
1.5 Improvement

Room 203

Chair: Mats Morell

1.51 Laura B. Sayre – Agromanie: crisis, improvement and agricultural enthusiasm in Western Europe from the eighteenth century to the present

‘He laughed heartily at his lordship’s saying he was an *enthusiastical* farmer; for (said he) what can he do in farming by his *enthusiasm*?’ Thus James Boswell described his friend Samuel Johnson’s response to visiting Lord Monboddo at his estate in Scotland in 1773. Like many scholarly, well-born men of his generation, Monboddo was a gentleman farmer, priding himself on his close attention to the management of his agricultural land. And yet it was an attitude controversial enough to separate the young rake from the celebrated critic: ‘Here, however, I think Dr. Johnson mistaken’, Boswell noted. Agricultural enthusiasm, or what the French called *agromanie*, was widespread in Europe in the eighteenth century; arguably, it has taken hold again today. The countryside is in desperate straits, and yet farming has rarely been so fashionable among urban elites. (‘I have a farm’, a young man declared by way of self-introduction at a recent agronomy conference. ‘It’s about a tenth of an acre, in Brooklyn. I’m thinking about getting a few chickens.’) What gives rise to agricultural enthusiasm, what does it achieve, and what does it conceal? What links can be drawn between its eighteenth-century version and its present form? This paper will consider the affective aspect of agricultural improvement, how it was theorised in the eighteenth century and how it is manifested today.

Laura B. Sayre is a researcher with the *Laboratoire de recherche sur les innovations socio-techniques et organisationnelles en agriculture de Dijon*, a division of France’s National Institute for Agronomic Research (INRA), the largest agricultural research organisation in Europe. She holds a PhD in English from Princeton University, where her dissertation on the use of the georgic in eighteenth-century British agricultural writing won the (US) Agricultural History Society’s Gilbert C. Fite Award in 2003. From 2003 to 2008 she was employed by the non-profit Rodale Institute, working as an agricultural journalist covering the organic and sustainable farming scene in the United States and overseas. In 2008–09 she was a fellow with Yale University’s Program in Agrarian Studies. She also has extensive experience working on organic farms, primarily in organic vegetable production, and served for two seasons as an independent organic inspector. Among her current work is an edited volume on the student farm movement in North America.

1.52 Daniel Reupke – Credit markets in the nineteenth-century countryside: a comparative study in a rural border region

Getting credit to satisfy their financial needs was vital for the people at all times. Historiography has made some distinctive studies about bank loans in big cities. But how about rural credit markets? For a small town, David Warren Sabeen (1990) detected social connexions, which made lending possible by improving the trust in each other, and Craig Muldrew (2001) showed the connexion between credit and social relations. For France, Gilles Postel-Vinay (1997) pointed out social networks in cities and villages, setting the limits within it gets possible for peasants and peons to obtain credit and capital from *Notabeln* of the region and from the local parish. However, the mechanics of lending within the networks never been explored systematically.

Social network analysis will be applied to examine the mechanics of lending in three rural towns located in the Saar-Lor-Lux (Saarland-Lorraine-Luxembourg) border region in a partly sociological manner (like Padgett/Howell (1993) for the Medici-bankers). Using notarised debt certificates to construct a database spanning the whole of the nineteenth century, the project seeks to reconstruct the networks within which all lending took place in an age before bank loans became available. Among other things, the preliminary findings suggest that participating in these networks was the *conditio sine qua non* to obtain credit; lending activities were locally centred, but regularly crossed

the state boundaries between the Prussian *Saarregion*, France and Luxembourg. The quantitative based economic history might be supplemented by social and cultural history (by exploring the sociocultural aspects of the networks). Finally, this research will reveal, how credit markets in nineteenth century countryside had operated.

Daniel Reupke is PhD student at Saarland University in Saarbrücken (Germany). He studied Law and Economics at University of Bayreuth, later History abroad in France and at Saarland University, where he received his MA degree in 2008. Now he works as a research assistant at the Department of History and as a doctoral student in the project *Kreditvergabe im 19. Jahrhundert* (Lending in the nineteenth century) headed by Professor Gabriele B. Clemens and funded by the *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft* (DFG – German Research Foundation). His research interests include Legal history in nineteenth century, economic, social and cultural history of border regions and rural towns as well as urban history.

1.53 Heather Holmes – The agricultural correspondent and Scottish agricultural periodicals and newspapers 1800–1850

An important function of Scottish agricultural newspapers and journals was to afford farmers and others a medium through which they could express their opinions on agricultural and kindred subjects. So important was the role of the agricultural correspondent that editors recognised their importance in determining the success of their publications and actively encouraged the supply of contributions.

This paper examines the role and character of the agricultural correspondent to Scottish agricultural journals and newspapers between 1800 and 1850, a period when these publications developed into distinct genres and became important methods to disseminate agricultural information. In particular, it focuses on the role and work of one of the most prolific and influential contributors, William Aiton of Strathaven, Lanarkshire, an established agricultural writer, and contributor to the Board of Agriculture's agricultural surveys and other publications before he became an agricultural correspondent. Between 1810 and his death in 1847 he contributed many communications to journals and newspapers such as *The Farmer's Magazine*, the *Quarterly Journal of Agriculture*, *The Ayrshire Agriculturist* and *The Ayrshire and Renfrewshire Agriculturist*.

Dr Heather Holmes has published widely on a range of aspects of Scottish agricultural and rural history since the mid-1990s. Her doctoral thesis, 'Potato Harvesting in the Lothians 1870 to 1995' (University of Edinburgh, 1996) won the prestigious Michaelis Jena-Ratcliffe Prize in 1996. In recent years she has published on aspects of Scottish agricultural books and periodicals in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, in journals such as the *Agricultural History Review*, *Review of Scottish Culture*, *Folklife: Journal of Ethnological Studies*, and the *Journal of the Edinburgh Bibliographical Society*. She has contributed articles on eighteenth-century agricultural books and periodicals to volume 2 of *The Edinburgh History of the Book in Scotland* (forthcoming, 2010). She is currently writing a monograph on the creation, dissemination and reception of the Board of Agriculture's county surveys, 1793–1817. She is currently head of Community Assets Branch in the Rural Directorate of the Scottish Government in Edinburgh.