

12th summer school in economic history

26-27-28 August 2024

Susa (Italy)

The economies of nature in the medieval and modern periods

Summary

The 12^e summer school in economic history proposes to tackle the fundamental theme of the use that medieval and modern economies made of nature, i.e. the way in which the elements making up their environment were transformed in order to be inserted into the processes of production, exchange and consumption, thus becoming resources with multiple functions that also fundamentally transformed the living environment of human beings, contributing to the construction of rural or urban landscapes. This is as much a question of epistemology as of empirical knowledge, and the partial overlap between two sub-disciplines, economic history and environmental history, raises questions.

Presentation

The 12^e Summer School of Economic History will be held in Susa (Piedmont, Italy) on 26, 27 and 28 August 2024. Its theme will be "**The economies of nature in the medieval and modern periods**". This theme will provide an opportunity to pursue and expand on those developed in previous years (the value of things, poverty, common goods, means of payment, quality, the organization of work, economic writings, entrepreneurship, the circulation of knowledge, risk, trading spaces).

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Partner institutions

The economic history summer school will bring together researchers, teacher-researchers, post-doctoral researchers and doctoral students of all nationalities. The partner institutions are the Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, the Université de Toulouse Jean-Jaurès, the EPHE, the Archives Nationales and the CNRS. The laboratories involved are as follows: LAMOP (UMR 8589, Paris 1/CNRS), FRAMESPA (UMR 5136, Toulouse Jean-Jaurès/CNRS), IDHE.S (UMR 8533 Paris 1, Paris-Nanterre, ENS Cachan/CNRS), SAPRAT (EA 4116, EPHE), BETA (UMR 7522, Strasbourg, Lorraine, Inrae/CNRS).

The event is also receiving financial support from the LabEx HASTEC (History and Anthropology of Knowledge, Techniques and Beliefs) and is taking place under the patronage of the Association Française d'Histoire économique (AFHé).

Objectives and nature of the operation

The nature of the theme means that, in addition to medieval and modernist historians, archaeologists and economists will also be involved. The proposed method is to have a series of presentations by specialists and to debate them. It also allows medievalists and modernists to engage in dialogue and compare the progress of their thinking on a given theme, and even to change doctrines. The aim is to deepen our knowledge and our reflections while allowing doctoral students and post-doctoral students to participate actively in the work. The doctoral and post-doctoral students will give presentations and take part in the debate following the presentations.

Theme for the 2024 session

The 12^e summer school in economic history proposes to tackle the fundamental theme of the use that medieval and modern societies made of nature, i.e. the way in which the elements making up their environment were transformed in order to be inserted into the processes of production, exchange and consumption, thus becoming resources with multiple functions that also fundamentally transformed the living environment of human beings, contributing to the construction of rural or urban landscapes. This is as much a question of epistemology as of empirical knowledge, and the partial overlap between two sub-disciplines, economic history and environmental history, raises questions. Their coexistence necessarily results in problematic inflections and the redefinition of concepts in use on both sides. This has implications for current and future research. The inclusion of environmental issues makes it possible to take a fresh look at classic questions, such as medieval land clearance, which can no longer be considered without an environmental perspective, although this does not mean that the economic question, namely the increase in cereal production, should or could be downplayed. Conversely, nature imposes constraints on economic activities, directing and limiting, for example, the question of traffic.

The question of the relationship between man and nature covers a whole range of concerns and themes that can be tackled on their own or as part of issues falling within the remit of several disciplines (economic history, environmental history, but also archaeology, anthropology, philosophy or theology). The list of areas addressed or to be addressed is long and often problematic: the economic impact of human-nature interactions covers an almost limitless field that is sometimes masked by the use of all-encompassing and widely-used concepts such as "natural resources". We might add that the concept of nature is itself all-encompassing and largely dialectical. It involves energy, wood and forests, the management of living and non-living waters, relations with the animal world, from breeding to hunting, agriculture too, and of course the climate (in the broad or local sense)? All of this has always been part of the historical question, and can be oriented in several directions depending on whether we are interested in human subsistence, or whether we place the environment and questions of ecological balance or sustainability at the heart of the intellectual apparatus, or whether we place the representation of human activities at the heart of our problematics.

Human subsistence, in all its forms, is at the heart of economic history, whose methods and discourse aim to explain the transformations of societies by questioning their action on matter. This attitude often results in the environmental framework being regarded as inert and stable, or as indifferent. In any case, these transformations in the medieval period helped to create the landscapes and living environment that still shape our surroundings today. The sudden increase in techniques and knowledge about nature that occurred in the modern era made it possible to go

beyond technical thresholds and, above all, to have a more profound effect on the environment. For economic historians, the function of interactions between man and nature is to produce and exchange wealth, and changes to the environmental framework are therefore inherent in the economic activities of societies, as are changes to landscapes and ecosystems, since the environment is shaped or destroyed by human activity.

Conversely, environmental history tends to make the question of subsistence a subordinate or adventitious issue, the real subject being the objects studied - climates, forests, water - on which human action is only one of the elements to be taken into consideration. This is particularly obvious in the case of climate, where human action can be considered to have had a negligible impact until the industrial revolution.

The emergence of environmental history as a new disciplinary field is therefore leading us to rethink approaches that have never been abandoned, but which may have seemed to have been sidelined by economic historians. This study naturally poses problems inherent in the very nature of the subject studied. While there is, of course, a medieval conception of nature, it does not go so far as to propose bodies of ideas that would describe man's action on the environment or even describe landscapes in a linear fashion other than through glosses, commentaries or lists. Conversely, human actions can be thought of in the mode of nature. Only the vocabulary of action allows us to understand what actually happens. For example, examining words like "artigues", "essarts" and "*exstirpare*" is the best way to access the fundamental phenomenon of land clearance and the transformation of uncultivated land into permanent fields, the juxtaposition of which forms the backbone of the rural landscape until the great land consolidation of the 1960s. This raises the question of whether nature is perceived for the products it provides or the services it renders, or whether it also exists in its own right, as a function of a more general, suprahuman 'meaning'.

Medieval technical knowledge was, on the other hand, essentially practical, and even when it had to deal with complex issues such as mining, whether in terms of extracting ore or clearing tunnels, or any other form of expertise, it did not allow for any generalization other than through reasoning by analogy. Each case is a specific one that experts examine and assess on the basis of their experience, and for which they "cobble together solutions". The same applies to economic issues, which were dealt with at a late stage from an ethical-economic angle. Until the end of the thirteenth century, in other words, until the Franciscans overturned the framework within which the Church's thinking took place, no theory had been formalized, and it was only the appearance of new words, such as *resicum*, for example, that made it possible to understand that new categories were emerging. This practical knowledge was formalized in the modern era, culminating in Diderot and d'Alembert's *Encyclopédie*. Despite its obvious modernity, this operation was based on ancient principles because it relied on wood for energy, at a time when, in England, the use of coal was overturning the general conditions of the economy, dooming the old forges to decline and consequently having an impact on forest management. Energy sources and their differential mobilization are at the root of the divergence of economies (Pomeranz).

Practical knowledge and rationality, technical knowledge and rationality, economic descriptions of nature and the environment, inventories, classifications and nomenclature all intertwine around this question, justifying the title *economies of nature* and the perspective adopted, at the junction of two sub-disciplines to tackle a theme rarely tackled directly by historians, despite the considerable lead taken by modernists in this perspective.

Historiography/economics/archaeology

The complexity of the issue warrants particular attention to historiography. A few medievalists and many modernists have used the methods and contributions of the environmental sciences to advance their thinking. As for archaeologists, the environmental sciences have revolutionised their approach to the field and to history, mainly through the use of observation, cartography and the examination of changes to territories, their development and their

transformation as a result of human action. Between the mute rationality of the actors and the assumed empiricism of the historians, the question of the environment provides a highly relevant playing field in which to reflect on what the economy actually is and what history is.

Exploiting and enhancing nature

Medieval and modern technical systems developed on a number of levels. The first was the direct exploitation of plants and animals. Wood was used not only as a building material, and therefore a raw material, but also as a source of domestic and industrial energy. Lime kilns, ceramic kilns and glassmakers' furnaces all made intense, compulsory and almost exclusive use of wood until charcoal could be mobilized. Trees also provided fodder and textile fibres when pruned, as well as the small wood needed for agricultural work, such as the poles essential for winegrowing. They are also essential to warfare, providing the building material for siege engines and means of transport, as well as for merchant ships and warships. Plants are selected and improved to suit the soil and climate.

Water provides one of the means of accessing energy by harnessing and transforming hydraulic power, with mills being the instruments used to move, through complex installations, from the linear and continuous movement of the current to the circular movement of the grinding wheel or the alternating movement of the forge hammer. The complex hydraulic installation that is a mill has a major impact on the immediate environment in which it is built. Digging a forebay certainly feeds a waterfall, which in turn sets in motion the grinding wheel or forge hammer mechanism. It also allows fish to be reared and changes the course of the river. With this object, we touch on a large number of compartments: running water as a source of energy; standing water as a potential or actual food reserve; harnessing hydraulic power to transform objects (grain into flour or cast iron into iron) and make them fit for human consumption. Energy, food and the transformation of objects are also elements in the making of landscapes, in their more or less lasting shaping. In the Middle Ages, the growing mastery of hydraulics was one of the factors that enabled land reclamation, whether by draining wetlands or, on the contrary, by creating ponds for sanitation and stocking to increase the production of non-meat proteins.

Access to energy is also achieved through the exploitation or management of the forest, the implications of which go far beyond the energy question alone. This is one of the most important issues to have arisen in medieval and modern societies, and one that has led to the development of industrial sites requiring both water and fire.

Complex technical systems were built around wood and water, enabling production to be diversified and specialized as part of a market supply that grew even during periods of crisis: the late Middle Ages and the modern era saw the development of a new iron and steel industry based on technical innovations that changed the relationship between fire and water through innovative processes.

Appropriation methods and conflicts of use

Exploiting nature means recognizing one's rights over the elements that make it up: land, water (still or flowing) and even air are shared assets, but they are not always accessed in the same way. In the Middle Ages, running water was part of the public domain, over which only the sovereign had rights that were not subject to any statute of limitations. These rights could be broken down into a multitude of other rights depending on needs: drawing water for industry and diverting the course of a river, fishing rights, property rights involved in the construction of a mill: the methods of appropriation were in fact infinite. They range from individual ownership to collective appropriation in the case of the commons. In each case, we need to define what each person can do in terms of transfer, transmission and use. In the case of the mountain economy, for example, the sharing of rights over mountain pastures is a constant problem. From the fifteenth century onwards, the development of transhumant livestock farming in Mediterranean Europe profoundly altered the relationship between rural societies and space. On the plains, these societies had to

share grazing areas with the herds of urban farmers, while in the mountains they had to develop an economy based on renting out mountain pastures, while trying to balance this with their own needs. Finally, the system of *drailles* and *tratturi* resulted in greater public control over village areas, which were no longer under the exclusive control of a local lord or peasant community, but were increasingly integrated into a regional economic system, forming a veritable district.

Constraints and risks

Bad weather, storms and tempests pose a permanent risk to Western societies, a risk that is exacerbated by climatic oscillations and against which it is impossible to protect oneself. Mountains, seas and forests are both obstacles to traffic and perilous, sometimes mysterious, elements that need to be understood in order to be used. Their presence partly determines that of animals. Animals are an omnipresent part of life.

They provide a primary source of energy through carrying and traction. They also provide the proteins necessary for human life. They are also a source of raw materials: skin for shoes or parchment, meat, of course, but also, increasingly from the twelfth century onwards, wool from sheep. Their presence was a godsend, but one that also brought risks. Pigs roaming around town were a constant concern for the public authorities, both for reasons of hygiene and safety. Urban regulations restricting and supervising livestock farming in the city are one aspect of the design of standards aimed at limiting pollution and nuisance, and which determine urban zoning. Stinking or dangerous activities are thus defined and relegated to specific districts or rejected outside the urban area, on the outskirts or downstream of rivers. Wild animals, for their part, are present, both as a threat, to varying degrees, and as prey providing food supplements. Throughout the Middle Ages, wolves and bears lived in close proximity to humans in western forests. The fox, on the other hand, posed a growing threat to farmyards as wooded areas, and therefore the prey available to this animal, dwindled. Hunting, which involved the use of vast areas set aside for hunting, i.e. where agricultural activity was excluded or strictly regulated, was a social necessity for the military aristocracy, who found it both a source of pleasure and physical training for combat.

Sustainable savings?

The exploitation of raw materials in the medieval period is a subject that is currently being studied in greater depth, and is closely linked to the history of technology. The history of climates depends in part on the study of solar radiation or the ice of Greenland: it is part of a *natural history that is essential* for understanding the evolution of environments. The vitality of the economy, however, depends on the ability of societies to exploit mineral raw materials and make the most of them. From the stone quarries and mines where iron is extracted to the galleries where silver lead and gold are mined, increasingly sophisticated techniques provide access to the various metals used by humans to produce weapons, tools and utensils. There is a particular chronology, linked to the discovery of orebodies and changes in the techniques used. Alum was the subject of intense trade between Anatolia and Western Europe until the great Italian discoveries of the XV^e century in Tuscany and Lazio.

The summer school proposes to tackle the issue in **ten sessions**:

1. Medieval and modern historiography
2. The views of economists and archaeologists
3. Exploiting and enhancing nature
4. Appropriation methods and conflicts of use
5. Constraints and risks
6. Sustainable savings?

And four sessions for doctoral and post-doctoral students (call for applications)

Registration procedures for doctoral and post-doctoral students

Places are available for young researchers - doctoral or post-doctoral students - in medieval and modern economic history, economics, sociology, geography and archaeology. As the working languages are English and French, candidates must have a minimum knowledge of both languages (oral expression will be in the language of their choice).

Candidates will be asked to give a 20-minute **talk on the** subject of the conference. This talk will be based on a presentation of an archive or economic history source that has been at the heart of their research.

The organization will pay for the entire stay on site. Travel expenses (return) will be reimbursed up to 200 euros.

As the number of places is limited, applications will be examined by a selection committee made up of the scientific organizers of the conference.

The application (in English or French) will include:

- . A detailed *curriculum vitae*
- . A presentation (minimum 2 pages) of the doctoral subject, the sources used and the planned oral presentation.

Applications must be sent in by 1 May 2024 (reply by May 7).

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Scientific managers

Michela Barbot (CNRS ENS Cachan, Idhe.s)

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Laurent Feller (Univ. Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, Lamop)

Agnès Gramain (University of Lorraine, Beta)

Jérôme Hayez (CNRS, Lamop)

Emmanuel Huertas (Toulouse Jean-Jaurès University, Framespa)

Jean-François Moufflet (Archives Nationales)

Cédric Quartier, (CNRS, Lamop).

List of participants

Michela BARBOT (CNRS, Idhe.s)

Marc BOMPAIRE (EPHE, Saprat)

Sylvain BURRI (CNRS, Traces)

Julie CLAUSTRE (Université Paris-Cité, Ict)

Anne CONCHON (Univ. Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, Idhe.s)

Jean-Pierre DEVROEY (Université libre de Bruxelles)

Laurent FELLER (Univ. Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, Lamop)

Emmanuel GARNIER (CNRS, Chrono-Environnement)

Agnès GRAMAIN (Université de Lorraine, Beta)

Fabrice GUIZARD (Université Polytechnique Haut-de-France, Larsh)

Jérôme HAYEZ (CNRS, Lamop)

Emmanuel HUERTAS (Univ. Toulouse Jean-Jaurès, Framespa)

Pierre MARCHANDIN (Archives du ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères)
Antoine MISSEMER (CNRS, Cired)
Jean-François MOUFFLET (Archives nationales)
Christine RENDU (CNRS, Traces)
Cédric QUERTIER (CNRS, Lamop)
Roland VIADER (CNRS, Traces)
Florence WEBER (ENS, Centre Maurice Halbwachs)

Dates and venue

Susa (Piedmont, Italy) from 26 to 28 August 2024

Organisation of work

(arrival of participants: Sunday afternoon, 25 August)

Day 1: Monday 26 August

Morning

9.00 : **Session 1 - Medieval and modern historiography**

- . Laurent FELLER (Univ. Paris 1, Lamop)
- . Anne CONCHON (Univ. Paris 1, Idhe.s)

10.00: discussion

10.30am: break

11.00 : **Session 2 - The point of view of economists and archaeologists**

- . Antoine MISSEMER (CNRS, Cired)
- . Christine RENDU (CNRS, Traces).

12.00 pm: discussion

12.30 pm: Lunch

Afternoon

2.30 pm: **Session 3 – Appropriation methods and conflicts of use**

- . Roland VIADER (CNRS, Traces)
- . Sylvain BURRI (CNRS, Traces)

3.30 pm: discussion

4.00 pm: break

4.30 pm: **Session 4 - Doctoral student/post-doctoral student session**

coord. Emmanuel HUERTAS (Univ. Toulouse Jean-Jaurès, Framespa)

Day 2: Tuesday 27 August

Morning

9.00 : **Session 5 - Constraints and risks**

- . Jean-Pierre DEVROEY (Free University of Brussels)
- . Emmanuel GARNIER (CNRS, Chrono-Environnement)

10.00: discussion

10.30am: break

11.00 : **Session 6 - Doctoral student/post-doctoral student session**

coord. Michela BARBOT (CNRS, Idhe.s)

12.00 pm: discussion

12.30 pm: Lunch

Afternoon: excursion to the Susa Valley (coordinated by Andrea ZONATO, archivist)

Day 3: Wednesday 28 August

Morning

9.00 : **Session 7 – Exploiting and enhancing nature**

. Pierre MARCHANDIN (Archives of the Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs)

. Jean-François MOUFFLET (Archives Nationales, Paris)

10.00: discussion

10.30am: break

11.00 : **Session 8 - Doctoral student/post-doctoral student session**

coordinated by Marc BOMPAIRE (EPHE, Saprat)

12.00 pm: discussion

12.30 pm: Lunch

Afternoon

2.30 pm: **Session 9 - Sustainable economies?**

. Fabrice GUIZARD (Université Polytechnique Haut-de-France, Larsh)

. Florence WEBER (ENS, Centre Maurice Halbwachs)

3.30 pm: discussion

4.00 pm: break

4.30 pm: **Session 10 - Doctoral student/post-doctoral student session**

coord. Agnès GRAMAIN (University of Lorraine, Beta)

5.30 pm: discussion

6.30 pm: end of summer school work

(night's accommodation paid for if departure on Thursday 29 August)