

Summaries of articles

Kinship and its numerical history

P. LASLETT

This piece begins by considering the importance of numbers of kin to the study of social structure in the past, the present and the future. It insists that there is no known method of recovering all the kin links of an individual or a community. This is true for the present, but it is much more so for the past. This makes it impossible to compare the size of kinship networks of individuals or of communities between periods or between places. The rest of the article discusses a method for simulating the numbers, sexes and ages of the relatives of individuals from information about births, marriages and deaths characteristic of the time at which these individuals lived. The technique used, microsimulation, using probabilistic methods, is summarized and a small selection of the very large number of available results are presented. These include the fact that kinship numbers vary over time and may have changed quite rapidly from period to period in the past. Kin numbers are being relentlessly reduced over time: in the extreme case of contemporary one-child China, if the policy of drastic fertility reduction continues, all kinship links except the vertical will gradually disappear. An appendix specifies the microsimulation system, CAMSIM, which has been used and four tables of numerical results are presented.

Climatic Change and its Impact upon Long-Term Fluctuations of Grain Prices in Europe (16th to 20th Century)

Ch. PFISTER

The significance of meteorological variables for grain price formation in Central Europe was tested for the period between the mid-sixteenth century and the coming of the railway. The model was based upon monthly estimated measurements of temperature and precipitation. The comparison with the fluctuations of grain prices allowed distinguishing between weather and non-weather impacts. Subsistence crises were touched off by meteorological constellations that included a cold spring and a rainy mid-summer. The contrasts of impact levels in the long run did bear on the intensity and duration of trade cycles, in particular on the price revolution in the sixteenth century.

Exports and Economic Growth in France in the 1860s

P. VERLEY

The objective of this article is to show how the intersectorial method can be of interest to the historian. Using an intersectorial exchange chart representing France's economy in the 1860s, the stimulating effect of exports according to product type is measured, and the question whether the evolution of export structure, following upon the 1860 free-trade treaty, had a favorable effect on economic growth or not is answered. Didn't the rapid development of exports risk running up against obstacles—obviously leading to adaptation—from certain highly solicited production sectors? Agriculture and textiles seemed to be unable, towards the middle of the decade, to respond to the dynamics of exports.

Indifference to Difference : Foreigners in the South-West of France

A. ZINK

There seem to have been three ways of being a foreigner in the south-west of France in the 18th century: 1) coming from some other area, i.e. being a migrant; 2) speaking a different language, i.e. being Basque; 3) observing another religion, i.e. being Jewish. The migrants did not inspire hostility. The Basques were designated as such in Gascon milieus when they only spoke Basque, but the population was not hostile towards them; it was the Bordeaux administration that manifested a sense of foreignness regarding them. Jews had been settled in the region for many years and were subjects of the King: neither the administration nor the notaries designated them as foreigners. It was the Bayonnais, a municipal body and corporation, which exploited to the utmost the pretext of difference to divest Jews of most of their economic rights. As for the population, in its everyday life it seemed indifferent to difference.

Central European Cities in the Late Middle Ages

H. SAMSONOWICZ

This article discusses the urban phenomenon in the transitional zone between Asiatic and European regions, to use Max Weber's classificatory schema. In the territory East of the Caroligian limes up to the Russian border, towns were created which constituted autonomous communities. The urban model in this zone differed from those of the "Asiatic" and "European" towns. It was the result of "external" forces inspired by territorial sovereign powers making use of Western models which were not always applicable to local conditions. The bourgeoisie, except in large cities such as Prague, Gdansk, Lubeck, and Dubrovnik, did not constitute a social force capable of counterbalancing chivalry. The cities—rather small on the whole—were socially open centers where the formation of new social groups took place up until the end of the Middle Ages. These cities had varying degrees of autonomy, and influenced professional life and their inhabitants' consciousness. Linked to the rural hinterland, these cities played a very important role in the money circulation process and, through their commercial activity, in the stimulation of rural production. It seems that almost all city dwellers simultaneously engaged in trade, crafts, usury and agricultural production. Central-Eastern Europe's great development in the 15th and 16th centuries was no doubt rendered possible by the existence of these numerous local centers.