithstanding, *The Pyrenees in the Modern Era* is a valuable book. It is readable and informative, and it provides an accessible history in English of one Europe's most wonderous landscapes.

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