

Jean-Louis Gaulin and Susanne Rau

Configuration of European fairs: an introduction

Why a history of fairs? A starting point from the present

Anyone interested in the origins of products for sale on the market today—whether in shops, boutiques, or supermarkets, physical or online—will easily be able to identify where they came from, either because various regulations require the origin or place of production to be indicated, or because such labelling may have tax advantages. Moreover, we often come across labels stating that the products come from the region close to the point of purchase or that they are a contribution to sustainability. These are not signs of nostalgia—a belief that things in the past were better—nor a reversal of the globalisation of trade in goods. On the contrary, the public at large has grown more and more aware of the fact that the availability of all products or goods at all times and in all places (for instance, fresh grapes from the southern hemisphere that are available in a supermarket in Germany or France in January) is not a simple luxury: consumption of such products can have several detrimental effects on the environment and society. There are still no import bans in place, but ethical considerations are becoming increasingly important—for both buyers and sellers. Of course, this leads to different behaviours. Just as there is a growing tendency to buy local or regional rather than global products, shopping in large supermarkets (*hypermarché* in French) in the urban periphery is being questioned, and shopping in smaller shops in the city centre or at the weekly market is becoming attractive again. This has created a new tension between globalisation and regionality. This potent vector of globalisation produced by the great liberalisation of economies over time has been thrown into question, as noted by the French economist Thomas Piketty: “Commerce must become again what it should never have ceased being: a means to higher goals.”¹

If we want to understand the origins of the current configuration of international trade in more detail, it is necessary to ask questions about the relationship

1 On the metamorphoses of capital since the eighteenth century, produced not only by the market but also by income and inherited wealth, see the book by Thomas Piketty and the debate surrounding it: Thomas Piketty. *Le capital au XXI^e siècle*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2013. This quote is taken from his blog: <https://www.lemonde.fr/blog/piketty/2016/11/15/pour-une-autre-mondialisation/> (14 August 2024).

between the spatiality and temporality of commerce. This is the subject of the French-German research project *Configurations of European Fairs. Merchants, Objects, Routes (1350–1600)* (CoMOR).² From the perspective of a long-term history of markets and consumption, criticism of the near-universal availability of goods is a relatively recent phenomenon. The coronavirus pandemic and the disruption of global and local supply chains it entailed brought new challenges to the narrative of liberal economics.

If we consider the long history of economic exchange and consumption and the organisation of long-distance trade before the Industrial Revolution and the rise of the liberal economy, we inevitably come to the often-overlooked historical subject of markets and fairs (as opposed to the subject of *economics*). As the backbone of trade, payments, and commercial communication, fairs have played a key role over several centuries by mediating (along with the long-distance traders) between distant lands (and the products and financial instruments hailing from them) as well as local merchants and consumers. They were places where merchants had to go to buy large quantities of goods brought from afar and where they settled their accounts (debts), often with complex financial instruments. At fairs, traders could learn about products, establish contacts, and build up the trust that underpinned the exchanges which often incurred debts entailing multiple layers of transactions in place and time. These fairs were much larger than the weekly local markets, and yet they took place in the city or very close to it and were integrated into local cultural life. Like the local markets, they were far from the anonymous interactions that we have come to experience in the modern liberal market economy. Even well before the nineteenth century, however, these commercial exchanges not only took place in geographically defined places—the physical fair locations—they had already created connections across great distances and, after the development of cashless transactions with ledgers of periodic reconciliation, resulted in virtual, invisible spaces by bringing several currency zones into exchange with one another. Incidentally, it was not only an ethical or moral economy that protected against the anonymity of markets typical

² Funded by the Agence nationale de la recherche (ANR-19-FRAL-0001) and the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG project number 430627254), the project “Configurations of European fairs: Merchants, objects, routes, 1350–1600” (CoMOR) was also supported by several teaching and research institutions. Our thanks go to the Universities of Erfurt and Leipzig and, in Lyon, to the CIHAM-UMR 5648 and the École normale supérieure. Special thanks go to Ulf Christian Ewert and Heinrich Lang for reading an earlier version of this introduction and providing important feedback. Jean-Paul Rehr translated the French parts of the original version into English and proofread the entire text. We are deeply grateful to him for his commitment to the CoMOR project.

of our modern era but also the so-called “economy of privilege”: the holding of markets or fairs was usually granted or formally instituted by a sovereign ruler.³

The starting point of CoMOR’s research agenda was the rich literature in the economic history of trade fairs. The traditional approach of this economic history has been to concentrate on institutions, with attempts at integrating the spatial and temporal dimensions of fairs into their analysis.⁴ CoMOR’s focus in particular is on researching the relations between space, time, and social connections in relation to the commercial exchanges at fairs. There are advantages to describing and analysing the historical development of trade fairs in more detail from a spatial and temporal perspective. This raises questions such as how places and spaces of economic exchange were created; what role was played by proximity or locality; how distances were overcome; how temporal sequences in exchange were created and used; which institutions and trade practices influenced the configuration of economic exchange; and which techniques of space-time management contributed to generating economic profits.⁵ This scheme of questions is instrumental to our analysis for two reasons: first, the tangled, layered interplay of agents, institutions, and locations of commercial exchange can be examined; second, commercial spaces can be reconstructed not only on a geographical basis—as done in former approaches—but it is now also possible to take agents’ relationships into account, and thus to reconstruct commercial space on a relational basis.

To better understand the pre-modern configuration of periodic markets and their own inherent dynamics, we must first go further back in history and ask the contemporaries what they understood as ‘markets’ or ‘fairs.’ In the course of research done by the CoMOR project, a number of historical figures stood out for their ability to express what fairs meant to them. Here, we look briefly at four of

3 Markus A. Denzel (ed.). *Europäische Messegeschichte 9.–19. Jahrhundert*. Cologne, Weimar, Vienna: Böhlau, 2018; Guillaume Garner (ed.). *Die Ökonomie des Privilegs, Westeuropa 16.–19. Jahrhundert/L'économie du privilège, Europe occidentale XVI^e–XIX^e siècles*. Frankfurt: Klostermann, 2016; Douglass C. North. *Institutions, Institutional Design and Economic Performance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

4 Examples can be found in the following works: Simonetta Cavaciocchi (ed.). *Fiere e mercati nella integrazione delle economie europee secc. XIII–XVIII*. Florence: Le Monnier, 2001; Franz Irsigler, Michel Pauly (eds.). *Messen, Jahrmärkte und Stadtentwicklung in Europa/Foires, marchés annuels et développement urbain en Europe*. Trier: Porta Alba, 2007.

5 For an introduction to historical spatial analysis, see Susanne Rau. *History, space, and place*. New York: Routledge, 2019, esp. 100–104 on trade and spaces. <https://www.routledge.com/History-Space-and-Place/Rau/p/book/9780367660307/> (15 August 2024); for the German version, see Susanne Rau. *Räume. Konzepte—Wahrnehmungen—Nutzungen*. 2nd ed. Frankfurt: Campus, 2017, 157–164, esp. the chapter “Handel: Interaktionsbeziehungen, die Räume hervorbringen.”

them who lived between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries: the Florentine Francesco Pegolotti, famous for his *Pratica di Mercatura*; the Marquis (and novelist) Tommaso di Saluzzo, author of the courtly novel *Le livre du Chevalier errant*; the Nuremberg merchant and arithmetician Lorenz Meder, compiler of the first known merchant manual printed in German, the *Handel Buch* (which is also the first known merchant manual printed in German); and lastly, Andreas Ryff, a modest merchant from Basel who recorded his business travels in a rare diary.

Fairs and markets: testimonials from the past

The Florentine Francesco di Balduccio Pegolotti, agent of the Bardi company at Anvers, London, and Cyprus, owes his fame to a work he created around 1340, the so-called *Pratica della Mercatura*. In this work, he compiled various types of information useful to conducting commerce across a vast space, extending from the trading posts at La Tana on the Azov Sea to the western Mediterranean, from Morocco to northern Europe via Atlantic routes. Yet, before detailing the merchant haunts with which he was familiar, Pegolotti established a nomenclature of the places of commerce (*luogora*) for himself and his readers:

Mercato in Toscana, e
 Piazza in più lingue.
 Bazarra e raba in genovesco.
 Fondaco in più lingue.
 Fonda in Cipri.
 Alla in fiammingo.
 Sugo in saracinesco.
 Fiera in Toscana e in più linguaggi.
 Panichiero in grechesco.⁶

These terms indicating the locations of markets come from the regions familiar to the great Tuscan trading companies of the period—Tuscany itself, Liguria, Flanders, the Maghreb, the Byzantine world, and Cyprus. Some among them, according to Pegolotti, were easily understandable “in many languages,” such as *piazza*, *mercato*, *fondaco*, as well as *fiera*. Others—more rare—were known to the Florentine merchant in the Genoese language, such as *bazarra* and *raba*—the latter per-

⁶ Francesco Balducci Pegolotti. *La pratica della mercatura*, Allan Evans (ed.). Cambridge, MA: Medieval Academy of America, 1936, 17; Maria Elisa Soldani. Pegolotti, Francesco di Balduccio di. In *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*. Rome: Treccani, 82 (2015): 86–89. <https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/francesco-balducci-pegolotti/> (04 September 2023).

haps related to the Arab *ribāt*⁷—or through Byzantine Greek, such *panichiero*, which likely stems from the antique ‘panegyric.’ Pegolotti adds that these places of mercantile activity are of two types: some function continually (*continuamente*), while others are periodic and follow a weekly or monthly rhythm (*a certi tempi ordinati della settimana o vero mesi dell’anno*). In the pages that follow, Pegolotti reviews those places where profitable business can be made in particular. For each one, he details those products (*mercantie*) that can be acquired there, with the weights and measures in force, the monies accepted, and indicates from time to time the customs and practices which a merchant may find useful. Moreover, Pegolotti provides his readers with conversion tables of those weights and measures used by the different merchant locations in such detail that one can reconstitute the spaces of exchange, with their places and their routes, that composed his mercantile worldview.

Of course, the Florentine author makes mention of the *fiere*. Although by this point they had begun their decline, the famous Champagne Fairs were still in a good position relative to those of Flanders, as well as those of Chalon-sur-Saône which, in particular, had a bright future ahead of them. Shifting focus to an entirely different zone, Pegolotti recounts the numerous fairs of the Kingdom of Naples, in Campania, and Puglia. For each of these fairs, he indicates the dates of the year on which they take place—indispensable calendars for merchants. In the same vein, his manual contains an Easter table for the years 1340 to 1465 (with a few errors).⁸

Despite Pegolotti’s belief that the term *fiera* was widely known, other words were available to designate the great periodic markets. Aside from the scientific discussion between historians on how to define a fair, the question of the vocabulary used in medieval and early modern sources is worthy of merit and thus central to our research. In the learned language of the period, Latin, ‘*nundinae*’ is the term of reference. In a reversal of meaning over time, this term, which originally designated the weekly markets in ancient Rome, came to indicate meetings of re-

7 In the Genoese context, ‘*raba*’ in the Middle Ages indicated the sole marketplace where the sale of grains was permitted. See <https://www.gdli.it/sala-lettura/vol/15?seq=183> (07 October 2024). Although the *Grande dizionario della lingua italiana* suggests that ‘*raba*’ refers to the French ‘*rève*’ (tax at the border), the term may be more related to the Arabic term ‘*ribāt*’ which, in the early days of Islam, designated a small fortification built along a border. *Ribāt*—which lent its name to Rabat, capital of Morocco—also means ‘hospice’, ‘inn’, ‘retreat.’ We are grateful to Lahcen Daaïf (Université Lyon 2) for sharing his linguistic expertise.

8 Pegolotti, *Pratica, ad indicem*. The fair at Chalon is mentioned without dates (“fiere di Celona in Borgogna”, foires de Chalon: 232). The “Tavola della Pasqua” can be found on pages 324–325.

duced frequency, once or twice, maybe four times per year.⁹ ‘*Mercatum*,’ on the other hand, was either a general term for a market among jurists (*ius mercati*), or the simpler weekly rural or urban market. Yet, the term ‘*nundinae*’ did not pass into the vernacular languages whose vocabulary most often borrowed the Latin ‘*feria*,’¹⁰ from which are derived ‘fair’, ‘foire’, ‘fiera’, ‘feria,’ among others. In German, the word ‘*Messe*’ became the usual term—another reminder of the link between religious celebrations and commercial activity—but not exclusively, with the terms ‘*meß*,’ ‘*marckt*,’ or ‘*jarmarckt*’ being used without much differentiation in official documentation. In the same fashion, Old Dutch had the word ‘*kermis*’ (or ‘*kermes*’), which resulted from a contraction of ‘*kerk*’ (church) and ‘*mis*’ (holy mass).¹¹

Half a century after the merchant Pegolotti, in an entirely different context, the noble marquis Tommaso III di Saluzzo evidenced a clear understanding of the details of fairs as the great periodic markets that animated urban life. Whether his work, the *Livre du chevalier errant*, written in French, was undertaken while the author was a prisoner of the Count of Savoy in Turin in 1394 or written (perhaps completed) when the author was in Paris where he found himself at the beginning of the fifteenth century, is of secondary interest to us. The most important—and also unexpected—event is the incorporation of an episode in which the scene is set in a “noble and beautiful city” hosting a fair into the knight’s various rites of passage, where he is accompanied by Love, Fortune, and Knowledge. The author, who colours his narration with a panoply of elements, delivers a very personal and effective description of the fair’s characteristics: the multitudes, the diversity of their geographic origins, the duration of sojourns (several days which require overnight stays), and the variety of merchandise.¹² Tommaso even fea-

9 On the roman periodical markets, see: Lukas de Ligt. *Fairs and Markets in the Roman Empire. Economic and Social Aspects of Periodic Trade in a Preindustrial Society*. Amsterdam: Giesen, 1993; Jörg Rüpke. *Nundinae: Kalendarische Koordination im republikanischen Rom*. In *Kommunikation in politischen und kultischen Gemeinschaften. Stätten und Formen der Kommunikation im Altertum V*, Gerhard Binder, Konrad Ehlich (eds.). Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 1996, 75–98; Elio Lo Cascio (ed.). *Mercati permanenti e mercati periodici nel mondo romano. Atti degli Incontri capresi di storia dell’economia antica, Capri 13-15 ottobre 1997*. Bari: Edipuglia, 2000; Jörg Rüpke. *L’histoire des fasti romains: aspects médiatiques et politiques*. *Revue historique de droit français et étranger* 81 (2003): 125-140.

10 *Feast day* in classical Latin, because markets were often held during religious festivals.

11 Kermis. Etymologiebank.nl: <https://etymologiebank.nl/trefwoord/kermis> (07 October 2024).

12 “En alant par nos journées venismez herbergier en une cité noble et belle. Et viz la multitude des gens qui la estoient, car la estoient gens de divers pays pour une foire qui la estoit [. . .]. Lors avint que quant nous feusmes la sejournez environ .iiij. jours, la foire se partoit et chascun aloit a ses besoingnez [. . .].” The text then goes on to describe a festival in which the actors “estoient

tures brokers (*courretiers*), who we know played an intermediary role between local and foreign merchants, at least for certain fairs.¹³ The main manuscript of this text, currently held at the *Bibliothèque nationale de France*, illustrates this episode with an illumination emblematic of a medieval fair. Under the watch of the narrator-knight and his mentor, Lady Fortune, a great public place is laid out, at the centre of which are found a cross, the traders and attendees, and merchandise (animals, fabrics, and so on).¹⁴

While literary sources with their typifying descriptions of cities and fair traders bear witness to the fact that fairs were part of the standard repertoire of European economic institutions at the time, the new printed books of the sixteenth century contributed to disseminating the specialised knowledge required for doing business at trade fairs.¹⁵ A merchants' handbook published in Nuremberg clearly indicates the dual function of contemporary trade fairs—namely, as commodity markets (for the exchange of merchandise) as well as money markets (for exchange and financial transactions).

The *Handel Buch* was published in 1558 by the Nuremberg citizen Lorenz Meder (d. 1561).¹⁶ It was an important working tool for the merchants of upper

tous les courretiers [. . .].” See Thomas III. von Saluzzo. *Le livre du Chevalier errant*, Robert Fajen (ed.). Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2019, 491. For another edition, see Tommaso III di Saluzzo. *Il Libro del Cavaliere Errante* (BnF ms. 12559), Marco Picat (ed.). Boves: Araba Fenice, 2008. In this edition, one can find a useful contribution by Renato Bordone. Une tres noble joust. In *Il Libro del Cavaliere*, Picat (ed.), 27–35.

13 On market brokers, see Kathryn L. Reyerson. *The Art of the Deal: Intermediaries of Trade in Medieval Montpellier*. Leiden, Boston, Cologne: Brill, 2002; Sandrine Lavaud. Le courtier dans l'Aquitaine médiéval, un officier de la commune. In *Vendre le vin de l'Antiquité à nos jours*, Sandrine Lavaud (ed.). Bordeaux: Editions Féret, 2012, 237–254; Vincent Demont, Anne Wegener Sleswijk, Mathieu Scherman (eds.). *Le pouvoir des courtiers. Univers marchand et acteurs du courtage en Europe (XIV^e-XVIII^e s.)*. Paris: Éditions Rue d'Ulm, 2018.

14 On the manuscript and its illumination, see *Paris 1400. Les arts sous Charles VI, Catalogue de l'exposition, Paris, Musée du Louvre, 22 mars–12 juillet 2004*. Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, Fayard, 2004, catalogue no. 131. Reproduction: https://fairs-in-history.huma-num.fr/expo/online/gallery?object=thomas_saluces (07 October 2024).

15 See the important analytical bibliography by Jochen Hoock, Pierre Jeannin, Wolfgang Kaiser (eds.). *Ars mercatoria. Eine analytische Bibliographie*. 3 vols. Paderborn, Munich: Schöningh, 1991–2001.

16 Lorenz Meder. *Handel-Buch darin angezeigt wird, welcher Gestalt inn den fürnembsten Handelstetten Europe, allerley Wahren anfencklich kaufft, dieselbig wider mit Nutz verkaufft, wie die Wechsel gemacht, Pfund, Ellen, unnd Müntz ublich verglichen, und zu welcher zeit die Merckten gewönlich gehalten werden*. Nuremberg: Johann vom Berg und Ulrich Neuber, 1558 [VD16 M 1856].

Germany and can be considered a standard work of the time¹⁷ due to the scope and level of detail in the knowledge it contained about trading practices.¹⁸ In the subtitle, Meder outlines the content that awaited the reader: knowledge about the purchase and profitable sale of goods, knowledge about bills of exchange, knowledge of the various weights, measures, and coins, and information about where and when markets and fairs were usually held. The book was aimed at those involved in trade—young merchants in particular. An index is highlighted in red lettering,¹⁹ thus suggesting that the book was expressly designed to quickly look up or access important subjects. The preface emphasises the pioneering and instructional nature of the handbook once again, especially for fairs in foreign countries, for which one would then have to be able to compare coins, measures, weights, and prices.²⁰ According to Meder, all of this was essential for successful trading. Such merchant handbooks and special calendars of fair dates not only existed in the Holy Roman Empire but were also published in other European countries as of the early sixteenth century.

Meder's first chapter deals in detail with trade in Venice, whose prominent position is explained by the importance of this trading city for the merchants of upper Germany. It does not only present typical goods, but also the payment methods—with the recommendation that such methods should be discussed with the seller beforehand. The recommendation is to pay in gold ducats, as a profit

17 Hans Welser of Nuremberg was the original owner of the manuscript. See Hermann Kellenbenz (ed.), *Handelsbräuche des 16. Jahrhunderts. Das Medersche Handelsbuch und die Welserschen Nachträge*. Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1974, 75–76.

18 Markus A. Denzel. Handelspraktiken als wirtschaftshistorische Quellengattung vom Mittelalter bis in das frühe 20. Jahrhundert. Eine Einführung. In *Kaufmannsbücher und Handelspraktiken vom Spätmittelalter bis zum 20. Jahrhundert/Merchant's Books and Mercantile Practice from the Late Middle Ages to the Beginnings of the 20th Century*, Markus A. Denzel, Jean-Claude Hocquet, Harald Witthöft (eds.). Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2002, 11–45, here: 20; Ulf Christian Ewert, Susanne Rau, Leif Scheuermann. Räumliche Konfigurationen des Messehandels im frühneuzeitlichen Europa. Gedruckte Messekalender des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts und ihre computergestützte Analyse. *Vierteljahrschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte* 110:4 (2023): 494–541, here: 497. <https://doi.org/10.25162/vswg-2023-0012>.

19 See Meder, *Handel-Buch*, frontispiece: “Allen Handthierern / und Jungen Kauffleuten / gantz nützlich und dienstlich. Mit einem Register.” The letters u and v were rendered according to their phonetic value.

20 Meder, *Handel-Buch*, Vorrede, [1]: “Dann dises Buch / gleich wie ein Register / Handbuch / Wegweyser / unnd anleytung ist / inn alle Hende / kauff unnd rechsenschafften etc. Dann es zeygt und lehret was der gebrauch / nit allein in Teutschen / sonder auch aller anderer lender / Jarmärkten / unnd handlen seye / Was für unkosten auff jede Wahren gehen / Wie sich allerley Müntzen / Eln / massen / Gewichten etc. gegen einander vergleychen.”

(on the exchange) can then be expected.²¹ This is followed by chapters on trade with, amongst others and to name but a few, England, Apulia,²² the Spanish court, Lisbon,²³ Nuremberg, Bolzano, and other regions in northern Italy. About halfway through the book, Meder turns to the city of Lyon with its four fairs. Here it becomes clear that the author and his contemporary readership (the merchants, but certainly a wider urban elite as well) must have been aware of the distinction between the periods of trade in goods and the periods of settlement of payments.²⁴ This indicates clearly that the trade in goods and the exchange trading were decoupled: the purchase, delivery, and financing of goods traded at fairs took place at different times.

In his presentation of Lyon as a trans-shipment centre for saffron from southern France and Aragon with exports to Nuremberg, domestic interests come to the fore.²⁵ However, the pages that follow also explain to the target audience the precise mechanics of the payment of these goods. The merchants use bills of exchange to finance their transactions. The bills of exchange purchased at the Epiphany Fair in Lyon are drawn on Villalón at the Lent Fair and honoured there.²⁶ In the opposite direction, the bills of exchange collected at the Lent Fair in Villalón are remitted at the Easter Fair in Lyon. From there, the bills are drawn

21 Meder, *Handel-Buch*, Venediger Handlung, Bescheyd der Bezalung, V^v: “In Venedig sind gemeinlich allezeyt 3 oder 4 Wechsellbenck / darinn man zalung thun mag. Und so denn einer in Venedig was kaufft, und im kauff nichts sonderlichs wird außgedingt bar zuzalen / so mag einer wol in den bencken zalung thun. [. . .] Item / Wenn einer ein kauff in Venedig thun will / so muß er zuvor mit dem Verkauffer außdingen / Wie im einer bezalen will / mit Duc[aten] oder Fl[orentiner].”

22 The Welsers had a branch in Bari around 1500. See Peter Geffcken, Mark Häberlein (eds.). *Rechnungsfragmente der Augsburger Welser-Gesellschaft (1496–1551). Oberdeutscher Fernhandel am Beginn der neuzeitlichen Weltwirtschaft*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2014.

23 Due to the Charta of Tordesillas, the Portuguese Crown was the sovereign to lease the contracts for the importation of products from India. See Ron Harris. *Going the Distance: Eurasian Trade and the Rise of the Business Corporation, 1400–1700*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020, 226–248. <https://doi.org/10.23943/princeton/9780691150772.003.0009>.

24 Meder, *Handel-Buch*, Leoner Handlung betreffend, LIII: “Zu Leon hat es alle jar 4 freye Meß / da nun vil volcks unnd aller hand Kauffmanschatz dahin kommet. [. . .] Unnd jegklicher Meß freyheytt / weret 15 wercktag. [. . .] Darnach fehet die bezalung an / und weret 8 tag oder 10 tag / oder noch lenger.”

25 Kurt Weissen. Safran für Deutschland. Kontinuität und Diskontinuität mittelalterlicher und frühneuzeitlicher Warenbeschaffungsstrukturen. In *Beschaffungs- und Absatzmärkte oberdeutscher Firmen im Zeitalter der Welser und Fugger*, Angelika Westermann, Stefanie von Welser (eds.). Husum: Matthiesen, 2011, 61–78.

26 Markus A. Denzel. *Das System des bargeldlosen Zahlungsverkehrs europäischer Prägung vom Mittelalter bis 1914*. Stuttgart: Steiner, 2008, 147.

at the May Fair in Medina del Campo, where payment of Lyon bills is possible until June 15 to 20. The bills acquired at the Spanish May Fair are exchanged and then paid at the Lyon August Fair; bills accepted at the Lyon August Fair are drawn at Medina del Campo for the October Fair, where the bill redemption period runs from October 25 to November 25. This almost completes the annual cycle, as the other bills of exchange from Castile (an August Fair) can only be redeemed at the Lyon Epiphany Fair, while the bills of exchange from the Lyon All Saints Fair can be drawn at the Lent Fair in Villalón.²⁷

Using the example of the saffron trade, Meder clearly describes that the exchange trade had to take place via two places at minimum, belonging to different currency zones (Lyon on the one hand, Villalón and Medina del Campo on the other). The Castilian fairs represent a special case here in that Villalón and Medina del Campo were two separate places which alternated their fair locations within one currency zone—that is, the same fair currency (the ‘book currency’ for settling transactions) was used at both fairs. The merchandise itself was only financially settled in Lyon and travelled as a commodity to a third place, principally—but not exclusively—Nuremberg. To summarise, only the saffron was transported, while the money itself did not ‘move.’ This configuration of commodity and financial transactions between Lyon and the Castilian fairs was by no means just an example invented by Meder for didactic purposes, but is also reflected in all other trade books, such as those of the Spanish fair traders, to whom Hilario Casado Alonso has devoted a large number of studies.²⁸

In addition to these two functions of the fairs, described as commodity fairs and exchange fairs, there was a third—that of financing the ‘state.’ A striking example is found in Armand Jamme’s contribution to this volume wherein he demonstrates that the levying of ecclesiastical taxes was linked to the great fairs in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Christendom. Although this link does not appear strongly documented in subsequent centuries, other political powers in turn took advantage of the availability of money generated by the fairs and the presence of merchant-bankers at the most important fairs to meet their extraordinary

27 Meder concludes by pointing out the potential for profit in the business of bills of exchange. See Meder, *Handel-Buch*, Leoner Handlung, LIII^v: “Item alle die obgemelten wechssel / bezalt man Duc Doro, oder oro de Pexo Campa, justa walutha. Und fura die Campio ist 6 / je 7 oder 8 p [er] Milier besser / dann inn Campi / darumb muß mans inn brieffen bestimmen / ob man abschrieto die Campo / oder darumb bezalen sol.”

28 Hilario Casado Alonso. Les relations entre les foires de Castille et les foires de Lyon au XVI^e siècle. In *Lyon vu/e d’ailleurs (1245–1800): Échanges, compétitions et perceptions*, Jean-Louis Gaulin, Susanne Rau (eds.). Lyon: Presses universitaires de Lyon, 2009, 91–108.

financial needs. A good case representing this aspect is the role of the Lyon fairs in financing the Italian wars of the kings of France in the sixteenth century which resulted in a loan known under the name the *Grand Parti*.²⁹

But fairs were not only a funding source for rulers. The functioning of commodity and exchange fairs is also reflected in one of the rare surviving travel diaries of a Basel merchant from the end of the sixteenth century. The increasing significance of the bill of exchange did not mean that payments were no longer made in cash or by basic credit instruments. The activities of the Basel merchant Andreas Ryff (1550–1603) bear witness to this. The travel diary of this merchant, who visited markets and trade fairs in his region for 30 years during the second half of the sixteenth century, reveals that he travelled to Frankfurt a total of 53 times—that is, to one of the major international trade fairs of the time.³⁰ Unlike Meder, Andreas Ryff did not write a guide (or manual) for a wider audience, but only for himself and his family, and perhaps for anonymous posterity. In addition to his travel diary, in which he recounts his experiences on various journeys throughout his life, he also wrote an autobiography. Again, there are no definitions of either ‘market’ or ‘fair,’ but he explains why it was important for him to travel to the fairs in his region (that is, at Strasbourg and Frankfurt), noting that they had an important function in the payment of previously purchased goods. These were rarely paid for directly—that is, at the same fair, but only at the next instance, or any subsequent one—either because a loan was taken out for them and had to be paid off or because a bill of exchange had to be honoured. When Ryff writes that he had to go to the Frankfurt Autumn Fair “because of the payment,”³¹ this meant that the payment was settled at the fair or offset against another transaction in a process that is known as ‘clearing.’

29 Angela Orlandi. *Le Grand Parti. Fiorentini a Lione e il debito pubblico francese nel XVI secolo*. Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 2002. See also the contribution of Heinrich Lang on the Salviati and the lending of money to the French monarchy in the current volume.

30 “Also hab ich, gönstiger läser, alle die strossen von Basel gehn Franckfort zimlicher mossen erklärt, hab dieselben alle woll geiebt und gebroucht, dan ich hab sidt anno 1569, do ich mein erste reiß dohin gethon, biß uff anno 1597 in eigner person 53 messen besuocht und do erschienen.” Friedrich Meyer. Andreas Ryff (1550–1603), Reisebüchlein. *Basler Zeitschrift für Geschichte und Altertumskunde* 72 (1972): 40.

31 “Ich bin auch fir daß hin in alle beide Strosburger, Johanne- und wienechtmessen, auch in beide Franckforter, Herbst- und vastenmessen, gefahren; dan die handlung nam durch den segen Gottes deglich zuo und ervordert auch der handel von wegen der bezalungen, daß ich die messen brouchen muoste.” Andreas Heusler. Andreas Ryff, Selbstbiographie (bis 1574). *Beiträge zur vaterländischen Geschichte* 9 (1870): 79.

Periodicity and interruptions

From the testimonies it becomes clear that the medieval and early modern fairs were commercial meetings sufficiently extraordinary in the context of a yearly rhythm of urban environments that they were carefully inscribed in calendars and were the object of external communication in order to attract and establish ‘regulars.’ Yet, the ‘established’ and regular nature of these meetings, anchored in urban commercial practices, also made them somewhat vulnerable to unforeseen events.

Rhythms enacted in fair privileges

The number of fairs (once per year or more) and their dates formed the central components of the privileges that instituted fairs. More often than not, the dates of the liturgical calendar, holy days, and feast days lent their name to the fairs, both in Latin and in the various vernaculars. Towards 1585, the draughtsman and engraver Jost Amman composed at Nuremberg an allegory of commerce, of which the upper half is taken up by a remarkable calendar of fairs. To the left and right of the figure of Mercury, Amman arranged across six rows 171 fairs which were held in 122 towns, each identified by their name and their coat of arms. The fair dates—some of which are not given by the author—cover the period from the beginning of January to the end of December and reference feast and holy days—from “Leon. Epiphan.” (a fair at Lyon on Epiphany, January 6) to “Wintherthur. Thome.” (a fair held at Winterthur on the Feast Day of Saint Thomas the Apostle, December 21).³² Care must be taken with interpreting these dates as they are not necessarily indicative of the exact opening date of a given fair. The fair may very well have opened on the same date as the holiday (generally after vespers) or perhaps shifted a few days afterwards. For example, the letters of franchise granted to Lyon by Louis IX 1463 make clear that the fair called “the Kings’ Fair” would begin on the first Monday after Epiphany, meaning that the fair would open, not on a fixed date but, following the liturgical calendar of the given year, anywhere between January 7 and 13.³³ The question of opening and closing dates of a given fair were an important matter as they had a significant consequence from the privileges, notably the fiscal exemptions, if any, and

³² Galerie—online, Jost Amman, Fairs in History. <https://fairs-in-history.huma-num.fr/expo/online/gallery?object=allegorie> (07 October 2024).

³³ Marc Brésard. *Les foires de Lyon aux XV^e et XVI^e siècles*. Paris: Éditions Picard, 1914, 21.

those special judicial considerations (*extra ordinem*) demanded by merchants to cover their transactions during that period.

The fair organisers, lay or ecclesiastical lords, and municipal powers were tied to the local calendar in religious, commercial, and popular terms as part of a town's identity, showcasing their city with regularity. In an attempt to increase the fame of these events, they were sometimes even tempted to date its creation back to antiquity. To take one example, the fairs of Saint-Denis, outside Paris, saw a tradition forged in the eleventh century which linked the fairs to the legendary voyage of Charlemagne to Jerusalem from whence came the relics kept by the royal abbey in the town.³⁴ In another example, the sixteenth-century canon Guillaume Paradin, who surely knew the municipal records and the royal privileges bestowed upon the city of Lyon well, reckoned that the fairs there existed since “time immemorial” because the ancient geographer Strabo had already referred to the city of Lyon as an *emporium*.³⁵

Interruptions

Contrary to the impression of regularity prescribed by the franchises of the fair privileges and compiled in fair calendars and of a deep historical continuity constructed in legends, case studies reveal the various risks for periodic markets to be temporarily or permanently interrupted.

Our research could hardly ignore the historical role of epidemics, as our work began at exactly the same time that the COVID-19 pandemic paralysed the European continent. The CoMOR launch meeting, which would have brought the whole team physically together in Lyon, took place on 18 and 19 June 2020—by video conference! All the more so because the epoch covered by the project—from the fourteenth to the seventeenth century—saw frequent returns of the plague after its first traumatic appearance in 1348. Numerous monographs have already underlined the effects of the plague on commercial activities. At Geneva, for example, the location of the covered markets which lodged the fair of Saint-Pierre-aux-Liens (August 1) yielded nothing in 1458 and 1459 *propter pestem*.³⁶

³⁴ See Rolf Große. Reliques du Christ et foires de Saint-Denis au XI^e siècle. A propos de la *Descriptio clavi et corone domini*. *Revue d'histoire de l'Église de France* 87 (2001): 357–375 and the article of Nicolas Sarzeaud in this volume.

³⁵ Guillaume Paradin. *Mémoires de l'histoire de Lyon*. Lyon: S. Gryphe, 1573, 12–15.

³⁶ Frédéric Borel. *Les Foires de Genève au XV^e siècle*. Geneva: H. Georg, 1892, 223; Jean-François Bergier. *Genève et l'économie européenne de la Renaissance*. Paris: S.E.V.P.E.N., 1963, “peste” *ad indicem*.

The archives reveal their share of similar episodes, like the release from confinement authorised by the consuls of the city of Lyon in February 1631. Believing that the great epidemic that raged in 1630 was over, the consulate issued certificates to merchants who had made purchases at the Kings' Fair, authorising them to resume their activities. The bales and containers holding their goods bore the mark of each merchant, marks that were copied with the certificate in the register of the city's council minutes.³⁷

Often appearing in chronicles in the same category as the plague for their devastating effects, public insecurity and wars also impacted the holding of fairs. According to the account of the chronicler Thomas Basin, in 1470, French and Burgundian merchants bore the brunt of one of numerous conflicts between King Louis XI and Duke Charles the Bold.

The fairs of Pentecost were just about to take place at Anvers. The Duke issued at that moment general edicts and had all the property and merchandise identified as belonging to the subjects of the King of France sequestered in that city. Descriptive inventories were taken and entrusted to reliable guardians. When the King of France learned of this, he did not act any differently regarding the property of the subjects of the Duke of Burgundy discovered at the general fair of Saint-Denis, commonly called *le Lendit* [. . .].³⁸

Another example in this vein is the military campaign waged in Provence by the imperial governor Antonio de Leyva in the summer of 1536 that caused a notable reduction in traffic to the August Fair at Lyon due to the closed roads. However, the army itself was decimated by the epidemic, and the interruption of the fairs at Lyon was short-lived, quickly recovering lost business.³⁹

And yet, analyses based on archival data allow us to put these narrative sources into some perspective. In his book on the fairs of Chalon-sur-Saône, Henri Dubois concluded that despite the near-endemic insecurity that characterised the years 1352 to 1445, the two annual fairs of Chalon took place as normal. Only

37 Olivier Zeller. Les marques des marchands suisses enregistrées à Lyon (XVII^e–XVIII^e siècles): usages et morphologie. *Revue suisse d'Histoire* 73:3 (2023): 243–272. We thank Olivier Zeller for signalling this document: https://fairs-in-history.huma-num.fr/expo/online/gallery?object=marques_marchands_lyonnais (07 October 2024).

38 Thomas Basin. *Histoire de Louis XI*, vol. II, Charles Samaran, Monique-Cécile Garand (eds. and trans.). Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1966, 13. The English translation is done by Jean-Paul Rehr.

39 Heinrich Lang. Seide für Lyon. Der Seidenzoll an der Rhône als Indikator für die Strukturen von Märkten einer europäischen Handelsmetropole in der Mitte des 16. Jahrhunderts. In *Wiegen—Zählen—Registrieren. Handelsgeschichtliche Massenquellen und die Erforschung mitteleuropäischer Märkte (13.–18. Jahrhundert)*, Peter Rauscher, Andrea Serles (eds). Innsbruck, Vienna, Bolzano: Studien, 2015, 387–409, 395–396.

ten merchant get-togethers were cancelled out of the 188 scheduled.⁴⁰ A similar conclusion was reached in a study of the Thirty Years' War in Swabia and neighbouring regions. The military conflict did not systematically lead to the closure or cancellation of fairs, but the places where fairs were held—such as Nördlingen—were sometimes difficult to access and could become less attractive, prompting merchants to stay away.⁴¹

Competition

To such external interruptions of commercial activity should be added the competition between the fairs themselves. The Champagne Fairs owed their attractiveness in part to their well-timed calendar organised by the comital power as of the end of the twelfth century—six fairs in four locations spread between January and November (two each in Troyes and Provins, and one each in Lagny and Bar-sur-Aube).⁴² More generally, the work of Franz Irsigler has highlighted the existence of several regional systems of fairs that developed between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries. Each of these systems was based, as in Champagne, on a calendar of fairs that formed an annual cycle. From the twelfth century onwards, such a cycle already coordinated the fairs of the towns in the lower valleys of the Meuse and the Rhine as well as the cities of Aachen, Cologne, Duisburg, and Utrecht. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries fairs continued to operate in a coordinated system at a regional level so as to allow merchants to frequent the greatest number possible.⁴³

⁴⁰ Dubois, *Les foires de Chalon*, 252–253.

⁴¹ Wolfgang Wüst. Süddeutsche Städte unter schwedischer Besatzung. In *Der Dreißigjährige Krieg in Schwaben und seinen historischen Nachbarregionen: 1618–1648–2018. Ergebnisse einer interdisziplinären Tagung in Augsburg vom 1. bis 3. März 2018*, Wolfgang Wüst (ed.). Augsburg: Wißner, 2018, 78.

⁴² Michel Bur. Champagnemessen. In *Lexikon des Mittelalters*, 1983, vol. II, col. 1685–1689; Franz Irsigler, Winfried Reichert. Les foires de Champagne. In *Messen, Jahrmärkte und Stadtentwicklung* Irsigler, Pauly (eds.), 89–105.

⁴³ See the clarification contained in Michel Pauly. Vom regionalen Messesystem zum internationalen Netz von Messestädten. In *Netzwerke im europäischen Handel des Mittelalters*, Gerhard Fouquet, Hans-Jörg Gilomen (eds.) Ostfildern: Jan Thorbecke, 2010, 49–100, esp. 51 for a map of regional trade fair systems. For a more recent period, see Jürgen Schneider, Markus A. Denzel. Foires et marchés en Allemagne à l'époque moderne. In *Foires et marché dans les campagnes de l'Europe médiévale et moderne (Flaran, XIV)*, Christian Desplat (ed.). Toulouse: Presses universitaires du Mirail, 1996, 137–152.

Yet the proliferation of fairs and the spirit of competition often worked to opposite effect. In Languedoc, where commercial growth was supported by the cloth industry as of the thirteenth century, attempts to establish new fairs (Pézenas, Montagnac, then Avignonet, Béziers, Beaucaire, etc.), which met with varying degrees of success, underscore the competitive situations which royal power was unable to regulate. In 1488, Charles VIII proclaimed that “all localities to which fairs had been granted could hold them, on condition that there were no two fairs on the same day,” a recognition that the coordination of a regional system of fairs was a vexing issue.⁴⁴

When the Lyon fairs, which were strongly supported by the royal power (in privileges of 1420, 1444, 1463) took off, they became the target of a coalition of cities from the centre of the French kingdom (Bourges, Tours) and of Languedoc. Shortly after the death of Louis XI, during the meeting of the Estates General at Tours at the beginning of 1484, criticisms were levelled against the Lyon fairs on the grounds that they would encourage the outflow of cash from the kingdom because it was a city on the frontier, the entry point for Italian silks, and because foreign exchange activities carried out there benefited foreign currencies. These complaints convinced the three orders (representatives of the clergy, nobility, and towns) and the royal council, and the privileges of the Lyon fairs were subsequently cancelled. The consulate of Lyon consequently endeavoured to “defend its fairs” with the support of foreign merchants who refused to desert the city—in particular, the merchants of the cities of southern Germany, from the Upper Rhine to the Swiss plateau. In two stages (1487 and 1494), the city managed to regain its four fairs.⁴⁵

Fairs in the Holy Roman Empire saw competition as well, as can be seen with the rather late establishment of a fair at Ulm (1429). Originally scheduled at a date close to the Whitsun Fairs of Nördlingen and Zurzach—both of which played an important commercial and financial role for all of upper Germany—the new fair at Ulm did not succeed because merchants could not attend it alongside one of the two well-established Whitsun Fairs, which resulted in several rescheduled dates.⁴⁶

44 Jean Combes. Les foires en Languedoc au moyen âge. *Annales E.S.C.* 13:2 (1958): 259.

45 Jean-Louis Gaulin, Susanne Rau. Rétablissement de deux foires à Lyon (mai 1487). In *Lyon, entre Empire et Royaume (843–1601). Textes et documents*, Alexis Charansonnet, Jean-Louis Gaulin, Pascale Mounier, Susanne Rau (eds.). Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2015, 523–528.

46 See the contribution of Ulf Christian Ewert in this volume.

The research project CoMOR

All these questions, reflecting a spatio-temporal approach to fairs, the places, and the calendars, both theoretical and real, are at the heart of the CoMOR project. Although the public health crisis would come to envelop the start of the project, during the development phase of the project (2018–2019), we had a different crisis on our minds: the 2008 financial crisis and its global impact. In the academic world, this crisis contributed to re-invigorating research in economic and financial history and reviving studies of markets over long periods, despite the relatively brief nature of the crisis. Moreover, attacks against structures which have governed modern international commerce have thrown institutional studies on the related institutions into doubt and provoked questions about the very future of those liberal, globalised markets.

It is within the context of these issues that the CoMOR project took up the history of European fairs from the perspective of “market integration.” Towards the end of the Middle Ages, the fairs formed a system that rested on a tightly organised schedule (“calendar of fairs”), permitting merchants to meet in specific places on specific dates known well in advance. At the same time, these fairs facilitated the interconnection between local and regional markets (rural as much as urban) and the trans-regional commercial networks. During the sixteenth century, a decoupling occurred between merchandise and financial fairs, linked to the shift from financing products to pure money markets. The chronological boundaries of the project have thus been chosen in order to best account for these major transformations: from the decline of the old fair systems at Champagne around 1320, through a cycle dominated by the fairs at Lyon, to the decline of the fairs at Besançon around 1630.

The CoMOR project was particularly interested in studying the relational aspects (and their changes) of these gatherings of merchants, the roles assumed by the participants, and their customs and behaviours. Fair data (including places, routes, and exchanges) have been collected for the first time in their spatial and temporal dimensions through an integrated database application which presents the data encoded with historical social and exchange networks founded on over 3,000 historical geographic coordinates. With this, we can trace the merchants through their fairs, commodities and monies, itineraries, and rhythms. The investigation is centred on France, southern Germany, and northern Italy (the specialties of the core consortium researchers), with extensions into neighbouring economic and cultural regions.

This research also has a historiographical dimension. Based on collaboration between German and French researchers, with a significant presence of Italian scholars as well, the team aimed to bring together different academic traditions.

In France, the emphasis is on social history and economic sociology, while in Germany the tradition of *'Handelsgeschichte'* and the history of finance is prevalent.

Sources

The question of sources useful to the production of a history of fairs is paradoxical. Fairs were instituted by sovereign rulers, organised by towns and cities, attended by merchants near and far, and organised by host cities. They were also regarded as “festive” in the conjunction of cultures, local and distant. All of this leads to medieval and early modern fairs having been documented in a great variety of sources. On the other hand, precisely because they developed as temporary moments and places of exchange between princes, cities, and merchants, these fairs did not truly produce a single or unified archival memory of their own as merchant associations and confraternities did. Writing the history of medieval and early modern fairs therefore requires an exploration of multiple archival collections containing many types of sources. In the following section, the principal types of available sources are presented with respect to the agents of their production: sovereign powers, cities, and commercial actors.⁴⁷

The earliest attempts at historical research on European fairs were based on official documents through which these large periodic markets were established—that is, where there is a fair, there must be fair privileges. This official act of granting a fair by a sovereign power set the “rules” for a fair on a case-by-case basis, authorising with a charter the benefiting town to hold one or more fairs per year according to a pre-established frequency and schedule. Tax exemptions for professional attendees as well as the terms for settling disputes arising from their commercial activities were an integral part of fair privileges. Intended to promote trade, the privileges of large fairs also promised security or “safe conduct” to merchants on both their inbound and outbound journeys. Indeed, the safe conducts established by Count Thibaud II as of the middle of the twelfth century were one of the reasons for the Champagne Fairs’ success. Numerous other examples can be found in the archives.⁴⁸ Fair franchises were implicitly granted ‘for life,’ but it was

⁴⁷ An interesting anthology of sources for the history of fairs from an Italian perspective is found in Alberto Grohmann. *Fiere e mercati nell'Europa occidentale*. Milan, Turin: B. Mondadori, 2011.

⁴⁸ Example of Frankfurt: <https://fairs-in-history.huma-num.fr/expo/online/gallery?object=sauf-conduit>.

common to request a renewal when there was a change in regnal power or in political control.

Fair privileges reflect the numerous holders of *ius mercati* in late medieval Europe: the emperor, kings, princes, lay and ecclesiastical lords, and finally, cities once they had gained a significant level of autonomy. On the contrary, the Papacy, which was an active agent in the creation of fairs until the thirteenth century, ceased to play a direct role in the fairs. This volume presents two studies on the granting of fairs: the privileges for the “new” fairs in the Holy Roman Empire, and the institution of two annual fairs in the Piedmontese city of Asti in 1468 by the Duchess Marie of Cleves, widow of the poet Charles of Orléans, lord of the same city.

The preambles of fair privileges rely on the concept of ‘good government’ of the time. The reasons invoked in them combine, with variation, the munificence of the sovereign, the loyalty of the subjects rewarded by the granting of such fairs, the desire to populate or repopulate the towns and cities and to support their activity, as well as geographical and/or historical considerations. In reality, the contents of the privileges were the subject of negotiations between the sovereigns, the cities, and the merchants, at times evidenced by other sources. From this, a background of competition between cities and competing powers emerged. This could lead to conflict because fairs were also used as a kind of an ‘economic weapon,’ as mentioned above.

As recipients of these valuable privileges, the cities carefully preserved the documentation related to them, and as organisers of the fairs, they naturally had to make decisions and incur expenses through public offices, both of which also left traces in various sources. More broadly, city dwellers evoked the fairs which so suddenly animated urban life for a brief period, both in writings of a historical or moralising nature, or with which they intended to glorify their ‘homeland.’

With respect to the category of sources produced by municipalities, we find among them letters, memoranda, and other official documentation prepared by urban officeholders and aimed at sovereign powers in order to obtain and defend fair privileges. This ‘commercial urban diplomacy’ is known (often euphemistically) from municipal deliberations and also through urban account books that record expenses for envoys and embassies, as well as gifts and “donations” demanded by the issuers of privileges. These same accounts also furnish data on the cities’ expenses incurred in communicating their fairs—that is, sending messengers to other cities with which they were already in commercial relations or with which they wished to establish new ones.

As much as fairs appear in the expense column of the urban accounts, they were a clear source of revenue and profit as well. The sudden influx of merchants, horses, and other beasts of burden provided work for innkeepers, lodgers,

and all the trades that kept them fed. The craftsmen of the fair towns were called upon to build or repair the stands or other parts of infrastructure. The professionals of writing—notaries and scribes—as well as guides and interpreters found a wealthy clientele among the merchants. In principle, this increase in wealth for the towns, produced by holding fairs, was very real but difficult to quantify in all its myriad expressions, and would likely have been offset by an expected decrease in tax revenues. Of course, the towns sometimes collected rental fees for stands from the merchants, as shown by the beautiful *Messestandsregister* of the Whitsun Fair in Nördlingen, the most important fair in southern Germany through the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.⁴⁹ However, tax exemption was a strong argument in the eyes of merchants and was an integral part of the privileges granted to cities by sovereign rulers. Depending on the extent of these exemptions (at ‘free’ fairs, merchants were treated as totally exempt), the loss of tax income was more or less offset by the increase in economic activities for city dwellers (and thus taxpayers) provoked by the fairs.

Eyewitness accounts of those city dwellers help illustrate how the fairs were perceived by contemporaries. There are sometimes short entries in urban chronicles, which—as with the aforementioned canon Guillaume Paradin at Lyon—can carry a moralising tone. Very rare but all the more valuable sources are the travelogues and diary entries by fair traders themselves.⁵⁰

Already well known to economic historians, the documents produced by the merchants at the fairs—and in connection to the trader’s business in general—have been central to our research. Even though third-party notaries still drafted extensive acts during fairs in the sixteenth century (one thinks here of the register of the August Fair kept by the Lyon notary, Nicolas Dorlin during the work to consolidate the aforementioned royal debt known as the *Grand Parti*), merchants themselves authored the practical records of their business from at least the thirteenth century. Contributions on this topic in the current volume contain numerous references to such sources, which allow us, for example, to reconstruct the relations between the Augsburg merchant David Gauger and his correspondent in Bolzano, David Wagner. Active in Lyon during the first half of the sixteenth century, the Salviati company, through the extraordinary wealth of its

⁴⁹ Gallerie—online, Registre, Fairs in history. https://fairs-in-history.huma-num.fr/expo/online/gallery?object=registre_stands_nordlingen (7 October 2024). See Ulf Christian Ewert. Handelsräume der vormodernen Stadt. Raumzeitliche Aspekte des Messehandels am Beispiel der Nördlinger Pfingstmesse. *Moderne Stadtgeschichte* 2 (2023): 147–172. See also <https://shs.hal.science/halshs-03876815/file/CoMOR-Projektvorstellung-HistSem-27-10-22-Folien.pdf>.

⁵⁰ See Susanne Rau’s article in this volume.

archives, offers a privileged field of study to understand the role of the Lyon fairs for the Tuscan and German companies of the period. Beyond the usual—if massive—books of accounts, a rich correspondence between merchants of the company survives in the archives, in addition to price and exchange lists produced for their agents and operators in the field.

Besides the letters and books of accounts produced under the auspices of mercantile activity, there are also (to take up the distinction formulated by Federigo Melis⁵¹) those texts whose origins were in preparing future merchants for their career and to assist professionals in the mercantile world in handling various practical situations. We have already cited the manual by the Florentine Pegolotti as a remarkable early example of this. Numerous other texts containing pragmatic and practical information, including fair calendars, were composed in many vernacular languages and circulated in Europe, first as manuscripts and then as printed works issued from the new printing presses at the end of the medieval era.⁵²

Transactions at fairs were not the exclusive domain of professional merchants. Sources produced by the buyers—when they can be located—provide information on commodities, prices, and the intermediaries in transactions. The examples of the papal court and the House of Savoy are developed in detail in this volume. For these ‘institutional buyers’ (to use a modern term), expenditures at fairs represented only a fraction of the purchases made over the course of a year. These purchases perhaps may have had a special meaning (abundance of products, trusted sellers, possibility of purchasing on credit, etc.) as they were recorded specifically in princely books of accounts.

Another range of sources, financial and legal in nature, produced in the context of settling disputes between merchants during fairs, promise much research potential even if, due to lack of time, the CoMOR project could only begin to consult them.⁵³

51 Federigo Melis. Presentazione. In *La “pratica di mercatura” datiniana (secolo XIV)*, Cesare Ciano (ed.). Milan: Giuffrè, 1964, V–XII. For the Italian domain, see Franco Franceschi, Richard A. Goldthwaite, Reinhold C. Mueller (eds.). *Il Rinascimento italiano e l’Europa*, vol. 4: *Commercio e cultura mercantile*. Treviso: Angelo Colla, 2007.

52 See the opening example on Meder’s manual and Ewert, Rau, Scheuermann, Konfigurationen.

53 Elena Maccioni, Sergio Tognetti. *Tribunali di mercanti e giustizia mercantile nel tardo Medioevo*. Florence: Olschki, 2016; Christoph Jeggle. *Privilegierte Rechtsprechung: die Gründung des Merkantilmagistrats in Bozen im 17. Jahrhundert*. In *Die Ökonomie des Privilegs: Westeuropa 16.–19. Jahrhundert*, Guillaume Garner (ed.). Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 2016, 197–223.

Another field with corresponding sources which the project could only approach marginally due to the specific skills required to work with them are the truly literary and iconographic sources. Nevertheless, several such sources were necessarily consulted, such as the *Livre du chevalier errant* by Tommaso di Saluzzo discussed in the beginning of this introduction, or the celebrated *Dit du Lendit*.⁵⁴ We know that fairs have been a rich subject for literary inventiveness and use. One of the most famous farces, that of Maître Pathelin, begins with a dialogue between the penniless judge and his wife Guillemette, who wonders how he is going to buy woollens “à la foire.” As the history of theatre and spectacles touch another research discipline distant from fairs, we must leave the exploration of those links between commercial history and the history of theatre to future projects of a more multidisciplinary nature.⁵⁵

There would not appear to be many iconographic representations of fairs that have come down to us—or perhaps the term ‘fair’ and other related words are not used frequently by image indexers, which would make them easy to locate in image and illumination databases. Medieval illuminated manuscripts do contain market-like scenes, often serving as backdrops for liturgical or legal motifs.⁵⁶ Rural markets in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries seem to have inspired painters—especially the Dutch artists—more than urban fairs. When it came to depicting commerce in urban settings, the trade-related buildings (market halls, exchange houses) attracted more attention than the modest, ephemeral stalls that sheltered traders and their customers.⁵⁷ The Beaucaire Fair, or Madeleine Fair, as drawn with its rows of stalls and lively scenes by François Cléric in the early eighteenth century, is a marvellous exception.

As is so often the case, there are also sources that provide information about—and insight into—the fairs that one would not have thought of and that surprise at the archive. However, as a reflection of the very nature of fairs as meeting places,

54 We thank Beate Langenbruch (École normale supérieure de Lyon) for her expertise on this text and as well as the German translation she authored. See Galerie—online, *Dit du Lendit, Fairs in History*. https://fairs-in-history.huma-num.fr/expo/online/gallery?object=dit_lendit (07 October 2024).

55 Jean Dufournet (ed.). *La Farce de maître Pathelin*. Paris: Garnier Flammarion, 2005. In a rapidly expanding bibliography, we point to an anthology: Darwin Smith, Gabriella Parussa, Olivier Halévy (eds). *Le Théâtre français du Moyen Âge et de la Renaissance—histoire, textes choisis, mise en scène*. Paris: Éditions L’Avant-scène théâtre, 2014 and to a case study: Marie Bouhaïk-Gironès. *Le mystère de Romans. 1509, une cité en spectacle*. Paris: Éditions de l’EHESS, 2023.

56 We have chosen the most beautiful of these for the exhibition posters and the book cover.

57 See, for instance, Der Vladislav-Saal des Prager Hradschins während des Jahrmarktes 1607, Nuremberg, Germanisches Nationalmuseum, K12245. https://fairs-in-history.huma-num.fr/expo/online/gallery?object=foire_salle_prague# (07 October 2024).

an experience shared by the researchers should also be mentioned here: not only are the archives very heterogeneous when it comes to the documentation of fairs, but sources relating to a particular town's fairs are never to be found solely in that town's own archives. Due to the trans-regional nature of these events, the sources have to be sought out in multiple places. A fair was not only a matter for the archives of the host town! This places high research demands on any study simply dedicated to the fairs of a single city.⁵⁸

‘Fairs in History’: data and database

One of the principal goals of the CoMOR project was the development of a database drawing from the sources—published or unpublished—consulted by the team members. The database's construction needed to address three desires: first, from a scientific point of view, to create a database in which to store information about the dates and locations of fairs, merchants, goods, and monies traded, and the commercial itineraries; second, with respect to the project timeline, the pilot database needed to be operational as early as possible to allow researchers to test it with real-world data and sources, with a goal to be production-ready by the end of the first year of the project; finally, the database had to adhere to the standards of Open Science.⁵⁹

The database and the website that enables online access to it—known as the application *Fairs in History* (<https://fairs-in-history.huma-num.fr>)—were developed in Lyon by Jean-Paul Rehr (engineer, October 2020–March 2021). Using historic maps, Leif Scheuermann (Mercator Fellow at Erfurt, July–August 2020 and March–June 2021) produced a geographic database required for encoding CoMOR data, which was subsequently integrated into the *Fairs in History* application. The application also automatically incorporates the bibliography produced by the researchers in conjunction with source analysis using Zotero, aided by Alain Marois (Lyon) and Simon Franzen (Erfurt).

⁵⁸ On the importance of “translocal dimensions” of towns, see Jean-Louis Gaulin, Susanne Rau (eds.). Introduction: Lyon vu/e d'ailleurs. Une autre perspective sur l'histoire lyonnaise. In *Lyon vu/e d'ailleurs (1245–1800). Échanges, compétitions et perceptions*. Lyon: Presses universitaires de Lyon, 2009, 13–23.

⁵⁹ Following the requirements of the ANR, three versions of the Data Management Plan were issued (October 2020, February 2022, October 2023); Jean-Paul Rehr, Jean-Louis Gaulin, Susanne Rau, Ulf Christian Ewert. *The CoMOR Data Management Plan*. 2019–2023. DOI: 10.34847/nkl.8cee-kn2a. A data paper is in progress.

The database is structured around three levels of data.⁶⁰ The top level is a “collection” of sources identified and grouped by the researcher: a register, a series of connected documents, a merchant’s manual, etc. The collection contains “sources” which make it up: an act in a register in a series of documents, a section of a manuscript, etc. Finally, the fundamental level of analysis for the database are the “events” which capture the relations between people, groups, and institutions, in a specific location, on a particular date(s) for a particular activity. Each event thus establishes a nexus between actors, places, dates and then qualifies their interaction with a verb (predicate).

A series of collections (that is, sets of data constituted into a corpus by a researcher) can already be consulted online and are freely downloadable in various formats. Thanks to *Fairs in History*, it has been possible to carry out unprecedented analyses—for example, by using data from Francesco Pegolotti’s handbook, from reports about the Villeneuve toll on the shores of Lake Geneva, from the *Libro di fiera* kept in Lyon by the Salviati company at Easter 1508, from the diary of Andreas Ryff, and many others.⁶¹

As an active database, *Fairs in History* is continuing to receive new data gathered by team members. It will also be enriched for years to come by new collaborations between researchers and the CoMOR team. Michel Pauly, invitee of the final colloquium in Turin, kindly allowed and encouraged us to add the list of fairs in the Duchy of Luxembourg to the database based on his extracts from *Historia Luxemburgensis* by Abt Bertel (c. 1600).⁶² The *Fairs in History* database is thus not simply a project with a fixed horizon, but welcomes contributions of data produced by researchers working on medieval and modern fairs.

Exhibitions and the general public

The *Fairs in History* web application is also home to a section called ‘Fair Exhibition’ which gathers resources aimed at a broader and more general public than the database. From its very conception, the project intended to present the re-

⁶⁰ For an in-depth explanation of how the database responds to the diversity of project sources, see the contribution to this volume by Noémie Lacroix, Jean-Paul Rehr, and Leif Scheuermann.

⁶¹ All these collections are accessible on the *Fairs in History* website: <https://fairs-in-history.huma-num.fr/about> (07 October 2024).

⁶² Susanne Rau, Marisa Holzer. Archives nationales du Grand-Duché de Luxembourg, A-XIX-1 renseignements divers, 1575–1793, foires et marchés (COL0103). In *Configurations of European Fairs: Merchants, Objects, Routes (ca. 1350–1600)*, Jean-Louis Gaulin, Susanne Rau (eds.). <https://fairs-in-history.huma-num.fr/collection/COL0103> (25 July 2024)—to quote just one example here.

search via an exhibition to be shown at Lyon, Erfurt or Leipzig, and Asti. This was successfully executed as “Faires, villes et marchands/Messe, Städte und Kaufleute/Fiere, città e mercanti (1350–1600),” adapted individually to each site. At Lyon (30 Mar–30 June 2023), the exhibition was realised thanks to a partnership with the *Archives du département du Rhône et de la métropole de Lyon*, for which we are indebted to the director, Bruno Galland. At Leipzig, the *Stadtgeschichtliches Museum Leipzig* welcomed the exhibition (1 September–15 October 2023). A final stop was made in Asti at the *Archivio storico del Comune di Asti* from 20 September to 5 November 2024.

In place of printed catalogues, the project opted for a digital solution to present the documents and texts on display. The resulting application was developed for mobile devices and was structured by Anaïs James (Avignon Université), with interfaces by Martin Roček and the database by Jean-Paul Rehr. Such an application would be useless without content, and here Noémie Lacroix and Ulf Christian Ewert played an extensive role in the collective effort of assembling and organising the materials. A sub-section of the application was created by Noémie Lacroix which has been launched for the public, particularly aimed at teachers and students in middle and high school as new resources for teaching and learning about history.

Our work, both in its scientific research and its public engagement, has managed to attract the interest of professionals in the fairs and exhibition business. Even if the function of current fairs is very different from the medieval and early modern antecedents, the questions that the profession is asking today are not entirely disconnected from those with which their ‘predecessors’ were confronted: the balancing of calendars and schedules, the pleasures and inconveniences of travel, the interest in face-to-face contact despite modern tools appearing to make them redundant, and so on.

This volume

This book is the result of the international research project described above, which was funded over three-and-a-half years and whose members met every six months between 2019 and 2023, alternating between Erfurt and Lyon, and once in Leipzig for two-day workshops. This constant exchange of ideas faced two difficulties: depending on the situation regarding the pandemic, individual workshops took place online or in hybrid mode; and depending on their work group membership status (full or associate) and their individual work packages, the members were able to devote themselves to the project with varying degrees of intensity. In June 2023, the entire

research team met in Turin—the symbolic centre of the transalpine orientation of the CoMOR project—for a final conference, to discuss the results of individual studies, especially as related to the initial hypotheses of the project. Once again, everyone was able to benefit from the comments of the experts present. Invited speakers from outside the working group were able to expand our previous horizons with new thematic aspects or the geographical focus: Nicolas Sarzeaud, who had just completed his dissertation on the subject of the holy shrines of Christ venerated at the end of the Middle Ages; Boglárka Weisz, a specialist in urban and economic history of medieval Hungary; and François Gipouloux, a specialist in the economic history of China and the beginnings of globalisation in east Asia. Pauline Gomes, who wrote her master's thesis on the de Pierrevive family at the ENS de Lyon, also joined the group.

The thematically organised chapters that follow this introduction centre on the core geographical focus of the project, with this focus expanding in Chapter IV to include eastern Europe and even Asia. The volume concludes with a joint essay by Noémie Lacroix, Jean-Paul Rehr, and Leif Scheuermann presenting the project's website and database.

Chapter I (Creating, defining, and attending fairs) starts with a contribution by Ulf Christian Ewert on the use of different German terms for markets and fairs, especially in the phase when 'new' fairs were granted in the Holy Roman Empire between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries. He demonstrates that the granting of privileges by sovereign rulers was necessary to create a coordinated network of markets with a legitimised spatio-temporal structure—one which would not have emerged without third-party enforcement. Using the example of Besançon, Nicolas Sarzeaud points out a connection between the dates of the fairs and the dates for the exhibition of the holy shrouds that has been little observed until now. The proximity of religion and economy thus extends far beyond the fact that fair dates are frequently named after the liturgical calendar. Indeed, the cities would also have benefited economically when they scheduled a trade fair on the date of a religious feast that attracted many pilgrims. Starting from accounting documentation of the former Savoyard States held at the *Archivio di Stato di Torino*, Jean-Louis Gaulin shows how, at the time of Duke Amadeus VIII, the court of Savoy was well connected to commercial networks as well as to the credit markets via the Geneva fairs. Given that the Savoyard States were crisscrossed by trade routes frequented by merchants from both sides of the Alps, the study seeks to understand the motives behind purchases made explicitly at Geneva's fairs.

The contributions in Chapter II (Credit and financial techniques) deal with the financial functions of fairs. To start with, Armand Jamme provides a comprehensive overview of the role of the papal court in European finance. Through his research using original sources, he demonstrates that the Roman Curia was a

powerful economic player in long-distance trade by the fourteenth century at the latest. The Roman Curia sent its representatives to the European fairs, and their tax collectors used the fairs to collect church taxes throughout Europe. In a chronologically wide-ranging overview, Ezio Claudio Pia examines the pan-European role of the small town of Asti and its territory. Mainly known beyond the Alps in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries as moneychangers and bankers—the so-called Lombards—the merchants of Asti also contributed to making their city an interface between Mediterranean (Genoa, Savona) and northwest Europe. This role was further strengthened by a trade fair privilege granted by the Duchess Mary of Cleves in 1468. Pia's research in the local archives demonstrates that in the early seventeenth century, some companies from Asti, by managing large sums of money, were part of an extensive system of relations that involved trading centres such as Frankfurt, Cologne, St. Gallen, Lyon, Nuremberg, Lille, Turin, and Genoa. Through the insights gleaned from the outstanding bookkeeping practices of the Florentine Salviati company, which have come down to us in a massive corpus of documentation, Heinrich Lang's study presents us with another point of view: here, the perspective is from the single company trading with their south German partners at the Lyon fairs in the first half of the sixteenth century. A detailed study of several of the Salviati *Libri di fiera* shows the clear predominance of payments via bills of exchange (cash payments were marginal) and a marked interest in the central European silver trade. In his article, Claudio Marsilio focuses on the special type of exchange fair as a first attempt at integration of the European monetary and financial markets in the early modern period. Written and printed exchange lists (*listini*), preserved in large numbers for the seventeenth-century Italian exchange fairs in Piacenza, Novi, Verona, and Bolzano, are an essential source for the history of the European payment system—a system already disconnected from 'real places'—as it developed with the great exchange fairs, first in Besançon in the sixteenth century. Proceeding from a talk he gave at our workshop in January 2022, Markus Denzel has developed a text which summarises the fair functions discussed in this introduction: the major international trade fairs were also money, credit, and exchange fairs. The more innovations—such as discounting in cashless payment and credit transactions—had become established, the more the traditional commodity fairs became obsolete.

Chapter III (Merchants at fairs) looks at merchants and merchant groups at fairs. Clément Lenoble follows the Pazzi (or Passis) family from Florence to the Lyon and Geneva fairs and analyses the shifting economic geography of the late fifteenth century. His hypothesis is that Louis XI, King of France, wanted to encourage Tuscan merchant families like the Pazzis to settle in Lyon, a city loyal to French royalty, rather than in Avignon or Geneva. Pauline Gomes pursues a similar question by following the relocation of the Pietraviva family from Chieri in

Piedmont to Lyon, where they—known as Pierrevive in French documents—were active in the fair trade, especially in the import of spices as revealed by the town's tax records (*garbeaux*). Her research in archives on both sides of the Alps has enabled her to demonstrate that the merchant family was firmly anchored in the respective urban societies. In contrast, Marta Gravela follows in the footsteps of the French Lyon merchants who helped to shape the early fairs. Her article focuses on the group of merchants and moneylenders active in the city and beyond up to the mid-fifteenth century. After identifying the merchants from fiscal lists (*nommées*), she examines their economic and political role and measures the impact of the city's growth on this social group. In the last article of this chapter, Matthias Baumgartl analyses the liquidity management of the merchant David Gauger at Augsburg and David Wagner at Bolzano at the end of the sixteenth century. Employees of these financial service providers attended trade fairs for bill of exchange redemption dates as well as to obtain access to capital markets.

Chapter IV (Europe and beyond: time and space of fairs) addresses questions about temporality and spatiality of trade fairs on different levels—from micro to macro. Drawing on a travel book and an autobiography, Susanne Rau analyses the experience of a Basel merchant while visiting fairs. She proposes a rhythm-analytical approach to analysing fair dates because the fair calendars are normative, and no single trade fair merchant could possibly have visited all of them. The question, therefore, is: which trade fairs were visited by an individual trader and for what reasons? Which routes and means of transport did he use? How much time was required for the journey? Such a rhythm-analytical and spatio-temporal approach can reveal how the micro and macro perspectives were linked.

The Kingdom of Hungary was a special case in that there were virtually no fairs of the type known in western Europe in the late Middle Ages. The article by Boglárka Weisz deals with the emergence of a new trade route to Hungary, which connected the Rhineland (Cologne) with Hungary. In her study, she presents the history of this route from the perspective of the merchant groups—the routes they used to reach the Kingdom of Hungary and their trading activities.⁶³ François Gipouloux's contribution takes us to Late Imperial China, highlighting the prevalence of the rural fairs and the timing and duration of temple fairs. While temple fairs served as a link between the merchant economy of the countryside and a more complex urban economy—namely, as meeting points and

⁶³ On markets in eastern Europe, see also Katalin Szende, Erika Szívós, Boglárka Weisz (eds.). *Cities and Economy in Europe: Markets and Trade on the Margins from the Middle Ages to the Present*. London, New York: Routledge, 2024.

hubs of the long-distance trade network—the local sources are silent about a potential dissociation of commodity fairs and exchange fairs observed at the same time in western Europe. Markus Denzel concludes this chapter with a study of the commercial meeting points in Poland and Muscovy up to the seventeenth century. The specific nature of the bigger markets in eastern Europe—regionally important but playing almost no role in European high finance—leads him to suggest categorising them as “great annual markets.”

Chapter V (Presentation of the CoMOR website/database) concludes the volume with an article co-authored by Noémie Lacroix, Jean-Paul Rehr, and Leif Scheuermann on the *Fairs in History* database and application. Far from a technical review, the authors look at the application from the perspective of historians concerned with capturing and using as much data from sources as possible and in a way that allows different types of documentation to interact and inform each other. The subjects are thus practical and range from describing user interfaces that facilitate non-technical users entering data to describing the tools for research, to concerns about assuring data quality to facilitate the interconnection of sources, to the ready-made outputs for citation and different analyses, from spatio-geographic to networks of people, places, and objects. The chapter concludes with a few brief case studies demonstrating through the outputs the different ways that the merchant and fair data may be easily used.

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⁶⁴ Her report will be published in the *Annales Mercaturae* 9 (2023).

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