



# Investigaciones de Historia Económica - Economic History Research

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## Introducción

### Special issue. Pandemics in History

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Guest Editors

The situation derived from the current covid-19 pandemic has produced an increasing interest in the way how past societies dealt with pandemics and their resulting social and economic consequences. However, the study of the epidemics in the past is not a topic widely covered/discussed in Economic History. As a response to both demands/ interests, this special issue of *Investigaciones de Historia Económica - Economic History Research* compiles six original papers that address the development and consequences of different pandemics along the past centuries from an economic perspective. As guest editors of the special issue, our main goal was to obtain a wide sample of works that could cover different outbreaks in different countries at different times. Therefore, the articles presented in this special issue span from the Middle Ages to the twentieth century, from the Black Death and the 1918 Spanish flu in Europe to the 2014 Ebola outbreak in Africa.

In 'Hacia un marco analítico de las consecuencias demográficas y económicas de las epidemias', Vicente Pérez Moreda provides a detailed theoretical framework of the main demographic and economic consequences expected from an epidemic outbreak. Based on the extensive study of the historical evidence available, the author presents the effects on key variables like mortality and morbidity, marriages, birth-rates, migrations, the labour market or income, as well as more indirect consequences inside households or on social stratification. The article not only provides a description of the short term costs faced during the pandemic, but also on long-term consequences like those derived from lost generations or the effects in the ability of younger cohorts to accumulate human capital. Therefore, the text provides the reader with a clear framework that will allow a better understanding of the research contained in the rest of the articles of this special issue.

Using the current covid-19 pandemic as a framework, in 'On plague and Ebola in a time of covid-19' Cormac Ó Gráda addresses the similarities and differences between the 2014-15 Ebola outbreak and the recurrent plague epidemics that took place centuries before. Ó Gráda presents a step by step comparison of the different outbreaks from the way the diseases spread, to the public response and their economic consequences. The author concludes that although there were important differences, both diseases shared some common characteristics such as the campaigns organised by health authorities in order to contain them. The paper also highlights the importance of international cooperation that was key in the Ebola outbreak and also achieved in the efforts to control the late plague epidemics.

Plague was a constant threat in late medieval and early modern Europe as the article by Fco. José Alfaro Pérez and Fco. Javier Marichalar Vigier under the title 'The plague in Spain in mid seventeenth century (1647-1654). Prophylactic measures and commercial repercussions' show for the Spanish Mediterranean area. The authors present how the epidemic spread across the country and the measures taken to fight against it by the local authorities and the State based on cordons sanitaires and quarantines. This type of isolations prevented the spread to the center of the Iberian Peninsula, but not to the Mediterranean coast and stopped partially the commercial activity. In this way, in Catalonia and Aragon, the spread of the plague was related to the Catalan Revolt (1598 - 1640) and to the different communication and commercial routes. However, in the East and the South of the peninsula the epidemic was the culmination of hard years of bad harvests and a local market oriented almost exclusively to self-sufficiency.

As an example of the wide chronological coverage of his special number, Carlos Álvarez-Nogal, Leandro Prados de la Escosura, and Carlos Santiago-Caballero analyse the economic consequences of the Black Death in Spain within the European context. In 'Economic Effects of the Black Death: Spain in European Perspective,' they show how unlike in most of Europe, in Spain the short term effects of the plague produced a substantial decrease of GDP per capita as well as an increase of economic inequality. Their conclusions suggest that far from suffering Malthusian pressures, Spain could be characterised as a frontier economy, where the outbreak hit a relatively scarce labour that broke a fragile economic equilibrium. On the long term, the plague reinforced a system of frontier economy based in the production of high value agrarian products that put Spain in a leading position at the Age of Discoveries.

Mathias Mølbak Ingholt, Lone Simonsen and Maarten van Wijhe present in 'Same place, different stories: The mortality burden of the 1918-20 influenza pandemic in Denmark.' a detailed account of the 1918-20 Spanish influenza pandemic in Denmark. Their paper makes use of an extensive regional dataset to estimate the mortality burden in both urban and rural areas. The authors show how the impact of the pandemic was geographically asymmetrical, and take advantage of this heterogeneity to carry out a statistical analysis to identify the factors that were associated with higher mortality levels. They conclude that factors such as urbanisation or socioeconomic conditions were relevant while population density or access to medical care were not.

And last but not least, the study 'Epidemic and (il)legal trade in Southern Europe. Majorca, nineteenth century' by Pere Salas-Vives and Joana Maria Pujadas-Mora sheds light on the effect of quarantines and sanitary cordons on the commercial activity. They show through the case study of Majorca how the isolation measures were not a brake on the national/international (legal and illegal) trade growth, but these were the only possibility to keep track in the Mediterranean context of the nineteenth century. Moreover, they were endorsed by the agreements reached at the International Health Conferences. In this sense, the restrictions on freedom were one of the aspects of the creation of the nation state, being a formidable tool for the authorities to discipline the population. At the same time, they were essential to ensure the good health of

the population, as Majorca only suffer few epidemic outbreaks, and economic development. A circumstance that in the twenty-first century, with the current COVID-19 pandemic, seems to have been forgotten.

To sum up, we believe that the papers included in this special issue present a wide and comprehensive view of some of the most important pandemics in human history, of the way they developed, were treated, and of their most important consequences, mostly economic ones. As guest editors we believe that the knowledge contained in the following pages will surely provide a better understanding on how humanity dealt with severe epidemics in the past, and therefore also as guidance for societies not only in the current situation but also for those faced by future generations.