

MODULE III



**ANNALES-MARC BLOCH AND BRAUDEL
TRENDS IN HISTORIOGRAPHY**

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CHARACTERISTICS OF ANNALES SCHOOL OF HISTORIOGRAPHY



- In 1929, a new journal called *Annales d'histoire économique et sociale* appeared in France, featuring the work of a new generation of historians: Lucian Febvre, Marc Bloch, Fernand Braudel, and Ernst Labrousse
- The *Annales* wanted to integrate insights and methodologies from anthropology, geography, sociology, economics and psychology.
- It was interested in longer time spans, the social history of everyday life, and “mentalites” (modes of consciousness).
- In essence, it was an analytical history which looked at economic and social history in a long-term perspective, departing from a traditional event-based historiography.
- These historians rebelled against traditional historians' obsession with wars and states, the “great” men of history, and looking at development as linear.



- *Annales* school historians examined phenomena and their underlying causes in depth with a particular attention to long stretches of time.
- Peter Burke has divided the movement in three phases or generations:
- **Phase 1 (1920-1945):** the movement is very radical and subversive and strongly opposes the tradition of political history. [Marc Bloch, Lucien Febvre]
- **Phase 2 (1945-1968):** the movement becomes a school of thought, with its main concepts (structure-conjuncture) and method (serial history of changes over the long term). [Fernand Braudel, Ernst Labrousse]
- **Phase 3 (1968-1989):** the school becomes more fragmented and shifts its concern from the socio-economic to the socio-cultural. [Ariel, Bourdieu, Goffman, etc.]

PHASE 1

Marc Bloch (social psychology)



Bloch started with a study of what he called ‘collective illusions’. In *The Royal Touch* he looked at the belief that the king’s touch could cure people from diseases.

- He compared France and England on a long term scale and analysed how such collective illusions survived after the Middle Ages.
- His aim was to problematize the fact that people believed such improbable things for a prolonged period in time, and to point to possible causes of such a phenomenon.
- A survey of this kind could be regarded as a psychological history, and Bloch partly applies Durkheim’s ideas on collective beliefs and mentalities.



- In 1931 Bloch published *French Rural History*. This work is important for the *Annales* school because it uses a regressive method (*lire l'histoire à rebours*).
- Bloch believed that it was better to proceed from the known to the unknown, hence he reads history “backwards”.
- His study on feudal society examines the culture of feudalism, its sense of time, forms of collective memory, and the structures of feeling and thought.
- *Bloch here and elsewhere attacks the “idol” of origins arguing that historical phenomena ought to be explained in terms of their own time, rather than of earlier periods.*

Febvre (linguistics, human geography)



In 1922, Lucien Febvre published *La Terre et l'évolution humaine* (translated as *A Geographical Introduction to History*, 1932)

- His work on religion is an example of a historical linguistics of the impossibility of atheism in the 16th century.
- Stood for the consideration of ‘multiple action of profound causes’ in historical writing
- Initiated the studies of historical geography and human geography, history of relations, rule of contingency in history, intellectual history and history of mentalities or history of collective psychology
- Studies of Martin Luther and Rabelais stand out as the initial works on intellectual history
- Makes detailed enquiries into the link between men and groups in the background of social necessity



- Martin Luther and Rabelais-As the product of social necessity and in the background of the structural moorings of the society

PHASE 2

Ernst Labrousse (conjuncture and structure)



He was an economic historian who largely used quantitative methods.

- He also introduced the idea of *conjuncture* (which can be translated as “trend”), i.e., the connection between diverse yet simultaneous phenomena
- .Conjuncture came to be contrasted with the idea of structure, in the sense that conjuncture identified the short-medium term whereas structure concerned long-term.
- Conjuncture and structure were however complementary to one another in Labrousse.
- He also adopted demographic models and mainly wrote regional history.

Fernand Braudel (methodological structuralism)



- Braudel became a crucial figure of the Annales movement, and is reckoned by some to be the greatest historian of the 20th century and the father of modern historiography.
- His most famous work, *Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II*, made him an international reputation
- Braudel attempted to describe deeper *unities* and lengthy rhythms of material life relating to the geographical environment and the structures that shape societies such as technology, trading, sailing routes, and mentalities.
- Started a whole new way of looking at the past, in which the historian re-created a lost reality through a feat of historical imagination based on detailed knowledge of the habits and techniques of the ploughman, the shepherd, the potter, and the weaver



- According to Braudel, historical time is divided into three forms of movement:
- geographical time
- social time
- individual time
- the past was really a unity: “history can do more than study walled gardens”—this was the ultimate expression of the intellectual ambitions of the *Annales* school.
- Braudel introduces the social sciences (esp. geography, political economics and sociology) to history.
- Braudel also demonstrated that history does not exist independently of the historian's gaze



- In *Méditerranée*, Braudel is interested first and foremost in the environment in which the peoples of the Mediterranean basin used to live: the mountains and the plains, the sea and the rivers, the roads and the towns
- *Méditerranée*, is divided in three parts
- The first part is in fact a geohistory and a history of the environment.
- In the second part, he looks at the general trends of the mediterranean people, writing a kind of history of structures, the economic, the geographical, the technological, etc.
- In part 3, Braudel is concerned with *undermining the history of events*
- Within the context of human history Braudel emphasises two themes:
1) technology and 2) exchange.
- 1) Human history is a history of *technological mastery* and the development of the skills basic to ancient civilisation: fire and water technology, pottery, weaving, metalworking, seafaring and finally writing.



- 2.It is imbalance that creates exchange and therefore leads to progress
- In *Civilisation matérielle et capitalisme*, Braudel divides his object of study into:
 - material civilization (where production takes place, immobile).
 - economic life (the place of trade and distribution).
 - capitalist mechanism (the realm of consumption, where change is more rapid).
- Braudel's main contribution lies in his insistence on writing total histories
- His main priority was to show that *time moves at different speeds*, and he divides time into geographical, social, and individual. He also examines long stretches of time, introducing into historiography the notion of *la longue durée*