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Jean-Claude Daumas, ed., *L'histoire économique en mouvement, entre héritages et renouvellements*. Lille: Septentrion, 2012. 406 pp. 30.00€. (pb). ISBN 978-2-7574-0376-1; Jean-Claude Daumas, ed., *Faire de l'histoire économique aujourd'hui*. Dijon: Éditions universitaires de Dijon, 2013. 358 pp. 22.00€. (pb). ISBN 978-2-36441-042-8.

Review by Hubert Bonin, Sciences Po-Bordeaux.

Instead of preparing pioneering “handbooks” as syntheses of a specialised academic field that can serve as toolboxes for researchers, French academics favour sweeping arguments as conclusive, state-of-the-art assessments to underline breakthroughs, gaps, and differences between past and present contributions that advance the work of the scholarly community under consideration. However, since the mid-1960s (and a progressive international conference on economic history held in Aix-en-Provence), French economic historians have felt lagging behind their American and British partners, all the more since the death of the “giants” of the 1930s-1970s such as Fernand Braudel, Ernest Labrousse, Jean Bouvier, Bertrand Gille, and Pierre Vilar, among others. Thick tomes were published, starting with the multi-volume *Histoire économique et sociale de la France* printed by the Presses universitaires de France under the guidance of Labrousse and Braudel, in the 1970s and 1980s.[1] A powerful *Comité pour l'histoire économique et financière de la France*, sponsored by the French government, has organised several conferences, while a few dozen bigwigs have created economic history departments in several universities and research centres in Paris, including Nanterre, Sorbonne I and IV, and the École des hautes études. At universities outside Paris can be found dozens of Ph.D. theses as well as their joint *Association française d'histoire économique* (AFHE), some 200 members strong that for years has brought historians together at conferences. Carlo Belfanti's chapter on Italy suggests that the situation is little different on the other side of the Alps, and makes me wonder if it would have been fruitful to compare the astonishing dynamism of the similar association in Spain with the AFHE.

As a recent president of AFHE, J.-C. Daumas is thus well-positioned to assess the evolution of this academic area since the 1990s in these two collections of essays, especially in his introductions on “trends, issues, proposals” and his chapter on “business history à la française.” He returns to the “glorious past” after World War II and sums up the state of the field at the turn of the 1980s. Even as he underscores the diverse and rich character of research advanced by French historians, he cannot but lament the pervasive perception of their supposed “backwardness” compared to the work done in American and British universities as measured in terms of participation at international conferences (despite recent exceptions), publication in foreign journals, international leadership in associations (at the World Economic History Congress, for instance), and even their poor command of English. However, he fails to mention the practice of sending specialists to teach large numbers of students in big university centers in well-known countries, principally the U.S., U.K., and the Netherlands.

This practice helps to explain the financial peculiarities of French research centres in the humanities, at least until the 2010s, especially in the little provincial fiefdoms that exist apart from the major research hubs at, for example, Paris IV and the *École des hautes études* for modern economic history, or Bordeaux in ancient economic history. To use a military metaphor, French economic history relies more on light, mobile units of researchers than on armoured divisions. This explains why the recurrent allusions to

differences among these faculties and various inferiority complexes likely do not correspond to reality. In fact, big research programs, several of them inspired by J.-C. Daumas himself, Dominique Barjot, Patrick Fridenson, and Hervé Joly, on the history of businessmen and firms or the rebirth of rural economic history, for example, have opened the door to broader inquiries and inspired junior colleagues. J.-C. Daumas seems to suggest that because conceptual pioneers of recent times have not hailed from France, French specialists cannot undertake sophisticated studies of global economic dynamics that link the interaction between institutions, socio-mental factors, and economic realities. Even more is it the perception that econometrics did not seduce French researchers to engage in enough quantitative analysis in order to bridge the rift separating economic historians and economists over the question of using statistics and econometrics. Michel Margairaz, a current “boss” of economic history at the Université de Paris, confirms J.-C. Daumas’s views, by insisting that “assets” like the co-operation with a few semi-public firms, the creation of the journal, *Entreprise & Histoire*, and co-operative research work. There are exceptions, of course, and his vision might seem “positivist” as it promotes the “social contribution” of economic history (an assertion that the recent economic crisis of 2008 might have contested). Through these syntheses, then, French economic history might appear challenged by the process of the “refoundation” of French universities (under the guidance of the State and imposed by the amalgamation of universities, which demands strategic refocusing, and by the stimulation of the international rankings). Thanks to such an assessment—as the conclusion of a collective program of pondering the specialised field along a “SWOT” matrix (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats)—the whole community and its foreign partners can now define the offensives to be conducted and the gaps to be filled.

The other chapters grapple with more specialised topics. Mathieu Arnoux scrutinizes the momentum gathered by French economic history alongside actual evaluation: journals (four), and the diversification of the field to introduce management, accounting, sociology, and institutions. These are not really a French monopoly, but they prove that French researchers have been actively engaged in the new questions being posed by the international communities, all the more as they are confronted by their international colleagues at the foreign conferences. The history of technology, already a French specialty (since Maurice Daumas), has been reinvigorated; and a new approach has recast local and micro-history into the history of “territories,” in order to determine whether the (Italian?) model of clusters or local business communities and cliques had analogues in France. A rupture occurred when French specialists tackled the “market,” which had been somewhat neglected by the Marxist generation: whatever ideologies—the history of consumption, the operation of the market economy, exchanges and trade houses, as well as trade finance were revisited, and even brought to bear on ancient and medieval history. This discussion ties in well with the chapter dedicated to these periods. Raymond Descat applies current work on the economy and exchanges to ancient history. Laurent Feller complains about the dearth of economists studying medieval history, raising similar questions about the market, capital, prices of land, and prices in general.

Didier Terrier follows the same path into the modern period, up to the 1820s. However, we can detect in his synthesis some discrepancy between cutting-edge researchers, well aware of recent techniques and issues, and those scholars still wedded to old-fashioned methods. Routine has also become an issue in the history of corporations and universities as institutions that cannot escape the risk of inertia. Very little of this book considers the serious French issue of the frequent recruitment of “local” researchers by “local” colleagues which forestalls the need for more “circulation of academic elites.” This practice hampers the circulation of new concepts and methods, and thus explains why local economic history remains so hidebound in its traditions. Paradoxically, the economic history of the eighteenth century has benefited from a tsunami of innovations about institutional history, popular and luxury consumption patterns (as in Maxine Berg’s chapter about the issue of luxury in the Euro-Asian connections at the turn of the nineteenth century), markets, and spaces of production and exchange.

The second book, *Faire de l'histoire économique*, offers a wide range of such case studies, from markets in Gaul, wine in Venice (F. Faugeron) to luxury (N. Coquery). A final section gathers together stimulating arguments about the nature and practices of markets in medieval Europe (Matheiu Arnoux) and on the Paris financial exchange (P.-C. Hautcoeur). Gérard Beaur confirms such a trend in his chapter about rural economic history, on which his research centre and networks are leaders, with an emphasis on monetary issues, on the assimilation of innovation by petty peasants, and on the connections between rural and urban areas. These subjects are also examined in several case studies in *Faire de l'histoire économique*, covering medieval and modern epochs, with a mix of senior scholars (G. Béaur, L. Feller, L. Fontaine) and junior ones. Such a Parisian community has help to reverse the relative decline of the French Braudelian school from its apex in the 1970s, seen best in the crisis at the *Annales* journal until it found new direction in the 1990s. The brilliant young scholar Claire Lemerrier exemplifies this new beginning as seen in her chapter on recent breakthroughs in the study of networking, elites, intermediary tools of representation of business (like Chambers of Commerce), institutional history about norms, regulation, private law, and cartels.

Finally, Patrice Baubeau and Pierre-Cyril Hautcoeur (now the chair of École des hautes études en sciences sociales and a member of the solid École d'économie de Paris) scrutinize banking and finance history with a methodical if somewhat conventional analysis by combining new monetary and financial market histories with banking history, but omitting recent work on the convergence between business history and organisation of banking firms. Happily, in *Faire de l'histoire économique*, Baubeau is in charge with a whole section devoted to banking and money, including richly argued chapters such as Georges Depuyrot's essay about money in the Roman Empire. Missing is a chapter on colonial economic history, one that might have assessed the competitiveness of trade houses, a lacuna given the growing interest in the history of capitalism overseas.[2]

A few chapters confront Francophone economic history in terms of globalised issues and methods. Laurence Fontaine points out what he describes as the "biased" representations of the world (e.g., the notion of "abroad") that appear to be so engrained in French culture and pedagogy. She draws particular attention to the assumption of many British and American experts in humanities of Michel Foucault's drastic views of false representations, as if French theories had more effect outside of France than among French academics. And "internationalised," even (positively) "cosmopolitan" Youssef Cassis, for a while a professor in Grenoble, cannot help but underline the weak presence of so many French academics in the field of world history. Few French journals publish in this field, despite several notable recent conferences. Perhaps the author was unaware of the activities of the many economic historians from ancient to modern history who worked from a global perspective, and the changes in leading journals such as the *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*, under the leadership of the modern economist Philippe Minard, and the *Annales*.

The final chapters delve into present topics and issues, to remind the French community that the "glorious times" of Braudel and Labrousse have long since lost momentum. Who are the present Braudels, the brilliant scholars pioneering new methods and concepts? As a counterpoint, the book welcomes an argument on Kenneth Pomeranz's now well-known theories and case studies, with a rich summary of his position and the criticism of it by Peer Vries, who insists on the fiscal foibles of the Chinese state, on the technological backwardness of steam power, and on the weakness of trade and banking structures, among other topics. In *Faire de l'histoire économique*, geographer François Gipouloux recaps his recent research on maritime and trade history between 1600 and 2010.[3] Supported by a large bibliography, this exchange of ideas reflects the importance of these debates about the economic models of growth. They recall to this reviewer the crisp arguments about the first industrial revolution in the 1970s and 1980s or those about the monetarisation of medieval and modern spaces, as in Luciano Palermo's chapter about money and credit at the end of the Middle Ages that revisits his original studies from the 1960s into 1980s.

All in all, and despite their omissions, both books offer a rare opportunity to assess the state of French economic history today, to deepen the knowledge of leading academic research groups, to discover new work by up-and-coming scholars, to follow thematic breakthroughs, and to find confirmation that “French academic patriotism” is alive and well. We can see main ideological turning points over the past fifty years, from the mix of Marxism and Braudelism to the present fragmentation of ideologies, concepts and methods. What stands out, if somewhat unclearly, is the interest in grappling with the study of the market, to understand how connections, circulations, money practices, and the involvement of “petty” agents shaped market growth. Missing here are the varieties of regional capitalism, the process of capital accumulation (an albeit an old-fashioned theme), the variety of business elites (perhaps because of the absence of the Paris IV team?), and the role of state-funded research programmes to stimulate academic competitiveness to match the role of private foundations and corporate grants found in so many countries. Indeed, the gap between companies and academics in the humanities has not yet been filled in France, except in a few sectors.

LIST OF ESSAYS for *L'histoire économique en mouvement, entre héritages et renouvellements*

Première partie: L'histoire économique en France aujourd'hui

J.-C. Daumas, “Où va l'histoire économique en France aujourd'hui ? Tendances, enjeux, propositions”

M. Arnoux, “Regards rétrospectifs”

R. Descat, “Un point sur l'histoire économique de l'Antiquité”

L. Feller, “Histoire du Moyen Age et histoire économique”

D. Terrier avec la collaboration de Ph. Minard et C. Maitte, “L'histoire du commerce et de l'industrie à l'époque moderne : entre héritage assumé et pistes nouvelles”

G. Béaur, “Histoire économique et histoire des campagnes : le renouveau d'un paradigme?”

A. Chatriot et C. Lemerrier, “Institutions et histoire économique”

P. Baubeau et P.C. Hautcoeur, “L'histoire bancaire, monétaire et financière française depuis 1980”

J.-C. Daumas, “La Business history à la française : deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle”

C. Diebolt et J.-L. Demeulemeester, “Quo vadis ? Quel futur pour l'histoire économique en France ? Réflexions et recommandations par deux economists”

M. Margairaz, “Histoire économique et sciences sociales : alliance, cohabitation, confrontation?”

L. Fontaine, “L'histoire économique et sociale : autour des changements de paradigms”

C. Belfanti, “L'histoire économique italienne à la recherche d'une nouvelle identité”

Y. Cassis, “L'histoire économique française vue d'ailleurs”

Deuxième partie: L'histoire économique vue d'ailleurs

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K. Pommeranz, “Repenser le changement économique de longue durée : la Chine, l’Europe et l’histoire économique”

P. Vries, “Un monde de ressemblances surprenantes”

M. Berg, “Les siècles asiatiques de l’Europe. Asie, luxe et approches nouvelles de la révolution industrielle”

L. Palermo, “Développement et crise dans une économie pré-industrielle : monnaie et crédit en Europe à la fin du Moyen Age”

R. Congost, “Les pauvres peuvent-ils s’enrichir ? Une autre façon d’interroger la courbe de Kuznets”

M. Kelly et C. O Grada, “Population et niveau de vie dans la longue durée : l’histoire quantitative se mesure à Malthus”

LIST OF ESSAYS for *Faire de l’histoire économique aujourd’hui* (no authors indicated)

Avant-Propos : Explorer les chemins de l’avenir

Conférence inaugurale

“De la grande divergence à la grande convergence : l’économie chinoise et sa trajectoire au cours des deux mondialisations, 1600-2010”

Les relations villes-campagnes

“Les rapports fonciers et monétaires entre les villes et les campagnes dans la France des XVIe-XIXe siècles”

“La place des migrations dans les relations villes/campagnes à l’époque modern”

“Rats des villes, rats des champs. Combats pour la maîtrise des surplus et de l’approvisionnement frumentaires : le tournant révolutionnaire”

“Les relations villes/campagnes durant le haut Moyen Âge (VIe-XIe siècle)”

“Bourg, mas et pouvoir économique en Rouergue au XVIe siècle”

Crédit, croissance, crise

“Expansions et crises monétaires dans l’Empire romain”

“La critique machiavélienne de l’économie politique de guerre”

“La distinction entre monnaie de compte et monnaie réelle est-elle à la racine des crises monétaires dans la France moderne?”

“Les Caisses d’Épargne au XIXe siècle : l’épargne contre la crise?”

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“La monnaie ‘dévoilée’ par le faux. Falsification monétaire et crise de souveraineté politique en Espagne (1890-1914)”

Distribution et consommation

“Commerce, dons et jeux du marché : le cas de la Gaule (VIe siècle-IIe siècle ap. J.-C.)”

“Un marché fragmenté ? Les circuits de distribution du vin à Venise dans les derniers siècles du Moyen Âge”

“Luxe et révolution : marchands et politiques, entre dirigisme et libéralisme”

“Innovations commerciales boulevard Barbés : Tati ou l'invention du maxi-discount textile”

La relation de travail

“Le travail et ses représentations : de l'activité aux institutions sociales”

“La corvée royale en France au XVIIIe siècle : une forme de travail contraint?”

“Le ‘deuxième servage’ revisité. Institutions, travail et dynamiques économiques en Russie, mi XVIIe-fin XIXe siècle”

Le travail à l'épreuve du genre

“Contrat, livret, règlement. La discipline du travail dans la France du XIXe siècle”

“Organisation scientifique du travail, scientific management et rationalisation : l'apport d'une approche internationale du taylorisme”

Table ronde institutions et dynamiques du marché : regards croisés

“Marchés et marché dans l'Europe medieval”

“Marché et liquidité : le cas du marché financier”

“Entre ‘le’ Marché et ‘les’ marchés : les apports de la sociologie économique”

NOTES

[1] Fernand Braudel and Ernest Labrousse, eds., *Histoire économique et sociale de la France*, 4 vols. (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1977-1982).

[2] See, for example: « Commémorer le centenaire de la SFHOM : défis et enjeux », *Outre-Mers. Revue d'histoire*, n°spécial *Cent ans d'histoire des outre-mers. SFHOM, 1912-2012*, 376/377(2012): pp. 13-42 and several collected works, such as *L'esprit économique impérial* (2008).

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[3] François Gipouloux, *The Asian Mediterranean: Port Cities and Trading Networks in China, Japan, and Southeast Asia, 13th-21st Century*, (Cheltenham: Elgar, 2011) and *Gateways to Globalisation: Asia's International Trading and Finance Centres*, (Cheltenham: Elgar, 2011).

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