

The
FRENCH
HISTORICAL
REVOLUTION



THE *ANNALES* SCHOOL
1929–2014

PETER BURKE

REVISED AND UPDATED SECOND EDITION

The French Historical Revolution

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The *Annales* School, 1929–2014

Peter Burke

polity

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Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>vii</i>
<i>Chronology</i>	<i>viii</i>
<i>Abbreviations</i>	<i>xiii</i>
<i>Preface to the Second Edition</i>	<i>xiv</i>
Introduction	1
1 The Old Historiographical Regime and its Critics	7
2 The Founders: Lucien Febvre and Marc Bloch	13
The Early Years	13
Strasbourg	18
The Foundation of <i>Annales</i>	23
The Institutionalization of <i>Annales</i>	28
3 The Age of Braudel	36
<i>The Mediterranean</i>	36
The Later Braudel	48
The Rise of Quantitative History	60
4 The Third Generation and the Cultural Turn	73
From the Cellar to the Attic	75
The ‘Third Level’ of Serial History	87
Reactions: Anthropology, Politics, Narrative	92

5 New Directions (1989–2014)	105
6 The <i>Annales</i> in Global Perspective	120
Reception and Resistance	120
Striking a Balance	134
<i>Glossary: The Language of Annales</i>	143
<i>Notes</i>	147
<i>Bibliography</i>	164
<i>Index</i>	190

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Chronology

- 1911 Febvre, *Philippe II et la Franche-Comté* [Philip II and Franche-Comté]
1913 Bloch, *L'Ile de France* [The Ile de France]
1922 Febvre, *La terre et l'évolution humaine* [A Geographical Introduction to History]
1924 Bloch, *Les rois thaumaturges* [The Royal Touch]
1927 Braudel first consulted Febvre
1928 Febvre, *Un destin: Martin Luther* [Martin Luther]
1929 Foundation of *Annales d'histoire économique et sociale*
1931 Bloch, *Les caractères originaux* [French Rural History]
1939 The title of the journal becomes *Annales d'histoire sociale*
1939–40 Bloch, *La société féodale* [Feudal Society]
1942 Febvre, *Le problème de l'incroyance* [The Problem of Unbelief]
1942 The title of the journal becomes *Mélanges d'histoire sociale*
1946 Braudel becomes co-director of the journal. Its title becomes *Annales: économies, sociétés, civilisations*
1947 Braudel defended his thesis
1948 Sixth Section founded
1949 Centre de Recherches Historiques founded
1949 Braudel, *La Méditerranée* [The Mediterranean]

- 1953 Duby, *La société dans la région maçonnaise* [Society in the Maçon Region]
- 1955 Chaunu, *Séville et L'Atlantique* [Seville and the Atlantic]
- 1956 Braudel President of the Sixth Section
- 1957 Le Goff, *Les intellectuels au moyen âge* [The Intellectuals in the Middle Ages]
- 1957 Morazé, *Les bourgeois conquérants* [Triumph of the Bourgeoisie]
- 1958 Febvre and Martin, *L'apparition du livre* [The Coming of the Book]
- 1958 Braudel, 'Histoire et sciences sociales' ['History and the Social Sciences']
- 1960 Goubert, *Beauvais et le Beauvaisis* [Beauvais and its Region]
- 1960 Ariès, *L'enfant et la vie familiale* [Centuries of Childhood]
- 1961 Mandrou, *Introduction à la France moderne* [Introduction to Modern France]
- 1963 Maison des Sciences de l'homme founded
- 1966 Le Roy Ladurie, *Les paysans de Languedoc* [The Peasants of Languedoc]
- 1967 Bennassar, *Valladolid au siècle d'or* [Valladolid in the Golden Age]
- 1967 Ferro, *La révolution russe* [October 1917]
- 1967 Le Roy Ladurie, *Histoire du climat* [Times of Feast, Times of Famine]
- 1968 EHESS moves to Boulevard Raspail
- 1968 Agulhon, *Pénitents et francs-maçons* [Penitents and Freemasons]
- 1968 Ferro, *La Grande Guerre* [The Great War]
- 1970 Agulhon, *La république au village* [The Republic in the Village]
- 1971 Lombard, *L'Islam dans sa première grandeur* [Islam in its First Age of Greatness]
- 1972 Le Goff becomes President of the VIe Section
- 1973 Duby, *La Dimanche de Bouvines* [The Legend of Bouvines]
- 1973 Vovelle, *Piété baroque et déchristianisation* [Baroque Piety and Dechristianization]
- 1974 Duby, *Guerriers et paysans* [Early Growth of the European Economy]

- 1975 The Vie section becomes the EHES
- 1975 Certeau, Revel and Julia, *Politique de la langue* [The Politics of Language]
- 1975 Corbin, *Archaïsme et modernité en Limousin* [Archaism and Modernity in the Limoges Region]
- 1975 Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou village ocitan* [Montaillou]
- 1975–6 Duby and Wallon, *Histoire de la France rurale* [History of Rural France]
- 1976 Ferro, *Cinéma et histoire* [Cinema and History]
- 1976 Ozouf, *La fête révolutionnaire* [Festivals and the French Revolution]
- 1977 Joutard, *Légende des camisards* [The Legend of the Camisards]
- 1977 Valensi, *Fellahs tunisiens* [Tunisian Peasants]
- 1978 Duby, *Les trois ordres* [The Three Orders]
- 1978 Furet, *Penser la révolution française* [Interpreting the French Revolution]
- 1978 Herlihy and Klapisch, *Les Toscans* [Tuscans and their Families]
- 1978 Nicolas, *La Savoie au 18e siècle* [Savoy in the 18th Century]
- 1979 Agulhon, *Marianne au combat* [Marianne into Battle]
- 1979 Schmitt, *Le saint lévrier* [The Holy Greyhound]
- 1979 Le Roy Ladurie, *Carnaval de Romans* [Carnival]
- 1980–5 Duby, *Histoire de la France urbaine* [History of Urban France]
- 1980 Hartog, *Le miroir d'Hérodote* [Mirror of Herodotus]
- 1981 Croix, *La Bretagne* [Brittany]
- 1981 Le Goff, *La naissance du purgatoire* [The Birth of Purgatory]
- 1982 Corbin, *Le miasme et la jonquille* [The Foul and the Fragrant]
- 1983 Flandrin, *Un temps pour embrasser* [A Time for Kissing]
- 1983 Vovelle, *La mort et l'occident* [Death and the West]
- 1984 Lepetit, *Chemins de terre et voies d'eau* [Communications by Land and Water]
- 1984–92 Nora, *Lieux de Mémoire* [Realms of Memory]
- 1985–7 Ariès and Duby, *Histoire de la vie privée* [History of Private Life]
- 1985 Jouhaud, *Mazarinades* [Pamphlets against Mazarin]
- 1985 Vigarello, *Le propre et la sale* [Concepts of Cleanliness]

- 1988 Boureau, *La papesse Jeanne* [Pope Joan]
- 1988 Chartier, *Cultural History*
- 1988 Corbin, *Le territoire du vide* [The Lure of the Sea]
- 1988 Gruzinski, *La colonisation de l'imaginaire* [The Conquest of Mexico]
- 1988 Lepetit, *Les villes dans la France moderne* [Towns in Early Modern France]
- 1988 Noiriél, *Le creuset français* [The French Melting-Pot]
- 1989 Bennassar, *Chrétiens d'Allah* [Renegades]
- 1989 Chartier, 'Le monde comme représentation' ['The World as Representation']
- 1990 Chartier, *Origines culturelles de la révolution française* [The Cultural Origins of the French Revolution]
- 1990 Corbin, *Le village des cannibales* [Village of Cannibals]
- 1990 Gruzinski, *La guerre des images* [Images at War]
- 1990 Lombard, *Le carrefour javanais* [Java at the Cross-roads]
- 1990 Schmitt, *La raison des gestes* [Gestures]
- 1991–2 Duby and Perrot, *Histoire des femmes* [History of Women]
- 1992 Chartier, *L'ordre des livres* [The Order of Books]
- 1992 Valensi, *Fables de la mémoire* [Fables of Memory]
- 1994 Title of journal changed to *Annales: histoire, sciences sociales*
- 1994 Corbin, *Les cloches de la terre* [Village Bells]
- 1995 Boureau, *Droit de cuissage* [The Lord's First Night]
- 1995 Lepetit, *Les Formes de l'expérience* [The Forms of Experience]
- 1996 Le Goff, *St Louis* [St Louis]
- 1996 Revel et al., *Jeux d'échelles* [Problems of Scale]
- 1997 Le Roy Ladurie, *Saint-Simon* [St-Simon]
- 1998 Chartier, *Au bord de la falaise* [On the Edge of the Cliff]
- 1999 Gruzinski, *La pensée métisse* [The Mestizo Mind]
- 2000 Jouhaud, *Les pouvoirs de la littérature* [The Powers of Literature]
- 2002 Ferro, *Choc d'Islam* [The Shock of Islam]
- 2002 Flandrin, *L'ordre des mets* [The Order of Dishes]
- 2002 Schmitt, *Le corps des images* [The Body of Images]
- 2003 Hartog, *Régimes d'historicité* [Regimes of Historicity]
- 2004 Gruzinski, *Les quatre parties du monde* [The Four Continents]

- 2005 Chartier, *Inscrire et effacer* [Inscription and Erasure]
2005–6 Corbin (ed.) *Histoire du corps* [History of the Body]
2005 Lilti, *Le monde des salons* [The World of the Salons]
2006 Noiriel, *Introduction à la socio-histoire* [Introduction
to Socio-History]
2007 Ruggiu, *L'individu et la famille* [The Individual and the
Family]
2011 EHESS moves to Avenue de France
2012 Valensi, *Ces étrangers familiers* [Familiar Foreigners]
2013 Corbin, *La douceur de l'ombre* [The Delight of the
Shade]

Abbreviations

AESC	<i>Annales: économies, sociétés, civilisations</i>
AHSS	<i>Annales: histoire, sciences sociales</i>
ARSS	<i>Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales</i>
P&P	<i>Past and Present</i>
RS	<i>Revue de Synthèse</i>
RSH	<i>Revue de Synthèse Historique</i>

Preface to the Second Edition

This book was originally published in 1990, as part of a series of slim volumes entitled *Key Contemporary Thinkers*, although it presented a portrait of a group rather than an individual. The new edition of *The French Historical Revolution* appears nearly a quarter of a century after the first. Much has happened in that time, in the history of the ‘*Annales* School’ as in history in general. The journal changed its title once more in 1994, and is now known as *Annales: histoire, sciences sociales*. Important new studies have been published by members of the group.

Studies of the group, or of individual members, have multiplied at such a rate that it is becoming difficult to keep up with them all. Massimo Mastrogregori’s careful analysis of the manuscripts has allowed a more faithful version of his *Historian’s Craft* to be published (though this version is not available in English).¹ Archives that were once closed, including those of Lucien Febvre and Fernand Braudel, have become accessible, and many of their letters, together with Marc Bloch’s, have now been published.² A few of Braudel’s lectures to fellow prisoners have been published, and so have his widow’s illuminating articles about the intellectual origins of her husband and his *Mediterranean*.³ A number of *Annalistes* have produced memoirs or given interviews about their intellectual lives.⁴

As a result, a new version of this book is both necessary and possible. I am grateful to John Thompson and to Polity for the opportunity to revise and enlarge this study, liberating it from the series to which it originally belonged, in order to take advantage of both the accumulation of information about the group and the changes in perspective that follow increasing distance from the foundation year of the journal in 1929. In the process of revision, dialogues with Jaume ('Santi') Aurell and references provided by my Emmanuel colleagues Philip Howell and David Maxwell proved invaluable.

Introduction

A remarkable amount of the most innovative, the most memorable and the most significant historical writing of the twentieth century was produced in France. *La nouvelle histoire*, as it is sometimes called, is at least as famous, as French, and as controversial as *la nouvelle cuisine*.¹ A good deal of this new history is the work of a particular group associated with the journal founded in 1929 under the title *Annales d'histoire économique et sociale*; following four changes of title, it is now known as *Annales: histoire, sciences sociales*. Outsiders generally call this group the 'Annales School', emphasizing what members have in common.

Insiders, on the other hand often, though not always, deny the existence of such a school, emphasizing individual approaches within the group.² During a discussion at the International Congress of Historical Sciences held at Stuttgart in 1985, I remember hearing a leading member of the group, Marc Ferro, vigorously denying the existence of a school. While so doing, he regularly employed the term 'nous'. If the word 'school' (like the *Annales* 'paradigm' or 'spirit') gives the misleading impression of an orthodoxy, a better term might be the one proposed by two more insiders, Roger Chartier and Jacques Revel: 'nebula' (*nébuleuse*).³ Alternatively, it may be useful to speak of an *Annales* 'network', a 'movement' or even an extended 'family'.

The centre of the network, over the decades, obviously includes the two founders, Lucien Febvre and Marc Bloch; their designated successor, Fernand Braudel, together with Charles Morazé, less well known but active behind the scenes, notably in the creation of the *Vie* section;⁴ younger historians such as Jacques Le Goff, Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, Marc Ferro and Maurice Aymard; and even younger historians such as Roger Chartier, Jacques Revel, André Burguière, Jean-Claude Schmitt, Lucette Valensi, Bernard Lepetit and Antoine Lilti. Near the centre we also find Alain Boureau, Pierre Chaunu, Georges Duby, Alphonse Dupront, Arlette Farge, François Furet, Pierre Goubert, Christiane Klapisch, Maurice Lombard and Mona Ozouf.

More difficult to place is Ernest Labrousse, who played a central role in the second generation while remaining a Marxist, of a kind that did not exempt him from attacks by members of the French Communist Party.⁵ In similar fashion, their commitment to Marxism may place Maurice Agulhon and Michel Vovelle outside the inner circle. Also on the edge, for different reasons, are Georges Lefebvre, who worked on the French Revolution; Alberto Tenenti and Ruggiero Romano, two Italians at the *École*; and Philippe Ariès, a self-defined amateur historian. One might add Jean Delumeau, Alain Corbin and Robert Muchembled, all three working in the style or spirit of *Annales* while remaining outside the network. On or beyond the fringe one might place the polymaths Michel Foucault and Michel de Certeau and the conservative historian Roland Mousnier, who make brief appearances in this study thanks to the overlap between their historical interests and those of *Annalistes*.

The journal, which is now over eighty years old, was founded in order to promote a new kind of history, and it continues to encourage innovation. The leading ideas behind *Annales* might be summarized briefly as follows. In the first place, the substitution of a problem-oriented analytical history for a traditional narrative of events. In the second place, the history of the whole range of human activities in the place of a mainly political history. In the third place – in order to achieve the first two aims – a collaboration with other disciplines: with geography, sociology, psychology, economics, linguistics, social anthropology, and so on. As Febvre

put it, with his characteristic use of the imperative, 'Historians, be geographers. Be jurists too, and sociologists, and psychologists'.⁶ He was always on the alert 'to break down compartments' (*abattre les cloisons*) and to fight 'the spirit of specialization'.⁷ In a similar way, Braudel wrote his *Mediterranean* in the way he did in order to 'prove that history can do more than study walled gardens'.⁸

The aim of this book is to describe, to analyse and to evaluate the achievement of this network. It is often perceived from outside as a monolithic group with a uniform historical practice, quantitative in method, determinist in its assumptions, and hostile, or at best indifferent, to politics and to events. This stereotype ignores not only divergences between individual members of the group but also developments over time. Hence it might be more illuminating to speak of the '*Annales* movement'.

This movement may be divided into three phases. In the first phase, from the 1920s to 1945, it was small, radical and subversive, fighting a guerrilla action against traditional history, political history and the history of events. After the Second World War, the rebels took over the historical Establishment. This second phase of the movement, in which it was most truly a 'school' with distinctive concepts (notably 'structure' and 'conjuncture') and distinctive methods (notably the 'serial history' of changes over the long term), was dominated by Fernand Braudel.

A third phase in the history of the movement opened around the year 1968. It is marked by what has been called 'fragmentation' (*émiettement*).⁹ By this time, the influence of the movement – especially in France – was so great that it had lost much of its former distinctiveness. It was a unified 'school' only in the eyes of its foreign admirers and its domestic critics. The latter continued to reproach the group for underestimating the importance of politics and of the history of events, although Marc Ferro, for example, was writing about the First World War and the Russian Revolution. From the late 1970s onwards, some members of the group turned from socio-economic to sociocultural history, while others rediscovered political history and even narrative. Since the year 1989 or thereabouts, different members of the group have moved in new directions,

returning to social history, for instance, or attempting to write a more reflexive history.

The history of *Annales* may thus be interpreted in terms of the succession of four generations. It also illustrates the common cyclical process by which the rebels of today turn into the Establishment of tomorrow, and are in turn rebelled against. What is less common is the longevity of the movement. This is partly due to its institutional base in Paris at the École Pratique des Hautes Études (and later at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales) but also to the openness of the leaders, who generally tolerated dissent even if they did not encourage it.

Continuity is particularly obvious in the case of the journal: Paul Leuilliot, who taught history at a *lycée* in Paris, was secretary to the editorial committee for well over half a century, 1930–88, as well as making frequent contributions to the journal in its early years. Some major concerns have persisted. Indeed, the journal and the individuals associated with it offer the most sustained example of fruitful interaction between history and the social sciences from the 1930s until today. It is for this reason that I chose to write this book.

This brief survey of the *Annales* movement attempts to cross several cultural boundaries. It attempts to explain the French to the English-speaking world, the 1920s to a later generation and the changing practice of historians to sociologists, anthropologists, geographers and others. The survey is itself presented in the form of a history, and attempts to combine a chronological with a thematic organization.

The problem with such a combination, here as elsewhere in history, is what has been called ‘the contemporaneity of the non-contemporary’. Braudel, for example, although he was exceptionally open to new ideas, even late in his long life, did not fundamentally change his way of looking at history or indeed of writing history from the 1930s, when he was planning his *Mediterranean*, to the 1980s, when he was working on his book on France. For this reason it has proved necessary to take some liberties with chronological order.

This book is at once something less and something more than a study in intellectual history. It does not aspire to be the definitive scholarly study of the *Annales* movement that it is to be hoped someone will write in the twenty-first century.