

“Primitive” economy and direct selling of farm products (decline and resurgence of communal agricultural uses in Brittany)

Tristan Arbousse-Bastide

Summary:

This article presents an archaeological and anthropological point of view on the evolution of agricultural and social uses in Brittany. The remains of traditional landscapes and ancient households, give us the keys to understand the evolution of rural economy. Since the 19th century (and sometimes even as early as 17th-18th c.), the agricultural progress through specialization and the appearance of market economy has been a pretext for dismantlement of communal habits. The morcellation of the landscape and later the erasement of field boundaries caused the loss of cultural references. The early development of the direct sales of agricultural products is presented as an evidence of the growing importance of money in commercial exchanges in rural areas. It illustrates the transition from a traditional subsistence economy to a market economy. In Brittany this process brings about a deep crisis in the relationship between town and countryside and the expansion of the urban way of life. However, the recent development of direct sales of agricultural products may be considered as one of the ways to regenerate local rural economy.

key words:

Brittany, agricultural uses, communal uses, landscape, field boundaries, regrouping of lands, money and exchanges, direct sales.

タイトル:

”ソヴァージュ(原始)”経済と産直—ブルターニュ地方の農業に見られる地域共同体生産活動の衰退と復活—

概要:本稿は考古学・人類学者としての見地からフランス北西部・ブルターニュ地方の農業生産及び社会生活活動の変遷について研究したものである。この変遷は当該地域に現存する風景、居住様式、そして経済活動に残された痕跡から見出すことができる。特に注目すべき点として、19世紀(時にはすでに17、18世紀)から始まった、農業技術改良と市場経済の発達による、段階的な地域共同体の慣習の破壊と地方農村地帯の文化・空間の指標の消滅が挙げられる。つまり農業生産活動の細分化と農村風景の破壊である。初期の農産物直接取引販売は農村地域での経済取引のモネティゼーション(通貨制使用)への手がかりとなり、自給のためのいわゆる伝統経済から市場経済への移行とされていた。このプロセスはブルターニュの環境に大きな変化をもたらした。農村地帯の生産活動や生活環境が都市化した生活様式に取って替わられるのである。しかし今日の産直あるいは農産物のサーキュイ・クール(限定流通)—生産者から消費者へ僕仲介をなるべく通さない流通—の動きは農業従事者の減少を招く蟬蝶 農業が主流となりつつある地方へ新たな経済発展の選択肢として希望を与え、俾一層の進展が望まれるのである。

キーワード:ブルターニュ、農業生産活動、地域共同体の慣習、風景、ポカージュ(生け垣や木などで囲まれたブルターニュに多く見られる農村の田園風景)、土地区画整備、流通のモネティゼーション(通貨制使用)、産直(農産物直接取引販売)あるいはサーキュイ・クール(限定流通)

Long Summary :

Despite profound mutations of agricultural and social practices in the north-west of France since late 19th century, there are still traces of ancient communal uses in Brittany. Some recent aspects of direct sales of agricultural products are the heritage of this traditional sociability.

Traditional landscape in Brittany is characterized by the “bocage”: fields and land boundaries enclosed by earthen banks (planted with bushes and trees) or dry stone walls. Most of these boundaries were made quite recently (19th c.) along with the development of “modern” agriculture and private property.

However landscape archaeology shows that there exist ancient boundaries formerly used to delimitate land

cultivated in common using traditional agricultural techniques. These were large open fields framed by angular boundaries called “mejou” or circular boundaries “round fields”. They are often linked to parishes founded during the early Middle Ages and are recognisable by their names starting by “plou”.

Food producing in traditional agriculture was based on extensive cereal cultivation and limited cattle breeding. Along the sea coast “arvor,” the use of seaweed as natural fertilizer gave good wheat crop. Inland “argoad,” land resting was practised instead of using of fertilizer. Wheat was cultivated along with rye; and buckwheat for regenerating the soil. Moorland and swamp were maintained in common and freely used for general pasture and collection of raw material for everyday life.

Mediaeval customary laws used to protect common agricultural work and some forms of peasant property:

- the construction of land boundaries within common land was forbidden
- the right of “vaine pature” (free pasture) ensured the common use of moorland and swamp but also allowed pasture on enclosed common cultivated land after harvest.
- the right of “domaine congéable” (13th c.) allowed the peasant to possess all constructions above the land (house, trees, culture) in exchange of a tax paid to the lord.
- the “quevaise”, one of these laws, allowed cultivation on communalized land in exchange of land clearing. This egalitarian system, organised by religious communities (Cistercians), prevented accumulation of land and ensured a communal way of life.

The stringency of money in rural mediaeval economy limited the occurrence of trade and therefore exchange within communities could not really be considered as direct selling but at best as forms of barter.

The fragmentation of the land and the abandonment of communal agriculture started with the development of linen and hemp textile shipping trade with Spain and England between the 16th and 17th centuries. Hemp canvas was used to produce sails or bags, and linen was hand-woven to produce fine burlap. Linen and hemp were traditionally cultivated and woven in almost every farm in Brittany. By becoming intermediary between cloth weavers and traders, a certain class of rich farmers emerged. In the north of Finistère called Leon they were named “Juloded” or the “riches”. They disengaged themselves from communal duties, started gathering private land and land clearing within communal moorland and swamp.

Since the French Revolution (1789) several laws had been voted in an attempt to force the fragmentation and privatisation of former communalised land. Communal and traditional working practices were considered as an obstruction to the advance of modern agricultural science and technology. New agricultural fertilizers, the intensification of cereal multiple cropping (barley, oats, wheat), and cattle fattening on herbland, were the paths to the market economy. Finally it was in 1850 (Second Empire) when a special law was adapted for the Breton counties. It resulted in the multiplication of small private enclosures (“bocage”). Ditches and banks were built and planted with trees and bushes in order to picket lots, to prevent cattle shifting, to produce fire-wood, and to improve water management of agricultural land.

Social implications were multiple. A dispersed habitat appeared, and social ties decreased. Small landowners and farm workers became considerably poor due to a rural depopulation. Traditional economy and agriculture attempted to survive using various strategies:

- the right of “domaine congéable” was maintained until the early 20th century.
- the egalitarian succession system
- the self-help housing in traditional architecture
- the direct selling of farm products

- the use of traditional measuring system.

After the Second World War, the fragmentation of land and the multiplicity of small agricultural exploitation were considered as an obstacle to farm mechanization. The improvement of soil productivity with chemical fertilizer, and the development of intensive agriculture were essential steps leading to rural modernity and prosperity. Land consolidation through destruction of “bocage” caused a considerable conveyance of registered land. The development of the road system, electric network, mass consumption, single-family house, ended the traditional rural way of living.

Farm workers were replaced by farm executives and group solidarity by social economy (association, agricultural marketing cooperative, membership organisation ...). Traditional houses were dismantled or their former use changed. In the villages, public squares and market places were turned into parking area, and pedestrian circulation was reduced. Town supermarket became more attractive for consumers than local shops.

The emergence of corporate farming forced a vast population of former farm workers to undergo social exclusion (those who lacked technical training, or older people and women...). To survive they combined social help with informal economy and multiple working activities:

- direct selling
- service exchange
- combining agricultural and factory work.

Since the nineties the new rural landscape has been stabilised. Large private open-fields took the place of “bocage”, and farm population is diminishing. Town areas dominate economically and culturally. The diffusion of the urban way of life is a growing acculturation in rural areas. Peri-urban population is increasing around large towns like Rennes.

Small agricultural enterprises remain numerous and agri-food industry is an important source of employment in Brittany. But these low-paid jobs fail to attract young generations. The land speculation encourages the transformation of agricultural land into residential areas or pleasure gardens. The direct-selling of high quality organic farming products is slowly developing and could stimulate the renewal of the farmer population. However customers idealize the notion of the agricultural production system often inconsistent with the rural way of life.

Middle-class neorural population seems to be privileged but remains financially and socially fragile. Residential investment even with low interest rate results in long term indebtedness. Rural residents tend to leave as the average market rent and the cost of private and public transport are increasing. Social ties are weakened by daily rural depopulation, the ageing of society, the reduction of family units and social isolation.

Today, new forms of direct selling of farm products could be one of the solutions to relocate economy in rural areas. It is a way for farmers to record their objection against agriculture becoming part of the tertiary sector. Production skills and knowledge must be preserved to resist global market economy.

The relationship between customers and farmers is based on mutual reconnaissance and therefore depends on personal involvement. It should not be limited to a contract or a financial agreement. Commercial law, morality and ethics are insufficient to ensure a balanced relationship. A philosophical approach of direct selling might help to reinvent the rural way of life.

High specialization and corporate agriculture means degradation of landscape and a strong dependence to phytosanitary products, chemical fertilizer and sooner or later, genetically modified organisms. This failed to prevent rural depopulation and poverty. The rehabilitation of subsistence and domestic economy as part of human life is a necessity in order to reach a sustainable economical development in rural areas.

There is a need for a reappraisal of communal habits and traditional agricultural practices in Brittany. Crop diversification, The direct selling of farm products are some of the ways to achieve this goal. Co-operative, small scale work adapted to local soil and village land are the key for a modern rural way of life. The creation of business units is a necessity but a secondary target in a farming community.

exchange of a tax paid to the lord.

Quevaise ケヴァズ:

A mediaeval right (12th c.) allowing cultivation on communalized land in exchange of land clearing. This egalitarian system organised by religious communities (Cistercians) prevented accumulation of land and ensured a communal way of life.

Juloded ジュロデツ:

The “riches” (17th-18th c.), a certain class of rich farmers working as intermediary between cloth weavers and traders.

Vocabulary :

Bocage ボカジュ:

Fields and land boundaries enclosed by earthen banks (planted with bushes and trees) or dry stone walls.

Mejou メジヨウ:

A type of primitive openfield generally quadrangular in shape.

Elipse bocagère エリプス:

A type of circular primitive open field also called “round field”

Arvor アルフォル:

Land along the sea coast

Argoad アルゴアツ:

Inland of Brittany

Vaine pature ヴァヌパツル:

A Mediaeval right for the common use of moorland and swamp. It also allowed pasture on enclosed common cultivated land after harvest.

Domaine congéable

ドマヌコンジャアブル

A mediaeval right (13th c.) allowing the peasant to possess all constructions above the land (house, trees, culture) in

“Primitive” economy and direct selling of farm products (long summary)
Tristan Arbousse-Bastide



A “mejou” type field structure in Cap Sizun, south Finistère.



Two « elipse bocagère » in Leon, north Finistère.



Preserved « bocage » landscape near Betton (north of Rennes) Ille et Vilaine.



Periurban landscape and field structure close to Betton (north of Rennes) Ille et Vilaine.



New openfield landscape near Betton (north of Rennes) Ille et Villaine.



Periurban private housings near Betton (north of Rennes) Ille et Vilaine.