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978-0-521-09078-0 - Tithes and Agrarian History from the Fourteenth to the
Nineteenth Century: An Essay in Comparative History

Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie and Joseph Goy

Excerpt

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PART ONE

Methodology

JOSEPH GOY

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social cohesion and social conflict in town and countryside, with the new ambition of studying 'the real life of all the people'² and with 'special sympathy for the small peasants and the badly paid workers'.

At virtually the same time as Goubert, Baehrel (whose study was published in 1961)³ used different methods, methods of quantitative and serial history, to answer similar questions about the mechanisms, the rhythms and the cost of economic growth and social change for a rural society in the preindustrial world. In order to analyse price changes, Baehrel tried to discover the relative importance of demand (population and purchasing power) and supply, i.e. production. He was the first to make a serious study of a series of tithe figures, which he checked against the production figures for two estates in the countryside near Arles. Working on tithes paid in money or in kind, farmed out or collected directly (see below, p. 30), he attempted to arrive at the percentage of the harvest that they represented in order to calculate long-term production trends over a period of more than two centuries. Baehrel's methodology was not refined, but his achievement was to exhume a somewhat neglected source which he treated as an indicator of changes in agricultural production, a source which is all the more valuable for being widely found.

A few years later, in 1966, Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie's *Peasants of Languedoc*⁴ confirmed the value of the tithe, both as an indicator of trends in production and as an index of certain revenues. Henceforward tithes joined population, prices, wages and incomes as part of the framework of research. The same year the Association Française des Historiens Économistes reiterated the recommendations of the CNRS. The Centre de Recherches Historiques in the Sixth Section of the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes was charged with studying changes in agricultural production from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries as refracted through the tithe documents. Thanks to the collaboration of a team of historians, some twenty case

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studies were prepared and presented at the first Congrès National des Historiens Economistes Français in Paris on 11 and 12 January 1969. Their findings were published under the title *Les fluctuations du produit de la dîme*.⁵ Most of these case studies were concerned with France, but the studies of Andalusia and Sicily already represented an attempt to extend the geographical scope of enquiry. These studies provoked a lively, wide-ranging and often polemical discussion of the value of this source and the ways in which it should be used.⁶ They succeeded in focussing attention on a mass of archival information previously exploited only by ecclesiastical and institutional historians. They also succeeded in confirming regional variations in the income and the obligations of the peasants in different provinces of France during the *ancien régime*.

While this national study was going on (between 1966 and 1969), Michel Morineau produced his work – which he intended to be controversial – on the misleading appearances of take-off by the French economy in the eighteenth century.⁷ He drew on a very important body of statistical and demographic data, and made the tithe series of Onnaing and Quarouble the focal point of this argument. Data drawn from tithes and from agricultural yields and income enabled him to question the existence of an agricultural revolution in France at the end of the *ancien régime*, placing it instead more generally in the first third of the nineteenth century.

For the same area – the north of France – Pierre Deyon collected a large quantity of tithe data in order to study changes in leases by the Hôtel-Dieu at Amiens, and, more generally, trends in rents in Picardy from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries.⁸

In other countries historians were showing a similar interest in tithe documents (though perhaps less systematically), and this was to open up very interesting areas for comparative studies. In an article about the Meuse area of Belgium in *Annales* in 1964, J. Ruwet identified some of

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the conditions necessary for the use of this type of source in the measuring of agricultural production in the *ancien régime*.⁹ Also during the 1960s in Hungary, Istvan Kiss collected a vast amount of data from the tithe registers of the sixteenth century, and, together with other Hungarian historians, began an important study of cereal production in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in which he incorporated tithe data.¹⁰

It was above all in Spain, however, that the real pioneer work was undertaken. The earliest of these studies was that of Angel Cabo Alonso, which appeared in 1955.¹¹ From 1965 on, studies of this type increased, influenced by the work of Gonzalo Anes, and in particular by his book on agrarian crises in modern Spain.¹²

Although the opening up of all these fields of research made it possible to draw comparisons on a European scale, it was still necessary to find a suitable framework in which this kind of comparison could take place. Once again it was Labrousse who, on the occasion of a conference on historical method organized by A. Eiral Roel at the University of Santiago de Compostela in 1973, suggested reviving the French enquiry of 1966–9.¹³ After this conference, dedicated to the discussion of research on the fluctuations in the tithe product, it was agreed to launch an international enquiry entitled ‘Peasant dues, tithes and trends in agricultural production in preindustrial societies’.¹⁴ Le Roy Ladurie and I were made responsible for this study. We wanted this survey to cover a very wide geographical area and a very long time span. More than sixty researchers from seventeen countries agreed to participate, and met in Paris (30 June–2 July 1977) for a conference in preparation for the Seventh International Economic History Congress.¹⁵

As the list of authors and subjects indicates, this new project spanned six centuries, from the fourteenth to the nineteenth, and above all, it considerably extended the geographical area previously covered by research. Eastern,

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Western, Central and Southern Europe are all well represented by contributions on the following countries: Eire, Great Britain, Belgium, Holland, West Germany, East Germany, Switzerland, Hungary, Poland, the USSR, Italy, Spain and Portugal. Research on Quebec, Mexico and on Chile (undertaken by Marcello Carmagnani a few years ago)¹⁶ has provided us with some very interesting points of comparison with regard to the nature of the sources, ways of using them and general trends. Finally, as for France (the subject of most of the studies at the 1969 conference), a serious gap is now being filled by research in Brittany and the area west of the Paris Basin. In the following chapters I shall return to the other problems considered at this preparatory conference, problems concerning the diversity of sources, sophistication of methods and widening of the range of questions asked.

This entire study will be published shortly by the Ecole des Hautes Etudes and the CNRS, but it is already possible to consult the *Proceedings of the Seventh International Economic History Congress*, edited by Michael Flinn.¹⁷ Volume I contains an introduction by Le Roy Ladurie and myself,¹⁸ and the five national reports presented in Edinburgh in August 1978:

- H. Van der Wee (Louvain), Agrarian development in the Low Countries as reflected in tithe and rent statistics, 1250–1800.
- M. Aymard (Ecole des Hautes Etudes) and G. L. Basini (Parma), Agricultural production and productivity in Italy (16th–18th centuries).
- L. Makkai (Budapest), Peasant dues, tithes, rents and trends in agricultural production during the preindustrial era in some Eastern European countries.
- A. L. Head-Koenig (Geneva), The measurement of production and cereal yields in Germany and Switzerland in the modern period.
- G. Anes and A. Garcia Sanz (Madrid), Tithes and agricultural production in modern Spain.¹⁹

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For the Netherlands, North and South, the report mentioned above, together with nine studies on the tithe, rents, yields, productivity and the problem of the 'agricultural revolution', were collected in a volume entitled *Productivity of Land and Agricultural Innovation in the Low Countries (1250–1800)* by Van der Wee and Van Cauwenberghé,²⁰ who participated in both the preparatory conference in Paris and the Edinburgh Congress.

Another team, led by Verhulst and Vandebroecke (Ghent), has just published a collection of essays on agricultural productivity in Flanders and Brabant, from the fourteenth to the nineteenth centuries²¹ which draw on tithe data. These two collections mean that the Netherlands, North and South, is one of the best documented areas in Western Europe.

We could almost say the same for the Iberian Peninsula, if all the work in hand was actually published. We already have access to some important studies, which include Baudilio Barreiro Mallon on the Xallas region of Galicia in the eighteenth century,²² and Manuel Garzon Pareja on the establishment and abolition of the tithe in the diocese of Granada.²³ Apart from the work of Gonzalo Anes which we have already mentioned, the most important of these studies are Pinedo's work on economic growth and social change in the Basque country,²⁴ Angel Garcia Sanz's analysis of development and crises in Old Castille during the *ancien régime*,²⁵ and M. A. Ladero Quesada and M. Gonzalez Jimenez's work on the production, commercialization and consumption of cereals in the Kingdom of Seville in the fifteenth century.²⁶

All in all a wonderful harvest of tithe data over the last twenty years! Not only, to borrow Labrousse's phrase, did the study of production 'take off' simultaneously in several countries, but comparative studies on a wide, international scale are now possible, thanks to the use of a source which has always been known but was previously used only for the history of the Church or administration. By its very

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Appendix

nature the tithe is one of the best means of measuring trends in agricultural production: its fundamental characteristics, like the variety of forms it took, account for the methodology we have suggested.

Appendix

Contributions to the conference held in Paris (30 June–2 July 1977) in preparation for the Seventh International Economic History Congress.

West Germany

W. Achilles (Göttingen), The development of the income of the peasants in lower Saxony during the last third of the 18th century.

F. W. Henning (Cologne), Die Entwicklung der Dienste und der Abgaben im 16. Jahrhundert in Mitteleuropa.

East Germany

H. H. Muller (Berlin), Le mouvement des prestations payannes, des rentes et de la production agricole dans la Marche du Brandebourg, du XVe au XVIIIe siècle (quelques seigneuries).

Eire

D. Dickson (Dublin), Tithe and rent as sources for Irish agricultural trends before 1815.

Great Britain

R. Kain (Exeter), Les dîmes, les relevés de dîmes et la mesure de la production agricole dans la Grande-Bretagne préindustrielle.

P. K. O'Brien and D. Heath (Oxford), The efficiency of British and French agriculture, 1815–1914.

Belgium

M. Gutman (Texas), War, tithe and agricultural production: the Meuse Basin north of Liège: 1661–1740.

M. J. Tits-Dieuaide (Paris), Rendements céréaliers dans les environs de Louvain, 1404–1726.

E. Van Cauwenberghe and H. Van der Wee (Louvain), Pro-

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ductivité, évolution du prix d'affermage et superficie de l'entreprise agricole aux Pays-Bas du XIVe au XVIIIe siècle.

Spain

- G. Anes Alvarez (Madrid), Las fluctuaciones de la producción agrícola durante el siglo XVIII y comienzos del XIX en España.
- R. Benitez Sanchez-Blanco (Valencia), Diezmos andaluces: series malagueñas de diezmos del trigo.
- L. M. Bilbao and E. F. de Pinedo (Bilbao). Evolución del producto agrícola bruto en el País Vasco peninsular, 1537–1850. Primeira aproximación a través de los diezmos y de la primicia.
- J. Casey (East Anglia), Structure et développement de l'agriculture de Valence à l'époque moderne, 1500–1700.
- A. Eiras Roel (Santiago), Dîme et mouvement du produit agricole en Galice (1600–1837).
- A. Garcia Lombardo Vinas (Santiago), Formas de apropiación del excedente agrario en una economía señorial: las rentas forales y el derecho de la luctuosa en la Galicia del antiguo regimen.
- A. Garcia Sanz (Madrid), La producción de cereales y leguminosas en Castilla la vieja: los diezmos del obispado de Segovia de 1570 a 1800.
- M. Garzon Pareja (Granada) and B. Vincent (CNRS–CRH, Paris), Tributos campesinos a la Iglesia en el Reino de Granada.
- M. Lemeunier (Casa de Velasquez), Approche méthodologique des dîmes de Murcie à l'époque moderne.
- J. M. Palop Ramos (Valencia), El producto diezmal valenciano durante los siglos XVII y XVIII. Aproximación a su estudio.
- J. M. Palop Ramos and R. Benitez Sanchez-Blanco (Valencia), Evolución de la renta fenda valenciana en el siglo XVIII.
- P. Ponsot (Lyon II), Malthus n'était-il pas prophète en Andalousie? Les rendements des céréales en Basse-Andalousie du XVIIe au XIXe siècle.
- B. Vincent (CNRS–CRH, Paris), Mesures de la production dans le royaume de Grenade au XVIe siècle.

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- G. Beaur (Paris), *Le mouvement annuel de la rente foncière chartraine, 1760–1780.*
- G. Bois (Besançon), *Sur les mouvements de longue durée en économie féodale.*
- P. Butel (Bordeaux), *Production viticole et rente foncière en Bordelais au XVIIIe siècle.*
- C. Chereau (Brussels), *Pour une approche méthodique des baux angevins et manceaux aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles.*
- J. M. Constant (Paris), *L'évolution de la rente foncière et de la rentabilité de la terre en Beauce aux XVIe et XVIIe siècles.*
- L. Gangneux (Grenoble), *Biens et seigneuries de l'ordre de Malte en France méridionale aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles: problèmes de production et de productivité agraires.*
- J. Garnier (Caen), *Eléments de conjoncture: production et rente foncière en Normandie, Maine et Anjou.*
- J. Georgelin (Marseille-Luminy), *L'écologie du froment en Europe occidentale.*
- T. Le Goff (Toronto), *Autour de quelques dîmes vannetaises (XVIIe–XVIIIe siècle).*
- M.Th. Lorcin (Lyon II), *La fraude des décimables: mouvement court ou mouvement long?*
- L. Michel (Montreal), *Quelques données sur le mouvement de la rente foncière en Anjou, du milieu du XVIIe siècle à la Révolution.*
- M. Morineau (Clermont-Ferrand), *Cambrésis et Hainaut: des frères ennemis?*
- M. Morineau (Clermont-Ferrand), *La dîme et le zeste, XIVe–XXe siècles.*
- J. Nicolas (Montpellier), *L'enjeu décimal dans l'espace rural savoyard.*
- J. P. Pavard (Caen), *Le mouvement de la rente foncière dans la plaine de Caen d'après trois échantillons. Fin XVIe siècle–1789. Bilan provisoire.*
- A. Poitrineau (Clermont-Ferrand), *Productions animales et végétales dans les montagnes d'Auvergne au XVIIIe siècle.*

Holland

- A. M. Van der Woude (Wageningen), *The secular movement of rent for pasture-land in North-Holland and the problem of profitability in agriculture, 1570–1800.*