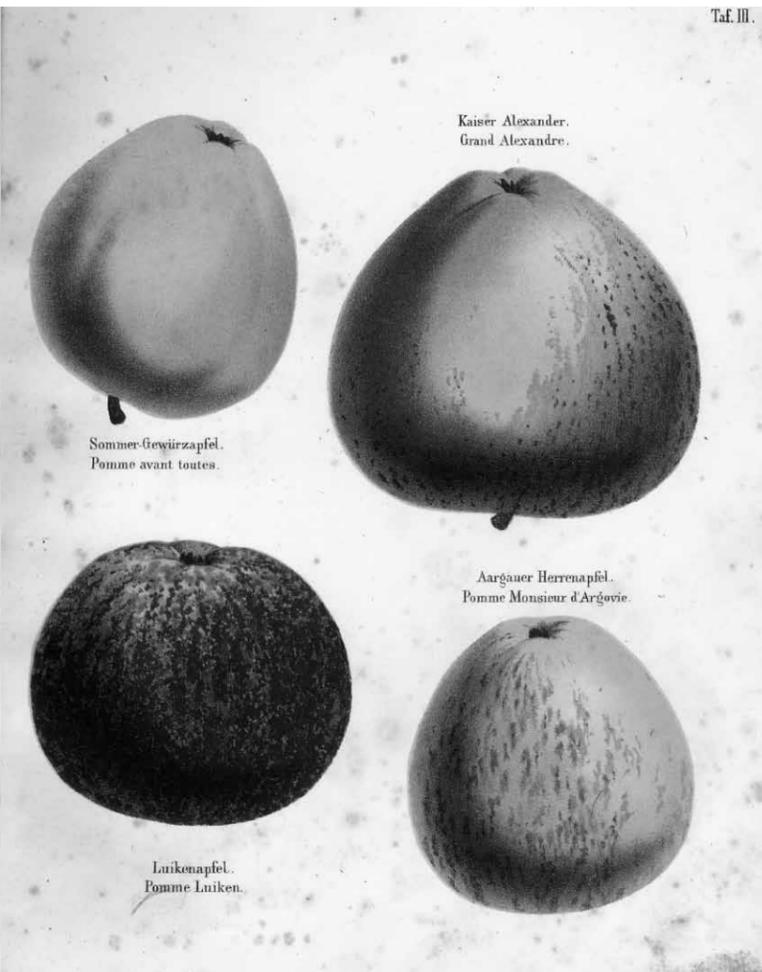


9.3. The economic enlightenment and beyond. Collecting, evaluating and spreading knowledge to exploit agrarian resources, 1750-1850

Panel organiser: **Dauser, Regina, University of Augsburg, Germany; Stuber, Martin, University of Bern, Switzerland; Popplow, Marcus, University of Salzburg, Austria**



This panel starts from the assumption that recent methodological approaches towards a “history of knowledge” can be fruitfully employed in rural history, in the sense of investigating a panorama of interacting layers of knowledge each shaped by particular traditions, media and institutions. In rural history, this approach is not only applicable to the modern period, but especially to the transitional phase between 1750 and 1850. Since the mid-eighteenth century – and thus preceding what is usually termed the emergence of “agrarian science” –, a practice-oriented strain of the enlightenment, comprising administration officials, scholars, clergymen and landowners, engaged in collecting, evaluating and spreading what they viewed as advanced agrarian knowledge. The term “economic enlightenment” highlights these activities for increasing the provisioning with agrarian resources. While in Britain, this movement has been quite well researched under the label “improvers”, its activities on the European continent, which in many respects continued far into the nineteenth century, have received much less attention. The panel explores, with regard to methodological issues as well as with regard to case studies, the activities of the promoters of the “economic enlighten-

ment” in gaining, transferring, implementing agrarian knowledge – and also in giving it a new reputation in comparison to ‘established’ learned disciplines.

Chair: **Popplow, Marcus, University of Salzburg, Austria**

Wednesday, 21 August 2013 // 1400 – 1600 // Session 9 – Room A-122

9.3.1. Hands-on Agriculture. Conceptualizing the Empirical in German Agricultural Enlightenment

Lehmbrock, Verena, University of Jena, Germany

Notions of the empirical can be linked with a crucial feature of German agricultural discourse during the long 18th century. On the one hand, pointing to long-term experience and a direct connection to the land could serve as a selling point on numerous book titles. On the other hand, there was harsh polemical resistance throughout the century against practice-oriented strategies to achieve agricultural improvement. Contemporary sources suggest that contact with the soil was seen as a lowly practice heavily loaded with cultural bias and that for learned protagonists it therefore entailed certain risks of exclusion from polite discourse. Nevertheless, we find that physical acquaintance with the land became a more and more indispensable claim amongst agricultural improvers. Drawing from statements of peasant farmers, academics, landlords (Gutsbesitzer) and state officials I intend to elaborate on those ambivalent evaluations of the empirical as a source for agricultural knowledge. Considering the economical Enlightenment as an arena for epistemological struggle, I would furthermore argue that it represents a showcase for the entanglement of social and epistemic factors in intellectual history.

9.3.2. The more Information – the more Expertise? Collecting, Evaluating, and Implementing advanced Agrarian Knowledge in the Electoral Palatinate, c. 1776-1800

Dauser, Regina, University of Augsburg, Germany

Using the example of the reign of Karl Theodor, Elector Palatine (1724-1799), the paper will discuss the conditions, opportunities, and also constraints of governmental initiative to improve agrarian practice. From 1776 onwards, improving the quality of tobacco grown in the Palatinate became an important project for the electoral government as there was no more American tobacco available because of the War of Independence. Thus, good profit seemed to be possible. Being highly dependent on the expertise of others – local experts and such from abroad, local authorities and elites, but also peasant farmers –, the government had to decide on ways of collecting relevant information, on criteria for evaluating diverse and sometimes contrasting concepts as inadequate or promising for augmenting tobacco quality, and eventually on the creation of a stock of knowledge becoming the basis of electoral orders. The ways of collecting information, generating knowledge, making and promoting decisions on concrete measures were rather different according to the groups of experts they took into account. Thus, communications history in a methodological point of view is densely intertwined with notions of a history of knowledge and will therefore be examined in the second part of the paper.

9.3.3. From „Pflantz-Gart“ to „Stammregister“ – On the history of knowledge of fruit cultivation in the canton of Bern

Stuber, Martin, University of Bern, Switzerland

Among the efforts for the improvement of agricultural productivity, the cultivation of useful plants is particularly at the center of the Economic Enlightenment. In contrast to fodder and textile plants, cereals and potatoes, fruit trees are not included among its favoured subjects. This may be considered as astonishing in view of the significance that fruit has acquired in the contemporary diet. Be that as it may, efforts to improve fruit cultivation go back to even before the classical period of the Economic Enlightenment. The example of Bern in particular is suited to such an analysis over the Longue durée that covers the time from Daniel Rhagor’s «Pflantz-Gart» (1639) to the «Register of varieties of excellent species of pome fruits for the canton of Bern» (Stammregister, 1865). From the perspective of the history of knowledge, the connections between scholarly knowledge and local experience on the one hand and the changing actors in these knowledge systems on the other hand are of special interest here.

9.3.4. From mobilizing knowledge to sustained productivity growth? Agricultural prizes in Geneva during the long 19th century

Wenger, Sylvain, University of Geneva, Switzerland

The growth of scientific and technical interaction in Western Europe during the long 19th century (c. 1750-1900) is generally described as part of the “Enlightenment movement”. A key institution in this movement are the industrial societies, which initiated a variety of operations and activities intended to promote the diffusion of different types of knowledge seen as useful for increased material welfare. Among the many activities were systems of prizes. Embedded within French territory, and surrounded by mountains, the Republic of Geneva was characterized by its small size and limited fertile land, making agricultural productivity a source of constant concern. Against this background, the Society for the Encouragement of Arts and Agriculture (established in 1776) offered almost 120 prizes between 1776 and 1875, of which about a third was aimed at stimulating the improvement of farming and livestock practices. While it remains difficult to assess the direct impact of the prizes on agricultural productivity, their existence shows the willingness to facilitate the acquisition and diffusion of knowledge useful for productive purposes. My proposal is to examine the issue of prizes, as they figured in the Society of Arts of Geneva in a long term perspective. In doing so, I seek to obtain a better understanding of the concerns and preoccupations with regard to agriculture in the Geneva region, and to place the initiatives of the Society of Arts in the broader context of diffusion and organization of knowledge in Europe in the long 19th century, sometimes called the “industrial enlightenment”.

Participants

Dauser, Regina

Regina Dauser received her PhD (2005) and her degree of Habilitation (2012) from the University of Augsburg, Germany. From 2006 to 2011, she worked as a research assistant at the chair for Early Modern History at the University of Augsburg. Currently, she is member of scientific staff at the same chair. Her research focuses on early modern communications history, the history of the European states system, history of knowledge, history of the economic enlightenment. Conference-related publications: *Grenzen und „Kontaktzonen“: Rekonfigurationen von Wissensräumen zwischen Frankreich und den deutschen Ländern 1700–1850* (co-editor, 2012).

Lehmbrock, Verena

Verena Lehmbrock is a PhD candidate at the Institute of the History of Medicine, Science, and Technology at the Friedrich Schiller University of Jena, Germany. She studied at the Universities of Paris, Berlin and Nottingham, and graduated in Philosophy and Early Modern and Modern History at the Humboldt University of Berlin. Before entering the Jena Graduate School “Laboratory of the Enlightenment” in 2009 she worked as a PR consultant for the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research. Currently she is a research fellow at the Research Center for Social and Cultural Studies in Gotha/Erfurt.

Popplow, Marcus

Ph. D. (University of Bremen); research scholar at the Max-Planck-Institute for the His-

tory of Science (Berlin), the BTU Cottbus, and Salzburg University; long-term experience as an independent scholar (research, teaching, and popular science activities); Visiting Professorships at Stuttgart and Salzburg University; member of the editorial board of the scientific journal *Technikgeschichte*; fields of interest: History of Technology, the Environment and related knowledge systems, in particular in the early modern period; conference-related publications: *Landschaften agrarisch-ökonomischen Wissens* (editor, 2010).

Stuber, Martin

Martin Stuber, Ph.D. (1996), is associated with the Institute of History at the University of Bern. He has published widely on the history of forestry, the network-based scholarly communication and the production of useful knowledge in the 18th and 19th century; in particular, he explored Albrecht von Haller and the Bernese Economic Society (*Oekonomische Gesellschaft*).

Wenger, Sylvain

Sylvain Wenger is a PhD candidate at the Paul Bairoch Institute of economic history, University of Geneva. His research focuses on institutional change and the mobilization of technological knowledge in industrializing Western Switzerland. He is particularly interested in operations implemented by technical societies to promote industrial development, and the exchange of technical information through correspondence and travels.