

## Historiographical Essay

# Marc Bloch: the identity of a historian

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In June 1986, historians and anthropologists from a dozen countries, East and West, met in Paris to commemorate the centenary of Marc Bloch's birth. An extraordinary tribute to someone whose mature work spanned less than 25 years, it seemed entirely appropriate for a historian whose reputation has been shaped so much by posterity: by his role as co-founder of the *Annales* journal and by his death in the French Resistance at the hands of the Gestapo.<sup>1</sup> Since Bloch's first translated works were in fact the *Étrange défaite* (in 1949) and the *Métier d'historien* (in 1953), for a long time most Anglo-Saxons were aware only of his less scholarly claims to fame. Later, the rise of the *Annales* movement established Bloch's standing as a brilliant and innovative historian. Now Carole Fink's important biography joins a growing corpus of research on Bloch's life, family and scholarship.<sup>2</sup>

It is perhaps fortunate that Fink is unconcerned by the distortions of posterity, indeed by Marc Bloch's personal disdain for traditional biography.<sup>3</sup> By sticking firmly to the available sources she has written a highly professional, extensively researched and documented narrative of Bloch's life. It is on any scale a considerable achievement, which one

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suspects had to overcome a strong sense of protectiveness among the guardians of Bloch's and the *Annales'* memory, and difficulties in gaining access to widely dispersed sources. After the end of the war, Étienne Bloch offered his father's working papers and manuscripts to the Archives Nationales, but the Archives were not interested. The material was deposited in the cellars of Bloch's *alma mater*, the École Normale Supérieure, where it lay untouched for decades. Other papers were lost or mislaid by Lucien Febvre and other former colleagues.<sup>4</sup> When Fink began researching in the 1970s, Bloch's correspondence with Lucien Febvre was under the tutelage of Febvre's spiritual heir, Fernand Braudel;<sup>5</sup> other important material was guarded by Étienne Bloch.

Fink is at her most informative on the better documented inter-war years, for which she can deploy Bloch's surviving manuscripts, contemporaries' archives and interviews with relatives and former students, and a vast correspondence with Lucien Febvre and, increasingly during the 1930s, with his elder children Alice and Étienne. She has less to say about the more elusive features of Bloch's intellectual apprenticeship, his religious views, and his relations with his family and wife.<sup>6</sup> Bloch's ironic aside, that his "chosen calling is generally considered to be peculiarly lacking in adventure,"<sup>7</sup> is thus borne out by Fink's description of his life before he joined the Resistance. It is that of a talented and ambitious man leading a happy and comfortable domestic life, and following the orderly and well-established *carus honorum* of the French professorial élite, in public scarcely more than indifferent to the gathering storms of Fascism.<sup>8</sup>

By the early 1930s Marc Bloch was established as the best French medievalist of his generation.<sup>9</sup> Editorship of the *Annales* from 1929 had also helped build professional links and ties of friendship with the leading foreign social and economic historians of his day; his son Étienne has recently described an 'unforgettable' visit with his parents to Venice in

1935, where they were chaperoned by Gino Luzzatto.<sup>10</sup> In 1929 he visited the Institute for the Comparative Study of Civilizations in Oslo where he lectured on what turned into his second book, the *Caractères originaux de l'histoire rurale française*. Perhaps on the strength of this work<sup>11</sup> he was invited in early 1934 to speak at the London School of Economics, where he met Eileen Power, R.H. Tawney and M.M. Postan and tried to whip up support for the faltering *Annales*;<sup>12</sup> during the same trip he was asked to contribute to the first volume of the *Cambridge economic history of Europe*.<sup>13</sup>

All of this occurred while Bloch was preparing to apply for a chair at the Collège de France. Bloch's defeat, which recalled his father's failure half a century before, becomes in Fink's reconstruction the single most significant event in his life before the Nazi invasion. Bloch may have believed (or wished to believe) that anti-Semitism and Jewish quotas were behind his rejection, and after the war Lucien Febvre gave support to this view by publishing a letter to him by Bloch on the matter.<sup>14</sup> But in an earlier letter to Bloch of 2 February 1935, Febvre—who had himself been elected to the Collège in 1933 at his third attempt—suggested that opposition had been self-serving rather than racial; he referred ironically to Isidore Lévy, who had voted against Bloch in 1934 and had then imputed the latter's defeat to anti-Semitism.<sup>15</sup> How much fear of Bloch's brand of scholarship was behind the rejection, as Febvre implied at the time, it is hard to say;<sup>16</sup> he cannot have posed an unsurmountable threat if he was elected unanimously to a chair at the Sorbonne only a couple of years later. Still, Febvre may have been closer to the mark than he would have cared to admit: Bloch's candidacy to the Collège received a single vote, which presumably came from his inside patron, Étienne Gilson, rather than from Febvre himself. The experience shook Bloch's professional self-esteem, and his political

<sup>10</sup> Bloch "Marc Bloch", 27.

<sup>11</sup> See R.H. Tawney's complimentary review of the *Caractères* in the *Economic history review*, 5 (1932-34), 230-3.

<sup>12</sup> The three L.S.E. lectures were published as *Seigneurie française et manoir anglais* (Paris, 1960), with a preface by Georges Duby. R.H. Hilton, "Seigneurie française et manoir anglais, fifty years later", in *MBA*, 173-82 dates the original texts incorrectly to 1936.

<sup>13</sup> *MB*, 178-9.

<sup>14</sup> *Annales d'histoire sociale*, 7 (1945), 1, 29-30. See E. Weber, "About Marc Bloch", *American scholar* 51 (Winter 1981-82), 73-82.

<sup>15</sup> Dumoulin, "Changer l'histoire", 90. N. Zemon Davis, "A modern hero", *New York review of books*, 26 April 1980, 27-30: 28 refers to "Isidore Lévy" as the Indianologist Silvain Lévy, then President of the French Society for Jewish Studies, and suggests that his arguments may have been less self-serving than Febvre portrayed.

<sup>16</sup> Dumoulin, "Changer l'histoire", 88-91 suggests that Bloch's rejection was the result of a temporary freeze of new posts at the Collège rather than of anti-Semitic bias.

<sup>4</sup> E. Bloch, "Marc Bloch. Souvenirs et réflexions d'un fils sur son père", *MBA*, 23-37: 30, 32.

<sup>5</sup> An edition of the correspondence is being prepared.

<sup>6</sup> See Étienne Bloch's introduction to F. Bédarida and D. Peschanski eds, *Marc Bloch à Étienne Bloch. Lettres de la "drôle de guerre"* (Cahiers de l'Institut d'histoire du temps présent, 19) (Paris, 1991) for an interesting view of Marc Bloch's relations with his children.

<sup>7</sup> *Strange defeat*, 2.

<sup>8</sup> For Bloch's general political outlook see Fink, *Marc Bloch* (hereafter *MB*), 100-3, 179-82 and E. Bloch, "Préface" to Bédarida and Peschanski eds, *Marc Bloch à Étienne Bloch*; for his views in 1934, *MB* 190-1.

<sup>9</sup> "Le seul historien de quelque envergure qui subsiste dans nos générations" (O. Dumoulin, "Changer l'histoire. Marché universitaire et innovation intellectuelle à l'époque de Marc Bloch", in *MBA* 87-105: 88 n. 5, quoting Robert Fawtier in 1936).



and religious identity to the core. It exacerbated his already strained relations with Febvre, who had expressed doubts about continuing with the *Annales* project during its first, difficult stages and whom Fink describes as ever more aloof after his move to Paris in 1933.<sup>17</sup> Fink steers a discreet middle path on the Bloch–Febvre partnership up to the 1934 crisis, but thereafter her sympathies turn increasingly to Bloch. The decision, forced upon him by Febvre, to continue publishing the *Annales* after the Nazis occupied Paris under a different heading and without his name as editor, and the loss in 1942 of his Parisian library, which Bloch implied could have been prevented had Febvre taken more decisive action, are among the most moving events in the biography.<sup>18</sup>

Thus, the outbreak of the war and, especially, the experience of Nazi and Vichy anti-Semitism radically changed Bloch's life and outlook. Both emotionally and politically he was a staunch republican. His devotion to the French motherland (I use the term advisedly, as we shall see) had been established along Jaurèsian lines during the Dreyfus Affair and was apparently undimmed by social and political crisis during the 1930s. His choice to join the Resistance in late 1942 or early 1943 was thus entirely consistent with his beliefs. Yet despite his secular agnosticism, or atheism as Étienne Bloch has stated, Bloch's attitude towards his Jewishness was more complex than Fink portrays. He did not shy from drawing distinctions on patriotic grounds between French and foreign Jews when restrictions began to apply under the *Statut des Juifs* and he sought (probably for similar reasons) one of the only ten exemptions to Vichy's ban on Jewish academics. But neither did he ever fully sever ties with his Jewish ancestry: Marc Bloch's father received a Jewish funeral, he himself married Simone Vidal at a Jewish wedding, his children were circumcised and experienced Jewish festivals at their grandmother's house, and his last wishes referred at length to his Jewish origins, and not in order to disown them.

The source of Bloch's complex and, at times, contradictory religious and political identity may be analogous to that of his curious lack of empathy and comprehension for the horrors of modern warfare. His *Memoirs of war, 1914–15* are a record of emotional and intellectual detachment; his famous article on the "Fausses nouvelles de guerre" describes the First World War as a "gigantic social experience, of

<sup>17</sup> *MB*, ch. 8. Besides the *Annales*, the *Revue historique*, *Revue d'histoire économique et sociale* and *Le Moyen Âge* were also struggling to survive in the late 1920s and early 1930s (Dumoulin, "Changer l'histoire", 95).

<sup>18</sup> *MB*, 261–3 (*Annales*) 276–8 (library). See also M. Bloch, *Écrire La Société féodale: Lettres à Henri Berr 1924–1943*, ed. J. Pualet-Despatis, Preface by B. Geronc (Paris, 1992), 112.

unbelievable [montrée] richness";<sup>19</sup> even the *Étrange défaite*, his chronicle of disenchantment faced with French collapse in 1940, recalls the earlier conflict as a glorious patriotic adventure in a world of strong beliefs and simple moral choices. These are not the reactions one expects to a catastrophe which killed millions, including many of Bloch's friends, colleagues and mentors, and which had devastating effects on the best European minds. However, Fink's attempt to explain the puzzle away by suggesting that Bloch's attitudes expressed a deep patriotism and intellectual stamina stretches credulity even further. Bloch's religious uncertainties, his vociferous patriotism, and his studied detachment from historical and political contingency (which he would later denounce as a major cause of France's military and moral decay)<sup>20</sup> suggest, on the contrary, a deep undercurrent of insecurity. The terms with which he would describe France in the *Étrange défaite* – alternatively as "mother" and as "beloved" – bespeak of psychological and emotional depths unsounded by Fink's univocal account.

There are, of course, other reasons why Bloch's explanation of the French collapse in 1940 was cast, albeit self-critically, in Polybian terms as a loss of national virtue, as though he were unable to deploy his customary historical method to such personally distressing events. A further strand in this emotional repression can probably be sought in Bloch's deep-seated psychological reductionism, which first appeared in his paper on rumour during the First World War<sup>21</sup> and was appealed to repeatedly in later work on technology and on agrarian and social structures.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>19</sup> "Reflexions d'un historien sur les fausses nouvelles de la guerre", in M. Bloch, *Mélanges historiques*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1963), vol. 1, 41–58; 45.

<sup>20</sup> *Strange defeat*, 171–3. In a letter to Henri Berr of October 1934, he advocated "faire sa tâche, malgré l'atmosphère" caused by the civil war in Spain (*Écrire La Société féodale*, 88).

<sup>21</sup> "Reflexions d'un historien"; see M. Mastrogregori, "Il genio dello storico. Gli scritti teorici di Marc Bloch a Strasburgo", *Rivista storica italiana* 99 (1987), 51–80; 58.

<sup>22</sup> "Les faits historiques sont par essence des faits psychologiques. C'est donc dans d'autres fait psychologiques qu'il trouvent normalement leurs antécédents" (*Métier*, 101); "une fois de plus, il apparaît que le problème de l'économie se résout en un problème psychologique" ("Pour une histoire comparée des sociétés européennes", in *Mélanges historiques*, vol. 1, 16–40; 26 n.1). See C. Ginzburg, "A proposito della raccolta dei saggi storici di Marc Bloch", *Studi medievali* 6 (1965), 335–54; 335–7; id., "Prefazione", in M. Bloch, *I re taumaturghi. Studi sul carattere sovranaturale attribuito alla potenza dei re particolarmente in Francia e in Inghilterra*, Ital. transl. (Turin, 1973), xi–xix; xvi; Mastrogregori, "Il genio", 58; A. Torre and L. Allegra, *La nascita della storia sociale in Francia. Dalla Comune alle "Annales"* (Turin, 1977), 323–28 on Bloch's and the *Annales'* subjectivist definition of class (see *Feudal society*, Engl. transl. (London, 1961), 268; "a social classification exists, in the last analysis, only by virtue of the ideas which men form of it"). P. Toubert, "Préface" to M. Bloch, *Les caractères originaux de l'histoire rurale française* (Paris, 1988), 5–41; 23 also suggests that after 1918 Bloch's research on agrarian history became more concerned with collective psychology and German *Anthropogeographie*.



Carlo Ginzburg has suggested on these grounds that the Great War marked a transition in Bloch's views, from a rather naïve form of positivism<sup>23</sup> to a kind of anti-positivist scepticism.<sup>24</sup> While Ginzburg may exaggerate the theoretical awareness and clarity of purpose of an essentially unsystematic thinker like Bloch, his hypothesis opens up possibilities which, for example, H. Stuart Hughes' influential analysis of French historiography between the wars effectively closes. According to Stuart Hughes, Bloch shared with Febvre the sense of smugness that pervaded French intellectuals after 1918. This, together with the weakness of the French brand of positivism which deprived its critics of a clearly defined target, explains why Bloch refused to engage in the most advanced Italian and German debates on historiographical practice.<sup>25</sup>

While Fink seldom discusses Bloch's intellectual milieu in much depth she appears, on the whole, to agree with Stuart Hughes's interpretation. She also believes, however, that the main reason why Bloch did not wish to engage in debate was his strong aversion, even downright hostility, to German nationalism, culture and scholarship. She quotes in support of this Bloch's critical reviews of Alfons Dopsch,<sup>26</sup> Bruno Hildebrand, August Meitzen and especially of Friedrich Meinecke's *Die Entstehung der Historismus*.<sup>27</sup> Certainly the latter, much-delayed piece, was both a statement of principle against the rising tide of German nationalism and a strand in Bloch's ongoing polemic with German historians' reification of the state, but to quote this and other evidence out of context, as Fink does, underestimates Bloch's considerable debt to the German historical tradition.

To list but a few examples, Pierre Toubert has recently demonstrated how Bloch drew inspiration for the *Caractères originaux* from German (and in lesser part English) scholarship on rural societies.<sup>28</sup> The lesson, later to

<sup>23</sup> Expressed in his *Critique historique et critique du témoignage* (Amiens, 1914), reprinted in *Annales ESC* 5 (1950), 1–8.

<sup>24</sup> Ginzburg, "A proposito", 344; id., "Prefazione", xi–xiii. R. Lyon, "Marc Bloch did he repudiate *Annales* history?", *Journal of medieval history* 11 (1985), 181–91 also sees the First World War as an intellectual watershed. This is denied by L. Febvre, *Annales ESC* 6 (1950), 1; L. Walker, reviewing *Feudal society in history and theory* 3 (1963–64), 247–55, 247.

<sup>25</sup> H. Stuart Hughes, *The obstructed path. French social thought in the years of deprivation 1930–1960* (New York–Evanston, 1968), chap. 2. A more subtle discussion of French historiography before the Second World War is in Allegra and Torre, *La storia sociale*.

<sup>26</sup> After the Austrian Anschluss Bloch decided to withdraw his contribution to Dopsch's *Festschrift*, on the grounds that he did not wish to be associated with other contributors who might be supporters of the National Socialist régime (*MB*, 198; see also H. Dopsch, "Marc Bloch et les Mélanges en l'honneur d'Alfons Dopsch. Réflexions sur une lettre de Marc Bloch datant de l'Anschluss", in *MB*, 65–71).

<sup>27</sup> *MB*, 96, 162–3, 193–4.

<sup>28</sup> Toubert, "Préface".

become the core of the *Annales* paradigm, that the *région* was the most appropriate unit of interdisciplinary analysis had been absorbed by Bloch at the Leipzig school of *Landesgeschichte*.<sup>29</sup> Even the retrogressive method, which Bloch applied so successfully to agrarian studies and whose invention he is often credited with, was a German and English discovery of the nineteenth century, the roots of which can be traced back at least to Marx.<sup>30</sup> Bloch's interest in German historiography dated at the latest from 1908–9, when he attended courses by Max Sering, Rudolf Eberstadt and Karl Bücher in Berlin and Leipzig, but his life-long engagement with it began in earnest after his appointment in 1919 to the newly gallicized University of Strasbourg. In Wilhelmine Germany, Strassburg had come to rival Berlin, boasting the largest academic library in the world and a faculty to whose memory Meinecke, who had taught there, would later dedicate the *Entstehung*. Bloch's unrivalled knowledge of the European Middle Ages was thus built on and around the French University of Strasbourg's inherited German treasures.

As soon as the armistice was signed, the French applied earlier plans to turn Strasbourg University into an outpost of French culture and civilisation in what remained, physically, culturally and linguistically, a deeply divided region. New staff were appointed, including Bloch and Febvre – 7 years his senior and further advanced in his career. The five Arts faculties were housed in the same building. They included a number of brilliant sociologists, psychologists, archaeologists and historians like Maurice Halbwachs, Charles Blondel, Gabriel Le Bras and Albert Grenier, who participated with the historians in a remarkable interdisciplinary seminar. Bloch's interests in the psychological roots of social phenomena took shape within this unusually intense intellectual fellowship and first came to fruition in the *Rois thaumaturges* (1924).

As Fink recounts it, the move to Strasbourg was happy – it gave him the security to marry – and uncomplicated. Although a descendant of five generations of Alsatian Jews, Marc Bloch identified fully with the French policy of assimilation, including the view that Strasbourg should be at the

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 8–9.

<sup>30</sup> M. Bloch, "Preface" to *Les caractères originaux*, id., "The rise of dependant cultivation and seigniorial institutions", in *Cambridge economic history of Europe* (First edn., Cambridge, 1941), vol. 1, 224–77, 224: "You cannot study embryology if you do not understand the grown animal". This metaphor bears a striking resemblance to Marx's famous passage in the *Grundrisse* (which Bloch could not have known): "The anatomy of the human being is the key to the anatomy of the ape" (*Marx's Grundrisse*, ed. D. McLellan, 2 edn. (London, 1980), 38). The retrogressive method was of course also applied by Fustel, Secholim, Maillard and Vinogradoff, all of whose work Bloch knew well (Toubert, "Préface", 5, 11).



vanguard of anti-German cultural revanchism. He was supported in this by his father Gustave, who had left Alsace after capitulation in 1870.<sup>31</sup> Bloch's adopted role as standard-bearer of French culture exacerbated his feeling of being posted to a foreign colony.<sup>32</sup> His growing sense of alienation was not improved by being reminded daily of his country's cultural inferiority, as Bloch wrote in consternation to Ferdinand Lot in 1920, not only did the University Library ignore medieval France, it even lacked a single work by his father's mentor and hero, Fustel de Coulanges.<sup>33</sup>

Other traits in Bloch's personality suggest that his feelings about Alsace may have been more mixed. His attitude to his Jewish ancestry has already been mentioned; further complexities emerge on examining his efforts to stake a claim to a 'new' kind of social history. Once again, success depended critically on Bloch's ability to distance and distinguish himself intellectually from his forebears.<sup>34</sup> In so doing, he did not fear making somewhat ingenuous disclaimers about the influence of, for example, Fustel, Durkheim, and those who became the *Annales*' 'événements!' bogey-men, Langlois and Seignobos. In a letter to Febvre in 1940, for example, Bloch remarked that "Durkheim n'était, certes, pas un imbécile. Ni (voyez-vous la face!) le pauvre père Seignobos non plus. Ni Charles V [Charles-Victor Langlois]. Combien, cependant, nous sommes loin de l'un, et des autres!"<sup>35</sup>

Taken at face value this, and other statements of its kind,<sup>36</sup> are just as misleading as assertions to the contrary, for example about Bloch's card-

<sup>31</sup> MB, 87-8, 98-100.

<sup>32</sup> MB, 100.

<sup>33</sup> MB, 84; also MB, 102. Bloch acknowledged his debt to German scholarship in an annual "Bulletin historique: Histoire d'Allemagne. Moyen Âge" published in the *Revue historique* in 1928, 1930, 1932, 1937 and 1938, and in many separate reviews (listed in his *Bibliography*, in *Mélanges historiques*, vol. 2, 1092-1104). See also R.F. Werner, "Marc Bloch et la recherche historique allemande", in *MBA*, 125-34.

<sup>34</sup> N. Zemon Davis, "History's two bodies", *American historical review* 93 (1988), 1-30, esp. 23-5.

<sup>35</sup> *Annales d'histoire sociale* 1 (1945), 31. See also the ironic reference to Fustel's lack of interest in agrarian history in the Preface to *Les caractères originaux*, where Bloch also suggests that Fustel applied the retrogressive method in a fit of absence of mind (on which point see above, n. 36 and below, n. 38).

<sup>36</sup> See Bloch's caricature of Durkheimian scientism and Seignobos-Langlois-style positivism in his Preface to the *Apologie pour l'histoire, ou Méthier d'historien*, and his comment on Fustel, 15.

carrying Durkheimianism.<sup>37</sup> In fact, Bloch's joint debt towards the rigorous philological tradition embodied by his father's mentor, Fustel de Coulanges,<sup>38</sup> and by his own teachers, Langlois and Seignobos, and towards the 'sociological method', the breadth of imagination and the interest in collective consciousness of Durkheim and his disciples, François Simiand, Marcel Granet, Louis Gernet, Maurice Halbwachs and others, can be found throughout his work.<sup>39</sup> A mediocre theoretician,<sup>40</sup> but an adept artisan of method (as the title of his reflections, *Méthier d'historien*, implies), Bloch believed that the 'total' history he strived for would have to combine Durkheim's emphasis on structure and integration, and the

<sup>37</sup> R.C. Rhodes, "Emile Durkheim and the historical thought of Marc Bloch", *Theory and society* 5 (1978), 45-73. See also L. Febvre, "Marc Bloch et Strasbourg: souvenirs d'une grande histoire", *Mémoires des années 1939-1945* (Strasbourg, 1946), 172-3; C.E. Perrin, "L'œuvre historique de Marc Bloch", *Revue historique* 199 (1948), 183-4. Rhodes is strongly criticized by Toubert, "Préface", 15.

<sup>38</sup> On Fustel see A. Momigliano, "La città antica di Fustel de Coulanges", *Rivista storica italiana* 82 (1970), 81-98. He exerted his considerable influence on Bloch (ibid. 87) through his pupils, Marc's father Gustave and Emile Durkheim, and through others like the sinologist Marcel Granet and the classicist Louis Gernet whom Bloch met during his fellowship at the Fondation Thiers in 1909-12. Both of Alsatian origin, Fustel and Bloch reacted similarly to French military defeat by questioning the meaning and purpose of historical writing (Fustel in "De la manière d'écrire l'histoire en France et en Allemagne", in id., *Questions historiques*, ed. C. Jullian (Paris, 1893), 1-16; Bloch in the *Méthier d'historien* and *Strange defeat*, 153-56). Both agnostic, they were at the same time deeply interested in the origins and nature of religion. They also shared a concern for the new field of comparative history. Bloch's approach (which was influenced also by Henry S. Maine) is discussed by W.H. Sewall Jr., "Marc Bloch and the logic of comparative history", *History and theory* 6 (1966), 208-18; Toubert, "Préface", 10; A.A. van den Brœnhusche, "Historical explanation and comparative method: towards a theory of the history of society", *History and theory*, 28 (1989), 1-24; M. Aymard, "Histoire et comparaison", in *MBA*, 271-8. In "Féodalité, vassalité, seigneurie: à propos de quelques travaux récents", *Annales d'histoire économique et sociale*, 3 (1931), 246-60; 247-8, Bloch was characteristically dismissive of Otto Hintze's comparative institutional history (only recently introduced to French readers; see O. Hintze, *Féodalité, capitalisme et état moderne*, ed. H. Bruhns (Paris, 1991); Hintze was briefly praised by Fernand Braudel in a critical review of O. Brunner, *Neu Äge der Sozialgeschichte: Vorträge und Aufsätze* (Göttingen, 1956) in *Annales ESC* 14 (1959), 2, 308-19). Hintze's work was in many ways methodologically more rigorous than Bloch's decontextualized use of anthropology; the latter seems to have been unaware of the work of Max Weber. See E. Padagani, "Europe, seigneurie, féodalité", Marc Bloch et les limites orientales d'un espace de comparaison", in *MBA*, 279-98 for a powerful critique of Bloch's concept of European feudalism.

<sup>39</sup> They are expressed most clearly in Paris I and III of the *Méthier d'historien*. See also Bloch's reviews of the new series of the Durkheimian *Année sociologique* in *Revue historique*, 155 (1927), 176 (where he noted the publication of Marcel Mauss's *Essai sur le don*) and *Revue historique* 155 (1930), 340-81; O.G. Oexle, "Marc Bloch et la critique de la raison historique", in *MBA*, 419-34.

<sup>40</sup> P. Ricoeur, *The contribution of French historiography to the theory of history*. The Zaharoff Lecture for 1978-9 (Oxford, 1980).



Marxist theory (read through Jaurèsian lenses) of social conflict and change.<sup>41</sup> Although neither approach satisfied him entirely, Bloch's methodological syncretism, the verve with which he attempted to join together the two main tributaries of twentieth-century sociological thought, is still one of the main sources of his intellectual appeal to historians of opposite theoretical persuasions.<sup>42</sup>

This interpretation can of course be disputed, as have other attempts to place Bloch's oeuvre in a broader intellectual and historiographical framework. His aversion of all-encompassing explanations and grand theoretical statements, and his habit of deliberately covering his intellectual tracks, will continue to fire controversy over his *Bildung* and ideas. Fink's decision not to get embroiled in these debates is probably a wise one, since so much depends on them and so much still remains to be understood. Her choice, however, risks painting a portrait of Bloch that accords with his students' and his eldest son's recollections, but with which it is difficult to sympathize: elegant, correct and distant, dry, ironic, and at times caustic.<sup>43</sup> The complexity of his personality and mind and his passionate devotion to his chosen field are hard to discern under this carapace of bourgeois and academic respectability.

Fink's un-*Annales*-like choice<sup>44</sup> to focus on the formal events of Bloch's life, rather than on his intellectual apprenticeship, and on the origins, nature and impact of his work, also makes it hard to explain his posthumous rise to fame, except instrumentally as a consequence of the *Annales*' need to establish a founding myth around a great historian and a Resistance hero.<sup>45</sup> One way around this dilemma has been recently suggested by Fossier, Le Goff, Toubert, Patlagean and others, who have traced intellectual genealogies of Bloch's major work on the basis of its internal references and of the many hundreds of book reviews written for

the *Annales* and other journals.<sup>46</sup> Particularly the latter (most of which are ignored in Fink's bibliography) contain suggestions and criticism towards rising or established, sometimes rival historians, and programmatic statements on hoped-for directions of research that are especially revealing of Bloch's shifting intellectual concerns. With the aid of Fink's detailed map of his outward life, a close textual analysis of Bloch's greater and lesser writings may eventually provide us with a more satisfying and complex picture of the workings of his mind.

C. Fink, Marc Bloch. *A Life in History* (Cambridge University Press, 1989, xix + 371 pp.) ISBN 0-521-37300-X, £32.50, Paperback edition in the *Canto* series, 1991, ISBN 0-521-40671-4, £6.95.

<sup>41</sup> The (in)compatibility of these two traditions is discussed in D. Lockwood, *Solidarity and schism. The 'problem of disorder' in Durkheimian and Marxist sociology* (Oxford, 1992).

<sup>42</sup> As the essays collected in *MB* make very clear. The tension between a functionalist and a-causal analysis of agrarian institutions on the one hand, which refuses to be lured by the "myth of the origins" (Mastrogregori, "Il germin", 76), and the retrospective method, with its implicitly deterministic and chronological concept of historical causation on the other, is particularly evident in the *Caractères originaux*.

<sup>43</sup> *MB* 97; F. Bedarida, "Marc Bloch historien, soldat et père de famille", in Bedarida and Peschanski, eds. *Marc Bloch à Étienne Bloch*, 9-25.

<sup>44</sup> *MB* 342 notes the "return ... even to biography" among Bloch's "spiritual grandchildren" in the *Annales*.

<sup>45</sup> See *MB*, chap. 12: *The legacy*. A similar conclusion is implied in B. Lyon, "Marc Bloch".

<sup>46</sup> J. Le Goff, "Prélude" to *Les rois thaumaturges: étude sur le caractère surnaturel attribué à la puissance royale, particulièrement en France et en Angleterre* (Paris, 1985), i-xxxviii; Toubert, "Prélude"; R. Fossier, "Prélude" to *La société féodale* (Paris, 1989), i-xii; Patlagean, "Europe".