



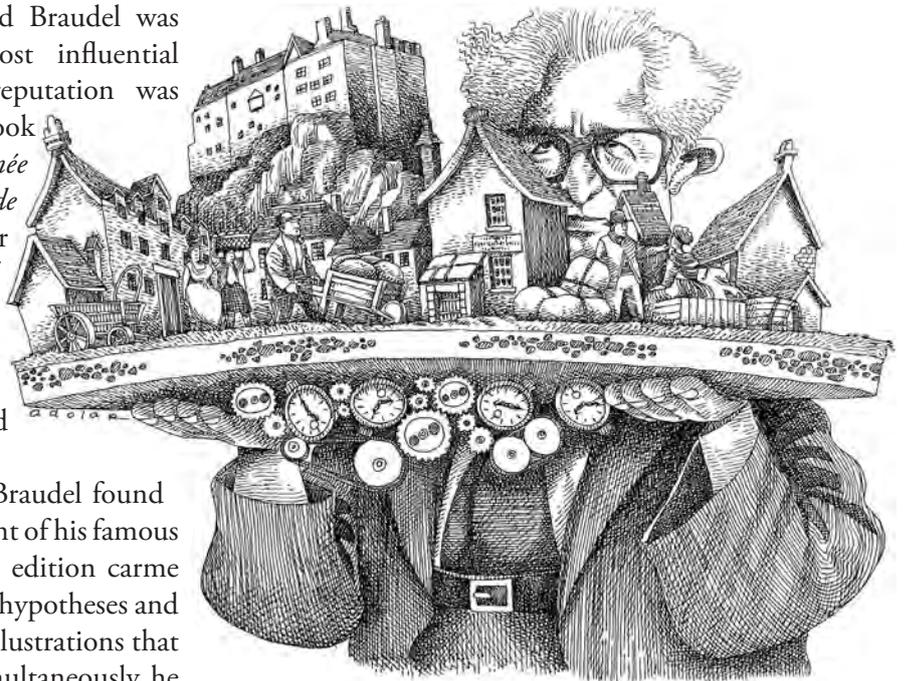
Fernand Braudel, Historian

William H. McNeill

When he died in 1985 Fernand Braudel was undoubtedly the world's most influential professional historian. His reputation was founded on a magnificent 1,100-page book published in 1949 entitled *La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II*; and his eminence was later consolidated by editorship (1956-68) of the journal *Annales: Economies Sociétés, Civilisations*, and at the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes in Paris where a vigorous group of young historians formed around him the famous *Annales* school.

Despite growing administrative duties, Braudel found time for substantial revision and enlargement of his famous book about the Mediterranean. A second edition came out in 1966, significantly reshaped by new hypotheses and queries and adorned by maps, charts and illustrations that had been absent from the first printing. Simultaneously, he worked towards a world history, published in a preliminary form in 1967 as *Civilisation matérielle et capitalisme, XV e XVIIIe siècle*. This work, too, was revised when it appeared anew in 1979 as the first of three volumes collectively entitled *Civilisation, économie et capitalisme, XV e XVIIIe siècle*. Then in his old age Braudel launched, but failed to complete, another lengthy history, this time of France. Its first sections appeared posthumously in 1986 as *L'Identité de la France* in three stout volumes.

Braudel also wrote a textbook for French secondary schools, entitled *Grammaire de civilisations* (1963). It surveyed the world, civilization by civilization, and was part of an effort at curriculum reform: but the French Ministry of Education did not approve the book, so Braudel's distinctive angle of vision on the world and its past continued to be excluded from French schools. It therefore died at birth, and can safely be disregarded trying to assess his achievement as an historian. He also wrote numerous articles and left other miscellaneous writings when he died, but the two massive works that he carried to completion, which I will refer to as *The Mediterranean*



and *Civilization and Capitalism*, for short, were what mattered. Let me therefore concentrate mainly on them.

Oddly, at a time when he already appeared to outsiders as the dominant figure among French historians, in his own opinion Braudel remains marginal, excluded from full participation in the University of Paris by those historians who emphasized political events and personalities or felt that much of what Braudel investigated - what he referred to as *la long durée* - was human geography rather than history.

"I, too, was excluded from the Sorbonne in 1947," he

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Braudel and our changing fortunes in São Paulo

Maarten Waelkens

Every day, we are invited to seminars on management techniques, tax laws, new computer systems, quality control and other forms of short-term knowledge. So it is unusual for businessmen, economists, lawyers and journalists to participate in a seminar cycle on Fernand Braudel's work. This is not a routine exercise, because we must prepare ourselves by reading, for each session at two week intervals, a chapter of the more than 2,000 pages of Braudel's trilogy, *Civilization and Capitalism*. William McNeill's brilliant essay in this issue of *Braudel Papers* shows us why this is so important.

Fernand Braudel and the Sao Paulo institute that bears Braudel Papers name deal with the long-term, with large spaces and with institutional problems, processes beyond our day to day horizon. And that is exactly why we must spend some time with this great work. An airline pilot has to know more than just the buttons of his control panel. He must also be familiar with weather conditions, and therefore he must have some basic knowledge of the mechanics of our climate, The dollar explodes. Our fortunes change. But why? Because long-term processes are at work that we barely understand. Braudel helps us to explain these changes.

It is amazing how many of our decisions have consequences in the long run. We marry, we have children, we save for an unknown future. We build houses that still may be there for hundreds of years. We move the location of production sites. We migrate to other countries. We are not

aware that these acts influence the future. Today's problems with the millennium bug show that even the most brilliant development engineers of new devices could not imagine problems appearing even in a very modest long run.

If our limited acts can have long-run consequences, how much more the opposite must be true. We all are influenced by thousands of decisions by thousands of people before and around us. The originality of Braudel and the historians of *les Annales* lies in the fact that they tried to give a historical perspective to myriad human decisions. This was a new way of seeing history, a way which was not totally accepted by historians, who called it geography instead of history. Braudel showed us that the everyday human struggle is part of history.

One can have doubts whether, due to the sheer multiplicity of facts that Braudel wanted to consider, it is still possible to find regular patterns necessary for analysis. Reading Braudel exposes us to elegant prose and powerful ambitions. Only in self-restraint one can show greatness, Goethe said. But Braudel shows little self-restraint. Does he suffer from announce and overweening ambition? Does he oversimplify?

Braudel divides economy and society into three levels: a lower sphere of self-sustaining peasants; a middle sphere of transparent local market economies, and a higher sphere of international capitalism, dominating the world trade. Is this "scientific" thinking? Let specialists debate this. But it certainly is a useful way of thinking about human development.

The immemorial peasant struggle for survival, banished by today's European welfare state, still is very important in other countries. Droughts in Brazil's Northeast remind us of this struggle. Not all poor are devastated by famine. But especially vulnerable are those unable to participate in the market economy. What then is the role of the market in human development? This is Braudel's great theme.

The role of overseas trade is particularly interesting. Braudel spends much more time on international trade than on the much bigger local trade. That might be due in part to the fact that there is much more written evidence on overseas than on local trade, which could live without documents. But Braudel convinces the reader that overseas trade, while limited in volume, always has been a prime mover of international growth and contacts. Today 70% of overseas trade is in the hands of multinational companies, and the influence of this trade on the world economy is much greater than its absolute numbers may suggest. Even in the times when Brazil's economy was less open to the outside world, the international economy and the availability of foreign currency remained one of the main determinants of economic growth. In other words, our economy always has had global reach.

Braudel should have stopped here. He overstates the role of "capitalists." He makes the mistake of structuralists, trying to put the whole society into the straitjacket of his own thoughts. Or the mistake of Marxists, emphasizing economic relations as the basis of society.

This is an oversimplification, by Marx as well as by Braudel. Society does not consist only of merchants. Many players, perhaps most of them, have a behavioral rationality that is different from the free market of the economists and all do certainly have social influence: children, pensioners, military men, civil servants, teachers, priests, doctors and their patients, judges and writers, all with important roles, not all of them economic. Nor is history only the history of trade, money and production, but also of religions, philosophy, ethics, law, science, mathematics, plagues and wars. All these subjects are less important in Braudel's work. Must to give the example of human rights. We celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It certainly took more than 50 years to develop the concept of human rights, and it did not develop in every country equally. What is the history of this concept? What is its role in human development?

Even if he cannot explain the whole world to us, Braudel is a pioneer in giving a meaning to the vast amount of detailed information he collected. He gives perspective to today's voluminous and sometimes chaotic accumulation of data. His technique is extremely useful. He helps us to understand the importance of such phenomena as demand and technical innovation, the role of cities in the world economy with their advantages and cost, population numbers and migrations and the development of money, fashion, furniture and food. All these are with us in our daily lives. McNeill observes: "Braudel's

venture towards global history, confined though it was to economic affairs between 1400 and 1800, ranks as one of the most impressive examples of how a single author can make the whole world fit into an intelligible picture of times past".

Just as his contact with the Mediterranean, with its enormous concentration of different and millennial civilizations, must have influenced his thinking, so must have been his contact with São Paulo. "Brazil transformed me intellectually", Braudel once said. Indeed, the experience of Brazil and São Paulo helped to animate his picture of the Mediterranean. Both São Paulo and the Mediterranean are hosts to monumental melding of cultures that continues today. Not only geographically different cultures, but also the new and the past living together. This interchange and fusion must be wonderful to every historian. São Paulo is a mind-opener to understand institutional problems. São Paulo is where reading Braudel comes alive to us through the long-term processes of history. Thus we come to understand our climate and times. Pilots do not try to change the weather. They just try to understand it in order to adapt. If we learn to adapt, with intelligence and humility, São Paulo will have fewer floods and currency crashes, less crime, better institutions as well as more political stability and hope.

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wrote in 1976. "When I defended my thesis that year, one of the judges suavely said to me: "You are a geographer, let me be the historian." His long-standing grievance against the historical establishment of the Sorbonne presumably pricked him on to work harder and prove how wrong they were. But ironically, after the student uprising of 1968, when Braudel did at long last become fully incorporated into the degree-granting university establishment of Paris, he immediately became a target for younger historians many of them trained in the *Annales* tradition, who set out, in their turf to assert their own intellectual autonomy by rejecting all or part of Braudel's style of history.

Generational frictions among historians and other professional academics may have been unusually acute in France. But the phenomenon is universal. What was unusual about Braudel's career as a historian was the way the detailed attention he lavished on the *longue durée* recorded and reflected the transformation that France itself went through during his lifetime. It changed from an imperial nation with a majority of citizens still living as tradition-bound peasants to a people whose outlook was thoroughly urbanized, wherever they resided. Its national identity and sovereign destiny was confused and challenged both by an emerging European community and by a swarm of immigrants from North Africa and other parts of the former empire, who fitted only awkwardly into French society.

Braudel experienced this transformation vividly and in person. He later declared that his mature approach to history had been profoundly affected by the experiences of his early life in the village of Lumeville, located in the department of Meuse, not far from Verdun in northeastern France. He was born there in 1902. His father taught mathematics at a secondary school in a nearby town, but the young



Fernand spent much of his childhood with his maternal grandmother, living in the same house and in much the same fashion as his peasant ancestors had done for centuries.

He thus could affirm: "I was in the beginning and I remain now a historian of peasant stock. I could name the plants and trees of this village of eastern France. I knew each of its inhabitants: I watched them at work: the blacksmith, the cartwright, the occasional woodcutters, the *bouquillons*. I observed the yearly rotation of crops on the village lands which today produce nothing but grass for grazing herds. I watched the turning wheel of the old mill, which was, I believe, built long ago for the local lord by an ancestor of mine. And because all this countryside of eastern France is full of military recollections, I was, through my family, a child at Napoleon's side at Austerlitz, at the Berezina...."

He dedicated his last book, *L'Identité de France* to his grandmother, and

begins that book with the proud words "I say it once and for all: I love France with the same passion, demanding and complicated, as Jules Michelet." Michelet (1798- 1874) wrote a multi-volume *History of France*, whose literary skill and anti-clerical, nationalistic fervor did much to shape French republicanism between 1871 and 1914. The France Braudel loved was the France of his childhood: a *pastiche* of villages and small towns where habitual routines conformed to the dictates of soil and climate, where face-to-face dealings were "honest" in the sense that both parties knew the customary price to be paid for goods and services, and everyone knew what to expect from others and from him or herself as well. It was a world almost wholly comprehensible and totally right in the eyes of a boy of five or six, who, under his grandmother's loving care, watched the seasons pass, and saw how his elders adjusted their labors accordingly.

Fond recollections of Lumeville

undoubtedly provided inspiration for the longue *durée* that Braudel investigated so lovingly and lengthily in *The Mediterranean*, as well as in the *Structures of Everyday Life* that constituted the first volume of *Civilization and Capitalism*. Luméville, in short, provoked Braudel's most successful innovation in the writing of history: his insistence on the basic importance of geographically variegated everyday custom and almost unconscious routines, which, he claimed, set limits to all deliberate, conscious activity, whether in matters economic, political or military. And just because the variety of local customs was disappearing so rapidly from rural France after World War II, the French reading public was prepared to relish Braudel's detailed descriptions and emphasis on the past importance of these traditional, local styles of life.

But the future historian did not remain a simple villager for long, and his mature way of writing history, which paid far more attention to towns, trade and finance than to agriculture, registered his subsequent urban experiences. In 1908 his father took a teaching job in Paris and the family moved to the outskirts of the capital. There Braudel attended primary school and encountered "a superb teacher, a man who was intelligent considerate authoritarian and who recited the history of France as though he were celebrating Mass. " Subsequently, he lived through World War I as a student at the Lycee Voltaire in Paris (1913-20) where he studied Latin and Greek, "adored history," wrote "too much poetry", and, he later declared, "got a very good education." On graduation, "I wanted to be; doctor, but my father opposed this insufficiently motivated career, and I found myself disoriented in that year 1920, which was for me a sad one. In the end I entered the Sorbonne as a student o history. I graduated without difficulty, but also without much real enjoyment. I had

the feeling I was frittering away my life, having chosen the easy way out. My vocation as a historian did not come to me until later."

In 1923, he began teaching history in Algeria first at a Lyce'e in Constantine and then, after a year, in Algiers itself. He continued to teach there until 1932, except for a period of military service 1925-26, which he spent in the Germar Rhineland as part of the French army of occupation. The history he taught was what the French state required: a sort of history he later disparaged because it dealt only with superficial political and military events. Yet he was conscientious in doing his duty and indeed claims to have emerged from the Sorbonne with thoroughly conventional views, having focused his personal attention like "all leftist students at the time" on

An act of audacity

the French Revolution of 1789.

Although he was not enthused, nor deeply committed to his subject as thus conceived, he was ambitious enough to wish for a university career. This required him to write an acceptable thesis on the basis of primary sources on a scale that would qualify him for a doctorate. Accordingly, after considering and then deciding his "overly French sentiments" made investigating German history unwise, he turned instead to France's older rival, proposing to write on the Spain of Philip II and the Mediterranean. His teachers approved readily enough, and Braudel accordingly began work in the Spanish archives at Simancas in 1927 during his summer vacation. For an intensely patriotic Frenchman to choose Spanish history was itself surprising. Residing as he did, in Algiers, on the opposite shore of the Mediterranean, Braudel had begun to

contemplate France from a distance, and his thesis soon turned into an act of audacity, provoking him to explore far wider horizons than those set by the national frame within which most historians confined themselves. Indeed an omnivorous curiosity was one of Braudel's enduring traits. In the end, nothing short of the whole wide world satisfied him.

Accordingly, he did not long remain content with Simancas but proceeded in subsequent years to investigate other Mediterranean archives, even in places as far afield as Dubrovnik on the Yugoslav coast. It was here in 1934, where the Ottoman and Christian Rontiers abutted on one another, he made a major discovery: "For the first time, I saw the Mediterranean of the sixteenth century in its everyday, mercantile aspect revealed by detailed records of ships, bills of lading, trade goods, insurance rates, business deals."

A thesis entirely at odds with the expectations of his Sorbonne professors thus began to take shape in Braudel's mind and in the voluminous notes he accumulated from the archives he consulted. The scale of his enterprise seemed out of control, for he had decided to write about everyday human life in all the Mediterranean coastlands during the half century when King Philip's government struggled against the Ottoman sultans for domination of that sea and when transoceanic European conquests and commerce began to shift the principal centers of European economic and political power from the Mediterranean to Atlantic Europe. A vast human panorama emerged from his researches, and fundamental questions about the course of European and world history arose in Braudel's fertile imagination. But the more he discovered, the more there was to inquire into in archives yet unexplored.

No wonder then that "among my friends and colleagues it was reputed that I would never finish this overly

ambitious work," even though he never ventured into the vast Ottoman archives, and only used West European languages. Nonetheless, his appetite for detail was insatiable, and from the very beginning he discovered how to escape the limits of vacation time research by using a secondhand movie camera to photograph thousands of documents each day he was able to spend in the archives. "I was," he says, "undoubtedly the first user of true microfilms, which I developed myself and later read, through long days and nights, with a simple magic lantern."

Not only he. For his wife, Paule, whom he first met as a student in one of his Algerian *lycée* classes eventually became an assiduous and skillful reader of the endless reels of microfilm they accumulated. Thereafter, Braudel's scholarly writing depended on her researches as much as on his own. Mme. Braudel kept herself very much in the background, and in later years tended her husband's fame and influence more assiduously than he did himself. She, for example, was the person who persuaded him to write the "Persona Testimony" from which I draw most of my information about his career, and after his death continued to prepare volumes of his miscellaneous writings for publication.

In 1932 Braudel left Algiers for a teaching post at a *lycée* in Paris. This allowed him to meet Lucien Febvre who was destined to play a critical role in shaping his subsequent career. Their encounters were only casual at first. Febvre (1878-1956) was a pugnacious, would-be reformer of French historiography. In particular, he was co-founder with Marc Bloch of an influential journal *Annales d'histoire économique et sociale*, which they edited together from 1929.

Bloch, who served in the French resistance, was caught and killed by the Nazis in 1944, whereas Febvre survived the war quietly. Then in 1946, with the help of grants from the Rockefeller Foundation in New York, he reorganized the journal and, pursuing his own vision of a new style of 'Loots history', changed its title to *Annales: Economies, Sociétés Civilisations*.

By proclaiming the importance of economic and social history, and provoking innumerable heated debates about how best to approach the past, Febvre and Bloch inaugurated the 'Annales school' before World War II. After 1946, Febvre expanded the imperial claims of his style of 'total' history, arguing

chance, he sailed on a ship that was also conveying Lucien Febvre back home from lectures in Buenos Aires. "Those twenty days of the ocean crossing were, for Lucien Febvre, my wife, and me, twenty days of happy conversation and laughter. It was then that I became more than a companion to Lucien Febvre - a little like a son: his house in the Juras at Souget became my house, his children my children." And there it was, in Febvre's house in the Juras, that Braudel began to write his greatest book in the summer of 1939, only to be interrupted by call-up for service in the French army when World War II broke out in September.

Braudel's war, like that of France as a whole, was brief and inglorious. He was captured by the victorious Nazis in 1940 and after a period of detention at Mainz found himself assigned to a special camp for unruly captives located near Lubeck, on the bleak Baltic coast. He remained there from 1942 to 1945, yet it was under these harsh conditions that Braudel resumed work on his projected thesis. As a result, he actually wrote a first draft of *The Mediterranean* on the shores of the Baltic! Here is what he has to say about this amazing feat:

It was in captivity that I wrote that enormous work, sending school copy book after school copy book to Lucien Febvre. Only my memory permitted this tour de force. Had it not been for my imprisonment, I would surely have written a much different book.... Yes I contemplated the Mediterranean, tête à tête, for years on end, far though it was from me in space and time. And my vision of history took on its definitive form without my being entirely aware of it, partly as a direct intellectual response



that all the human sciences met and mingled in the minds of appropriately trained historians. Then, when Febvre died in 1956, Braudel inherited his position as editor and in the ensuing twelve years carried the influence of the *Annales* school to its peak.

From their first encounter in the early 1930s, Febvre encouraged Braudel to broaden the scope of his thesis researches; but the two men remained only distant acquaintances until 1937. By then Braudel had spent two memorable years teaching a general course on the history of civilization at the newly established University of São Paulo, and was returning to France to take up a new appointment at the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes. By

to a spectacle - the Mediterranean - which no traditional historical account seemed to me capable of encompassing, and partly as a direct existential response to the tragic times I was passing through... All those occurrences which poured in upon us from the radio... I had to outdistance reject, deny them. Down with occurrences, especially vexing ones! I had to believe that history, destiny was written at a much more profound level. Choosing a long time-scale to observe from was choosing the position of God the Father himself as a refuge. Far removed from our persons and daily misery, history was being made, shiftings slowly as the ancient life of the Mediterranean, whose perdurability and majestic immobility has often moved me. So it was that I consciously set forth in search of an historical language - the most profound I could grasp or invent - in order to present unchanging (or at least very slowly changing) conditions which stubbornly assert themselves over and over again. And my book, is organized on several different temporal scales moving from the unchanging to the fleeting occurrence. For me, even today, these are the lines that delimit and give form to every historical landscape.

These remarkable words describe an amazing achievement, even though they glide over a prolonged process of editing, correcting and perfecting the text as it emerged from the POW camp. Even during the war years, Mme. Braudel having access to their notes and all the reels of microfilm they had accumulated, was presumably at work correcting details and filling in references. Moreover after his release in 1945 two years passed before Braudel defended his completed thesis at the Sorbonne and two more before the book itself was published in 1949. The Braudel team was surely busy throughout that time using their notes to correct and improve the manuscript.

But it remains true that the essential shape and message of the book took form in a POW camp under Baltic skies. Very likely, without

Braudel's apparently crippling yet actually liberating separation from the tangled mass of his notes and supporting documentation, he might not have been able to write about the Mediterranean by, as he says, "choosing the position of God." In particular, his unique concept of different temporal scales of changing human behavior, operating simultaneously and within the same geographical space, might never have emerged. This odd and logically dubious organizing device became second only to his wide-ranging curiosity as a distinctive characteristic of Braudel's approach to writing history. It was seldom imitated by others; and Braudel himself encountered logical difficulties, especially in dealing with an intermediate temporal rhythm, referred to as 'conjuncture' in the second and edition of *The Mediterranean*, but which had no name and no distinct presence in the first edition. Braudel says he borrowed the term "conjuncture" and a closely associated word, "structure" from French economists, but he was never completely comfortable with the result, as he made clear in introducing Part 2 "Collective Destinies and Trends" in the revised edition of *The Mediterranean*, as follows:

This second book has, in fact, to meet two contradictory purposes. It is concerned with social structures, that is with mechanisms that withstand the march of time; it is also concerned with the development of those structures. It combines therefore what have come to be known as structure and conjuncture, the permanent and the ephemeral, the slow moving and the fast. These two aspects of reality, as economists are well aware - indeed it is to them that we owe the original distinction - are always present in everyday life, which is a constant blend of what changes and what endures. But it will not be easy to convey this complex spectacle in a single attempt. The chapters that follow share the task among them, tackling in turn the problems relating to economic

systems, states, societies, civilizations, the indispensable instruments of exchange, and lastly the different forms of war. But the reader should not be misled. They are all contributions towards a unique, comprehensive view of the subject, impossible to achieve from any one vantage point. These subsequent subdivisions are both convenient and necessary. They may not altogether satisfy the intellect, but any schema is of value as long as it allows for the best possible explanation with the minimum of repetition.

Thus Braudel split time, the historian's indispensable guide, into logic-defying trinity *longue durée*, *conjuncture*, *événement* - to justify the sequence of themes developed in the successive parts of his book, even though it did not "altogether satisfy" his own intellect nor fit smoothly into the fascinating variety of themes his chapters explored. After all, the book was based, initially on a vast and miscellaneous assemblage of notes.

It was my original idea in the first edition of this book, that the many dimensions of the Mediterranean in the sixteenth century should be suggested, through a series of examples, by selecting certain important and indicative details.... But this would mean leaving enormous blank spaces between the specks of color; at best it would only give an impressionistic notion of the distance that separates our world from that of the sixteenth century. Today [in 1966, when the second edition came out] on the other hand, I am more attracted towards the language of what economists call national accounting.

Braudel, in short, found himself torn between the generalizing language of economics, which he believed to be "the most scientific of the sciences of man," and the confusing variety of everyday life as revealed in the archives he had consulted. Like his mentor, Lucien Febvre, Braudel was a convinced partisan of the notion that history was "a very imperfect science, but a science." Even though historians had to rely on "language of an old

craft that must be formed close down to earth," and depended on details and more details. "But is it not a good thing," he declared when lecturing in the United States in 1976, "for history to be first of all a description, a plain observation, a classification without too many previously held ideas? To see and to show is half the historian's task." The other half, presumably was to be scientific and systematic, seeking to find enduring "structures" and borrowing economists' terms or those of other human sciences whenever convenient.

Braudel always remained tentative in trying to reshape the amorphous multiplicity of history into a science. But in course of revising *The Mediterranean* between 1949 and 1966 he did convince himself that economists offered him concepts and terms that were uniquely powerful, with the result that:

Nowadays we have two fairly well established 'chains' to choose from, one

built by the research of the last 20 or 30 years - the chain of economic events and their short-term conjunctures; the other catalogued over the ages - the chain of political events... which, to the eyes of contemporary observers, took precedence, over any other series of happenings... For us, there will always be two chains - not one. So ever in the realm of traditional history, it would be difficult to tread exactly in Ranke's footsteps. In turn, we should beware of assuming that these two chains preclude the existence of others, or in falling into the trap of naively assuming that one can explain the other, when even now we can guess at fiercer possible chains composed of data from social and cultural history and even from collective psychology.

Braudel's approach to history thus remained open-ended, comprising an ever-broadening array of questions whose answers were tentative at best. This in fact was what made the *Annales* under Braudel's editorship

so attractive to ambitious young historians. Anyone with a new question was welcome in the journal's pages. New themes and widely discordant approaches to the past thus proliferated under Braudel's benign editorial jurisdiction reflecting his own limitless curiosity and open-mindedness.

Yet the revision of *The Mediterranean*, and all his efforts to make history a more perfect science (often by hypothetical quantification), fell short of his hopes, and regularly provoked him to call for further research to test his guesses and preliminary calculations. Braudel in effect found himself with a collection of learned, delightful chapters on his hands, each fascinating in itself but only slenderly connected with what went before or followed after. His technique in the first edition resembled that of the *pointillist* painters of the nineteenth century who used innumerable separate dots of paint to depict



everyday scenes relying on the eye of the beholder to blend them together into a comprehensible whole. And for innumerable readers, Braudel's technique worked wonderfully well, conveying a vivid, convincing sense of what life in the lands of the Mediterranean had actually been like in the sixteenth century.

By comparison, the efforts he made to fit his magnificent, multicolored portrait into a scientific straightjacket, conceived along economic lines was a failure. He was trying to put a saddle on a cow, hoping to tide off into the sunset and discover a complete understanding of the past. Yet his quixotic attempt to reduce history to quantified science is admirable in its way, since it speaks to a deep human desire to make whatever happens meaningful. Braudel himself was never sure that the conjunctures he explored told the truth, much less the whole truth. He saw himself as a pioneer whose hunches and tentative formulations would have to be corrected and replaced by subsequent, more detailed and precise quantifiers; and never entirely forgot that other lines of inquiry - evolving *mentalités* for example that Lucien Febvre had turned his attention to in his later years - might be needed to supplement the narrowly economic measurements on which Braudel focused nearly all his efforts.

An obvious - and deliberate - deficiency of *The Mediterranean* was the rather perfunctory treatment of political affairs in the final part of the book. This was a way of proclaiming how superficial and even trivial were the preoccupations of Braudel's academic rivals. Yet in his eagerness to make the shortcomings of merely political historians apparent Braudel introduced a larger and more damaging structural incoherence into his book. For his effort to discern the conjunctures and structures of economic life in the middle section of the book, as revised, dangle entirely unconnected to political structures

and changes of part three; and both of these 'chains' of happenings remained unrelated to the (ostensibly unchanging) geographical *longue durée* so skilfully set forth in the first three hundred and fifty pages.

As a result, the first edition of *The Mediterranean* was, I believe, a greater literary masterpiece than the second; while the intellectual foundations of both editions were seriously flawed. For, in addition to the problem of how to understand the interaction of structure and process on three different but overlapping time-scales, Braudel chose to neglect dimensions of his subject that most historians regard as essential. In particular, he had almost nothing to say about religion or about other intellectual ideas and currents of opinion. Yet the age of Phillip II (reigned 1556-1598) was when the

A saddle on a cow

clash of Protestants and Catholics assumed a new intensity throughout Europe, competing with and often outweighing the long-standing clash between Christians and Moslems in the Mediterranean. Were the *longue durée*, economic conjunctures and the actions of the Ottoman and Spanish governments unaffected by the religious controversies of the age? It seems unlikely; but this is what Braudel's pages imply without saying so explicitly.

Heir to Michelet's sort of French anti-clericalism, Braudel disdained religiosity, and accordingly felt free to exclude a leading dimension of contemporary consciousness from his history. He was fascinated instead by routines of everyday work and economic exchanges. Bringing these back to life in all their concreteness was what really mattered to him. Religious ideas and political-military

plans, being based on empty hopes and systematic self-deception, were, by comparison the stuff of dreams, and deserved to be dismissed as marginal, trivial, unimportant.

When he was revising *The Mediterranean*, Braudel considered omitting politics and the person of Philip II entirely, but in the end decided, rather reluctantly to retain the political narrative that the expectations of the professors who approved his thesis had required. But amazing, Braudel only gets round to mentioning the mind of Philip II on the very last page of his narrative, and does so only to dismiss him because: "He was not a man of vision: he saw his task as an unending succession of small details. Never do we find general notions or grand strategies under his pen." The religious anxieties and beliefs that shaped a great deal of King Philip's conscious behavior do not appear at all.

Braudel was aware of the oddity of such a vision of the past and added a brief conclusion in 1965 to justify how he had shaped his book. Here, then, are the book's very last words:

So when I think of the individual, I am always inclined to see him imprisoned within a destiny in which he himself has little hand...In historical analysis as I see it, rightly or wrongly, the long run always wins in the end...I am by temperament a 'structuralist,' little tempted by the event, or even by the short run conjuncture. But the historian's 'structuralism'... does not tend towards mathematical abstraction... but instead towards the very sources Of life in its most concrete, everyday, indestructible and anonymously human expression.

Braudel did indeed portray concrete, everyday, and anonymous human behavior in Mediterranean landscapes as no one had done before; and this remains the lasting, distinctive achievement of his greatest book. By comparison, when he turned his attention from the Mediterranean he had come to know so well to the wider world, same of the sureness of touch,

that made his *pointilliste* technique effective, deserted him. Consequently, although *Civilization and Capitalism* introduced a new tripartite principle for historical analysis, and contains many instructive and convincing passages, especially those dealing with Europe, it remains inferior to its predecessor. Regrettably, Braudel knew too little about the Chinese and other non-European peoples to pick out key details unerringly, as he had done in *The Mediterranean*. Since he relied entirely on European sources, the rich grounding in local archives that sustained the earlier book, was also missing.

Civilization and Capitalism was initially conceived in 1950 as part of a series *Destins du Monde*, edited by Lucien Febvre. It was designed to serve as companion piece to a book Febvre himself tentatively entitled *Western Thought and Belief 1400-1800*. But Febvre died in 1956 without leaving a publishable manuscript, thus compelling Braudel's deliberately lop-sided work to stand alone. This invited Braudel to indulge his interest in details of everyday, material life and his intellectual predilection for economic history and excused, more plausibly than before, his inattention to thought, science and religion.

The initial version, published in 1967, conformed to the pattern of *Destins du Monde*, and, being designed for general readers, lacked footnotes. But Braudel was not content. A wider vision of the human condition in modern times had begun to dawn on him, so he proceeded to revise and expand his study of the global economy between 1400 and 1800 reissuing the publication of 1967 in 1979 as the first volume of three, with a new title, and with a set of laboriously reconstructed footnotes based on elliptical notations he had made when preparing the first version. He dedicated that volume to "Paule Braudel, who was dedicated to this book." Presumably it was she who was mainly responsible for re-inventing

the footnotes, while continuing to assist him, as always, by industriously taking notes for the later volumes.

Braudel's new master idea for organizing *Civilization and Capitalism* depended on drawing a sharp distinction between capitalism and what he called "market economies." He was aware of how strange that sounded in the United States, and took the occasion of lectures at Johns Hopkins in 1976 to summarize his argument concisely, pointing out that "markets are found everywhere, even in the most elementary societies"



and even "more complicated and developed societies are literally riddled with small markets." But, according to Braudel, a different, predatory sort of exchange system gradually emerged with European capitalism when "unequal exchanges in which competition - the basic law of the market economy - had little place and in which the dealer had two trump cards: he had broken off relations between producer and the person who eventually received the merchandise (only the dealer knew the market conditions at both ends of the chain and hence the profits to

be expected); and he had ready cash which served as his chief ally....Now, the longer these chains became, the more successful they are at freeing themselves from the usual regulations and controls and the more clearly the capitalistic process emerges." The argument continues: "These men knew a thousand ways of rigging the odds in their favor...They possessed superior knowledge, intelligence, and culture. And around about them they grabbed up everything worth taking: land, real estate, rents. Who could doubt that these capitalists had monopolies at their disposal, or that they simply had power to eliminate competition nine times out of ten?" And Braudel concludes: "Let me summarize: There are two types of exchange: one is down to earth, based on competition and almost transparent; the other, a higher form, is sophisticated and domineering."

Braudel liked and admired the market economy almost as much as he delighted in portraying the everyday routines of material life. Here was his down-to-earth human reality. No less clearly, he disliked capitalists for taking unfair advantage of ordinary people, thanks to their monopoly of ready cash and of information about prices and credit in distant places. Also, as a French patriot, he located the evils of capitalism first in Holland and then in England with the industrial revolution of the eighteenth century. Moreover, these rapacious foreigners proceeded to exploit his beloved rural and small-town France, which, he declared, had been "seized, remodelled, reduced to inferiority by the capitalist economy that established itself in Europe after the sixteenth century".

Yet Braudel's distinction between capitalism and market economies seems fundamentally mistaken - at least to me. At least all, competition often exists among capitalists too and local markets are not always transparent and competitive either. In describing market economies, Braudel

was surely thinking of the style of life he had known as a child in Lumeville where buyers and sellers usually met on very even terms. But that sort of local society was far from universal. In Polish and Russian villages, for example, when Braudel was growing up, no such equality of buyers and sellers prevailed. Instead a single tavern keeper, licenced as often as not by the village landlord, commonly enjoyed effective local monopoly. In other frontier societies, whether in the Americas or Australia, other kinds of local monopoly also prevailed, simply because transportation and communication networks were too slender to assure effective local competition.

Braudel's predatory capitalism, in short, seems to me to be a transitional phenomenon, depending on monopolies that tend to disappear when transport and communication catch up with market demand, only to reappear when new technologies and communications introduce evanescent new monopolies. As a case in point, consider the advantages enjoyed by Bill Gates and his like arising out the computer revolution we are now undergoing, like the industrial monopolies of eighteenth century. The pioneering industries of England, featuring machine-made textiles, have long since given way to cut throat capitalist competition from other sources producing cotton and other kinds of doth.

Hence Braudel's structuring of economic affairs in *Civilization and Capitalism* around (1) an almost unchanging material life, which underlay both (2) local market economies, where conjuncture was especially at home, and (3) an emergent, more global style of capitalist exploitation seem as obviously defective as his failure to articulate the three levels of time he used to organize *The Mediterranean*. Yet he was never dogmatic, and always recognized that his organizing ideas were tentative, since "a work

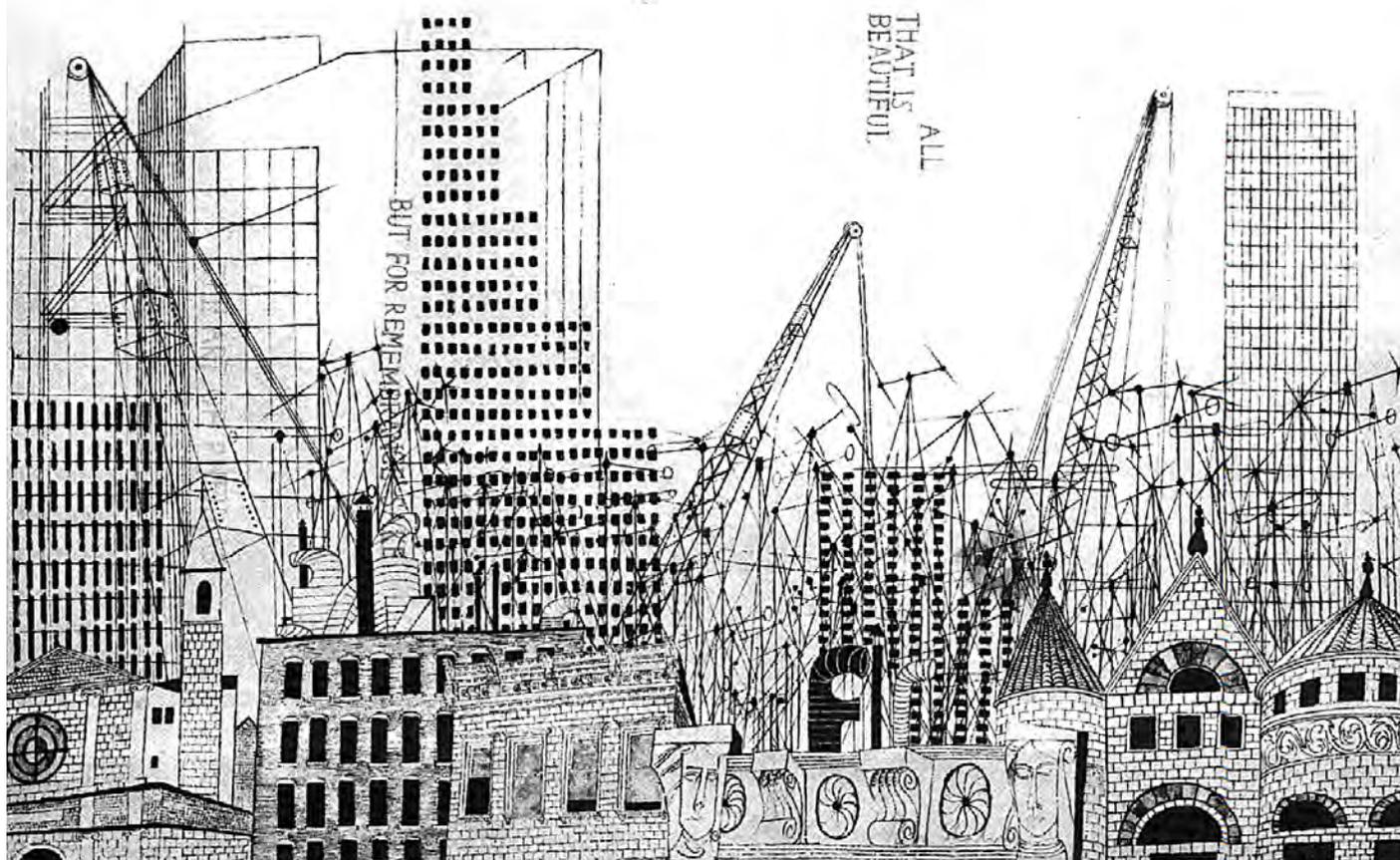


of history ...can never claim to be complete, to have told the truth for once and for all."

More generally, "scientific" abstract generalizations were never his forte. Instead, Braudel's principal strength and enduring greatness was always literary, and his attainments as a writer were fittingly recognized in 1984, just a year before he died, by his election to the Académie Française, making him, officially, an immortal. He certainly wrote elegant, sometimes informal, always discursive and vastly learned histories, enlivened by details and informed by a quizzical, endlessly curious mind, seeking structures and explanation of the past, even though he was always unable to quite convince himself that he had in fact

found the truth. This is a fine and time-tested recipe for an historian. For Braudel's literary art, combining vast learning and sustained research with lively exposition of everything that interested him, exactly replicates the classical inquiries of Herodotus from which the European historiographical tradition descends. Lie was, in fact, a far more faithfully follower of Herodotus than any other historian of our age.

His truly exceptional literary skill was reinforced by two features of Braudel's thought that seem likely to become landmarks in the fixture development of academic history throughout the world. First is the emphasis he put on the overriding importance of circumstances and



process of which contemporaries were quite unconscious. This meant that the most meticulous transcription of contemporary sources no longer could pretend to be an adequate account of times past, as the political historians, against whom Braudel revolted so vigorously in his youth, had tended to assume. Conscious purposes were not enough: processes - *longue durée*, *conjoncture*, and who knows what else? - defeated even the most careful human plans. Of course, people have always noticed that intentions and experience never quite coincide. Traditional explanations attributed such discrepancy to Fortune, Chance or God's hidden purposes. Braudel was not content with those answers, even though the scientific structures and conjunctures he used as partial explanation never satisfied him either.

Many of Braudel's contemporaries among academic historians also looked behind conscious recorded purposes for intellectually intelligible processes affecting the human past. Nothing like consensus emerged; but the search is unlikely to be given up. Braudel's role, through his own books

and as leader of the post-World War II generation of French historians of the *Annales* school, gave him a central role in shifting professional attention from what the dead said and did - deliberately and consciously - to unintended, collective processes that their behavior set in motion. This, it seems to me, is the central departure from older views that affected the historical profession after World War II. Braudel played a leading role in forwarding this change; and his enduring influence will probably rest on that simple fact.

The second feature of Braudel's accomplishment was the world-wide vision of the human past he came to embrace. His reach for far horizons was already evident in *The Mediterranean*, when he explored the (quite literally) global rivalries of the Spanish and Ottoman governments, while seeing the Sahara less as a barrier than as a navigable sea of sand connecting Mediterranean and African peoples. Braudel's globalism became explicit in *Civilization and Capitalism*, even though he was far more familiar with the European scene than with

other parts of the earth and always remained quintessentially French in taste and outlook.

World history, too, is a growing field of inquiry, though it has yet to achieve full respectability among academic historians either in France or in other countries. Braudel's venture towards global history, confined though it was to economic affairs between 1400 and 1800, ranks as one of the most impressive examples of how a single author can make the whole world fit into an intelligible picture of times past.

These achievements, together with the array of *Annaliste* historians Braudel helped to shape, assure him of a leading place among historians of the twentieth century. Moreover, his literary skill and his lively inquiry into how ordinary people lived seem likely to assure long-lasting, widespread attention to what he wrote. Braudel, in short, as an authentic heir of Herodotus, deserves his reputation as the most influential historian of his time, despite the failure of his Thucididean effort to reduce the multifarious variety of

human behavior to the constraints of generalizing science.

Braudel and the world economy

The Perspective of the World. Volume 3 of Civilization and Capitalism: 15th-18th Century. The world economy is the greatest possible vibrating surface, one which not only accepts the conjuncture but, at a certain depth or level, manufactures it. It is the world economy at all events which creates the uniformity of prices over a huge area, as an arterial system distributes blood throughout a living organism. It is a structure in itself The economy, all-invading, mingling together currencies and commodities, tended to promote unity of a kind in a world where everything else seemed to be conspiring to create clearly-distinguished blocs.

The metropolis was a super-city. A world-city could not reach and maintain its high standard of living without some sacrifices, willingly or unwillingly made by other large towns....Perhaps the most distinctive characteristic of all of these super-cities was their precocious and pronounced social diversification. They all had a proletariat, a bourgeoisie, and a patriciate, the latter controlling all wealth and power and so self-confident that before long it did not even bother, as it had in Venice or Genoa in the old days, to take the title of *nobili*. Patriciate and proletariat indeed grew further apart, as the rich became richer and the poor even poorer, since the besetting sin of these pulsating capitalist cities was their high cost of living, not to mention the constant inflation resulting from the intrinsic nature

of the higher urban functions whose destiny it was to dominate adjacent economies. Economic life flowed spontaneously towards their high prices. But caught in this high-tension system, the city and the economy concentrated upon it ran the risk of being burned. In London and Amsterdam, the cost of living sometimes reached well-nigh intolerable levels, just as New York today is losing its firms and businesses, as they leave to escape the huge cost of local rates and taxes.

And yet these great urban centres appealed too strongly to interest and imagination not to be heard, as if individuals hoped to be able to take part in the spectacle, the luxury and the high life of the town and to forget the problems of everyday living. These world-cities put all their delights on display. Seen through a reminiscent glow, the image reaches absurd proportions. A guide for travellers written in 1643 describes Antwerp in the preceding century: a city of 200,000 inhabitants, 'Moth nationals and foreigners', capable of taking 'at one time in the port 2500 ships (which would wait) a month lying at anchor without being able to unload'; a town of great wealth, which had paid Charles V 300 tons of gold and into which there flowed every year '500 million in silver, 130 million in gold', 'not counting exchange currency which comes and goes like the tide'. Such a picture is completely unrealistic - but there was something behind the hyperbole. In 1587, Alonso Morgado's *Historia de Sevilla* claimed that 'with the treasure imported into the city, every street could have been paved with gold and silver!' Dominant cities did not dominate forever; they replaced each other. This was as true at the summit as it was at every level of the urban hierarchy. Such shifts, wherever they occurred (at the top

or half-way down) whatever their causes (economic or otherwise) are always significant; they interrupt the calm flow of history and open up perspectives that are the more precious for being so rare. When Amsterdam replaced Antwerp, when London took over from Amsterdam, or when in about 1929, New York overtook London, it always meant a massive historical shift of forces, revealing the precariousness of the previous equilibrium and the strengths of the one which was replacing it. The role circle of the world-economy was affected by such changes and the repercussions were never exclusively economic, as the reader will probably already suspect.

The Mediterranean. Throughout Europe, too densely populated for its resources and no longer riding a wave of economic growth, even in Turkey, the trend was toward a pauperization of considerable masses of people in desperate need of daily bread..In Spain, vagrants cluttered the roads, stopping at every town: students breaking bounds and forsaking their tutors to join the swelling ranks of *picardia*, adventurers of every hue, beggars and cut purses. They had their favorite towns and within their headquarters: San Lucar de Barrameda, near Seville; the Slaughterhouse in Seville itself; the Puerta del Sol in Madrid. The *mendigios* formed a brotherhood, a state with its own *ferias* and sometimes met together in huge gatherings. Along the roads to Madrid moved a steady procession of poor travelers, civil servants without posts, captains without companies, humble folk in search of work, trudging behind a donkey with empty saddle bags, all faint with hunger and hoping that someone, in the capital, would settle their fate. Into Seville streamed the hungry crowd of emigrants to America, impoverished gentlemen hoping to restore their family

fortunes, soldiers seeking adventure, young men of no property hoping to make good and along with them the dregs of Spanish society, branded thieves, bandits, tramps, all hoping to find some lucrative activity overseas, debtors fleeing pressing creditors and husbands fleeing nagging wives. To all of them, the Indies represented the promised land, the refuge and protection of

all the desperadoes of Spain, the church of rebels and sanctuary of murderers': so says Cervantes at the beginning of one of his most delightful tales, *El celoso extremeño*, the story of one of the returned travelers from the Indies, now rich, who in rigands everywhere. But police records of city life pale beside the blood-stained history of banditry in the Mediterranean,

banditry on land that is, the counterpart of piracy on sea, with which it had many affinities. Like piracy and just as much as piracy, it was a long established pattern of behavior in the Mediterranean. Its origins are lost in the mists of time. From the time when the sea first harbored coherent societies, banditry appeared, never to be eliminated. Even today it is very much alive.■