

## 8.7. Rural Resilience to Disaster: explaining regional divergences (Middle Ages – c. 1850). Part I: Epizootics

**Panel organiser: Soens, Tim, University of Antwerp, Belgium**

Over the past decade an increased number of historical studies have focused on the impact of natural and man-made disasters in the past. Although a lot of attention has been paid to both the impact of disaster, and human adaptation and mitigation strategies, most studies fail to explain why similar 'shocks' often had a completely different impact in different regions and periods. Framed within the CORN-Research programme, a systematic effort to compare and explain structural regional divergences in resilience to disaster on the pre-1850 countryside has been initiated. For different types of rural disaster, we want to assess the impact of regional divergences in (A) "Institutions": regional differences in risk-coping institutions and policies; (B) "inequalities": the social spread of risk, linked to overall social (im)balances in the region; (C) "Envirotech": regional divergences in the development of technological answers to disaster; (D.) "Discourses": contemporary discourses and perceptions of disaster and their agency on the impact of disaster and (E) "Market development": the capacity of regional markets to cushion the effects of natural disasters on prices and thus to alleviate their impact on material welfare. In the first session, we want to explain divergences in the impact of epizootics, from the interrelated sheep- and cattle 'panzootic' of 1315-1321 to the successive waves of 'rinderpest' in the 18th century, by relating them to regional divergences in farming practices, social relations, and state or local policies. Especially for eighteenth-century outbreaks of rinderpest, detailed investigations have revealed the considerable regional variation in both impact of and responses to the disease. Preventative slaughter was instated in some areas (England; the Austrian Netherlands) but failed in others (France; the Dutch Republic). Concurrently, during the eighteenth century as during the Great Cattle Plague of the fourteenth century there were marked regional differences in cattle mortality. Historians have noted links with, among other factors, cattle density and geographical isolation, but as yet no comparative study has been made of this divergent mortality. Nevertheless, such a study could help clarify, for instance, the relative importance of state intervention versus socio-economic structure in determining the impact of epizootics. Conversely, divergent experiences of cattle diseases might have led to very different medical attitudes, perceptions of risk, or ways of mitigating their impact.

**Chair: Soens, Tim, University of Antwerp, Belgium**

Wednesday, 21 August 2013 // 1100 – 1300 // Session 8 – Room A 019

### 8.7.1. Power, Economics and the Seasons. Local Differences in the Perception of Cattle Plagues in 18th Century Schleswig and Holstein

**Huenniger, Dominik, University of Goettingen, Germany**

The impact of cattle plagues on society in Early Modern Europe was – like today - immense. Containment policies and strategies of coping with epizootics have been varied and were discussed controversially. This paper will use the reactions and measures of local farmers, artisans, physicians and administrators in 18th century Northern Germany in analyzing different strategies and concerns. The duchies of Schleswig and Holstein, geographically located between the Baltic and the North Sea, are especially suited for the panel's focus on regional differences, because economical practices as well as power relations and property rights varied considerably. Parallel to the recent research on the history of epidemics from the point of view of the social and cultural history of medicine and its focus on the "framing of diseases", the interests and behaviour of different actors and their ways of communicating in times of crises will be examined.

### 8.7.2. God's Hand striking the Netherlands? The Dutch response to Cattle Plague in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries

**Looijesteijn, Henk, International Institute of Social History, Netherlands**

**Van Leeuwen, Marco H.D., University of Utrecht, Netherlands**

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the Netherlands were hit several times, at long intervals, by swiftly spreading outbreaks of cattle-plague, severely impacting on Dutch husbandry and the rural economy. The central issue we will address in this paper will be how differences in the virulence and the tactics to fight the spread of cattle plague in the Netherlands were connected with and influenced by changing technological, social-cultural, political and institutional factors. In addition we will look at how one perceived

the risk at the time and tried to contain it, how and why one tried to prevent the outbreak and spread of Cattle Plague, if, how and why one tried to come up with insurance arrangements and other forms of damage control.

### 8.7.3. Explaining regional variations in the impact of rinderpest. Flanders and Brabant in the 18th century

**Van Roosbroeck, Filip, University of Antwerp, Belgium**

Historians studying the 18th century rinderpest epizootics in a variety of countries, such as England or the Dutch Republic, have long noted that outbreaks seem to have been particularly intense and lethal in regions specializing in cattle breeding or dairy farming. While this seems manifestly plausible — the combination of short incubation period, high contagiousness over short distances and dramatic symptoms make rinderpest a disease that can very quickly spread through a dense population while reaching high rates of mortality and morbidity — there is as yet no systematic and quantitative comparison of rinderpest outbreaks in different regions. In this paper, such a comparison will be conducted for two distinct regions in present-day Belgium: the Campine, to the east of Antwerp, characterised by peasant smallholders, and Coastal Flanders, dominated by large commercial holdings. Using annual data from taxation records as well as more detailed information gathered during the 1769 - 1785 epizootic, it is argued that there were significant differences in both the short-term behaviour of outbreaks as well as the long-term impact of rinderpest. These differences are explained with reference to socio-economic differences between agrosystems. The implications for the efficacy of government policy and attitudes towards rinderpest are also discussed.

### 8.7.4. Tradition, Judgment, and Response: Combatting Cattle Plague during an Era of Disaster

**Sundberg, Adam, University of Kansas, USA**

The history of eighteenth century cattle plague in the Netherlands is often interpreted as a process of gradual adaptation leading to an eventual, successful eradication of the disease. This type of positivist analysis privileges modernist assumptions about progress relating to the eventual development of veterinary science and medicine. Seen in this light, Dutch responses to rinderpest epidemics were relatively ineffectual and static. While rinderpest did eventually prompt a reevaluation of disease in the Netherlands much as it did in other European countries, historians often treat the Dutch case as one of political indecision and conservative, rural aversion to developing techniques including slaughter and inoculation. The Dutch example must be reevaluated in view of the context of the era rather than eventual outcomes. Rinderpest was not simply an independent epidemic, but part of a larger series of disasters that affected the Netherlands in the eighteenth century. Dutch governmental, religious, and personal documents attest to the perceived connectedness of these disasters. These documents also reveal an active interest in understanding and combatting the disease whether by traditional remedies, spiritual solutions, or novel innovations. This project investigates Dutch political, cultural, and economic responses to cattle plague given the perception and interpretation of disease in the eighteenth century, their foundation in the histories and traditional means of understanding environmental change, and in view of a larger period of eighteenth century disaster.

#### Participants

**Huenniger, Dominik**

Dr. Dominik Huenniger is a cultural historian with special interest in 18th century environmental and medical history as well as the history of universities. After studying History, English and Psychology at the Universities of Kiel and Hull, he obtained a PhD from the University of Goettingen with a thesis on the cultural history of epizootics in 18th century Northern Europe. In Goettingen, Dominik Huenniger held a scholarship of the PhD programme on "Interdisciplinary Environmental History". Since October 2012 he is managing director of the Lichtenberg-Kolleg - Goettingen's Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities and Social Sciences.

**Looijesteijn, Henk**

Henk Looijesteijn (1973) specializes in the history of the Dutch Republic in an international and global perspective. He obtained his doctorate from the European University Institute in Florence, for his thesis on the Dutch radical social and religious thinker Pieter Plockhoy (ca. 1620-1664). Currently he is a postdoc researcher on the GIGA-project at the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam, studying among others how and why private benefactors founded almshouses for the elderly. He also organized the first international comparative conference on almshouses as a specific charitable institution.

**Soens, Tim**

Tim Soens is Associate Professor of Medieval and Environmental History at the University of Antwerp (Belgium). He studied Medieval History at the University of Ghent, where he obtained his PhD in 2006, investigating water management and the interaction of man and nature in coastal Flanders (1300-1600). Within the Antwerp Department of History, Tim Soens has developed a new research line 'Environment and Power', concentrating on the historical relationship between human societies and the natural environment, and the way this interaction was steered by evolving power constellations and formal and informal institutions.

**Sundberg, Adam**

Adam Sundberg received his BA in history from Truman State University (2007) and his MA from the University of Kansas (2011). He is currently working toward his PhD under Gregory Cushman. Sundberg's work focuses on Dutch environmental history, historical GIS, and the history of climate. He is a fellow in KU's NSF IGERT program; an interdisciplinary climate change research and training group. From 2011-2012, he was a Fulbright scholar to the Netherlands working with Petra van Dam at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam on a dissertation focusing on Dutch response to environmental and cultural change in the eighteenth century.

**Van Leeuwen, Marco H.D.**

Marco H.D. van Leeuwen is professor of historical sociology in Utrecht, and honorary research fellow at the International Institute of Social History. He studied history in Amsterdam (MA cum laude 1985) and sociology in Utrecht (PhD cum laude 1990). He holds the ERC Advanced Investigator Grant 'Towards Open Societies? Trends, Variations and Driving Forces of Intergenerational Social Mobility in Europe over the Past Three Centuries'. His chosen field is social inequality world wide from 1500 to the present.

**Van Roosbroeck, Filip**

After graduating from the Vrije Universiteit Brussel in 2009 with an MA in History, Filip Van Roosbroeck (1987) went on to read for an MSc in the History of Science, Medicine and Technology at the University of Oxford. Currently, he is working on an FWO-funded Ph.D. project at the University of Antwerp about the rinderpest epizootic of 1769 - 1785. Particular points of interest are divergent experiences of rinderpest in various agro-systems, and medical views among the peasantry.