

REVIEW ARTICLE

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French Historical Method: The Annales Paradigm. By Traian Stoianovich (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1976). \$12.50, 260 pages.

In 1957, one of Fernand Braudel's assistants in Paris told a Ford Foundation official that ". . . the social sciences had risen three times in France and fallen twice. The pioneering of Comte and Durkheim had been destroyed by philosophical talk. Now the third period of solid empirical studies is emerging and it shall not be undermined again." Such is the characteristic optimism of two generations of French historians and social scientists whose works have inspired a flowering of a new social history throughout the world. Traian Stoianovich, a Rutgers professor known for his studies of Balkan civilization, was a student in Paris in the late 1940's when members of this movement known as the *Annales* gained its first important footholds in the French university. He has remained in close contact with its important leaders over the past three decades as a friend and American fellow traveler. His former mentor, Fernand Braudel, author of an awesome two volume study of the Mediterranean world, has written a foreword to his book. In a rare autobiographical essay of importance in itself, Professor Stoianovich is praised for having written a "reflective, attentive, and fruitful" history whose roots lie deep within the intellectual history of modern France. Thus duly crowned by the *chef d'école*, this book appears just at the time when the growing interest in the *Annales* among American scholars threatens to trivialize the whole movement.

Happily, through Professor Stoianovich's dedicated and privileged efforts, this danger is abated. His comprehensive guide to this complex historiographical movement, the first in English, is superior to anything that has been written anywhere on the subject. Yet at the same time the book represents a magisterial synthesis of specialized studies like that of the Swiss historian Hans Dieter-Mann which have focused upon the continuing positivist tradition in French scholarship that seeks to adapt empirical models to the study of history.

While no mere spokesman for a school, Traian Stoianovich has nonetheless that audacity and talent for interdisciplinary invasions which made the founding masters of the *Annales* circle, Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre, the *bêtes noires* of the French professoriat during the last three decades of the Third Republic. His application of the Kuhnian paradigm of scientific revolutions to French historical scholarship is a useful gambit by which to place the *Annales* "new history" into some rational framework. Indeed, his periodization of the history of history, from the nineteenth century lineal, progressive "story-telling" to the longing for an integral historical synthesis in the first decade of the twentieth century, provides one of the most concise and elegant descriptions of the progress of historiographical thought in France in the past two centuries.

Stoianovich links the origins of the *Annales* "paradigm" to the decline of the European age. A new relativism, defeats in war, and ideological strife created a

“plastic present” in which French historiography was transformed by “breakthroughs” like those in the natural sciences. Thus *Annales* scholarship, in Stoianovich’s view, is symptomatic of a post-imperial stage of historical explanation—a “third paradigm” concerned with structures, problem solving, and new compartments of comparative social history.

Such a new history—involving a search for wholeness, for series, and for the *longue durée*—is ingeniously described in one of the author’s best chapters as the struggle between the mythological Hermes and Hestia. But has not all modern historiography since the French Revolution been formed out of just such a dialectic between the principles of action and change (Hermes) and those of order and fixity (Hestia)? The question, of course, remains moot as to the circumstances (*conjonctures*) which created the “third paradigm” in the post-World War II period. Here Stoianovich’s admirable treatment of Braudel’s macrohistorical classic of 1949 with its emphases upon passages and routes will prove invaluable for readers of the book.

While Professor Stoianovich clearly serves as a defender of a movement, his interventions within debates he describes so well are modest and infrequent. Yet for one who is as close to the contemporary “court” of *Annales* academic circles, one is surprised to find so little in the book about the personalities and activities of the powerful figures who have dominated this movement. Why, for instance, when Robert Mandroux’s books are mentioned in the notes, does Stoianovich not inform the reader of the infamous feud between Mandroux and Braudel which has created a kind of schism among the men who control the destinies of French scholarship at the present time? Also, in dealing with such Marxist critics of the *Annales* as Louis Althusser one finds the author’s loyalty serves to distort the vitality of an important debate.

Such a departure from the role of *amicus curiae* is particularly apparent in Stoianovich’s treatment of one of the acknowledged precursors of the *Annales*, Henri Berr, the mentor of Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre, and perhaps the outstanding philosopher of history in France during the first half of this century. As Braudel indicates in his Foreword, it is misleading to think of Berr’s *synthèse* movement as having become too “philosophical and unpragmatic” for the founders of the *Annales d’histoire économique et sociale* by 1929. Recently uncovered letters of Bloch and Febvre reveal that their central concern at that time was the need for more general ideas and philosophical prowess among their colleagues who were stunted by a pragmatic approach to professional scholarship. Clearly, the historiographical ideals of Henri Berr and his *Revue de synthèse historique*, which he founded in 1900, has remained the spur in the development of a distinct creative and speculative *Annales* mentality which Stoianovich so skillfully describes in the pages of his book.

In spite of such “inevitable procedures of exclusion” which Michel Foucault finds in such quasi-religious groups as the *Annales*, Stoianovich’s study functions well as an introduction to a dominant intellectual movement in twentieth century France. His footnotes, in the absence of a bibliography, will serve as a valuable guide to both the general reader and the specialist. But as Professor Stoianovich himself points out, his book is not the “full-blown” history of the *Annales* that is so much needed. For the “breakthrough” which produced the “*Annales* paradigm” remains

entwined within the many "strange defeats" of the French world of the late Third Republic. His book points the way to future research in archives like those of the Ford Foundation which provide an intimate and revealing view of Braudel and his circle in the 1960's.

Traian Stoianovich's book, completed and published in America, reminds us that France has remained a center of intellectual leadership in the social sciences. It will enliven the debates concerning the future of the historical profession and make the "*Annales* paradigm" more than just a rather cryptic title for a well-wrought and brilliant book.