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Reseña de "Markets and Agricultural Change in Europe from the 13th to the 20th" de Vicente Pinilla (editor)
Ager. Revista de Estudios sobre Despoblación y Desarrollo Rural, núm. 11, octubre, 2011, pp. 139-141
Centro de Estudios sobre la Despoblación y Desarrollo de Áreas Rurales
Zaragoza, España

Available in: http://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=29620045008
The role of the agriculture sector and its interaction with other sectors in the long term process of societal change occupies scholars from many disciplines. The editor of the anthology, Vicente Pinilla, states in the introductory chapter that fundamental changes in the agricultural sector, such as increasing specialization of farms and transition from traditional activities, were facilitated by the growth of urban markets. As a consequence, diversification increased and activities in the industrial and service sectors came to play a greater role in the rural economy. Such transformations had remarkable impact on the rural territory, particularly during the past two centuries. Against this background it is the book’s purpose to explore how the involvement of rural communities in different markets (mainly for agricultural commodities) has influenced the management of rural land in Europe. The topic is tackled with the aim that the contributions of the anthology taken together would result in a general picture covering time and space, from the Middle Ages and onwards and for different parts of Europe.

The disposition is chronological, starting with a contribution by Isabelle Theiller. Theiller looks at the organization of a network of local markets in Normandy in the late Middle Ages, arguing that the impact of these markets was a shift to more inten-
sive farming through higher capital and labor inputs per unit of land along with more demanding systems of crop rotation. The second contribution by José Vicente Serrão claims there was a “silent revolution” taking place over the course of the eighteenth century in Portugal, enriching and reconfiguring the rural landscape and agricultural output, driving the expansion of cultivated land and encouraging implementation of new technologies and investments in agriculture. The driving force according to Serrão was a change in market conditions as a consequence of population and urban growth and colonial demand. The third contribution by Mats Olsson and Patrick Svensson concerns southern Sweden in the eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth century. Through investigations based on new source materials for estimating agricultural production, Olsson and Svensson find that peasants’ reaction market incentives were much greater when institutional conditions were favorable, controlling for the impact of enclosures and land ownership. The fourth contribution by Michael Kopsidis examines the German regions of Ruhr and Westphalia in the mid-nineteenth century. Applying Boserup’s theoretical approach combined with von Thunen’s spatial model for agricultural production in relation to distance to markets, Kopsidis shows that the interplay between market, demographic and ecological factors determined and systematically transformed agriculture.

Making a half-way summary, the first four contributions argue that a demand-push, although strengthened by favorable supply side conditions, caused agricultural change. They emphasize however that conditional factors need to be taken into consideration, such as natural conditions. The fifth contribution by Ramon Garrabou, Enric Tello, Xavier Cussó and Marc Badia-Miró follows this line by investigating how environmental constraints and demographic conditions modulated farmers’ response to market changes. Their area of investigation is the province of Barcelona in the mid-nineteenth century and the authors show that constraining environmental factors and differences in natural endowments in an organically based agriculture determined specialization and thereby growth in the Smithian sense. The sixth contribution by Vicente Pinilla and María Isabel Ayuda analyzes the impact on Spanish agriculture of growing external demand for horticultural products between 1850 and 1935. By comparing Spain and California the different paths taken in the presence of similar market stimuli are investigated. The seventh contribution by Aud Mikkelsen Tretvik studies mid-Norway in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Tretvik shows that market factors were major drivers of agricultural restructuring and for the growth of reindeer herding. Tretvik claims however that adaptation differed due to demographic and environmental factors, but also due to distance from and means of transportation to markets as well as institutional factors such as regulations. The last contribution by
Ann-Catrin Östman examines the interplay of economic growth, co-operative organization and land ownership from a gender perspective. Studying the rural community of Purmo in Western Finland between the 1880s and 1930s, Östman emphasizes the work of women since farms that responded to new opportunities by specializing on dairy farming took advantage of female skills and experience in particular.

As for a critical assessment of the book, one may begin by asking whether its purpose is fulfilled. The answer in the reviewer opinion is yes and fairly well. With such a broadly formulated purpose, the anthology format is a suitable approach. Despite the competent contributions however, the scientific preciseness of the book suffers some because of the same format. A more demarcated purpose broken down into more consequent and precise research questions for the various chapters to deal with could have promoted more profound and coherent results. One advantage with such an approach could be more profound discussions of some key issues on the topic of markets and agricultural change, such as for instance to what extent growth and change was supply or demand driven. Another possible advantage could be a further investigation and discussion of farmers’ susceptibility to market incentives since this constitutes an ever present debate for any scholar dealing with, particularly pre-industrial, agriculture and markets. However, the introductory chapter written by Vicente Pinilla constitutes a crucial building block which creates unity. This is because the chapter introduces some of the most relevant debates and theoretical perspectives along with a chronological summary of the book.

To sum up and conclude it is the reviewer’s opinion that the book gives a competent introduction and summary, along with some new in-depth insights, to the topic of markets and agricultural change. The bibliography is impressive and offers a good point of departure for future research. Moreover, the richness of the book as regards geographical and chronological representation offers interesting reading for anyone interested. The scientific precision of the book as a whole suffers however somewhat due to incoherence, between the different chapters as well as in relation to central debates. This is to some extent remedied by the introductory chapter.

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