

The Rise and Fall of Road Transport 1700–1990. By Theo Barker and Dorian Gerhold. London: Macmillan, 1993. Pp. 118. £5.99.

L. A. Clarkson, the editor of the Economic History Society's series of Studies in Economic and Social History, hopes that this small volume will serve as an antidote to a widespread but no longer tenable belief that road transport was unsuitable to the needs of a developing British economy. Road transport charges per ton-mile were, it is true, several times the cost of water transport in the eighteenth century. On short trips, though, the greater cost of loading and unloading could erase this disadvantage. Moreover, road transport had many advantages: it was invariably both quicker and more reliable, and thus tended to dominate the movement of high-value finished goods. It could also go innumerable places where water could not, and thus played an indispensable role in the movement of goods that went primarily by water.

Transport historians have done much to establish the importance of road transport in the past decades, though their research has been published primarily in specialized journals. Even there, the attention has too often been focused on the roads themselves, rather than the traffic upon them. Theo Barker and Dorian Gerhold show that improved breeding of horses, better wagon and coach construction, organizational innovations among carriers, and the exploitation of economies of scale all aided the rise in road traffic observed over the eighteenth century. (They likely go too far in downplaying the improvement in road quality that resulted from turnpike trusts.) The authors show a commendable evenhandedness in comparing Gerhold's with previous estimates of the increase in road traffic to London from 1690 to 1830; it increased by three to five times. Nor did this simply reflect increased demand; productivity in road transport services expanded by a factor of 2 or 3 over this period.

The authors at times suggest that much of this productivity advance was concentrated late in the period. It is both curious and disappointing that they do not try to estimate productivity advance over shorter periods. Gerhold's own estimates show that road carriage had more than tripled in volume from 1690 to 1765. Although he is right to maintain that increased traffic was a major cause of road improvement, he is too eager to ignore the wealth of contemporary comment that points to a revolution in road quality wrought by turnpikes in the first decades of that century.

The prerailway period is covered in much greater detail and more analytically than that which follows. Still, it is laudable that the authors have carried the narrative through to the present, for it is too easily forgotten that road transport continued to be of great importance after the appearance of the railway and before the automobile. Of particular interest in this period is the rise of the bicycle, which it is now recognized paved the way for the auto technically and organizationally, provided clear evidence of a large market for personal mechanical transport, and induced successful agitation for better roads.

This volume suffers from the usual flaw of books written by transport historians; it gives short shrift to the impact that these improvements in road transport had on the wider economy. It is not clear how the authors hope to achieve their aim of encouraging historians to pay more attention to road transport in this fashion.

A related point: British transport improvements cannot be appreciated fully in a vacuum. Space constraints naturally limit the degree of cross-country comparison possible. Yet the absence from the bibliography of Simon Ville's *Transport and the Development of the European Economy, 1750–1918* (New York, 1990), which provides such comparisons, is striking. In the era before and during the Industrial Revolution, Britain had the best road transport system in the world (see my *The Role of Transportation in the Industrial Revolution* [Montreal, 1991]). We can debate the importance of such a historical fact, but it would seem worthy of mention in a survey such as this.

I do not wish to end on a negative note, for I agree with the authors that road transport deserves more attention from economic historians. This volume is a valuable step in the right direction; it is up to date and surveys much that is interesting in the literature.

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THE MIDDLE EAST AND ASIA

The Commerce of Smyrna in the Eighteenth Century (1700–1820). By Elena Frangakis-Syrett. Athens: Centre for Asia Minor Studies, 1992. (No price given.)

This is a frustrating, repetitious, but still interesting and useful book. Although focusing on one city in Turkey, it gives a general view of conditions in the Ottoman Empire and a fairly detailed assessment of European trade and its expansion in the early modern period. The discussion extends back to the sixteenth century and reaches forward to the early nineteenth century. However, the main contribution of the book lies in the quantitative trade data presented in the appendices and in the brief evaluation of the political economy of Ottoman-European relations.

The reader is first treated to a glimpse of the Ottoman institutional structure, system of governance, taxation, feudal dependencies, land tenure, and usufruct of the land. Although power was constitutionally concentrated in the hands of the Sultan, it was distilled downward into the hands of the military leaders and members of the nobility. Trade benefited from this power structure, which in turn it helped to sustain. Another chapter discusses the socioeconomic and environmental conditions in Smyrna. Here the reader learns that though in the eighteenth century Smyrna suffered from recurrent plagues, earthquakes, fires, riots, piracy, and war, its trade with various countries of Europe continued.

The rest of the book, five more chapters, is devoted to details on trade. European merchants came from France, England, Holland, and other parts of the continent; United States merchants came later to trade with the Ottomans. The Ottoman counterparts were non-Muslim citizens, including Jews, Armenians, and Greeks, and of course, Muslim Turks. Smyrna served the hinterland, offered security to foreigners, had a good infrastructure, a good port, and a convenient location. Its trade benefited also from the Capitulations (concessions by the Sultan to foreign non-Muslim governments that gave them special trade privileges, often better than those enjoyed by Ottoman citizens). This part of the book, however, is repetitious and too detailed for the general reader, although not enough for the expert. It discusses trade with France and other countries, itemizing the main exports and imports, and the direction of trade and its value. Unfortunately, such detail does not enrich the presentation; a few tables would have been sufficient.

The study does, however, touch on some basic features of trade between Smyrna and the outside world, apparently as a proxy for trade of the Empire. For example, exports through Smyrna continued to be primary products, whereas imports increasingly became manufactured goods. Europe expanded its manufacturing, improved the productivity of its labor, and enhanced its domination of international trade. In the meantime, Smyrna and the Empire witnessed little socioeconomic change, little diversification of exports, and hardly any improvement of technology or competitive power.

Unfortunately, the foregoing observations are presented as assertions, with little attempt to explain why that state of affairs persisted in spite of the direct contact between the Empire and the more-developed Europe. The reader gets little help in trying to understand the rise and fall of Ottoman power. Another disappointment is the