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Transhumant pastoralism and demographic development in the Italian pre-Alps: Verona and the low Lessinia in the 12-14th centuries

The aim of this paper is to expose the first results of a research concerning transhumant pastoralism between the Twelfth and the Fourteenth centuries in the valley of Illasi, in the lower Lessinia (Verona).

Historiography and social sciences have already demonstrated that the social group of shepherds has often been made an object of distrust and transfer by popular and urban dominant culture. The main cause of this attitude seems to be the seasonal nomadism, a habit that radically opposes the modern idea of a merely settled civilisation.

Very interesting details of their material culture (as seasonal migrations, boundary practices and exploitation of communal properties) emerged from a careful perusal of unpublished documentation of the Vatican Archives. Although until the XIIIth century we have nearly no trace of these usages, it doesn't mean that they were not practised, and, on the contrary, in their first appearances in the documentation they seem to be well deep-rooted and several testimonies certify their presence since 50 years and more.

Broadening the chronology beyond the short-term period, it's moreover possible to analyse the process of dislocation of these activities toward the higher mountains, due to the strong demographical increase of the lower valley of Illasi until the second half of the XIVth century. The growth of population pointed out by the present research partially contradicts what demographic historians believed, that is an opposite trend starting from the middle of the century.