

Atti delle “Settimane di Studi” e altri Convegni
45

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NELL'ECONOMIA EUROPEA

SECC. XI-XVIII

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SERFDOM AND SLAVERY
IN THE EUROPEAN ECONOMY

11TH - 18TH CENTURIES

* *

Atti della “Quarantacinquesima Settimana di Studi”
14-18 aprile 2013

a cura di Simonetta Cavaciocchi

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I testi pubblicati nella collana “Atti delle Settimane di Studi” raccolgono ricerche originali attivate dalla Fondazione Istituto Internazionale di Storia Economica “F. Datini”, sulla base di un progetto varato dai suoi organi scientifici. Gli autori vengono selezionati a seguito di una Call for papers che indica gli obiettivi scientifici del progetto; la selezione è effettuata sulla base di proposte circostanziate contenenti indicazioni sulle questioni storiografiche affrontate, l’area e il periodo storico preso in considerazione e la tipologia delle fonti utilizzate. La Giunta del Comitato scientifico, eventualmente integrata da specialisti volta a colta individuati, analizza le proposte e seleziona quelle ritenute più valide e coerenti con il progetto generale di ricerca. La commissione può anche decidere, ove lo ritenga opportuno, di effettuare inviti diretti a studiosi che si siano distinti per la qualità della loro produzione scientifica sul tema.

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INDICE

Tomo I

Domenica 14 aprile – APERTURA DEI LAVORI

SERGEJ PAVLOVIC KARPOV, Schiavitù e servaggio nell'economia europea.
Secc. XI-XVIIIpag. 3

Lunedì 15 aprile – IL SERVAGGIO E IL SISTEMA ISTITUZIONALE / THE SERFDOM AND THE
INSTITUTIONAL SYSTEM

Relazioni

CHRIS BRIGGS, English Serfdom, c.1200-c.1350: towards an Institutional
Analysispag. 13

SHEILAGH OGILVIE, Serfdom and the Institutional System in Early Modern
Germany » 33

ALEXANDER KLEIN, The Institutions of the 'Second Serfdom' and Economic
Efficiency: Review of the Existing Evidence for Bohemia » 59

TRACY DENNISON, The Institutional Framework of Serfdom in Russia:
the View from 1861 » 83

Lunedì 15 aprile – LE CONDIZIONI DELLA SCOMPARSA, RINASCITA O SOPRAVVIVENZA DEL
SERVAGGIO / THE CONDITIONS OF DISAPPEARANCE, SURVIVAL OR REVIVAL OF SERFDOM

Relazioni

FRANCESCO PANERO, Il nuovo servaggio dei secoli XII-XIV in Italia:
ricerche socio-economiche sul mondo contadino e comparazioni
con alcune regioni dell'Europa mediterranea.....pag. 99

MICHAEL NORTH, Serfdom and Corvée Labour in the Baltic Area
16th-18th Centuries » 139

Comunicazioni:

PERE ORTI GOST, LLUÍS TO FIGUERAS, Serfdom and Standards of Living
of the Catalan Peasantry before and after the Black Death of 1348.....pag. 155

ROSA LLUCH BRAMON, Remences pauvres, remences riches: les inégalités
économiques (Vieille Catalogne, XIV-XVI) » 173

Martedì 16 aprile – REGIMI SIGNORILI IN EUROPA ORIENTALE: LA DIFFUSIONE DEL SERVAGGIO E IL CONSOLIDAMENTO DELL'ECONOMIA / THE SEIGNIORIAL REGIMES IN EASTERN EUROPE: THE SPREAD OF SERFDOM AND AND THEIR RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE WORLD ECONOMY

Relazioni

MARKUS CERMAN, <i>Seigniorial Systems in East-central and Eastern Europe, 1300-1800: Regional Realities</i>pag.	187
PIOTR GUZOWSKI, <i>The Role of Enforced Labour in the Economic Development of Church and Royal Estates in 15th and 16th-century Poland</i> »	215
ALESSANDRO STANZIANI, <i>Serfs, Slaves or Indentured People? Forms of Bondage in Russia and Central Asia, from the Fifteenth to the Nineteenth Century</i> »	235
ANTAL SZÁNTAY, <i>Serfdom in 18th Century Hungary</i> »	263

Comunicazioni

CARSTEN PORSKROG RASMUSSEN, <i>Forms of Serfdom and Bondage in the Danish Monarchy</i>pag.	281
MARTEN SEPPEL, <i>The Growth of the State and its Consequences on the Structure of Serfdom in the Baltic Provinces, 1550-1750</i> »	291

Martedì 16 aprile – LA SCHIAVITÙ IN EUROPA DAL MEDIOEVO AL XVIII SECOLO / THE SLAVERY IN EUROPE FROM THE MIDDLE AGES UNTIL THE 18TH CENTURY

Relazioni

SALVATORE BONO, <i>Schiavi in Europa nell'età moderna. Varietà di forme e di aspetti</i>pag.	309
JEFFREY FYNN-PAUL, <i>Reasons for the Limited Scope and Duration of 'Renaissance Slavery' in Southern Europe (ca. 1348-ca. 1750): A New Structuralist Analysis</i> »	337

Comunicazioni

ANTI SELART, <i>Slavery in the Eastern Baltic in the 12th-15th Centuries</i>pag.	351
JULIANE SCHIEL, <i>Die Sklaven und die Pest. Überprüfung Forschungsnarrativs am Beispiel Venedig</i> »	365
FRANCESCO GUIDI BRUSCOLI, <i>Bartolomeo Marchionni and the Trade in African Slaves in the Mediterranean World at the End of the Fifteenth Century</i> ... »	377
FLOCEL SABATÉ, <i>Gli schiavi davanti alla giustizia nella Catalogna bassomedievale</i> »	389

Tomo II

Mercoledì 17 aprile – LA SCHIAVITÙ IN EUROPA DAL MEDIOEVO AL XVIII SECOLO / THE SLAVERY IN EUROPE FROM THE MIDDLE AGES UNTIL THE 18TH CENTURY

Relazioni

AURELIA MARTÍN CASARES, <i>Evolution of the Origin of Slaves Sold in Spain from the Late Middle Ages till the 18th Century</i>pag.	409
RAÚL GONZÁLEZ ARÉVALO, <i>Ordenanzas municipales y trabajo esclavo en la Corona de Castilla (Siglos XV-XVI)</i> »	431

JUDITH SPICKSLEY, <i>The Decline of Slavery for Debt in Western Europe in the Medieval Period</i>	pag.	465
FILIPA RIBEIRO DA SILVA, <i>Il commercio di schiavi nell'Europa sud-occidentale a metà del XVIII secolo: uno sguardo sull'importazione di "Negri da India, Cacheo, Angola e Brasile" a Lisbona</i>	»	487
Comunicazioni		
MAGNUS RESSEL, <i>Protestant Slaves in Northern Africa during the Early Modern Age</i>	pag.	523
ANNE BROGINI, <i>Au Coeur de l'esclavage méditerranéen: Malte aux XVI^e-XVII^e siècles</i>	»	537
Mercoledì 17 aprile – LA TRATTA DEGLI SCHIAVI / THE SLAVE TRADE		
Relazioni		
KENNETH MORGAN, <i>The Flows of the Slave Trade: National Flags, African Region of Departure, and American Region of Arrival, 1501-1867</i>	pag.	555
DIENKE HONDIUS, <i>West-European Urban Networks in the History of Slavery and the Slave Trade: New Research Perspectives from the Netherlands</i>	»	575
MATTHIAS VAN ROSSUM, <i>'To Sell Them in Other Countries and to Make Their Profit'. The Dynamics of Private Slave Trade and Ownership under the Dutch East India Company (VOC)</i>	»	593
KARWAN FATAH-BLACK, <i>A Network to Encourage the Slave Trade? Paramaribo-Middelbourg-Amsterdam, 1783-1793</i>	»	619
Comunicazioni		
IVÁN ARMENTEROS MARTÍNEZ, <i>Towards the Atlantic Mediterranean. Catalan Participation in the Early Atlantic Slave Trade (Late Fifteenth-Early Sixteenth Century)</i>	pag.	631
NUALA ZAHEDIEH, <i>Monopoly and Free Trade. Changes in the Organization of the British Slave Trade, 1660-1720</i>	»	651
Giovedì 18 aprile – TAVOLA ROTONDA / ROUND TABLE		
MARKUS CERMAN, <i>'Serfdom' and Slavery in European History since the Middle Ages: Identifying Common Aspects for Future Research. Contribution to the Final Round Table</i>	pag.	665
PAOLO MALANIMA, <i>Serfdom in Eastern Europe after the Revisions</i>	»	677
SHEILAGH OGILVIE.....	»	689
Intervento conclusivo		
MARIA GRAZIA GIAMMARINARO, <i>Human Trafficking in Contemporary Europe: Features of the Phenomenon and Actions for Combating it and for Protecting the Victims</i>	pag.	697
Abstracts	»	705

Paolo Malanima

Serfdom in Eastern Europe after the Revisions¹

1. A DUALISTIC VIEW

Until a few years ago, a well-known view prevailed on the East-West economic differences and relationships in pre-modern Europe. We could define this view as “dualistic” or “binary”, as suggested by some of the participants in the congress.² According to this view, during the late Middle Ages and early Modern times, Western and Eastern Europe followed two quite different development paths. In Western Europe, forced labour services on demesne lands disappeared during the late Middle Ages and, already before the Black Death, were replaced by waged labour and rents in money. Contractual and monetary production relationships set the basis for the development of capitalism in the succeeding centuries. Eastern Europe, from the Elbe River as far as the Urals, followed a different path. Here serfdom was almost totally unknown before the Fifteenth century. It developed from this period onward and became the dominant production relationship until the Nineteenth century. So, while on one side of Europe feudal relationships were superseded, on the other side they became more and more common.³

These different developments in the West and East were not independent. Since Eastern Europe was richer in arable and agricultural lands and then cereal cultivation was less costly than in the West, from the Sixteenth century onward it began to export cereals and livestock towards Western Europe. Serfdom was functional to the rise of a surplus of marketable agricultural goods to export. In exchange, Western Europe exported manufactured goods towards the East; these being much easier to produce there due to the greater availability of skilled labour and capital goods.

¹ I thank Markus Cerman for his comments on a previous draft of this paper; although the responsibility for the errors is mine alone.

² And primarily S. OGILVIE, *Serfdom and the Institutional System in Early Modern Germany*.

³ See the reconstruction of the past views by M. NORTH, *Serfdom and Corvée Labour in the Baltic Area 16th-18th Centuries*. However, the term of *Agrardualismus* is much older and has been used since the end of the Nineteenth century to distinguish the diverse development paths of Western and Eastern Europe.

This view found its more compact presentation in 1974 in the work by I. Wallerstein on the modern *World System*.⁴ According to Wallerstein, a true division of labour existed in pre-modern Europe between the Eastern “periphery” and the Western “centre”. Together with the other periphery, that is America, where slavery predominated, Eastern Europe was part of a complex world-system. The gradual development of capitalistic production relationships in Western Europe, the centre of the modern world-system, was supported by the pre-capitalistic production relationships of serfdom and slavery at the extremities, or “peripheries”, as Wallerstein called them.

2. THE REVISION

From the 1980s this compact view of the Western-Eastern relationships in pre-modern Europe began to fade away from both a methodological and empirical viewpoint. Economic and social historians began to show decreasing interest in production relationships as main drivers of historical changes and to pay more and more attention to conditions of modern economic growth and the modernisation of society. The view of history as a succession of different production relationships is nowadays a memory; of greater interest to the scholar of the philosophies of history than to the historian. This change of perspective is derived rather from the decreasing interest in production relationships and modes of production than from open criticism.

If, on the one hand, the binary view of the Western-Eastern developments of pre-modern Europe began to lack its methodological support, on the other hand, the actual progress of research on the East began to fit the past dualistic view less and less. S. Ogilvie and M. Cerman, in particular, have in recent years greatly contributed to modifying our views on the early modern history of the Eastern economies and societies. There is certainly a difference of approach between the two scholars.⁵ However, besides the differences, we can find a common critical view of the dualism or dichotomy in early modern Europe inherited from past literature. M. Cerman, in his book on *Villagers and lords in Eastern Europe*, went further in this direction. This recent work seems to have fulfilled a removal of the deeply stratified commonplace views about the early modern Eastern economy. The concepts, terminology, and actual developments, dear to past scholars, are addressed, discussed and challenged. On reading his book, we get the impression of standing before a heap of ruins and feel the need to start building again from the remains of past literature.

⁴ I. WALLERSTEIN, *The Modern World-System*, I, *Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century*, New York/London 1974 (Academic Press); and also IDEM, *The Capitalist World-Economy*, Cambridge 1979 (Cambridge University Press).

⁵ As is clear from a comparison of the articles by S. OGILVIE, *Communities and the “Second Serfdom” in Early Modern Bohemia*, in “Past and Present”, 187, 2005, pp. 69-119, T. DENNISON, S. OGILVIE, *Serfdom and Social Capital in Bohemia and Russia*, in “Economic History Review”, 60, 2007, 3, pp. 513-544 and the book by M. CERMAN, *Villagers and Lords in Eastern Europe, 1300-1800*, Basingstoke 2012 (Palgrave-McMillan).

This congress widely contributed to the revision of our concepts, methods and knowledge about Eastern European pre-modern history. Reading the papers, we begin to appreciate the distance between the opinions of many past historians and the actual developments of recent research. It has been shown that the system of serfdom did not cover all the regions of Eastern Europe and that, within the regions analysed in the papers, it coexisted with diverse contractual arrangements and forms of land exploitation, such as small ownerships and rents in kind and money.⁶ In some regions serfdom was often a marginal system of exploitation or did not exist at all. The chronological development was not the same in all the regions of Eastern Europe. In some cases it developed as early as the Fifteenth century, such as in Romania;⁷ whereas in other areas, it developed much later. In the majority of the Eastern regions, such in Russia,⁸ Schleswig-Holstein, Pomerania,⁹ Denmark,¹⁰ Bohemia,¹¹ part of Germany,¹² Hungary,¹³ the seigniorial system gained ground especially in the Sixteenth century and continued to spread until the Nineteenth. The burden of the *corvée* was relatively light in some areas (1-2 days per week), but heavy (3-5 days per week) in others. As to the commercial flow of agricultural goods towards the West, this seems insufficient to explain the formation and the evolution of serfdom. A chronological or geographic correlation between these flows and the change in production relationships seems to be totally absent.¹⁴ We learned also from the papers that, in order to understand serfdom, economic history is important, but social, political and particularly institutional approaches are important as well.¹⁵

On the whole, uniformity has been replaced by variety.

3. A RECONSTRUCTION?

Even accepting all the revisions of our former certainties, it seems impossible to deny that serfdom, from the late Fifteenth century onwards, was much more widespread in Eastern than Western Europe. Ultimately, a difference existed

⁶ See for instance the papers by T. DENNISON, *The Institutional Framework of Serfdom in Russia: the View from 1861*; A. KLEIN, *The Institutions of the "Second Serfdom" and Economic Efficiency: Review of the Existing Evidence for Bohemia*; M. NORTH, *Serfdom and Corvée Labour in the Baltic Area 16th-18th centuries*.

⁷ S. CORLATEANU-GRANCIUC, *La specificità della schiavitù medioevale in Moldova nei secoli XV-XVII, nel contesto della servitù in area rumena*.

⁸ A. STANZIANI, *Serfs, Slaves or Indentured People? Forms of Bondage in Russia and Central Asia, from the Fifteenth to the Nineteenth Century*; T. DENNISON, *The Institutional Framework in Russia: the View from 1861*.

⁹ M. NORTH, *Serfdom and Corvée Labour in the Baltic Area 16th-18th Centuries*.

¹⁰ C.P. RASMUSSEN, *Forms of Serfdom and Bondage in the Danish Monarchy*.

¹¹ A. KLEIN, *The Institutions of the "Second Serfdom" and Economic Efficiency: Review of the Existing Evidence for Bohemia*.

¹² S. OGILVIE, *Serfdom and the Institutional System in Early Modern Germany*.

¹³ A. SZÁNTAY, *Serfdom in 18th Century Hungary*.

¹⁴ P. GUZOWSKI, *The Role of Enforced Labour in the Economic Development of Church and Royal Estates in 15th and 16th Century Poland*.

¹⁵ See especially the papers by Briggs, Ogilvie, Klein, Dennison in these *Proceedings*.

between East and West. Although we can also find examples of serfdom in Western Europe, its presence was absolutely negligible in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth centuries. In regions such as Italy, France, Spain, England and most of Germany it had been eliminated by the end of the late Middle Ages.¹⁶ The situation in Eastern Europe was different. I would like to mention the tables presented by S. Ogilvie¹⁷ and M. Cerman in their papers.¹⁸ Although elaborating information from different sources and despite the diverse geographic coverage, these tables show that, from the Black Sea in the South as far as Estonia and Sweden in the North, and from Central Germany in the West to the Urals in the East, a wide part of the territory was actually “demesne land”, and was hence subject to the landlord or seigniorial system. The table presented by Cerman shows that the demesne land varied from a minimum of 7 percent in Eastern Prussia to a maximum of 62 percent in Pomerania.¹⁹ The percentages are mainly comprised between 25 and 50 percent. The area covered by the table presented by S. Ogilvie is wider. For the Sixteenth and Seventeenth centuries, her data confirm more or less the values proposed by Cerman. In the Eighteenth century, the ratio between the extent of the demesne land and the total surface was less than 10 percent in countries such as Southern and Western Germany, Denmark and Scandinavia; it was between 10 and 40 percent in Bohemia, Hungary, Estonia, Livonia; and exceeded 40 percent in Poland, Meklenburg, Pomerania, Schleswig-Holstein, Eastern Prussia.²⁰ In Russia it was between 26 percent of the total surface, in the early Eighteenth century and 55 in the first half of the Nineteenth.²¹

All considered, serfdom was an important reality in the economic and social life of Eastern European populations.

It would be interesting to know how many labourers were serfs in this part of the continent. To this question it seems impossible to provide a plausible answer. Certainly the population in servile conditions was far from negligible. In the light of what was said in this congress, an estimate of about 30 percent of families would seem a plausible figure.²² The percentage of the population would be lower since in any family, only one or two members were involved in the *corvée*.

Although the participants in this congress followed different approaches, the institutional view prevailed. The economic approach was certainly the least followed. From economics, where institutionalism was introduced some decades ago, the attention to the institutions has been gaining more and more ground in

¹⁶ C. BRIGGS, *English Serfdom, c. 1200-c. 1350: Towards an Institutional Analysis*; F. PANERO, *Il nuovo servaggio dei secoli XII-XIV in Italia: ricerche socio-economiche e comparazioni con alcune regioni dell'Europa mediterranea*.

¹⁷ S. OGILVIE, *Serfdom and the Institutional System in Early Modern Germany*.

¹⁸ M. CERMAN, *Seigniorial Systems in East-Central and East Europe, 1300-1800: Regional Realities*.

¹⁹ See also the data in M. CERMAN, *Villagers and Lords*, cit., pp. 62-69.

²⁰ Previous data is from S. OGILVIE, *Serfdom and the Institutional System in Early Modern Germany*.

²¹ M. CERMAN, *Seigniorial Systems in East-Central and East Europe, 1300-1800: Regional Realities*.

²² Such as in Hungary. See A. SZÁNTAY, *Serfdom in 18th Century Hungary*. In Russia according to D. MOON, *The Russian Peasantry, 1600-1930: The World the Peasants Made*, London-New York 1999 (Longman), a quarter of the rural households were exposed to labour rents at the middle of the Nineteenth century.

historical research in most recent years. However, I would like to recall some economic features characterizing the Eastern regions and some main differences between East and West. In my view, these are important whenever we try to explain the existence of Eastern serfdom. I will follow the argument laid out in the important article by Evsey Domar, *The Causes of Slavery and Serfdom. A Hypothesis*,²³ well known to the participants in this congress; although never quoted in their papers. So doing, I will simplify the complexity and will try to look at some main differences between East and West. Attention to details is important, but simplification is sometimes no less important; although not so dear to historians as it is to economists.

It is useful, first of all, to recall Domar's model.²⁴ According to Domar, from the late Middle Ages Eastern Europe was characterised by a particular production factors endowment. Land was the plentiful production factor in the East, while labour was scarce. As a consequence, land per worker being plentiful, marginal productivity of labour was high. Domar assumed that labour marginal productivity was equal to average labour productivity. The consequence was that rent (corresponding to the difference between labour average and marginal productivity) was nil. In this case, if the landowner had requested rent from the peasant family cultivating the land he owned, this same peasant family would have moved to a different location as land to cultivate was abundant. The only way to receive a rent was to bind the family to the land and oblige its members to the payment of a charge in the form of labour services on seigniorial demesne farms. Since the State supported the claims of the landowners,²⁵ this social class succeeded in her aims and the establishment of serfdom was the consequence. "Now –Domar wrote- the employer can derive a rent, not from his land, but from his peasants by appropriating all or most of their income above the subsistence level".²⁶ In Western Europe, serfdom was unnecessary. In this Malthusian economy, the high density of the population and the scanty land per worker had already caused a fall in the marginal product of labour, which was close to the subsistence level. Since marginal labour productivity was lower than average labour productivity, rent already existed without any need of extra-economic coercion.²⁷ In a sense, the introduction of contractual labour relationships in Western Europe depended on the scanty land per worker on this side of the continent.

When Domar wrote his article, our knowledge of the economic conditions of Eastern Europe was more superficial than it is today. However, Domar did very little to support his model with historical evidence. Nowadays, in the light of more recent findings, the historian can not only support Domar's model but also suggest doubts about its explanatory capacity.

²³ E. DOMAR, *The Causes of Slavery and Serfdom. A Hypothesis*, in "Journal of Economic History", 30, 1970, pp. 18-32.

²⁴ See the geometric presentation in the Appendix.

²⁵ The role of the State in the establishment of serfdom is in fact, not easy to define, as shown by S. Ogilvie and T. Dennison in their papers.

²⁶ E. DOMAR, *The Causes of Slavery and Serfdom*, cit., p. 20.

²⁷ See particularly *Ibid.*, p. 23. See also the graph in the following Appendix.

A first approximation of the labour-land ratio can be made by looking at population density. I will refer to the year 1600, when the European population (within the present borders of Europe) was about 100 million and in Eastern Europe there lived a third of the European inhabitants.²⁸ At that time, European density on the whole was 10 inhabitants per km², including Russia (whose extent is half the total extent of Europe), and 20 inhabitants per km² excluding it. Some countries, such as Flanders, The Netherlands and Italy, counted more than 40 inhabitants per km² and France, England and Germany about 30. This Western part of Europe was surrounded by territories whose density was far lower. In Scandinavia the density was less than 3 inhabitants per km² and in Eastern Europe it was between 8 and 15, with Russia with about 3-4.²⁹

Population density is an imperfect proxy of the endowment with land since it also includes those lands that are impossible to cultivate, such as high hills and mountains, marshes and built-up, urban areas. In Western Europe extensive territories could not be cultivated. In Italy, where the density was among the highest, only a third of the surface is plain. The rest is covered with hills and mountains. In terms of arables, Western Europe is poorer than Eastern Europe, where extensive plains exist, particularly suited to cereal cultivation and animal breeding. The ratio labour-productive land is more favourable in Eastern Europe than suggested by the simple density of population. Probably the land-labour ratio was even higher in the tenant sector of Eastern Europe; a further reason to assume that labour productivity was higher.

It is hard to find data on agricultural labour productivity for both the West and the East and attempt to make a comparison. A way to address the problem could be to deflate the agricultural wage by means of the price index of the agricultural product. Since wage represents marginal labour productivity, a ratio between the nominal agricultural wage (W) and the prices of the agricultural goods (P) would supply a measure of the agricultural labour productivity (MPL), that is: $MPL = W/P$.³⁰ Unfortunately we lack information on agricultural wages in Eastern Europe. However, since the wages of agricultural labourers are similar and often identical to those of unskilled workers and we have information on the wages of building labourers, both in Western and Eastern regions, some comparison is possible.³¹ Such a comparison was made by J.L. Van Zanden in an article published in 1999.³²

²⁸ I take the following data from P. MALANIMA, *Pre-modern European Economy. One Thousand Years (10th-19th Centuries)*, Leiden-Boston 2009 (Brill), chap. 1.

²⁹ The relationship between the scarcity of labour and serfdom is stressed by M. NORTH, *Serfdom and Corvée Labour in the Baltic Area 16th-18th Centuries*, and by A. KLEIN, *The Institutions of the "Second Serfdom" and Economic Efficiency: Review of the Existing Evidence for Bohemia*.

³⁰ See G. CLARK, *The Long March of History: Farm Wages, Population and Economic Growth, England 1209-1869*, in "Economic History Review", 60, pp. 97-136, 105.

³¹ On the other hand, urban and rural labour productivity cannot be so diverse for similar jobs, given the competition between urban and rural labourers.

³² J.-L. VAN ZANDEN, *Wages and the Standard of Living in Europe, 1500-1800*, in "European Review of Economic History", 3, 1999, pp. 131-163. As noted by R.C. ALLEN, *The Great Divergence in European Wages and Prices from the Middle Ages to the First World War*, in "Explorations in Economic History", 38, 2001, pp. 411-447, when the Eastern European wages are deflated by means of the price basket of

According to his estimates, the wages of unskilled workers converted into wheat or rye were far higher in Eastern than in Western Europe. At the start of the Seventeenth century these were from twice to even as much as five times those in Western Europe. From these data, could we therefore draw the conclusion that in Eastern Europe labour productivity was higher than in Western Europe? Perhaps! However, we cannot be certain. Where serfdom exists and involves a remarkable share of the population, this share is excluded from the labour market. Consequently the supply of labour is artificially lower than it would be if the labour market were free. The artificial reduction of the labour force engenders a reduction of labour (on the horizontal axis) and a shift of the supply curve which intersects the demand curve in a higher position.³³ The price of labour (on the vertical axis), the wage that is, increases.³⁴

Domar did not distinguish between slavery and serfdom³⁵ and thought that American slavery was similarly caused by the abundance of natural resources (primarily land) and scarcity of labour. American slavery thus corroborated his view. Actually, the early modern spread of slavery occurred on a continent where resources were plentiful, population scanty and labour productivity high. The importation of slaves from the Sixteenth century onward could actually be seen as the consequence of the need of an extra-economic support of margins of profit or rents, where the mere working of the labour market would have eliminated them completely. If a wage had been paid to the forced immigrants to America for their labour, this would have been very high and then rents and profits would have been too low or nil.

Another element of support to Domar's thesis could be ancient slavery. According to some historians, a determinant of slavery in the Roman Republic was the the high labour productivity (together with extra-economic variables, especially war and the possibility of transforming conquered populations into slaves).³⁶ When the pressure of population increased and labour compensation approached the level of mere survival, there was no longer reason to exploit the system of slavery. Since subsistence is the same for both the slave and the free worker, to pay a wage or to pay for the subsistence of the slave implies the same cost. Furthermore, while the

goods, including manufactured goods, wages in Eastern Europe are lower. However, here we are not interested, in real wages and standards of living, but in marginal labour productivity. In this case we have to deflate wages through the price of agricultural goods, represented by the price of cereals.

³³ As shown in the Appendix, Figure 2.

³⁴ When slavery was abolished in the United States, wages of unskilled workers diminished, while the wages of skilled workers rose remarkably. This evidence might suggest that, where a share of the population is excluded from the labour market, the wage of workers in similar occupations is artificially high. See the data in S. LEBERGOTT, *Trends in the American Economy in the Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge (Mass.) 1960 (National Bureau of Economic Research), pp. 449-499.

³⁵ In some cases, such as in early modern Romania, it is hard to distinguish between slavery and serfdom: S. CORLATEANU-GRANCIUC, *La specificità della schiavitù medioevale in Moldova nei secoli XV-XVII, nel contesto della servitù in area rumena*.

³⁶ See the fine article by E. LO CASCIO, *Thinking Slaves and Free in Coordinates*, in *By the Sweat of your Brow. Roman Slavery in its Socio-Economic Setting*, ed. U. ROTH, London 2010 (BICS Supplement-109, The Institute of Classical Studies University of London), pp. 21-30.

organisation of slavery implies a cost of supervision, this cost is eliminated whenever the landowners resort to free labour.

4. CONCLUSIONS

While Domar's approach can be supported by relatively strong evidence, we cannot deny that certain particular developments scarcely fit the picture suggested by his model. I will consider two questions for which it is difficult to find an answer.

The first question concerns geography. Although population density is higher in Western Europe than in the Eastern part, there were regions in early Modern Europe, such as Spain, Portugal, Ireland, and Scandinavia, where the density of population was relatively low. Why did serfdom (although present in some areas) not succeed there as it did in the East? Could the lack of serfdom in these areas be explained by the relatively low availability of fertile land due to the climatic conditions (too dry a climate in Spain and too cold in Scandinavia)?

A second question concerns the chronological developments. Serfdom disappeared in Western Europe in the late Middle Ages, when population was rising and wages were diminishing due to the decline in marginal labour productivity. Since wages were approaching mere survival level there was no reason to have to resort to forced labour services. As shown before, labour was then relatively cheap and the difference between average and marginal labour productivity wide. However, after the Black Death, the density of population diminished fast and the ratio between land and labour underwent a rapid change. Why did serfdom not re-emerge?

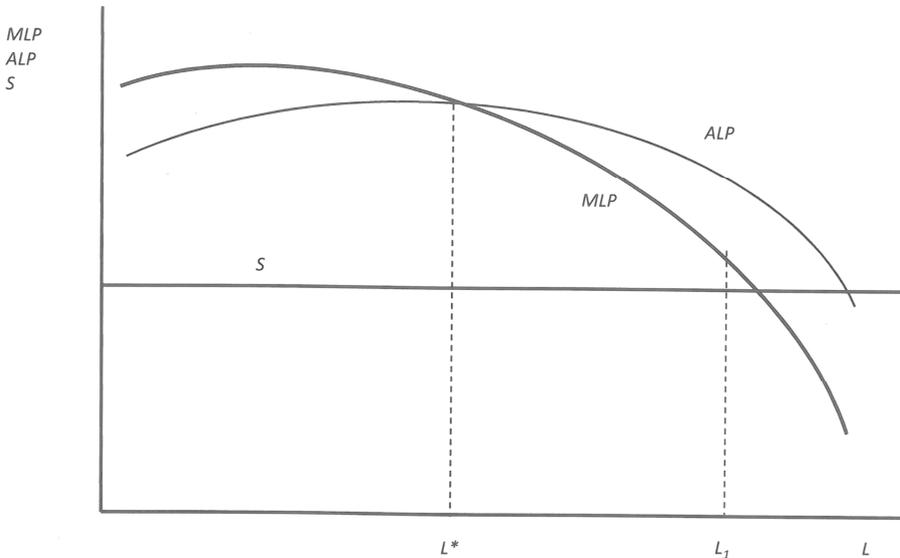
There is no doubt that the explanatory capacity of the economic historian can benefit from the simplification typical of economic theory. The simplification, however, cannot ignore the accumulation of evidence. In any theory there is a breaking point and this breaking point is reached when the simplification cannot deal any longer with the multiplicity of the real evidence. At that point we need a more comprehensive view. Did we reach this breaking point in the case of Domar's model?

APPENDIX

In the following diagram, Domar's model is represented with some liberty and is adjusted to the East-West differences in early Modern Europe. The case of slavery, according to Domar, is similar to that of serfdom. His model could also be used to explain slavery.

In Figure 1, we have, on the horizontal axis the number of agricultural labourers (L). On the vertical axis, we find the level of subsistence (S or the minimum consistent with survival), the average labour productivity (ALP or product per worker) and the marginal labour productivity (MPL). Both S , ALP and MPL could be expressed in constant money or as a quantity of cereals. As soon as the number of workers increases, while the level of subsistence S cannot but be the same (any further worker needs the same amount of food for his survival), MPL firstly increases and then diminishes, due to initial increasing and then diminishing returns to labour. As long as MPL is higher than product per worker, the curve ALP cannot but rise. When the number of workers exceeds the point L^* , ALP starts to diminish. Beyond the point L^* , rent is equal to the difference between ALP and MPL . Then $R=ALP-MPL$ or (where Y is gross product):

Figure 1. Geometric representation of marginal (MPL) and average labour productivity (ALP), as soon as the number of workers (L) rises (the S line is the quantity of product necessary for survival)



Let us now assume that the number of labourers is relatively high: equal to L_1 in our diagram. In this case MPL would be low and close to the level of subsistence

and rent particularly high. There would be no reason for the landowner to claim any *corvée*. Whether *MLP* is a sum of money (or wage) or part of the output of a farm rented by the peasant family (once the rent has been paid), both forms of income, because of the competition among workers, are close to the level of subsistence and cannot diminish much. This is, more or less, the situation we find in Western Europe before the Black Death. *MLP* is low at that time and landowners cannot claim a higher rent from the workers of their lands (neither as labourers nor as tenants). The elimination of serfdom at that time depends on the fact that there is no economic reason to keep serfdom alive (this is not said by Domar, but it is a consequence of his reasoning). In fact, with labour compensation being close to the level of subsistence and having to cover the need for survival for both slave or serf, it is simpler for the landowner to resort to waged labour rather than to the labour of serfs or slaves which in any case need some coordination or control and entail added costs.

According to Domar, the situation in early modern Eastern Europe is far different. In that case, the ratio of the number of workers to the land is lower, there being a lot of land per worker. Let us suppose that the situation is similar to that represented in Figure 1 by the point L^* . In that case, as assumed by Domar, *MLP* is high and equal to *ALP*. There is no rent (the difference between *ALP* and *MLP* is zero). If a landowner claims a rent for the cultivation of his land, the peasant family can move to another location. Land is free. If the landowner chooses the cultivation of his land through waged labour, the wage cannot but be high. In neither case is there a possibility of obtaining a rent, and the only prospect of receiving a rent is to bind the peasant family to the land. If the power of the State supports the action of the landowners (as assumed by Domar) the problem can be solved to their advantage. It is precisely what happened in Eastern Europe. Domar stresses the importance of “the behavior of political factors –governmental measures- treated here as an exogenous variable” (p. 21).

A corollary (not discussed by Domar), is that the effect of the diffusion of serfdom implies an artificially higher level of real wages (Figure 2). Without serfdom the supply of labour is equal to L_1 and the level of real wages equal to W/P_1 (where, that is, labour supply S_1 intersects the curve of the demand for labour). Once serfdom progresses, part of the labour force is subtracted from the free labour market (in the direction of the arrow, from L_1 to L_2). The amount of the labour force on the labour market is lower than before and equal to L_2 . Labour supply shifts from S_1 to S_2 . The real wage (the wage of the free workers) moves from W/P_1 to W/P_2 , in the direction of the arrow. The difference W/P_2 minus W/P_1 is an indirect measure of the inefficiency of the economic system. With the elimination of serfdom, we can expect a decline in real wages from W/P_2 to W/P_1 ; as happened in the United States after the abolition of slavery, in consequence of the sudden increase in the labour force on the free labour market (see footnote 33). Suddenly the curve of the unskilled labour supply shifted to the right and intersected the curve of labour demand in a lower position. The real wages of unskilled workers diminished (relative to those of skilled workers).

Figure 2. Labour demand and labour supply without serfdom and with serfdom

