

9th summer school in economic history

26-27-28 August 2021

(Susa, Italy)

CIRCULATION OF KNOWLEDGE AND ECONOMIC DYNAMICS IN MEDIEVAL AND MODERN TIMES HUMAN MOBILITY, TECHNICAL TRANSFERS AND TERRITORIAL ISSUES.

Abstract

The 9th Summer School in Economic History will be held in Susa (Piedmont, Italy) on 26, 27 and 28 August 2021. The topic chosen this year - "Circulation of knowledge and economic dynamics in medieval and modern times: human mobility, technical transfers and territorial issues" - is at the crossroads of cultural and economic history. This theme will also serve to further and deepen those developed in previous years (the value of things, poverty, common goods, payment methods, quality, organization of work, the writings of the economy, entrepreneurship).

Presentation

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People migrate and with them their skills and know-how, which they pass on in the places where they settle. Apprenticeships are also a means of disseminating knowledge. The mobility of individuals is therefore an essential issue in the organization of technical transfers. The circulation of knowledge through the movement of people can lead to the constitution of "technical districts", homogeneous in their know-how as well as in their industrial practices. Thus, the issue of the dissemination of technical knowledge and its transmission through the settling of newcomers or through apprenticeships overlaps with that of the construction of landscapes and territories, bringing together seemingly distant issues.

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Partnership

The Summer School in Economic History will bring together researchers, university academics, post-doctoral researchers, and doctoral students of all nationalities. The Summer School is organized with help of Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne University, Toulouse Jean-Jaurès University, the EPHE, the National Archives and the CNRS. The research centres involved are the following: LAMOP (UMR 8589, Paris 1/CNRS), FRAMESPA (UMR 5136, Toulouse 2/CNRS), SAPRAT (EA 4116 EPHE), IDHES (UMR 8533 Paris 1/CNRS). The event also receives financial support from the LabEx HASTEC (History and Anthropology of Knowledge,

¹ <http://terrae.univ-tlse2.fr/accueil-terrae/operations/ecoles-d-ete-d-histoire-economique-452786.kjsp?RH=1322144697526>

Techniques and Beliefs) and takes place under the patronage of the French Association of Economic History (AFHé).

Scientific committee

Michela Barbot (CNRS ENS Cachan, Idhes) ; Patrice Baubeau (Univ. Paris-Nanterre, Idhes) ; Marc Bompaire (EPHE, Saprat) ; Julie Claustre (Univ. Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, Lamop) ; Anne Conchon (Univ. Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, Idhes) ; Laurent Feller (Univ. Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, Lamop) ; Agnès Gramain (Université de Lorraine, Beta) ; Emmanuel Huertas (Univ. Toulouse Jean-Jaurès, Framespa) ; Jean-François Moufflet (Archives Nationales)

Objectives and nature of the operation

The school bring together not only historians of the medieval and modern times, but also economists and sociologists specialised in the study of economic life. The method proposed is to have a series of presentations by specialists in the annual topic and to then put them up for debate. It also allows medievalists and modernists to engage in dialogue and compare the progress of their thinking on a given theme, and even to influence doctrines. The aim is to deepen our knowledge and our reflections while allowing doctoral students or post-doctoral fellows to be associated with the work through active participation. The doctoral and post-doctoral students will give presentations and take the floor in the debates following the interventions.

Theme of the 2021 session

The theme chosen for the 9th Summer School is at the crossroads of cultural and economic history. The question of the circulation of knowledge is naturally first and foremost a question of transmission, i.e. its passage from one generation, one region or one economic sector to another. Its study and understanding implies knowing what degree of elaboration and formalisation has been achieved by actors and what is required to allow this passage.

People with practical knowledge about which economic operations need to be carried out may move. They frequently have the opportunity to confront their opinions and methods in expert commissions that meet to solve complex problems, such as in Amiens where the consolidation of the cathedral nave at the end of the 14th century gave rise to a problem that could not be solved by local masons alone. Similarly, in Pampailly, in one of Jacques Coeur's mines, a commission was able to work out a solution to the question of water drainage (dewatering). It took real geological skills and a thorough knowledge of the terrain to find it. In this case, the meeting between experts from different cities brought together knowledge as well as imaginable solutions to a practical problem. But this type of traffic remains occasional. The solution used in Pampailly may not have been used elsewhere because of the uniqueness of the site, but the method used to reach a rational solution could have been mobilized elsewhere, and by others than the Basle native Claus Smermant.

The movement of technicians is not simply related to the question of expertise: migrations, whether voluntary or more or less forced, lead to the transfer of knowledge from one region to another. These movements can be systematic and sustainable and have consequences on the very organization of the territory. Metal workers from the southwest of France and the north of the Iberian Peninsula moved from one side of the Pyrenees to the other. Their movements were for various reasons, including political instability, but also their poverty and the need to earn a salary. They helped to improve the mills of the Southwest and brought with them the manufacturing

processes they used, which were then imitated. In this way, they played a major role in the construction of a real industrial district where agents had the same shared knowledge and used the same practices and processes.

Merchants, on the other hand, needed special practical and theoretical knowledge for their activity which urban schools were unable to provide. Italian cities therefore developed special institutions to teach the knowledge that merchants needed. Such schools have existed in Italy since the 13th century. They provided the rudiments of a practical culture based on reading and writing in the common language, the use of accounts and abacuses. All this knowledge and these techniques presuppose a minimum of formalization and a certain capacity for mathematics: Fibonacci came from a merchant background and *Liber Abaci* was not without utility or practical outlets, even if the main invention, the zero, was intended to make it possible to make negative calculations and, consequently, to understand the mechanisms governing debt and the calculation of interest. The question of the diffusion and late mobilization of Arabic numerals, which are correlated with the scholarly work of Fibonacci, is linked to that of the ambivalence of medieval accounting, which was simultaneously a tool for controlling agents and an instrument for understanding and memorizing the operations carried out on objects and securities. On the other hand, from the beginning of the 13th century, the same Pisan merchant milieu investigated questions related to cartography, the representation of space, and the measurement of distances and travel times, thanks to the truckers and portulans and the accompanying nautical charts. In the light of recent scholarship, the practical knowledge necessary for economic life thus appears to be closely linked to developments in the most sophisticated abstract knowledge.

For merchants, knowledge about trade items was one of the major concerns. It dealt with their nature, their quality, the places where they could be found, and the price that should be paid for them. Schools were able to provide basic information on these issues. However, this knowledge needed to be updated and the information collected needed to be disseminated in the communities concerned. In the Middle Ages, some colossal compilation works were undertaken, bringing together and organising knowledge from various parts of the known world, the most famous example of which for medievalists is undoubtedly Pegolotti's *Pratica della Mercatura* dating from the 1340s, which lies at the heart of the gathering and dissemination of geographical and economic knowledge.

The circulation of people and their knowledge also gave rise to social and cultural oppositions and conflicts. Of this sometimes somewhat surprising confrontation, the building site of the Duomo in Milan offered an example with the opposition, which was not only rhetorical, between a purely empirical practice, that of the city's master masons, and a highly standardized theoretical knowledge, imposing both technical choices and aesthetic biases, that of the architect Jean Mignot. What was at stake was quite simply the relationship between scholarly knowledge and locally acquired know-how, and can be summed up in Mignot's murderous formula: *Ars sine scientia nihil est*. To which the Milanese replied by saying: *Scientia sine arte nichil est*. This can be understood as an opposition between international knowledge, travelling across borders and validated by multiple achievements, and purely local practical knowledge that has no value elsewhere than where it is produced. The reception of exogenous scholarly knowledge is therefore by no means automatic inasmuch as it meets knowledge structured around the material or spiritual needs of solid and often very self-confident societies.

Finally, there is the question of the passage of knowledge from one generation to the next, i.e. both teaching and, above all, apprenticeship. The teaching of trade practices and knowledge has already been mentioned. The case of apprenticeship is equally complex. It did not necessarily suppose going from one town to another, at least in the Middle Ages, when it was reserved primarily for the inhabitants of the city for moral and economic reasons. Through gestures and knowledge, values that were part of the identity of the city were passed on.

Apprenticeship concerns tacit knowledge, i.e. knowledge that does not give rise to systematic

verbalization and very rarely to a passage to the written word, except in the form of recipes that are often not very explicit. The "manufacturing secret" can only be transmitted by imitating the gesture which, accompanied by the living word of the master, allows the vertical circulation of knowledge, its passage from an "authority" to a disciple who is often a child and, consequently, from one generation to another. The teacher's teaching, mentioned in apprenticeship contracts, is never explicit. Its content is in fact never specified and its methods remain unknown, even if it were to be based on imitation and repetition. This form of circulation-transmission requires neither formalization nor, *a fortiori*, passage to the written word, except when, by accident or chance, the apprenticeship contracts mention it. It builds authority and is linked to the young person's integration into the institution which will subsequently supervise his professional life, control the quality of his work and often accompany him, through the confraternity, in all the ritual acts of his life, even in his death. In this particular case, the vertical circulation of knowledge is indissolubly linked to the entire social life of the subject, of which it constitutes one of the first acts. This form of circulation does not, however, encourage innovation or even the dissemination of practical knowledge. On the contrary, it organizes secrecy, that of the techniques specific to each workshop (atelier?) and the repetition of the same.

However, the development of a new form or the appearance of a new product, such as the banknote for example, may be based on a difficult compromise between a trend toward rationalisation and industrialisation, required to speed up production, and the development of specific craft or quasi-artisanal know-how, based on "secret" skills, which are the only way to guarantee against counterfeiting. The distribution of banknotes as a standardised monetary information medium is therefore accompanied by an effort to make production more complex, which is in contradiction with standardisation, and is accompanied by close monitoring of workers to prevent the leakage of strategic information on the "signs" of the concrete banknote. The Banque de France, like many other economic players, saw the withholding of information as a *sine qua non* for the value of the banknote: in the mid-19th century, the classic combination of privilege, monopoly and secrecy was once again in evidence.

In other fields, such as textiles, the presence of guilds meant the preservation of the city's own techniques through permanent quality controls: here, transmission also means the honour of the city, magnified by its productions and by the body of institutions that can guarantee it. This transmission has a counterpart: the tendency to block the circulation of knowledge. Letting go of trained craftsmen is also letting go of the techniques that enrich the city and form its honour. On the other hand, the reception can be very favourable: Lucca, which had a monopoly in Italy on the silk industry, long held back its silk craftsmen, until it was forced in the 14th century to let many of them go to Bologna and others to Milan, because of the political and economic crises this part of Tuscany was experiencing then.

These medieval challenges are found and transformed in modern and contemporary Europe, due to the expansion of printed publishing and the growing literacy of the population. Yet it would be naïve to believe that it would be enough to be printed for knowledge to circulate: multiple obstacles remain, either in terms of access to printed matter, selection from among this printed matter, or finally the capacity to receive this knowledge. Moreover, the same issues of reputation, retention of trade secrets, or business discretion when profit depends essentially on privileged access to information, continue to limit the circulation of information. The question of the link between the movements of economic growth and the circulation of knowledge, circulation from practitioners to scholarly circles or in the opposite direction, between regions or between economic sectors has become a fundamental area of economic history. Connected history, the history of knowledge, the history of the capture of indigenous knowledge within commercial and territorial empires, thus directly challenges the "information content" of economic growth.

The 9th Summer School will be divided into four main thematic sessions that will reflect the

points raised here: (1) how does new knowledge become established in a region or in a new generation and how is it adapted? (2) The modalities of transmission and the institutions that make it possible. (3) The different types of elaboration and transmission of knowledge through the practical problems posed by the question of knowledge and natural resource management. (4) Secrecy, protection and imitation.

Sessions:

1. Implementing and adapting knowledge
2. Transmission frames and vectors
3. Scholarly and shared knowledge: the issue of natural resources
4. Preserving, protecting, imitating knowledge

Registration modalities for doctoral students / postdoctoral fellows

Places are available for young researchers - doctoral or post-doctoral students - in medieval and modern economic history, economics or sociology. The working languages being 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 15-minute oral presentation on the topic of the day. This communication will be based on the presentation of an archival collection or a source of economic history that has been at the heart of their research.

The organization will take care of the entire stay on site. Travel expenses (round trip) will be reimbursed up to 200 euros.

As the number of places is limited, applications will be examined by a selection committee composed of the scientific organisers of the conference.

The application file (in English or French) will include :

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

Applications must be sent before 1st May 2021 to Emmanuel Huertas (Univ. Toulouse Jean-Jaurès): emmanuel.huertas@univ-tlse2.fr