



Investigaciones de Historia Económica - Economic History Research

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Introducción

Special issue. Pandemics in History in Spain

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Guest Editors

Following the interest in the special issue on Pandemics in History published in 2020 by *Investigaciones de Historia Económica - Economic History Research*, this present issue deepens in the analysis of this crucial topic with a special focus on Spain. Furthermore, this issue also responds to the renewed national and international interest in the study of past pandemics that has been triggered by COVID-19 outbreak just over a year ago. It includes five original articles that deal with the effects of pandemics in history from the eighteenth century to the present tackling with preindustrial mortality crises, yellow fever in the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century, and the 1918 flu pandemic from a regional context. The issue also provides relevant information regarding the importance of the transfer of knowledge between research institutions, and the tensions that also existed in the past between health experts and political authorities. Our main goal as guest editors of this special issue was gathering new research results to broaden the knowledge on epidemics and their demographic and economic effects from a historical view. In this way, this issue seeks to offer a historical perspective to the COVID-19 pandemic and presents the lessons that we can learn and apply from the past.

This special issue begins with a contribution by María Isabel Porras Gallo, who in 'De la gripe de 1918-1919 a las epidemias de poliomielitis en España. Estancias internacionales de investigación en el proceso de modernización científico-sanitaria' analyses the impact of the 1919 influenza outbreak and polio epidemics, and the role that research transfers played in their management in Spain. The article highlights the relevance that the formation of Spanish scientists in leading research international institutions had in the control of epidemics, from the training of bacteriologists to the application of state of the art methodologies in the identification and analysis of outbreaks. Although the effects of these advances in the 1919 influenza pandemic were obstructed by an erratic and late political response, they were clearly visible in the polio outbreaks that followed. The effects of the Spanish Civil War in the dismantling of research groups produced a significant setback after the destruction of strategic infrastructures and the exile of key leading researchers. The article also presents a detailed description of the recommendations from health experts and the implementation of political authorities in the different outbreaks, revealing a tensions between both sides that connects the reader with recent experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In 'La pandemia de COVID-19 en 2020 en perspectiva histórica. Epidemias y crisis de mortalidad en los tres últimos

siglos en Castilla y España', Enrique Llopis Agelán, Vicente Pérez Moreda, José A. Sebastián Amarilla, Felipa Sánchez Salazar and Ángel L. Velasco Sánchez evaluate the effects of the current pandemic in historical perspective, comparing them with the number and intensity of the most relevant increases in mortality in Castile and Spain since the eighteenth century. The highest mortality crises in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were more intense during their first halves, with 75 per cent of the main mortality crises happening before 1814. The excess mortality reached in the early nineteenth century was the most severe of the period analysed, and presented levels that more than doubled those reached by the most severe crises that followed it in intensity. The authors conclude that during the twentieth century, only the Spanish influenza outbreak of 1918 reached similar levels to the increases observed in the preceding centuries. The comparison with the COVID-19 outbreak shows that the current pandemic presented effects that were relatively small compared with the historical experience in Spain, with an excess mortality similar to the mildest crises presented in the article.

Yellow fever outbreaks were frequent in time from the 18th century onwards in Spain. Needless to say, this phenomenon was directly related to the intensification of colonial trade in the Atlantic since the 18th century and its connections with the increasingly urbanized and dynamic Mediterranean coast. However, epidemic cycles of yellow fever have been scarcely studied as Víctor A. Luque de Haro, Andrés Sánchez Picón and José Joaquín García Gómez show in their article on 'Epidemia, economía atlántica y aprendizaje social. La fiebre amarilla en España'. Thus, they describe and map the different waves of yellow fever throughout the 19th century in Spain (1800, 1804, 1810 - 1812 and 1821). In addition, it is compiled the lengthy medical debate on the disease and it is analyzed how the public authorities acted in the face of this epidemic threat. At the same time, it will deal with the social gradient of epidemics, showing how the wealthier classes reduced their exposure to contagion by fleeing the affected localities, a practice documented throughout Spain.

The importance of the last pandemic in Europe before COVID-19 is seen through the last two articles devoted to 1918 flu pandemic from a local context. In this sense, Mikel Erkoreka, Josu Hernando, Eduardo J. Alonso and Anton Erkoreka in 'Impacto económico, demográfico y social de la pandemia de gripe española en Bizkaia (1918-1920)' address the economic, demographic and social impact of the Spanish influenza outbreak in Bizkaia between 1918 and 1920. After a detailed analysis of the

evolution and distribution of the outbreak in the region, the article proceeds to measure its impact, concluding that the burden was heavier in more industrialised areas. Working class neighbourhoods were hit harder for their high population density and poor sanitary conditions, as were younger cohorts that represented almost two thirds of all deaths. The study also measures the effects of the outbreak in the regional economy, concluding that they were relatively mild and framed within the general decline consequence of the post WW1 adjustment. The response of public authorities to the outbreak focused on the provision of basic goods and services for the vulnerable, but was less engaged in the provision of healthcare.

Using the case study of the municipality of Hellín (Castilla la Mancha), José Cañabate and Javier Puche seek to show also 'El impacto de epidemia de gripe de 1918 en La Mancha meridional: estudio de caso'. To this effect, they have reconstructed using individual data the mortality, epidemiological and seasonal pattern of that municipality for the period 1900 – 1929, showing, among other features, how the pandemic slowdown the population growth and the demographic transition and

also caused a decrease at the average age of survival and as well as a worsening in mortality rates for male population. Additionally, the impact of the flu epidemic on the local economy was not as noticeable as the economic deceleration observed around the pandemic years may have been rather a consequence of the contraction of foreign demand at the end of the First World War. Nevertheless, the working class experienced a worsening of their standard of living since nominal wages did not increase as much as inflation.

Therefore, this special issue presents a broad sample of studies that put in historical perspective the effects of the COVID-19 outbreak, from the comparison of the levels of excess mortality, the social inequality in the face of death, to the reaction of the public authorities to control previous pandemics or the low impact on local economy. We believe that the quality of the studies and their conclusions provide the foundations for a better understanding of pandemics, where history once again provides a unique laboratory from where we can learn and apply the lessons to face similar challenges today and in the near future in a global perspective.