PART ONE

PREMODERN PEOPLE AND THE NATURAL WORLD
TREES, NUTS, AND WOODS AT THE END OF THE FIRST MILLENNIUM: A CASE FROM THE AMALFI COAST

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The cartulary of the Benedictine convent of S. Lorenzo al Piano, founded just outside Amalfi in the late 900s, is commonly known by the name of the Enlightenment lawyer from Angri who purchased it around 1780 for use in his practice, as an arsenal of legal precedent. The “Perris Codex” is comprised of almost six hundred documents and contains several early medieval charters, though the bulk of its content is late medieval, of deeper interest to the copyist who created the extant version. Among the documents from the tenth and early eleventh centuries, several make reference to a characteristic land use of southern Campania in those times, the chestnut grove. This essay analyzes only one charter in any detail, but attempts to build on it a wider portrait of medieval chestnut cultivation around Amalfi. *Castanea sativa*, the European chestnut, remains a significant presence in Campania’s highlands today, yet the early charters suggest that along the Amalfi peninsula, in the Lattari mountains looming above the maritime zone and even in some low valleys there, just as further south and east around Salerno and the Picentini mountains, and in the vicinity of Avellino further inland, this tree was once more important than it became in the twentieth century. In early

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1 In 1943 SS. Trinità’s original charters in the Archivio di Stato at Naples were destroyed. The “Perris Codex” was still in private hands then, and survived. It seems to be a fifteenth-century compilation: Jole Mazzoleni and Renata Orefice, ed., *Il codice Perris* (Amalfi, 1985), pp. xi–xii; and Antonio Allocati, “Il cartulario amalfitano detto comunemente ‘Codice Perris,’ e la sua edizione,” in *Convegno internazionale 14–16 giugno 1973. Amalfi nel medioevo* (Salerno, 1977), pp. 361–65.

2 Though most of them reflect ecologies different from Amalfi’s, the Cava and Montevergine charters confirm the impression left by the "Codice Perris," and the *Codice Diplomatico Amalfitano*, ed. Riccardo Filangieri di Candida (Naples, 1917). For a synoptic view, see ch. 3 in my *Dark Ages and Old Chestnuts in Europe* (forthcoming). On the decline of chestnut cultivation since the 1800s, see Massimo Becchi, *Discorso sul castagno* (Reggio Emilia, 1996), p. 27; and Marco Conedera et al., “Competition and Dynamics in Abandoned Chestnut Orchards in Southern Switzerland,” *Ecologia Mediterranea* 26 (2000), 101–12.