

Call for Sessions - WEHC 2015 [S20081]

Proposed title of the session

Nobility and business. The contribution of the aristocracy to economic development in the 18th-19th centuries

Abstract

In recent years the history of the nobility has received increasing attention throughout Europe. However, there is still a lack of research on the contribution of the aristocracy to the economic development during the crucial period of industrialization and its initial diffusion beyond England and Europe (18th and 19th century). The progressive loss of political and social power of the nobility has led to studies investigating the rise of the bourgeoisie, focusing on merchants and entrepreneurs with lower class origins. The traditional «transition from feudalism to capitalism» itself implied the decline of the nobility and the end of its prominent role in social and economic life.

Nevertheless, in Europe (even in those countries where the illuminist reforms and the Napoleonic sale of public property took place) the nobility continued to hold a considerable share of land ownership throughout the 18th and 19th centuries and, more importantly, the aristocracy as a whole owned most of the large plots of farming land. Several noblemen were interested in agricultural innovation, financed agrarian schools, academies and studies and introduced new techniques and types of plants, cultivation and animals. This marked tendency towards innovation did not lead to a revolution in relationships and contracts in the agrarian sector, indeed peasants were usually obliged to work and live in worse conditions than before. Nevertheless, this often seems to have occurred more to earn higher profits or for «management» reasons, than for social or ideological objectives. Crops, harvests and the economic yield of land were strictly controlled, and administered using a complex system similar to that of the managerial structure of a competitive enterprise. At the same time, noblemen were among the principal investors in railways, urban transport systems, the construction of gas and electricity networks, public national and foreign debts, industries (in which they were directly involved - especially in the transformation of raw materials such as silk or cotton and in the agro-alimentary sector), sharing a common economic behaviour with merchants and industrialists and following similar investment strategies.

The aim of the session is to re-evaluate the contribution of the aristocracy to economic development. Noblemen were in the exceptional and favourable position of being able to exploit the increasing number and type of opportunities for profit offered by the economic transformation: the richest, with a strong scientific interest (and sometimes scientific knowledge), heirs to large estates and to complex administration systems originating from feudal times and updated to meet the new managerial necessities, embedded in wide, international, social (and political) networks which were easily transformed into economic relationships.

The session is open to all those studies which could provide new insights into the economic behaviour of the nobility in different continents, countries and local realities. Contributions on extra European cases are particularly welcome. Papers which deal with the main theme from different viewpoints (also referring to other historical periods) - thus opening up a debate - are encouraged.

I. Corresponding Session Organiser

Prof. Silvia A. Conca Messina (University of Milan [Italy])

II. Co-Organiser(s)

1. Corresponding Organiser.
 2. Prof. Takeshi Abe (Kokushikan University [Japan])
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III. Expected Participant(s)

1. Takeshi Abe (Kokushikan University, Tokyo [Japan])
2. Silvia A. Conca Messina (University of Milan [Italy])
3. Matthew Cragoe (University of Lincoln [United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland])
4. Daniela Felisini (University of Rome Tor Vergata [Italy])
5. Gudrun Gersmann (University of Cologne [Germany])
6. Nkemjika Chimee Ihediwa (University of Nigeria, Nsukka [Nigeria])
7. Maria Eugenia Mata (Universidade Nova de Lisboa [Portugal])
8. Shunsuke Nakaoka (Kokushikan University, Tokyo [Japan])
9. Porphant Ouyyanont (Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University, Pakkred Nonthaburi [Thailand])
10. Marta Petrusewicz (University of Calabria [Italy])
11. Monika Pöttinger (Bocconi University, Milan [Italy])
12. Stuart Schwartz (Yale University [United States of America])
13. Roberto Tolaini (University of Genoa [Italy])
14. Bartolomé Yun-Casalilla (Universidad Pablo de Olavide de Sevilla [Spain])