
REVIEWS OF BOOKS

H. BERGHOFF, *Englische Unternehmer 1870-1914*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1991, pp. 387.

Berghoff's book on English entrepreneurs from 1870 to 1914 is published by Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht who also published *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* one of the best-known German historical journals, and is part of the *Burgertum* (bourgeoisie) series, one of whose editors is Han-Ulrich Wehler. Berghoff's work takes its rightful place in the tradition of German *Sozial-und Wirtschaftsgeschichte* (economic and social history) and in its now well-established branch of studies on the bourgeoisie — or rather on the different bourgeoisies — where social history again pays special attention to trade unions and the peasant classes. Berghoff concentrates on one very specific section of the bourgeoisie, the entrepreneurial bourgeoisie.

Despite the central role of entrepreneurial initiative in industrialisation and in the transition from the old regime's closed economies to the era of continuous growth, economic theory which accompanied this great change and has tried to account for it, relegates the entrepreneur to a secondary role. As Berghoff shows at the beginning of the book, the classical and neo-classical schools are based on autonomous and impersonal market dynamics and attach very little importance to the entrepreneur, whose role is re-valued only by a small eccentric group of «dissidents» such as Schumpeter, Schmoller and Sombart. It may be emphasised that they all belong to the German-Austrian area, a point to which we will come back later.

Berghoff's book goes back to the heart of the question concerning the make-up of the entrepreneurial bourgeoisie and their role; the area he chooses for his research is Great Britain, the industrial and entrepreneurial nation *par excellence*, according to common historiographical consensus. The period examined by Berghoff is generally seen as the first phase of decline in British industrial power: the giant first-comer's power began to fade and late-comers like Germany began to steal the limelight on the world economic scene, as if according to some fatal dynamic inherent to the rise and fall of national fortunes. Connected with these accepted characteristics of the period is the idea that British entrepreneurial virtues were in decline, and that the economic elite aped the aristocratic way of life, in other words became gentryfied.

This theory, which is another historiographical commonplace, is severely put to the test in Berghoff's book. The entrepreneurs of three important industrial cities — Manchester, Birmingham and Bristol — are examined using

the «collective biography» method. The total sample is made up of 1,639 individuals; their income, type of activity, entrepreneurial decisions, fathers' professions, education, religion, political influence, ways of gaining social prestige, type of dwelling-house, and ways in which leisure was spent, are all recorded. Thus a complete analysis of the sample is made according to a wide range of economic, social and cultural variables; this allows the analyst to overcome the fundamental distinction between industrial entrepreneurs and commercial bourgeoisie, which was very deep-rooted in the mentality of the time.

The results of the analysis are preceded by an outline of the economies of the three cities during the period in question. First of all, the geographical, social and religious origins of the entrepreneurs are examined and what emerges is a substantially endogenous recruitment. In one of the most interesting parts of the book we have, in the sample under study, confirmation of the classical Weberian argument about how central the religious factor is in economic activity (a centrality which is not necessarily conducive to the goal of maximising profits but which may be perceived in the way work is organised and in the relationship between workers and owners).

Yet another result of the analysis is the confutation of the gentrification theory, understood as the entrepreneurial bourgeoisie's return to the land. Land investments in practice were often confined to small areas near the cities, unless there were strong economic reasons for larger purchases. Rather, it was the British aristocracy (historically with a less rigid juridical status than their counterpart on the Continent) which adopted bourgeois models and attitudes, thereby contributing to the formation of a relatively homogeneous upper class.

The most notable difference was then not between classes or groups, like the usual distinction between aristocracy and bourgeoisie or even between commercial bourgeoisie and entrepreneurial bourgeoisie, but between regional situations: instead of social hierarchies we have a geographical hierarchy among the provincial élite and the London élite, both absolutely supreme in terms of prestige and political importance.

In any case, the British entrepreneurs' economic success, their capacity to act quickly and to react to the new challenges posed by the world economy is without doubt proved by Berghoff's analysis. In other words, the most optimistic interpretation of the available macroeconomic data is confirmed in micro-economic terms: in absolute terms, British economic growth continued unperturbed and it maintained its central position in a world context. The new powers advanced but still did not endanger British supremacy. If some criticism may be levied at the British entrepreneurs it is rather that they made only small investments in cultural formation and in keeping abreast of technical and scientific developments — and herein lies the difference, the great difference, with regard to contemporary German entrepreneurs.

Here we touch on another field of enquiry: the history of technology and the importance of «R and D» (research and development) factors in economic

development. These themes, which are central in the comparison with the rise of the German nation, lead us to another question that underlies and pervades all of Berghoff's research: namely comparative history. Britain and Germany are frequently compared and this is implicit in the very choice of the 1870-1914 period, a period which was much more significant for German history than for British history. At the basis of this approach there is at stake an indirect verification of the German *Sonderweg* model and its specific route to modernity. By studying the British entrepreneurial bourgeoisie, not at the time of its glory but at the beginning of its decline (i.e. in the phase in which it risked gentrification, a phenomenon parallel to the German bourgeoisie's *Feudalisierung*, which according to current historiographical thought brought so many and such terrible consequences) and by confuting historiographical commonplaces, the author contributes fundamentally to providing a more complex interpretation in the debate about the many different and specific national paths to industrialisation. But even if one poses the question about German specificity without negative or positive preconceptions, one must surely recognise that the heroic vision of the entrepreneur is part of it, a vision which, on the contrary, is foreign to British culture. Berghoff's prodigious research is certainly a critical and problematic re-elaboration of this idea.

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- R. BRENNER, *Merchants and Revolution: Commercial Change, Political Conflict, and London's Overseas Traders, 1550-1653*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993, pp. XX-734.
- A. G. OLSON, *Making the Empire Work: London and American Interest Groups 1690-1790*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1992, pp. XIII-261.
- L.D. SCHWARZ, *London in the Age of Industrialisation: Entrepreneurs, Labour Force and Living Conditions, 1700-1850*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992, pp. XV-285.

Like other aspects of human activity, historical writing is subject to fashion: agricultural history, social history, industrial history have had their phases of popularity. Now, after years of neglect, attention has turned to the history of London which, because of its size and diversity, has daunted historians. The three books under review here deal with aspects of London history between 1550 and 1850.

The first concerns politics and trade between the middle of the sixteenth and the middle of the seventeenth centuries. Professor Brenner made his reputation with an analysis of agrarian class structure and economic

development in pre-industrial Europe. Now he has turned to matters of trade and politics. Though published in 1993, this substantial volume is based on a Princeton PhD thesis of 1970 entitled 'Commercial change and political conflict: the various sections of the merchant community in Civil War London' which led to articles in the *Journal of Economic History* in 1972 and *Past and Present* in 1973.

The purpose of his account, Professor Brenner states, is 'to lay bare the relationship between the evolution of English commerce in the century after 1550 and the political activities and alignments of London's overseas traders in the conflicts of the first half of the seventeenth century'. The first part of this book provides an account of the generally accepted course of English foreign trade 1550-1640 which offers less in re-interpretation than is suggested. As a result of his earlier publications, his argument that re-exports as well as imports rather than exports powered commercial expansion at this time is well-known.

Brenner traces three phases of merchant involvement in this hundred years. He shows how the Merchant Adventurers, who controlled cloth exports mainly to Antwerp in the middle of the sixteenth century, gave way to the largely aristocratic members of the two major trading companies, the Levant Company and the East India Company, who dominated the import trade because of their political and financial links with the crown. In turn, these monopoly interests gave ground to what Brenner calls fresh recruits to commercial activity, the 'new-merchant group' whose main interest was in trade with the North American colonies but who later encroached on trade with the East Indies. Different men with different political interests were involved in the different trades with different modes of organisation and operation. This analysis provides the background in part two for a discussion of the complex realignment of the merchant community between the 1620s and 1653 in intricate detail. Whereas the Company merchants were important in support of the Crown, from 1640, with Cromwell's rise to power, the new colonial merchants became the chief architects of the Commonwealth commercial policy. The discussion, some of which is carried on in long footnotes, pays more attention to lists of names than to the activities of individuals. Brenner's detailed analysis ceases with the dissolution of the Barebones Parliament and the fall of the new-merchant group from power. Finally, in a lengthy postscript, Professor Brenner applies his analysis to a broader interpretation of political conflict in later Stuart England, influenced considerably by recent publications. In this densely argued, somewhat repetitive book, the core of Brenner's argument is to stress the central position of London in the politics of the English Revolution.

Then there is the place of London in imperial policies in the following decades. It has long been recognised that pressure groups played a part in sharpening British politics in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, an area of study in which Professor Alison Olson has been engaged for some years. Now, after a number of papers, Professor Olson has produced a book linking

activities in the American colonies and London. She is not concerned, as Charles Andrews was, with the structure of imperial politics; rather her aim is to discuss how the empire worked. How, she asks, in the absence of an army of officials and elaborate machinery, did the British empire function? She traces the rise of pressure groups, mercantile, religious and ethnic — such as Presbyterians, Baptists, Jews, Quakers, Lutherans and Huguenots — on both sides of the Atlantic. She dates the emergence of interest groups in London from the 1640s when Parliament, as Brenner shows, was anxious to gain public support and the emergence of similar groups in the mainland colonies from the 1690s as colonials decided that problems of mutual concern could best be dealt with in London. Relations developed in the 1700s, flourishing between 1721 and 1754. Imperial affairs went reasonably well in these decades when colonials were happy for London merchants to act on their behalf. The 'representation' of the Americans, though never official, Professor Olson argues, was crucial in keeping the colonists content with the empire. Even if American groups did not always win in the give-and-take of London's interest group politics, they felt that they were part of the process by which decisions were made and rarely questioned British authority. But things fell apart in the third quarter of the eighteenth century as different persons became involved, issues changed and British and American interests diverged. As a result, imperial relations ceased to work so smoothly and the dissolution of the first British empire threatened. In this discussion there is perhaps an over-concentration on London and more attention could surely have been given with advantage to what happened elsewhere in Britain, in ports like Bristol, Glasgow and Liverpool which also had American connections. Such a comment confirms Professor Olson's view that her book is an interim report, which indicates some directions in which aspects of her study could be extended and elaborated by historians who follow her trail.

The third of these books concerned with London provides an analysis of London's working population between 1700 and 1850 and deals with the effects of the industrial revolution on the metropolis. For the past seventy years the standard account of London life in the eighteenth century (and beyond, for its discussion takes the story up to the mid-nineteenth century) has been that by Dorothy George, written at a time when developments in coal, iron and textiles in the north of England and south Wales dominated historical writing and London's history was generally neglected. J.L. Hammond's assertion that 'the industrial revolution was a storm that passed over London and broke elsewhere' is an interpretation which Dr. Schwarz, author of the book here under review, is set to contest. In the course of the eighteenth century London grew to be the largest city in the world with its population rising to almost one million by 1800. But as the largest manufacturing centre in England with more steam engines than Lancashire, London was not dependent on a single group of industries. It was England's largest port, it had a range of processing industries, it was a major centre of conspicuous consumption, it provided the residence of lawyers, civil

servants, doctors and others. As a result there were several Londons: the port, the east end, the city, the west end, and so on. Employment was affected by the seasons — by weather and by fashion — and the state of trade — particularly by war. London suffered a prolonged depression during the reign of George II but flourished from the 1760s until the crisis of the late 1820s. In his detailed statistical analysis of the economy and social structure of London between 1700 and 1850, Dr. Schwarz also enables the impact of London on economic growth in its region to be examined. But his discussion pays more attention to the nature of the labour force, including the role of women, and to living conditions than to the activities of entrepreneurs. The really great improvement, Dr. Schwarz argues, was the decline in the death rate, particularly infant mortality, from consumption, smallpox and the fevers. The impact of industrialisation was complex but its greatest effect as far as London was concerned was to strengthen the dominance of the service sector, where London led the world. Dr Schwarz's book should ensure that in future discussions of English economic growth in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the place of London will be more appropriately assessed.

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- A. CARACCILO-G. BONACCHI, *Il declino degli elementi. Ambiente naturale e rigenerazione delle risorse nell'Europa moderna*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1990, pp. 1-264.

Though ecological problems arouse the deepest concern in our present age historians are generally unable to transfuse ecological interest into their work. Of course, themes closely related with the history of the environment have long been studied: the movements of plants and animals, the history of demography, of economic activities, of science, of technology, of medicine. But for the reconstruction of environmental history this is not enough. One needs a broader perspective and different emphasis. Historians have competently examined questions of direct environmental relevance (such as deforestation, land reclamation, earthquakes, sources of energy), but economic and social viewpoints have usually dominated their analyses.

The fact that historians have had difficulty in adopting an ecological perspective is quite remarkable; they are, as is well known, a camaleon-like species capable of adapting to the most diverse tastes, fashions and ideologies. Given this unusual maladjustment and the urgency of environmental issues, the publication of a collective work on many themes of environmental history is especially welcome. Directly or indirectly, the volume deals largely with economic questions, and I hope that my decision to review it in a journal of economic history is auspicious and symbolic of the inclusion of the

environmental costs of production and consumption within the ordinary interests of economic historians.

Alberto Caracciolo discusses the concept of ecological history. Dieter and Ruth Groh look for the religious roots of contemporary problems. Giusto Traina offers a series of considerations on the history of the environment, especially that of ancient Italy, warning the reader against accepting many wrong but widely-diffused interpretations. Jean-Paul Deléage reconstructs the ecological aspects of the history of agriculture (especially French agriculture) during the last two centuries. Sergio Anselmi sketches the history of the diffusion of chemical products in Italian agriculture. Yuri Vasari describes the vicissitudes of animal breeding in the Finnish region of Kuusamo, near the Polar Circle. Piero Bevilacqua analyses the impact on the environment of what he calls *water economies*, in marshy or rice-growing areas of Italy. Peter Brimblecombe traces a history of air pollution. Ilja Mieck writes of forest damage caused by industrial smog during the last century. The contributions by Istvan N. Kiss and Joachim Radkau also focus on wood and woods. Emanuella Guidoboni studies the significance of earthquakes in Italian history. Lucia Volta examines the interrelationship between rural activities and natural environment in a Piedmontese valley near Switzerland.

It is impossible to describe adequately such a composite work within the short space of a brief review. The authors deal with different problems, countries and ages, without aiming at a synthesis. The book as a whole confirms something already known through common sense: before the Industrial Revolution ecological disasters were limited to certain specific areas and they did not threaten the survival of our species. In this respect our times differ completely from all preceding ages, and our contemporary ecological anxieties and fears can find little interest in the study of history prior to the Industrial Revolution, or even prior to our over-populated, consumer-based, resource-squandering era.

But a better knowledge of past interaction between man and the environment is interesting in itself and, besides, it is an antidote against simplifications or idealizations of man's past ecological behaviour. In his analysis of *water economies* Bevilacqua remarks that from the point of view of environmental consequences no productive activity is innocent on this earth. He describes, for example, the efforts of fishermen around Rome to raise their profits by obstructing rivers, thus illegally extending marshy areas and worsening the sanitary condition of neighbouring populations. In the north of Italy the production of rice needed big investments, brought good profits, and entailed the gravest health problems: the spread of malaria, of rheumatic and gastro-intestinal diseases. It meant also a diminished supply of vitamins in the diet, because infiltrations of water from the paddies — besides polluting the wells of water used for drinking — damaged the roots of fruit trees. The landowners and the major tenants earned more, but at the cost of spreading disease and also social unrest. Agricultural labourers, who were terribly

destitute, had a greater opportunity to find employment, but also sickness and death. The rest of the population obtained scarce benefits, while it had to put up with much of the evil. In this complex situation, from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century those governments (like our government) had to act as moderators between entangled economic, social, sanitary and ecological interests.

The book describes various ways of co-existing with the environment. But independently of the diverse ways of living, for centuries and perhaps millennia our attitude towards the environment has basically remained the same: careless, anthropocentric, postulating a fundamental separation between nature and man and the right of the latter to dominate the former. Not even those who protested against the pollution of early industries thought about the environment. Their preoccupations were restricted to human health and perhaps to agriculture. As a matter of fact, industrial smog was perhaps detested about the wrong reason, considering its effects in the light of the miasmatic theory of infectious disease. And firm faith in technology and progress could even give a vaunted symbolic significance to industrial pollution. Indeed, businessmen liked the representation of the smoking chimneys of their factories in advertisements, on letter-heads and payment-forms.

Is this man-centred attitude towards nature inherent in the human species or is it a distinguishing feature of Judeo-Christian civilization? The question of the relationship between mentalities and facts is both insoluble and fascinating. In this specific case it takes on added interest, since our future chances of success in coping with ecological dilemmas may depend also on our ability to adopt new attitudes, before harsh realities violently compel us to make mental changes. Dieter and Ruth Groh stress those aspects of Christianity in general, and of Calvinism in particular, that stimulated the development of science, the excessively optimistic use of technology, the absurd belief in the inexhaustibility of natural resources. Unfortunately their interesting account, short and without notes, deals exclusively with Christianity, except for a brief mention of Greek classical thinkers. For a real grasp of the problem we would obviously need to analyse attitudes towards nature, science, technology and progress within other religious milieus, primitive and civilized, western and eastern.

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J. MACEK, *Jagellonský věk v českých zemích (1471-1526)*. 1. *Hospodářská základna a královská moc* (The Jagellonian Age in the Czech Lands 1471-1526). 1. *Economic Basis and Royal Power*, Praha, Academia, 1992, pp. 342.

Josef Macek (1922-1991) was one of the few outstanding historians of the past era of Czech historiography — both in his work and in his intellectual

honesty. His first book *The Hussite Revolutionary Movement* (1952), in Czech, made him immediately a favourite of the CP which for the following 18 years heaped on him honours and favours. Macek was made director of the most important institution of historical research, the Historical Institute of the Academy of Sciences which he headed (1952-1970); he was a member of the presidium of the Academy of Sciences, member of the party's Central Committee (1960-1969) as well as a deputy of the National Assembly (1964-1970). In spite of all these official functions, however, he retained his integrity: as the director of the Historical Institute he encouraged and gave full support to the team of historians who painstakingly gathered documentary evidence on the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968 and published it in November of that year under the title *Seven days of Prague*. In consequence Macek was forced to resign his post and was only allowed to serve at other academic institutes in minor jobs.

Macek began his scientific career with the above-mentioned publication on the Hussite movement — fully in accordance with the party line which tried to trace the historical “roots” of the contemporary workers (= revolutionary = Communist) movement. Hussitism was indeed an important social uprising (also on a European scale) so its Marxist (which in the 50s meant dogmatically Marxist) interpretation served very well the party's purposes. The following works dealt with different aspects of the movement: a book on the military commander of the remnants of the Hussite army *Prokop the Great* (1953) as well as a two-volume summary *Tabor in the Hussite Revolutionary Movement* (1955-56). Through this research Macek gained an international reputation as is testified by the book he published in Paris in 1973, *Jean Hus et les traditions hussites* (a Spanish edition also appeared: *La revolución hussita*, Madrid 1975).

It is therefore surprising when we are told in the introduction to the book under review: “During the entire period I worked as a historian I felt it my life's task to try to appraise comprehensively those 55 years of national history at the end of the fifteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth century. Only ostensibly did I move away from this duty when I tried to understand the Hussite revolution and Czech reformation...”. Be that as it may, we have now the first volume of Macek's *magnum opus* dealing with “Economic Basis and Royal Power”, while the following three parts will treat the aristocracy, the towns and the rural population. Let us hope we will not have to wait for these volumes as long as we had to for this first one: it took 14 years before the book was published — its introduction is dated 1978 yet it had to make its round of official reviewers and only the arrival of the new regime in November 1989 made its publication possible. The author himself did not live long enough to see his major work in print.

We can only surmise why the historian whose major works dealt with stormy social upheavals chose as his last subject a period during which the Czech lands — to quote a recent commentator — “were a seat behind the top of an old country stove”. Macek himself admits having tried “to penetrate more

deeply into the heart of an age that since the times of Palacký and Tomek remained in the shadow of historiography's disinterest" (p. 9).

The researcher's interest in a "neglected" period might have had a deeper motive which the external circumstances of Macek's last 20 years might have strengthened and indeed, as he himself confessed, even reversed: the idea of a (centralized) state power. He writes: "It seems to me that the relationship with the state is the main difference between Palacký's conception and mine. F. Palacký was, I believe, too much a prisoner of the struggle for state rights to remain uninfluenced by ideas about the bourgeois democratic struggle for an independent Czech state. Therefore the Jagellonian period seemed to him more or less a period of anarchy in which firm support for a strong energetic ruler was lacking. I myself shared years ago the Revivalists' belief in the omnipotence of a centralized state power... It is the gradual demythologization of an "omnipotent centralized state" which, together with a minute exploration of the estate movement and of the ideopolitical legacy of the Hussite revolution, has led me to opinions that are contrary to those of the great nineteenth-century historians..." (p. 10).

We had to quote extensively to show the author's starting point. Another point, seemingly a muted one which, however, emerges very clearly is his Marxist orientation. Out of 11 chapters of the text (there are 24 pages of supplement) 4 are devoted to economic problems. A very short one (7 pages) concerns "Society, order, estates — basic concepts". Its brevity, however, can be doubtless understood in view of the volumes that should follow which will deal with social groups and classes in more detail.

The economic part follows the traditional division: there is a chapter on agriculture, one about industrial production, one devoted to trade, one on currency and prices. Macek's analysis of the economic stages of development in the Czech lands during the Jagellonian period can be summarized as follows.

There were no revolutionary technological innovations in agriculture in this period. However, small accessories to the inventory of tools (the cutter, the cross-bar) accompanied the very slow yet continuous growth of the level of technology and production which was becoming an ever larger part of the developed market economy. The search for new sources of income caused an expansion of some spheres of both vegetable (viticulture) and animal (pisciculture) production. It is in these domains that the peasants most markedly exceeded the level of previous generations. Nevertheless Macek is forced to state that new production processes remained "confined to the medieval framework and they even strengthened the economic base of the feudal lords" (p. 84).

Neither did industrial production exceed remarkably the limits of feudal production relations. At the end of the fifteenth century the industrial base expanded from the towns to subordinated towns and small townships. The consequence of this atomization was not intensification but extension and diffusion. 55 years of Jagellonian rule represent a unitary period characterised

by inertia and stagnation. Compared with neighbouring Germany, technological progress was retarded. As there was no further division of labour there is no wonder that industrial production was kept within the limits of local markets.

At the end of the chapter on industrial production the author puts the question as to why more developed forms of capitalist production relations did not emerge in the Jagellonian Czech lands to the same extent as in other West European countries and Italy. He sees several reasons, one of them being the geographical position of these lands, cut off from sea transport and the main trade routes which would have made possible the acquisition of cheap raw materials in a sufficient quantity. A further important cause in his eyes was the feudal base of Czech society since the aristocracy with its strong economic and power position was not oriented towards economic enterprise. Armed with the instruments of the feudal state it defended its traditionally ancient economic privileges. The lack of a labour force was also rooted in the attitudes of the aristocracy which struggled to keep labour bound to agricultural production with its tributes and labour services. Commercial capital did not accumulate to any significant extent, was mostly locked up in land and was not used for developing industrial enterprise. The isolation of a "heretical country" brought disturbed trade connections and weakened the possibility of accumulation of domestic capital. In Macek's opinion the causes of the retarded economic development of the Czech kingdom compared with other European countries were of a complex nature.

The picture Josef Macek painted of the Jagellonian period of Czech history does not seem to differ too much from the picture of the well-known predecessors he refers to — Palacký and Tomek. Yet his emphasis on economic and social history presents quite another perspective as does the first chapter of the book which provides an analysis of how the Czechs of the period conceived of time and space. By treating this as a subject Macek breaks new ground in Czech historiography — as he does with his attempts to give "psychological" portraits of both the Jagellonian kings, Vladislav and Ludvík. There is no other Czech historian on whom the French *Annales* school made such a strong impact. The development of his thinking is the more remarkable when we remember his first books.

Thus we can only recommend the book which bears rigorous criteria and which prompts us to look forward to its continuation. It is probably only in the last volume that a complete bibliography will be given which in this volume is referred to only in extensive footnotes. Last but not least it is especially in the context of recent Czech historiography that the book is to be seen as a major work.

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M. TOUSSANT-SAMAT, *The History of Food*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1992, pp. XIX-801.

Over the last few decades the field of historical enquiry has considerably widened and the history of so-called material culture has become popular. Previously it had never been the object of serious study and had always been treated as an isolated and marginal subject by traditional historians. With the *Annales'* school, however, and especially the contributions of Marc Bloch, Lucien Febvre and Fernand Braudel, material culture has now become the object of frequent research. Through wide-ranging and long-term analyses these scholars have developed and reinforced the natural tendency of history to descend to the level of everyday life, to the ordinary and the "common man". Naturally with this approach there is a risk of embarking upon some obscure study for its own sake with no overall goal or historical scheme, a problem which however we shall only allude to here, without carrying out a detailed analysis.

The history of food lies within this context and to some extent sets itself up as a model for this new way of perceiving history. The book under review draws explicitly on the *Annales'* school: it is no coincidence that the bibliographical references on which the research is based are mainly essays on the history of food published in the French journal. However, there is an evident and important difference in the approach used in this book compared to other studies dealing with the same subject: rather than being centred on the man-food relationship and perceiving the latter as a general and undifferentiated entity, the book aims to provide a broad and detailed study of the close and diverse relations between human beings and individual foods, focusing on the ways and the periods in which this not always harmonious relationship developed.

The result is a rich and varied study which is very readable; if at times it appears to be a little text bookish, it is nonetheless an important contribution to the history of food in view of the scope and interest of the work and considering the patient and appreciable effort to reconstruct so many different subjects. Given the enormity of the work we will not dwell on all the foods dealt with and will restrict our analysis to those parts which appear more useful for giving us an overall picture.

It seems strange that the author should begin her study with the history of honey, although on a closer reading this choice is by no means casual. Almost as if she wishes to confute the eternal conflict between man and the environment, the author focuses on the fact that ever since the beginning of the history of mankind honey has always been a gift of nature. Given the great poverty of food and the very hard struggle that people have fought to provide for their own daily sustenance, honey has always been considered a welcome and unexpected gift. Well before the development of sophisticated foods, honey was an integral and necessary part of man's diet. Later, like all sweet foods, it was attributed magical and healing properties, and was increasingly used in food preservation.

With hunting the conflict between man and nature openly manifested itself for the first time. It was the only sure way of guaranteeing survival for oneself and for one's family. Not surprisingly, beasts of the hunt frequently appear in ancient iconography, indicating their centrality in the mentality and in the culture of the times, whereas man is depicted much less frequently. Centuries later, hunting became an increasingly aristocratic pursuit, with the creation of special hunting grounds and gaming laws which became the symbol of the ruling classes. The first important law was issued by the Merovingian King Dagobert who regulated all the game in his territory, introducing the term forest which officially became part of the French language, and soon after entered the usage of other European languages. The author's analysis of the attitude of the Catholic Church towards hunting is interesting. While it was strictly forbidden for all "God's servants" to go hunting, bishops and prelates spent much of their free time in gaming pursuits, following the natural inclinations of the aristocratic classes. However the author is careful to examine the different attitudes of the most popular world religions towards food habits and the great influence the latter had on diet.

The practice of domesticating animals spread mainly in the Middle East. However, before being used for food, cattle were often kept for traction and for their milk. Animals for hauling quickly became necessary, since it was impossible for men to carry out all the heavy work of ploughing and preparing vast tracts of land for cereal growing by themselves. In the Middle Ages meat consumption increased, especially in the large urban centres in Europe. Cattle were reared very close to the towns to make transport easier. In the towns themselves roads were built and were used exclusively for the meat trade. In view of the large amount of land they owned and of the efficiency and rational nature of their administration, religious communities had a major role in the meat trade: the Templars and the Abbey of S. Germain-S. Denis had sold meat since their foundation and received high and enduring profits.

Cereal-growing, particularly corn, was certainly an ancient practice. On the banks of the Jordan in Jericho, corn remains have been discovered, dating back to the tenth century B.C. Cereal-growing has for long had such an important influence on man's possibilities for survival that the author rightly speaks of the "imperialism of cereals." Yet it is important to point out that not even the totality of bread grains was able to create abundance and prosperity and all over the world man has had to adapt to a chronic and often fatal food scarcity. Despite such a shortage, there has always been something mysterious and impenetrable in the mere fact of casting seeds to the ground in a particular season and of seeing them turn into crops laden with fruit only a few months later, almost without any human intervention. And in view of the veil of mystery surrounding it, cereal-growing has taken on a heavily symbolic value and has gradually come to signify the transition from what is hidden to what is manifest, from ignorance to revelation. Later it became a more strictly religious symbol and for Christians the harvest has always been considered the exclusive gift of God's benevolence.

Not surprisingly, ever since ancient times annual festivities and the very rhythm of life were dictated by sowing and harvesting; a famine or a bad harvest was seen as a punishment for man's behaviour and gave rise to penitential rituals in Mass. When the potential of cereals was discovered, they soon became a fundamental instrument for increasing the economic power of the wealthy classes through the widespread practice of exploiting serfdom and price speculation.

The author continues her study with the analysis of other foods and the development of their relationship with men in the course of centuries, although we cannot discuss them here. In conclusion, we should emphasise once more the value of this work, not only in view of its academic rigour and the amount of research carried out by the author (particularly if we consider the absence of a convincing and exhaustive theoretical framework for reference) but also for the balanced and agreeable way in which the subject is treated.

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F. NOEL, *The Christie Seigneuries: Management and Settlement in the Upper Richelieu Valley 1760-1854*, Montreal, McGill-Queens University Press, 1992, pp. 221.

Within the sphere of economic history, research focusing on the study of the estates of individual families is becoming increasingly important, both in terms of quality and quantity. Far from appearing local or microscopic in content, this type of "field research" claims openly to test the veracity of certain general definitions and hypotheses. It aims to reconstruct and to delineate micro-realities where the effects of more general events can be verified and measured. And this is the exacting task which Françoise Noel has set herself. With her detailed reconstruction of the origin and the development of the estate owned by Gabriel Christie, a British military officer who settled in Northern Canada in 1760, Françoise Noel carries out research in a well-defined area, the Upper Richelieu Valley, in a wide-ranging chronological context, from the second half of the eighteenth century to 1854.

The subject dealt with is of undoubted interest and Noel's analysis is extremely innovatory compared with existing studies. Research on aristocratic estates has often been too much influenced by a unilateral, narrative view of events: this type of view, which has, with time, become almost a school of thought, usually considered the real estate of great families as a preponderantly static and conservative factor that for a long time greatly hindered progress and industrialisation. Whatever its general value, this *a priori* analysis has in many ways prevented or at least hampered our gaining a thorough, circumstantial

understanding of the mechanisms by which big land-owners have been able to conserve and even extend their estates over a long period.

However, the author's main aim is to set aside similar ideological analyses in favour of investigating with comprehensive and well-defined field research the individual landowner's ability to change and adapt in response to new social and economic conditions.

Of course the danger of this kind of research lies in isolating and exaggerating the behaviour of certain individuals without setting them in a wider context. However, Françoise Noel's research does not appear detached from the main historical events of the period, such as the War of American Independence, or the many peasant revolts during the rebellion against aristocratic privileges. On the contrary, we can appreciate the author's wish to clarify the consequences and the economic and social effects that these general events had in the specific geographical area under consideration.

For research of this kind, the availability of homogeneous and well-ordered archive sources and the use made of them are of fundamental importance. The author has certainly succeeded in making the most of the possibilities which archive documentation on the Christies could offer: by means of a systematic scrutiny of the notarial documents regarding the Christie estate which have been put onto a database programme with a series of well-defined variables, she has reconstructed the purchase of the original estate, the gradual purchase of bordering lands, the main contractual clauses between landlords and tenants, expenditure for investments and land improvements, the income deriving from the exercising of certain rights, such as access to the land, timber felling, the use of mills and water and lastly, but by no means least, inheritance procedures. A series of maps and graphs depicts the gradual purchase of bordering lands, the type of land and the profits made by the Christies in the timespan under consideration.

The decision to purchase land was not at all unusual on the part of the new English colonisers; in fact after the Seven Years' War, land-ownership continued to play an important role in the colony's economy. It was one of the safest and most profitable forms of investing cash and moreover guaranteed indisputable control of traditional resources. Within this context, Gabriel Christie exploited to the full the opportunities he was given: what distinguishes Christie and his heirs is the fact that they sought to obtain the maximum from the resources that owning a great deal of land could guarantee in that particular period of history. When the Christies purchased land in the Upper Richelieu Valley, it was an uninhabited area, ever liable to plunder and pillage. But after the War of American Independence, many American emigrants from the South settled in the region on account of its geographical location and its relative ease of access. With their arrival, the Christies began to amass their fortune and gradually increased their revenue; the Christies reserved for themselves the right of access to the land, of felling and selling timber and the use of water and mills (many mills had been built on strategic sites on the estate). The family thus

revealed a remarkable entrepreneurial talent and apposite contractual clauses were used to secure substantial and extended profits. Moreover, the subsequent Continental System in Europe imposed by Napoleon forced the British to have large-scale recourse to Canadian timber. It is no coincidence that from 1783 to 1815 revenue from the estate increased, due principally to the felling and sale of timber, the Upper Richelieu Valley's chief resource. Of course there were plenty of problems inherent to the administration of such an estate: the difficulty of exacting rents when due and the huge increase in arrears accumulated above all in the 1830s and 1840s (which, moreover, were the years in which the peasant revolts were most rampant) are evidence of the numerous problems encountered in the day-to-day administration of the estate.

The Christies did not always manage their own estate personally: they had to go away for periods of varying length and they delegated management to local administrators. Yet being absent from their domains did not necessarily mean, as is often believed, that they stopped thinking and acting as entrepreneurs, nor that they were uninterested in estate management. On the contrary, Françoise Noel's book reveals a detailed correspondence between landlord and agents, which gives ample proof of the Christies' constant interest and of their desire that the traditional rights connected with land-ownership should continue to yield increasing revenue.

Although it is concerned with one specific estate, this book is an original contribution to studies on the ownership and management of large estates in general, which is a fundamental and to a large extent still unexplored issue. Instead of the usual interpretations or, worse still, the ideological prejudices that for a long time have marred a clear, objective examination of the facts, multiple research comparing different geographical areas and case studies to establish analogies and differences would be very useful for bettering our knowledge in this field.

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