

Na ruim zestig pagina's verhelderende achtergrondinformatie volgt de transcriptie van alle brieven, met telkens voor een aantal brieven tegelijk een korte inleiding. Dat is een prettige oplossing omdat de brieven in hapklare hoeveelheden worden aangeboden en er hierdoor een doorlopend chronologisch verhaal ontstaat. De al genoemde namenlijst sluit deze keurig verzorgde en geïllustreerde bronnenuitgave af.

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Thomas Max Safley (ed.), *Labor Before the Industrial Revolution. Work, Technology and their Ecologies in an Age of Early Capitalism*. [Perspectives in Economic and Social History, vol. 55.] (London/New York: Routledge, 2019). xiv, 262 p. ISBN 9780815369950.

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*Labor Before the Industrial Revolution* brings together ten essays which all deal with labour as a lived experience in early modern and medieval Europe. In an introductory chapter, Thomas Max Safley and Leonard N. Rosenband state that in debates on industrialization, the development of capitalism and the growth of a 'modern' economy, generalizations, monolithic views and teleological reasoning are still latent. Whether primacy is attributed to the accumulation of capital, technological progress or a rising consumer demand as the engine of economic growth, labour is most often reduced to a mere factor of production. By contrast, this volume aims to show how labourers themselves were creative agents and played a meaningful role in economic development. Safley and Rosenband moreover plead for a nuanced, contextualized view that recognizes the various requirements posed by different industries for rising productivity. The importance of variety and context is implied by the 'ecological' approach developed by the authors. In essence, this approach implies a consideration of the dynamic and mutually transformative interactions that exist between labourers and their behaviour on the one hand, and the specific environment – comprising the physical setting, social relations, market forces, regulatory regimes and so forth – on the other hand. Variations in the environment create distinctive 'ecologies of work' and render every 'locus of labour' unique. This opens the way to think of multiple forms of capitalism and expose different types of industrialization. Bert de Munck and Jelle Versieren thus aptly speak about genealogies of capitalisms (in plural) in their essay on the commodification of labour.

The contributors to this volume explore the experience of work and how

it interacted with its environment in ten different industries (paper-making, ribbon-making, ceramics, leather trade, harvest work, building, maritime work, glass-making, mercury mining and the illicit economy). Debates on economic growth and industrialization generally revert to the classic example of the textile industry, yet here the editor has chosen to turn our attention to rarely studied forms of labour in this context, which in itself is original and refreshing. Thijs Lambrecht, for example, explains how in the eighteenth century attempts to increase productivity during harvest changed work regimes and labour organization in the cereal plains of Northern France. Large farmers attracted itinerant workers, imposed new wage systems and introduced new tools and technologies. Yet, as these evolutions threatened to dislocate customary work patterns and local social relations, laws were imposed by the government to restore order and balance. Thus, the experience of harvest work was shaped by the dynamic interaction between the labour and product market, technology, social relations and a regulatory framework. The issue of regulation is also addressed by Philippe Minard, who focusses on the adaptations of rules and norms concerning quality control among the London leather trades around 1800. He demonstrates convincingly that the traditional dichotomy between archaic regulations and a modern free market and the narrative suggesting a linear movement towards deregulation are too simplistic.

Another issue touched upon by various authors is the interplay between science, technology and skill. The idea that technological change brought about by science was the source of modern economic growth, as upheld for instance by Joel Mokyr, is clearly refuted in this volume. Rosenband, Safley and Corine Maitte in their essays on paper-making, mercury mining, and glass-production respectively, point out that formalized knowledge disseminated through encyclopaedias or technical manuals, did not render skill redundant. The tacit knowledge and practised judgement of the craftsman remained important in the course of production. Nor was technological innovation a simple top-down process imposed by learned scientists: its success was dependant on the response and receptivity of the labourers themselves in specific environments (as demonstrated by Lambrecht as well). The empirical study of intensified labour in specific industries also challenges Jan de Vries's thesis of an industrious revolution. For one, labourers did not necessarily choose to work more voluntarily. According to Andrea Caracausi, the industriousness displayed by ribbon-weavers was not as much a free choice as a forced consequence of the growing market for this fashionable product. Moreover, specific ecologies, like the Idrija mercury mine with its health hazards, simply did not allow labourers to intensify work.

Together, these essays illustrate the hazards of rational abstractions, generic concepts and grand narratives. Labour and its organization were strongly embed-

ded in a specific and path-dependent context. Work processes, wage regimes and social relations of production were shaped by their unique environment, and in turn influenced this environment, resulting in a multiplicity of ecologies of work. Given the extreme contingency of these ecologies, it must be noted that this approach faces the risk of lapsing into a relativistic stance or delivering a descriptive narration. Some of the contributions in this volume, lacking clear research questions, cannot withstand this last critique completely. In general, however, the conclusions of the individual essays and the approach advocated can surely inspire fresh questions about past production environments. By bringing to the fore the agency of labour and workers and by pointing at the variety of impulses for change, this volume certainly offers a valuable contribution to various topical debates in social and economic history.

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Jaak Slangen, *Tussen gemeynte en landschapspark. Zes generaties boeren op Mortelshof (1829-2005)* (Leiden: eigen uitgave, 2018). 735 p. ISBN 9789081757515.

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In 1829 stichtte een Roermondse brouwer en jeneverstoker een ontginningsboerderij op de Linnerheide tussen Linne en Sint-Odiliënberg. Een kleine twee eeuwen later, in 2005, verkocht de laatste bewoner de grond van het bedrijf aan het Limburgs Landschap, dat er een landschapspark van maakte. De geschiedenis van deze boerderij Mortelshof en haar bewoners is nu beschreven in een lijvig boek van de Leidse historicus Jaak Slangen, die zelf op de boerderij opgroeide. Hij beperkt zich daarbij overigens niet tot de geschiedenis van boerderij en bewoners, maar plaatst die in het kader van de agrarische geschiedenis van Limburg en van de sociaaleconomische geschiedenis van de Roerstreek.

Wat de geschiedenis van de Mortelshof vooral interessant maakt, is dat we hier op microniveau de ontwikkeling van de Nederlandse landbouw in de negentiende en twintigste eeuw weerspiegeld zien. De boerderij werd gesticht op grond van de gemeynte, de gemeenschappelijk gebruikte 'woeste gronden', elders marken genoemd, die in de eerste helft van de negentiende eeuw werden verdeeld of verkocht. De verdeling en geleidelijke ontginning van de marken betekende het begin van de expansie en intensivering van de landbouw op de zandgronden. Die processen zouden in de loop van de twintigste eeuw een geweldige snelheid krijgen. Dat leidde tot een enorme toename van de productiviteit per hectare en aanvankelijk ook nog tot een stijging van het aantal arbeidskrachten in de land-