

9.6. Long-term effects of agrarian crisis and agrarian depressions on commercial networks (1750-2000)

Panel organiser: Herment, Laurent, GDRI, CRICEC and EHESS CRH, Paris, France



networks and speed up technological improvements. In some cases, it is not possible to invoke technological improvements or political choices to explain the emergence of new commercial networks but only a specific agrarian crisis which disrupt the former commercial networks. Phylloxera, for example, determined the growth of production of grapes in Greece. From another point of view, long-term depression seemed to be also turning point and sparked new opportunities for some areas or on the contrary lead to the backwardness of production in some other areas. At last, it is possible that short-term or long-term agrarian crisis created new long-term market opportunities during the nineteenth century but also in previous periods, for which it is impossible to invoke major technological changes and in later periods, for which improvements in commercial networks were inseparable from technological improvements. The aim of this session is to investigate the potential link between emergence of new international commercial networks and agrarian crises in various contexts and periods. The session will deal with the transnational commercial networks between countries of the whole Europe, North-America and South-America, for two centuries.

Chair: Chatriot, Alain, CNRS, Centre de recherche historique, Paris, France

Agrarian crises provoked significant and important historical works for 50 years. Their effects on demography, migration, productive systems, land market, etc. were studied in various context over times and places. Furthermore, the different national historiographies studied shifts of commercial networks during agrarian crisis. But, even though they did not ignore the shift of international commercial networks during agrarian crises, these networks seemed to be only a kind of adjustment tools which could solve, or could not, temporary crisis. From another point of view, the different European and non-European historiographies are very concerned by normal international commercial networks. If agrarian crisis caused massive shifts in agrarian systems, it is likely they sometimes caused long-term shifts in international commercial networks for consumer countries but also for producer countries. It is often supposed that the technological improvements in transportation or political decisions (the repeal of the Corn Law for example) were the first and foremost causes for the emergence of a new organisation for provisioning Europe in wheat and livestock from the middle of the nineteenth century on. But it would be possible that agrarian crisis during this period had led to the emergence of new

9.6.1. The Great Depression and the Greek rural economy: agrarian crisis and rural production's commercialisation

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According to the League of Nations (SDN, 1931) agrarian crisis had in the early 30's a generalised negative influence in the European economies, highlighted by the considerable fall of agricultural products' prices. It is to be noted that Great Depression initially appeared in Europe as a severe agrarian crisis. This paper will focus on the Greek interwar rural economy; as interwar Greece was primary a rural country, the crisis affected its foreign trade balance. Commercialised products (mainly olive oil and tobacco) faced a considerable decrease of their prices. In general, between the years 1929-1931 a significant decline of the Greek agricultural production took place, primary in terms of value and secondly of volume. In terms of everyday life, the agrarian crises had a great influence on the rural population, as it is described by State's sources. The international context, and the financial crisis, forced the Greek State to re-orientate its agricultural policy; in the framework of an increasing protectionism, agricultural production was orientated to the internal market, while wheat cultivation was supported by technical and institutional interventions. On the other hand, export trade was based on clearing agreements. In the late 30's an increase was achieved in agricultural output, according to the official statistical data. Nevertheless, the growing lending of the farmers and the "bankruptcy" of the cooperative movement give a different picture of the situation in Greek rural areas.

9.6.2. Harvest crises and dearth crises: a comparison of the causes and effects of the food crises of the 1840s and 1850s in Belgium

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The 1840s and 1850s were both decades of food crisis in Belgium. Judging from grain price developments, the crises of the 1840s and 1850s, together with that of 1817, were among the worst of the entire nineteenth century. However, looking at developments in harvest output in both decades, the 1850s appear much less as a decade of food crisis. High prices and poor harvests clearly co-occurred in the 1840s, but not in the 1850s. The causes and effects of the food crisis of 1845-1847 in Belgium are well understood, while the food crisis of the 1850s has received much less attention up to now. It seems that the food crisis of the 1850s was more a dearth crisis than a harvest crisis, where market disturbances provide a better explanation for the high grain prices than harvest results. The aim of this paper is twofold: first, to understand the differences in causes and effects of the crises of the 1840s and 1850s, and secondly, to use these different crises as a point of departure to reflect upon long term transformations in the grain trade in Belgium in the nineteenth century.

9.6.3. What about subsistence crisis in the middle of nineteenth century in England?

Herment, Laurent, GDRI CRICEC EHESS CRH, France

The aim of this work is to investigate the wheat market in England during the period 1853-1857. This period is characterised by a very deep crisis in Europe (Sweden, France, Belgium and Spain). For example, in France the harvest shortfall was about 20% in 1853. It seems that this crisis did not affect England. As Bruce Campbell and Cormac O'Grada quoted recently "by the eve of the Industrial Revolution, England had become effectively famine-free". In fact there was no famine at all in France during this period but a very high level of price of all staple foodstuffs (wheat, meat, vines, etc.). If countries so different as France, and Sweden were affected by a very deep harvest crisis it is very unlikely that this crisis did not affect England at all. At the moment, I am looking for some information in Hereford and Kent archives about the wheat, barley and oats markets during this period. The aim of this work is not to produce a new price data series but to investigate the trend of transactions on local British market and to examine the perception of foreign trade over the year 1853-1856 during the Crimean war which disturbed the international market for wheat.

Participants

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Chatriot, Alain

Ph.D. EHESS 2001. Books : La démocratie sociale à la française. L'Expérience du Conseil national économique 1924-1940, Paris: La Découverte, 2002. CHATRIOT A., CHESSEL M.-E., HILTON M. eds.: The Consumer Expert : Associations and Professionals in Consumer Society, London: Ashgate, 2006. DAUMAS J.-C., CHATRIOT A., FRA-BOULET D., FRIDENSON P., JOLY H. eds. : Dictionnaire historique des patrons français, Paris: Flammarion, 2010. CHATRIOT A., LEBLANC E., LYNCH E. eds. : Organiser les marchés agricoles. Le temps des fondateurs. Des années 1930 aux années 1950, Paris: Armand Colin, 2012.

Herment, Laurent

Ph.D. 2009: Prix de thèse d'histoire économique 2011: l'Association Française d'Histoire Economique et BNP-Paribas. Book: Les fruits du partage. Petits paysans du Bassin Parisien au XIXe siècle, 2012. He published on the economics of French agricultural development during the nineteenth century. More recently his interests have turned to agricultural economic history of the North-West of Europe (nineteenth century and first half of twentieth century), with a particular focus on land use, and productivity and market.

Ronsijn, Wouter

Wouter Ronsijn (1982) obtained his PhD in History at Ghent University in 2011 with a dissertation on the role of urban weekly markets in Flemish rural society between 1750 and 1900. Before, he published the book De kadasterkaarten van Popp: een sleutel tot uw lokale geschiedenis, a guide on the possibilities of cadastral documents for local historical research. He currently works at the Sociology department of the Free University of Brussels on the HISSTAT project, for which a database with local and/or individual statistical data is compiled.