

Summaries of articles

Virginity without a Hymen

G. SISSA

Although the word hymen is Greek in origin, feminine virginity in Ancient Greece was not identified with a thin membrane. The doctors of the classical period, Aristotle and Galen weren't aware of its existence, while Soranos, a practitioner who wrote in Greek but who taught in Rome, explicitly negated its physiological existence. For him the membrane which in some cases obstructed the sexual organ of young girls was nothing but an abnormality, a tissue that was to be excised.

But above and beyond the existence of the hymen, sexual integrity in women was nonetheless considered an important standard of behavior, as can be seen in one of Solon's laws and from a number of historical and mythical accounts concerning the seduction of young unmarried girls and the punishment they deserved. For the Greeks, virginity without the hymen, was not as much a question of social status (the absence of marriage), as a particular physical representation of the body both closed and intact.

Women and Robert d'Arbrissel

J. DALARUN

Michelet and others after him thought of Robert d'Arbrissel, founder of the double order of Fontevrault at the turn of the XIIth century, as the defender of women's rights. The truth, however is more complex. The success of Fontevrault was due to the conjunction between the man and his public. Robert's followers were all women from the upper social class, all victims of the matrimonial crisis at the end of the XIth and beginning of the XIIth century. Robert's own attitude was ambivalent. He sought out women so that he could put his chastity to the test, and appointed an abbess at the head of his order, thus ensuring religious salvation by means of this unnatural subordination. But he proposed salvation to women as well: not that of Eve or Mary, but of Madalene, the forgiven sinner. If this represents feminine advancement, it is in more subtle terms than is usually implied by the concept.

Alimentation and Ideology: the Chestnuts

A. BRUNETON-GVERNATORI

Within the span of a single century a crop of considerable importance both in terms of commercial and food production almost disappeared completely: namely the French production of chestnuts.

This is generally explained by various specific factors, which tend to overlook the role of representation of food consumption and production. In this case the negative image of chestnuts—accused by the partisan of modernism of being the fruit of a tree rather than the result of human labor, and of slowing down agricultural development and progress in general—played an important role. The devaluation of this food product was accompanied by that of its traditional consumer as well. The internalization of this devaluation is manifest in the evolution of this crop, as is the case in the Third World today for other foodstuffs.

The Extravagant King. Gifts, Constraint and the Origins of the Financial System of the French Monarchy in the Old Regime

A. GUERY

The origins of the modern state lead back in political history to monarchic power. The financial system of the last centuries of the Old Regime, which our own system inherited more than it believes, was still based upon the principle of the extravagant king whose largesse was initially a political means of maintaining power. But the system was already based on one of taxation, where the exercise of the power of one man depended on a contribution from all. The modern state derives from this confrontation between the king as the magnanimous giver and his administrative apparatus, the constraining taker. Throughout the controversy over gifts which developed from the XIVth to the XVth century, and which was followed by the debate over taxes in the XVIIth and XVIIIth centuries it was always this practical aspect of the social contract which was at stake, be it between individuals, groups or society as a whole. It is therefore essential to understand the role of political authority in the interplay of power contrived by social relations.

State and Society in Seventeenth-Century France: Taxation in Languedoc and the Question of Social Distribution

W. BEIK

The rise of the French state is often analyzed in terms of its ability to extract taxes from the population, especially in the seventeenth century when figures for the taille become relatively reliable. However these figures, usually drawn from the work of J. R. Mallet, require close scrutiny. Mallet's figures, representing net revenues to the crown, do not tell us how much money was spent by the king in the provinces without ever reaching the treasury or how much was redistributed to local notables, and his figures for the "pays d'états" are incomplete. This article attempts to set the record straight for Languedoc. It establishes the total amount imposed on the province each year from 1628 to 1686 by the Estates, criticizes Mallet on the basis of this information, and analyzes where the money went in 1647 and 1677. It argues for a social interpretation of the relationship between state and society in which the state is viewed as a distributor of wealth to the provincial elites and not merely as a centralizer of resources and power.

Money and Canadian Finances at the Beginning of the XIXth Century: Transformation of a System

G. PAQUET and J.-P. WALLOT

Although it sketches the longer evolution, this paper studies the emergence of new financial institutions in the 1810's-1820's, in Lower Canada, concomitant with the great discontinuity that stamps the socio-economy at the turn of the XIXth century. Some theoretical considerations on money and financial institutions lead to an analysis of the Canadian financial system, prior to and after this economic transformation. It shows, in particular, the central role played by the state in creating credit, in insuring a steady flow of specie and in stabilizing the financial situation. It is the state again that produced the first large-scale paper-money, during the British Regime: the Army Bills that served to finance the war of 1812-1815. They were the immediate predecessors of the creation of banks, from 1817 on, and of bank-notes. But the Canadian financial system would always be controlled by the state to a greater degree than that of the United States.

Innovations within the American Monetary Institutions and Theorizing (1862-1913). The Greenbacks "Revisited"

R. BOYER and B. CORIAT

This paper surveys the Greenbacks era initiated in 1862 when the Treasury of New York issued a non-convertible paper money intended to finance the Civil War. As regards institutions, the evolution towards a unified US monetary system is the consequence of a very complex social and economic, political and doctrinal process. This episode seems still to have an influence upon contemporaneous discussions of monetary policy. As regards theory, these years 1862-1913 played an important role in the emergence of an American school of economic thought. So W. Mitchell, starting from an institutional point of view, built the quantitative tools for analyzing business cycles. I. Fisher extended quantitative theory to credit money and its relations with the cycles. Could the Greenbacks be the remote origin in the shift from the English political economy to the American economic analysis ?