

among foreign sailors in being treated as a kind of service-internal underclass, but many of them explicitly embraced forms of anti-English Catholicism and anti-monarchical republicanism that led them to sympathize and sometimes collaborate with the failed attempt to start an Irish war for independence in 1798. The officer corps at the time certainly considered their heavy reliance on such a potentially disloyal – if not openly hostile – population a serious issue, and it is odd that Caputo does not.

In her attempt to show how little a man's foreign status mattered, Caputo seems eager to distinguish herself from those historians (the present author included) who have argued that the multinational nature of the eighteenth-century maritime working class had a significant impact on how the age of revolution unfolded across the Atlantic world, onboard ship and on shore. Ignoring the Irish, and more broadly any political affiliations that may have marked a man as alien to the British nation, certainly makes that much easier to accomplish. However, given the considerable contributions of this book, and its potential to have delivered a definite statement on its chosen topic, it is impossible not to feel that the author has missed an important opportunity by simply sidestepping this complication. This does not detract from any of the remarkable insights the book delivers, but it does mean that a more complete synthesis remains to be written.

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FISHER, JAMES D. *The Enclosure of Knowledge. Books, Power, and Agrarian Capitalism in Britain, 1660–1800*. [Cambridge Studies in Early Modern British History.] Cambridge University Press, Cambridge [etc.] 2022. xiii, 330 pp. Ill. £75.00. (E-book: \$99.99.)

Sometimes, you come across a study that parallels your own research, and James Fisher's book from 2022 on agrarian literature in eighteenth-century Britain has similarities with a project I pursued some years ago. My article was published in 2022 in *Agricultural Knowledge Networks in Rural Europe, 1700–2000*,¹ and Fisher has read the conference proceedings. My goal was to follow agricultural treatises over more than two thousand years, from the very beginning until the nineteenth century in Eurasia, but for the later period I had to restrict myself to English-speaking countries and Scandinavia. The latter offers outstanding source material, as not only all books, but also every single article printed in agricultural

¹Janken Myrdal, "Agricultural Literature in Scandinavia and the Anglo-Saxon Countries as an Indicator of a Deep-Rooted Economic Enlightenment, c.1700–1800", in Y. Segers and L. Van Molle (eds), *Agricultural Knowledge Networks in Rural Europe, 1700–2000* (Woodbridge, 2020), pp. 26–49.

journals up to the early nineteenth century have been catalogued and indexed. England is gifted with bibliographies and extensive research.

Agricultural literature has attracted considerable academic attention because it is considered a proxy for an emerging knowledge-based society. Fisher is well-acquainted with the British and American literature, but there is also vibrant scholarship elsewhere, in France and Germany, for example, and it is remarkable that Fisher makes no mention of Dutch scholar Jan Luiten van Zanden, who has done research on book production as an indication of economic change, summarized in his seminal work *The Long Road to the Industrial Revolution*.²

Fisher's book fits neatly into this discourse, and he presents an opinion divergent from the dominant interpretation as he is critical of the idea of books as promoters of useful knowledge to ordinary farmers. He points to the fact – well-known to both contemporaries and modern scholars – that few farmers read the books.

His next step in this line of argument is to claim that books on agriculture registered, or as he phrases it “appropriated”, the existing practical art of husbandry in a bottom-up transfer of knowledge. These books were to a great extent compiled by observation and conversation with farmers: “standing on the shoulders of farmers”. A codification of existing practice was presented for an educated public, and, above all, to the gentleman farmer. The context was the increasing role of the gentleman farmer in English agriculture, and the gentry began to take an active interest in how to farm their estates. Fisher also supposes that this implied a separation between manual labour and writing, though he also gives many examples of how contemporaries underlined the importance of practice, and claimed that farming based only on book learning was doomed to fail. Experimentation became an acceptance of praxis as the test of theory.

More convincing is Fisher's reasoning as to why gentleman farmers needed books. They wanted to reduce their dependence on socially inferior persons, such as the steward or even the ploughman. The master should amass prestigious knowledge superior to that of the ordinary worker. Fisher's conclusion is that books gave control of practical knowledge, and he ends up with a top-down argument: the books became a way for the gentry to establish control. He claims to have put agricultural literature into a socio-economic context in a way that has not been done before.

His method is basically qualitative, and to support his arguments he compiles quotes from the literature from a dataset of about 130 books (he mentions 131, but, according to my calculation, there are actually 128 in his dataset). He has selected books about the practice of farming from England and Scotland from 1669 to 1792 and thirteen periodicals from 1681 to 1808, although the latter do not play an important role in his exemplification. He excluded books with political or economic commentaries and books from Ireland and North America, as well as the real peak of publishing, when the Board of Agriculture began collecting reports from all over the country in 1793.

²Jan Luiten van Zanden, *The Long Road to the Industrial Revolution: The European Economy in a Global Perspective, 1000–1800* (Leiden, 2009).

According to the index in Fisher's book, he quotes from less than half of the books he selected, and a few authors stand out. Two are mentioned on more than thirty occasions: Arthur Young, who published from the 1760s to 1780s, and William Marshall, who published in the 1780s and 1790s. Eight other authors are mentioned about ten times each, the rest only a few times. This bias follows from the method of finding the most revealing texts, and thus the famous authorities stand out.

He presents all the titles in an appendix, but he has left it to others to utilize this database. I calculated the distribution of publication dates and it has a basic resemblance to the change in the publication frequency for all agricultural literature. After an increase in the first half of the eighteenth century a dip followed, a new push forward came in the 1770s, and after a short period of decline the curve rose steeply in the 1790s. The only real difference is that practical literature had already started to decline in the 1740s. Perhaps we can interpret this pattern in terms of setbacks, when books about agriculture did not deliver as hoped, but then a new expansion appeared with more publications, inspired by the main tendency in economic Enlightenment. Scotland saw a relatively faster increase in agrarian book production at the end of the century, and had Fisher included North America he would have found that the same held true for this part of the Anglophone world. In Scandinavia as well, the periphery saw a relative increase in the number of agrarian publications, and this was likely a pan-European pattern, as more regions began to publish agricultural books and articles.

In his appendix, Fisher includes new editions, but they are not often addressed in his main text. The new editions are nearly as numerous as the original editions, and an interesting pattern emerges. Up to the early eighteenth century, more than half the books were published in one or more new editions, after which this proportion decreased. We see this clearly if we look at the number of titles. During the first forty years, about twice as many new editions were published as original titles. This figure subsequently declined, and by the end of the period the number of original titles surpassed new editions by about fifty per cent. Again, the same pattern occurred in Scandinavia. The explanation is probably that novelty was increasingly appreciated, and that agrarian change made older publications obsolete. Fisher also includes quotes that indicate a shift in opinion in the later part of the eighteenth century, when older books became a less legitimate source of knowledge.

Though Fisher's study focuses wholly on practical books, the details of farming are not discussed. Fisher refers to change as being incremental and stresses that practical knowledge was closely related to the socio-economic sphere. Had he addressed such issues, articles have an advantage over books because they normally focus on one specific topic. In my Scandinavian study, I was able to prove that the agricultural articles discussed topics simultaneously with real changes (new types of harrow were discussed when they began to appear in the countryside, and so on). This sustains Fisher's claim that the literature was following rather than leading farming, because if literature had been promoting change the discussions in the articles would have preceded change on the ground.

England has singular socio-economic characteristics, and the gentleman farmer is a more prominent figure here than in many other parts of Europe, where instead the free

farmer, the peasant, dominated the social fabric of the countryside. In both Germany and France, the agricultural enlightenment encompassed ambitious attempts to reach out to the ordinary farmer with information. Nevertheless, in these parts of Europe as well, the agricultural literature was read mainly by wealthy estate owners, and gradually also by large farmers, who made up a social stratum of increasing importance.

One last critical point: instead of merely a division between head and hand, the great stride forward was an acceptance of practical knowledge as the foundation of agricultural science and theory. This is already apparent in some of the quotes in Fisher's book, but there is another book that explores nearly the same theme, the social history of knowledge: Verena Lehmbrock's, *Der denkende Landwirt. Agrarwissen und Aufklärung in Deutschland 1750–1820*.³ She goes deeper in her analyses and shows that there was a true cleavage between theory and practice in the German debate, but that this eventually evolved into an acceptance of the melding of hand and mind. With the arrival of German agronomist Albrecht Thaer, this became the model in the early nineteenth century. Lehmbrock also explains that this experimental, hands-on agriculture was established first in England and later became dominant in Germany.

Fisher's book has important assets. He shows that the agricultural literature reflected farming as it was rather than led it, and that the gentleman farmer wanted to gain control over knowledge when agriculture became an honourable pursuit for elite landowners. However, Fisher's interpretation of a split between theory and practice needs to be further developed. I would argue that it could be understood as a dialectical process in which the reuniting of hand and mind was turned into a synthesis: the applied science that later became of paramount importance to technological and economic change.

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KENEZ, PETER. *Before the Uprising. Hungary under Communism, 1949–1956*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge [etc.] 2022. viii, 281 pp. Ill. £75.00. (E-book: \$99.99.)

After World War II, the countries that became part of the Soviet zone built a party-state system on the model of the Soviet Union. However, this was far from being a slavish copy of a master plan. On the one hand, no such master plan existed. On the other, national and local characteristics determined how the apparatus and citizens implemented the decisions taken at the centre of the party. The different turns and breaking points also show that – despite the common

³Verena Lehmbrock, *Der denkende Landwirt. Agrarwissen und Aufklärung in Deutschland 1750–1820* (Cologne, 2020).