

**Aristocracy, patrimonial management  
strategies and economic development,  
1450-1800**

*ROBERT BRENNER, PAUL JANSSENS AND BARTOLOMÉ YUN-CASALILLA*  
*Session Organizers*

*CLARA EUGENIA NÚÑEZ*  
*Editor*

**B5**

*Proceedings*  
*Twelfth International Economic*  
*History Congress*  
*Madrid, August 1998*







*Aristocracy, patrimonial management strategies  
and economic development, 1450-1800*

*Stratégies de gestion patrimoniale de la noblesse  
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UNIVERSIDAD  
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Caja de Ahorros  
del Mediterráneo

FUNDACIÓN  
FOMENTO  
DE LA  
HISTORIA  
ECONÓMICA

Sevilla, 1998

Serie: Ciencias Económicas y Empresariales  
Número: 39

Edición financiada dentro del Convenio  
Universidad de Sevilla y Fundación El Monte.

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DE LA UNIVERSIDAD DE SEVILLA, 1998

Porvenir, 27 - 41013 Sevilla.

Telfs. 95 423 19 58 - 95 423 59 75. Fax: 95 423 22 45

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© Editor: Clara Eugenia Núñez, 1998

Impreso en España - Printed in Spain

I.S.B.N. de la obra completa: 84-472-0271-2

I.S.B.N. del tomo: 84-472-0442-1

Depósito Legal: SE-1.592-1998-B5

Maquetación e Impresión:

Imprenta A. Pinelo. Camas-Sevilla

## PREFACE

As in previous meetings, all the authors were asked to supply their text in English or French, yet we decided to accept also papers submitted in the mother tongue of the host country, this being the first International Economic History Congress to be held in a Spanish-speaking country. Furthermore, in an attempt to increase the possible spillovers of having such a scholarly meeting in our country, and thanks to a generous grant from the Spanish Ministry of Education and Culture, we have included an abstract of the largest possible number of papers in the local language.

Lack of time, financial strains and possibly inadequate editorial skills help to explain some of the errors the reader may still find in these Congress Proceedings. That most of these problems have been overcome is due to the dedication and ability of a most capable group of collaborators: Stefan Houpt, Begoña Moreno, José María Ortiz-Villajos (the author of all translations into Spanish), Gloria Quiroga, and Graciela Sylvestre. We would also like to thank all those who submitted their papers, especially those who did so in time and were kind enough to follow our cumbersome editing directions, and above all those who organized the B-Sessions and are responsible for the final selection of papers.

Finally, recognition is due to the Universidad de Sevilla and the El Monte Foundation which have made the publication of this volume possible as well as to Caja del Mediterráneo which has contributed to finance it.

CLARA EUGENIA NÚÑEZ  
Editor



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## INTRODUCTION

ROBERT BRENNER, PAUL JANSSENS, *K.U. Brussel, Belgium*  
and BARTOLOMÉ YUN-CASALILLA, *Universidad de Valladolid, Spain*

For many years certain assumptions have governed the study of the aristocracy and its role in economic development. It has often been considered as a parasitic class, lacking both interest and rationality in managing its estates, and, overall, an obstacle to economic development. Within this critique, an exception has been made of the English aristocracy, an economically innovative group whose achievements led to the agrarian revolution that would pave the way for the rapid industrialization of the island. It is not an exaggeration to say that all this has determined our concepts of growth and backwardness up to the 19th century.

Although there does not yet exist an alternative point of view, many assumptions supporting the above scenario are being questioned in current research. This revisionism coincides with certain changes in our perception of pre-industrial economic growth. There is a tendency to look not so much at a technological revolution, but at gradual improvements or organizational innovations, and at the processes of labor intensification feasible in peasant family economies leading to economic growth at the margins of large noble farms. In addition, current research on social and political history underlines the logic of the aristocratic family networks and the relevance of political influence to understand the coherence behind behavior apparently incomprehensible from our own criteria of rationality.

The main objective of this session is to study the implicit rationality—if such a rationality really exists—in seigneurial patrimonial management and its effects on the economic development in distinct times and societies. As addressing the subject from a comparative and innovative viewpoint is one of our main aims, papers on different regions and epochs were asked for. Our session includes not only different European regions, but also areas of other continents. All this obviously means a wide conception of the term aristocracy, embracing even the dominant groups in some regions of North America. In spite of its inaccuracy from the social point of view, this flexibility in the concept seems to us appropriate to an international session whose main aims are transcontinental comparisons of a variety of management criteria and the examination of their impact upon the economy.

Contributors were asked to address many different aspects, all of them to be considered from the viewpoint of the way they influenced economic development.

Thus internal variables and particularly family conflicts and solidarities impinging on management strategies should be stressed. One has the impression that noble administration were not monolithic units of maximizing profits but the result of complex and heterogenous networks of family interests and tensions whose main end was to keep internal equilibrium and to support the political aspirations of the lineage. With this as the starting point, we have tried to approach the following questions: were the large fortunes managed according to economic (maximization of profits) or to socio-political criteria derived from these tensions? Were there changes in that respect during the period under study? How and to what extent did changes or immobility affect the performance of the economy?

The relevance of legal considerations is obvious. In this sense, the main questions that we hoped would be answered are related to changes in property rights and the conditions of the credit market as well as their effect on managerial criteria. How did modifications or immutability in this respect affect aristocratic investment, expenditure or consumption? Was economic development possible without such transformations? On a similar line, we wanted to know more about the role of privilege in ownership or about the seigneurial control of the market in economic development. Did it entail obstruct investment? How did it affect the allocation and circulation of productive resources and their effect on economic development? As regards institutional control of the markets and monopolies in general, did they lead to a way of raising revenue that obstructed or made innovative and productive investment unnecessary? What role did the seigneurial coercion to use different productive resources (particularly land and labor) play in the same way?

As is nowadays the case with business enterprises, institutional contexts and political structures were determining elements. The nature of the State and the rules of the political game must be considered as the starting point for the analysis of managerial rationale. In that sense, how were institutions permeated by the aristocratic interest group and how did this affect their economic behavior? Did corruption or sinecures reduce the interest for economic improvements in their properties? To what extent was nobles' integration in the State (or, if so, in the Empire) and in certain key institutions favorable or obstructive to an economic policy conducive to growth or development?

As can be seen, the contributors were asked to analyze all these aspects from the point of view of their impact on economic development and in a comparative approach. To that end, not only should direct effects on the economy be considered, but also the way in which aristocratic interests contributed to create a whole historical framework that conditioned it. It is worthwhile to consider not only the extent to which family, political or ideological conditions affected this group's investments or its conspicuous spending, but also the way in which these aspects influenced the performance of other groups.



# LANDLORDS AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN ENGLAND, 1450-1800

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## AGRICULTURE AND ENGLISH ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The English aristocracy is one of the few that historians have judged favourably in terms of its contribution to economic development. The owners of great estates enclosed the open fields, created large-scale capitalist farms, and invested in both agricultural and nonagricultural infrastructure. While the English gentry and aristocracy were undoubtedly more progressive than the aristocracies in some other countries, this paper urges a reconsideration of their role in English economic development. This reassessment is developed by examining the role of large landowners in raising agricultural productivity, expanding the home market for industry, and promoting capital formation.

Before analyzing what the landed classes did, it is important to establish who they were. Large landowners in England included both the titled aristocracy and the broader class of gentry. Peers did not enjoy an elevated legal status except they they could not be arrested for debt. While the rise of the gentry has been debated for the 16th century, Stone and Stone (1984) have concluded that there was little change in the composition of large landowners from 1590 to 1880, including, indeed, little assimilation of new members from business and commerce. Gregory King's social table for 1688 shows 160 temporal lords, 26 spiritual lords, 800 baronets, 600 knights, 3,000 esquires, 12,000 gentlemen, and 10,000 clergy. This was the gentry and aristocracy on broadest count, and is the group whose role will be discussed in this paper.

Unlike many of their continental counterparts, the English upper classes depended on the management of landed property for their income, rather than on royal favour or public office. While King's figures are not unambiguous, one reading of them shows the landed classes receiving somewhat more than half of the rent of England in 1688. The share rose to 80% in the next century. While this increase is consistent with the large-scale acquisition of property to be discussed later, some historians have claimed the landed classes had already reached the three-quarters mark by 1688. In any event, the English gentry and aristocracy owned a larger fraction of their country's land than did other aristocracies and received a larger fraction of their income

from land. Having real estate as an economic base inclined the English gentry and aristocracy towards improvement.

### AGRICULTURAL IMPROVEMENT

The progressive reputation of the English gentry and aristocracy depends, in the first instance, on their role as agricultural improvers. The two most famous initiatives were the enclosure of the open fields and the amalgamation of small farms into large. This paper concentrates on the effects of these policies in the South Midlands (Allen 1992), but considers other regions as well.

The enclosure movement began in the 15th century and went through three waves of mounting intensity —the first was in the late 15th and early 16th centuries, the second was mainly in the 17th century, and the third was the parliamentary enclosure movement of the 18th and 19th centuries. Preparliamentary enclosures were usually intended to convert arable to pasture. Early parliamentary enclosures had the same objective, but later ones sought to improve arable farming. Most enclosures were pushed forward by the gentry and aristocracy in order to raise the rental values of their estates.

The movement to large farms was mainly an 18th century reorganization. In earlier centuries, demesnes were usually let with beneficial leases and cultivated as large units, while the rest of the land was held by peasants, who relied principally on the labour of their families. Peasants held their land on a variety of tenures —freeholds, copyholds, and beneficial leases. These tenures fixed rents for very long periods, thereby giving the cultivators an incentive to improve the efficiency of the farm. Statistical studies show that large farms were more efficient than small farms at any point in time, since the large farms economized on labour and draught animals. A system of mixed sizes remained, however, until the 18th century when lords stopped renewing the long term agreements and replaced the small family farms with large farms let on short-term leases. This was the capitalist agriculture extolled by Arthur Young and the other improvers of the period. This was also an important way in which the gentry and aristocracy increased their ownership of land.

There is no doubt that agricultural productivity was rising during the early modern period. First, from 1520 to 1740, farm production about doubled. There was then a pause in expansion to 1800 followed by a two and a half fold increase to 1850 (Allen 1997, O'Brien 1996). Second, while the farm labour force did not fall absolutely, it was stabilized and declined as a share of the overall workforce. Output per worker in agriculture rose as production

increased. New farm jobs were not forthcoming as the rural population grew after 1750, and the additions to the population were either employed in manufacturing or became new charges on the Poor Law. Third, the use of capital rose in English farming from 1450 to 1800 due to (1) the increasing importance of livestock, (2) the creation of buildings, roads, hedges, etc. entailed by enclosure and farm amalgamation. There is debate as to whether this investment was necessary for the rise in output or was the (unproductive) embodiment of the new system of property relations.

How did enclosure and farm amalgamation affect agricultural productivity? Begin with the output increase. Rising crop yields were its principal cause, at least after 1600, and they doubled between the 16th century and the early 19th. Enclosures and large farms made little if any contribution to these advances. They were mainly accomplished by small-scale, open field farmers before the mid-18th century.

The impact of enclosure on yields can be gauged from surveys of hundreds of villages c. 1800. Enclosed yields were the highest, but in most cases the advantage was small; in particular, it was small compared to the doubling of yields that had occurred since the late middle ages. The yield figures show that open field villages had accomplished almost all of the productivity growth achieved by enclosed villages. The studies of yields correlate well with the aggregate estimates of output increase, which show negligible growth during the period of parliamentary enclosures. The important conclusions are that enclosure made little contribution to output growth, and that open field agriculture was progressive.

Probate inventories can be used to study the effect of farm size on yield. They establish two conclusions: First, much of the yield increase occurred before 1740—at the same time output was growing. Second, yields were uncorrelated with farm size (Allen 1997). Therefore, large farms did not lead to more output.

Enclosure and large farms did, however, stabilize farm employment. Large farms and pastoral farms employed less labour per acre than did small-scale, open-field farms, so progressive estate management practices did reduce employment in established farming regions. On the other hand, enclosure was usually the legal precondition to the improvement of waste. Millions of acres were improved in the 18th century, and that result of progressive estate management increased agricultural employment. On balance, there was little change (Allen 1992, 1994, Wrigley 1985). Hence, the constancy of farm employment after 1700 owes much to estate management practices.

These policies also increased the demand for capital in English agriculture, thereby reducing savings available to other sectors. Enclosures and large farms required new buildings, roads, hedges, and ditches—all provided at landowners' expense. Livestock herds also increased, absorbing much tenant capital. Many of these expenses would have been avoided without enclosures and large farms.

This review of recent research on farming methods calls the progressive role of the gentry and aristocracy into question. While enclosure and large farms did bump up productivity, much of the growth in output and yields was achieved independently of these initiatives by small-scale, open field farmers.

### THE RATIONALITY OF ENCLOSURE AND FARM SIZES

Even if enclosure and farm amalgamation do not explain as much technical progress as earlier historians thought, these management practices did, nonetheless, nudge productivity upward. The usual logic is that they must have been rational since they were progressive. But how rational were they? The answer is not clear cut for several reasons.

The object of enclosure was to raise rents, and often it did. This suggests that it was rational and that it contributed to economic development. The link between rent and development was forcefully proposed by McCloskey (1972), who showed that the rise in rent from enclosure equalled the rise in gross domestic product (GDP) so long as farmers and manufacturers maximized profits, capital and labour were fully employed, and the returns to those factors were the same across the economy. Under those conditions, the rise in rent equalled the rise in the value of farm production plus the rise in the value of manufacturing output from the reemployment of the released capital and labour. The sum of these increases was also the rise in GDP, which proves the theorem. Furthermore, when McCloskey's rent argument applies, the rational pursuit of the aristocracy's private interests is consistent with economic development and the advancement of the public interest.

But did the aristocracy always follow its interest? Entrepreneurial failure could have had two aspects—the failure to undertake enclosures that would have been profitable or the enclosing of villages where the rent gains did not justify the costs. These possibilities are tantalizing.

The 15th century is the era when the first possibility was likely to have obtained. The question is: why was more land not enclosed by 1500? Some would not have been profitable to enclose then. In the South Midlands, the

heavy clays that remained under the plough after enclosure were worth enclosing only during the very high prices of the Napoleonic Wars, and the light soils that remained arable may never have been worth enclosing, as we shall see. That leaves half of the South Midlands that was mainly converted to pasture after its enclosure. About 20% of that land was enclosed between 1450 and 1525 —why not more?

A good deal of it was probably too costly to enclose. Most of the enclosures of this period occurred because one manorial lord owned all of the parish either because the land was poor and the farmers had left or —and these are the more important cases— because the farmers were all customary tenants (no freeholders) and so had no legally defensible, proprietary interest in the soil. They could be evicted at low cost, the land converted to pasture, and the village destroyed.

Many enclosures of this sort were effected in the late 15th century, but they tapered off in the early 16th. One explanation is legal —that the eviction enclosures of the 15th century provoked the courts of common law and equity to recognize and protect the proprietary interests of the customary tenants. Another possibility is that, in fact, all the villages with a single lord and only customary tenants had been enclosed by c. 1500. Only villages with multiple freehold interests remained, and they were too expensive to be worth enclosing.

A judgement on the rationality of estate management at this time hinges on this issue. The resolution would require identifying the landownership situation in a sample of villages and seeing if all the ones where a single lord was the sole freeholder were enclosed. (A more complex test would require establishing the costs of negotiating an enclosure in cases with more complex ownership patterns and seeing if the ones that would have been profitable to enclose were, in fact, enclosed.) Needless to say, no one has yet undertaken this inquiry. Nonetheless, it seems unlikely that every profitable enclosure was accomplished before 1500; in which case, there was entrepreneurial failure (irrationality) of the first sort.

The second way to be irrational was to enclose land where the rent gains did not justify the costs. There are several *prima facie* examples of such enclosures in the South Midlands in the 18th and 19th centuries. The 1760s and 1770s witnessed enclosing for the conversion of arable to pasture. Many of these enclosures resulted in high quality fattening pastures stocked at high rates. There were other villages, however, where stocking densities did not rise after enclosure. Labour costs were reduced but so were revenues. Land

values (revenue minus costs) rose little, although landlords demanded higher rents and farmers' incomes fell. From a social point of view, these were not profitable enclosures.

The light arable district of the South Midlands gives many examples of seemingly unprofitable enclosures. These villages remained under the plough after enclosure, and agriculture was improved by the adoption of the most famous improvements —the Norfolk four course rotation and the New Leicester sheep. These changes caused a small rise in profit on the sheep account but had no impact on yields or other aspects of agriculture. The rise in net farm income and rents was modest. The rent gains did not cover the costs of a parliamentary enclosure, and many villages, in fact, remained open until well into the 19th century. Their productivity continued to rise under open field cultivation. Whether it was ever profitable to enclose them is far from clear. In the end, it might have been just too unEnglish to leave them as open fields. So there is also a case for entrepreneurial failure of the second sort.

Even broader questions arise when considering farm amalgamations. Bigger farms cut employment and accelerated the release of labour to industry. However, this labour release was of little use after 1750 given the population explosion during the industrial revolution. Much of the labour freed in the Midlands remained unemployed and contributed to the Poor Law Problem. From the point of view of society as a whole, the value of extra labour was zero rather than the wage paid in agriculture. The rise in rents that lords received from amalgamating farms did not represent a rise in GDP (as the McCloskey model posits) nor, for that matter, did rent increases from enclosures that freed labour. A socially rational calculation would assess farm amalgamation and enclosure on the assumption that the freed labour was worthless, and such an exercise reveals that large farms in the 18th century did not lead to economic growth nor did many enclosures that converted arable to pasture. There was, thus, a difference between private rationality and social rationality. Under these circumstances, rising rent was not an indicator of more efficient resource allocation but was simply a transfer of income from the poor to the rich.

There is also a dynamic sense in which English landowners may have acted irrationally. Into the first half of the 18th century, the small-scale, open field farmers were effective in raising output and productivity. Many of these farmers held their land on long-term tenures that gave them a considerable proprietary interest in the soil. They had an incentive to innovate since they received the resulting increase in income if they raised efficiency. This

incentive was weakened, if not eliminated altogether, as leases were transformed into tenancies at will during the 18th century. A weaker incentive to innovate may have slowed progress in open field villages and given the advantage to enclosed farming. But this organizational arrangement was not particularly productive. It may have been, therefore, that the desire to reap the short-run gains of large-scale farms led to a dynamically less efficient agriculture.

While the English gentry and aristocracy have a reputation for rationally modernizing their estates, the detailed study of enclosure and farm amalgamation raises serious doubts. Traditionalism in the early years, the faddish pursuit of improvement in the later, the contradiction between private and social rationality, the sacrifice of long term advantage for immediate gain—all these call the judgement of rationality into question.

#### AGRICULTURE'S FAILURE TO PROVIDE A MARKET FOR INDUSTRY

One potential contribution that English agriculture did not make to development was providing a home market for industry. In this respect, England stands in sharp contrast to Meiji Japan or the northern United States with their systems of small family farms. In those societies, rising farm incomes translated into rising demand for standardized manufactures, and that demand launched many consumer goods industries during early industrialization. English industry grew through exporting and sales to the urban economy. The absence of a domestic, rural market for mass produced manufactures in England was an indirect consequence of estate management policies and, so, calls those policies into question.

Promoting economic growth was never the aim of the gentry and aristocracy. Their object was to live well as lords and gentlemen. This aim did, however, predispose them to reform the agrarian system. An upper class life was more successful, the more money there was to spend, so raising income was always desirable. Indeed, improved agriculture meant little more to most aristocrats than a fatter rent roll.

The English gentry and aristocracy were remarkably successful in raising rent—indeed, they were the only gainers of the agricultural revolution. Consumers would have gained had prices fallen, but the real price of agricultural products rose from 1450 to 1800. Farmers and labourers would have gained had real wages or the real return to farm capital increased, but those factor payments declined over the same period. Real rent was the only input price that rose and it increased seven fold from 1450 to 1800. Since the gentry

and aristocracy were engrossing more and more peasant land, they were becoming the sole beneficiaries of the farm productivity growth.

This favorable (from the aristocratic point of view) distributional story was, in part, the immediate result of management policies like enclosure and large farms, but it was also the result of the slow growth in farm output, which led to higher food prices, and the rapid growth of population, which lowered wages and increased the demand for food.

Whatever its cause, the rise in rent explains why English agriculture failed to supply industry with a large market. The landed classes certainly spent their rising income, but it was on servants, stately homes, and custom handicrafts—not the mass produced goods of modern industry. A more equal distribution of income would not only have raised the living standards of many people, it would also have promoted industrialization.

#### SUPPLYING CAPITAL TO INDUSTRY

Since the gentry and aristocracy controlled most of the agricultural surplus during the industrial revolution, they were in a position to assist economic development by financing nonagricultural capital accumulation. To a degree they did, but the size of their contribution is uncertain. There are famous examples of English landlords constructing canals, urban housing, etc., as well as of landowners borrowing large sums, often from urban lenders. What was the balance? The classical economists did not regard the aristocracy as a likely source of savings (Crouzet 1972). Crafts (1985: 125) concluded that agricultural savings financed about one fifth of nonagricultural capital formation—a positive contribution but hardly decisive.

Aristocratic management policies played a role in limiting investment to the nonagricultural sector. In many countries, entails have been important in this respect. They were employed in England but were not particularly restrictive.

Every landed family aimed to ensure the survival of its estate and its name in perpetuity. At the same time, the incumbent of every estate wanted to spend as much as possible to ensure social success. The tension between estate preservation and lavish living was resolved in different ways at different times. In the late middle ages, estates in fee tail were created, but by the late 15th century entails could be barred by fines and recoveries. In the 17th century, lawyers devised complex and effective family settlements using trustees to preserve the interests of contingent remainders (unborn children). The incumbent was never more than a life tenant, so land could not be sold.

This was a powerful limitation since it meant the estate could not be mortgaged, nor could it be enclosed since that involved selling—in this case exchanging—land.

Strict settlements were actually more flexible than this description suggests. The settlements had to be recreated each generation, so changes could be made when the land was settled again. Moreover, parliamentary acts could amend settlements. One reason for the popularity of parliamentary enclosing was probably that the enclosure acts overrode the prohibitions on exchanging land specified in the family settlements.

Of greater significance for economic development was the law of mortgages. In the 15th and 16th centuries, it acted to preserve the regime of small farms. In the 18th century, it facilitated the creation of large farms and, at the same time, turned agriculture into a borrower of funds from the rest of the economy.

The undeveloped state of the law of mortgage in the 15th and 16th centuries preserved the small farms. At that time, land could not be safely and conveniently used as security for long term borrowing. One way to borrow with land as security was to transfer the property to the lender and let him operate it and receive the income—a *vif gage*. A mortgage allowed the landowner to remain in possession of the property, but this was only a device for raising short term funds since the term of the loan was usually only six months. When the land was mortgaged, its title was transferred to the lender. If the borrower missed the repayment, he lost all hope of ever recovering the land and still owed the debt to the lender! Neither of these was a satisfactory way of using land as long term security.

The only prudent alternative was to sell leases or copyholds to tenants. With these contracts, the tenant paid a large fine initially and nominal rents thereafter. Raising funds by borrowing from the peasantry was expensive—the implicit interest rates were double or more the cost of mortgage funds—but they were preferable since the lord retained occupation of the property and did not risk losing it.

Once land was sold to tenants for fines, it was hard to retrieve. Some lords in the 15th century may have thought they could back out of these deals since the tenants could not enforce their agreements against them, but the legal decisions from the 1490s onward were in the tenants' favour. Thereafter the only way for a lord to get rid of a tenant was to buy him out or to wait until the lease or copyhold expired and renew it on different terms. Under these circumstances, a conversion from selling leases to annual rents would have been difficult since it would have represented a fall in income for decades.

Financial considerations of this sort explain why farms remained small once lords began to sell leases.

During the 17th century the law relating to mortgages changed, and the modern English mortgage appeared. Mortgages were still nominally for six months and the title to the property was still transferred to the lender, but the borrower could always recover the property by repaying the principal so long as he paid the interest in the interim. The mortgage then became a device for using land as security to raise long term loans. By the 18th century, the English aristocracy was borrowing heavily and using the money to reorganize their estates. Much freehold land was bought up, while copyholds for lives and beneficial leases were not renewed. The small properties acquired in this way were amalgamated into large farms and let on short term, fixed rent contracts.

Since large farms had lower costs than small farms, farm amalgamation raised the value of the estate. However, the reorganization was not costless since the lords lost the fines they would otherwise have received from reletting the small farms on the old terms. Only gradually did the annual rental income rise and eventually exceed that value. During the transition, consumption was financed by mortgaging the property. High consumption based on the issuance of debt was rational management during the reorganization of estates (Allen 1988). It also had the perverse effect of making agriculture a borrower from the rest of the economy during the industrial revolution.

But if landowners were mainly borrowing to reorganize their estates, why were so many —apparently— investing in infrastructure and urban housing? Two factors —the extreme inequality in landownership and the law of mortgage— explain this behaviour. These factors were important because of difficulties inherent in financing construction projects. The finance for a project could not be secured with a mortgage on the project itself because, at the outset, the project did not exist. For instance, an entrepreneur may have planned to spend £500 to erect a structure on land worth £100. The resulting investment may have been worth £600, but at most £100 of borrowing could have been secured by mortgaging the project since that was all the land was worth. The rest of the £500 needed for construction would have had to have been raised as a personal loan, which would have been expensive. A good solution to this problem would have been to mortgage other property. In that way, the project could have been financed by borrowing at low mortgage interest rates rather than at higher personal rates.

Since the gentry and aristocracy owned 80% of England's real estate during the industrial revolution, they could raise four times as much cheap finance

as the rest of the country combined. It is no wonder that the landed classes were active in nonagricultural investment. Access to cheap capital is the supply-side to the story.

There is also a demand-side. Owning 80% of the country's land meant that the gentry and aristocracy owned much of the property suitable for urban and manufacturing development. Investing in that development raised the wealth of the landed classes and provided an incentive to invest outside of agriculture.

It was circumstances rather than a more rational or modern outlook that explains the role of the English gentry and aristocracy in nonagricultural capital formation. The English mortgage was no better than the French mortgage, for instance, and so mortgage law does not explain the extensive nonagricultural investments of the English landed classes. England differed from the continent in two important ways, however. The first difference was the rapid growth of its nonagricultural economy. Without a demand for funds from this sector, there would have been much less aristocratic supply. A second difference was the huge proportion of land owned by the gentry and aristocracy. In other countries much more of the land—and, hence, much more of the collateral to finance building projects—was in the hands of nonaristocratic owners. For the same reason, the English gentry and aristocracy received more of the benefits of appreciating land values from urban and commercial development than did the aristocracies of other countries. The progressiveness of the English aristocracy has more to do with the inequality in landownership and the rapid growth of the commercial economy than with a penchant for urban investment.

## CONCLUSION

While the English gentry and aristocracy have a progressive reputation, it is largely undeserved. Their well-known investments outside of agriculture were responses to the growth of the industrial economy and reflected the exceptional inequality in land ownership in England. Under their management, English agriculture failed to provide a home market for industry. Their favourite policies of enclosure and farm amalgamation did not make much of a contribution to raising output—particularly, in comparison to the advances effected by small-scale open field farmers before the mid-18th century. The unique contribution of the aristocracy and gentry were to create a system of large-scale farms that stabilized agricultural employment after 1750. Population growth

in the countryside forced many to seek their sustenance outside of farming. Unfortunately, this often meant parish relief rather than productive work.

The true heroes of the English agricultural revolution were the country's yeomen farmers —not the gentry and aristocracy who were the ultimate owners of the land they tilled. Of course, many peasantries in human history have been much less successful. The central question of English agricultural history, therefore, ought to be why the English peasantry was so productive from c. 1550 to c. 1750. The gentry and aristocracy have been allowed to claim too much of the glory that rightly belongs to England's small farmers.

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## CARACTERES D'UNE ECONOMIE ARISTOCRATIQUE EN FRANCE XVIIE-XVIII SIECLE

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Selon le Richelet, un dictionnaire de la fin du XVIIe siècle, “Soutenir noblesse, c'est vivre noblement, faire une dépense convenable à la noblesse de sa naissance”. Cette définition établit un lien étroit entre deux critères de noblesse essentiels aux Temps modernes: le statut lié à la naissance et une dépense d'un niveau et/ou d'un type particuliers. Elle pose la question du rapport noblesse-richesse, qui est au centre de la caractérisation d'une économie aristocratique, économie au sens donné par Rousseau dans l'Encyclopédie - “le sage et légitime gouvernement de la maison” —qui conduit à prendre en compte les aspects économiques mais aussi culturels du problème.

Cette approche amène à s'interroger sur la notion même d'aristocratie. Sous l'Ancien régime en France il n'y a pas une mais des noblesses. Se renouvelant profondément entre le XVIIe et le XVIIIe siècle, le groupe est confronté en permanence à un problème d'identité et de définition. Durant la première modernité il n'y a pas de véritable consensus pour définir la noblesse. Aussi au delà de quelques principes —le rôle de la naissance et du sang, la place des privilèges ou des fonctions dans la définition de l'ordre, une façon de vivre noblement— cerner la noblesse c'est s'interroger sur l'évolution des représentations et des définitions de la noblesse par les contemporains avec le passage d'une noblesse de type médiéval fondée sur la vertu notamment militaire à une noblesse moderne fondée sur des critères juridiques plus précis où le sang et la race occupent une place prépondérante (Schalk 1986). En permanence se manifeste un double mouvement de renouvellement de la noblesse et du concept lui-même. Au fur et à mesure que les XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles se déroulent, la noblesse se définit de plus en plus par sa richesse même si elle n'ose l'affirmer clairement ou même le dénonce en critiquant certaines formes d'anoblissement. Si à l'évidence le terme d'aristocratie concerne la strate supérieure du groupe, en permanence se pose un problème de limite ou de frontière car l'aristocratie recouvre une réalité diverse dans ses composantes, ses origines et sa richesse. Dans un premier temps on peut retenir sous cette appellation une noblesse titrée souvent de race immémoriale dans laquelle est incluse une bonne part des chevaliers portant des titres de dignité. Elle comprend donc le monde des princes, qu'ils

soient de sang royal, français ou étrangers mais aussi l'ensemble des duc et pairs. Mais il ne faut pas des limites trop strictes car on ne peut en exclure la véritable aristocratie d'État qui se met en place avec les grandes familles ministérielles. La haute noblesse parlementaire, dont certaines familles (les Harlay ou les Baileul) appartiennent à la noblesse de race, ne peut non plus être écartée bien que son comportement économique ait des traits spécifiques (Descimon 1989). Enfin la frontière entre la noblesse titrée et une noblesse seconde est souvent poreuse et ne doit pas davantage être saisie de façon trop stricte. La question d'un seuil à partir duquel on passe de la noblesse à l'aristocratie est réelle. Une réflexion sur les stratégies de développement économique suivies par la noblesse peut y apporter des éléments de réponse.

### LES FONDEMENTS D'UNE ECONOMIE ARISTOCRATIQUE

Cerner ces fondements conduit à s'interroger sur la nature et l'ampleur des fortunes aristocratiques, donc à voir le rapport à la terre, à l'industrie au commerce ou à la finance et à s'intéresser à la place occupée par le roi et la monarchie dans la constitution et le développement des grandes fortunes aristocratiques.

#### *Les composantes de l'emprise foncière*

Le fondement principal de la puissance économique de l'aristocratie réside dans la terre et les grandes fortunes nobiliaires sont d'abord foncières. Chez les ducs et pairs au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, 16% des fortunes sont composées uniquement de terres et pour 80% du groupe cette dimension foncière entre pour plus des 2/3 dans les patrimoines (Labatut 1972). Cette donnée est présente dans toutes les strates de la haute aristocratie et les domaines fonciers constituent généralement l'armature des fortunes. L'ampleur de ces dernières est considérable. Elles dépassent toujours le million de livres et atteignent des niveaux encore plus élevés pour les plus importantes d'entre elles (trente-deux millions de livres pour les Condé au début du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, cent millions pour les Bourbon-Penthièvre en 1789, vingt-neuf millions pour les Conty en 1783 (Roche 1967; Duma 1995: 51; Mougel 1971)). Elles sont généralement supérieures aux grandes fortunes issues de la marchandise ou même de la finance. Cette composante foncière s'affirme de plus en plus du XVI<sup>e</sup> au XVIII<sup>e</sup> aux dépens d'autres éléments comme la faveur royale ou les formes nouvelles d'activité économique.

Cette prépondérance foncière se traduit par une extension géographique considérable des possessions aristocratiques surtout pour les très grosses fortunes. Les Condé, présents dans plus de dix généralités, ne sont pas un cas isolé. En 1645 Charles de Levis duc de Ventadour possède des terres en Limousin, dans le Bourbonnais, en Bourgogne et dans la Bresse. Les Bourbon-Penthièvre contrôlent une douzaine de domaines principalement en Île de France mais aussi en Normandie, en Picardie, en Bretagne, dans la Marne, dans les Ardennes et jusque dans le sud du royaume.

Ce contrôle de l'espace est d'autant plus fort que la propriété noble est une propriété seigneuriale. Celle-ci est un élément constitutif de la noblesse même si la bourgeoisie y accède progressivement. Pouvoir sur les biens mais aussi sur les hommes, le système seigneurial conduit à un contrôle direct et indirect de la terre par la noblesse.

A coté de la réserve dont l'exploitation est de la responsabilité immédiate du propriétaire noble, l'existence des propriétés censitaires et de la multitude de droits qu'implique la seigneurie donnent à la noblesse une puissance et des moyens considérables. Cela se traduit principalement en terme de revenus. La part féodale de ces derniers est très diverse. Elle peut être très importante dans certaines fortunes et selon les régions. Elle dépasse la moitié des revenus tirés de la terre chez les La Tremoille au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle (Labourdette 1975) et constitue plus de 60% des revenus du duché de Penthièvre en Bretagne (Meyer 1985: 888-890). A la veille de 1789, en dépit de disparités régionales, elle n'est pas obsolète d'autant plus que le mouvement de réaction seigneuriale révèle des propriétaires nobles très attentifs à cette dimension de leur patrimoine.

De plus la seigneurie implique aussi un pouvoir important sur les hommes dans un espace qui va au-delà de celui de la simple propriété directe de la noblesse. Ainsi les Bourbon-Penthièvre, en raison de cette dimension seigneuriale de leur patrimoine et de la multiplication des duchés-pairies en leur possession, par le biais des divers droits dont ils jouissent, des pouvoirs de justice ou de police dont ils disposent, exercent un contrôle sur plus de 254 paroisses et 150.000 personnes au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle (Duma 1995: 222). Avec une ampleur moindre des situations analogues existent ailleurs dans le royaume. Dans le Maine à la fin du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle le plus important propriétaire foncier, le comte de Tessé, possède plus de 3.000 hectares (dont la moitié en forêts) répartis sur une trentaine de paroisses avec plus de dix châteaux et 82 exploitations (Bois 1960: 334). Une même constatation pourrait être faite pour la plupart des grandes fortunes nobiliaires. Aussi cette dimension

des fondements fonciers de la puissance de l'aristocratie, importante en terme de revenus, va au delà du seul aspect économique. Induisant des rapports de domination multiples sur les dépendants, elle donne à l'aristocratie des moyens de fonder sa prééminence qui lui assurent un pouvoir de commande important et diversifié et confortent sa puissance économique.

Enfin la puissance foncière de l'aristocratie ne s'incarne pas seulement dans les activités agricoles, elle se manifeste aussi dans le contrôle de la forêt où la noblesse exerce un véritable monopole. La forêt regroupe près de 75% des 4 454 hectares de la réserve du duché de La Meilleraye à la fin du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle (Péret 1976). Celle-ci représente 48,2% des 47.530 arpents du duché-pairie de Rambouillet et 85% du domaine propre des Bourbon-Penthièvre et seule une centaine d'arpents échappe à la noblesse (Duma 1978 : 185). De façon plus générale la forêt constitue en 1789 44% de la fortune des Bourbon-Penthièvre (Duma 1995: 57). Dans l'actuel département de la Sarthe la quasi totalité de la forêt est entre les mains de la noblesse, les bois représentant plus de la moitié des possessions des plus importants d'entre eux (Bois 1960: 331). Cette dimension se retrouve dans la plupart des grandes fortunes aristocratiques connues même si le rapport entre le foncier et le forestier apparaît plus équilibré lorsque la noblesse intermédiaire est concernée.

A travers ces différentes modalités une domination réelle de la noblesse sur la terre se manifeste. À l'image de la Beauce où le gentilhomme traditionnel possède 177 hectares, l'anobli récent 60 et le roturier aisé 45, où plus le lignage est ancien et plus il accumule les seigneuries (Constant 1981: 110), cette emprise souligne à la fois la prééminence de la noblesse dans la société de son temps et les hiérarchies qui la traverse. Ce monopole foncier fonde l'écart très grand entre la noblesse et le reste du corps social. Il n'est cependant pas la seule composante des fortunes.

### *La place du roi*

Même si en raison de sa nature même, elle s'exprime plus en terme de revenu que de capital car celui-ci est difficile à estimer, la part des faveurs royales constitue une deuxième composante importante des fortunes aristocratiques. Guillaume Gouffier compagnon de jeux de François 1<sup>er</sup> avec qui il reste lié d'amitié obtient de celui-ci en 1515 une rente annuelle de 80.000 livres, en 1517 la charge d'amiral de France et, en 1519, 8.000 livres de pension comme gouverneur du Dauphiné (Goulet 1994). Chez les Condé au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle près de la moitié des revenus annuels proviennent des charges royales (Roche 1967). Les revenus de l'Amirauté (plus de un million de livres par an en

période de guerre) jouent un rôle décisif dans la constitution de la fortune du comte de Toulouse (Duma 1995: 131-134). Cet élément est essentiel pour les grands noms de la noblesse et plus généralement pour la noblesse de Cour. Les dépenses de la monarchie revenant sous une forme ou une autre à la noblesse en sont une preuve a contrario. En 1781 cela constitue environ 24% du projet de budget présenté par Calonne.

Ces sommes parviennent à l'aristocratie par des canaux divers. À côté des classiques charges et pensions, des modalités plus discrètes mais plus efficaces se manifestent. Au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle les Condé savent tirer profit de leurs rapports privilégiés avec le Roi et Richelieu pour reconstituer une puissance foncière mise en cause au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle. Ils associent une politique d'achat, des mariages judicieux, des dons royaux (le Clermontois en 1648) et des engagements du domaine royal. Ils utilisent les pouvoirs résultant de l'exercice des charges royales (Roche 1967). Au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle les agents du comte d'Artois sous-estiment en permanence les revenus provenant de l'apanage accordé par le Roi afin de justifier l'octroi de terres supplémentaires (Bula 1993). En 1783 Louis XVI verse une prime de plus de six millions de livres au duc de Penthièvre lorsqu'il lui achète le duché de Rambouillet (Duma 1995: 120).

Ces pratiques révèlent un lien organique très fort entre le Roi et la noblesse. Elles témoignent des rapports complexes qui s'établissent entre l'aristocratie et un roi qui cherche à affirmer son pouvoir absolu et contrôler la noblesse. Cependant du XVII<sup>e</sup> au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle les fortunes aristocratiques gagnent peu à peu en autonomie. Les sommes obtenues servent en effet à faire face à des dépenses immédiates mais elles sont le plus souvent converties en domaines fonciers et en massifs forestiers qui donnent stabilité et solidité aux fortunes (Duma 1995: 142). Elles constituent un facteur de différenciation à l'intérieur de la noblesse, confortant la prééminence aristocratique, les nobles éloignés de la Cour participant de façon moindre au processus.

### *Des investissements*

En même temps la noblesse s'engage dans d'autres secteurs de l'activité économique mais cette intervention reste en partie conditionnée par la façon dont ces activités sont perçues.

Certaines activités industrielles, le travail du fer et les verreries, ne portent pas à dérogance car elles sont considérées comme une forme d'exploitation du domaine propre. Aussi la noblesse occupe une place importante dans la métallurgie, place qui se renforce au cours du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle pour répondre à l'élargissement du marché des produits métallurgiques. En Normandie 84%

des forges sont propriété nobiliaire et en Bretagne la quasi totalité de la métallurgie est entre les mains de la très haute noblesse: les Condé, les Rohan-Chabot, les Bethune-Charost, les Villeroy. La très haute aristocratie est largement présente dans ce secteur. Les Conty, en Languedoc, s'intéressent au charbon et possèdent des forges. Tous les grands noms de la noblesse française accumulent forges et hauts fourneaux. A la fin du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle le comte d'Artois possède quinze unités, le duc de Penthièvre quatorze, les Rohan six, les Condé huit et le duc d'Orléans six. La noblesse possède environ la moitié des établissements métallurgiques du royaume (Richard 1974: 121-142; Woronoff 1984: 71-75). Cette présence nobiliaire conduit à une certaine concentration. La plupart des grands aristocrates, tout en multipliant les forges, pratiquent une forme de concentration verticale en réunissant entre leurs mains mines, forêts et forges. Ce n'est pas forcément un signe de modernisme car la question de la façon dont sont gérés ces établissements reste posée et la forge apparaît souvent comme un simple appendice de l'exploitation des bois.

Présente dans l'industrie, l'aristocratie s'intéresse aussi à la finance. La dérogeance est aussi au cœur du débat. Trafiquer sur l'argent est interdit à la noblesse car l'appât du gain est étranger à l'idéal nobiliaire. De plus un discrédit touche finance et financiers. En même temps s'intéresser aux affaires financières de la monarchie fait partie du service du Roi et officiellement ne porte pas à dérogeance. En outre ce service très rentable est à l'origine d'affaires fructueuses car il est au cœur du système fisco-financier français. Aussi l'aristocratie n'est pas indifférente aux finances et aux profits qu'on y réalise, d'autant plus que sa fortune lui donne les moyens d'y participer.

Elle le fait sous des formes multiples. Elle prend en charge directement certains revenus du Roi par le biais des engagements. Surtout, jouant sur la structure et la forme de l'impôt, elle agit de façon indirecte, effectuant des investissements dans les recettes de la Ferme ou dans les affaires extraordinaires. Cette participation, souvent difficile à débusquer car l'utilisation de prête-noms est fréquente, n'en est pas moins réelle. En 1655 les baux Lenoir, Autruy, Courtial de la Ferme des Gabelles comprennent 69% de nobles sur les 52 participants. Beaucoup de membres de la haute noblesse se révèlent de redoutables affairistes: les La Tremoille, les Guise, les Colbert, les Pontchartrain, la grande robe avec les Mesmes ou les Séguier (Dessert 1984: 341-379).

La haute noblesse contrôle ainsi largement le système fisco-financier de la monarchie et tire profit de ses inégalités et ses dysfonctionnements, rendant très difficile une éventuelle réforme. Aussi cette participation de la noblesse

aux finances royales apparaît plus comme un facteur de blocage politico-social que comme une manifestation de dynamisme économique.

Fort potentiel foncier, intégration/utilisation de l'appareil monarchique, participation contrastée aux activités industrielles et financières, ces fondements de la puissance économique de l'aristocratie montrent que celle-ci est largement intégrée et attachée aux formes traditionnelles de l'activité économique. On n'en doit pas pour autant conclure à un comportement archaïque car sa richesse, l'importance et la nature des pouvoirs dont elle dispose font d'elle un acteur essentiel de la vie économique. Cela se manifeste également dans le domaine de la gestion.

## LES PRATIQUES GESTIONNAIRES

Les pratiques gestionnaires sont un deuxième axe d'étude de la place de l'aristocratie dans le développement économique. Elles concernent l'organisation et le contenu de cette gestion.

### *L'organisation de la gestion*

La haute aristocratie est rarement présente dans ses domaines en raison de la large extension géographique de ses possessions et des exigences de la vie de Cour. Elle n'est pas pour autant absentéiste car elle met en place des appareils administratifs importants pour faire face aux besoins de la gestion de patrimoines considérables et le plus souvent spatialement éclatés. La création de conseils, sur le modèle du Conseil du Roi, et la mobilisation d'un personnel abondant à Paris comme dans les domaines constituent des relais efficaces de l'autorité nobiliaire ou princière. La pratique est générale et concerne les frères du roi comme les princes du sang ou les ducs et pairs (Bula 1993 ; Duma 1995 ; Hyslop 1965 ; Labourdette 1975 ; Lefebvre 1973). Placés sous l'autorité d'un chef du Conseil ou d'un intendant qui sont des acteurs décisifs de cette gestion, ces conseils comprennent de dix à quarante personnes. Leurs membres se rendent fréquemment dans les domaines pour contrôler l'activité des responsables locaux. Ces derniers sollicitent souvent l'organisme central pour conforter leur autorité locale. Par leur mode de recrutement et en raison des rapports entretenus avec leur supérieur, ces hommes témoignent de l'importance et de la vitalité des réseaux de clientèle durant toute la période moderne.

Les exigences juridiques de la gestion conduisent, au niveau parisien, à un recrutement privilégié dans le milieu parlementaire ou dans le monde

de la finance. Localement les petits officiers et les petits notables sont davantage sollicités. Ces corps, souvent en symbiose étroite avec leurs maîtres, font preuve d'une grande cohésion culturelle et idéologique reproduisant les attitudes du chef de lignage qui les commande. Ainsi la sensibilité janséniste est forte dans le conseil des La Tremoille. Celui du charitable duc de Penthièvre est la plupart du temps dirigé par des ecclésiastiques. Il est davantage ouvert sur la finance avec le comte d'Artois.

Mis en place pour assister le Grand et non pour se substituer à lui, ces conseils voient généralement leur activité régulièrement suivie et contrôlée par ce dernier. Le duc ou la duchesse de La Tremoille assistent assidûment aux séances hebdomadaires. Le duc de Penthièvre entretient une abondante correspondance avec son secrétaire des commandements dans laquelle il se montre attentif au moindre détail de la gestion. Cette pratique est assez générale bien que des fluctuations existent selon les moments ou en fonction de la personnalité du noble considéré.

L'intervention des nobles peut même prendre parfois une forme encore plus directe et le chef d'une maison marque alors de sa personnalité l'organisation de son patrimoine. Sur les marges du royaume, au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle, le duc Charles de Lorraine, qui a notamment dans sa directe plus de la moitié du comté de Vaudémont, s'intéresse de près à la gestion de ses possessions, s'efforçant d'augmenter son emprise foncière dans la région et s'attachant à provoquer un renouveau de la production des mines et des salines (Cabourdin 1977: 228). Au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle Louis François de Conty est à l'origine d'une réorganisation plus rationnelle de son domaine avec la constitution de vastes unités territoriales et une liquidation des terres marginales (Mougel 1971).

Ces interventions des nobles comme de leurs conseils vont dans le sens d'une gestion rigoureuse avec un effort de rationalisation qui prend des voies multiples.

### *Une gestion rigoureuse*

Les indices de cette rigueur dans la gestion apparaissent dans plusieurs domaines.

L'équilibre des comptes et les dettes. Cette double question revient fréquemment autour de quelques exemples célèbres de faillite nobiliaire notamment celle des Rohan-Guéménée au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle. L'approche du problème doit être nuancée. D'une part parce que les dettes constituent un aspect normal et presque inévitable des grandes fortunes. Celles-ci ont une base foncière qui les rend difficiles à mobiliser rapidement pour répondre

aux dépenses quotidiennes. L'emprunt est alors un recours naturel. En 1789 les dettes du duc de Penthièvre représentent 10% de sa fortune ce qui n'est pas excessif compte tenu de l'ampleur de cette dernière (Duma 1995: 52).

D'autre part parce que les grandes familles font preuve d'une faculté de récupération assez importante dans ce domaine et disposent des moyens de faire face. Henry de Montmorency, à la fin du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle, parvient à rétablir sa situation grâce à une vente de terre et au recours aux faveurs royales (Greengrass 1986). Au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle, les La Tremoille, en trois générations de gestion rigoureuse, effacent la situation difficile que la famille connaissait à la mort de Louis XI. Le domaine qu'ils reconstituent demeure solide jusqu'au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle (Weary 1985).

Enfin parce que souvent la question de l'endettement ne se pose même pas, les comptes des grandes familles aristocratiques étant généralement équilibrés ou même fortement excédentaires. C'est le cas, au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, notamment des Bourbon-Penthièvre ou des Conty pour la très haute aristocratie ou des La Tremoille à un niveau moindre de la hiérarchie nobiliaire.

Il existe cependant dans certains cas une fragilité accentuée par le fait que la gestion est largement commandée par les dépenses. Il s'agit pour l'aristocratie de disposer des moyens de tenir son rang et une poussée imprévue des dépenses peut conduire sinon à la ruine du moins à la remise en cause de cette rigueur de gestion. Confronté aux exigences de sa participation à la Ligue, Charles de Lorraine abandonne son effort de rationalisation du domaine au profit d'une politique d'engagement et de ventes de seigneuries (Cabourdin 1977: 230). Les La Tremoille au XVIII<sup>e</sup> vendent bois et terres pour faire face à leurs dépenses (Labourdette 1975).

Les reprises. Ces revenus, non perçus une année et reportés sur les comptes de l'année suivante, sont présents dans toutes les grandes comptabilités aristocratiques. Les reprises représentent 90% des recettes foncières des Conty. Elles varient entre 10 et 20% chez les Bourbon-Penthièvre. Le caractère usuel de cette pratique est l'expression de la pesanteur d'une fortune foncière. Les agents seigneuriaux n'acceptent jamais de cette situation et ils exercent une pression permanente sur les mauvais payeurs, utilisant notamment les prérogatives judiciaires de leurs maîtres, pour obtenir une rentrée des sommes en retard. Cet effort porte ses fruits mais en s'inscrivant dans le moyen terme. Dix ans d'interventions et de pressions diverses sont nécessaires aux agents du duc de Penthièvre pour obtenir une rentrée plus rapide des revenus forestiers (Duma 1995: 152-153).

Tradition et efficacité. Cette gestion rigoureuse demeure la plupart du temps une gestion traditionnelle attachée à associer en permanence les deux dimensions des possessions domaniales : un système d'origine féodale qui respecte la hiérarchie des structures féodales et les moyens qu'elles donnent pour contrôler aussi bien l'espace que les hommes et un système économique plus moderne avec la constitution de vastes ensembles fonciers. La politique du duc de Penthièvre à Rambouillet est ainsi marquée par le strict respect des limites féodales et la perception de tous les droits féodaux pour les censitaires et la constitution au niveau de la réserve d'unités foncières et forestières importantes prenant des libertés avec le cadre féodal pour s'adapter aux exigences d'une gestion plus moderne (Duma 1982). Les Conty ou les Condé n'agissent pas autrement et de façon plus générale l'aristocratie se trouve engagée dans plusieurs modes d'exploitation des richesses foncières. La dimension seigneuriale reste très importante avec une grande attention aux droits et à l'exercice de la justice qui constitue un moyen de pression extra-économique essentiel et qui est, surtout dans le cadre des duchés-pairies, sous le contrôle étroit du supérieur. Y est associé un type plus moderne de gestion avec la pratique de l'affermage ou de la régie des réserves.

Ces deux modalités font souvent l'objet d'un débat au sein des conseils princiers. Les réponses apportées témoignent de la capacité d'adaptation dont font preuve les nobles mais aussi de leurs limites dans ce domaine. Il n'y a pas de réponse unique ou systématique mais un souci de tenir compte aussi bien de la conjoncture économique générale — la régie est plus avantageuse en cas de hausse des prix — ou de la nature des possessions : la ferme peut être plus pratique en cas de grande dispersion des domaines car c'est alors au fermier d'avoir en charge les risques et les frais d'exploitation. Les limites résident dans les finalités de cette gestion qui est commandée par un modèle de consommation aristocratique où les dépenses sont premières. Quelle que soit la modalité retenue, il s'agit d'essayer de tirer les revenus maximum du domaine pour pouvoir tenir son rang. Certes la préoccupation du maintien, éventuellement de l'extension du capital foncier que constitue une grande fortune est présente mais le profit que l'on cherche à en tirer a pour objet principal de faire face aux dépenses de caractère ostentatoire. La préoccupation d'investissement productif ou d'innovation apparaît largement seconde.

Cette gestion est cependant dans l'ensemble efficace. Au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle la rigueur dont font preuve certains nobles dans la gestion directe de leurs domaines leur permet de connaître une hausse de leurs revenus alors que la conjoncture économique est médiocre (Constant 1983). Au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle,

dans une conjoncture de hausse des prix, la poussée des revenus de l'aristocratie foncière est générale et importante et son capital foncier se trouve largement revalorisé.

### *La place de l'innovation*

Le noble, surtout au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, est-il soucieux d'investissement et de rentabilité de la terre ? Est-il ouvert à l'innovation ? L'exemple du duc de La Rochefoucault-Liancourt dans l'Oise ou la mode de l'anglomanie vont dans ce sens. La réalité est cependant à nuancer fortement.

La volonté d'innovation existe. En témoigne l'action du contrôleur général Bertin multipliant les initiatives en faveur des Sociétés d'agriculture où la noblesse est présente (Bourde 1959). Mais celle-ci n'en est peut-être pas l'élément le plus dynamique et restent posées la question de l'impact réel de ces sociétés et celle de la mise en œuvre effective des innovations proposées. Les exemples connus incitent à la prudence. Ainsi les parlementaires d'Aix sont des rassembleurs de terre plus pour arrondir leur patrimoine que pour bouleverser les structures agraires. Leurs achats n'entraînent pas un remembrement et leurs domaines restent marqués par une polyculture méditerranéenne traditionnelle avec la prédominance des céréales, une faiblesse des instruments de labour, peu d'engrais et de fourrage. Les investissements qu'ils réalisent portent davantage sur le fonctionnement ou le prestige que sur la croissance (Cubells 1984: 181-196). A l'inverse, en Alsace, les nobles s'intéressent à l'arboriculture qui apparaît comme une spéculation de riches cantonnée aux réserves seigneuriales. Des plantes étrangères à la province sont introduites et sont un moyen d'améliorer les terres et d'augmenter leur rapport. Les grains se trouvent également au centre de l'innovation et, vue de l'extérieur, la plaine d'Alsace apparaît au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle comme un îlot de prospérité et de progrès (Boehler 1994: 801, 836).

En fait surtout dans les régions de grande culture c'est plus au niveau des gros fermiers, éventuellement parmi les hommes d'affaires de la noblesse que se met en œuvre l'innovation. Lorsqu'elle se manifeste chez les nobles on peut s'interroger sur la portée et la signification des mesures prises. Lorsque les Phelypeaux au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle se lancent dans l'agronomie, ils multiplient des expériences qui sont toujours réduites dans le temps et dans l'espace. Ils ne semblent jamais chercher à mesurer l'impact économique exact de leurs réalisations. L'agronomie est pour eux plus une forme de consommation et une façon de tenir leur rang qu'une réalité économique (Michel 1994). L'activité de La Rochefoucault-Liancourt, qu'Arthur Young admire, constitue

plus la substitution d'une bienfaisance philanthropique à la charité chrétienne traditionnelle que la volonté d'investir pour développer des secteurs nouveaux de l'économie (La Rochefoucault, Wolikow, Ikni 1980 ; Duprat 1993). L'agriculture française reste traditionnelle et, sans être les responsables principaux de cette situation, les nobles n'apparaissent pas non plus comme des agents actifs de transformation.

Dans le domaine industriel la situation est tout aussi très contrastée. Les Condé pratiquent une politique d'investissement et de développement de la métallurgie. La création de la forge de Moisdon dans leur terre de Château-briant en Bretagne fait passer la part du fer dans les revenus du domaine de 25 à 50%. Dans le même temps ils font construire des fourneaux sur le même modèle à Senonches dans l'Eure et Loire, à Clavières dans les Ardennes puis à Anet en Île de France. Avec l'assistance de leur Conseil ils suivent avec rigueur l'exploitation des forges de Moisdon. Le Conseil hésite entre affermage et mise en régie directe. Lorsque la ferme est retenue au début du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle et que les fermiers font construire de nouveaux fourneaux, c'est sur l'ordre du Conseil qui prend en charge les investissements. Le rendement financier des opérations est important et avoisine les 20%. Ce souci de rentabilité conduit le Conseil à préférer la régie à partir du milieu du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle. Plus sûre, celle-ci rapporte 50% de plus qu'une ferme traditionnelle et permet en outre de mieux tirer profit de la hausse du prix des fers (Cahiers de l'Inventaire 1984: 133). Mais cette attitude est loin d'être unanimement partagée. Alors que les Condé se lancent dans la gestion directe le duc de Penthièvre par contre s'oppose à plusieurs reprises aux suggestions qui lui sont faites dans ce sens par son conseil, car il estime qu'une telle démarche est contraire à la dignité d'un prince et il préfère exploiter la forge de façon traditionnelle la considérant comme une simple composante du domaine propre (Duma 1995: 172).

Enfin lorsqu'une noblesse moyenne crée ses propres entreprises métallurgiques les choses sont également diverses et l'on peut opposer un Babaud de la Chaussade en Nivernais qui utilise toutes les possibilités de la société d'Ancien régime (politique de mariage, recours au marché protégé des fournitures à la marine) pour constituer un ensemble important mais fragile qu'il doit finalement revendre, aux Dietrich en Alsace et aux de Wendel en Lorraine et au Creusot, plus dynamiques et plus innovants qui fondent des dynasties appelées à durer (Richard 1974).

La nature et l'ampleur des fortunes aristocratiques, où la terre est centrale, ainsi que les pratiques gestionnaires conduisent à un bilan nuancé de la place

de l'aristocratie dans le développement économique. Son comportement économique reste marqué par la tradition. Le poids de l'idéal nobiliaire débouche sur une attitude où dépenser est plus important que produire (Elias 1974).

Pour autant tradition n'est pas synonyme d'archaïsme. Que l'aristocratie ait un comportement traditionnel n'est pas incompatible avec le fait qu'elle dispose d'une puissance économique considérable et qu'elle joue un rôle essentiel dans l'économie et la société de son temps. C'est particulièrement vrai aux XVI<sup>e</sup> et XVII<sup>e</sup> siècles alors que le changement aussi bien dans l'agriculture que dans les autres secteurs de l'activité économique n'est pas encore réellement amorcé. Cela demeure au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle dans une conjoncture différente où le poids des permanences économiques et sociales reste fort et où l'aristocratie incarne souvent cette stabilité.

Tradition n'est pas davantage synonyme d'immobilisme. Si beaucoup de grands nobles n'apparaissent pas comme des agents actifs du changement économique, ils n'en sont pas moins des animateurs de la vie économique notamment en raison de la puissance de leur fortune ou de l'ampleur et des formes de leur consommation. La primauté des dépenses dans leur comportement contribue à faire d'eux un pôle de consommation essentiel avec un rôle particulièrement important dans le développement et l'organisation des marchés urbains. Sensibles aux lentes mutations qui se font jour au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle dans les domaines aussi bien agricole et qu'industriel, ils savent les accompagner progressivement. Cela contribue cependant à donner des caractères spécifiques au développement français accentuant notamment dans de nombreux domaines l'écart avec l'Angleterre voisine (O'Brien 1996).

Enfin il faut aussi prendre en compte la diversité du groupe nobiliaire. Une grande aristocratie attachée à la terre et à ses privilèges seigneuriaux et féodaux, dominant outrageusement le reste de la société n'a pas le même comportement qu'une moyenne ou petite noblesse davantage en osmose avec le monde rural où elle joue un rôle d'entrepreneur important aux XVI<sup>e</sup> et XVII<sup>e</sup> siècles, avec une place plus contrastée au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle. Les objectifs et les choix ne peuvent être les mêmes et les stratégies mises en œuvre — qui sont parfois autant des comportements que des stratégies — sont diverses à l'image de la noblesse elle même.

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## LE ROLE ECONOMIQUE DE L'ARISTOCRATIE BELGE AUX XVIIe et XVIIIe SIECLES

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### COMPOSITION ET GESTION DU PATRIMOINE

Notre étude recouvre les Pays-Bas espagnols et autrichiens et la principauté de Liège. A partir du XVIIIe siècle, ce territoire correspond, à peu de choses près, à celui de la Belgique actuelle. Schématiquement, on peut distinguer trois niveaux de fortune au sein de la noblesse: au niveau le plus bas, il y a les petits rentiers, qui disposent d'une fortune suffisante pour vivre sans travailler, mais dont le mode de vie reste assez modeste. Il s'agit, dans la plupart des cas, de nobles non titrés. A un niveau intermédiaire, la noblesse plus fortunée, qui siège aux États provinciaux. Elle dispose d'un hôtel urbain avec chevaux et carrosse, peut entretenir une domesticité plus ou moins nombreuse et possède une maison de campagne ou un château. A cette catégorie appartient la majorité de la noblesse titrée (principalement les barons, vicomtes et comtes). Enfin, une petite minorité de nobles très fortunés, que l'on reconnaît, entre autres, à leurs titres prestigieux de marquis, prince ou duc. Ils disposent souvent de plusieurs résidences secondaires et d'un somptueux hôtel dans la capitale. Nous limiterons nos analyses aux deux dernières catégories, c'est à dire la noblesse titrée.

#### *La composition des fortunes*

Au début du XVIIIe siècle, on pouvait discerner à Anvers plusieurs types de fortune distincts. D'abord, celle des rentiers. Ceux-ci, qui n'étaient pas les plus riches, évitaient les investissements à risque et ne souscrivaient jamais à des emprunts étrangers. Leur fortune était composée de terres, de fermes, de rentes hypothécaires ou de rentes émises par les autorités locales et régionales. La fortune des marchands —qu'ils soient encore actifs ou déjà retirés des affaires— avait une composition tout à fait différente. Dans leur portefeuille, les placements immobiliers étaient peu importants, alors que les investissements à risque et les valeurs étrangères occupaient une place prépondérante. Le dernier type de fortune était un mélange des deux types précédents. Il se généralisa dans la seconde moitié du XVIIIe siècle. Terres et fermes formaient alors entre 5 et 15% des fortunes anversoises.

Les investissements industriels effectués par la noblesse anversoise étaient bien moins spectaculaires que ceux de la noblesse wallonne. Ils n'étaient pourtant pas négligeables. Car si les nobles anversois n'étaient pas les initiateurs des nouvelles entreprises industrielles, ils en finançaient tout de même une bonne partie. L'investissement initial pour les raffineries de sucre et les imprimeries d'indiennes érigées au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle était pour une bonne part d'origine noble. C'étaient des nobles encore qui souscrivaient en masse aux obligations émises par ces mêmes entreprises. Les investissements industriels ne formaient sans doute qu'une fraction minimale des fortunes nobles, mais pour les entrepreneurs anversois, ces capitaux étaient indispensables au succès de leur entreprise et ils avaient un effet d'entraînement économique non négligeable.

Même sur le plan des activités financières — en particulier les prêts à court terme accordés au gouvernement — et sur celui des opérations commerciales, la participation des nobles avait tendance à croître. La création en 1722 de la Compagnie d'Ostende en offre un bon exemple. Cette société anonyme équipait une flotte d'une dizaine de navires, qui entreprenait des expéditions commerciales en Asie. Parmi les actionnaires principaux, on retrouve une bonne partie de la noblesse de Cour. Inversement, tous les grands négociants étaient admis dans la noblesse à cette époque.

Bois et forêts privés étaient entre les mains de l'aristocratie. Dans le Luxembourg, de nombreux nobles exploitaient des forges. La métallurgie se développa dans les Pays-Bas à partir du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle. À l'origine, il s'agissait de petites entreprises, dont les investissements étaient financés par les artisans eux-mêmes. Dès le siècle suivant apparurent les entreprises concentrées, qui appartenaient à un grand propriétaire foncier. La plupart des maîtres de forges étaient nobles et ceux qui ne l'étaient pas le devinrent rapidement.

La noblesse a joué un rôle important sur le plan de la sylviculture. Les nobles étaient les seuls propriétaires privés (à côté de la monarchie et du clergé) à entretenir des bois de haute futaie, dont la rentabilité n'apparaissait qu'au bout de plusieurs générations. Les chênes, par exemple, mettent deux siècles avant d'atteindre leur plein épanouissement. Ayant effectué quelques coups de sondes dans les archives du duc d'Arenberg, Goblet d'Alviella est émerveillé des soins apportés par les forestiers ducaux à l'entretien des forêts (Goblet 1930). Le seul auteur belge à avoir publié sous l'Ancien régime un manuel de sylviculture de quelque importance est Philippe d'Olmen, baron de Poederlee. Il appartenait à une famille de noblesse de robe et son intérêt pour la culture forestière illustre bien l'intégration de la noblesse d'office au sein de l'aristocratie foncière.

Le contraste est indéniable entre les grandes fortunes bourgeoises, largement investies dans des opérations commerciales ou financières à risque, et les fortunes aristocratiques, beaucoup moins engagées dans ce type d'investissement mobilier. Mais l'investissement noble déborde largement l'agriculture: l'industrie métallurgique et minière naissante est largement financée par les propriétaires de domaines nobles. Cette diversification reflète le changement de mentalité qui s'opère sous l'effet des idées mercantilistes: le développement économique est élevé au niveau d'une priorité nationale et la concession de distinctions nobiliaires aux négociants soutient ce renversement des valeurs.

### *La gestion du patrimoine*

Certaines critiques ont reproché aux nobles de négliger la gestion de leurs domaines et de leur patrimoine. Sur ce point comme sur d'autres, il faut se garder de généralisations hâtives. S'il n'est pas difficile d'évoquer des cas de négligence criante, les exemples en sens contraire ne manquent pas non plus. Considérons le rôle traditionnel joué par la haute aristocratie dans l'administration des finances publiques. Pendant longtemps, l'administration financière se confondit avec celle du domaine princier. Tant qu'il en fut ainsi, des nobles de haute naissance restèrent en charge de ce département. Cette situation persista jusqu'au début du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle. Le Conseil des Finances subit alors de profondes modifications. D'abord, par la levée, à partir de 1600, de l'impôt permanent. Puis, au milieu du siècle, par l'introduction de tarifs douaniers d'inspiration mercantiliste. La gestion passa alors entre les mains de financiers.

Gérer soi-même son patrimoine était hors de portée des aristocrates disposant de nombreuses propriétés. Seul les petites rentiers pouvaient gérer personnellement leurs biens, faisant le tour de leurs fermiers, percevant eux-même les loyers et dirigeant en personne leur propre exploitation agricole. Les grandes maisons nobles disposaient d'une administration domaniale plus ou moins comparable à celle du prince. Celle-ci était dirigée par un intendant général. Mais si les nobles ne pouvaient s'occuper de la gestion quotidienne de leur patrimoine, cela ne signifie évidemment pas qu'ils s'en désintéressaient. Le soin apporté à la gestion du patrimoine se reflète dans les fonds d'archives subsistants. L'exemple le plus frappant est celui du duc de Cro, qui alla jusqu'à faire représenter en aquarelles l'ensemble de ses domaines. C'est lui encore qui conçut et rédigea personnellement un règlement pour l'administration de ces domaines. La correspondance échangée entre les grands seigneurs et leurs intendants, ou les contrats passés entre eux, sont tout aussi éloquents.

L'attention portée par les propriétaires nobles à la gestion de leur domaine apparaît également dans l'intérêt qu'ils manifestaient pour les idées physiocratiques et pour le grand débat qui se développa dans la seconde moitié du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle entre partisans et adversaires des grandes fermes. Alors qu'en Angleterre, les partisans des grandes fermes l'emportaient, l'inverse était vrai dans les Pays-Bas autrichiens. C'est dans le Hainaut que les idées nouvelles se manifestèrent d'abord. Dans cette province, où les riches abbayes et l'aristocratie possédaient de grands domaines, certains fermiers prenaient en bail des exploitations s'étendant sur plusieurs centaines de bonniers. A la demande des États provinciaux, un édit gouvernemental limita en 1755 la superficie de ces fermes à 70 bonniers (quelque 85 ha.). Les États attendaient de cette mesure des avantages tant économiques (l'augmentation de la productivité) que sociaux (l'établissement de nouveaux foyers). Il est frappant de constater que seul le clergé prit la défense des gros fermiers. Le second ordre, par contre, partageait les idées nouvelles du Tiers État. Parmi la poignée d'agronomes ayant consacré une étude à l'agriculture des Pays-Bas autrichiens, on trouve le marquis de Chasteler et Joseph-François de Lichterfelde, dont le père avait obtenu le titre de comte en 1745. Eux aussi se montrent favorables aux petites fermes n'excédant pas une dizaine d'hectares.

Dans la seconde moitié du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, le gouvernement lança son fameux projet de vente des biens communaux. Il en attendait un vaste mouvement de défrichement. Il fallut bientôt déchanter. Dans le Namurois, où les terres communales furent partagées proportionnellement entre les propriétaires, l'opération suscita peu de mécontentement. Mais si beaucoup de sols incultes changèrent de mains, bien peu changèrent de nature. Ailleurs, seuls les grands propriétaires fonciers se portaient acquéreurs. Ils étaient les seuls à pouvoir réaliser les investissements longs et coûteux nécessaires à la transformation en terres arables des landes et marécages mis en vente. Mais les déconvenues étaient fréquentes. Dans la Campine anversoise, le comte de Proli entrepris à grands frais la mise en valeur des bruyères. Ce fut un échec.

#### *L'évolution des revenus du patrimoine*

Rien de plus commun dans la littérature que l'affirmation d'une crise de la noblesse. Ainsi, l'inflation du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle a été mise en rapport avec les troubles politiques et religieux sous le règne de Philippe II. Le ralliement de nombreux nobles à la Réforme protestante a été expliqué par l'appauvrissement dû à l'inflation séculaire. Koenigsberger a essayé de démontrer, chiffres à l'appui, la baisse des droits féodaux dans le Hainaut. C'est faire peu de cas

des nombreux droits encore payés en nature. C'est ne pas tenir compte non plus de la hausse des fermes. Ajoutons, par ailleurs, que le rapport supposé entre protestantisme et pauvreté n'est pas évident.

Considérer séparément les droits féodaux payés au seigneur, la dîme prélevée par le clergé ou par ses ayant-droits, les fermes versées au propriétaire et les impôts exigés par les autorités conduit à des conclusions erronées. Toutes ces charges, qui pesaient conjointement sur les agriculteurs, étaient reliées entre elles comme des vases communicants. Si on les prend une à une, la disparité des pourcentages d'un endroit à un autre est frappante. En les additionnant les unes aux autres, on s'aperçoit qu'elles s'équilibrent mutuellement. Les charges totales qui frappaient les paysans étaient donc partout comparables. Bien entendu, si la tendance à long terme de ces courbes est similaire, elles peuvent toutes être un indicateur du revenu noble. En fait, l'on peut regrouper dîmes, droits féodaux et baux et les opposer aux impôts. Les premiers allaient aux propriétaires, tandis que les seconds étaient destinés au monarque.

La composition des fortunes nobles démontre qu'il ne suffit pas de considérer la tendance à long terme de la rente foncière pour évaluer l'évolution des revenus nobles. L'importance des taux d'intérêts des emprunts publics et privés ne peut être négligée. Or, la rétribution des emprunts publics n'était pas moins sujette à des fluctuations que la rente foncière. A la fin du XVIIe siècle, les autorités publiques accordaient 6 à 7%, alors que tout au long du XVIIIe siècle, le taux de ces emprunts ne dépasse plus 3 à 4%.

La tendance à long terme de la rente foncière suggère une hausse des revenus fonciers durant les deux premiers tiers du XVIe siècle, en dépit d'une inflation soutenue. Ensuite, le revenu s'affaïsse jusqu'à la fin du siècle. Après la première moitié du XVIIe siècle, la conjoncture s'assombrit de nouveau pour près d'un siècle. Le reprise ne s'affirme que dans la seconde moitié du XVIIIe siècle. Les baux sont souvent exprimés pour une part en argent et pour une autre part en nature. Il s'agit en fait d'une indexation partielle du bail au mouvement des prix. A terme, les baux —établis souvent pour une période de neuf ans— suivent la tendance des prix céréaliers, mais il y a parfois des moins-values importantes. Tel est le cas lorsque la récolte est perturbée par de mauvaises conditions météorologiques ou à cause de la guerre. De 1621 à 1713, la guerre est presque continuelle et sous le règne de Louis XIV les mouvements de troupes ne se limitent plus aux régions frontalières. Bien souvent, les biens situés dans la zone des combats ou des mouvements de troupes ne rapportent rien. Ils sont parfois aussi en but à

des déprédations. Au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, les rentes émises par les autorités publiques apparaissent d'un revenu plus assuré et plus élevé que la rente foncière. En 1778, le règlement d'admission à l'État noble du Brabant place les rentes publiques sur le même pied que la propriété immobilière.

### *La transmission du patrimoine*

Sous l'Ancien Régime, le partage noble ne se plie pas toujours à la règle de la primogéniture. Loin s'en faut. Lorsque des coutumes inégalitaires existent, elles ne concernent que les biens féodaux en ligne paternelle et peuvent avantager l'aîné dans une mesure variable selon les régions. Les fidéicommiss ne mettent le patrimoine à l'abri des partages ou d'une aliénation pendant une génération seulement. Seule l'instauration d'un majorat perpétuel permettait de sauvegarder l'intégrité du patrimoine de génération en génération. Il existe de multiples exemples de cette pratique, mais elle n'est certainement pas le fait d'une majorité de nobles. Au contraire, la tendance allait plutôt dans le sens d'une égalité accrue entre héritiers (ou, plus exactement, d'un recul de l'inégalité).

Nous pensons que le régime successoral relativement égalitaire pratiqué au sein de la noblesse belge peut expliquer en partie l'inexistence dans les Pays-Bas de grandes fortunes comparables à celles que l'on rencontre dans d'autres pays. Le partage égalitaire encourage, au contraire, la ramification des lignées. Si l'on admet que la mobilité des fortunes est favorable au développement économique, le nombre limité de majorats, le nombre croissant de titres patronymiques et les partages peu inégalitaires ou même égalitaires, peuvent être considérés comme autant de facteurs positifs. Il est vrai que de nombreuses familles réussissaient malgré tout à transmettre leur fortune de génération en génération. Mais c'était par le biais du célibat, c'est à dire par une limitation des naissances dans les branches cadettes.

### REVENUS PROFESSIONNELS ET INFLUENCE POLITIQUE

Dans l'administration intérieure des Pays-Bas espagnols et autrichiens, les nobles étaient partout. Au niveau gouvernemental, dominé par la noblesse de robe. Au niveau provincial, où l'aristocratie composait l'État noble. Au niveau local enfin, où des nobles étaient présents dans les conseils municipaux des principales villes. Il ne semble pas que cette présence en force ait été un obstacle à la modernisation économique du pays, au contraire. Des souverains comme Philippe II ou Joseph II avaient tendance à se réclamer de

l'intérêt général pour légitimer leurs aspirations centralisatrices. Ces souverains dénonçaient volontiers les intérêts particuliers poursuivis par la noblesse et, plus généralement, par tous ceux qui se réclamaient des privilèges en vue de maintenir l'équilibre traditionnel des pouvoirs. En fait, il ne s'agissait pas d'une opposition entre progrès et conservatisme, intérêt public et privé. L'enjeu véritable du conflit était ailleurs: il opposait les partisans d'une modernisation décidée de commun accord à ceux qui prônaient une modernisation autoritaire, imposée d'en haut.

Il n'est pas possible, dans l'état actuel de la recherche, de préciser globalement quelle est —dans l'ensemble des revenus de la noblesse— le poids des avantages provenant de l'exercice de fonctions publiques. Mais nous disposons de quelques indications indirectes: le nombre de nobles n'exerçant aucune fonction nous apprend dans quelle mesure ces revenus formaient ou non un appoint indispensable. A la fin de l'Ancien Régime, un tiers seulement des familles nobles de Bruges avaient une occupation professionnelle. Dans l'ensemble des provinces belges, pas plus de 20% des nobles exerçaient une fonction au début du XIXe siècle. Ces chiffres correspondent au seuil supérieur, car certains nobles exerçaient une fonction par ambition, et non faute de ressources financières suffisantes.

Ayant réussi, à la fin du XVIIe siècle, à maintenir une large autonomie politique sur le plan de l'administration intérieure, la noblesse s'associait —au sein des États provinciaux— à la bourgeoisie et au clergé pour contenir la pression fiscale émanant du gouvernement central. Étant donné l'accès limité de la noblesse belge aux fonctions publiques les plus lucratives, il n'est pas étonnant qu'elle ait cherché à augmenter la rente foncière en réduisant au minimum la pression fiscale.

Si vivre en rentier ne mettait pas nécessairement en péril la fortune, vivre noblement était en exercice plus périlleux. Pour se maintenir, il fallait que la fortune dépasse un seuil critique. Il est frappant de constater combien les fortunes moyennes étaient vulnérables. Dans le comté de Namur, ce sont les familles de la haute aristocratie (les Glymes, Spontin, Marbais, Namur, Oultremont, Groesbeek) qui ont le mieux résisté à la crise du second XVIIIe siècle. Les familles anoblies, en revanche, furent les premières emportées: l'abandon des activités industrielles ou des fonctions publiques leur a été fatale. Au XVIIIe siècle, leur place fut prise par une nouvelle noblesse d'affaires ou de robe qui ne tomba pas dans le même piège: leur train de vie élevé était alimenté par la poursuite de leurs activités professionnelles.

Sur l'exemple d'Anvers, plusieurs auteurs ont réfuté le cliché de la trahison de la bourgeoisie (Soly 1973; Degryse 1977). Dans les riches cités marchandes, ce sont les négociants qui tiennent le haut du pavé. Tant que la conjoncture est favorable, ils ne songent pas à abandonner les affaires. Les acquisitions de biens immobiliers qu'ils réalisent alors servent de base à leur crédit. Ce n'est que lorsque la conjoncture se renverse que les marchands les plus cossus se retirent des affaires. Ils acquièrent alors le statut nobiliaire pour maintenir leur rang dans le nouveau milieu social où ils se meuvent. La suppression de la dérogeance n'a eu aucune conséquence tangible sur l'attitude des marchands. Elle reflète un changement de mentalité au niveau de l'État et de l'aristocratie traditionnelle, qui accepte les nouvelles valeurs utilitaristes introduites par le mercantilisme.

## LE TRAIN DE VIE ET L'ENDETTEMENT

### *L'équilibre budgétaire*

Vers 1600, le duc Charles de Cro rédigea un règlement d'ordre intérieur pour la bonne tenue de sa maison. Cette décision provenait du souci de juguler les dépenses excessives. En conséquence, le duc décida de ramener son personnel domestique à ... soixante-six personnes, dont il décrivit minutieusement les tâches. L'attitude du duc n'a rien d'exceptionnel. Les exemples abondent de grands seigneurs dont les dépenses restaient élevées, en dépit de leurs dettes. Sur ce point, la noblesse anversoise se distingue de l'aristocratie bruxelloise. Les dépenses des anoblis anversois étaient adaptées à leurs revenus, c'est à dire à l'état de leur fortune. Ces familles ne semblent pas avoir perdu leur esprit commerçant. Dans certaines familles —et non des moindres— on épargnait plus de la moitié du revenu annuel, un taux d'épargne assurément exceptionnel. Les dépenses annuelles de ces familles se situaient entre 5.000 et 10.000 florins et suffisaient pour vivre noblement, à condition de ne pas exagérer. Le fait que même les fortunes moyennes ne dépensaient pas tout leur revenu illustre bien l'esprit d'économie qui caractérisait la noblesse anversoise. Elle avait, il est vrai, la réputation d'être un peu radine. Le train de vie mené à Anvers était certainement moins somptueux qu'à Bruxelles. Il suffit de comparer le nombre de domestiques des élites anversoises et bruxelloises. A Anvers, les familles les plus riches avaient rarement plus de 4 à 5 domestiques. Il en allait tout autrement à Bruxelles, où la noblesse de cour donnait le ton. Nous sommes bien renseignés sur le détail des dépenses quotidiennes pour un certain nombre de familles nobles.

Remarquons, au passage, que ce genre de dépenses était plus d'une fois placé sous la houlette de la maîtresse de maison, même lorsque celle-ci était de haute naissance.

### *L'endettement*

Pour nous faire une idée du nombre de familles nobles appauvries au point de voir leur patrimoine échouer en vente publique, nous avons examiné le mode de dévolution des châteaux situés dans les environs de Bruxelles. De 1500 à 1800, l'ensemble de ces châteaux ont fait l'objet de quelque 450 transmissions. Dans 5% des cas, il s'agissait d'une vente forcée pour cause de dettes. Ces situations de détresse financière étaient très diverses. Le nombre de cas où une grande fortune était dilapidée par une suite de gaspillages et de dépenses excessives n'est pas très élevé. Il arrivait plus fréquemment que les revers financiers résultent d'options politiques ou militaires malheureuses.

Le sens de l'économie qui caractérisait les nobles anversois se reflète aussi dans leurs successions. Rares étaient celles qui étaient grevées de dettes. Comme les dépenses les plus importantes n'intervenaient qu'à l'apogée de la fortune, la plupart des nobles anversois évitaient l'endettement. Mais il n'en allait pas toujours ainsi pour les fortunes moyennes. Le désir de mener un train de vie élevé s'opposait parfois aux moyens financiers disponibles.

Lorsque les dettes résultaient de dépenses effectuées au service du souverain ou de l'occupation des domaines par des troupes étrangères, les nobles obtenaient souvent un moratoire pour le paiement de leurs dettes. Ainsi, leur patrimoine échappait à la saisie des créanciers. Ces derniers correspondent parfois au profil du légiste impitoyable dépeint par Lucien Febvre. Ainsi, en 1660, le gouverneur-général Caracena évite de soumettre les demandes de moratoire à l'avis des conseillers gouvernementaux, car ceux-ci seraient —dit-il— tout à la fois juge et partie. Mais l'aristocratie militaire et la noblesse de robe ne se retrouvent pas toujours dans le rôle du pauvre débiteur et du méchant créancier. Créanciers et débiteurs appartiennent parfois aux mêmes cercles aristocratiques.

La nécessité de mener un train de vie correspondant au rang nobiliaire ou à celui des fonctions exercées rendait extrêmement difficile le rétablissement des finances familiales obérées par l'endettement. Il n'y avait guère d'autre solution que de se retirer à la campagne et de mener une vie de reclus. De ce point de vue, le décès inopiné du chef de famille alors que les enfants étaient encore en bas âge, pouvait s'avérer une bénédiction pour le rétablissement des finances familiales.

## CONCLUSIONS

A mesure que l'Ancien Régime approche de sa fin, l'aristocratie belge se différencie de moins en moins de la haute bourgeoisie. Elle forme un groupe ouvert et mélangé. Militaires, gouvernants, magistrats, négociants et rentiers, tous font partie de la noblesse titrée. L'inégalité successorale est battue en brèche. Les investissements débordent largement le secteur agricole. La gestion du patrimoine est au mains de collaborateurs avisés et dynamiques. Le point faible se situe du côté des dépenses plutôt que des revenus.

Le débat sur le luxe, qui se développa dans la seconde moitié du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, ne semble pas avoir beaucoup influencé le mode de vie de la noblesse. La critique des dépenses somptuaires était l'expression de la nouvelle mentalité utilitariste qui s'affirmait au siècle des Lumières et qui alimenta la critique anti-aristocratique au cours de la période révolutionnaire. Ce courant de pensée pose le problème du rôle de la noblesse dans le développement économique. Il est indéniable qu'il existait une incompatibilité entre le mode de vie noble et celui des négociants. Les nobles se souciaient d'accroître leur fortune afin de pouvoir mener un train de vie plus élevé. Pour la majorité d'entre eux, les revenus ne constituaient pas une source d'épargne, mais un moyen de dépenses.

La noblesse n'accumule pas, elle dépense. Pour autant, les conclusions de notre analyse ne sont pas évidentes. Car, en quoi l'accumulation du capital est-il bénéfique dans une société de type pré-industriel? A n'en pas douter, l'épargne était réinvestie dans le commerce. Il faudrait examiner l'effet de ces investissements commerciaux sur le développement économique et comparer cet effet avec celui qu'induisait les dépenses somptuaires de la noblesse. Les secteurs d'activité économique stimulés par le négoce seraient-ils plus importants que ceux de la construction (châteaux et hôtels), du textile (mode vestimentaire), de l'alimentation (produits importés ou exotiques) ou de la culture (créations artistiques)?

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FROM POLITICAL AND SOCIAL MANAGEMENT TO ECONOMIC  
MANAGEMENT? CASTILIAN ARISTOCRACY AND ECONOMIC  
DEVELOPMENT, 1450-1800<sup>1</sup>

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REFLECTIONS ON THE MANAGEMENT OF SEIGNEURIAL  
PATRIMONIES IN CASTILE

The aristocracy traditionally has been held responsible for the economic backwardness of many parts of Europe. With the possible exception of post-17th-century England, it has been characterized as irrational or careless in its patrimonial management, practicing conspicuous consumption that used up resources that otherwise would have generated economic growth. It has even been said that the economic problems undergone by the European aristocracy since the late 16th century were the result of this irrationality, carelessness and conspicuous consumption, all linked to a love of luxury and life at court.

In 1506 there were fifty-three members of the Spanish titled nobility—dukes, marquises and counts; by 1800 the number had risen to 1,323. In 1832, S.S. Cook said of them that “their vast possessions are, in general, semi-deserts.” And, he went on, “before any progress or even a commencement can be made in the political and economic reorganization of the kingdom [...] the landowners must be compelled to build houses and live at least a part of the year on their estates.” The “founders of colonies, or the makers of roads and bridges” and those who encouraged any sort of improvements must be compensated for their labors, he advised (1832, I: 159-60). Similar clichés would come later from Baudrillart (1881), who found the 17th-century Spanish nobility to epitomize the link between luxury and decadence. There are antecedents in Spain itself, where Enlightenment thinkers such as Jovellanos (echoed by Sempere Guarinos) wrote that the entailed properties (*mayorazgos*), the most emblematic institution of the nobility, “encouraged excessive luxury and corruption” (1952: 106). Along with so many other ideas of the Enlightenment, this concept has survived to the present. But are these acceptable explanations?.

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1. I should like to express my gratitude to Ruth MacKay (University of California at Berkeley), for her help with the English version of this paper.

When studying 15th-century seigneurial economies one reaches an obvious conclusion: One cannot understand them as profit-maximizing units in which profit is reproduced through innovative and productive investment in the context of an economy in which the factors of production are regulated through the market. War and coercion, along with jurisdiction and political power, all manifested in the capacity to mobilize influence and armies, were the keys to seigneurial economies.

At the same time, family dynamics had a crucial role in resource management criteria. Families such as the Fernández de Córdoba and the Pimentel (see i. e. Quintanilla 1979) conducted themselves within a complex of converging and sometimes contradictory interests of the great lineages. Using the language of organizational theory, one could say that, rather than profit-maximizing units with just one objective, they were coalitions governed by satisfying (or mutually supporting) behavior (see Cyert and March 1963). Because unity and cohesion were essential for the maintenance of family power—and power was the key to their economic and social survival—noble patrimonies were oriented toward reducing conflicts within the lineage and promoting family members through considerable expense, which can be considered either as side payments or the result of policy commitments but not as being aimed at increasing productivity of their properties. Far from reducing such conflicts, the *mayorazgo*, because it reserved most of the patrimony for the eldest son, led to increased spending to finance ecclesiastical and political careers, achieve politically and socially advantageous marriages, and acquire land, income and new estates for the rest of the sons. The *señorío*, more than an economic unit, was a complex of control and social legitimation in which rents were justified as the pillar supporting the military and governmental functions which had to be attended, regardless of one's income.

This does not mean that the Castilian lords ignored economic affairs in their territories. On the contrary; their growing needs required careful management. Already since the 15th century, the reorganization and division of the estates into *mayordomías*, units for the management and administration of rents, and the profusion of accounting books, are indications in this regard. Other such indications are their strategies for controlling livestock paths, collecting sales taxes, obtaining permission to hold fairs on their estates, and even, as in western Andalusia, creating large estates (*latifundios*), whose production was aimed at the market. But these strategies were subject to a logic of social and political management in which spending—neither capricious nor irrational but rather with deep structural roots—constituted

the independent variable to which income had to adapt itself, no easy task if one considers the inelasticity of much of their revenue.

## ECONOMIC PROBLEMS AND MANAGERIAL STRATEGIES:

### A LONG HISTORY

#### *Medieval origins of 16th-century problems, 1400-1540*

Coordination between spending and income had been achieved relatively easily in the 15th century. The expansion of royal taxation, especially sales taxes (*alcabalas*) and production taxes (the *tercias*, part of the ecclesiastical tithe), meant that the nobility, through either usurpation or royal favor, now had an important source of income. Nevertheless, unlike the French case described by Brenner (1985), in Spain this coincided with the creation of large estates in some areas, such as Andalusia, where it was easier to increase one's domain through the purchase or usurpation of commons and royal lands. This further diversified Iberian feudal structures, the result of a long Reconquest that had given rise to very heterogeneous forms of property and of relations between rural communities and lords. Yet many 16th-century nobles, including some Andalusians, obtained more than half their revenue from the *alcabalas* (Yun 1985).

In the 15th century, the Castilian aristocracy was one of the most economically powerful in Europe. Unlike the indebted Aragonese families, it was apparently in good economic health. Nevertheless, and contrary to what has been thought, the tension between spending and income was causing difficulties for many lords whose revenues were committed to necessary fixed expenses. The anarchic period between 1504 and 1521 to a large degree reflects a reaction by the nobles aimed at increasing their revenues at the expense of their vassals and the crown. During the Revolt of the Comuneros, the complaints of the cities, who were the administrators of the crown treasury, reflect friction within a model of feudal development that was provoking increasingly bitter protest (Yun 1987a).

Contrary to the implicit assumptions of the traditional view of the aristocratic crisis, there is a nexus between this dynamic and the lords' financial problems around 1600. To begin with, the situation was delicate already in the 1530s (Yun 1987a), before the generally-accepted onset of the crisis (Jago 1973) and before sumptuary consumption had risen so dramatically. There were economic and institutional causes for this circumstance.

The controversial Modern State was hardly modern. It was the outcome of a new equilibrium among the powers of the king, the cities, the rural communities, the Church and the nobility, which limited or made more selective the forcible expansion of seigneurial revenue but eliminated neither the vigor and needs of the *señoríos* as units of social domination, nor their expenses or the forms of management on which they depended. The possibility of adapting income to spending was increasingly dim. Income, in fact, was growing very slowly or, in the case of some seigneurial houses, not at all. Behind this lay the lump-sum ceiling placed on the *alcabala* since the 1530s, which mimetically followed the evolution of the crown's portion of that tax. Though some portions of revenue, such as short-term land leases or rents in kind, could benefit somewhat from the rise in prices, others were very inelastic. In the Meseta, much land was subject to fixed-rent perpetual leases paid in cash by powerful communities, making any revision of rents or property rights in the lords' favor very difficult. In Galicia, the cession of land-use through *foros*, also in return for fixed payments, was individual, but access to the property was not profitable for the nobles because of the underdeveloped market and difficulties for selling the surplus. In addition, spending increased at a pace with the expanding logic of seigneurial needs while the *mayorazgos* began revealing the drawbacks of their inherent administrative rigidities. Military spending did not disappear, and social control and the need for legitimation grew, manifested in palaces, charitable works, religious foundations, and even in universities. The value of dowries, which reinforced alliances at court, the center of emerging power, skyrocketed (Atienza and Simón 1989), and service to the king and the expansion of properties for the benefit of younger sons were increasingly essential. All this conflicted with the lords' inability to transfer alienated property or restructure their patrimony in order to attend to these expenses. Requests by the lords to the king for permission to sell part of their *mayorazgo*, and short-term loans at high interest, were increasingly common in this period (Yun 1987a), thus threatening the survival of some families and even of the class as a whole.

#### *Old Problems, New Solutions? Mortgages and Empire, 1540-1600*

Already in the 1540s, we see what would become both a problem and a solution during the following centuries: the consignatory mortgages (*censos consignativos*), loans at a reduced rate of interest (usually 7.1%) set by the crown, redeemable upon request by the borrower. These loans were not

without their problems. Entailed property by definition was not allowed to be mortgaged. Therefore, the collateral for the loan was not the property itself but the revenue generated by that property, and the operation was tolerated only because of the kingdom's extreme state of need, which justified the king's permission by virtue of his *plenitudine potestas* (Jago 1973). Such permission was first granted in order to allow the nobles to assist the king, but the practice was soon extended to address other needs such as the payment of dowries and the purchase of jurisdictions or revenues to meet the *señorío* growing needs. The inalienable nature of the *mayorazgo*, the protection against the dissolution of the seigneurial class, was not threatened.

The consequences of this were enormous. In a country swimming in precious metals and with a growing money supply, the censos on the *mayorazgos* allowed for the expansion of patrimonies, careers for younger sons, and increasingly lavish dowries. But, above all, they enabled the aristocracy, upon whom the king was making demands for services (generally financed through seigneurial debt), to reach high positions within the imperial government, a complex power system that had been taken over by the great Castilian families at the start of the 17th century. Debts were generated as a result, but so were new sources of revenue and patronage with which to place relatives and allies in positions of political power to a degree unheard of in France or England. To cite just two examples, the count of Benavente earned more than 60,000 *ducados* as viceroy of Naples in 1600, approximately the same amount as was being generated by his estates at the time; and a good share of the treasure arriving on the Indies fleet were personal remittances for the viceroys.

Logically, it was a contradictory system. By the late 16th century, many nobles had mortgaged their estates beyond what their earnings would allow, and they went bankrupt (Jago 1979). At the same time, new noble houses of modest origin had risen thanks to the purchase of crown jurisdictions. Such an aristocratic crisis had peculiarities, however. The system of patronage and interlocking interests between the king and his nobles would continue to function for some time. The *mayorazgo* remained sound because its new function as a source of liquidity aimed, precisely, at serving the crown, made it increasingly important both to society and to the king, who restricted permission for the disentailments. The bankruptcy of the aristocracy was no more than a liquidity crisis, and the great noble fortunes were in no danger of disappearing. The greatest danger was the seizure of estates by the crown, which would then administer them, but even then the estate-holders were

paid an annual pension which at times was considerable. The rise of new titled members of the aristocracy was encouraged by subsidiary branches of the leading families, always within the context of a social and political system that was tense yet solid and which permitted integration.

*Political and social managerial strategy at its peak, 1600-1700*

All this affected the management of seigneurial patrimony, whose revenues began to decline because of the economic crisis (Jago 1979). Contrary to what has been thought, one can detect strategies for investment and economic improvement among the Castilian nobility. Many Andalusians, for example, invested in market-oriented farms and crops whose profitability, as in the case of olive groves, are perceptible only after decades. The dukes of Lerma and Béjar and the count of Benavente in the 17th century all encouraged textile manufacturing on their estates so as to increase revenues from alcabalas (Yun 1985). Others retreated to their estates and tried to improve their own administration (Jago 1979). There were reports and treatises aimed at bettering estate management. Though the cases are not identical, some features of the so-called refeudalization of Castile in the 17th century, especially in Andalusia, are reminiscent of the privatization of common lands which in England led to the development of agrarian capitalism (Bernal 1988: 61-4). Though Castilian nobles were not active in commerce, except in the case of Seville, they did organize an overseas empire without which it is difficult to conceive the rest of the economy.

But these strategies formed part of an even more complicated system. In fact, a common way of overcoming problems was to cut interest rates on consignatory mortgages; the king granted such a reduction taking the rate down to 5% and allowing them such an operation. Given the growing importance of its earnings from political activities, the aristocracy put more and more money into political investments at court —ostentatious display, social occasions, dowries, and the cultivation of advantageous alliances— to the detriment of investments in their estates. Even bankrupt nobles preferred this sort of spending (or investment, in a sense) to putting their indebted estates in shape. Thus luxury coexisted with poverty and need, and, contrary to what has been thought, such coexistence was far from irrational (Domínguez 1985: 107-8).

There were two sides to seigneurial economies: On the one hand was the economy of the estates, and on the other hand was the wealth acquired through the nobles' participation in the empire. The former was semi-public (belonging to the noble house but subject to the requirements of and liable to seizure

by the crown) and of limited movability; the latter grew irregularly, was stored in chests and jewel boxes, easily transferred, highly liquid, entirely private, and involved no political obligation if none was desired. There was movement from one sphere to the other, and some nobles used funds from the latter category to resolve the problems of their troubled estates. But it was not always profitable or reasonable to sink large amounts into the estates given the availability of better returns elsewhere and the inalienable status of property. Private ownership of jewels and gold, so characteristic of 16th- and 17th-century Spain, was a profitable investment not only because of the revaluation of gold, silver, and gems against a devalued currency, but also because of the essential role of dowries in a marriage market that was decisive for the politics of alliances and factions (Yun 1994).

*Toward economic management? 1700-1800*

This situation would change somewhat in the 18th century. By then, the empire as well as possibilities for advance in the imperial structure had declined, and the number of candidates for political posts and personal gain had multiplied. A more professionalized aristocracy with a more bureaucratized notion of service, in the Weberian sense, was making headway in politics. Enlightenment thinkers toward the end of the century wrote that the *mayorazgo* was ensuring relative poverty and hardship for younger sons and minor branches of the titular families. Though the assertion remains to be confirmed empirically, can we assume that family solidarity, so characteristic of the previous era, was dissolving? In any case, endogamy led to a concentration of estates despite many families having distributed their property among grandfather, father, and son of the same direct line.

A reduction in 1705 of the interest rate on *censos* (from 5% to 3-2.5%) was a relief at a time when the economy and land rents were reviving in some areas. Income composition changed. Inflation, which undercut earnings from *alcabalas*—whose nominal value was even more rigid than in previous centuries—pushed up earnings from the sale of agrarian products. Land became the primary source of income and therefore the object of improved methods in an age of greater financial optimism; this was true particularly when land was used directly or subject to renewable leases paid in kind, as was the case with the new noble families.

This does not mean that ostentation, lavish dowries, or spending on political self-promotion and social legitimation had disappeared. Mortgages were still a recourse for urgent needs, but the financial picture was more hopeful.

Houses such as the Osunas and the Medinacelis had established treasurer's offices staffed by specialists who centralized the administration of each of the family's estates throughout Spain, and on each of those estates there were stewards (*mayordomos*) carefully analyzing the most favorable leasing conditions (Atienza 1987: 318-27; Windler 1995). The Andalusian latifundios began combining agriculture and livestock (for wool, beef, and bullfighting), a sign of a new, flexible adaptation to the market and the increasing productivity of the land, a trend evident at least between 1650 and 1750 (Bernal 1988: 128-38). The marquis of Cuéllar and other nobles introduced new products such as alfalfa and extended their use and control over their forests (Yun 1995). The dukes of the Infantado, in Cantabria, promoted industrial ventures on their lands; others, along with more dynamic members of the bourgeoisie, joined the *Sociedades Económicas de Amigos del País* (societies that advocated economic reform) to proclaim the virtues of the physiocrats. If few of the traditional stereotypes of the Castilian aristocracy can be confirmed in previous centuries, the second half of the 18th century is witness to an even stricter and more careful style of management.

#### ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES

Though it is clear that seigneurial management strategy cannot be the only variable under consideration, one can still ponder its effect on the economic development of Castile. I would like to offer a few thoughts in this regard, taking into account that the enormous regional diversity of Spain makes this subject one that extends well beyond the limits of this paper.

#### *Change and Continuity: The Diversity of Economic Structures and Growth, 1450-1580*

In Lower Andalusia and other areas of the south, large estates were already the rule by the 16th century. They were either run directly or leased out in large parcels. In the Meseta, and especially in the Duero Valley, however, it was rural communities that had long-term dominium; they either used the land communally or ceded it in parcels to its inhabitants. A similar arrangement existed in the northern part of the peninsula where, however, the land was generally granted for use by particular families. Can we say, then, that we have two very different models: the Andalusian, based on large latifundios that would bring about the beginnings of agrarian capitalism, and the northern, based on peasant farming? So it would appear, but there

is more to it than that. There were, after all, large communal properties in both cases, and many small property-holders in the south, especially in Upper Andalusia. And it is important to emphasize that throughout the kingdom seigneurial income was not merely land rents; a large proportion came from taxes such as *alcabalas* and *tercias*. At the same time, jurisdiction and coercion constituted an essential part of collections. Even in the south, seigneurial monopolies and the lords' capacity to intervene in certain markets were crucial elements of the entire system.

These structures and the measures implemented by many lords to enforce them beginning in the 15th century contributed to the economic growth that accompanied urban expansion and the rise in population. In the south, those who had leased large seigneurial properties benefited from rising urban markets, the development of livestock farming, and migration from the north as a result of the agricultural expansion in the south. North of the Tagus River, population growth, a dense urban network—though consisting of smaller nuclei—and strengthened communities, reinforced through the use and regulation of communal lands, all favored peasant farming on small- and medium-size properties (Yun 1987a). Population mobility allowed southward migration to less-populated areas and the continual adjustment between available land and the work force. The very use of the consignatory mortgages may have reduced pressure on the lords, thus allowing productive expansion based on the dynamic nature of peasant economies. But this growth was not about to lead to structural economic change. The abundance of land south of the Tagus and the nature of earnings as a whole, taking into account taxes and jurisdictions, made it impossible for productive investments (though they were more important than has been thought) to generate a true transformation. In the northern Meseta, lords took indicative action; they encouraged fairs and markets, leased good land to their vassals, and encouraged rural industry. But there were no large-scale investments. The same thing occurred in the more seigneurial areas along the Cantabrian Sea, where there was also a certain disassociation between the productive sphere, in the hands of peasants, and seigneurial action, removed from production.

#### *The Crisis of the Aristocracy and the 17th-Century Economic Recession*

The limits of this expansion can be seen at the end of the 16th century. Low levels of seigneurial investment contributed to the problems. But the causes of the so-called 17th-century crisis were more general. Impediments to growth arose from the deficiencies of the extensive model, from the crisis of the

urban system, and from tax pressure, which was, to a certain degree, the result of the lords' appropriation of crown income.

By this time, however, there was little help for the lords who were facing such economic problems. Although there were some improvements, as we have seen, it is also true that the aristocratic crisis was fought with methods ill-suited for reforms. Contrary to what occurred in England (Brenner 1993), the result was the reinforcement of the dependence's links between the aristocracy and the Crown and the reproduction of the rigid institutional system that was little conducive to economic changes. Concentration of property in Castille did not bring about advances in innovative investment but rather a reinforcement of the patterns of social and political seigneurial administration. Nobles only occasionally engaged in commerce, and when they did so it was because they had been granted monopolies or customs exemptions in return for political services. As can be seen in certain cases, this speculative activity was profitable but hardly conducive to general economic development (Yun 1990).

As for the empire, the influence of seigneurial clientage did not lead to the creation of a solvent, efficient, or transparent imperial administrative apparatus. Instead, the prevalent attitude was one of *oficio como beneficio* (profit from office), the outgrowth of a political structure that was incapable of controlling clientage. Venality, corruption, and fraud plagued both American and European administration, entailing high transaction costs and risks for commerce as well as new trading opportunities for third countries, regardless of regulations prohibiting such activities. As a result, the crown's administrative expenses rose and its tax revenue fell. Considering the Spanish economy's structural weaknesses, it is not surprising that the effect on productive development was neither positive nor quick.

Under these conditions, the recovery of the economy —affected by demographic decline, disarticulated urban networks, a profound commercial crisis, heavy taxation, and monetary manipulation— would be very slow. All possibilities of growth were not cut off, however. In Galicia, for example, ecological conditions and the relative flexibility of agrarian systems allowed for the introduction by peasants of corn, which contributed to an early demographic and productive recovery. The relatively mild nature of the agrarian recession in Andalusia can be attributed to productive improvements during the 17th century. But economic changes would be slow and very localized.

*The Aristocracy and the Limits of 18th-Century Economic Growth.*

The aristocracy's role in 18th-century expansion was relative, though greater than is usually thought. Careful study of seigneurial administrative reforms reveals concern over improvements not in productivity but in collecting income (Windler 1995). Many of the improvements carried out by the nobility could not be applied in those areas where land was under perpetual lease to the peasantry because there the peasants responded not to the lords but to the towns that had extended them temporary land-use. Thus, for example, the marquis of Cuéllar's experiments with alfalfa were confined to the few lands he still owned. In the south, it is unclear that the aristocracy implemented significant reforms. As the Enlightenment thinkers reiterated, the enormity of some families' fortunes and the fact that their land was entailed meant that management criteria were hardly innovative. Recent studies show that management was aimed more at maintaining control over the land by reinforcing ties with the local oligarchies than at overcoming problems of productive development (Windler 1995). Even at the end of the 18th century, Andalusian agrarian capitalism appears to have been just one element of a seigneurial regime whose contribution to agrarian development was very limited. Furthermore, accumulation of land by the nobility and the increase in land rents often limited direct users' possibilities, while short-term leases (from four to six years, even in Andalusia) posed an obstacle to investment and improvements by the leasers.

This does not mean that economic growth was impossible on seigneurial estates. We have already seen ways in which growth was generated. The declining importance of the *alcabalas*, occasional laxity regarding peasant access to certain resources, and, simply, the development of rural industry and transport, all had a positive impact. Even in Andalusia, links and clientage between noble families and leasers gave the latter the confidence to invest, especially in enclosures (Cruz 1980: 148-52). Was this growth accompanied by economic development? Probably, but it is clear that the changes were very slow and that the role of the aristocracy was, at times, entirely indirect.

Possibly the aristocracy admitted the need for improvements and implemented them from time to time, but as a social class it was bound by the very structures on which its social and political preeminence was based. This would enable us to understand why its accomplishments were limited and why, even in the case of industry, success was achieved only in the presence of favorable circumstances related to markets and capital. In any case, the contradiction between structures and personal interests appears to have

intensified in the latter half of the century, when inflation and the growing demand for money for commerce and industry offered alternative and more profitable investment opportunities than the *censos*, making it increasingly difficult for nobles to obtain mortgages. The image of noblemen such as the duke of Osuna (Atienza 1987: 347) resorting to non-mortgage loans and higher interest rates leads one to believe that the old bridge between seigneurial spending and earning was crumbling. The Enlightenment critique of the *mayorazgos*—which, because of the new bureaucracy and a more professional army, had lost their function of mobilizing resources to finance political and military undertakings—coincided with requests by the nobility to desentail their estates or to be compensated for them in more profitable or manageable ways. The logic of political and social management was being superseded by more strictly economic criteria just as the entire political and social system was in crisis and the society of orders collapsed.

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The internal dynamics of aristocratic Castilian families are, unfortunately, not well known to us. But their behavior was clearly consistent with contemporary social and economic conditions, as were their management strategies, which involved productive innovation, particularly in the 18th century. Nonetheless, one cannot say that the aristocracy made a decisive contribution to economic growth, and even less so to a structural transformation leading to capitalism. Its management strategies for many years supported a credit system that did little to direct savings into productive activities.

Already since the 16th century, a combination of mortgages, inalienable *mayorazgo*, and revenue from the empire had enabled the aristocracy to overcome the structural tension between earnings and income and to reduce the impact of its debts both on itself as a class and on the social equilibrium that sustained the political system. The result was to reproduce and extend institutions and a system of land tenure which did not induce productive development. Under these circumstances, management strategies came to regard productive investment as somewhat marginal. Growth could be obtained through many means, among which we cannot underestimate the intensification of peasant labor and the increase of commerce, but economic development was limited. It was only the institutional changes in the late 18th century that produced the transformations which would lead to the development of capitalism.

At the same time, the strength of the seigniorial regime ensured a very unequal distribution of income, which allowed for conspicuous consumption by the lords and limited demand by the peasantry. The resulting impact on the kingdom's industrial development was hardly positive, not only because of the obstacles to the formation of a mass market but also because the conspicuous consumption was largely aimed at foreign products.

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# THE ARISTOCRATIC ESTATES IN PORTUGAL AND THEIR MANAGEMENT (1600-1834)<sup>1</sup>

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## INTRODUCTION

I would like to begin by making two preliminary remarks. The first concerns the way in which the Portuguese case fits into the context of this seminar. As far as I am aware, this seminar focuses on the survival of the aristocracy into the 19th century, of which the English and Castilian (and Andalusian) cases are typical examples. Its objective, I believe, is to explain the survival of the aristocratic estates by changes in the way these estates were managed and administered. Looked at in this way, the Portuguese experience clearly goes against the grain. This is first of all because there are hardly any pointers to modernisation in the 18th century, and secondly because the old aristocratic houses did not in fact manage to survive into the 19th century: there was an almost complete break-up of the aristocratic estates as a result of the impact of the liberal revolution.

My second preliminary remark concerns the extent of the available Portuguese bibliography on this subject. In fact there is very little, and most of it touches on the last phase of the Old Regime.<sup>2</sup> However, the information available for that particular period is extremely complete. For this reason, my paper will not follow the usual sequence: instead I will start with the period from 1670 to 1834, and then go back in time.

## THE PECULIARITIES OF THE PORTUGUESE ARISTOCRACY

There are two long-term historical features which somehow distinguish the Portuguese aristocracy and their estates. The first is the fact that in Portugal the various forms of lifelong or hereditary endowment of land to tenant-farmers—by way of *foral* (charter), *aforamento colectivo* (grant of collective leases) or of *contrato enfiteútico individual* (individual long-term lease contracts), whether in perpetuity or for life—took on far greater significance

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1. I would like to thank Rui Ramos for the comments on an earlier English version of this paper.

2. Most of the material for this paper comes from my own works. See Monteiro (1991, 1992, 1993, 1997).

and lasted much longer than in most of the other European countries. These various forms of long-term leasing of land already existed before the founding of the kingdom, and continued to be used with surprising frequency throughout the 19th century. Thus, there was a tendency for the large aristocratic institutions in most of the country to be above all great receivers of dues deriving from long term lease contracts (*enfiteuse/emphyteusis*) and of tithes, rather than to be large landowners. There were, nevertheless, some differences between the north and the south of the country. The north and central regions contained a large majority of perpetual tenants, who were required to pay various types of dues, while in the south, which was sparsely populated, and came to be populated at a much later time, there was a predominance of the large landed property, which was exploited by means of short-term leases.

The second particular feature of the Portuguese case is the role of the Crown in keeping this situation. From the outset, the crown encouraged tenant-farming and other forms of land occupation in most of the country. In fact, it was the crown itself which received and handed out the dues paid by the tenants: for each town or village, these dues had been set out in the charters granted by Manuel (1495-1521) at the beginning of the 16th century. Moreover, a royal edict of 1423 (the so called *Lei Mental*) gave the crown's endowments a special legal statute, making them subject to specific inheritance rules and periodic confirmation. Crown property, when granted to nobles, never lost this specific legal statute and could revert to the crown. The resources of the crown, and its capacity to redistribute them, considerably increased when the king took over the administration of the Grand Military Orders of Aviz, of Christ and of Santiago in 1551: the distribution of the honours and livings associated with these Orders became part of the mechanisms used for rewarding services to the monarchy. The 700 or so *comendas* (commanderies) of the Military Orders were mainly made up of tithes. Finally, the enormous receipts from the colonial empire enabled the Portuguese crown to be generous. It allowed the king to dispense with receipts from crown property and the military orders in favour of the aristocracy, and even to use fixed levies on Customs duties as a form of pension.

#### THE ESTATES OF THE COURT ARISTOCRACY OF THE BRAGANÇA DYNASTY (1640-1834)

In Portugal, the true nobility was identified with a group of 50 or so aristocratic houses which monopolised most of the titles. Even though these dukes,

marquises and counts were only a small part of a vast aristocratic pyramid, they were described, from the end of the 17th century, as the highest nobility of the realm. They all resided at the court in Lisbon, and were made up of a few dozen families of lords, *comendadores* (masters of the commanderies) and holders of office at the palace.

As can be seen in Table 1, this titled elite was established during the closing decades of the Spanish Habsburg rule (1580-1640). It was during this time that some 40 or so titles were created. The total number of titles reached at that time (i.e. going from about 20 to over 50) remained stable right up to the last decade of the 18th century, even though some 40% of Portuguese titled houses were extinguished at the time of the Restoration in 1640. In fact, they were quickly replaced by new ones, and the frequency of annual granting of titles between 1641 and 1670 would only be (substantially) exceeded during the regency and subsequent reign of João VI (1792-1816). The remarkable 130-year period of stability following the war of Restoration (1668) has no parallel in any other period of Portuguese history, and was probably rarely equalled by other European aristocracies.

Within the limits set by the monarchy, the families which made up the titled elite, called *Grandeas*, developed a set of strategies to assure their reproduction. Since almost all their assets belonged to the crown and the Military Orders or were entailed to the first-born, being passed down undivided to the successor, their first and immediate objective was to ensure that there was a male heir. The second objective was to preserve their status. To achieve this, they followed a policy of complete social exclusivism. From 1651 on, 80% of the first-born among the *Grandeas* married ladies of the highest court aristocracy or from abroad. The same principle of social exclusivism led the families to direct the vast majority of second-born and subsequent sons, and daughters who could not be married into the ranks of the higher aristocracy, into the church. Alternative options in the marriage market (namely the provincial nobility and the monarchy's major financial backers) were not even considered until the beginning of the 19th century. Among the *Grandeas*, dowries did not include landed property and were not very high. Marriage was a means to ensure succession rather than a means to acquire new wealth. The extraordinary social exclusivism of the aristocratic nobility was a way of monopolising access to the high offices of the monarchy and to the concessions and gifts of the crown. In that respect, second-born sons (as priests, bishops and cardinals) and daughters (as ladies-in-waiting

at the palace) played a role almost as important as that of the heirs themselves. The Grandees did not look for real estate, but for more crown pensions.

From the end of the 17th century the composition of the estates of the great houses of the Bragança dynasty stayed relatively stable. Although there were a few exceptions, most of the titled houses had their origins in *senhorios* (lordships or manors) granted by the Avis dynasty (1386-1580) and/or in entailments dating back to the 16th century. Along the way they had been through an extended phase of accumulation of property, partly through marriages. After the final quarter of the 17th century, however, the crown became the main or even the only source of accumulation of new forms of income for the aristocratic houses. In the 18th century the acquisition of new property, or its incorporation into family estates by way of marriage, was the exception.

These developments coincided with a remarkable process of concentration of royal endowments, which is clearly exemplified in the case of *comendas* (Table 2). At the beginning of the 17th century the masters or commanders of military orders (*comendadores*) were numerous, representing a social group which included some four hundred individuals and families, even though the few titled members of this category already absorbed a high proportion of the aggregate income of the directly managed *comendas*. A century and a half later (in 1755) the number of *comendadores* had been reduced to considerably less than half, and 50 titled houses already absorbed some two-thirds of the aggregate income. Up to the final triumph of the liberal revolution in 1832-34, the number of *comendadores* increased only slightly, but the titled members would by then represent more than half of the total and would be receiving more than four-fifths of the total income.

As was to be expected, the relative importance of the income derived from the crown tended to increase constantly. I have been able to reconstruct the income pattern of 40 of the 51 aristocratic houses which existed in Portugal between 1750 and 1775 (Table 3), as well as of other houses of the higher court aristocracy. My research suggests that the property of the crown and the orders represented on average 55% of the income of Grandees. The *comendas* of military orders alone account for almost a third of the total. Thus more than half of the income of the aristocratic houses was derived from property granted by the crown and subject to confirmation by the crown.

There was a clear income hierarchy in the group of houses under review. Half a dozen of them were clearly much better off than the rest: their average net income (after allowing for running costs) was far from insignificant in

European terms. However, there was a huge difference between that net income and the amount actually available to them, because of the heavy debt burden which most of the houses had to bear.

Interests on public debt represented 4.8% of their income while rents from urban property represented 8.6%. This left a little more than 31% for income from country estates. Of this figure, around 9% derived from freehold ground rents. Some of these derived from old contracts, but there was a significant proportion from recent leases. That is, arguing that they were short of the liquid funds needed to carry out maintenance and improvements, the aristocratic houses continued to lease property in the form of long-term inheritable leases (emphyteusis) right up into the 19th century. On the other hand the fully owned country estates (entailments nearly always situated in Estremadura, near Lisbon and in the Alentejo) provided the Portuguese aristocracy on average with little over one-fifth of their income. In short, the large aristocratic houses were not large rural landowners (Table 4).

For some of the houses (Table 5) we do not have quantitative data as to how the properties were managed, but in the vast majority of cases the properties were administered indirectly, since, on average, the fully owned and directly managed country estates did not account for even 3% of total income. Properties, scattered throughout five of the six provinces of the realm, were as a rule rented out wholesale in Lisbon to merchants from the capital or from the provinces. A small number of these sold off the rights to the rents to the highest bidder. It was quite common for more than half the property income of an aristocratic house to be in the hands of one sole receiver of rents. He would subcontract the actual collection of rents to local agents.

This static, rent income-based model for the structure and management of estates helps to explain the fact that the real income of the aristocratic houses, after adjustment for inflation, failed to keep pace with the rise in prices when these took off in the decade of the 1780s. This trend applied to all the different types of property which made up the income of the grand aristocratic houses.

Most of the houses of the grand aristocracy took on large debts in the middle of the 18th century. Many of them never again recovered from this burden, while a number of others fell on financially hard times either permanently or temporarily. The sources and providers of these older and longer-term loans had been above all other nobles, the Holy House of Mercy (*Misericórdia*) of Lisbon and various religious orders and monasteries. By the end of the century all these sources had become exhausted, and began

to be replaced by commercially-based capital. Throughout this period the most common solution for the more severe financial difficulties was nearly always the same: the crown would appoint a judicial commission which would set allowances for the members of the household, and deliver the rest to the creditors. More often than not, these creditors were the very same leaseholders, whose rent contracts had been cancelled by virtue of the appointment of the judicial commission. In most cases the aristocratic houses had very little management structure and only rudimentary accounting. This fitted in with the tendency to grant rights of tenure on a wholesale basis encompassing almost all their estate. Thus at various times the crown was obliged, on political grounds, to step in to protect most of the *Grande*s from their creditors, and at the same time furnish them with the management which they lacked. The legal notion of the usurious contract and the political need to maintain the principal nobility of the realm were invoked to defend the aristocratic houses against their creditors, especially those from the merchant class. Bad debts became one of the hallmarks of the *Grande*s in the transition from the 18th to the 19th century.

The make-up of ordinary expenditure of the aristocratic houses (Table 6) was extremely unusual, not only because of the generally low level of investment expenditure and running costs, but because of the uncommonly large proportion of expenses attributable to the kitchen, to the servants and to the stables, i.e. to the costs of running a noble house in the patriarchal sense of the term. This was the principal distinguishing characteristic of the lifestyle of the aristocracy in Portuguese society at this time. It had a major impact on the way in which they fell into debt, not because it gave rise to debts directly, but because it committed the households of the aristocratic houses to a group of items of fixed expenditure which was so inflexible that they were unable to repay the loans they had taken on.

Moreover, the exercise of jurisdictional rights by the Portuguese grand aristocracy reinforces this interpretation. Only a small part of their income derived from land which was subject to their direct jurisdiction (11% on average). Many of them had no jurisdictional lordship (*senhorio*) (Table 7). In fact the number of districts subject to aristocratic jurisdiction clearly fell after 1640. Only a small number of the aristocratic houses put any effort into carrying out these tasks. The actual influence of the great aristocratic houses at the end of the Old Regime was, with a few notable exceptions, very small. The *Grande*s were confined to the capital: there was no network of dependency in the provinces. This in part explains their recourse to special

privileged courts, appointed by the crown, which often collected rents by administrative (court) order.

#### RETROSPECTIVE PROJECTIONS

This picture fits in with that of the Portuguese aristocracy in earlier periods of history. Going back to the 15th century, it was stated that “the assets of the nobles were made up mainly of settlements, pensions and property of the crown: there were few possessions and lands which were their own” (de Sousa 1903: 486). The same was said for the first half of the 16th century (Cordeiro 1986). But it should be noted that these statements relate to an undefined and unquantified number of individuals and houses, of which the house of the Duke of Bragança is undoubtedly the best example. Moreover the titled aristocracy of the 16th century was a much smaller group, numbering barely twenty families. If we had income figures for the beginning of the 17th century for the same houses which were studied previously (or rather, for those which already existed then), it is certain that the weight of the property of the crown and the orders would on average be less significant than at the end of the 18th century.

In effect the 16th century was a period of intense competition between a large number of the aristocratic houses for property and distinction. The majority of the entailments date from this time, and a process of selection and contraction began. From the end of the 16th century, by way of abolition and various unions, the number of aristocratic houses of any magnificence started to decrease, a trend which was to be accentuated in the 17th century.

Up to the end of the 17th century the prevailing mentality was one of increasing material and symbolic wealth. Large fortunes were still being made in the colonies and good marriages were a means of getting hold of those fortunes which others had been able to make there. It was a time which saw the meteoric rise of some. It was also a time of war in Europe (against Spain) and overseas (in India and in Brazil). The heroic and adventurous deeds of some lords and masters of the aristocratic houses were recorded in chronicles and poems. As previously mentioned, Portuguese aristocratic dowry amounts stabilised at the end of the 17th century at levels which cannot be regarded as being very high. All the indicators point to the fact that up to the middle of the 17th century aristocratic marriages were the focal event in the process of accumulation of material wealth in the aristocratic houses. Known examples show that in the first half of the 17th century several marriages took place

where the nominal dowry amounts were greater than any of those which took place in the first half of the 18th century, even before allowing for inflation. There are other indicators suggesting clearly that the first of these periods was a time when great efforts to accumulate wealth were made. Marriages played an important role in this process, both by virtue of the real property which went to make up part of the dowry, and of the number of marriages to heiresses to entailments and crown property. But with the consolidation of the elite of the great houses of the dynasty of Bragança, there came a profound change in the logic of marriage and dowries, as we were able to show in relation to the marriage contracts made in the last decades of the 17th century.

On the basis of the information available to us, we can draw a general outline of the composition and management of aristocratic estates at the beginning of the 17th century. For a start, the difference of wealth among the titled aristocrats was much more significant than at the end of the century. Some already possessed many royal endowments, but this was not the general rule. In fact the homogenising effect of the royal Court was very limited at that time. Most of the titled aristocrats and *senhores de terras* did not reside in Lisbon, but in Évora, in Porto, or at their manors in the country. This was an essential difference from the 18th century, with major implications. Although there is only a fragmented empirical base for this judgement, it seems that expenditure was more contained, at least for those who did not go to Madrid (Teixeira 1984).

There seems little doubt that a different model of administration of the estates prevailed. This difference lay not necessarily in the fact that many properties were managed directly, but rather in the fact that properties were rented to a number of small tenants, and not to merchants/traders. Also, a much closer control was kept on the relationship between the rents actually paid and changes in the cost of living. There are many examples of substantial investments made at this time. And in this context, although there were signs that agricultural income fell, there are no indicators which justify stating that there was a generalised crisis in the aristocracy at this time. What can be stated from empirical observation is that there was a concentration of wealth in fewer hands and a reduction in the number of aristocratic houses.

But everything changed with the establishment and consolidation of the elite at the new court of Bragança. Positions obtained (and secured) at the court of the new dynasty created the conditions for perpetuating in particular the material wealth of the aristocratic houses. And what they now sought

to maintain and increase were their positions at the court, and the material and symbolic returns which these positions (and only those) could provide. There was a decisive shift in the ground on which aristocratic competition took place. The politics of marriage, like the patterns of consumption, changed accordingly.

#### ARISTOCRACY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Thus, everything seems to point to the conclusion that the methods of administering estates in the period from the 16th century up to 1640 were more rational than those which applied in following period. This is all the more surprising when one considers that the recent historiography has emphasised the aristocratic capacity for modernisation in several European countries during the 18th century.

What happened in Portugal at this time cannot be explained simply by invoking an economic rationale other than those which were prevalent in other Western societies. In the final analysis, the behaviour of the Portuguese titled elite was determined by the fact that it was their positions at the court society which defined the worth of each house and its master. It is true that the same could be said for other European aristocracies. But in the Portuguese case, the objective institutional conditions underlying that kind of behaviour seem to have lasted longer. The aristocracy was not just dependent on the inherited wealth of earlier generations, but on the service to the king, and this was to remain the fundamental component of the aristocratic identity. As a consequence, the Portuguese Grandees developed a complex set of customs and practices in which the good manager had no important part to play.

All the circumstances described above made the aristocracy of the Old Regime very dependent on the monarchy and its institutions. Insofar as it changed the institutional framework of the monarchy, the liberal triumph after the civil war of 1832-34 was to bring with it the irreversible and rapid decline of the Portuguese Grandees.

It remains to consider the possible global effects of these historical facts on economic development in Portugal. In essence, they can be summarised as follows:

1. Market distortion, with an excessive concentration of luxury consumption and large households in the royal court (at Lisbon). The lack of a network

of mid-sized cities, so often mentioned as one of the characteristics of Portuguese urban demography, is inextricably linked to that fundamental factor. In actual fact, the distortion was not only due to the demographic importance of Lisbon, which with its 200,000 inhabitants accounted for some 6 to 7% of the population of the realm. It was also due in large measure to the concentration of wealth in the capital: the average income of the grand aristocracy was 5 times higher than that of the municipal aristocratic elite in the second city of the realm (Oporto).

2. The persistence of a strong fiscal burden on farmers (seigniorial rights and tithes), which was a source of intense conflict at the beginning of the 19th century. This was highlighted by the actions of the rent collectors. As these rents were payable to the highest aristocratic houses of the Court, the *Grandeães* tended to appear as one of the main targets of resentment all over the country.

3. A constant flow of income from the aristocratic houses to their principal lease-holders. Most of these were city or provincial traders and merchants, who therefore achieved significant capital accumulation, and came to play an active role in the transfers of property which took place in Portugal in the 19th century. However, the institutional framework remained archaic and old-fashioned. It failed to protect the rights of creditors and tenants, and created an environment of high risk for any contractual relationship with the aristocratic houses. The annulment of usurious contracts at the behest of the aristocratic houses continued to take place right up to 1832.

## APPENDIX

Table 1. *Titled houses existing in Portugal (1385-1832).*

Period	no. created	Annual average	no. extinguished	Annual average	Total
before 1390	1				1
1391-1430	4	0,1	0	0,0	5
1431-1460	5	0,2	1	0,0	9
1461-1490	10	0,3	5	0,2	14
1491-1520	5	0,2	3	0,1	16
1521-1550	6	0,2	2	0,1	20
1551-1580	2	0,1	3	0,1	19
1581-1610	13	0,4	2	0,1	30
1611-1640	28	0,9	2	0,1	56
1641-1670	18	0,6	24	0,8	50
1671-1700	8	0,3	7	0,2	51
1701-1730	5	0,2	5	0,2	51
1731-1760	7	0,2	10	0,3	48
1761-1790	8	0,3	2	0,1	54
1791-1820	63	2,1	14	0,5	103
1821-1832	38	3,2	14	1,2	127

Table 2. *Distribution of income of the military orders commanderies (1611, 1755 and 1832).*

No. of Commanders				Distribution of income (%)			
Year	1611	1755	1832	Year	1611	1755	1832
Titled	19	50	88	Titled	18,4	66,4	82,2
Untitled	390	120	96	Untitled	81,6	33,6	18,8
Total	409	170	184	Total	100	100	100

Table 3. *Income distribution of Portuguese titled aristocracy.*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
		Casa e Ano	Coroa	Ordens	Tenças	Total	Patrim on.	Juros	Total	Rendimentos Nominales	Deflaciona.
*	1620	Condes de ARCOS	0,00	3,13	0,00	3,13	91,54	5,33	96,87	4 313 375	9 227 975
*	1676	Condes de COCULIM	0,00	17,65	0,00	17,65	79,22	3,14	82,35	12 042 823	23 002 816
*	1759	Marquesses de POMBAL	6,55	18,04	0,00	24,59	75,41	0,00	75,41	41 575 928	58 602 234
*	1638	Marquesses de FRONTEIRA	0,00	26,58	4,16	30,74	61,52	7,75	69,26	19 777 329	28 900 294
*	1765	Condes da LOUSÁ	3,86	23,37	5,94	33,17	64,48	2,35	66,83	11 152 666	7 668 842
1460	1759	Condes da PONTE	7,38	13,93	13,24	34,55	55,43	10,01	65,45	12 201 437	24 498 344
*	1758	Condes de BOBADELA	0,00	22,80	11,76	34,57	65,43	0,00	65,43	6 139 100	8 901 105
*	1666	Viscondes de ASSECA	9,71	25,21	2,11	37,04	40,06	22,90	62,96	8 646 578	15 538 535
*	1640	Marquesses de SABUGOSA	0,30	35,87	1,00	37,17	61,94	0,89	62,83	17 983 871	25 748 433
1358	1662	Condes de POMBEIRO	5,69	9,06	25,62	40,38	59,62	0,00	59,62	10 537 828	21 199 456
1458	1764	Condes de SAMPAIO	28,23	11,91	1,06	41,21	49,69	9,10	58,79	8 655 082	10 826 418
*	1664	Marquesses de LAVRADIO	12,39	24,96	5,77	43,13	56,87	0,00	56,87	17 665 160	15 054 331
1200	1499	Marquesses de NIZA	21,27	23,57	1,17	46,02	42,61	11,37	53,98	38 993 060	67 680 464
*	1702	Condes de VALADARES	6,59	38,85	4,72	50,15	37,46	12,39	49,85	13 353 760	18 534 679
*	1633	Condes de S. MIGUEL	3,30	47,21	0,00	50,51	41,34	8,15	49,49	11 225 900	14 039 848
*	1758	Condes da EGA	0,00	19,83	31,07	50,89	34,18	14,93	49,11	9 269 783	12 712 919

Table 3. (cont.) *Income distribution of Portuguese titled aristocracy.*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	
		Casa e Ano	Coroa	Ordens	Tenças	Total	Patrim on.	Juros	Total	Rendimentos Nominales	Deflaciona.	
1384	1504	Marqueses de ABRANTES	1824	31,57	18,43	1,12	51,12	47,15	1,73	48,88	44 254 989	57 659 128
1449	1614	Condes de VIMIEIRO	1791	25,88	14,51	11,59	51,99	48,01	0,00	48,01	7 302 850	10 831 617
1424	1754	Condes da REZENDE	1800	37,56	7,70	10,65	55,90	29,45	14,64	44,10	13 657 880	13 657 880
1453	1628	Marqueses de LOULÉ	1810	13,75	33,88	8,29	55,92	44,08	0,00	44,08	25 594 458	16 298 308
*	1622	Marqueses de LOURIÇAL	1806	5,57	40,51	10,83	56,92	42,98	0,10	43,08	26 916 498	22 938 365
1385	1666	Condes de S. VICENTE	1806	1,63	49,87	5,52	57,03	41,88	1,09	42,97	19 617 157	16 715 046
1384	1475	Marqueses de ALVITO	1789	16,91	25,26	16,87	59,04	35,43	5,53	40,96	10 847 500	16 450 513
D.JI	1709	Condes de POVOLIDE	1808	6,34	46,13	6,69	59,16	40,68	0,16	40,84	14 992 979	10 735 223
*	1677	Marqueses de ALORNA	1802	6,34	46,12	8,48	60,95	27,94	11,11	39,05	21 602 255	23 218 828
1381	1611	Marqueses de TAVORA	1758-9	11,38	47,33	2,25	60,97	39,03	0,00	39,03	13 328 618	29 495 292
*	1760	Condes da CUNHA	1784	0,00	44,99	16,00	60,99	32,65	6,37	39,01	6 125 903	10 897 680
*	1640	Condes de LUMIARES	1782	0,00	31,54	32,19	63,73	31,89	4,38	36,27	3 199 880	5 789 885
1422	1640	Condes de AVEIRAS	1743	10,85	23,18	32,82	66,85	8,41	24,74	33,15	11 065 000	24 875 590
1452	1504	Duques de CADAVAL	1782	42,53	25,06	1,81	69,40	28,01	2,59	30,60	37 547 700	67 939 069

Table 3. (cont.) *Income distribution of Portuguese titled aristocracy.*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
		Casa e Ano	Coroa	Ordens	Tenças	Total	Patrim on.	Juros	Total	Rendimentos Nominais	Deflaciona.
1396	1654	Marqueses de ANGEJA	1811	27,89	36,70	5,55	70,14	29,86	0,00	29,86	15 714 775
*	1515	Marqueses de VALENÇA	1795	19,34	48,58	2,42	70,35	29,33	0,32	29,65	28 128 255
1466	1583	Marqueses de TANCOS	1774	5,02	51,29	18,45	74,76	20,96	4,28	25,24	30 019 523
1388	1476	Marqueses de PONTE LIMA	1810	39,50	31,45	3,91	74,86	22,19	2,95	25,14	14 659 109
1384	1475	Marqueses de MARIALVA	1802/6	41,09	31,25	4,11	76,46	23,54	0,00	23,54	26 289 113
1397	1611	Duques de LAFÕES	1800/1	25,00	44,16	8,54	77,71	22,24	0,05	22,29	46 161 772
*	1667	Condes de SANTIAGO	1784-6	10,04	62,53	6,60	79,17	20,83	0,00	20,83	17 517 412
1499	1499	Marqueses de PENALVA	1802	35,43	41,58	8,01	85,03	12,50	2,47	14,97	31 277 629
1425	1448	Condes de ATOUGUIA	1758	37,73	42,42	7,35	87,51	12,49	0,00	12,49	27 294 907
1498	1498	Duques de AVEIRO	1759	66,07	23,44	0,00	89,51	10,49	0,00	10,49	116 901 981
		MÉDIA		15,57	30,75	8,44	54,76	40,47	4,77	45,24	26 090 087

1 - Year in which the oldest «Senhorio» was given by the crown

2- idem Title

3- House/Year

4- % of seigneurial rights endowed by the Crown

5- % Commanderies of military orders

6- % Crown pensions

7- % 4 + 5 + 6

8- % patrimonial property and rights

9- % interests

10- % 8 + 9

11- Income in «reis»

12- Defl. Income in «reis» (1800=1)

Table 4. *Emphyteusis and «full property» (%)*.

		1	2	3	4	5
House	Year	TEN. + JUR.	B.C.O.	URBANAS	FOROS	PROPR.
Penalva	1802	10,49	77,01	7,00	2,74	2,75
Louriçal	1806	10,87	45,83	13,34	26,96	2,99
Aveiras	1743	57,51	34,00	2,32	0,00	6,18
S. Vicente	1830	12,98	55,58	3,73	16,02	11,69
Ega	1829	46,00	19,83	16,18	3,88	14,11
Valadares	1794	17,63	44,91	16,82	5,27	15,37
S. Miguel	1830	28,67	28,10	1,43	22,12	19,67
Lumiaraes	1782	36,56	31,54	5,69	0,00	26,20
Sampaio	1795	10,16	40,15	12,24	1,27	36,18
Arcos	1762 (0)	4,65	2,73	2,47	12,91	77,24
Average		23,55	37,97	8,12	9,32	21,04

1- % interests and crown pensions

4 - Rural *foros*2- *Bens da coroa e das ordens militares*

5- Rural full property rights

3- Urban rents and *foros*

Table 5. *Assets leased and under direct management (28 houses) %.*

House/Year		A	B	C	D
Marquese do LAVRADIO	1806	5,77	94,23	0,00	0,00
Marqueses de PONTE LIMA	1810	6,86	90,57	2,57	0,00
Viscondes de ASSECA	1771	27,29	69,53	3,18	0,00
Condes de LUMIARES	1780	37,45	59,34	3,21	0,00
Condes da ATOUGUIA	1758	7,34	88,28	4,38	0,00
Condes da BOBADELA	1831	11,76	81,88	6,36	0,00
Marqueses de LOULE	1810	8,29	83,50	8,20	0,00
Condes da REZENDE	1829	44,55	43,49	11,97	0,00
Condes da ARCOS	1762	4,65	82,44	12,91	0,00
Condes de S.MIGUEL	1830	28,67	55,04	16,29	0,00
Condes da EGA	1829	46,00	33,94	20,07	0,00
Marqueses de LOURIÇAL	1806	10,87	86,68	1,90	0,55
Condes de POVOLIDE	1808	6,85	87,99	4,15	1,02
Marqueses de FRONTEIRA	1830	11,90	86,60	0,35	1,15
Marqueses de ALEGRETE	1824	17,61	79,56	1,64	1,19
Condes de VIMIEIRO	1791	11,50	78,37	8,77	1,36
Marqueses de VALENÇA	1795	2,71	95,86	0,00	1,43
Condes de S.VICENTE	1806	6,61	88,07	2,77	2,55
Marqueses de ANGEJA	1811	5,55	91,85	0,00	2,59
Duques de CADAVAL	1792	3,05	90,64	3,43	2,88
Condes de SAMPAIO	1796	10,16	85,39	1,27	3,18
Condes de AVEIRAS	1744	58,24	37,70	0,22	3,84
Condes de COCULIM	1777	3,14	87,43	3,98	5,45
Condes da SANTIAGO	1784-6	6,60	86,61	0,05	6,74
Marqueses de MARIALVA	1802 (6)	4,18	85,69	1,60	8,53
Condes de VALADARES	1794	19,35	63,54	8,49	8,62
Duques de LAFÕES	1800/1	8,60	72,54	7,75	11,12
Marqueses de POMBAL	1793/4	0,00	75,47	12,63	11,90
<b>Average</b>		16,69	77,22	5,29	2,65

A - % interests and crown pensions

C - % *foros* and rights collected by aristocratic houses

B - % leases of rights and property

D - % Full property under direct management

Table 6. Structure of spending by aristocratic houses (current expenses).

House	Senhor ALCAÇ.	Marquês ANGEJA	Marquês ALVITO	Conde REDINHA	Conde S.LOUR.	Conde V.NOVA	Duque CADAVAL	Marquês POMBAL*	Duque LAFÔES*	Média
Year	1800	1812	1789	1787-8	1793	1773	1783	1793-7	1800-1	
1 cavaliariças	5,5	8,6	14,7	9,7	12,6	10,8	20,7	7,8	7,1	10,8
2 cozinha	35,4	34,5	34,0	29,7	45,7	28,1	24,2	19,2	21,8	30,3
3 encargos e esmolos	12,3	0,8	1,4	3,0	2,4	4,4	2,6	2,2	2,2	3,5
4 Família	16,0	22,5	14,7	9,5	11,5	16,8	16,4	11,9	11,2	14,5
5 Impostos	2,1	@	@	8,4	5,1	3,7	@	5,9	1,1	4,4
6 Investimentos	3,4	8,6	11,3	6,8	4,6	16,0	6,7	22,0	18,8	10,9
7 mesadas (alimentos)	7,0	24,9	22,7	30,0	16,9	3,8	29,4	21,5	37,3	21,5
8 ordenados e despesas ad.	18,3	@	1,3	2,9	1,2	16,4	@	9,5	0,5	7,1
total (em milhares de reis)	6 865	13 930	8 253	10 085	15 133	12 789	24 813	36 847	61 879	21 177
Total deflacionado (1800)	6 865	9 424	12 852	16 219	21 671	25 727	44 591	48 569	61 015	27 437
9 Consumo pessoal + da casa	76,2	91,4	87,5	81,9	89,1	63,8	93,3	62,6	79,6	80,6
10 caval.+ cozinha + família	45,9	65,6	63,4	48,9	69,8	55,7	61,3	38,9	40,2	55,6

9- 1+2+3+4+7

10- 1+2+4

@- omitted

\*- average

1- horse stable

5- taxes

2- cooking

6- investments and expenses with direct management of property

3- charity

7- personal pensions and clothing

4- servants

8- judicial expenses and wages of administrators

Table 7. *Jurisdictional rights and income(%)*.

CASA	ANO	A	B	C	D
		geral	b.c.	comend	pat.
Marqueses de ALORNA	1802	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00
Condes de ALVA	1756	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00
Condes de ARCOS	1762	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00
Viscondes de ASSECA	1783	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00
Condes de BOBADELA	1831	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00
Condes de COCULIM	1777	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00
Condes da CUNHA	1784	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00
Condes da EGA	1829	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00
Marqueses de FRONTEIRA	1830	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00
Condes da LOUSÃ	1812	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00
Condes de LUMIARES	1782	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00
Condes de POVOLIDE	1808	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00
Condes de S.MIGUEL	1796	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00
Condes de S.VICENTE	1806	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00
Condes de S.LOURENÇO	1793	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00
Condes de SANTIAGO	1784-6	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00
Condes de SOURE	1796	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00
Condes de VALADARES	1794	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00
Marqueses de VALENÇA	1810	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00
Condes de VILA FLOR	1791	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00
Marqueses de PENALVA	1802	2,68	1,58	1,10	0,00
Marqueses de PONTE LIMA	1810	4,97	4,97	0,00	0,00
Marqueses de LOURIÇAL	1806	5,57	5,57	0,00	0,00
Condes da PONTE	1770	5,74	5,74	0,00	0,00
Marqueses de LOULÉ	1810	8,28	8,28	0,00	0,00
Marqueses de NIZA	1785	9,27	9,27	0,00	0,00
Marqueses de TANCOS	1774	9,50	0,00	0,00	9,50

Table 7. (Cont.) *Jurisdictional rights and income(%)*.

CASA	ANO	A	B	C	D
		geral	b.c.	comend	pat.
Marqueses de LAVRADIO	1806	12,39	12,39	0,00	0,00
Condes de ATOUGUIA	1758	12,76	12,76	0,00	0,00
Condes de AVEIRAS	1743	13,56	10,85	0,00	2,71
Condes de POMBEIRO	1772	14,39	5,69	0,00	8,70
Marqueses de ABRANTES	1824	17,05	12,58	0,00	4,47
Duques de LAFÕES	1800	20,87	20,87	0,00	0,00
Condes de VIMIEIRO	1791	23,20	0,68	0,00	22,52
Marqueses de ALVITO	1789	25,81	15,51	0,00	10,31
Marqueses de POMBAL	1793/4	26,91	6,55	0,00	20,36
Marqueses de MARIALVA	1802	27,17	27,17	0,00	0,00
Condes de REZENDE	1800	31,87	23,23	0,00	8,64
Condes de SAMPAIO	1795	33,40	16,19	0,00	17,21
Marqueses de ANGEJA	1811	35,07	25,49	0,00	9,57
Duques de AVEIRO	1759	40,82	40,82	0,00	0,00
Duques de CADAVAL	1782	50,58	38,19	5,86	6,53
Marqueses de TÁVORA	1758-9	69,14	9,43	36,80	22,92
E n°casas		23	22	3	12
F média		11,65	7,30	1,02	3,34

A - % Global income  
 B - *idem bens da coroa*  
 C - *idem comendas*

D - *idem* «patrimonial» property  
 E - Number of houses  
 F - Average income (43 houses).

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THE STRUCTURES OF ARISTOCRATIC PATRIMONIES IN THE  
KINGDOM OF NAPLES: MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES AND  
REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT (16TH-18TH CENTURIES)

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THE NOBILITY IN THE SYSTEM OF THE ITALIAN REGIONAL STATES  
Italian society under the *Ancien Regime* did not have a homogeneous development in modern times. Within the system of the regional states (republics, princedoms, provinces of the Spanish empire) the political organization and economic development of each area assumed its own physiognomy and proceeded at its own pace. The history of the regional states is characterised by the marked semantic ambiguity of the term nobility, not least because until the 18th century no legal definitions of the status of nobleman existed. Thus in the practice of historiography the term nobility refers to quite variegated subgroups of the aristocracy, which often followed their own course of development because they represented differing interests and objectives.

Within the world of the nobility, and independently of any formal hierarchy, a first group comprised the urban patriciate. In all Italian cities, both in the north and the south, there were a small number of families who by the beginning of the 16th century had acquired a legitimacy not just as members of the nobility but as patrician families, with the right to a seat in the city councils and to take up posts in the city government. The social mobility that had characterised the Italian cities during the 15th century had come to an end, and the patrician families had formalised their mutual recognition of privileged status in a specially drawn up *libro d'oro* or *liber nobilitatis*, which in practice excluded other families from being added to the roster and hence from gaining access to city government. Of course this closing of the ranks on the part of the patriciate was not a pacific process and met with considerable resistance, especially from the families left off the list.

A second group of the nobility consisted of the titled nobility, articulated according to the usual hierarchy (princes, dukes, marquises, counts, viscounts, barons), whose titles were normally linked with the possession of infeudated land. Thus in this sense it is possible to say that the titled nobility coincided more or less with the feudal nobility. The distribution and influence of infeudation in Italy varied from one state to another. In the republican states (Genova, Venice, Lucca) its presence was very limited, while in the

princedom it was obviously much more common, although it did not always signify much power. Naturally, in order to make a correct evaluation of the role of the feudal nobility one must bear in mind the increase in the numbers of noble titles during the 16th and 17th centuries. Not all the feudal concessions had the same significance: in various parts of the peninsula, alongside a titled nobility which exercised its influence on large and medium-sized territories, there was a minor baronetcy that wielded its power in tiny communities, exploiting them much more intensively than was the case of the large and medium-sized landowners (Villari 1967: 191).

In the Piedmont of the Savoy dynasty the feudal nobility continued to play an important role in court politics up until the 1580s, but from then until 1630 its power waned and it was gradually excluded from the most important government positions. In the first half of the 17th century, of the 266 offices which made up the backbone of government only 29 were filled by members of the nobility, and by the end of the century nobles and clergy together accounted for no more than 24% of the global income generated by land holdings (Stumpo 1979: 282, 66). In the Tuscany of the Medici the presence of feudal nobility was in effect marginal: "There were few fiefs in 16th-century Tuscany. In 1604 fifteen fiefs between Florence and Siena depended on ducal investiture, and nineteen others claimed a partial independence through old treaties of *accomandaglia* made with the Republic. The number of Tuscan fiefs increased in the 17th century partly through the infeudation of communes that had previously been under ducal administration, and partly through the regranting of older fiefs to new families. But Tuscany was a scarcely infeudated region [...] Despite the sonorous legal phrases in the patents of investiture, the dukes conferred very limited rights of administration." (Litchfield 1985: 35-36). The limited extension of feudal nobility in the Tuscany of the Grand Dukes is borne out by the static that in 1642 only 4.2% of the entire population resided in an infeudated community (Pansini 1972: 184).

The situation in the Church State was less clearcut, for the presence of the feudal nobility varied considerably across the territory. In the Adriatic area (now the regions of Umbria and Marche) feudal holdings accounted for between 3% and 6% of the whole, whereas in the areas extending from the central uplands to the Tyrrhenian coast (the former provinces of Comarca, Campagna e Marittima, Sabina and Patrimonio) feudality was deeply rooted, with a prevalence which during the 17th and 18th centuries fluctuated from 35% to 60% (Zenobi 1983: 11).

In the provinces under Spanish dominion the presence of a feudal nobility is a constant feature all over the territory. When the dukedom of Milan came under the Spanish throne in 1535 three quarters of the Lombard communities had already been infeudated under the Sforza, and the remaining quarter gradually followed suit, especially from 1630 onwards (Sella 1979: 247). Thus apart from the nine leading cities, the Lombard territory had a positive experience of feudalism, and the traditional contrast between a northern Italy free of feudal ties and a totally feudal south is seen to be mistaken. The real problem concerns the specific contents and powers which characterised feudalism. Ever since 1441, in fact, a decree had been in force in the Lombard dukedom which limited the powers of the feudal lords by removing the citizens, their goods and the peasants who worked the land of urban landowners from the jurisdiction of the feudal judges: citizens could only be judged by city magistrates.

In the Kingdom of Naples the level of feudalism remained constant across the territory throughout the centuries of the modern era. With respect to the geographical distribution, in the mid-16th century about 85% of the south of Italy was infeudated, while two centuries later this figure had gone down slightly to 75%. Of course the extent to which this implied large-scale fiefs varied from one province to another, so that the overall picture was highly articulated (Visceglia 1992). The only maps of the distribution of feudal lordships available cover the two provinces of Calabria between 1510 and 1650 (Galasso 1975), that of Abruzzo Ultra between 1500 and 1670 (Incarnato 1972) and that of Terra d'Otranto in the 16th century (Visceglia 1988). They illustrate the difficulties that the large-scale feudal holdings found in maintaining their territorial integrity in the long term. A case in point is the experience of the Sanseverino di Bisignano family in Calabria at the end of the 16th century. However, these difficulties did not always lead to the dismemberment of the great patrimonies. This is an area of enquiry that can only be pursued on a regional basis, examining singly the evolution of the feudal holdings in the course of time in each of the twelve provinces of the kingdom.

In Sicily too the titled nobility coincided in practice with the feudal nobility, but the jurisdiction governing the feudal system differed from the situation in Naples in many respects. In my opinion the most important difference was the fact that the feudal concession did not give the feudal lord the rights to exercise powers of jurisdiction unless they had been expressly negotiated and defined during the act of concession. Of course the Sicilian feudal nobility pushed hard for a generalisation of the powers of jurisdiction, known as *mero*

*et misto imperio*, on various occasions (in 1515, 1520, 1548, 1585) but always met with strenuous resistance on the part of the Crown. Such resistance flagged for the first time in 1610 and then again in 1621, when the sovereign, beset by financial difficulties, finally bowed to the barons' requests.

### THE NOBILITY AND THE POLITICAL SYSTEM

Within the system of the Italian regional states the territories that were under the dominion of the Spanish Habsburgs (Milan, Naples, Sicily and Sardinia) do not present common features with regard to the political and economic formation of their nobilities. The dukedom of Milan seems to have been characterised by a substantial harmony among the different components of the nobility, inasmuch as the succession of the leading families in the key posts of the collegiate magistracies came about with reasonable equanimity. The case of Milan is very interesting because it illustrates the ability of the traditional elites to keep their control over the institutions of central government. This proved to be possible because the two main components of Lombard nobility, the urban patriciate and the feudal lords, did not represent two alternative social worlds but rather complementary aspects of the same reality. For this reason one must also exclude any juxtaposition in Lombardy of noblemen and men of the law, for it was above all the patricians of the city who occupied the key posts in the ministries. Coming from backgrounds which had much in common, the members of these noble families invariably gained a doctorate at the university of Pavia and went on to careers in the Senate, the Ordinary or Extraordinary Magistracy, or other less exalted offices in the state administration.

In the Kingdom of Sicily the presence of the nobility in the higher echelons of the great magistracies and councils was quite marked throughout the first half of the 16th century, not least on account of an antique privilege which obliged the sovereign to appoint only Sicilian citizens to posts in the state administration. The reform of the law courts in 1569 modified the role of the nobility profoundly, excluding them from presiding the collegiate magistracies and giving more scope to the men of law (Koenigsberger 1969: 98). Following this reform the political redimensioning of the nobility comes to be seen as a *fait accompli* which is borne out by a variety of sources. In about 1620 Pietro Corsetto could say in no uncertain terms: "*Su Magestad en el Reyno no tiene mucho en que emplear los titulados en cosas de su servicio*" (Scuiti Russi 1984: 77). Their loss of direct control over the ministerial apparatus,

however, did not mean any lessening of their scope for political negotiating. Unlike the situation in Naples, the Sicilian class of lawyers proved to be untrustworthy in affairs of government and unable to offer a viable alternative to the class of the nobility (Scuiti Russi 1983: 89). Furthermore the nobility managed to retain quite extensive powers over fiscal exaction, for it was Parliament, largely controlled by the noblemen, who effected the most significant quota of taxation —*donativi*— by means of one of its organs, the *Deputazione del Regno*.

In the Kingdom of Naples the nobility also failed to keep full control over the institutions of central government. In the first half of the 16th century there was still a significant proportion of noblemen in the ministries, but during the 1560s and 70s their influence was significantly reduced by the rise of new middle class social groups. In fact from the last decades of the 16th century there was a clear predominance of lawyers in the three major organs of government, the *Cancelleria*, *Consiglio Collaterale* and *Sommaria*. There is no doubt that the preference of the court of Madrid for men of the silk (*robins/letrados*) as their political interlocutors played a decisive role, but this change probably had other causes too. In the historical experience of the deep South, feudalism and its concomitant juridical and economic privileges counted for much more than in Lombardia. The patrician status of the noblemen of the Mezzogiorno was much less pronounced than their feudal status: in the capital the families enrolled in the patriciate of the five urban seats of government (*seggi*) corresponded almost exactly to the holders of the main fiefs of the Kingdom, while the patrician groups in the other cities of the South had no contractual power, either politically or economically. The exclusion of the nobility from administrative government meant that the nobles took a greater interest in their territorial influence in the provinces to ensure the greatest possible benefit for their own feudal holdings. This explains why they tried to gain control over the *udienze provinciali*, the most important decentralised magistracy.

If the balance of power in the central government had shifted away from the ancient nobility of the Kingdom, the nobles maintained their grip on the city councils, for the civic administration continued to be in the hands of representatives of the nobility and the populace. During the second half of the 16th century the statutes of the leading cities in the Kingdom were modified and the government of the councils passed into the control of the representatives of the nobility (Galasso 1967: 294-96, 312-24).

The situation changed gradually during the 18th century, especially in the cities of Puglia, where the seats of the noblemen were obliged to accept new families, bringing about small shifts in the balance of power in civic governments (Spagnoletti 1981).

Thus if there was a reduction in the political power of the nobility, which was more noticeable in the organisms of central government than in civic administrations, it must also be said that the noblemen conserved their social identity and the prerogatives afforded by a hierarchical society like that of the Mezzogiorno. These consisted above all of juridical privileges, concerning both the person and property. The patrician families of the capital were distributed in five *seggi* (Capuana, Nido, Montagna, Porto, Portanova) whose representatives had jurisdiction over the quarrels that arose between nobles of that seat for whatever motive, provided it did not have penal implications. This was an important privilege, for it allowed the nobles to settle their differences through a form of arbitrate, with rules that could differ from those in force in the state law courts. As for the juridical tutelage of property, in lawsuits between feudal lords and vassals, the verdicts pronounced by the Neapolitan courts, and above all by the highest court of appeal, the *Sacro Regio Consiglio*, were invariably in favour of the lords (Miletti 1995: 251-6). As in other states throughout the Empire, the Crown extended considerable patronage to the nobility. Of the 116 concessions of the Order of the Golden Fleece made to Italian knights between 1519 and 1700, no less than 41 went to Neapolitan noblemen, as against 11 to Milanese and 11 to Sicilian noblemen (Spagnoletti 1996: 80-84). This tendency to favour the Neapolitan nobility is confirmed by the statistics for the award of the Order of Malta between 1550 and 1718. Out of a total of 3,448 knights, the largest group was from the Kingdom of Naples with 732 knights, comprising 406 from the capital city and 326 from other cities throughout the Kingdom (Spagnoletti 1988: 68).

#### COMPOSITION AND STRUCTURE OF THE ARISTOCRATIC GROUPS

The first problem to be dealt with is naturally the numerical proportions of the aristocratic classes in the Kingdom of Naples. Unfortunately all the primary documentation concerning the Neapolitan nobility has been lost and the only sources available are family archives and contemporary literature, which can allow us to make an approximation of the numbers involved. For such a reconstruction it is necessary to sum the various

categories of nobility: a) the *patriziato* enrolled in the five districts or *seggi*, b) the noble families which, although resident in Naples, were not part of these *seggi* and were known as the *nobiltà fuori piazza*; c) the *nobiltà cittadina* which resided in other cities in the Kingdom; d) the *feudalità titolata delle province*, which possessed fiefs and jurisdictions and which largely comprised the new nobility that emerged in the 16th and 17th centuries; e) the *baronaggio minore*, a sector that embraced titulars of precarious fiefs, either because of uncertain origins or because their fiefs were uninhabited or again because their jurisdictions were virtually worthless. Most of these noble groups were composed of a certain number of families of lineage, in other words families sharing the same family name. In effect these were clans comprising a variable number of families, originating from one founding father. During the 16th century the clan of the Carraciolo, for example, was composed of at least forty families (Astarita 1992: 161). Finally each family had a varying number of members, and it is difficult to trace the demographic trends of these families. We know, for example, that between the 1500s and 1600s many families belonging to the patriciate in the capital died out, and the same tendency can be found in other cities in the South of Italy. We also know that in the 18th century there were more new additions to the civic nobility in the provincial cities than in the capital, but in any case the turnover was quite limited and did not exceed 10-15%. What we do not know is the distribution of the demographic trend and its variables (birth and death rate, marrying age, intervals between births) within these families. For these reasons we can only surmise the total number of families of the various lineages, and do not know the number of members in each family unit. In these terms, a reasonable hypothesis concerning the entity of the Southern aristocracy gives a figure of some 2,500 families in the mid 17th century (Muto 1989: 241) and 6,200 by the end of the 18th century (Galanti 1969, I: 275). A reasonable estimate of these figures in percentage terms shows that the aristocratic population accounted for no more than 1% of the whole population of the Kingdom.

A second important problem concerns the structure of the Neapolitan aristocratic family which, in many respects, is no different from that of other groups of noblemen in Italy under the ancien régime. "A Neapolitan aristocratic clan (the most common Italian word is *casata*) consisted of all the individuals who could trace back their origins to common ancestors. All members of the clan lived, originally, in the same district of the city and

even when —by the 16th century— some of them had moved to other districts, they retained until 1800 their membership in the same aristocratic organizations that participated in the government of the city. A clan had several member families. When used in opposition to clan, family (*famiglia*) refers to successive divisions of a clan into several lines, taking their origins from some distinguished member of the clan (Astarita 1992: 21). As an example we can again consider the capital. When the Neapolitan families carried out the closure of the city districts in the first half of the 16th century, the resulting situation was clearcut. In each of the five districts there were some clans with a greater number of families, and hence on the basis of the high number of knights they supplied, they could control the assemblies of the district and all its deliberations. In the district of Capuana, for example, at the beginning of the 17th century the clan of Caracciolo Sguzzari accounted for a third of the knights of the district. By analogy, we can suppose that in each district there were one or two clans which could condition, on the strength of one third or one quarter of the total membership, the decisions reached by that district (Muto 1989: 241-42).

Naturally there was a strong solidarity among all the families that belonged to the same clan, although there were also cases of contrast which, especially in cases of inheritance, gave rise to clashes and lawsuits. In general it can be said that each individual family in the clan, while maintaining its juridical autonomy, acquiesced in sharing a common destiny with the other families in the clan. Accordingly networks of alliances and business interests developed within the clan and the ties of solidarity were cemented through matrimonial strategies that linked the various family lines across several generations.

### THE ARISTOCRATIC PATRIMONY

We must now turn to the structure of the aristocratic patrimony. As a rule the patrimony of a noble family was composed of the following elements: land estate, credit, cash and goods. Land could be held as either feudal or burgensatic (i.e. private) property; estate comprised the family seat in the city, the feudal castle and country residences, as well as other buildings (apartments, shops, warehouses) which may have been rented out, possession of offices and jurisdictions. This is known to have played a very important part in the aristocracy's wealth. In the Kingdom of Naples many of the offices of both state and civic administration were put up for sale and contested by different

noblemen. More remunerative still was the administration of offices of civil and criminal jurisdiction which were normally in the gift of a fief but which could also be assigned independently. Concerning credit, it was customary for families to lend money to third parties, often noblemen or other members of the same clan, or else in the country to the peasants as an advance in money or in kind. An important component of this item was investments in the public debt (both of the state and the local community) which represented a substantial part of noblemen's credit. Cash would normally have been quite insignificant, restricted to the daily needs of managing the patrimony. Finally there were goods. The extant inventories show that goods did not account for large sums. The furnishing of aristocratic residences in the 16th century appears to have been quite sparse, while horses and carriages were an important element in the prestige of a house. Similarly not much money was tied up in gold, silver or precious stones. In this respect things seem to have changed in the 17th century, especially regarding investments in paintings and sculptures to adorn both the family seat and the chapel.

All these manifestations of aristocratic wealth may have had different forms of management in the capital and outside, but they usually corresponded to a centralised organization with well-defined hierarchical roles. A distinction must be made between the administration of the whole patrimony (land, buildings, credit, cash, etc.) and the single components of this wealth. The general administration of the whole patrimony was supervised from the place where the family resided (Naples or a provincial city) and was undoubtedly dictated by the head of the family himself. The management of the household economy, although not always described in detail in the archive sources, must have included a treasurer, who received and transferred monies, an accountant who kept the books, an agent or general dealer who was authorised to act on behalf of the head of the family, and a lawyer who helped out with his knowledge of the law, even if at times this was more notional than real. In addition to this structure there was the domestic court consisting of a larger or smaller cohort of people who saw to the various tasks in maintaining the household.

Alongside the small group of officials who administered the property from the family seat and implemented the main policy decisions, an important family of the aristocracy which possessed a feudal state (i.e. a large number of fiefs bordering on or close to one another within the same province) had to count on a second and more extended organization that comprised two levels of economic management. The first, vertical level included a number of salaried employees with specific functions who probably travelled about

between the lord's various holdings; the second, horizontal level consisted of few persons who would not necessarily have received a financial recompense and lived on the holdings and productive units. As an example we can consider the state of Bisignano in the 1670s, a large feudal complex in Calabria belonging to the Sanseverino family, princes of Bisignano, comprising some forty communities (Galasso 1975: 231-233). The vertical level included the general treasurer, the general receiver of the silk tax, an agent and general dealer (in Naples), a buyer, a wardrobe supervisor, stewards in charge of grain and other stores, sheep, cows, water buffalo and goats, pigs, sheep, and a collector of outstanding credits.

The organization of the horizontal level required that in each holding or productive unit there should be at least three regular workers: a tax collector, bursar and recorder, who were sometimes assisted by more obscure figures (*mastro di camera*, *vignero*, *mastrogiurato*, *commissari*, *credenzieri*). I must repeat that the personnel in question were all involved in the economic management; every fief also had a greater or lesser complement of other employees responsible for duties outside the economic administration. If we take the example of the Calabrian fief of Scilla belonging to the Ruffa family, we see that in 1754 of the 29 salaried persons only 5 were employed in the economic management (a tax collector, an accountant, a secretary, an assistant accountant and a *mastro di camera*). It is interesting to note that of 6582 ducats spent in that year, no less than 1714 went on personnel costs, of which 472 for the salaries of the five employees cited (Caridi 1995: 182). It is difficult to assess the rationale of this management model. One gets the impression from the literature and direct documentation that the autonomy of the officials who resided in the country and were employed in day-to-day administration and supervision was severely limited by the directives that arrived from headquarters. In time, however, the economic and financial management of the aristocratic patrimonies tended to respond to more rational criteria. In a disposition of 1746 for the feudal state of Melfi, in the province of Basilicata, possessed by the Genoese family of Doria, it was laid down that with regard to the economic matters of the fief it was necessary to operate by means of a weekly consultation (*consulta*) comprising the governor, treasurer and accountant. By 1767 this body was made up of a general agent, treasurer, accountant and economic superintendant (Sinisi 1996: 37-38).

The structure and functions of this management were however different to the economic administration of the estates, which certainly made up the most important part of aristocratic patrimonies. Although there were cases

of direct management by the lord himself, in the Kingdom of Naples too the general rule was for the single holdings to be rented out separately or in block: "aristocratic landowners in the 16th to eighteenth centuries did not manage directly any significant part of their estates through the employment of wage labour, but preferred to rent the land and all other sources of revenues, either separately or in block" (Astarita 1992: 68). Direct management of feudal lands was common practice in the provinces closest to the capital, and especially where the estates did not exceed 100 hearths, as in the province of Principato Ultra (Benaiteau 1980: 607; Lepre 1986: 73).

#### INVESTMENTS AND EXPENDITURE. TYPOLOGY OF INCOME

In Neapolitan society under the ancien régime the possession of land was not only considered the most profitable form of investment but also had the greatest symbolic value, because it counted for a lot in social standing and was a source of power over both territorial resources and the members of the community. Of course this was on condition that the land had been acquired as a fief and not as allodial land, free of feudal ties; this explains why in the composition of the aristocratic patrimonies the quota of allodial land was generally limited (Astarita 1992: 47; Caridi 1996: 111). Accordingly "whoever possessed fiefs tried to keep them, and whoever was seeking to improve his social standing tried to acquire them" (Benaiteau 1992: 195). The consequences of such a situation, characterised by an insistent demand and a limited supply, should have been absolutely catastrophic with land prices rising sky high, making it a very unattractive investment, and also giving rise to fierce conflicts among would be purchasers of land.

In the South of Italy several important factors helped to maintain a certain equilibrium between demand and supply of the commodity land. There were various factors which influenced demand, preventing it from expanding unreasonably. The documents available to us often show that in each line of family it was above all the first two generations who dedicated themselves to amassing land (Astarita 1992: 42). Thereafter people concentrated on rationalising their holdings, selling off marginal and remote land and buying up nearby estates that would make the management of the fief more economical. Furthermore, as time went by the patrimony tended to be diversified and investments, as we shall see, were diverted to the financial and speculative sectors. Another important element which tended to limit demand while ensuring the turnover of ownership between one family and another was

succession through female descent, as for example when an estate was part of the dowry of a noblewoman or when, on the extinction of the male line, land was transferred through a woman who was married but childless to another family. Let us now consider the elements that may influence supply in the sense of increasing the quota available on the market. The first element concerns those cases in which the fief reverts to the Crown either through lack of heirs or because of a breach in the bond of political loyalty uniting the feudal lord and his sovereign (this was common in the Kingdom of Naples during the first half of the 16th century when the nobility was split between those who were loyal to the French and to the Crown of Castile); in this case the land went onto the market to be bought by a new landlord. The second factor able to increase the supply of land derived from noblemen getting into debt, so that their fief had to be sold to pay off creditors. A third element involved the financial requirements of the Crown, for in certain periods, such as the years 1620-1648, it put onto the market plots of public land.

To have an idea of the volume of fiefs bought and sold in the Kingdom of Naples, we can refer to a research carried out by G. Delille for the province of Principato Ultra. For the 137 fiefs in this province between the beginning of the 16th century and the end of the 18th the figures for passages from one family to another are as follows:

Period	No. of passages	Relative deeds of purchase
1500-1550	140	81
1551-1600	201	147
1601-1650	200	146
1651-1700	89	52
1701-1750	64	27
1751-1800	71	17

Thus trading in fiefs was particularly lively in the period between 1550 and 1650, after which it became virtually negligible (Delille 1988: 20).

Of course it must be borne in mind that the elements that influenced demand corresponded to a commodity that was not fully and freely available to buyer and seller, for in Naples feudal lands could only change hands with royal assent. One must also consider how much resistance there was on the part of noble families to ceding feudal holdings. As in other regions of Italy

and Europe, the nobility adopted a strategy of conservation and defence of the family patrimony, based on some very common legal mechanisms: the progressive exclusion of women and younger sons from the succession, the birthrights of the firstborn, *fidei-commissum*, the restriction of marriages to within the family, the reduction in the dowries of daughters (Visceglia 1988).

We have given a lot of attention to land as the main element in patrimonies and the most advantageous form of investment, yet it is evident that from as early as the years 1570-80 noblemen began to differentiate their investments according to the economic and political situation. These were the years in which, both in the capital and in the larger cities in the provinces, there was a surge in prestigious building schemes whereby the aristocracy gave tangible form to its status (Labrot 1979). Similarly large sums were spent on acquiring public offices, especially in the economic and financial sector (general treasurer and comptroller). The investment which attracted the most substantial outlay of capital by the nobles was in public debt issues. During the 16th century "the presence of the titled nobility in the debt [...] was quite substantial in terms of wealth if not numbers. Nobles, in fact, made up only about 8% of the investors in 1563, but they held 32% of the securities. In 1572, they had declined to about 5% of the investors, but their share of the bonds had inched up to more than 33% . At the end of the series, in 1596, both their presence in, and the share of, the debt had declined somewhat, to about 3% and 27 respectively" (Calabria 1991: 118). Although we do not have precise data, it seems likely that the participation of nobles in the public debt remained high right up to the 1740s, when the financial requirements of the Spanish Crown were at their highest (Villari 1967: 121-163). Subsequently the investments of the aristocracy in this sphere were undoubtedly redimensioned as a result of the devaluation of the returns. Needless to say the participation in the public debt was not restricted to bonds underwritten by the state revenue, but also included the debt of the city and communities which also borrowed money from private creditors to service their financial commitments.

Finally some members of the nobility were very active in commerce and industry, without of course detracting from their aristocratic status, for they never undertook such activity personally but through agents, the management of their households or using a cover name. During the 1570s and 80s the Ruffo di Calabria were very active in financial speculations, borrowing money at the rate of 7.5% in Naples and lending it to clients in Calabria at 10%. At the same time they traded in silk, wheat, iron and steel with good returns (Caridi 1995: 101). Two other aristocratic families active in the production

of silk and sugar were the Sanseverino di Bisignano and the Spinelli (Galasso 1967: 175). These and other examples of noblemen busy in commercial and industrial enterprises acted in these spheres without losing their aristocratic identity; in other words they made such choices not through an ideological conviction or in pursuit of a precise and conscious economic strategy but simply to increase their profit margins whenever the situation offered such opportunities. Even when this practice was passed down from one generation to another it did not give rise to more rational and developed forms of economic behaviour. In effect it was a consequence of the effective management of the lord's estate and his ability to speculate in the short and medium term without starting up a true mechanism of economic development on the territory, which would have involved groups from the local bourgeoisie and artisans.

It is difficult to explain why, even in periods of economic boom, an autonomous mechanism of economic growth never managed to take hold in the various regional areas. It is indisputable that the global demand for goods and services always remained insufficient, but even during the buoyant phases of the economic cycle (1550-1620 and 1730-1790) when actual demand seems to have been at a high level, the structures of the production system in the South do not seem to have been able to respond with adequate supply. In these cases it was left to foreign economic investors to step in and supply the Kingdom's markets with suitable quantities of goods. The most probable explanation is that, during the phases of rising demand, the capital market was not able to give sufficient support to the productive and marketing structures in their effort to cope with increased demand. The limited elasticity of capital was due to the fact that, in the rapid evolution of the situation, it proved impossible to free the capital from the sectors in which it was invested; the legal and social mechanisms which regulated and defended property ruled out rapid recouping of capital tied up in land and public debt, which then had to be converted into cash and invested in new productive and commercial initiatives. In practice the wealth produced was converted into rigid forms of investment (land, public debt, purchase of offices) which could not grant the productive system adequate levels of liquidity with remunerative interest rates.

In this context the role of the nobility as a privileged social group possessing the greatest wealth was fundamental, for this was wealth that did not circulate and was increasingly fossilised on account of transmission mechanisms that excluded its immission onto the market. The total value

of the patrimony of the Carraciolo di Brienza in 1584 amounted to 189,426 Neapolitan ducats, of which no less than 114,060 represented the value of the feudal lands, or 60% of the total patrimony, a figure which rose in 1625 to 80% and in 1680 to an incredible 83% (Astarita 1992: 45). In the strategies of the aristocracy land always represented the safest investment: in 1591 Vincenzo Ruffo possessed feudal lands to the value of 353,932 ducats, but between 1606 and 1624 he purchased other lands for a total of 600,000 ducats (Caridi 1995: 111-130). Even if one excludes real estate from an assessment of the aristocratic patrimonies, there is still no doubt about the difficulty of raising cash in the short term. In 1601 the value of the capital of G.B. Tocco di Montemiletto excluding feudal lands and buildings amounted to 150,000 ducats, of which two thirds was tied up in public debt bonds and the other third in his wife's dowry and in bad debts (Benaiteau 1992: 208). One last element which invariably conditioned the willingness of aristocratic families to invest in sectors other than the traditional ones was the high level of indebtedness, especially for those at the peak of the noble hierarchy. An anonymous report dating from the end of the 16th century surveys 165 members of the titled nobility of the Kingdom of Naples, and reveals that 7 princes out of 23 were heavily in debt, 9 dukes out of 33 and 13 marquises out of 65, while 25-30% of the rest were in conditions of mere survival (Ceci 1899: 122-138). The causes of the indebtedness are largely due to the aristocratic policy of promoting family unity with the dual conditions of primogeniture and the indivisibility of the patrimony. Sometimes land was acquired not on the grounds of economic advantage but simply because three generations earlier it had belonged to the family's patrimony. A second reason can be identified in the high cost of managing the patrimony. Even though the title and property went to the firstborn son, he was obliged to supply his younger brothers with an annual allowance, known as the *vita et militia*, and provide dowries (on the occasion of either marriage or taking holy orders) for his sisters. A third cause was undoubtedly the life style thought fit for noble families, which involved a large outlay on public ceremony, especially in the capital.

Thus in these conditions all efforts were concentrated on raising the level of income as much as possible, and we should now look at the various items of aristocratic income. The first source derived from the estates, the *rendita fondiaria* or *feudale*, comprising above all income from the exploitation of the feudal land, and indirectly also that from the allodial property. The second source was the *rendita immobiliare* or incomes from rented buildings

and shops and the working of cloth mills, flour mills and bakeries. When such buildings were situated in the city this income was obviously urban. Flour and cloth mills could be located on farm holdings and thus got confused with the income from feudal properties. Often however they were built on communal territory and comprised a service run by the lord as a monopoly, known as *diritto proibitivo*. A third type of income consisted in the *rendita giurisdizionale*, i.e. the profits from the exercise of judicial functions or due to the lord as holder of offices (*portolania*, mint, weights and measures). A separate category was the *rendita finanziaria* including the proceeds from mortgages, interest, public debt bonds and currency speculations. A further possible source of income was from industrial and commercial profits, obtained by the sale of raw materials or manufactured products (exporting of cereals outside the Kingdom, wood, silk, wool). In some cases calculation of the income also has to include such extraordinary benefits as *mercedes*, *pensiones*, *ayudas de costa* or other forms of income granted by the King as remuneration for services rendered by the lord.

All these forms of income rank differently in the patrimony of each individual aristocratic family. In general, research has given the greatest weight to the first three types (feudal, jurisdictional and property), not least because they are the easiest to identify for tax purposes and thus leave clearer traces for historians. If we look at the trends of these sources of income at a regional level, regarding all the income of the feudal nobility of the Principato Ultra there was the following evolution between the middle of the 16th century and the end of the 17th (Benateau 1980: 566).

	1550-1656	1656-1750	1750-1806
jurisdictional	22.7%	24.4%	15.4%
feudal	47.3%	48.9%	60.3%
property	30.0%	26.7%	24.3%

The trend of a progressive increase in the feudal income as against a drop in the jurisdictional income can also be traced in the fiefs of Ruffo di Scilla in Calabria between 1587 and 1803 (Caridi 1995: 131, 153, 198). In the province of Terra d'Otranto in Puglia as well, in general the feudal income never fell below 60% of the overall income of the fief (Visceglia 1981: 44). The evolution of the income of feudal lords, firmly linked to the agrarian sector, was naturally affected by the long term fluctuations of the agrarian

cycle, comprising a lengthy phase of expansion beginning in the 1530s and continuing until the 1620s, followed by stagnation and a sharp drop in the middle of the 17th century, and a slow recovery from 1720 onwards, based once again more on the exploitation of new arable land than on any real increase in productivity (Lepre 1981: 29).

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## TWO AGES OF SEIGNEURIAL ECONOMY IN BRANDENBURG-PRUSSIA: STRUCTURAL INNOVATION IN THE 16TH CENTURY, PRODUCTIVITY GAINS IN THE 18TH CENTURY

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### THE TRADITIONAL CONCEPTION OF JUNKER POWER

The historical literature holds that the Brandenburg-Prussian nobility's principal management strategy was, in Marx's phrase, extra-economic coercion. This they exercised on two levels: in their rural bailiwicks, through their judicial and police powers as feudal lords, and, at the level of the state, through the institutions of the corporate nobility, which constrained and directed the princely power to their collective advantage. Before the Thirty Years' War, the landed nobility (or Junkers) dominated the politically weak rulers of Brandenburg, to whose realm in the 17th century the eastern Baltic Duchy of Prussia was hereditarily joined. Following the great war, which had devastated much of Brandenburg-Prussia, the Hohenzollern dynasty erected the iron structures of Prussian military-bureaucratic absolutism. But the historical literature holds that the absolutist system rested on a compromise between crown and nobility, assuring the noble landlords domination of their subject villagers, whose unpaid labors produced the profits of the Junkers' large-estate demesnes. Prussian absolutism further benefited the nobility by reserving for their younger sons appointments at court and in the army officer corps and important branches of the civil administration. The Junkers' class power survived the defeat and deligitimization of 18th-century Prussian absolutism at Napoleon's hands, so that in the modernization of the Prussian state in the 19th century, the nobility succeeded, despite peasant emancipation, in maintaining their domination of the countryside and, despite the formal abolition of noble privilege, in the state apparatus.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Space limitations prevent full citation here of the historical literature, though for a recent summation of the standard view, see Dewald (1996). For detailed historiographical critique, and (except as otherwise noted) on the substantive issues discussed in this paper, including extensive quantitative data, see the works of the present author cited in the bibliography below. An expanded form of the present essay would draw for support, among other sources, on the relevant documents edited by Friedensburg (1913-16), Riedel (1838-69), and Stadelmann (1878-87).

## AN ALTERNATIVE VIEW OF THE 16TH-CENTURY SEIGNEURIAL REVOLUTION

The principal defect of this analysis, whether in its (closely related) liberal or Marxist versions, is its one-dimensionality, which subordinates to the Junkers' will, or reduces to passivity, the other collective actors on the Brandenburg-Prussian stage—especially the princely power (state), the village farmers (peasants), and the townspeople. It substitutes tautology (equating the Junkers with an irresistible class power) for empirical explanation, while mystifying or misunderstanding the historical basis of such power as the nobility in fact possessed.

A more accurate and realistic picture emerges when it is accepted that the Junkers could unimpededly dominate neither their village subjects nor the Brandenburg princes. An explanation for the landed nobility's great accomplishment of the long 16th century—the creation of large-scale demesne farms (*Gutswirtschaft*) aiming to maximize production for sale, especially on export markets—thus requires a micro-analysis of the landlord-village farmer relationship and a macro-analysis of the landlord-state connection. These analyses I have presented elsewhere. Concerning the landlord-village nexus in the Brandenburg heartland, the crucial points are that the nobility's new demesne farms arose primarily on pre-existing arable holdings, amplified by the extensive village lands left abandoned by late-medieval depopulation (*wüste Feldmarken*), rather than through forcible seizure of occupied peasant holdings, though such enclosures began to occur on a small scale toward the end of the 16th century. The nobility's incentive to become large-scale agricultural entrepreneurs was market-driven, in that the increasingly favorable market conditions of the long 16th century inspired them to negotiate with the village farmers under their seigneurial jurisdiction in possession of full-holdings (ca. 35 hectares+ in size) to obtain from them new and unpaid labor services with draft-teams (2-3 days weekly). These labor services, supplemented by the work of permanently employed farm servants, livestock specialists, and estate officials, produced the Junker estates' marketable surpluses, sold at river ports for export to western Germany and western Europe.

Typically, the village farmers acquiesced in the Junkers' demands for labor services on condition that pre-existing rents *in natura* were reduced, or that they received other concessions enabling them to maximize the sale of their grain and livestock surpluses on the 16th century's favorable markets. In cases of conflict over imposition of the new labor rents between noble landlords and their villagers, appeals to the princely courts often ensued,

yielding inquiries by judicial commissioners and compromise solutions generally falling short of maximal Junker claims. The Brandenburg Electors did not allow the noble landlords to degrade their subject villagers at will, since the villages formed the princely tax-base, together with the towns whose economic health depended importantly on the villagers' demand for their services. On the eve of the Thirty Years' War, the large-scale Junker landlords formed a wealthy and even opulent elite, but the subject villagers had maintained, though not without some losses, their individual and corporate judicial rights and—crucially—had held seigneurial rents within limits that assured their social reproduction at acceptable levels of consumption. The towns suffered from over-taxation and lack of access to the profits of the export trade in the Junker estates' products, but were not without their prosperous middle and upper classes. Debt and dependence on the corporate nobility for irregular tax levies weakened the princely state, but its independent military-diplomatic, legislative, and judicial powers were intact and unchallenged.

Thus the prosperous landed nobility's 16th-century successes were real, but limited. The lordship they exercised was neither unrestrained by princely power nor absolute with respect to their subject villagers. Especially at the local level, it was, rather, a negotiated lordship, conditional on numerous and variable factors.

#### NOBLE STRATEGIES OF PROPERTY DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGEMENT IN THE LONG 16TH CENTURY

The Junkers' chief entrepreneurial accomplishment was to bring the large-estate system into production. But the analysis of noble economic behavior, and its larger effects on economic development, must range more broadly. Peter-Michael Hahn has argued (Hahn 1979, 1989) that entry into the ranks of the wealthiest Brandenburg nobility required more than successful estate management. It was also necessary to acquire princely office, in which money-lending to the ruler yielded rewards in the form of pawned crown estates and former church properties. In this way, noble fortunes multiplied, allowing the most successful Junkers to supplement their hereditary landed estates with new properties and to accumulate savings which they invested in interest-bearing public bonds. Hahn has drawn attention to the widening stratification prior to the Thirty Years' War within the noble class, which yielded a power elite of some 15-25 noble lineages holding the lion's share of lucrative princely offices, larger commercialized estates, and savings deposits. Opposed to this

newly-arisen noble oligarchy stood those who did not hesitate to refer to themselves as the poor nobility (*Armen von Adel*), as well as what might be called a squirearchy resentful of the elite's glitter and power.

Yet the path to princely office and favor led in most cases through successful estate management, including the noble landlords' prowess in marketing their products so as to accumulate savings to finance their subsequent political careers. Looking more closely at the strategies the landed nobility followed in developing their demesne economies, a series of steps may be discerned. Unquestionably, the Junkers possessed a strong sense of solidarity within familial lineages (*Geschlechter*). Feudal property law, in force throughout the early-modern period, vested the right of inheritance, beyond a landlord's immediate male heirs, in all male agnates (*zur gesamten Hand*). This system greatly complicated the sale of noble lordships outside the agnatic circle, even after the Prussian monarchy proclaimed the allodification of noble property, in return for a minor direct tax, in 1717 (Martiny 1938).

Nonetheless, in the late 15th and early 16th centuries noble lineages undertook to sort out their various landed holdings to enable the development under single families' ownership and management of compact domanial economies, supported by the labor services of nearby subject villages. Frequently lineage conferences were held to attain this end, which amounted to the introduction of a kind of consolidated noble private property, where previously the crucial issues had been, apart from ownership of a residence, rights to the collection of more or less widely dispersed village rents in cash and kind. Lineages continued to function as larger property-holding networks. But as the 16th-century state imposed military pacification upon an increasingly civilian society, the functions of castles or fortresses held in common by noble lineages—which occasioned many treaties (*Burgfrieden*) governing kinship members' rights and duties concerning such properties— weakened, so that increasingly the only strong bonds between them were of affection, political interest, and collateral inheritance rights to individualized noble properties.

Feudal law did not, therefore, dampen the incentives of Junker landlords to develop their own lordships as profit-driven and profit-making enterprises. Even when they acquired crown estates as pawns, or when they purchased vacated noble properties knowing that, after variously stipulated periods, the descendants of the former owner might exercise the right of repurchase based on agnatic claims, they could confidently improve such properties through capital investment and reap the subsequent profits, knowing that

their ameliorations would be appraised and returned to them with interest should they be obliged to surrender such conditional holdings.

During the long 16th century the Junkers did not face complicated decisions about the agricultural technologies applicable to their domanial economies. Although the manorial arable was normally separated out into compact blocks separate from the open-field strip-farming of their subject farmers, virtually everywhere in east-Elbian Germany the Junkers followed the three-field rotation of winter grain, summer grain, and fallow. They were keen to maximize their wool production and, where meadows were suitable, their dairy herds. They shared the risks of sheep-raising with shepherd-contractors (*Pachtschäfer*), who tended the seigneurial animals along with their own, a system extended after the Thirty Years' War to dairy production under the supervision of *Holländer*. The number of pigs they could keep depended on their holdings of oak and beech forest. Timber sales on any large scale required princely approval, to avert the danger of lawsuits filed by heirs or agnates charging the offender with diminishing the substance of the property to the disadvantage of its future possessors. Junkers whose lordships entitled them to maintain a tavern and supply it with beer and spirits might invest in brewing and distilling, but before the 19th century these remained localized activities rather than large-scale enterprise.

As for their village subjects, the Junkers needed a sufficient number of fullholders (*Hufenbauern*) to maintain draft animals and farm servants sufficient to the seigneurial economy's need for labor services with teams of horses, just as they needed enough smallholding farmers (*Kossäten*) to supply manual labor services. They could not dispossess their subject farmers without imposing upon themselves the need to maintain equivalent numbers of expensive draft teams and wage-earning laborers of their own. Before 1618 it was not uncommon for noble landlords to settle new farmers in their villages, especially where the late-medieval depopulation had left previous farms unoccupied, to strengthen their supply of labor. Additional subject farmers also meant additional rents payable in kind in bushels of grain and additional patronage of the mills under the Junkers' jurisdiction, from which they drew valuable rents.

The 16th-century Junkers' innovation lay not in farming techniques, but in the unprecedentedly large scale of their domanial production. Once they had set up the large manor farms (*Vorwerke*), their production methods and labor organization remained largely unchanged until late in the 18th century. But there is no question that they enormously increased agricultural output

for the market in the period 1470-1620, even recognizing that many of the formally abandoned fields they brought under their plows had previously been leased to village communities for tillage or grazing.

Little is known of the Junkers' commercial activities, which consisted mainly in marketing the products of their own estates. Some acted as buyers of their peasant subjects' surpluses, as well as those of neighboring small-scale Junkers and other rural producers. But, apart from calculating when in any given year the preceding year's harvests should be sold, they had few alternatives to selling their reserves at nearby river ports at prices determined in Hamburg or Stettin. In times of domestic shortage, exports would be halted by princely decree and the Junkers' crops would be sold in local markets or in Berlin.

Money-lending in their bailiwicks certainly fattened some Junker wallets. In the absence of bank credit, the nobility had little choice, when in need of loans, but to turn to their richest colleagues. Such transactions required co-signatures of the borrowers' relatives and friends. The promissory notes circulated as legal tender, putting at a considerable risk the assets of co-signers in the event of the presentation to an impecunious borrower of a note fallen due. The increasing rate of turnover of noble properties in the pre-1618 decades may relate to rising volatility in credit markets, and to excessive borrowing based on overly sanguine assessments of rising commodity-price and property-value trends. But the credit, monetary, and fiscal systems in Brandenburg did not plunge into major crisis before 1618.

To enter princely service meant to serve at court, as a district governor, or as the manager of a crown estate or, following the Protestant Reformation, of a former church property. It was not difficult for prosperous landlords to combine such office-holding with the management through bailiffs of their hereditary estates. Though they might (on paper) receive a salary, they commonly financed their own officeholding expenses. Their surest path to fortune was to lend money at interest to the ruling princes, the reward for which—if only after ten or twenty years—would be investment for life with a crown or former church estate, including the right to pass such property on to their heirs until the crown repaid the original loan.

## MACRO-EFFECTS OF THE 16TH-CENTURY JUNKER ECONOMY

The older literature attributed to the system of noble Gutswirtschaft a long-term under-developing impact. The regime of compulsory and unpaid labor services (the chief attribute of the landed peasantry's legal subjection [*Untertänigkeit*]), impoverished the villages and cut them off from the monetized, urban-centered economy. This, alongside the tendency for noble exports to bypass local urban markets, undermined the towns and stunted bourgeois growth. Noble domination of the state legitimized these effects, and prevented until after 1789 the adoption of alternative strategies.

More recent studies have viewed central and eastern European commercialized manorialism as an important generator of growth and enrichment, unequally distributed though it was (Kochanowicz and Gunst in Chirot 1989). Before 1618, the standard of living of village farmers and the demand their incomes generated for urban products were more robust than formerly assumed (Hagen 1997). The 17th-century wars, far more than 16th-century noble manorialism, impoverished wide sweeps of the central European rural and urban landscape before the 18th-century recovery began.

In the Brandenburg towns, the decline of the cloth industry in the 16th century was attributable to German and European trends unconnected to noble manorialism. The Junkers did indeed challenge the towns' old-established control of the grain trade, as well as their monopoly of beer-brewing. They did so both in their own interest and in that of the village farmers, whose right the Junkers ratified in legislation to sell their crops on the most favorable market, and to brew limited quantities of beer for their own (considerable) needs, rather than depending on urban suppliers. Village farmers undoubtedly benefited from these changes, as they did from long-term rising grain prices. And, though the Junkers spent some of their earnings from grain exports on luxury imports from western Europe, their patronage of local merchants and craftsmen also rose with their incomes.

The Junkers advocated a political economy of free trade, whereas the towns clung to medieval corporatism and monopoly. The short-term effect of the nobility's orientation was to advance agrarian rather than commercial or proto-industrial capitalism. Of course, commercialized manorialism based on compulsory labor services hardly represented capitalist best practice, given the low productivity—readily acknowledged by the Junkers themselves—of such unpaid labor. The Junker estates were effective in greatly raising commercializable agricultural output with a low, though not negligible input of capital (leaving land out of account, since the Junkers were collectively

land-rich before they launched into *Gutswirtschaft*). Given the sparse population of east-Elbian Europe, and the possession by the nobility's village subjects of relatively sizeable farms to which they were materially and culturally strongly attached, and from which their hereditary tenures protected them (except in individual cases) from eviction, there was no pool from which the Junkers could draw a reliable supply of cheap free wage labor. In any case, the cost of draft-teams was a greater expense in the operation of commercialized manorialism than hand-labor. Had the Junkers been obliged to equip themselves fully with the draft-teams their estates required, instead of maintaining the few teams which they kept for setting the subject farmers' pace in manorial service and for other specially important jobs, their production costs would have undermined their estates' profitability (Hagen 1985).

The Junkers' only course, given the disastrous decline in the late middle ages of their incomes from village tributes in cash and kind, was to replace such earlier rents with labor services and farm their broad acres themselves. For the villagers, unable to counter the Junkers' legal demands for heightened labor services, the life-and-death issue was to restrict them, as mostly they succeeded in doing, to levels that did not exhaust their household labor and draft teams, while bargaining down grain-rents to levels that allowed them to monetize as much of their marketable farm surplus as possible.

One might imagine that the Junkers would have done better to avoid the costs and aggravations of commercialized manorialism by renting their estate land to farmers for the rising market rents chargeable in the 16th century. Here, though, the limited supply of peasant-farmer candidates for such holdings, the start-up costs of settling them, and the difficulty of imposing satisfactorily high rents upon them, inspired the Junkers instead to employ their seigneurial authority to impose the regime of labor services on their settled subjects (who had already for centuries performed minimal labor services on their feudal lords' small-scale household demesne farms).

#### NOBLE ECONOMIC STRATEGIES IN THE AGE OF ABSOLUTISM (1653-1789)

The older literature's assumption that the absolutist system rested on a mutually profitable compromise between the princely state and the Junkers blinded it to the severe losses which the crisis of the 17th century imposed on the east-Elbian nobility. There were, first, the ravages of war, destroying in great numbers both service villages and noble demesne farms. In

Brandenburg, it was not until the 1720s that these losses were made good and the material and demographic *status quo* of 1618 restored. Second, post-1648 agricultural commodity markets, especially for grain, declined and stagnated. Not until after 1763 did export markets once again boom as they had in the 16th century. Even then, the profits of noble estateowners were hedged by Frederick II's post-1740 system of domestic grain-price controls, achieved through large-scale buying and selling by the Prussian state's military grain magazines, and through export prohibitions in years of high domestic prices. Third, the absolutist system imposed new and heavy taxes on the villages, as well as conscription of non-inheriting sons of the landed peasantry. Absolutism cut into the Junkers landlords' resources, draining money and manpower from the villages which the nobility might otherwise have tried to claim.

The older literature argued that the Junkers offset absolutist resource-extraction in the villages by hyper-exploitation of their own, thus squeezing from their impoverished subjects a surplus satisfactory to themselves. But this assertion was never empirically demonstrated. In fact, because of the severe post-1648 labor shortage in the countryside, the Junkers were obliged to offer concessions to their surviving village subjects to deter them from seeking better terms elsewhere, while new settlers in the Junkers' bailiwicks received various material incentives (e.g., lumber, livestock, and multi-year exemptions from labor services and other rents). In general, village rents fell precipitously, only finally recovering their pre-1618 levels in the early 18th century. At the same time, the cost of wage labor, to which many estates were obliged to have recourse, along with horsepower of their own, rapidly rose (Hagen 1989).

The Lutheran Junker nobility, in a majority, resented and opposed the rise of the Calvinist Hohenzollern dynasty's military-bureaucratic state. But, given the low returns of post-1653 manorialism, the lure of supplementing noble incomes through state service was difficult to resist. Yet the profitable system of officeholding characteristic of the 16th century never returned. Though some noble courtiers, officials, and military officers rose to riches through princely pay and patronage, the Prussian state was notoriously frugal, as the ironical expression, *travailler pour le roi de Prusse*, indicated. Frederick William I (reigned 1713-1740) imposed on the sons of the nobility, whether they wished it or not, ill-paid service in the army officer corps. Under Frederick II state service only became profitable after penurious years, upon attainment of high-level army or bureaucratic rank. In the late 18th century,

the large majority of Brandenburg nobility drew sizeable incomes neither from state patronage nor from large landholdings, which flowed at best to the upper one-third of individual noble families. Instead, most subsisted as small-scale country squires, junior officers and officials, and estate administrators. Some became *literati*, others sank into poverty (Martiny 1938).

The owners of medium and large-scale Junker estates sought after 1700 to reimpose on their subject villagers the full measure of seigneurial rent. But the Prussian monarchy was loathe to see its tax and conscription bases in the villages undermined, so that the 18th century was filled with lawsuits between lordships and village communes over labor services and other rents. The government's general position was that rent increases over the 17th-century *status quo ante bellum* were illegitimate. Even allowing for evasion and collusion of officials with landlords at the villages' expense, Junker opportunities for squeezing their subjects were not promising.

Instead, the landlords increasingly turned —if reluctantly— to improving their estates' productivity by organizational and technological innovations. From the 1730s enclosure of seigneurial land, where it had not previously occurred, was carried out, and on the demesne lands new systems of crop rotation were adopted, inspired by the English model but adapted to the ecological conditions of northeastern Germany (Müller 1967; Enders 1992). Landlords responded positively to the government's pressure on them to follow its policy on the extensive crown lands of settling peasant colonists on uninhabited or abandoned land, on terms of uninhibited personal freedom, hereditary tenure, and fixed rents (which, unintendedly, gave the old-established village farmers a higher standard by which to judge their own condition). And, to the extent that an intensified and expanded manorial economy required labor and draft-team inputs exceeding the contribution of the subject villagers' unpaid services, the landlords began to settle on their estates housed day-laborers and to expand their inventories of seigneurial horse and oxen. The long-term effect of this move from manorial production dependent on unpaid labor services to manorial production increasingly based on wage-labor and seigneurial teams was to reduce the significance in the Junkers' eyes of the regime of compulsory labor services. Thus when, after the Napoleonic defeat of Prussia in 1806, abolition of peasant subjection became politically unavoidable, the Junkers concentrated not on opposing it but on obtaining the best possible terms of compensation from the villages for the cessation of feudal dues and services.

## THE GROWTH EFFECTS OF NOBLE ECONOMIC BEHAVIOR IN THE 18TH CENTURY

From the 1780s, when the first imported industrial steam engine was deployed, the Kingdom of Prussia moved rapidly into the regime of 19th-century industrialization. In the post-emancipation countryside, both large landowners (whether noble or, as was now increasingly possible, bourgeois entrepreneurs) and freeholding family farmers adapted successfully, though not painlessly, to conditions of free-market and (until 1879) free-trade agrarian capitalism. In this perspective, it is evident that the early-modern regime of Junker manorialism had not blocked the Brandenburg-Prussian path to liberal capitalism.

Despite many noble landlords' adoption after 1763 of wage labor and improved estate agriculture, the 18th-century motor of economic growth in the Kingdom of Prussia was certainly the state itself. This can be seen in its allodification of noble properties in 1717, in its vigorous settlement on newly cleared land of freeholding farmers, in its promotion on the crown estates (leased to bourgeois tenant-farmers) of English agriculture, in its abolition on the crown estates of the village farmers' legal subjection, in its mercantilist promotion of textile and metallurgical industries (whatever their defects as monopolies), in its weakening of guild powers and urban oligarchies, and in the banking and credit facilities it introduced after 1763. The authors of the Prussian state's economic policies were university-trained cameralists, mainly bourgeois. Its bureaucratic implementors were officials who, if of noble origins, had gained higher education adequate to their posts and whose guiding star was state interest rather than aristocratic privilege. Far from being the executive committee of the nobility, 18th-century Prussian absolutism was a regime which, though certainly moulded by aristocratic values, vigorously pursued a statist program of economic development and socio-economic modernization of all classes.

Except for the nobility in high military and bureaucratic office, the 18th-century Junkers, especially those with landlordly ambitions, did not support the project of Prussian absolutism with much enthusiasm. Symptomatic of their ambivalence toward economic change was the persistence among them of egalitarian inheritance practices, including agnatic succession where direct male heirs were lacking. Although landed estates had long ceased to be physically divided among heirs, the Junkers' rejection of inheritance by primogeniture (and hence also of *fidei commissa*) burdened estateowners with heavy financial obligations to their male (and female) siblings. Borrowing

against the security of landed property was impeded by the need for the numerous potential heirs' co-signatures, so that the credit institution created by Frederick II's government in the 1770s to provide advantageous loans to noble landowners found fewer patrons than could have been expected, given the Junkers' need for cash and opportunities for productive investment.

Left to their own devices, the Brandenburg-Prussian nobility would not have instituted the program of military-bureaucratic absolutism, but would have attempted to adapt the 16th-century system of sovereignty shared between princely power and corporate nobility to the post-1648 world. Anti-absolutist Poland—or Mecklenburg (an stronghold of east-Elbian landlords)—might have served as their model. Though there were many Prussian landlords who adopted improved agriculture and were prepared to abandon the regime of compulsory labor services, the initiative for capitalist development lay with the state and the bourgeoisie, whose strengthening it fostered, rather than with the noble class.

Considering the relation of the Brandenburg-Prussian nobility to European economic growth in the early-modern period, the organization in the 16th century of the system of commercialized manorialism or *Gutswirtschaft* was undoubtedly their chief contribution. This was not so much an act of invention as of adaptation to local circumstances of models of manorial production based on unpaid (or underpaid) labor that had been pioneered earlier in east-Elbian Europe by the Cistercian abbeys and the Teutonic Knights. The Junkers' 16th-century entrepreneurialism paid the successful among them handsome returns, while creating the material basis for their survival as a powerful political class into the 20th century. Yet the rise of the Junker estates neither ruined the east-Elbian peasantry nor prevented the absolutist state, working in alliance with the educated and propertied bourgeoisie, from launching Brandenburg-Prussia successfully onto the path of 19th-century industrialization.

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# ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND MANAGEMENT ON THE ESTATES OF THE LOWER AUSTRIAN NOBILITY, 1550-1780<sup>1</sup>

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## INTRODUCTION

Historically the Archduchy of Lower Austria formed the core region of the Austrian territories under the Habsburgs. Covering an area of nearly 20,000 km<sup>2</sup>, it numbered about 80,000 households at the beginning of the early modern era (1527), with a possible equivalent population of 500,000, a number which had risen to about 930,000 by 1754. If one assumes a figure of 600 aristocratic families in the region in 1600, this accounts for a percentage of nobility among the population of 0.6%. Despite the increase in population, this percentage remained stable until the late 18th century due to the draining effect of Vienna as capital and Imperial residence (Feigl 1988: 192; Winkelbauer 1992b: 331).

In accordance with the social stratification of the estate system prevalent in the late Middle Ages, upper nobility, which was mainly constituted of barons and, increasingly, counts (among them several princely families such as the Houses of Liechtenstein, Dietrichstein, Auersperg and Lamberg), stood opposed to a lesser nobility of knights. Possession of extensive landed property delineated the latter from the *Briefadel*, court officials, officers and entrepreneurs whose titles had been conferred by letter of patent. Opportunity for social advancement within the estate system was, however, nearly unlimited and there is evidence in individual cases of rapid social career advancement from commoner to *Reichsgraf* within one generation.

In general, a nobleman would be the owner of tenanted estates (*Güter* and *Herrschaften*) as well as exercising the functions of landlord and magisterial authority over a peasant and, frequently, a bourgeois tenantry; to this could be added demesne lands of varying size and function. While in 1590/91 the upper nobility controlled about 40% of tenant households, with 28% in the hands of lower nobility, thus accounting for a ratio of 10:7 in the late 16th century, by 1760 the proportion had changed to 10:0.6. In the case of the Liechtenstein family, the number of tenant households had already exceeded 2,000 units by 1701.

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1. Translated by Christine Wagner.

Apart from the growing insignificance of the lower nobility with a resulting concentration of property in the hands of families of the aristocracy, changes also took place on other levels. From about 1600 onwards key functions were increasingly filled with Catholic noblemen loyal to the Emperor, who were recruited from Austria and the Holy Roman Empire as well as from Italy and Spain. The suppression of the Protestant rebellion of 1619/20, the ensuing confiscation of rebel estates and their transferral into the possession of loyal families completed the restructuring of the nobility. In the course of the Thirty Years' War, an aristocracy emerged with properties and interests in several Crown lands, which thus came to be the proponents of Baroque court culture in the Imperial residence and an important political force in their own right (Bérenger 1975: 112 f.). A transformation, however, towards a *Hofadel* in the strict sense of the word did not take place as the nobility continued to use their landed interest as the financial backbone of their independence. Younger sons, however, took up careers at court, as well as in the state, military and church service, thus largely compensating for the decrease in political power of the nobility as a corporation during the 18th century.

#### SURVEY OF RESEARCH

The study of the aristocratic elite in Austria has, until recently, developed along two principal methodological paths: one focussing on biography and family history, the second, which has been successfully applied in regional historical research, taking an approach based on land-ownership and genealogy (Vocelka 1992: 34). Both approaches have met with considerable results but can only offer limited insight into the question at issue here, the role of human capital in the organisation of landed estates as functioning enterprises, with special regard to their position within the context of general economic development. However, a minimum of quantitatively secured data on the size, concentration, income and productivity of landed estates is essential in order to escape the purely incidental and descriptive. Different insights can further be gleaned from an analysis of the socio-political behaviour of the nobility, accessible either through programmes or factual historical evidence.

Two recent studies, Thomas Winkelbauer (1992a) on the Upper and Lower Austrian nobility in general, and Helfried Valentinitzsch (1995) on the *Gutsherrschaft* in the early modern period, establish the Archduchy of Lower Austria as the most thoroughly researched region, followed at a

distance by Upper Austria and Styria; the territories to the west remain underexposed, a fact which does not unduly weigh the argument owing to the considerable differences in the economic and political structure of aristocratic society there. Occasional reference to Bohemia, especially in the period after 1620 would seem essential, without however lending it the prominence its economic significance might otherwise deserve.

Of the many strands of research that have further developed the topic, only few shall be cited here. Otto Brunner's (1949: 300) monumental analysis of the work of Wolf Helmhard von Hohberg (1612-88) and his treatment of the correlation between the so-called *Hausväterliteratur* and political economy, along with Georg Grüll and Alfred Hoffmann's (1958) more source-based, quantitative studies on Upper Austria, provide a convenient beginning. Hoffmann can take credit for the introduction of the term *Wirtschaftsherrschaft*, which he isolates as an autonomous type at the transition from the rental-based *Grundherrschaft* to *Gutsherrschaft* and further defines as a weave of estates farmed directly by landlords, combined with seigneurial market control. His essay on the economics of *Grundherrschaft* has also stimulated further research on structural changes in feudal agricultural enterprises in the early modern period.

In the 1970s, a series of regional taxation-sourced studies revealed an enormous variation in the size of feudal properties (ranging from less than 20 to more than 1,000 tenants). An analysis of patrimonial management strategies should thus be based on a compact representative sample. For this purpose, middle-sized or larger estates of the upper nobility prove to be the best suited.

A collaborative study, edited by Gernot Heiß, on the nobility in 16th-century Lower Austria shifted the focus of research from the purely political and confessional to issues concerning education, economics and society, thus initiating a new phase in the historiography of the nobility, which has since led to the exploration of many new avenues of research (Cf. Knittler 1981). The examination of tax assessments, manorial account rolls, estimates and *Steuerfassungen* has produced a quantitatively more secure basis to substantiate earlier observations of transformation processes (Knittler 1989), thus broadening the scope of investigation (Knittler *et al.* 1990). A collection of essays on the history of the House of Liechtenstein, edited by Evelin Oberhammer, complemented the regional comparative approach by investigating a particular leading noble family with estates in Austria as well as in Bohemia and Moravia (Heiß 1990; Hofmeister 1990; Stekl 1990;

Winkelbauer 1990). The Liechtensteins are, however, an exceptional case in point, owing to the extent of their landed properties and the diversity of their interests as well as their concrete formulation of a seigneurial concept, as seen through Prince Karl Eusebius's guidelines for his son Johann Adam. A rather different picture of the nobility's economic ethos can be gleaned from the partly published study on bureaucratic careerist and social climber, Johann B. Verda von Verdenberg (Scheichl 1991).

### THREE STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT

A convenient starting point for the present investigation is the administration of the *Kammergut* (crown estates) from the 16th century onwards. These estates were predominantly leased to noblemen through the system of *Pfandherrschaft*, where land was handed over as a security for credit. As the lessees did not effectively own the land, their economic behaviour constitutes a particularly worthy subject of examination. From the second half of the century onwards, when income derived from this form of land tenure had come to be regarded as the equivalent of credit interest at a fixed rate (5-6%), nobles found it necessary to maximise their profits from the capital invested. Administrative rationalisation, evidenced through the general introduction of bills, and the increasing feudal coercion of tenants are to be seen as phenomena of this period of transition. Although lessees had the possibility of claiming reimbursement for improvements, limited tenure undoubtedly dampened any enthusiasm for investment. In addition, a gradual tendency can be discerned by 1570 to complement a crop economy with more export-oriented activities, such as fisheries, sheep breeding and various manorial trades, the latter of which were however largely dependent on monopolised markets (Knittler 1981; Knittler 1989: 20-85).

The risk inherent in the system of *Pfandherrschaft*, dependent as it was on feudal rents, classifies it as a specifically entrepreneurial activity of the nobility in the early modern period. Although generally independent of social status, this system could ultimately be used as a means of social and economic advancement. The great number of lessees among favourites and court officials ascertains that public service and remuneration often acted as starting capital. From the late 16th century onwards, the transition from creditor to owner largely depended on political loyalty and adaptability in religious adherence. (Knittler in print) However, it is interesting to note that the regions's richest

families (according to their tax returns) generally refrained from the practice of *Pfandherrschaft*. (Perger 1990: 33-36).

In 1570, the princely chamber still regarded as backward estates whose incomes were based solely on the landlords' agricultural output and trades, as opposed to those whose revenues derived from regalia and monopolies. Things, however, were rapidly changing and by the turn of the 17th century the majority of estates in the hands of the upper noble Estate gathered revenues from entrepreneurial undertakings in addition to feudal rents. The relevant information in this respect can be gleaned from estimates and evaluations, sources which proliferated in the years following 1600. This is doubtless indicative of an increasingly dynamic land market, initially due to the fast rising indebtedness of individual estates, which again was hastened by extravagant spending, especially on castle-building (Geir 1988). After 1620, confessional affiliation often becomes the major criterion for changes in ownership.

Estimates, however, prove to be far from reliable sources with regard to changes in the value of landed estates. They tend to paint prettified and subjective pictures, which instead of assessing real incomes, often evaluate only their formal prerequisites. At the same time, they rarely permit examination over extended periods (Bastl 1992). More trustworthy information can be obtained by monitoring the *Pfandschillinge* (initial mortgage loans) of the *Kameralherrschaften*. Such a comparison reveals an increase in value that reflects the shift from a rental economy to entrepreneurial estate management, although exact changes in inflation cannot always be accounted for.

A number of questions can only be answered for the period after 1620, when, following confiscations after the Battle of the White Mountain, estate accumulation was accompanied by an interregionalisation of the aristocracy within the Habsburg territories (Evans 1978; Press in Knittler *et al.* 1990: 19-31). Modified succession patterns (where sons were now provided for during their fathers' lifetime), the introduction of entail as a legal basis for the inalienability of family property (Hofmeister 1990), the expansion of the administrative apparatus, the evolving division of labour and functions between individual estates as well as the exploitation of extensive properties for credit dealings of hitherto unknown proportions, are all phenomena the examination of which would go well beyond the scope of the present work. In addition stands the danger of warping the presentation of the average family of the (upper) nobility in Lower Austria through the generalisation of insights

gleaned from the aristocratic elite (Eggenberg, Meggau, Starhemberg, Hardegg, Hoyos etc.).

The House of Liechtenstein, however, has to be excepted from the above statement. Not only did it occupy the pole position in Lower Austria, but also took a leading role in economic questions. A central position is held by Prince Karl Eusebius's advice to his son Johann Adam (around 1680), which, poised between a feudal mentality and a capitalist outlook, cannot deny its closeness to the old-European *Ökonomik* (Stekl 1990: 64).

Of special interest in the context of the present investigation are Karl Eusebius's recommendations for the systematic tapping of all sources of income that land tenure offers, for the shouldering of ultimate responsibility in decision-making processes in economic and administrative matters as well as for sound financial provision for future generations. With regard to economic ethics, the programme is committed to traditional mores, as are similar statements by Hohberg and other 17th-century guidelines of *Hausväter tradition*. In the foreground is the principle of the just profit, which grants the landlord an upkeep in keeping with his rank and militates against unseemly demands from the tenants. Surplus profits are to be invested, not however aiming at an accumulation of capital (*des Geldes und der Reichtümer halber*) but rather towards charity in the good Christian tradition, and thus ultimately for eschatological purposes (Stekl 1990; Winkelbauer 1990).

Prince Karl Eusebius's advice is not inherently consistent, as elsewhere he advocates the maximisation of profits in general and the acquisition of additional revenue through the establishment of foundries, glassworks and mines. Nor do his guidelines correspond to any factual historical developments. Elements of this inconsistency are the tendency within the administration of agricultural enterprises towards rationalisation and bureaucratisation, as well as the rising seigneurial coercion from the time of the Thirty Years' War onwards, with its marked negative consequences for the tenant economy.

In practice, the advance of profitability considerations during this transitory phase from the late 16th to well into the 17th centuries is manifest through the development of a clearly instructed apparatus of officialdom as well as the rigorous keeping of account books. The question of the movement of organisational ideas regarding estate management from the aristocratic level through the instruction of their officials has not been sufficiently investigated for Austria, especially where the direction, mechanisms and speed of their diffusion are concerned. It can be taken that the high level, which had already been recorded for Bohemia by the end of the 16th century, was reached on

the Liechtenstein estates between 1600 and 1640, whereas in other parts of the country the imitation process was only completed by the mid-1700s (Brunner 1949: 273; Winkelbauer 1990: 109 f.) With regard to the content of these instructions, disciplinary rules are paramount, while where managerial issues are concerned tried and trusted ideas of *Ökonomik* still dominate.

Although these instructions seem to have been defined by reiteration rather than innovation, they offered sufficient scope for adaptation in individual areas. In any case, they tied together the two primary groups integral to *Grundherrschaft*, the landowners and their officials. It therefore seems necessary to pursue a two-pronged approach when considering administrative innovation.

Unfortunately, the intellectual roots of modernisation attempts on landed estates of the early modern period have not adequately been elucidated. While “the landed nobleman's wretched existence far from the Court” (Valentinitsch 1995: 294) generally lacked intellectual stimulus, the customary Grand Tours of the feudal elite hardly offered any specific guidance in management training. Evidence pertaining to the encouragement of the study of law and economics is completely absent from 17th-century curricula. (Heiß 1990) In this respect, changes only began to occur towards the late 18th century.

Allusion to employees' education in the correspondence of the nobility, however, point to an opposing picture, as does the fact that training for officials was sometimes paid for by the estate (Tersch 1995: 104) and, moreover, that cases can be found of stewards and agents holding academic titles. This picture would lack relief, if it were not for the evidence from the 16th century onwards of incidences of managerial initiative emanating from estate officials. These range from the mostly technical improvements in the pond district of southern Bohemia and the administrative and management recommendations of stewards on the Harrach estates in Upper Austria (Stenitzer 1991: 47-50), to warnings among the nobility of fraudulent estate officials, who were prohibited from pursuing their own economic interests. The image of the corrupt official is underscored by a satirical sketch, attributed to Abraham a Santa Clara, concerning a steward who rides upon the backs of the peasants, while he himself is ridden by the landlord. All in all, the figure of the steward who acts independently of the social codex of the nobility represents a thematic aspect deserving special attention (Cf. Feigl 1964: 272-290).

The 17th century comes in several guises. Economic chaos in the aftermath of the war, accompanied by a deep recession, was followed by an upswing from about 1680 onwards. During this time demographic trends consolidated,

Vienna with its twin functions of imperial seat and state capital grew rapidly, while markets became more dynamic. As regards agricultural production on landed estates, opportunities increased especially for the trading of cereals, cattle and wool. The asymmetrical structure of the geography of demand became a decisive parameter for the increasing divergence of the traditional systems of estate economies. At the same time, the traditional principle began to wane, which had declared noble status as incompatible with business interests in excess of the estate's domestic needs, unless the latter can be reinterpreted in a much wider sense.

By the late 16th century simple *Rentenherrschaften*, that is estates that derived their incomes mainly through monopolies and controlled markets, stood side by side with *Wirtschaftsherrschaften*, with their tendency to invest in production. Experience of crisis and recession, however, finally led to a polarisation of the rental and entrepreneurial mentality. The safe-money option often became the yardstick by which business proceeds were evaluated, and in view of necessary investments often proved the crucial factor for the leasing out or eventual sale of dairy farms and other production industries. The availability of sufficient unpaid labour was another decisive factor for estates to remain within the market economy, as was the existence of a network of estates with varying functions in the division of labour. In addition to meticulously kept profit and expense accounts, a new source of information for the historian comes into use, that of profitability calculations, commissioned by the landlord, but with the steward as its knowledgeable executor (Knittler 1989: 128-130).

For a quantitative approach to the problem of economic change, the *Theresianische Steuerrektifikation* of 1750 offers basic information on a province-wide basis (W. Berthold in Knittler 1989: 204-235; Hackl 1996). These data confirm the assumption that the expansion of agricultural acreage (by a third since the beginning of the 17th century) was largely confined to the two eastern-most quarters of Lower Austria, whereas the level of agricultural revenue stagnated following decreased productivity (seed-yield ratios). The lack of progressive activity on the part of the landholding nobility in the area of agriculture, especially in the heartlands of the Habsburg Empire, was in the 19th century repeatedly cited as the cause for economic backwardness (Feigl 1988: 206). With a 9% share in total tax revenue, agriculture just about equalled the share of the net product of industrial enterprises and monopolies. The latter, however, were faced with increasing competition after the abolition of compulsory rights during the physiocratic

reforms of Joseph II. A new wave of hereditary leasing or sale of lands and interests ensued.

The above mentioned tax regulations also reveal the ongoing significance of rentals for the economy of the Lower Austrian nobility, which make up about two thirds (65%) of tax revenue, and thus the unbroken predominance of the low-risk rental system. Moreover, they herald an economic sector that was to characterise the management of aristocratic estates up to today, the exploitation of woodlands as a preliminary stage of systematic forestry. As tax was payable according to area, forestry's 13% share in the overall tax revenue is doubtless exaggerated for the middle of the 18th century, since only the increasing fuel shortage set a realistic price for wood, for which transport costs constituted the defining factor.

After a few short-lived attempts on the part of the nobility in the 17th and early 18th centuries to break into manufacturing and industrial production (Kurz - cloth manufacture in Horn: ca. 1650 - ca. 1670; Sinzendorf - silk mill in Walpersdorf: 1666 - 83; Mallenthein - weaving and spinning mills in Großsieghards: ca. 1720-27), it was the timber trade which, from the second half of the 18th century onwards, integrated the aristocracy more solidly into the market-oriented economic system.

Apart from the concentration of woodlands in the hands of the nobility as a primary prerequisite for the timber trade, it may have been helped along by the fact that forestry fitted into a system of values that was defined by forest privilege and hunting rights, and thus proved compatible with the idea of a status-oriented entrepreneurship (Feigl 1964: 162-169; Feigl 1991: 119). Without doubt it was this which, at a time when the nobility was beginning to lose its traditional function, proved central to a new economic self-image.

In reality, however, functions and risks remained divided also in the timber trade, and the aristocratic entrepreneur remained only an element —if an important one— of a larger system. Other parts of this system included the state as the authority to sanction rafting installations, the engineers dealing with the problems of building canals and gratings, the surveyors and foresters responsible for forest management, and finally, the predominantly bourgeois tradesmen, who, often organised in companies, ultimately put the product on the market.

Particularly in the context of human capital, it seems necessary to underline the considerable significance of a skilled stratum of officialdom for phenomena such as modernisation and economic growth. This is especially true for the early 19th century, when, following after the aristocratic forester,

the aristocratic farmer began to face a free market economy, but only after the managers in his employment had discussed the economic and market strategic management necessities.

## CONCLUSION

In the absence of a mining district and a significant commercial and industrial production in the region, the Lower Austrian economy remained largely agrarian until the second half of the 18th century. The question of the nobility's relation to economic change thus has to be primarily posed from the point of view of long-term fluctuations in the agrarian economy. In this context, organisational matters stand beside market issues, and questions of manorial production complement those of the peasant economy. When, in the second half of the 16th century, the Lower Austrian nobility began to react to the gradual recovery of the agricultural economy, it responded in two ways. Firstly, an extension of monopolies and regalia secured the hold over peasant surplus production. Secondly, the nobility began to enter commercial production—initially based on paid labour—with the expansion in size of manorial enterprises. Income derived from the growth of the noble economy, however, was primarily invested in the acquisition of luxury goods and building projects.

In the early years of the 17th century, however, agrarian crises and devastation in the aftermath of the Thirty Years' War put a sudden stop to the economic boom. Economic development at the time was determined by demographic stagnation, low productivity in the peasant economy as well as in manorial production, which in turn began to rely on labour services, and finally by the increasing tax demands of the state. This state of crisis enforced the nobility to make improvements in the administration of landed properties, with the rationalisation of accounts and the development of a clearly instructed apparatus of officialdom as its most important elements. During the course of economic recovery towards the end of the 17th century, profits were yet again preferably invested in non-agricultural sectors; for the great part, a rental mentality prevailed over entrepreneurial activity. Measures towards a transformation in the economic framework from the middle of the 18th century onwards were carried by aristocratic officials such as Counts Haugwitz, Kaunitz, Cobenzl, Zinzendorf among others, but had, as of yet, little direct significance to the nobility as a whole.

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ECONOMIC ACTIVITY OF THE POLISH NOBILITY  
AND ITS CONSEQUENCES. MANORIAL SYSTEM  
IN EARLY MODERN PERIOD

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PART I

It would be impossible to understand the Polish economic and social history in the early-modern period and later without taking into consideration as deeply and variously as possibly the manorial-serf economy and its consequences. In my subsequent remarks I will focus first of all on these consequences (in the economic and social life) analysing in a rather sketchy way the problem of the emergence and development of the manorial system.

It is very important to point first at some common processes which took place in Europe (not only in East-Central Europe or in Poland) in the last centuries of the Middle Ages and in the 16th century. One can say that until the end of the 15th century the social and economic development of the European territories (I do not include Russia in my analysis) had, generally speaking, a similar upward direction. Agricultural and industrial production grew, urbanization processes took place, the sources of energy were similar everywhere. According to the Malthusian model the size of population was determined in all parts of Europe by the food production based on a relatively stable level of (especially) agricultural production.

There were, obviously, many, sometimes significant, regional differences, the territories were more or less developed, more or less peripheral. The main factor and at the same time the main index of these differences was the level of urbanization. From this point of view, independently of the growth of towns, the East and Central European territories were less urbanized than Western Europe with a longer tradition of urban development.

Despite these discrepancies in the town development, one can single out one very important economic and social process which characterized all Europe. That process consisted of the significant shift in the distribution of national income. In the last centuries of the Middle Ages the income of the nobility dwindled while the income of the townspeople and (to some extent) also of peasantry rose.

The decline of the nobility's income was not only relative but also absolute, which means that it became more and more difficult for the nobles to satisfy

the needs of the life more *nobilium*. The factors which contributed to this decline were connected with the growth of the market economy. The value of the money rents collected from peasantry dwindled. Marc Bloch has written that the end of the Middle Ages was marked by the crisis of the income of the nobles.<sup>1</sup>

Apart from the aforementioned decline of the nobility's income, one must take into consideration another factor which worsened the plight of the nobility. It was the increase of needs, a result of the general rise of the standard of living of the late medieval society connected with the advent of the Renaissance and the difficulties for the nobles to cope with this challenge. The response could be, if taken seriously, one: to intensify economic activity. The European nobility responded in such a way, and Poland did, as well.

The simplest way to get more income from the villages could obviously be to raise the money rents. The Polish nobles sometimes did so, but there were limits on the side of the peasantry which the nobles could not to surpass without, for example, pushing the peasant to leave the village and to go to the developing towns. Several sources of information clearly substantiate that fact. In Jaroszew in 1358 the peasants were paying to the lord 12 *grosz* from 1 *laneus* (ca. 15 ha); by 1511 the amount had reached 20 g but at the same time the silver content dwindled from 1,75 g to 0,77 g (i.e. 56%). The loss of the lord was about 10%.<sup>2</sup> It was a rather small difference between the fall of the money value and the rise of the rent. Other data are more radical. In the village Chasno in 1359 the peasants paid 12 *grosz* from 1 *laneus* and in 1511 18 *grosz*.<sup>3</sup> If the fall in the value of money rent could have been taken into consideration, the money rent should have amounted to 50 *grosz*.

## PART II

Thus, income based on money rent dwindled independently of the possible rise of this rent and still the needs grew. In such a situation it was necessary to develop a real economic activity which could derive more income from the villages in a more structural way. There were in Europe different forms of economic activity for the nobility in the 16th century. All these forms

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1. Bloch (1955: 108).

2. *Visitaciones bonorum archiepiscopatus necnon Gnesnensis Saeculi XVI*, Kraków, 1920: 289, 398.

3. *Visitaciones bonorum archiepiscopatus necnon Gnesnensis Saeculi XVI*, Kraków, 1920: 41.

depended on three groups of factors: (1) market for agricultural production, (2) land/labor ratio and (3) natural conditions.<sup>4</sup>

The first group of factors limited the choice of the form of economic activity to those forms which could take advantage of existing market possibilities, because market production was the only form which could be regarded as a source of rising incomes. Thus in England there was a good market for wool both at home and abroad. The Polish nobility could produce grain and other products for the Western European market (as well as for the Polish towns). Rising prices for agricultural production improved trading conditions (terms of trade) for the exporting nobility. Grain export, however, could be profitable only for a part of the East Elbian nobility, since it depended to a very great extent on transportation costs. For that reason the exporting noble farms appeared in the region from which grain could be easily shipped down the Vistula to Danzig (which accumulated about 70% of all Baltic grain export—about 8-10 million tons during the 16th and 17th centuries.<sup>5</sup> In many other regions there were other markets which kept the noble economy active (the home market for grain, overland trade in cattle, the Silesian market etc).

The second group of factors (land/labor ratio) also involves the problem of the political position of the nobility, but it predominantly deals with the land and labor problems which the nobles faced in the tendency to develop their own agricultural production. In the territories where the price of labor, because of growing towns and better social status of peasants, was relatively high (as, for example, in England), the nobility had to choose a labor-saving form of production. However in the territories such as Poland, the problem of labor supply was relatively easy to solve because the peasants at the end of the Middle Ages were not yet completely free and the towns were relatively weak, and where land was available, the nobility could resort to labor-consuming forms of production.

Natural factors also were determining the form of the economic activity chosen by the nobles. Thus in England natural conditions were favorable for sheep breeding, while in Poland conditions were favorable for the cultivation of grain. In Spain and Portugal the geographical factor facilitated colonial expansion while in Eastern Byelorussia the soil was good for growing hamp and flax etc.

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4. Topolski (1994: 347-340).

5. Glaman (1971: ch. 6)

Despite the many regional differences in the economic choice of the Polish nobility (as well as of the other nobilities) the development of the manorial-serf economy is understandable. There were good natural conditions for agricultural production, especially of grain. It was possible to extend the medieval small noble farms (*praedia, allodia*) because of the existence of much uncultivated land (*lanei deserti*) and because of the possibility, created already in 1423, to redeem the mayor of the village farms. It was also possible to incorporate some common fields into the manors. The strong political position of the Polish nobility helped to dominate the peasantry and the towns.

The necessary power for the enlarged farms cultivated directly under the lords management could be assured by the coerced labor of peasantry. How was it possible? In Eastern Central Europe the serfdom of peasantry, although milder at the end of the Middle Ages, had not yet vanished. Until the end of the Middle Ages there also existed some corvée obligations (1-12 days per year). Taking advantage of these starting-points the Polish nobility began to shift the medieval, in principle non-labor peasant obligations toward compulsory service. In 1520 the Polish nobility, who dominated the Parliament, were able to pass a law introducing the obligatory labor of peasants for the lords at least 1 day per week from the average peasant holding. It was at the same time the introduction, as a legal principle, of the corvée measured per week.<sup>6</sup> Through the end of the 16th century the corvée amounted to 3 and more days per week. In such a way the manorial system based on coerced peasant labor could emerge as the main factor in economic life in Early Modern Poland. The nobles became entrepreneurs but not in the capitalistic sense. The nobles farms produced for the market; they used, however, for that production the compulsory man-power stemming from their feudal property rights and, what is possibly more decisive, they produced in order to satisfy their needs *qua nobles*. Not counting corvée as a production cost they could be interested only in the amount of money income coming from the sale of the agricultural products. Rather than comparing the production costs with the income in order to know the profit, they were comparing the money income with their social needs.

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6. Wyczanski (1960: 106-119).

### PART III

The new system with the lord manor in the centre and the peasant holdings strictly dependent on the lord, thus limiting the peasants' economic initiative and their contacts with the market, had its different consequences, some of them short-term and others long-term. There is no serious controversy on the short-term consequences. The inclusion to the manors of many uncultivated lands contributed to the general rise in agricultural production in the 16th century. That contribution amounted to at least 10% of the global production.

The transition from the money rent economy to the manorial-serf economy brought about a significant change in the distribution of the national income to the advantage of the nobility. According to the calculations of S. Orsini-Rosenberg, exceptional in all Polish historiography concerning the manorial economy, the villages delivering *corvée* were already giving to the lords, by the middle of the 16th century, about 40% more income per unit of land than the villages paying money rents.<sup>7</sup> Coerced labor was becoming a more and more valuable source of income. The improvement of the economic position of the Polish nobility in the 16th century was one of the necessary conditions for the development of the parliamentary system (limited to the nobility) and for the flourishing of Renaissance cultural life. Its cost in money and other resources were to a great extent assured by the manorial economy. As far as the long-term consequences of the manorial system for the Polish economic life are concerned, there is a controversy provoked by the explanation of Witold Kula in his well-known book.<sup>8</sup> I think that it will be useful for the inconclusive discussion to return to the model of the feudal (in principle Polish) economy constructed by Kula. His model has generally been included into the body of historiographical achievements without, however, confronting it with some other explanations. I would like to propose another model of understanding the consequences of the manorial economy.<sup>9</sup>

It is obvious that such an understanding can be attained only by the analysis of the functioning of the manorial system itself. Kula developed the idea that the main cause of long-term changes in the Polish economy in the 17th and 18th centuries stems from the mechanisms of business trends in international commerce and in prices. This explains why Kula has split his analysis into two parts: that pertaining to short-term trends (fluctuations), i.e., the

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7. Orsini-Rosenberg (1925: 73-81).

8. Kula (1962).

9. Topolski (1994b).

dynamics of short duration, and that pertaining to long-term trends, i. e., the dynamics of a long wave or long duration. In both parts he studied the manors and peasant holdings, being also interested in crafts. In each of these dynamics he discovered different mechanisms. The analysis of the mechanism of the short-term fluctuations, i. e., the annual changes following the good and bad years, is in Kula's book very penetrating and interesting. In my opinion it corresponds well to the known processes and facts. Short-term fluctuations provoked constantly adaptive movements on the part of both manors and peasant holdings. It was an economy which breathed in accordance with the rhythm dictated by the alternation of the good and bad years. The quantities produced were more important for the level of life and for the amount of income than the fluctuations of prices.

We are here interested first of all in the model of long-term dynamics. It hides the mechanisms of development super-imposed upon the annual fluctuations caused by changing factors. From this point of view, the manors in Kula's model appear as a structure subjected to the impact of the market and the prices.

The structure of prices, determined by changes in commerce and production, manifested itself to agricultural producers above all through the terms of trade, that is, in their case, the purchasing power of agriculture produce expressed in terms of the basic purchases made by the consumers. In other words, the terms of trade meant the changing possibility of satisfying needs by the sale of agricultural produce. The better terms of trade were for the agricultural producer, the more he could buy for a unit of agricultural produce sold. According to the calculations made by Kula the terms of trade for the magnates and for the middle nobles exporting grain and selling other products became during the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries more and more favorable thus creating income growth due to the development of price levels.

Kula was convinced that the nobles, and especially the magnates, were interested in agricultural production because of the situation of the rentiers assured by the movement of prices. The *nobles qua* rentiers having income without a real economic effort were not interested in investment in the rural areas. It blocked economic progress. The nobles became a class of consumers rather than of producers. Nor were the peasants in Kula's model interested in economic activity. Their holdings were regarded by them and conceived by the lords as subsistence farms assuring only survival. The peasants in Kula's model were not able to avoid this vicious circle.

#### PART IV

In Kula's model the noble farm is a constant producer of backwardness. It took advantage of the good terms of trade and kept peasantry on a subsistence-economy level, and consequently brought about the economic regression of the country. I would like to propose another explanation (another model) regarding Kula's model as a starting point.

My model describing the functioning of the manorial-serf economy is liberated from the dependence on the fluctuations of prices. It takes into consideration first of all the mechanisms of production. I do not minimize the impact of the international and home market on the manorial and peasant economy but I am not convinced by Kula's calculations of the terms of trade. They were indeed very advantageous for the nobles (and for the magnates) in the 16th century, to some extent in the first part of the 17th century. In the following period the situation changed: the good terms of trade were not more actual. Let us note that this eventual rectification of Kula's model does not change the basic explanation suggested by it. The nobles deprived of gains coming from the terms of trade should be even less interested in investments than in a situation of good terms of trade. In sum one can say that the analysis of terms of trade has rather limited explanatory value. Let me add that in the 16th century, good terms of trade were accompanied by more developed economic activity of the nobles than later when the terms of trade were worsening.

I think that the crisis of the manorial system already visible by the 17th century was connected first of all with much deeper mechanisms concerned also the structure of human activity. The crisis in my opinion was already inherent in the system itself. It needed a given lapse of time to manifest itself. Inherent in the system were first of all the forces which lowered the productivity of labor. One of these forces, probably the most important in our reasoning, was serfdom and *corvée*, i.e. coerced labor.

The peasants were caught between the necessity to work on their holdings and the obligation to work for the lord. They tried to work better on their own fields and in their farms but the lack of sufficient time led to the deterioration of the level of work. The efficiency (productivity) of the compulsory labor delivered by the peasants on the manors also dwindled. The visible sign of that fact was the fall in crops observed during the 16th, 17th and the 18th centuries. In the 16th century it was commonly estimated that 1 grain sown yielded 5 grains on the average. In the 17th century that indicator of the income used in the taxation dropped to 4 grains and by the middle of

the 18th century to 3 grains. The falling trend is remarkable and cannot be called into question, consistent with the fact that the crops at that time oscillated on a large scale. All that meant the decline of the income derived by the lords from each unit of land.

Why this downward development? The answer is rather simple. The efficiency of the compulsory labor, as I have said, dwindled, but it did not signify that in the 16th century peasants worked better for the lords than, for example, in the 17th century. The relationship between peasant work and the productivity of land was more complex. We have to take into consideration the agrarian technique, i.e. the three-field rotation.

The efficiency of three-field rotation depended above all on the accuracy of agricultural work, the agricultural procedures, the implements used. It also depended on the structure of the soil influenced not only by the accuracy of the agrarian work but also by the amount of manure used in this work. The lack of sufficient manure was an imminent trait of the agrarian technology functioning in the manorial-serf economy. Livestock was the weak point in both the manors and the peasant holdings. In such a situation the role of the quality of labor grew, and for the productivity of the soil, it had extreme importance.

Serf labor under the manorial system affected above all the accuracy of work and the technical equipment of the manors. The peasants undertook the *corvée* carelessly as they treated it as a heavy chore to be discharged with the least possible costs of their own. They came to the lord's fields and buildings with worse implements (e.g. such which had wooden parts instead of the expensive iron ones), did not take care to plow the soil deeper, leaving tracts of land unplowed or barely touched by the plough, etc. The serfs' sabotage of their labor obligations (more or less hidden) was a constant phenomenon. The peasants worked better on their own holdings, although, their high *corvée* slowly but surely gave them less and less time for that work. This led to a vicious circle: the lords tried to counter-balance the falling productivity of the *corvée* by supervising it more rigorously. That, however, was costly as it required additional hands and deteriorated the plight of peasantry. The peasant holdings became less efficient which in the end negatively affected the productivity of the manors as well. In sum the crisis affected the whole rural economy and in consequence the economy of the country.

In Kula's model the real value of the serf work done in one day is regarded by definition as constant. In my explanation this real value dwindled over the time the peasants could really work for the lord and for themselves in

the same manner in the 16th century and in the following centuries, but because of the continuous deterioration of the three-field system the productivity of their work dwindled, especially on the manors. In my opinion the crisis of East-Central Europe an economy in the 17th and in the first half of the 18th century was due first of all to the decline in the productivity of labor in agriculture. According to my estimations the global rural production at the end of the 18th century was lower (perhaps by up to about 30%) than at the end of the 16th century.

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THE ROLE OF ARISTOCRATIC MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES  
IN THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE BRITISH  
AMERICAN CHESAPEAKE

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In 17th-century British North America being (or becoming) an aristocrat was usually more a matter of ability to wrest material gain from the wilderness than of privileged birth. Some few European immigrants to the Chesapeake colonies (the present states of Virginia and Maryland), often younger sons of middling families, survived the harsh local disease environment, married and reproduced, and founded what became aristocratic families through a combination of provincial political power and incomes obtained from exported tobacco raised on extensive landed estates by indentured servant and, increasingly over time, African slave labor. By the beginning of the 18th century the offspring of these favored migrants assumed high political office, control of land and labor, and deference from social and economic inferiors as a matter of birthright (Sydnor 1952; Bailyn 1959; Kulikoff 1986).

This privileged group, perhaps a twentieth of the region's white men, maintained social control, not from inherited titles, but rather from their great wealth derived from the labor of slaves and from the influence of extensive kin connections through which the group monopolized all important political offices. The rewards of office were largely indirect, for most positions involved neither salaries nor other direct prerequisites aside from allowances for expenses incurred in attending meetings of county and provincial courts or of the legislature. However, high office holders benefitted privately from advance inside information, from chances to award themselves generous grants of frontier land, and from the ability (restrained largely only by distant British authorities) to make laws favoring their own interests. The gentry also controlled the established Anglican church through local parish vestries which they dominated and which selected ministers and set their salaries, thus ensuring that the established church reinforced the established social and political order. Although lesser planters sometimes directly challenged gentry rule in the 17th century, occasionally with violence, they later came by and large to accept this hierarchical system, and the ruling group periodically made sufficient accommodations to the concerns of independent

freeholders to enable them to retain political control and to maintain social order (Kulikoff 1986).

By the second quarter of the 18th century the great majority of the gentry were native born rather than immigrant, and so their outlook became more provincial in the sense that the sources and superior expressions of their culture continued to be found in Europe, not at home. Still, by mid century they had become a self-confident and self-conscious ruling class with distinctive manners and a separate life style, accompanied by a sense of both their obligation and their right to provide moral guidance and political leadership for the whole society. Possession of enough bound labor so that they could eschew manual labor was the initial prerequisite for gentle status. This meant owning at least thirty slaves; by the end of the century, however, the most prominent claimed dominion over as many as from one to seven hundred perpetually bonded human beings. Participation in written culture, education in the classics acquired through private tutors or by attending a provincial college, and direct contacts with European merchants, intellectuals, and political leaders also set them apart from ordinary folk (Bailyn 1959; Kulikoff 1986).

Maintenance of such privileges required continued careful management and expansion of the agricultural base of family fortunes. Political and social preeminence could not be long sustained if family wealth declined. The pattern among the Chesapeake gentry was to endow all sons (and, in the 17th century, daughters as well) with landed estates and bound labor to work it. Each generation had to accumulate additional, often previously unsettled, land in order to provide for all the sons, and, in the 18th century as land became scarcer, surplus laborers and/or cash reserves from agricultural earnings with which to endow daughters. The offspring of gentry planters who failed to maintain the family's economic standing by substantially augmenting their initial inheritances inevitably fell in status. In colonial Virginia, many gentry did attempt to keep some of their lands within the family by entailing them in the male line. Some also attempted to balance inherited land with labor to work it by entailing some slaves as well. By the middle of the 18th century slave workforces in older areas more than reproduced themselves through natural increase, but new land had to be acquired in ever more distant places (Kulikoff 1986; Carr 1989).

Strategic marriages also played a prominent role, first in acquiring, and later in maintaining family status and fortunes. In the 17th century aspiring immigrant men often rose into the ruling class by marrying the propertied widows (gentle or otherwise) of prominent office holders who had died young.

Once the native-born predominated, the local gentry married almost entirely among themselves. Over time, optimal matches increasingly involved the union of sons who inherited land and some slaves with daughters who were endowed primarily with either slaves or a substantial cash dowry. Young gentry husbands could then use the laborers or financial assets the wife brought to the marriage to further develop their inherited lands, and subsequently, to acquire additional land and laborers to pass on to their children. Family size increased once the demographic chaos that characterized the immigrant generation was replaced by more stable patterns among the native born. Continued intermarriage, coupled with an inheritance system that did not penalize younger sons and endowed all daughters, promoted a general equality of fortunes, status, and political influence among a broad group of leading Chesapeake families. Wealth, family authority, and political power remained relatively evenly shared between an ever-expanding number of collateral branches stemming from the initial founding immigrant (Bailyn 1959; Kulikoff 1986; Carr 1989).

Most gentry planters spent much of their time managing their agricultural operations directly. Enslaved workers were housed on the home farm and on multiple, scattered ancillary quarters where they labored under the control of overseers who usually worked for annual shares of the major crops. The largest planters also employed general managers on a fixed salary to oversee the home plantation and to supervise the quarter overseers. Although they did not themselves engage in any manual labor, most gentlemen routinely lived on and supervised their estates on a daily basis except when public business called them from home. Gentry planters personally undertook the trans-Atlantic marketing of the critical tobacco crop. They almost invariably consigned their tobacco to English factors, taking upon themselves the financial risk of shipping the crop to Britain, in the hope of realizing higher profits than they could by selling in the colony, as most small planters did. Consigning planters maintained financial balances with their English factors which they could use to purchase imported goods, or upon which they could draw bills of exchange in order to buy land or slaves in the colony. When the market was prospering, the factors often extended gentry planters substantial loans secured either by the promise of continued tobacco consignments or of mortgages of land and/or slaves. Some gentlemen purchased tobacco as well from smaller planters for resale in Britain on speculation. A few also profited by selling newly imported Africans on consignment for British slave traders, by money lending, or from side

enterprises such as gristmills, tanneries, fisheries, and iron mines. Many more profited from speculations in frontier land.

Until the last quarter of the 18th century, land rents contributed relatively little to gentry fortunes. They did sometimes rent small tracts adjoining their major holdings and some frontier lands, but usually only in order to profit eventually from whatever improvements—cleared land, houses, barns, fences, orchards—the tenants could be induced to erect. Pre-Revolutionary leases were usually for three lives at low rents, arrangements that favored tenant interests over the short-run interests of landowners (Walsh 1985, n.d.).

The planters themselves also performed or closely supervised whatever estate bookkeeping was attempted. Many seem to have kept their accounts in their heads or made rudimentary calculations based on the annual accounts of tobacco sales that their factors sent. Most of those who kept more formal financial records employed simple double entry accounting to keep track of sums that they owed or were owed to them. Individual accounts were settled infrequently and irregularly. By the early 19th century a few begin to keep detailed records of crops, rents, and household expenses; of side enterprises such as blacksmith shops, fisheries, mills, distilleries, and ironworks; sets of annual inventories of slaves, livestock, and tools; and daily or weekly work logs. But only a handful appear to have attempted to calculate the annual profit or loss of their operations, and none were very successful (Walsh n.d.).

Gentry planters began training sons in plantation management from an early age. Given the high mortality prevailing in the tidewater Chesapeake and the relatively late age at which most immigrants married, during the 17th and early 18th centuries heirs often began managing their estates at or soon after reaching their majority. Later in the 18th century native-born gentry married relatively young and enjoyed somewhat longer life spans. Family size increased, and by the end of that century, many sons did not gain full control of their inheritances until a decade or more after they reached majority, sometimes having to share living space on the home plantation and management of the family estate with widowed mothers. After the Revolution, some gentry fathers blessed with too many sons steered the younger ones into alternative careers in law, medicine, religion, or trade from which they could gain respectable livings until they came into a landed estate (Walsh n.d.).

Relative success or failure depended in large measure on individual skill. Some were exceptionally able, possessed with a knack for marshaling resources to advantage in hard as well as flush times. Others possessed of no more

than average managerial competence inherited vast resources—an optimal mix of fertile improved and reserve unimproved land, slaves mostly of productive ages, skilled subordinate managers, and business connections that ensured ready access to credit—that virtually guaranteed success. On the other hand, there were also those who were singularly lazy or disinterested, chronically sick or mentally unstable, addicted to drinking or gambling, or simply hopelessly incompetent.

Like all 17th-century Chesapeake farmers, gentry planters initially exploited land which in the New World was abundant and cheap, and sought to make the most of labor which was scarce and dear. At first they concentrated on maximum production of tobacco from fresh lands. Abandoning most European agricultural practices, they adopted girdling and/or slash-and-burn clearing, long fallows, and hoe culture from local Native Americans, and adopted local cultigens—maize and tobacco—as their major crops. The main innovations were the introduction of domestic livestock and the use of metal tools. The annual work cycle was almost wholly shaped by the seasonal demands of tobacco. Production of food crops—primarily maize—was usually limited to the requirements of self-sufficiency, and almost all essential manufactures were imported. Until the last quarter of the century, small farmers, who often owned a few indentured servants, were the major producers. Then, as the supply of European servants dwindled, richer planters turned to slaves as the primary source of bound labor. Large plantations became more common and wealth more concentrated. Family wealth was likely to grow markedly over the course of a planter's lifetime, but for at least the first generation, increased wealth was usually more a result of returns to farm building rather than to marked increases in income from livestock or crops (Walsh 1989).

Still, in the 17th and first half of the 18th century, tobacco accounted for at least two-thirds of gross revenues on larger plantations, and sometimes more. Consequently, from the outset, production for the international market dominated planters' day to day management strategies. In most parts of the Chesapeake, tobacco output per laborer rose from the early 1600s through the 1690s. Planters learned how to handle more plants per worker and developed improved strains. Productivity gains steadily lowered the costs of marketing tobacco, allowing planters to realize reasonable profits despite falling prices. The initial shift from indentured servant to slave labor relieved a severe labor shortage. And, since males at first predominated among slave imports, the proportion of prime adult men in the labor force increased, raising

productivity levels for a time. Output per laborer later fell, a result of greater use of marginal lands and some soil depletion and erosion, as well as of difficulties in managing large numbers of sick, alienated Africans, and later, as slaves began to reproduce themselves, the inclusion of more black women and teenagers who could produce less than prime adult men in the agricultural work force (Walsh 1989, 1993).

Efforts to counter diminishing returns to tobacco predominated in the first half of the 18th century, and gentry planters were clearly the leaders. Most continued to grow tobacco as a major cash crop until at least the 1770s. Depending on the area and the strain raised, some continued to concentrate on raising large quantities, while those who could produce higher priced strains concentrated on raising smaller crops of high quality. They also substituted home produced goods, such as coarse cloth and shoes, for imported manufactures. They cut shipping costs by improving the packing of the finished crop, and in some parts of Virginia they began further local processing of tobacco before export. They tried to maintain more livestock in order to get manure that would allow sustained yields of tobacco. Gentry planters also added maize and wheat as major revenue crops. The labor demands of corn and tobacco limited the amount of land planters could cultivate in wheat, a constraint that could be partly overcome by using plows for ground preparation and weeding. On large plantations throughout the Chesapeake, grain production rose from the 1730s. Everywhere maize crops reached 10 or more barrels per worker, a level of deliberate market production where about half of the crop was surplus. Even small crops of wheat raised market income appreciably since, unlike maize, about 90% of the wheat crop, net of seed, was sold. From around 1750, grains usually contributed about half of gross field crop revenues. The development of new trans-Atlantic wheat and corn markets assured large planters that they could find buyers and continue to get an adequate price should they make steadily larger crops. And they learned how to grow more grain with little or no reduction in tobacco (Walsh 1989, 1993).

Evidence from individual farms suggests that annual gross revenues per laborer were very roughly £15 sterling constant value from the 1640s to early 1680s, probably then fell to about £10 from 1680 to 1740, and rose again to about £15 in the third quarter of the 18th century. Where records are available for the same plantations over 50 years or more there is little evidence of serious resource depletion before 1775. Tobacco yields fell after the best virgin lands had been cropped, but could be maintained at respectable levels

for several generations either with long fallows or increased manuring. Planters of the 1760s who inherited lands that were good in 1660 could, by adding more grains to their crop mix, realize the same revenues in constant value as had their fathers and grandfathers (Walsh 1989).

Beginning about mid century some gentry planters also became interested in adopting advanced European technologies and integrated land and livestock management strategies. The results, however, were judged pathetic by European observers, as they are by most modern historians. Wheat yields remained dismally low, reflecting the effects of acid soils, inadequate forage for livestock and hence a shortage of manure, and the poor plows and weak draft animals that the planters employed. A near universal inability to significantly expand available forage continued to preclude any meaningful adoption of English-style rotations or of closely integrated crop and livestock management. Tobacco was so demanding of labor time that there was insufficient labor, even on the largest estates, to be diverted into meaningful long-term improvements. Moreover, uneducated slaves, whose labor was unwillingly coerced through threats of sale, separation from family members, or outright physical violence, frequently resisted attempts (usually coupled with increased work requirements) to alter established ways. So too did their only slightly more educated overseers whose incomes depended on maximum production of familiar crops, and who stood to benefit little or not at all from any diversion of labor into long-run improvements to the land. In addition, the clearing of expanded acreage for grain accompanied by greater use of plows on hilly terrain quickly led to unprecedented levels of soil erosion throughout the region (Walsh n.d.).

Indeed, gentry planters maintained or increased their incomes primarily by buying new slaves or accumulating larger labor forces through natural increase, and by working their laborers, however acquired, harder. When planters could farm fresh land extensively, they obtained high outputs per person-hour that afforded workers considerable leisure time, at least in the off-season. Once output per hour declined, ever more labor had to be expended in order to maintain returns, much less to increase them. Slaves suffered increasingly in the process. Slave owners drastically reduced the number of holidays their workers were allowed to keep and eliminated the custom of Saturday afternoons free of labor. They began to require their slaves to do night work processing tobacco or shucking corn, and also increased the amount of off-season labor, thus fully utilizing the entire labor force year round. They realized large crops of wheat by hiring additional off-plantation

labor for the harvest. And they began more frequently to divide their work forces into separate groups according to gender, enabling them to drive their strongest workers faster and harder while wresting some return even from the weakest (Carr and Walsh 1988; Walsh 1993).

There was a severe economic depression in the Chesapeake during and after the American Revolution. Armed conflict, market disruptions, falling land prices due to westward migration, scarce money and credit, planters' unpaid prewar debts, and continued high taxes all contributed to economic malaise. From about 1790 until 1818 or 1819 the situation improved. Wars in Europe, which closed major continental markets, made tobacco a risky crop, and once the French national tobacco monopoly was abolished in 1791, planters throughout the Chesapeake diminished or abandoned altogether their commitment to the region's traditional staple, except for those living in new western settlements with a reserve of unexploited fresh lands and in a few older areas with prime tobacco soils. Otherwise most shifted to a mixture of maize, wheat, hay, dairy products, and livestock (Walsh 1989, n.d.).

Between 1770 and 1820, gentry planters attended ever more closely to shifts in regional and international markets. Market information became more rapidly and more widely disseminated through newspapers, price currents, and more regular correspondence. The adoption of the US Constitution encouraged the development of an integrated domestic market, and fostered more sanguine expectations for the future. New financial institutions facilitated trade and offered alternative nonagricultural investments. Urban real estate, bank stock, and shares in internal improvement companies for the first time began to make modest contributions to big planter prosperity. The post-Revolutionary years also saw pronounced changes in marketing networks. While most tobacco and wheat continued to be exported rather than consumed within the new nation, the marketing process was increasingly controlled by US buyers. Most planters ended direct dealings with European factors, and instead relied on regional merchants to supply imports and credit. Urban markets too became more important as Chesapeake cities grew rapidly in population after the war and demand for firewood, lumber, hay, dairy products, meat, fruits, and vegetables rose. Improved roads, a few canals, and more regular river and bay transport increased the possibilities for marketing perishables locally and also encouraged intermediate and long-distance trade. Planters even in distant counties began raising livestock for urban markets. Transport remained a major obstacle to extreme specialization, however,

and only farmers living within two hours' travel time from market could risk much reliance on highly perishable products (Walsh 1989, n.d.).

Of equal or greater import, gentry planters increasingly adjusted their output of major cash crops in response to local, national, and international markets, changing crop mix and expanding or contracting the amount of land in production in response to change in demand (usually war-related) and the relative prices of wheat and tobacco, sometimes switching cash crops from year to year depending on anticipated shifts in sub-regional relative prices and in marketing possibilities, or in response to price trends of previous years. Some slave owners adjusted the composition of their labor forces to accommodate change in crops mix with some selling off or hiring out surplus workers and others hiring extra labor. Landowners who made part of their income from farm rentals switched from inflexible, multiple-life or other long-term leases to short-term leases than could be frequently adjusted to reflect changes in demand for farmland and in the prices of major cash crops. Restrictive leases specifying crop rotations and strict timber conservation became more common, as did either caps on the maximum number of laborers allowed to work a tenement (reflecting a desire to conserve resources for the long run), or else requirements that some minimum number be employed so that the landlord could maximize short run returns from bigger crops produced by more substantial sorts of tenants paying higher rents (Walsh 1985, 1989, 1993).

During the early 19th century, the revenues of large producers pulled far ahead of those of smaller planters. Big planters who shifted their crop mix to suit changing markets, and tailored their slave labor forces to that mix, realized increasing returns from major field crops as well as growing revenues from livestock and from the sale of produce and timber. Not all abandoned tobacco entirely, and planters who grew grain every year and tended tobacco when prices were favorable did better than most of the farmers who dropped it altogether. Gross revenues per laborer among large slave owners rose to about £25 sterling constant value between 1790 and 1807 and averaged over £35 between 1810 to 1818 (Walsh 1989).

Investment and consumption patterns among Chesapeake residents have been analyzed only for the colonial period. Since the Chesapeake remained an overwhelmingly rural region until the end of the 18th century, gentry social life centered primarily on their plantations and to a lesser extent on other rural gathering places such as parish churches, county courthouses, tobacco warehouses, and race courses. By mid century, many had begun to build

Georgian style great houses on their home farms from which they dispensed lavish hospitality to numerous kin and other gentle visitors. Emulating the life styles of British elites, Chesapeake gentry families cultivated genteel manners, and acquired an ever-growing array of fashionable amenities and luxury goods, mostly imported from Europe, including clothing, carriages, silver plate, fine furniture, books, pictures, musical instruments, and elaborate dining and tea wares. They put a high priority on items that facilitated self presentation, genteel social rituals, and social display. However it has been amply demonstrated that during these years planters at all levels of wealth, including most of the gentry, increased their levels of consumption without spending a greater proportion of their assets on consumer goods. Import replacement strategies, more favorable international terms of trade, a proliferation of stores and heightened competition among domestic merchants, and greater availability and falling prices of some European consumer goods all fueled the colonials' consumer aspirations without requiring changes in established investment strategies that privileged accumulation of long-term income-producing assets over consumption. Since Chesapeake planters had no choice other than to own the laborers who worked their lands, as well as livestock, tools, and other capital equipment, the majority continued to allocate roughly three-quarters of their moveable assets to income-producing goods, and only about a quarter to consumer durables. The proportion of total annual income devoted to all forms of consumption, however, was likely higher than the distribution of stocks reflected in enumerations of durable assets; only the latter have been closely analyzed. Like more ordinary Chesapeake residents, gentlemen borrowed in order to expand their operations during booms in export markets and were often caught short during the cyclical downturns that inevitably followed. But, despite the politicization of the issue of debt at the time of the Revolution, analysis of the financial records of individual estates shows little evidence of markedly increased or unsustainable levels of borrowing among the gentry as a whole (Carr and Walsh 1994; Walsh n.d.).

Investment patterns in the new republic have yet to be studied systematically. In the early 19th century some gentry began to devote more slave labor to a combination of long-term improvements and greater social display that may have signaled a shift in investment priorities, accompanied as it was by the building of ever grander rural mansions and the maintenance of urban (often rented) establishments as well. After the war heightened social competition and the concentration of more governmental and economic

functions in towns prompted some families to remove periodically and sometimes permanently from their rural estates to the growing cities of the region. The high expenses of town living often taxed the resources of even the most affluent. Extraordinarily high incomes fueled extraordinarily high expectations that could not be easily sustained in the world-wide deflation that accompanied the end of the Napoleonic wars.

Some democratic reforms enacted during the American Revolution did affect gentry inheritance practices, most especially the abolition of entail which precluded concentration of estates by legal devices. This change was not contested, in part because it came at a time when many gentlemen welcomed the chance to sell off older, tidewater farms in order to seat fresh lands in the west. However, after the war, as before, gentry planters retained their hold on political power at local and state levels. While making some concessions to demands from below for a greater measure of participation in political processes, and while making accommodations to the emergence of competing partisan political parties, in predominately rural areas, the local gentry continued business, by and large, as usual. In growing urban areas, rising merchants and other professionals and organized groups of artisans sometimes contested aristocratic rule. But by retaining control of the all-important state governments, the Chesapeake gentry continued to dominate the political life of the region (Beeman 1972; Keim 1968; Ridgway 1979; Risjord 1978).

As a whole, across the 17th, 18th, and early 19th centuries, the Chesapeake gentry managed their estates rationally and took the lead in strategies that promoted regional economic development. These included diversifying crops, increasing agricultural outputs through more efficient use of labor, introducing some new agricultural technologies, improving livestock husbandry, setting up domestic manufactures and some nascent industries, and supporting internal improvements. However, gentry planters' unwillingness or inability to transform or end the slave labor system on which their fortunes were based soon shackled their region to a cruel and increasingly anachronistic economic and political system that could not be sustained in a larger world shifting rapidly and irreversibly toward free labor.

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## ARISTOCRATIE, NOBLESSE ET ENTREPRISES ECONOMIQUES: LE CAS DE LA NOUVELLE-ESPAGNE AU XVIIIIE SIECLE

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### L'ARISTOCRATIE DE LA NOUVELLE-ESPAGNE

On étudiera ici le rôle de l'aristocratie et de la noblesse dans le cadre de la réalité économique de la Nouvelle-Espagne au cours du XVIIIe siècle. On le fera en respectant les exigences de cette Session, qui a comme point central le rapport entre l'aristocratie et le développement économique sous l'Ancien Régime. A l'époque coloniale, la plupart des titres nobiliaires étaient concentrés dans trois régions ibéro-américaines: la Nouvelle-Espagne, la vice-royauté du Pérou et Cuba (Rizo Patrón 1990). En Nouvelle-Espagne, les titres dépassaient probablement la centaine à cette époque. Sur 49 concessions de titres de noblesse mexicaines au XVIIIe siècle, dix-huit allaient à des entrepreneurs miniers, dix à des marchands et dix autres à des propriétaires fonciers, tandis qu'il y avait huit fonctionnaires d'État (pour les trois cas restant, l'occupation est inconnue). Ces chiffres illustrent bien le rôle majeur que l'entreprise minière a joué dans la constitution du noyau dur de l'aristocratie de la Nouvelle-Espagne (Brading 1975). Mais ils indiquent aussi la prédominance au sein de cette aristocratie d'une élite pluri-fonctionnelle, composée d'entrepreneurs miniers, de marchands, de propriétaires fonciers et de membres de l'appareil d'État.

### LE SYSTEME ECONOMIQUE

La Nouvelle-Espagne du XVIIIe siècle constituait l'une des entités coloniales les plus importantes pour l'économie de l'empire espagnol. Productrice à elle seule de presque la moitié de l'argent du monde, son rôle économique était fondamental pour la survie de cet empire, comme l'était sa position dans le cadre de l'économie-monde (on y frappait de 23 à 25 millions de pesos annuels à la fin de la période coloniale). Ce rôle découlait aussi des coûts peu élevés dans l'industrie productrice de l'argent, marchandise qui est à la fois la mesure de toutes les valeurs. Les coûts de production peu élevés "déterminent la baisse du prix mondial de l'argent et la hausse des prix-argent dans le monde" (Vilar 1974).

Pendant toute la période coloniale (et pendant une grande partie du XIXe siècle), les exportations à partir du Mexique ont été constituées à plus de 80% par l'argent. Cet argent passait du nouveau monde à l'ancien grâce à un système marchand très développé, la partie appropriée directement par l'État colonial n'étant qu'une fraction du total exporté. Ce système commercial était centré autour d'un marché intérieur riche et complexe. Ce marché constituait précisément le mécanisme économique qui permettait l'extraction de l'argent et son expédition vers l'Europe, en passant par la courroie de transmission des échanges marchands, basés sur un système de différences de prix, échelonnées tout au long du chemin de l'argent des mines jusqu'aux ports (Assadourian 1983).

Dans cette réalité économique du marché intérieur, les aires minières et celles productrices de marchandises destinées aux régions minières occupaient une place de choix. Dans cette immense Nouvelle-Espagne (presque deux fois le Mexique actuel), il y avait trois régions qui étaient plus liées aux aléas de la production minière: le Bajío, Guadalajara et Zacatecas. Ce mêmes régions étaient aussi les aires privilégiées de concentration de titres de noblesse (Brading 1988; Tutino 1990; Van Young 1981 et 1992; Katz 1990; Serrera 1977; Langué 1992)

## ENTREPRENEURS ET GRANDS PROPRIETAIRES

Le Bajío se trouvait à mi-chemin entre l'énorme marché de la ville de Mexico (plus de 100.000 habitants à la fin du XVIIIe siècle) et les centres miniers du Nord. C'était une région dominée par des cultures commercialisées, quoique sans forte tradition paysanne ni population indigène très dense à l'époque pré-hispanique. Jusqu'à la fin du XVIIIe siècle, la région était une aire d'attraction d'immigrants, caractérisée par une rapide croissance démographique. Il y avait là une population métisse et indigène fortement hispanisée.

La structure agraire était très flexible —au moins, jusqu'au milieu du XVIIIe siècle— avec un vaste secteur de petits et moyens producteurs (métayers, colons, petits propriétaires, etc.) qui avaient pu prospérer jusque là. Dans la seconde moitié du XVIIIe siècle, la situation se modifia d'une façon dramatique: la valorisation de la production agricole et de la terre provoqua une subordination croissante et une perte d'autonomie des familles paysannes.

Les *haciendas* utilisèrent de plus en plus de métayers et de colons, surtout dans les régions où l'*hacienda* ne contrôlaient que vaguement le sol. Cela devait permettre à l'*hacienda* de réduire sa dépendance des *peones acasillados*,

mais cela impliquait également une menace quand le cycle économique entrait dans une phase d'expansion, car l'*hacienda* était confrontée à une économie paysanne très compétitive sur le marché des céréales. Évidemment, la grande masse des métayers et des colons n'était pas uniforme. On y trouvait d'une part des *rancheros* aisés, employant des journaliers, et d'autre part des paysans très démunis. De toute façon, une partie de ces métayers put résister à la concurrence de l'*hacienda* et bénéficier de la montée de la demande après 1770. Leur prospérité ne fut pas tant affectée par la perte de leurs terres et leur conversion en journaliers, que par la généralisation et la transformation du système de métayage.

Allons maintenant à l'Ouest, dans les hautes terres de Jalisco, près de la ville de Guadalajara. A l'opposé du Bajío, on trouve là une région peuplée par des communautés indigènes sédentaires très denses. Dans cette région, le développement de l'*hacienda* resta limité parce que la communauté indigène gardait le contrôle d'une partie des terres et de la force de travail et parce qu'elle participait activement au marché régional des céréales. Comme dans le Bajío (et par un processus analogue) cette structure agraire allait subir des transformations intenses pendant le XVIIIe siècle. Mais ce processus s'opéra dans des contextes régionaux très différents. La croissance rapide de la ville de Guadalajara (dont la population tripla entre 1750 et 1810) exigea un développement de l'agriculture marchande. Ce processus entraîna le développement de la grande *hacienda*. Il fut accompagné d'une pression accrue sur la famille paysanne indigène et non par des changements technologiques ou une augmentation de la productivité. La situation était donc très différente du Bajío, où un processus analogue fut rendu possible grâce à l'expansion de l'aire irriguée.

Ainsi, même si pendant le XVIIIe siècle on assiste dans les deux régions à une substitution progressive de la production des céréales par l'élevage du bétail, les modalités en ont été très différentes. Dans les deux cas, le résultat fut le même: la terre n'étant plus une ressource abondante, on assistait à un processus de valorisation des propriétés, et plus particulièrement des grandes propriétés. Cependant, le même processus a affecté des catégories sociales très diverses. Alors que, dans le cas du Bajío, l'axe de friction était le rapport entre les *haciendas* et les petits producteurs indépendants, à Guadalajara le conflit principal se situait entre les *haciendas* et les villages indigènes. En outre, l'intensité de la transformation n'était pas la même. Si à Guadalajara on assistait à une mise en valeur de terres que l'*hacienda* possédait déjà, dans le Bajío l'expansion physique de la grande propriété entamait les terres des

*rancheros* et ce processus s'opéra à partir de l'action du capital marchand. Alors qu'au Bajío, on rassemblait de petites parcelles les unes après les autres pour former de *grandes haciendas*, à Guadalajara la taille des propriétés semblait ne pas avoir variée d'une façon substantielle.

Parlons maintenant des propriétaires fonciers. Dans le Bajío, ce groupe est formé, dès le milieu du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle au moins, par des membres de l'élite marchande et minière locale qui, peu à peu, avaient constitué un type d'entreprise intégrée. Dans cet ensemble intégré, l'hacienda avait une triple fonction: apporter des revenus monétaires, assurer la reproduction du patrimoine et soutenir par la production agricole —destinée aux travailleurs et aux animaux de trait— le développement du secteur minier de l'entreprise. Le triomphe du grand domaine était le résultat de l'action du capital marchand. Sur le plan strictement économique, c'était le capital marchand qui permettait l'achat des petites et moyennes parcelles de terre, rendant ainsi possible l'expansion physique de l'hacienda et transformant son organisation interne.

Au milieu du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, les commerçants étaient encore les principaux acteurs, mais dès la fin du siècle, les grands entrepreneurs miniers prirent le relais (en particulier ceux de Guanajuato, l'aire minière la plus importante de la Nouvelle-Espagne). Ces entrepreneurs miniers allaient devenir les plus grands propriétaires fonciers de la région et constituer le noyau de la noblesse titrée. Le fait marquant, à mettre en évidence ici, c'est qu'on ne peut établir ni localement, ni au niveau de la région des distinctions de classe entre propriétaires fonciers et marchands ou entrepreneurs miniers. Le point d'aboutissement de cette évolution fut une élite régionale pluri-fonctionnelle et relativement unie, dont le noyau dur était constitué par les entrepreneurs miniers.

L'action du capital marchand dans la configuration de la structure agraire du Bajío se manifeste clairement dans ce que David Brading a appelé le caractère volatile de la propriété de la terre. La circulation de la terre était telle qu'elle changeait de mains presque à chaque génération. Un des facteurs les plus importants de ce phénomène était le poids énorme des hypothèques ecclésiastiques. C'était le résultat non seulement du besoin de crédit des entreprises agricoles, mais aussi de la place centrale qu'occupait l'église dans la société, dans le cadre de ce qu'on a appelé la monarchie catholique hispanique. Un autre facteur important était l'influence du système égalitaire de transmission du patrimoine dans une région où le *mayorazgo* ne put s'implanter sinon d'une façon très marginale et presque toujours dans le cas des familles nobles. Ainsi, le groupe des propriétaires fonciers du

Bajío présentait une caractéristique essentielle: le renouvellement continu de ses membres. Le fait est important, car si au commencement du XVIIIe siècle l'*hacienda* coexistait avec une gamme étendue de petits propriétaires *rancheros*, l'action du capital commercial affecta finalement les deux catégories.

A Guadalajara, on trouve également une élite régionale pluri-fonctionnelle. Là non plus, on ne peut reconnaître de différences de classe au sein du secteur d'activité économique. Lindley (1987) a décrit la situation typique: les liens familiaux, basés sur la parenté et le crédit, développaient un réseau de rapports sociaux, qui prévenait la distribution de la richesse et du pouvoir hors du groupe. L'entreprise typique était une entreprise familiale, dont le caractère patriarcal garantissait une stratégie d'action unifiée à travers différents secteurs économiques et différentes institutions sociales. Ce réseau familial permettait l'accès au crédit et positionnait l'entreprise sur le marché en organisant une vaste ramification sociale, basée sur la consanguinité, les alliances, la parenté rituelle et le clientélisme. Ce réseau s'étendait à toute la société, tant en ville qu'à la campagne.

Cette action permettait d'établir un rapport de complémentarité entre l'*hacienda* et la maison de commerce, et tout indique que la rentabilité de l'*hacienda* dépendait de sa fonction au sein du patrimoine familial. Le poids des entrepreneurs miniers dans cette élite régionale était moins important, car les mines de cette région étaient moins riches et moins productives que celles de Guanajuato ou du Bajío. Le noyau dur était constitué ici par les grands marchands.

Ce type d'entreprise, caractéristique des aires centrales les plus commercialisées du monde colonial latino-américain, dépendait entièrement du crédit ecclésiastique, car le système économique ne possédait pas de véritable structure bancaire. Le réseau familial étendait ses ramifications jusqu'au sein de l'église. Ainsi, nous avons trouvé dans la région de Puebla, au sud de Mexico, des réseaux familiaux de marchands et de propriétaires fonciers qui avaient à chaque génération deux ou trois ecclésiastiques, et ceci pendant plus d'un siècle et demi (Garavaglia et Grosso 1990). Ces relations assuraient l'accès des entreprises familiales au crédit ecclésiastique. C'est là que la propriété territoriale prenait toute son importance, car elle avait pour fonction primordiale d'être le soutien financier de toute l'entreprise, grâce aux hypothèques. C'est précisément par ce biais que l'endettement était un des facteurs majeurs du mouvement de rotation de la propriété foncière. En d'autres termes, dans la vie des élites coloniales, le prestige social était

aussi un des éléments économiques clés pour avoir accès au crédit, qu'il soit financier ou marchand.

Comme dans ce milieu social, la condition de commerçant n'était pas moins prestigieuse que celle de propriétaire foncier, la combinaison et l'intégration de ces différentes activités était à la fois une ressource économique et un instrument de prédominance sociale. Comme l'ont écrit Brading et Ladd, le noyau de l'aristocratie coloniale (où l'on trouve les membres les plus importants de la noblesse) était constitué par ces marchands plus ou moins polyvalents (Brading 1975; Ladd 1976). Il s'agit en réalité d'un système d'entreprise et d'une forme de comportement social typiques d'une économie où la grande propriété et les mines dépendent du capital marchand. Le type d'entreprise qui en résulte est parfaitement adapté à un système économique où il n'y a pas de véritables marchés (ni de la terre, ni de la force de travail, ni de l'argent). L'intégration et la combinaison d'activités dans le cadre d'une famille-entreprise était rentable dans la mesure où l'on respectait certaines limitations. D'une part, le développement de l'économie ne favorisait pas de grands investissements dans une même branche d'activité et la structure des investissements cherchait plutôt à assurer une marge de sécurité acceptable et à obtenir des profits extraordinaires. D'autre part, ces profits dépendaient largement tant du maintien de l'ordre socio-politique que de cette imbrication particulière entre l'activité privée de l'entreprise et la bureaucratie de l'Église et de l'État.

Zacatecas, situé au nord du Bajío et à plus de 500 km de Mexico, était au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle la troisième région minière mexicaine, après Guanajuato et San Luis Potosí. Nous nous y intéressons spécialement parce que huit titres de noblesse furent concédés dans cette région au cours du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle. Ces titres allèrent aux membres les plus riches de l'élite locale. Celle-ci était composée principalement de grands entrepreneurs miniers, mais elle était aussi -comme celles décrites plus haut- une élite pluri-fonctionnelle.

Les deux centres miniers de la région (Zacatecas même et Sombrerete), après avoir constitué le point fort de la production d'argent de la Nouvelle-Espagne au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle, étaient entrés dans une phase de dépression qui s'étendit jusqu'aux années 1760/1770. C'est alors que commença une ère nouvelle dans l'histoire de la production minière locale. De puissants entrepreneurs —pour la plupart des immigrants péninsulaires, mais aussi quelques autres en provenance de Mexico— commencèrent à investir massivement à partir du milieu du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle. La Couronne leur vint en aide en pratiquant une politique de subsides et d'exemptions fiscales. De toute façon, la mine était

le type même de l'entreprise à haut risque. On a calculé que deux entrepreneurs sur dix seulement voyaient leurs efforts couronnés de succès. De ce groupe d'entrepreneurs allaient surgir les membres les plus importants de l'élite locale et une partie de ce groupe fut élevée à la noblesse par la Couronne.

### ARISTOCRATIE ET NOBLESSE AU MEXIQUE

Le groupe supérieur de l'aristocratie mexicaine était composé des familles les plus riches, les millionnaires (selon Humboldt, si un riche péruvien avait une fortune de 200.000 pesos et un gros marchand ou planteur de La Habana de 500.000 à 700.000 pesos, les mexicains les plus riches dépassaient généralement le million de pesos). Rappelons-nous ce que dit Doris Ladd: s'il est vrai que tous les aristocrates de la Nouvelle-Espagne ne vivaient pas dans l'opulence, en revanche, les millionnaires de la vice-royauté, qu'ils soient péninsulaires ou créoles, étaient tous nobles (Ladd 1976). Cela signifie que la "condition préalable à l'obtention d'un titre [était] l'existence de revenus importants" (Langue 1992).

Au XVIIIe siècle, une partie importante de ce groupe social était composée d'immigrants péninsulaires (60% des titres concédés à cette époque). Ces immigrants venaient en grande partie du Pays Basque et de la Montagne de Santander. Membres de la plus petite noblesse locale ou, plus souvent, jeunes cadets des familles du Pays Basque (tant au Guipúzcoa qu'en Biscaye existait une *hidalgua universal*), ils arrivèrent en Nouvelle-Espagne avec plus de fierté que des biens, mais ils se mirent très rapidement en rapport avec des parents arrivés avant eux, ou bien ils s'allièrent avec les anciennes familles de l'aristocratie foncière. Dans certains cas, ils réussirent à nouer des alliances avec des familles vraiment puissantes, dont les origines remontaient à la conquête du Mexique au XVIe siècle.

Les origines économiques et financières de ce groupe sont probablement sa caractéristique la plus frappante. Ainsi, une des familles les plus puissantes de la noblesse de la ville de Mexico, les Fagoaga, marquis del Apartado, dirigeaient le *banco de avío*, l'institution la plus importante de la Nouvelle-Espagne dans le financement de l'industrie minière. La production minière, le commerce, le négoce et la production agricole étaient les secteurs d'activité où l'on pouvait voir à l'oeuvre les hommes d'affaires qui allaient composer la noblesse titrée. A la différence de leurs pairs de la péninsule, qui dirigeaient rarement leurs affaires personnellement, les nobles mexicains — tout au moins la première génération des nobles titrés — étaient presque tous des entre-

preneurs. Il faut aussi souligner leurs liens avec les membres des sphères supérieures de la bureaucratie coloniale. La rationalité socio-économique de ce type de rapports avec le pouvoir est assez transparente.

Mais tous ne parvenaient pas au terme du parcours annoncé par le proverbe andalou *el padre mercader, el hijo caballero y el nieto pordiosero*. Les nouvelles générations ne purent (ou ne voulurent) pas toujours avoir le même engagement. Une chose paraît évidente: en abandonnant les aléas de la production minière, une grande partie de la noblesse mexicaine s'est réfugiée dès la seconde génération dans la sécurité de la propriété foncière. Les Fagoaga, qui ont conservé des activités liées à la production minière pendant trois générations, constituent l'exception. Certaines familles ont pu maintenir un style de vie nobiliaire pendant longtemps, malgré la suppression légale de la noblesse et des majorats, suite aux réformes républicaines dans les années vingt du XIXe siècle (les marquis de Jaral de Berrio ont conservé leur *hacienda* principale jusqu'en 1949 [...]). N'oublions pas que les titres de noblesse étaient presque toujours liés aux haciendas, même si l'origine des fortunes était souvent d'origine minière ou marchande.

Le style de vie nobiliaire signifiait dans ce contexte un mode d'ostentation et de consommation typique. D'abord, une demeure imposante à la cour, c'est à dire dans la capitale Mexico où siégeait le vice-roi (pendant deux siècles, les vice-rois envoyés par la Couronne appartenaient tous à la noblesse titrée et faisaient même parfois partie des *Grandes*). À défaut, une demeure dans une ville de province comme Guanajuato, Guadalajara ou Zacatecas. Certains de ces palais, à Mexico et dans d'autres villes, subsistent toujours. Autre signe distinctif, la constitution d'un *mayorazgo* qui devait assurer la continuité du nom et du titre. Quelques haciendas en constituaient la base économique. Précisons que le système hispanique permettait la transmission en ligne féminine du titre et des biens appartenant au majorat. La plupart de ces haciendas —avec leurs imposants *cascos* fortifiés— n'étaient pas très endettées lors de la constitution du majorat, à l'opposé des autres haciendas.

La dotation de fondations religieuses et l'institution de dots et de *capellanías* pour les femmes et les hommes les moins favorisés du clan familial étaient très importantes. Ces fondations religieuses doivent être mis en rapport, une fois de plus, avec le rôle de la religion dans le cadre de la monarchie catholique hispanique. Cette forme de consommation ostentatoire avait une importance non seulement économique, comme nous l'avons déjà souligné, mais aussi sociale. Sans arriver au cas extrême que cite Rizo Patrón pour le Pérou du XVIIIe siècle, où une riche héritière, la marquise de Corpa, légua

son immense fortune aux *obras pías ad aeternitas* (Rizo Patrón 1990), les fondations religieuses ont affecté dangereusement la solidité financière des entreprises nobles. Comme tous les aristocrates, les nobles fondaient eux aussi des paroisses et des couvents. Ladd nous raconte que le comte de la Valenciana, un riche entrepreneur minier, avait fait bâtir à La Valenciana une église, dont la valeur était jugée supérieure à celle de la mine elle-même! Il y avait aussi les donations à la Couronne, quelques fois de vraies saignées, qui permettaient d'augmenter les chances d'anoblissement d'autres membres de la famille. Le comte de Regla, un autre riche entrepreneur minier, fit construire des bateaux pour en faire cadeau à la Couronne. Il dépensa presque deux millions et demi de pesos à cet effet.

Toutes ces familles nobles ont entretenu au plus haut point le système aristocratique des réseaux familiaux. Les liens établis entre les titres de San Mateo de Valparaíso, Jaral de Berrio, San Román et Moncada en constituent un bon exemple. Tous ces titres ont fini par être réunis, à la fin du XVIIIe siècle, au sein d'un même réseau familial. Une partie de la noblesse mexicaine est arrivée à nouer des liens avec la noblesse espagnole et européenne. Certains de ses descendants ont fini leur vie dans un château de Castille, d'Andalousie ou de Naples.

## LA NOBLESSE ET LES AFFAIRES

Comme nous l'avons déjà indiqué, une des caractéristiques de la noblesse de la Nouvelle-Espagne au XVIIIe siècle était ses origines minière et marchande. Les formes nouvelles d'exploitation minière ont eu une répercussion marquée sur ces membres de l'élite. La genèse de la noblesse mexicaine à cette période est liée à sa participation aux innovations économiques et techniques, qui ont permis à la Nouvelle-Espagne de jouer un rôle majeur dans la production mondiale de l'argent. Si ces entrepreneurs ont réussi le pari risqué de la production de l'argent, c'est parce qu'ils ont su faire évoluer leurs entreprises minières dans une double direction: d'une part dans le sens d'une concentration au sein d'un même réseau familial et d'autre part dans le sens d'une intégration horizontale (de l'hacienda qui produit le maïs pour les mulets et pour les travailleurs jusqu'à la mine et l'*hacienda de beneficio* [l'usine de traitement des minéraux], en passant par la maison de commerce). Les entreprises intégrées des comtes de San Mateo de Valparaíso, des comtes de Regla ou des Fagoaga étaient des exemples typiques de cette évolution.

Elles réunissaient à l'intérieur du même groupe économique familial mines, *haciendas* et maisons de commerce.

Mais, comme nous le disions plus haut, les générations suivantes ont modifié ce mode d'investissement en se réfugiant presque exclusivement dans la propriété foncière. Peut-on considérer cette préférence pour l'investissement foncier uniquement comme un effet de la mentalité seigneuriale hispanique? En grande partie, oui, car il est évident que si quelqu'un s'enrichissait dans les affaires ou dans la production minière en vue d'obtenir un titre de noblesse, cela signifie qu'il avait une conception seigneuriale de la société. Mais il faut se rappeler aussi que les entrepreneurs miniers savaient très bien quels étaient les risques énormes encourus par les investissements dans cette branche de l'économie coloniale. Les hauts et bas des fortunes minières tout ou long du siècle sont la meilleure preuve de la profonde insécurité de cette activité. En d'autres termes, cette recherche d'un refuge dans l'investissement foncier était aussi fondé sur de solides considérations économiques.

Ce processus s'accéléra après les guerres d'indépendance (1810-1821). Les temps avaient bien changé et, au lendemain de l'indépendance, le Mexique était très différent de la Nouvelle-Espagne du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle. Les effets destructeurs de la guerre (abandon des mines, départ des travailleurs ralliés aux insurgentes, incendies, saccages, etc.) et les difficultés de l'économie mexicaine durant les premières décennies après l'indépendance, ont accéléré le passage de presque toute la vieille élite nobiliaire à la condition de rentiers de la terre. C'était également le cas de la plus grande partie de l'aristocratie non titrée, qui continua à régner sur ses *haciendas* jusqu'au milieu du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle au moins. Les lois édictées par les libéraux (désamortissement des biens dits de mainmorte) ont cependant fini par ébranler considérablement leur pouvoir économique.

## CONCLUSIONS

La noblesse de l'Amérique hispanique constituait, comme l'a affirmé un auteur, l'élite de l'élite. Cette élite disposait d'une structure patrimoniale typique, caractérisée par l'intégration et la combinaison d'activités marchandes, minières et agricoles dans le cadre d'une même famille-entreprise. Les activités minières et agricoles, appuyées sur la solvabilité d'une entreprise marchande à caractère familial, constituaient une des clefs de la réussite de l'élite, et plus particulièrement de la noblesse coloniale mexicaine. L'intégration

horizontale et la concentration constituaient les conditions indispensables de son action dans le secteur économique.

On peut dire de la noblesse de la Nouvelle-Espagne ce que l'on a écrit, il y a quelques années, sur les *hacendados* de la région de Puebla:

*The economic calculations of these hacendados... in the administration and exploitation of their haciendas, were undoubtedly 'rational'. This is confirmed by inventories and administrative accounts of hundred of haciendas, and, without a doubt, relations with the market constituted the guiding principle of their economic endeavors. Nevertheless, their greatest energies were not oriented to make a fortune, but to spend it in order to safeguard those values they considered fundamental... (Garavaglia et Grosso 1990).*

Son style de vie nobiliaire et son mode de consommation ostentatoire amplifiaient et accentuaient au maximum les valeurs dominantes de cette société coloniale au sein de la monarchie catholique hispanique. Pour la noblesse -comme pour l'aristocratie mexicaine et ibéro-américaine en général- le vrai but de la vie était la conservation et la défense de ces valeurs et cette action assurait en même temps son rôle social hégémonique.

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*RESUMENES*



TERRATENIENTES Y DESARROLLO ECONOMICO EN  
INGLATERRA, 1450-1800

ROBERT C. ALLEN

Aunque los historiadores habitualmente consideran a los terratenientes ingleses como progresistas y racionales, esta reputación no es merecida. La agricultura inglesa contribuyó al desarrollo económico expandiendo grandemente su producción entre 1500 y 1750, pero este logro se debió a agricultores pequeños de campos abiertos más que a la alta burguesía y la aristocracia. Sus políticas de cercamientos y de unión de explotaciones contribuyeron poco al crecimiento de la producción, aunque limitaron el empleo en el campo al forzar a mucha gente a abandonar la agricultura a partir de 1750. Desafortunadamente, muchas de estas personas permanecieron desempleadas, sin alcanzar la condición de proletarios. Privando a mucha gente de sus explotaciones agrícolas, las políticas estatales enriquecieron a la alta burguesía y la aristocracia, pero impidieron que el campo fuera un mercado doméstico para los bienes de la industria. La unión de explotaciones durante el siglo XVIII requirió un alto nivel de endeudamiento para cubrir la caída de renta, ya que las tasas de entrada se convirtieron en rentas anuales. Este endeudamiento limitó la contribución que la agricultura inglesa hizo a la financiación de la inversión industrial durante la revolución industrial. Las bien conocidas inversiones no agrarias de los aristócratas fueron una respuesta al crecimiento del comercio y la industria, reflejaban la desigualdad extrema en la propiedad de la tierra inglesa, y pudieron, sencillamente, haber reciclado los ahorros urbanos dentro de las propias ciudades. Los verdaderos héroes de la revolución agraria inglesa fueron los pequeños agricultores familiares, responsables del crecimiento de la producción a comienzos de la edad contemporánea.

## CARACTERISTICAS DE UNA ECONOMIA ARISTOCRATICA DE FRANCIA ENTRE LOS SIGLOS XVI Y XVIII

JEAN DUMA

La caracterización de una economía aristocrática se apoya sobre el análisis de las fortunas y de las prácticas de gestión del estrato superior de la nobleza reagrupando una nobleza llamada de raza inmemorial, la aristocracia del Estado de las grandes familias ministeriales, los miembros de la alta nobleza parlamentaria.

Las fortunas aristócratas son masivamente de inmuebles y van acompañadas de un monopolio sobre los bosques. Superiores a las grandes fortunas mercantiles y financieras, alcanzan una gran extensión geográfica. Su dimensión señorial está en el origen de unas rentas sustanciales y permite a la aristocracia ejercer un dominio diversificado sobre miles de dependientes conformando así su potencia económica.

La parte real, esencialmente de rentas, es considerable. Llegando a la aristocracia por diversos canales, convertida en dominios y bosques, refuerza la solidez de las fortunas, asegurando la preeminencia aristocrática en la nobleza.

Con una notable participación en la metalurgia, la aristocracia se interesa también en las finanzas, controlando el sistema fiscal-financiero y los beneficios de sus funciones. Por los fundamentos de su fortuna, la aristocracia permanece fuertemente atada a las formas tradicionales de la economía.

La organización de la gestión reposa sobre consejos importantes y personal numeroso. Reclutado en el parlamento o en las finanzas, reproduce los comportamientos de sus amos que siguen de cerca su actividad e intervienen a veces directamente en la gestión.

Esta gestión rigurosa apunta a equilibrar las cuentas, controlar las deudas, reducir los errores. Tradicionalmente, supone una mezcla del modelo feudal y un esfuerzo de racionalización más moderno. La eficacia permite el aumento de ingresos de la aristocracia inmobiliaria. El lugar de la

innovación se contrasta tanto en la agricultura como en la industria. Responde más a un deseo de rango que a una preocupación económica y refleja un comportamiento donde gastar es más importante que producir. Esta tradición no es sin embargo ni arcaica ni inmovilista y proporciona un lugar específico a la aristocracia en el desarrollo económico, acentuando la diversidad del grupo nobiliario.

## LA FUNCION ECONOMICA DE LA ARISTOCRACIA BELGA EN LOS SIGLOS XVII Y XVIII

KAREL DEGRYSE Y PAUL JANSSENS

Abordamos en esta exposición sucesivamente las cuestiones siguientes: En primer lugar, ¿cómo se transmiten los patrimonios nobiliarios? ¿En qué grado la integridad de las grandes fortunas de los nobles era protegida por las leyes sucesorias específicas (primogenitura, mayorazgo, etc.)? Pasamos a continuación al análisis de las fortunas: ¿Cuál era su importancia? ¿Cómo se componían y se gestionaban? ¿Se puede en el largo plazo dilucidar si hubo una tendencia a la baja o al alza de las rentas inmobiliarias (crisis aristocrática)? Sobre todos estos puntos, tratamos de explicar la singularidad de la propiedad noble, puesto que tal singularidad ha existido realmente. Del patrimonio pasamos al modo de vida, y a continuación a las funciones ejercidas. Éstas nos interesan desde diversos puntos de vista: financieramente, ¿se puede considerar la actividad profesional de los nobles como una fuente de rentas importante? Políticamente, ¿tiene el ejercicio del poder por los nobles una repercusión sobre el desarrollo económico? En fin, sobre las mentalidades, ¿el modo de vida de la nobleza ejerce una influencia sobre las inversiones y compromisos en los negocios? El modo de vida implica igualmente gastos. Terminamos el trabajo considerando la importancia y naturaleza de los gastos, con una atención muy particular al fenómeno de las deudas contraídas por la nobleza.

¿DE UNA GESTION POLITICA Y SOCIAL A OTRA ECONOMICA?  
ARISTOCRACIA CASTELLANA Y DESARROLLO ECONOMICO,  
1450-1800

BARTOLOMÉ YUN CASALILLA

Como parte de una reconsideración más general de muchos estereotipos sobre la historia de España, este trabajo analiza las estrategias señoriales de gestión y sus efectos sobre la economía. El fin último de dicha gestión era mantener la unidad y solidez de los linajes. Estos linajes eran coaliciones sujetas a tensiones internas y por tanto requerían compromisos políticos de gastos no superfluos que chocaban con la inelasticidad de la renta señorial y su depreciación. Como en otros países, este problema pudo haberse solucionado a través de la extensión de la propiedad y el acceso a fuentes de ingreso fiscales. Pero en el caso de Castilla, el acceso al crédito y los ingresos por el servicio imperial después de 1550 fue también decisivo. Dada la estricta naturaleza de la tenencia de la tierra, la crisis aristocrática no fue más que una crisis de liquidez. Ésta fue superada con medidas políticas que impidieron la inversión productiva y que, además, ayudaron a perpetuar, hasta finales del siglo XVIII, un sistema social e institucional y unas relaciones de propiedad que parecieron haber alcanzado su límite productivo ya a finales del siglo XVI. Nada de esto supuso una falta de interés en la gestión patrimonial. La existencia de inversión productiva, aunque negada en la literatura tradicional, es evidente, como lo es la importancia de las políticas de gestión de los recursos señoriales dirigidas a fomentar el desarrollo económico. Pero la composición de la renta señorial y de las formas de acceso a la propiedad por la nobleza—en el contexto de la diversidad de Castilla, que incluía áreas de propiedades de los agricultores y grandes fincas— significaban que el control estricto sobre la inversión a gran escala era prioritario. Todo este sistema entró en crisis a finales del siglo XVIII, hundiéndose junto con las instituciones del Antiguo Régimen.

LOS ESTADOS ARISTOCRATICOS EN PORTUGAL Y SU  
GESTION (1600-1834)

NUNO GONÇALO MONTEIRO

Hay dos antiguos problemas históricos que de alguna manera distinguen a la aristocracia portuguesa y a sus posesiones. El primero es el hecho de que en Portugal las diversas formas de dotación de por vida o hereditaria de la tierra a los agricultores (*enfiteusis*) tuvieron mayor importancia y pervivieron mucho más tiempo que en la mayoría de los países europeos. Y el segundo es el de los enormes recursos de la Corona que, hasta el siglo XIX, podían ser donados. Por consiguiente, las posesiones de la aristocracia estaban modificándose constantemente. En casi todos los casos, el derecho de recibir rentas se convertía en un componente cada vez más importante. En contraste con los modelos lineales de desarrollo y modernización, el control directo de las haciendas fue cada vez menos común. Al término del Antiguo Régimen, sólo eran responsables del 3% de los ingresos. Por tanto, para valorar la acción de la aristocracia portuguesa, han de utilizarse unas variables muy distintas. Este sistema afectó al desarrollo de la economía en su conjunto de maneras complejas, como, por ejemplo, permitiendo que la renta fluyera de las casas aristocráticas a sus principales arrendatarios.

LA ESTRUCTURA DE LOS PATRIMONIOS ARISTOCRATICOS EN  
EL REINO DE NAPOLES: ESTRATEGIAS DE GESTION Y  
DESARROLLO REGIONAL (SIGLOS XVII-XIX)

GIOVANI MUTO

Este trabajo analiza la estructura de los grupos de nobles en el Reino de Nápoles, la composición de sus patrimonios y sus formas de ingresos en los siglos XVI y XVII. La fuerza contractual de la aristocracia era de naturaleza no tanto política como social. Su hegemonía en la sociedad del Sur de Italia descansaba en la capacidad de salvaguardar a largo plazo su posesión de la tierra, en forma de feudo, con una estrategia basada en la primogenitura, el fideicomiso y la extensión de los grados de sucesión feudal. La administración de los patrimonios tenía un cierto componente de racionalidad institucional, pero era rígida en su respuesta a los progresos económicos de la época. Entre los siglos XV y XVIII el mercado de la propiedad se mantuvo paralizado, aunque entre 1550 y 1560 las compras de feudos mostraron una tendencia más dinámica. Los feudos por lo general no llegaron a convertirse en bienes vendibles y la propiedad de la tierra permaneció en manos de los mismos grupos, aunque se renovó al ser admitida entre sus filas una nueva nobleza civil. Pero el sistema de gestión de la tierra no tuvo ninguna innovación real. Durante tres siglos los ingresos de la aristocracia mostraron una muy pequeña diversificación, y las rentas procedentes de las propiedades continuaron siendo la principal fuente de ingresos. Se hicieron muy pocas inversiones para incrementar el nivel tecnológico de la agricultura, por lo que la productividad siguió siendo baja. Los aumentos de la producción se debieron sobre todo a la extensión de la superficie de cultivo más que a mejoras de la productividad. La renta de la tierra no era dinámica y no proporcionaba oportunidades empresariales. En periodos de crecimiento de la demanda las estructuras de capital no pudieron servir de apoyo a las estructuras productivas y, por tanto, las iniciativas de grupos de comerciantes nunca pudieron consolidarse.

## DOS EPOCAS DE ECONOMIA SEÑORIAL EN LA REGION DE PRUSIA-BRANDEBURGO. INNOVACION ESTRUCTURAL EN EL SIGLO XVI, GANANCIAS DE PRODUCTIVIDAD EN EL SIGLO XVIII

WILLIAM W. HAGEN

Durante el periodo 1470-1620, los nobles dueños de grandes propiedades de tierras en la región de Brandenburgo en Prusia (los *Junkers*), desplegaron gran energía empresarial en la creación de un sistema manorial comercial orientado a la exportación, que expandió considerablemente la producción agraria para el mercado, a la vez que les hizo enriquecerse. Aunque estaba basado en los servicios de trabajo no remunerados de los habitantes de los pueblos de los *Junkers*, el sistema de grandes posesiones se impuso a través de negociaciones, a menudo con la mediación del Estado, que impedían el agotamiento de los recursos de los agricultores. El sistema de manorialismo comercial favoreció una economía política de libre comercio por encima del corporativismo y monopolio medieval urbano, que las ciudades estaban obligadas a adoptar. La riqueza señorial era el prerrequisito para conseguir los beneficios del funcionariado estatal a través del préstamo de dinero a los príncipes legisladores. La ley feudal no impedía a los *Junkers* que se desarrollaran dentro de una clase de familias terratenientes, conectadas en materias de deuda y herencia por vínculos de linaje pero con capacidad de perseguir sus intereses como empresarios individuales. En el siglo XVIII, los *Junkers* se enfrentaron a un Estado absoluto que puso límites a los beneficios que obtenían de los habitantes de sus pueblos. Muchos terratenientes adoptaron estrategias de aumento de productividad en la gestión de sus posesiones, ganando en capacidad laboral y en energía animal a través del empleo de trabajo asalariado y compra de equipos manoriales más que a través del incremento de sus rentas feudales. Pero la iniciativa hacia el progreso económico estaba ahora en el Estado absolutista y en sus oficiales, especialmente en los representantes de la burguesía y los arrendatarios de la Corona más que en la nobleza, aunque muchos terratenientes siguieron el modelo de desarrollo agrario por propio interés y apoyados por el Estado.

## EMPRESARIADO Y GESTION DE LAS POSESIONES DE LA NOBLEZA DE LA BAJA AUSTRIA, 1550-1780

HERBERT KNITTLER

Dentro del modelo estudiado se podría demostrar la existencia de tres etapas en la relación entre capital humano y desarrollo económico. Durante la segunda mitad del siglo XVI la mayoría de las posesiones de la Corona fueron hipotecadas a los nobles, que trataron de maximizar la renta obtenida de estas haciendas. Algunos de estos nobles, a menudo procedentes del grupo de oficiales del príncipe, se convirtieron en los dueños de sus posesiones a comienzos del siglo XVII. Como resultado de la Batalla de la Montaña Blanca (1620) surgió un tipo de aristocracia, que vinculó los derechos de propiedad que estaban esparcidos en varios territorios de los Habsburgo. Surgieron nuevos comportamientos y modelos de gestión. Las instrucciones dadas por el príncipe de Liechtenstein a su hijo muestran las tensiones entre la anticuada mentalidad feudal y las nuevas visiones capitalistas. Aparte de inversiones en sectores como la agricultura, la industria y el comercio, y el fortalecimiento del control señorial del mercado, tuvo lugar una creciente racionalización de las estructuras organizativas. Esto se consiguió a través del establecimiento de una sofisticada burocracia manorial. Algunos de estos oficiales se convirtieron en los verdaderos gestores innovadores de las grandes fortunas aristocráticas. Pero en una serie de casos, la existencia de unos ingresos considerables de rentas feudales en dinero redujo el interés de la nobleza por las mejoras económicas. A mediados del siglo XVIII, los datos catastrales muestran el desarrollo de la actividad forestal como un sector líder. Pero también dentro de un mercado libre sin monopolios, por ejemplo para la madera y después para los cereales, los bien entrenados gestores de la economía señorial parecen haber sido el grupo responsable de la modernización y el desarrollo.

LA ACTIVIDAD ECONOMICA DE LA NOBLEZA POLACA Y SUS  
CONSECUENCIAS. EL SISTEMA MANORIAL EN LA EPOCA  
MODERNA

JERZY TOPOLSKI

El factor principal que configuró el desarrollo social y económico de los territorios orientales de Europa central en la época Moderna fue la economía servil-manorial. Fue un efecto del aumento de la actividad económica de la nobleza. Se puede decir que la nobleza polaca fue la más activa en este desarrollo. Comenzó pasando del sistema basado en las rentas dinerarias al basado en el trabajo obligatorio ya en la segunda mitad del siglo XV, transición que fue completada en el siglo XVI. En el siglo XVI el nuevo sistema contribuyó al aumento de la producción agraria pero muy pronto llevó a la disminución de la productividad del trabajo y de la agricultura y frenó el desarrollo de las ciudades y consecuentemente la emergencia del capitalismo.

LA FUNCION DE LAS ESTRATEGIAS ARISTOCRATICAS DE  
GESTION EN EL DESARROLLO ECONOMICO DE LA REGION DE  
CHESAPEAKE DE LA AMERICA BRITANICA

LORENA S. WALSH

La alta burguesía de las plantaciones de Chesapeake en la América Británica debieron su condición a su *status* político y económico y a su nacimiento. El mantenimiento de tal condición requería una administración cuidadosa y la expansión de la base agraria de las fortunas familiares. La dependencia de la renta de una materia prima de exportación principal, el tabaco, fue resultado de la inicial orientación al mercado. Para mantener los ingresos cuando disminuyeron los resultados, las siguientes generaciones iniciaron una diversificación de la producción y otras mejoras agrarias. Sin embargo, dado su acceso a tierras no explotadas, su principal progreso fue extensivo más que intensivo y, dada su dependencia del trabajo esclavo, intensificaron las necesidades de trabajo y la explotación de la fuerza laboral.

Estas estrategias produjeron rendimientos constantes por trabajador durante la era colonial, y mayores rendimientos después de la independencia. La integración de los mercados nacionales y los internacionales a comienzos del siglo XIX llevó a una mayor preocupación por el mercado y a un ajuste a más corto plazo de la mezcla de cultivos, uso de la tierra y gestión del trabajo. Aunque se dedicó a una notable ostentación, la mayor parte de la alta burguesía de Chesapeake incrementó sus niveles de consumo sin gastar una mayor proporción de sus valores en bienes de consumo. Las contribuciones al desarrollo económico regional fueron, sin embargo, anuladas por la falta de voluntad o incapacidad de la alta burguesía para transformar o acabar con el crecientemente anacrónico sistema de trabajo esclavista en el que estaban basadas sus fortunas.

ARISTOCRACIA, NOBLEZA Y EMPRESAS ECONOMICAS:  
EL CASO DE NUEVA ESPAÑA EN EL SIGLO XVIII

RAUL FRADKIN Y JUAN CARLOS GARAVAGLIA

El trabajo analiza la función de la aristocracia terrateniente y de la nobleza en la Nueva España a finales del periodo colonial. A partir del estudio de tres casos regionales (el Bajío, Guadalajara y Zacatecas) se muestra cual fue la estrategia de la aristocracia para sustentar su hegemonía social y económica. El aspecto económico de esa estrategia —que fue llevada a su máxima expresión por la nobleza, elite de la elite novohispana— consistía fundamentalmente en operar a través de la concentración en una misma empresa familiar y en la integración horizontal de una serie de actividades que iban desde las haciendas a la minería, pasando por la gran casa de comercio. La contrapartida social de esa estrategia consistía en un tipo específico de patrón de ostentación y consumo aristocrático que consolidaba ese poder económico y que tendía a salvar la función dominante de este grupo en la sociedad colonial, en el marco de los valores imperantes en la monarquía católica hispana.







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ISBN 84-472-0442-1



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