
7.4 Communal properties and agrarian collectivism in the north-west of Spain (eighteenth to twentieth centuries). Communal tradition, development and alternatives for the future Room 202

Convener: Laureano Rubio Pérez

Chair: James Simpson

The session proposed has as its principal objective the analysis, quantification and evaluation of the communal properties that served as a basis for the development of the farming communities of the north-west of Spain. It will in addition address the process of preservation and management carried out by communities run by councils in periods during which sale and privatisation, whether by the communities themselves, or by the State, were general. Unlike those of the rest of Spain, farming communities in the Province of Leon, led by their council organisations, retained total management of communal lands and resources. This meant that they were able not just to keep or even expand them, but also to use them as a base for agrarian expansion and a future agricultural revolution.

For this purpose, they devised a whole framework of collective and community actions and strategies which not only encouraged agrarian collectivism but in addition maintained a sustained balance of natural resources, even against a background of population growth. Both the collective management of councils and the preservation of these communal properties explain to some degree their major presence to this day, as in some areas they amount to as much as 40 per cent of all productive lands.

7.41 Maria-José Pérez and Alfredo Martin Garcia – Communal properties and resources: size, type and development, eighteenth to twentieth centuries. The keys to their preservation

A quantitative approach will be used to evaluate the extent of communal properties over a wide area of north-western Spain within the boundaries of the present-day Province of Leon. Taking as a starting point the varying agricultural and economic models found in mountainous and lowland areas, an analysis will be made of the different types and uses made of communal properties. In addition, their development will be traced, noting in particular how common and council lands were retained and utilised, despite the major processes of removal of lands from mortmain through sale to private individuals in the nineteenth century and the inroads made by the progressive imposition of private ownership and by self-centred peasant farmers.

On these same lines an attempt will be made to assess the impact of communal property both on the farming economy and on the economic development of these zones, overwhelmingly dominated by pastoral and arable farming. In them, the need for a balance between resources and population demanded the preservation of considerable natural resources upon which fell the burden both of crop-growing and of intensive and extensive livestock rearing. Similarly, an investigation will be undertaken of the contribution that these common lands, with their varying forms of use and exploitation, whether joint or individual, made to agricultural development and the major changes experienced during the nineteenth century. These led to the establishment of intensive agriculture using irrigation and the conservation of wooded areas and grasslands, upon which new kinds of arable and pastoral farming would develop, permitting demographic growth.

Dr María José Pérez Álvarez is a Lecturer in Modern History at the University of Leon. Both her Doctoral Thesis and a considerable proportion of her later pieces of work have concentrated on the rural world, with particular reference to the economies of mountain areas in the North-West of Spain. Among her publications linked to this theme are: ‘Propiedad y uso colectivo de la tierra en la Montaña de León’, *Tierras de León* 101 (1997); ‘Economías y haciendas concejiles en la montaña de León: el modelo de los concejos mayores y menores y las mancomunidades en el siglo XVIII’,

in Bernardo Ares, J. M. and González Beltrán, J. M. (eds), *La Administración Municipal en la España Moderna*, Cadiz, (1999); 'Société et structures sociales des communautés d'élevage de la montagne de Léon à la fin du XVI^e siècle : Babia'. *Annales de Bretagne et des Pays de L'Ouest*, 18 (2001); 'Modelos Socioeconómicos en la provincia de León: La Montaña y Tierra de Campos en el siglo XVIII'. *Studia Historica*, 241 (2005), pp. 27-41.

Dr Alfredo Martín García is a Lecturer in Modern History at the University of Leon. One of his lines of research centres on the rural world. He has studied the mechanisms of solidarity and mentalities in village communities in the Province of Leon. Among other publications of his related to the topic are: 'Religiosidad y actitudes ante la muerte en la Montaña Noroccidental leonesa: el concejo de Laciana en el siglo XVIII', *Estudios Humanísticos. Historia*, 4 (2005); 'Ilustración y religiosidad popular: el Expediente de Cofradías en la provincia de León (1770-1772)', *Estudios Humanísticos. Historia*, 5 (2006), pp. 137-158.

7.42 Laureano Rubio Pérez and Oscar Fernandez – Agrarian collectivism and communal management. Types of action, uses, and the economic and social aspects of communal properties, eighteenth to twentieth centuries

In the light of the observation of the extensive presence and the preservation of communal property and resources in these territories in mainland Spain, the intention of this paper is to analyse the keys to the use, distribution and retention of such properties and resources, particularly those still in existence, with regard to common pasture lands and woodlands. A compilation of council bye-laws from past periods, combined with the establishment of a catalogue of agricultural patterns, will allow an in-depth study of certain fundamental points relating to social and economic development. This tended to maintain the balance between resources and population and to conserve resources through sustained and sustainable development that in some wise guaranteed the occupation of lands, the preservation of rural communities and the perpetuation of traditional systems in the context of new challenges and contemporary needs.

A combination of documentary sources of both qualitative and quantitative types will permit elucidation of the role and the full dimensions of communal properties. In particular, the causes and consequences, whether of their sale or privatisation, or of their preservation and exploitation, will be outlined in the context of changes and new contemporary needs.

Dr Laureano M. Rubio Pérez is Professor of Modern History at the University of Leon, Spain. Awarded a Doctorate in Modern History by the University of Oviedo in 1986, from his very first pieces of research he concentrated on the problems of Rural History in all its aspects and dimensions, paying special attention to Economic History and to the question of communal and council properties. More recently, his research has focussed on matters of power and power relationships in the rural world. This is seen from two angles: the power or ability of councils to manage properties, and communal resources as a support for farming communities. The outcome of these lines of research has been a number of books, articles and papers read at specialist congresses, together with the award of four bonuses for long-term research. Among other books, the following are of note: *La Bañeza y su Tierra, 1750-1580*; *La burguesía maragata: dimensión social, comercio y capital en la Corona de Castilla*; *El sistema político concejil en la provincia de León*. He is currently running several research projects, in particular a research and development project conceded by the relevant Spanish Ministry under the: 'Bienes concejiles, régimen comunal y colectivismo agrario en el noroeste español, siglos XV-XX'. He is the Chair of the research group 'Concejo', which is a leading player in investigating the area of the communal movement and popular tradition, in which all the participants in this session are involved, as also in the project.

Dr Óscar Fernández Álvarez is a Lecturer in Social Anthropology at the University of Leon. Apart from other lines of research, he has studied the communal movement. His results have been published in various books and Spanish and international journals. He has participated in a large number of research projects, both Spanish and international, either as Chief Researcher or as a team member. Of special note among these are: 'Pobreza y Asistencia en la Península Ibérica', Spanish Ministry of Education, Reference: HP-2007-0020, Chief Researcher: Dr. María José Pérez Álvarez; 'Análisis Antropológico de la cultura en acción de los nuevos movimientos sociales', Regional Government of Galicia and the University of Corunna, Principal Researcher: Dr. José Antonio Fernández de Rota y Monter. Among his publications of recent years are: 'Educating for Difference in a Gypsy Community in Spain: An Exercise in Integration', *European J. Intercultural Education* 17 (2006); 'Asistencia social en León. Los Establecimientos de beneficencia en León en el inicio de la época actual', in Rubio Pérez, L. (Editor) *Pobreza, marginación y asistencia en la Península Ibérica*. University of Leon. 2009, pp. 29-64.

7.43 Francisco Beltrán Tapia – Social and environmental filters to market incentives: Common land persistence in nineteenth century Spain

The regional diversity of communal persistence in nineteenth century Spain has been well documented by the historiography. Although the explanation of this divergence has been attributed to the social and environmental context, together with the market incentives, that characterised the different rural societies of this period, there has not been a clear assessment of the role played by each. Through a comparative study of the historical data at the provincial level, this paper analyses the relative contribution of these elements to that divergence. The results diminish the significance of the market signals and show how the social and environmental conditions of these communities interacted to limit or promote the dismantling of the common lands.

Francisco Beltrán Tapia teaches Economics in Secondary education and Economic History, as a part-time Teaching Assistant, at the University of Zaragoza. He is engaged in doctoral studies dealing with the evolution of the management of collective-owned resources in pre-industrial societies and their transition to capitalism, as well as their influence in economic development in rural areas. He develops his work under two research projects devoted to the history of the commons and the agrifood economy respectively.

7.44 José Miguel Lana Berasain – Forgotten commons. Rhetoric, memory and property rights in an action arena (a case study: Sansomáin, Spain, sixteenth to twenty-first centuries)

This paper examines some universal problems through the example of a little village in Spain. The main objective is to contribute to understanding the historical evolution of property rights. For a long time, we have assumed a top-down, linear and teleological approach that illuminated some aspects of the historical process, but also kept out of sight important facets of this process (R. Congost, *Tierra, leyes, historia*, Barcelona, 2006). In this sense, how could we explain that the same legislation applied to similar towns or countries produced different results? The answer to this question emphasises the significance of the actors and their interactions into fixed contexts. The understanding of this historical process (as a bottom-up and non-linear approach) could benefit from the Ostrom's notion of an Action Arena (E. Ostrom, *Understanding institutional diversity*, Princeton, 2005). If we agree that specific actors and fixed contexts matter, then a case study could be a good way to interrogate and explain the history.

In our explanation, we should take into account the material conditions of the action situation (population, arable, productivity, markets, prices), but also we need to examine the intangible interactions between the actors. Definitively, property rights are mainly a rhetorical question. Words matter: it could be stored up and transferred in order to dominate. By this way we need to take into account the written texts (rules, laws, sentences,...) but also memory (or confronted memories).

The case study tries to answer the mystery of the disappearance of the common lands of Sansomáin, a little hamlet with 53 inhabitants in 1797. At the beginning of the eighteenth century there were six families of owner peasants and the common meadows, common pastures and common wastes were perfectly identified. In the twentieth century some tenants lived there and all the land belonged to a foreign landowner. Nowadays there is an attempt to recover the common lands. The key of the mystery lies in the memory of the community.

Josemiguel Lana-Berasain is teacher of Economic History in the Public University of Navarra. He was member of the council of the Spanish Society of Agrarian History (SEHA) between 2002 and 2009, and president of the 'Geronimo de Uztariz' Social and Economic History Institute between 2000 and 2005. He is the main researcher of the research projects HUM2006-01277/HIST and HAR2009-09700/HIST, financed by the Spanish Government. He has published several articles in: *Historia Agraria* (2000 and 1995), *International Journal of the Commons* (2008), *Revista de Historia Económica* (2003), *Investigaciones de Historia Económica* (2007) and *Historia Social* (2000). He has

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participated in several workshops of the project COST A-35 *Progressore. Programme for the Study of European Rural Societies*.