Outside of Europe, the provision of poor relief in the countryside in the past is a neglected topic, in part due to the assumption that it was minimal compared to the provision of relief by large urban institutions and in part because of a lack of evidence. Nonetheless, those historians who have studied rural poor relief have shown that many types of assistance were available for the poor, such as local hospitals, bread doles, dowry funds, other endowed charities, confraternities and almshouses of different kinds. By large and local, these forms of charity were private, though sometimes administered by public bodies. More recent work has stressed that these forms of charity were important even in England, operating alongside statutory poor relief as part of a mixed economy welfare. What has largely not been addressed for anywhere in Europe is the role and significance of such charities. Were funds adequate enough to provide relief in any systematic and sustained fashion? What contribution could they make to the household’s economy of mke-shift? Did migration to the cities represent the only option in times of hardship? How did poor relief change over time? In posing these questions, historians also need to consider the different relationships between family forms and poor relief that may have existed. Richard Smith and Peter Solar have suggested that the English poor law provided a safety net that mitigated against the hardship traditionally associated with the nuclear family, in particular through provision of relief to the elderly. This raises the question of how poor relief may have functioned in association with the family. Were funds adequate enough to provide relief in any systematic and sustained fashion? What contribution could they make to the household’s economy of mke-shift? Did migration to the cities represent the only option in times of hardship? How did poor relief change over time? In posing these questions, historians also need to consider the different relationships between family forms and poor relief that may have existed.

Chair: Marfany, Julie, University of Oxford, UK

Tuesday, 20 August 2013 // 0800 – 1000 // Session 3 – Room A-122

3.3. Poor relief and taxation in the Southern Low Countries during the eighteenth century.

Lambrecht, Thijs, University of Ghent, Belgium

Winter, Anne, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Belgium

Until the end of the eighteenth century, poor relief in the rural Southern Low Countries was organized by so-called ‘amendising’ or poor tables, dating back to the late middle ages. Poor tables pooled charitable gifts and redistributed them to poor inhabitants of the parish. The bulk of their income consisted of charitable endowments: gifts of land and annuities. From the early seventeenth century, parishes could raise taxes to supplement the income of the poor table. However, it was not until the middle of the eighteenth century that poor rates became a widespread measure, as poor tables experienced difficulties in attracting charitable gifts. The decline in charity can be attributed to legal measures concerning mortmain and different attitudes to poverty. After 1750, more parishes introduced local poor taxes and the weight of these increased relative to other sources of charitable income. In some regions, poor rates constituted up to three-quarters of the resources raised for the poor. In this paper, we explore the origins and effects of poor rates in some 20 rural parishes in the western part of the Southern Low Countries. In this region, characterized by farmland in high levels of mobility, poor taxes were introduced in nearly all parishes in the second half of the eighteenth century. The transition from a charitable to a tax-based model of welfare was much debated and resulted in social tensions within parishes. By the end of the eighteenth century, the organization of poor relief resembled English practices under the Old Poor Law.

Participants

Lambrecht, Thijs

This Lambrecht studied history at Ghent University and obtained his PhD in 2007. He was postdoctoral research fellow of the FWO (2007 to 2012) and visiting scholar at the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure (2008-2009). In August 2012 he started working as an archivist at the General State Archives. His research focuses on rural society in the Southern Low Countries and he has published on the history of credit markets, labour organization and poor relief. In recent years, he has developed an interest in rural welfare provisioning in the eighteenth century.

Winter, Anne

Anne Winter studied history at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel and the London School of Economics. She obtained her PhD at the VUB in 2007 and was appointed lecturer in urban history at that same university in 2010, after carrying out research visits at Serafina College (University of Oxford), the FERSA in Paris and at the University of Salzburg. She research focuses on social and economic problems of the early modern period and the long nineteenth century in an international comparative perspective, with a particular interest in migration, social policies, urbanization and labor conditions in the transition period (1550-1850).

3.3.1. Poor relief in eighteenth-century rural Spain: a case study of Catalonia.

Marfany, Julie, University of Oxford, UK

Almost no research has been done on poor relief in rural Spain. The assumption has often been that the poor in rural Spain and southern Europe more generally either relied on extended kin networks for support or were forced to migrate to the large institu-

Paper

3.3.2. The provision of poor relief in the Polish countryside during the preindustrial period. A case study of Cracow and its surroundings.

Wyza, Mateusz, Institute of History, Pedagogical University in Cracow, Poland

Paupers in the Polish countryside could count on various forms of social welfare. In principle, it was the Church that took care of poor relief. Often, however, it was not formalized. Rural shifters usually gave places to only a few individuals, who in turn helped in the church and were godparents. Sometimes more impoverished, including orphans, disabled war veterans, single mothers with children, sick traders or handicrafters, were located in rural shelters. These so-called “hospitals” were generally neglected, small, wooden houses. The poor were also supported by confraternities and the gentry. It is known that many paupers lived in peasant households. They did lighter, additional work on the farm. The nuclear family type (parents and their children) dominated in the Polish countryside of the 18th century. Sometimes, there was no place for the elderly in the household. Many poor left their place of birth or habitation because of poverty, hunger and old age. This situation escalated during natural disasters, epidemics, war and famine. Paupers register contains information about wandering children, who died from exhaustion, or seeking food for people who arrived in the environs of Cracow, sometimes from a long distance. It seems that a chance of a better life for the poor was to go to the towns. This paper investigates these issues through a study of 13 parishes near Cracow, using parish registers from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, episcopal visitations and the census of 1790-2 for the province of Cracow.