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# THE JOURNAL OF EUROPEAN ECONOMIC HISTORY: ITS FIRST TWENTY YEARS

(1972 - 1992)

## Introduction

When Luigi De Rosa invited me to write an account of what was then the first twenty years of history of the *Journal* I accepted without realising the scale of the work which this would involve. That, together with a full-time commitment at Cambridge, supplemented by an array of other obligations, goes a long way to explain, and I hope will to some extent excuse, the inordinate delays in bringing the task to a conclusion. A choice presented itself at the outset: one option was that of an impressionistic, bland and generalised essay, whereby the main trends in the life of the *Journal* could be sketched subjectively, with the occasional highlight, and this could preface the publication of the various indexes. A heavy pudding would thus be covered and disguised with a cream topping. However, such a brief exercise was clearly not the intention of the editor or the Bank. The inevitable alternative was to produce quantified break-downs of the contents of the *Journal* by contributors, by the category of contributions, by period, by the countries (or regions) to which contributions related and — above all — by subject. Only on the basis of such systematic counts could a more detailed assessment be made and the exact profiles of the *Journal* revealed, upon which assessments could be established. Apart from the labour, this demanded difficult, but inescapable, problems of interpretation involving double or multiple counting under different heads.

The necessary basis of the analysis was provided by the three computerised indexes made by Dr. Costanza D'Elia of the *Istituto di studi sull'economia del Mezzogiorno nell'età moderna* (C.N.R) of

Naples. These were the index of authors, in alphabetical order for all categories of contributions, including book reviews; the list of contents, chronologically by volumes but with the authors contributing to each volume listed alphabetically. Again, all categories of contributions are listed. Both these indexes are 'discrete' in the sense that no duplication exists in the content of either. However, this cannot be the case with the third index — that construed by subject categories. Some detailed comments are made in the appropriate places in the text but the reader should be alerted here to the issues. In the first place duplication occurs where an article is listed by the geographical location to which its contents related (town, locality, region, country, etc) with the possibility of appearing more than once in such a distribution e.g. under 'Barcelona' and under 'Glasgow', where both places are the subject of the article, or 'Brazil', 'Europe' and the 'United States'. There is no duplication between articles cited under the name of a town and those cited under the name of the country in which the town is to be found (e.g. 'Cologne' and 'Germany', 'Florence' and 'Italy').

Further multiple entries for single articles occur where a contribution is cited both under a spatial/geographic category and a topic category (e.g. 'Paris', 'Amsterdam', 'Venice', 'cultural factors', 'Balkans', 'Italy', 'Trade', 'International Trade'). The greatest number of multiple entries are occasioned when the same article is listed under different topic headings (e.g. 'banking', 'money', 'usury'; 'agriculture', 'dualism'). This is entirely justified to make it possible to 'finesse' subjects — any reader wanting to check the entries under a topic of particular interest will want to know all the contributions relating in whole or in part to that topic, and one major theme — such as 'trade' or 'demography' or 'technological innovation' and technology — will have many more specialised topics within it. Multiple counting is inevitable with a much-subdivided subject index of this sort. However, the convenience for the individual reader is bought at a cost when it comes to making generalisations about the distribution of contents. Re-aggregation is required for such purposes and this has been attempted in certain tables and counts made in the text.

The subject categories chosen for itemisation are those of Dr. D'Elia rather than myself (except for the regroupings which I imposed on those categories originating from her work), which are inevitably subjective to a degree. Dr. D'Elia's labours were immense (and tedious) but she knows that this text could not have been written without the foundations she provided and I pay tribute to her notable achievement.

Dr. Johnson considered that "when writing history all the greatest powers of the human mind are quiescent". While not accepting the assertion for the highest flights of history-writing I have been conscious of its force many times when working on this text. It has been an equivocal sort of commitment — neither creative nor original in research, depending always on second- or third-hand data, utilising the work of others collectively (if not seeking to make personal assessments of individual articles). Indeed, in my view, lack of creativity is a necessary attribute and objective to such a task — it would be wrong to impose personal predilections and priorities onto what is meant to be objective *rapportage* and analysis. I should make it clear, however, that I have had complete freedom in writing this work, neither the editor nor the Bank imposing conditions or altering the text.

Dr. Johnson mitigated his severity of judgement in another context by admitting that "the writer is not wholly useless who merely diversifies the surface of knowledge and calls us back for a second view". An exercise such as this — of the second order of status historiographically (in not being an original work of scholarship) — has its own utility. I had no personal experience in undertaking a comparable work — this has been a question of learning the violin while giving the concert — nor am I familiar with a precedent for putting any other contemporary learned journal under inspection in this way. This itself poses a problem when seeking to draw general conclusions about the *Journal*. The study will make clear the contents of the *Journal* since its inception, the various profiles and distributions which an analysis of its indexes makes possible. The external context and the institutional basis are also clear — how it was conceived,

launched and funded; how it has been organised and edited, what has been the scale and distribution of its print-run.

This information is intrinsically significant because the *Journal* is a major presence in the subject. But, beyond that, one needs comparisons to be able to enhance that significance. In what ways is the *Journal* unique, putting its own stamp on the evolution of the subject? Has it led trends in the historiography of economic and social history? How do the distribution and trends compare with those revealed by other journals? What other journals could be taken as the norm for comparisons — the *Economic History Review*, the *Journal of Economic History*, *Annales*? But each of these, as any other journal, has its own style, reflects a national tradition, draws on its own catchment area, responds to how it is sponsored and edited, is self-selective for would-be contributors by its established reputation, depends upon levels of expectation. Is there, in fact, any quantified scale for the output of economic and social history as a whole which would provide such a template against which the record of the *Journal* could be judged? Is there a total record for the contents of all 'significant' economic and social history journals? And what of those articles in the subject which were published in journals orientated to other social sciences? Clearly there is no definitive population from which to create such an aggregate index against which to test the contents of a single journal. The creation of vast data bases, built up from the 'contents pages' of a very large number of journals, with computer access, offers a way forward in principle. However, choices (and hence discretionary judgements) would still have to be made at the margin, the labour would be immense and the cost (for access to the data bases) considerable. There might be an alternative strategy of using published bibliographies of books (for example, the British National Bibliography, Library of Congress catalogue etc.) for the comparison but this would not necessarily be comparing like with like and the labour input would also be immense. Needless to say, these other exercises have not been performed on comparable lines, even for any main-line journals, and it is no part of the present commitment to attempt any.

The other dimension of 'bibliometry' to be considered — at least in the abstract — is that of seeking a mode of assessment to reveal quality and influence as distinct from mere quantitative distributions. This also requires comparison with other journals. Scholars may be subject to a 'citation' count in referred journals, and this procedure can be reversed in compiling a citation index which records the extent of citation, and therefore the degree of influence, of the journal in question in comparison with other journals. This exercise has also not been performed and would require large new inputs to achieve. It is as well to acknowledge the limitations of what this analysis sets out to do as well as its positive contents. By any criteria, however, the *Journal* is a major presence in the firmament of economic and social history journals so that construing its contributions is of intrinsic significance, irrespective of comparisons.

The *Journal* has unusual, if not unique features. Most academic journals in other western countries are 'owned' — that is founded and organised under the auspices of a learned society. In certain cases (such as the Economic History Society in the UK, or the Economic History Association in North America) the principal activity of the society is to publish its journal and membership of the society is the means of funding the journal. There may be differential subscriptions for individual and library or institutional members and, in effect, only individual members would be active in the constitutional operation of the society (by electing members to the council or executive committee, voting at annual general meetings, etc). Anyone can become a member of such a society which is international in membership and anyone can usually buy individual copies. The journal may be published (in a formal sense) by a commercial publisher but the copyright to contents would normally be held by the society and individual contributors, and academic authority would be exercised by the editors responsible to an editorial board and/or the council of the society. It would be the society, acting through its council, or executive body, which would appoint the editor and be responsible for its finances. Subscription levels for individual members would be the responsibility of the society (because,

technically, this is a membership fee rather than a journal subscription). A commercial publisher might require control over the level of institutional subscriptions and might take contractual publishing liability for the journal in the short run. But the sponsoring society retains ultimate control and responsibility, editorial and financial. This is normally made clear in a preliminary page. The society, the publishers (or printers) and the editors would disavow responsibility for the views expressed by contributors.

This sets out the constitutional position of journals 'owned' by a society which is ultimately responsible to its members, with their views being made known indirectly through the council/executive committee or directly at the annual general meetings. The powers of the editorial board/committee will vary but this is normally advisory to the editors. Complaints may reach editors via members of the editorial board and the editors could, of course, consult such members about an individual article (although refereeing would range much more widely) and in the case of any special problems where advice was needed.

Where an academic journal is owned by a publisher rather than by a society, clearly, the publisher will take all the major decisions about format, prices and the general academic terms of reference. The publisher would also take the final responsibility in appointing the editor, even if advised by an editorial board or other *ad hoc* group with academic status. The publisher would normally own the copyright of whole issues with authors maintaining rights over their individual contributions. Academic independence — and academic status — would be maintained by the publishers/owners not interfering with the academic autonomy of the editors over the choice of contributions for publication. Editors would need to keep within an agreed budget and the publisher would have discretionary power to close down the journal or to sell it on.

Setting out these provisions is to underline the particular characteristics of the *Journal of European Economic History*. Being initiated, sponsored and financed by the Banca di Roma sets a precedent for an academically-independent learned journal which is

unusual (but not unique) in Italy but virtually unknown elsewhere. Banks not uncommonly publish their own journals in the field of money and banking, usually on a much reduced scale, which enjoy academic standing, but not a fully-fledged journal devoted to economic history, distributed without charge. With the Banca di Roma and the *Journal of European Economic History* the Bank does not just offer a financial subsidy to a commercial publisher or society but itself owns and organises the journal, providing office space, secretarial and other infrastructure support, being itself the registered publisher. The Bank took the decision to initiate and sponsor the *Journal* encouraged (if not prompted) by Professor De Rosa. The motives of the Bank in taking this decision are sketched out in the text (pp. 453-464)

The *Journal* has never been openly available to would-be buyers at the price of a subscription for current numbers, but distributed free on a discretionary basis. This has been largely determined on the advice of the editor, up to the budgetary limit which determines the number of copies which can be printed and distributed. In practice, priority has been given to the libraries of universities and colleges (with encouragement for exchanges with other journals) although many individual scholars receive copies and the Bank maintains its own internal distribution list (as it has, of course, for its other sponsored publications on contemporary financial and economic affairs). The *Journal* is fully in the public domain according to Italian public law. Emphasising the latter principle is the arrangement that volumes i-xx are kept in print by a German re-print house (Schmidt Periodicals of Bad Feilnbach) and available for purchase at a charge (thereby relieving the Bank of storage, distribution and reprinting costs). Doubtless the reprint rights for subsequent groups of volumes will be transferred in due course. The Bank exercises no editorial control over the choice or content of articles, which belongs entirely to the editor, within the financial parameters agreed and the broad objectives established at the outset of the initiative (which have not changed).

In 1972 the *Journal* was launched under Professor De Rosa's

editorship and so continues. There is an editorial board, membership of which is long-standing and terminable (judging by results) mainly by death; but this offers a general academic imprimatur rather than being invoked to generate advice (or, indeed, a critique) to the editor. Members of the editorial board would be approached on an individual basis and would-be authors or those hoping to get on the circulation list would see members of the board as intermediaries with the editor. All this has worked personally and informally — in contrast to the more structured arrangements current in other journals, and its success is to be judged by the results. The same is also true for the refereeing of articles submitted — this has not followed a formal procedure but personal consultations often lay behind decisions to reject, modify or publish. Again, success is to be judged by the high general standards maintained. Unusually, contributors receive an honorarium for texts published in the *Journal*, as contributors to the journals of learned societies in the humanities customarily do not. This convention goes with the sponsorship of the Bank and may give the editor some slight advantage with competitors.

In another sense, also, the *Journal* is the personal achievement of its editor. For most of the main-line articles, notes and debates, Luigi De Rosa has acted in a 'responsive' rather than 'directive' mode: articles are submitted at the initiative of their authors and submitted to the decision of the editor. This is in the tradition of many academic journals, as it is for many academic publishers, particularly those of traditionalist views. They would maintain that their position is that of the old-style conventional lady: she does not take initiatives or make propositions but awaits proposals and accepts those which meet her expectations. However, that is not the whole story. Individual submissions have been prompted (as I have reason to know) but more important have been the special categories of the *Journal* reserved for conference reports, review articles, reports on other journals and tributes to individual historians. These are regular features, with the objective of keeping a finger on the pulse of the subject, bringing readers up to date with recent research and current interpretations of major issues in the field, and generally serving an 'information role' in

contrast to the results of new research embodied in main-line articles, which push back the frontiers of knowledge. All these categories of contributions, which make the contents of the *Journal* more diversified than some others, result from the editor's initiative and set his stamp on its structure.

The end of this introduction is the appropriate point at which to acknowledge how much the *Journal* — and the Bank — owes to Luigi De Rosa. The *Journal* is his achievement. He created it as an academic venture, devised its terms of reference in all the operational ways, gave it full momentum from the first issue and has sustained it with unflagging energy and commitment ever since. He has done this for a quarter of a century — a remarkable achievement. If we had those missing comparative statistics from other journals we would surely find that Luigi De Rosa's record is unique. Not the least important aspect of this achievement has been the maintenance of mutual confidence between the editor and the Banca di Roma. This continuity has also been extraordinary: clearly the confidence of the Bank has been a precondition for the *Journal's* continuing existence; the extent of the resources devoted by the Bank to the *Journal* is a measure of this. Having now studied the entire corpus of the *Journal* in detail I am more aware of the extent of its contribution in promoting the subject than most academics. We must all hope that the Banca di Roma, in retrospect, is content with its original decision to sponsor the *Journal* and believes that its support over a generation has been justified. Economic historians owe the Bank — and the editor — a vote of thanks.

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## Note

Some disavowals are required. Time and space precluded every contribution to the *Journal* being cited in the text. Even some articles which drew critiques have not been mentioned individually, although all are obviously to be found in the indexes. I apologise to any author who feels misrepresented as well as unfairly unrepresented in my citations. This will also apply to the commentary. Although seeking to document the *Journal* as objectively as possible, construing trends, identifying particular themes for discussion and choosing high-lights will reflect my own perceptions and priorities, which may well be contested by others. I also apologise for any mistakes and factual errors which may have survived the scrutiny of the proofs.

P. M.