

THE NEW TRENDS AMONG THE ANNALES HISTORIANS: AN ASSESSMENT OF THE THREE PHASES OF THE ANNALES MOVEMENT**Yasin COŞKUN*****Abstract**

The Annales School, founded in 1929 by two French historians, Lucien Febvre and Marc Bloch, has brought a new approach to the conception of writing history. The Annales School did not accept the historiography which focused on relations between the countries, wars and the lives of important political and military personalities. The Annales School defended a conception of history that gave importance and priority to economic and social issues. Unlike the Marxist concept of history, the Annales movement did not only have an economy-based perspective. When analysing a historical subject, it was advocated to use other disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, geography. The Annales historians applied this new method in their works. However, different approaches have emerged among them. In general, the Annales movement is divided into three phases. The first phase, in which Lucien Febvre and Marc Bloch were active, lasted until the end of the Second World War. In this period there is a strong opposition to the tradition of political history. The second phase, in which Fernand Braudel was the leading historian, lasted until the end of the 1960s. In the third phase, no single trend was dominant. The Annales historians started to use different methods. This study examines the approaches of the Annales historians in the three phases of the Annales movement.

Keywords: The Annales School, the Annales Historians, Lucien Febvre, Marc Bloch, Fernand Braudel

ANNALES TARİHÇİLERİ ARASINDA YENİ EĞİLİMLER: ANNALES HAREKETİNİN ÜÇ EVRESİ ÜZERİNE BİR DEĞERLENDİRME**Özet**

1929 yılında iki Fransız tarihçi Lucien Febvre ve Marc Bloch tarafından kurulan Annales Okulu tarihyazımına yeni bir anlayış getirmiştir. Genel olarak devletlerarası ilişkiler, savaşlar, önemli devlet adamlarının hayatları üzerine yoğunlaşan tarihyazımını kabul etmeyen Annales ekolü, ekonomik ve toplumsal konulara önem ve öncelik veren bir tarih anlayışını gerekli görmüştür. Marksist tarih anlayışından farklı olarak Annales hareketi sadece ekonomi temelli bir bakış açısına sahip olmamıştır. Tarihi bir konu incelenirken sosyoloji, antropoloji, coğrafya gibi diğer disiplinlerden yararlanılması savunulmuştur. Annales ekolünden gelen tarihçiler temelde bu düşünceler etrafında birleşseler de zamanla farklı yaklaşımlar meydana gelmiştir. Genel olarak Annales hareketi üç evreye ayrılmaktadır. Lucien Febvre ve Marc Bloch'un etkin olduğu ilk evre İkinci Dünya Savaşı'nın sonlarına kadar sürmüştür. Bu dönemde geleneksel tarih anlayışına yönelik güçlü bir karşı duruş vardır. Fernand Braudel'un etkin olduğu ikinci evre 1960'ların sonuna kadar sürmüş daha sonra gelen üçüncü evre de ise tek bir kişinin egemenliği söz konusu olmamıştır. Bu dönemde Annales Okulu tarihçileri düşünsel farklılık içinde olmuşlardır. Bu çalışma, Annales Okulu'nun geçirdiği gelişimi ve Annales hareketinin üç evresinde, tarihçilerin yaklaşımlarını incelemektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Annales Okulu, Annales Tarihçileri, Lucien Febvre, Marc Bloch, Fernand Braudel

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Introduction

It is accepted that the Annales School has had an important effect on historiography. The Annales historians have changed the old ideas about the conception of history and brought a new approach to it. "A good deal of this new history is the work of a particular group associated with the journal founded in 1929", known as the Annales School.¹

Generally, the conceptions of writing history have focused on the political and diplomatic issues up to the twentieth century, where history was understood in terms of the wars and agreements between countries and the lives of important people such as kings and queens. This kind of historical approach was not accepted by the Annales historians², who "rejected the primacy of political history by insisting on its interaction with cultural and economic history".³ This was an important milestone, after which the Annales historian started to produce new works which focused on cultural and economic issues rather than political ones. Also, the concern of the Annales historians changed over time. New trends appeared among them.⁴ From this point of view, this essay will look at the Annales' conception of history and its changing nature over time.

1. The Foundation of the Annales and the Works of Lucien Febvre and Marc Bloch

The Annales School was founded in 1929 by Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre at the University of Strasbourg as the *Annales d'histoire économique et sociale*,⁵ and the journal moved to Paris in the mid-1930s.⁶ As the founders and the first generation of the Annales School, Bloch and Febvre's works had an important effect on the Annales historians. Their aim was to escape from history only being part of the political issue. Therefore, in parallel with this aim, they "rejected the near-monopoly of French history by political and diplomatic topics, an approach they saw sterile".⁷ This can be considered as a starting point of the Annales School.

Similar to the Annales' ideas of the writing history, Marxist history looked at the past from an economic perspective rather than concentrating on the political issues. The Marxist consideration of history had an effect on Bloch and Febvre but different from the Marxist history,⁸ they did not use only a philosophic and economic determinist perspective in their works.⁹ They looked at history from other perspectives such as cultural, anthropological, geographic, and demographic. Therefore, the analysing of history from different perspectives brought two new approaches. Firstly, Bloch and Febvre introduced the broadly new idea of total history. According to them, history should be thought of as a whole, and the past does not consist of only particular events.¹⁰ When writing history, it is essential to look at the events as a whole.

Secondly, according to the idea of total history, it was necessary for history to contact with other disciplines because if the historians want to write history from the perspective of total history, they have to use geography, ethnography, demography. Therefore, Bloch and Febvre "wanted to break down the boundaries between the human sciences, with historians incorporating as many of

¹ Peter Burke, *The French Historical Revolution: The Annales School, 1929-1989*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1990, p. 1.

² Elie Kedourie, "HISTORIOGRAPHY: History, the Past and the Future", *The American Scholar*, Vol. 53, No. 1 (Winter 1984), p. 114.

³ Anna Green & Kathleen Troup, *The Houses of History: A Critical Reader in Twentieth-century History and Theory*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1999, p. 87.

⁴ Ergin Ayan, "Türk Tarih yazımının Evriminde Annales Kuramının Yorumu", *Tarih Okulu*, Sayı: XI Eylül-Aralık 2011, p. 76.

⁵ Ignacio Olabarri, "'New' New History: A Longue Durée Structure", *History and Theory*, Vol. 34, No. 1, (February, 1995), p. 5.

⁶ Lynn Hunt, "French History in the Last Twenty Years: the Rise and Fall of the Annales Paradigm", *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 21, No. 2, Twentieth Anniversary Issue (April, 1986), p. 209.

⁷ Green & Troup, *The Houses of History*, p. 87.

⁸ Robert Forster, "Achievements of the Annales School", *The Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 38, No. 1, The Tasks of Economic History (March, 1978), p. 58.

⁹ Michael Harsgor, "Total History: The Annales School", *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (January, 1978), p. 2.

¹⁰ Olabarri, "New' New History", p. 7.

these disciplines as possible in their work”.¹¹ Especially, using other disciplines with history took an important place in Fernand Braudel’s works. He had an important effect on the second generation of the Annales School.

Bloch and Febvre’s history understanding was similar to each other’s. Furthermore, in their works they applied other disciplines. In his work *Philippe II et la Franche-Comte*, Febvre used the geographical background to see how the geographical features of the region affect its social, cultural and political development. This work is a good example to see the Annales idea of historiography. In addition, his other book, *The Problem of Unbelief in the Sixteenth Century*, was the examination of the culture. Therefore, this work can be regarded as the history of mentalities which became famous in the third generation of the Annales School.

Bloch’s work generally focused on rural history. *French Rural History* was the one of his important works. There were comparisons and contrasts between France and England from the 13th to the 18th century and in this book. Bloch examined the rural society of the both countries. As a principle of the Annales School, in his work, Bloch looked at the history as a whole. Therefore, he did not only consider French or English’s rural communities separately. Instead of this, he compared two countries in the same time period and “Bloch conception of rural history, defined as the combined study of rural technique and rural customs was an unusually broad one for its time, when historians were more likely to write on narrower themes such as the history of agriculture or serfdom”.¹²

Another important work of Bloch was *Feudal Society*. In this book, he was “dealing some four centuries of European history, from 900 to 1300”.¹³ It was a comprehensive study. He analysed the European feudal society with a wide range of topics such as economic and politic. *French Rural History* was also a good example of the idea of total history because it was different from earlier studies of the feudal system. It is not only about the relation between land tenure, warfare and the state. It considers feudal society as a whole: “with what we might now call “the culture of feudalism”.¹⁴ As can be seen, as the first generation and founder of the Annales School, Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre played a significant role in the development of the idea of the Annales School.

2. The Next Generation and Fernand Braudel

French historian Fernand Braudel had an important effect on the Annales School. “The second generation of the Annales has been called “The age of Braudel”.¹⁵ Especially, his work *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II (La Méditerranée et le Monde Méditerranéen à l'Époque de Philippe II)* (1949)¹⁶ has brought a new conception of history.¹⁷ The originality of his work was that “Braudel introduced a multi-layered historical chronology”.¹⁸ According to his three-tiered conception of historical time: *Longue Durée* (the long-term) at the base, then *Conjunctures* (medium-length) and third one *Histoire Évènementielle* (the short-term). *Longue Durée* was the slowest movement and related to changing in geology and climate and people cannot perceptible this changing. *Conjunctures* comprised changes in a period of ten to fifty years such as population fluctuations. *Histoire Évènementielle* was related to short term changes and it comprised traditional conception of history, such as political and diplomatic ones.

¹¹ Green & Troup, “*The Houses of History*”, p. 87.

¹² Burke, *The French Historical Revolution*, p. 23.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

¹⁵ Hunt, “French History”, p. 210.

¹⁶ For more information on a selective bibliography, see, “The “Annales Movement” and Its Historiography: A Selective Bibliography”, (Compiled by Jean-Pierre V.M. Herubel), *French Historical Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (Spring, 1993), p. 346-355

¹⁷ Halil İnalçık, “Impact of the Annales School on Ottoman Studies and New Findings”, *Review*, Vol. 1, No. 3/4, The Impact of the “Annales” School on the Social Sciences (Winter - Spring, 1978), p. 70.

¹⁸ Green & Troup, “*The Houses of History*”, p. 87.

According to Braudel, the traditional conception of history was not enough to explain the historical events because it comprised a narrow time period. Similarly, he did not think that *Conjunctures*, which was about the ten to fifty years terms in the past, was enough to evaluate the historical facts. He thought that the best way to explain history was to look at the period of *Longue Durée* because when historians looked at the long-term changes in the past, such as climatic and geographical, they would gain a wider perspective to evaluate the past correctly. The old conception of history confined the past only to political and diplomatic issues. According to this idea, it was enough to write a king's life to explain a certain time of the period in the past. Contrary to this conception, Braudel advocated that man did not have an important effect on shaping history and man only played a part in history which was directed by the geographical milieu.¹⁹

Braudel designed his book, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, according to his three-tiered conception of historical time. The book "was divided into three parts -the geographical, the social and the individual- which correspond in a general way to these temporal divisions".²⁰ He described the geography of the Mediterranean and its effect on shaping history in this area. Actually, Braudel had a particular interest in the Mediterranean. In the book's preface, he said: "I have loved the Mediterranean with passion".²¹

In his book, Braudel showed an example of total history, which Bloch and Febvre applied in their works, but as a different from Braudel, they looked at total history from conception of topics. In Braudel case, his conception of total history was based on a range of *durées*. From this point of view, it can be said that he had a structuralist approach. He considered the deepest layer (*longue durée*) as always most influential. Therefore, "he largely overturned the traditional emphasis on the importance of events and people as the agents. Braudel's agents are the mountains and the sea itself".²²

There are some criticisms about *La Méditerranée*. One of them was that Braudel did not mention key topics, such as culture, agriculture, law and religion in his work. Therefore, it posed a problem in terms of the conception of total history.²³ Also; another criticism about the book, as the historian Peter Burke pointed out that "some critics have gone still further in their criticism of Braudel and spoken of "a history without humans".²⁴ Therefore, it was emphasised that Braudel did not give enough attention to humans in his work, although mentioned human affairs in the third part of the book.

Another of Braudel's important works was the three-volume *Civilisation Matérielle, Economie et Capitalisme* (Capitalism and Material life). The book generally focused on pre-industrial modern world and explained how the people's economic activities were. "Braudel's three volumes are more or less concerned with the economists' categories of consumption, distribution and production".²⁵ In the first volume of his work (1967), *Civilization and Capitalism*, Braudel breaks out the boundaries of traditional economic history in terms of subject-matter, as in geography. He gets rid of the conventional classification of agriculture, trade and "looks instead at everyday life at people and things mankind makes or uses: food, clothes, tools, money and so on".²⁶ Furthermore, he applied statistical data as an illustrative.

After Braudel's work, there was a movement towards the economy-centric history in the second generation. Braudel had an influence among the historians. As a result of this, they started to follow the Braudel's work. Especially, the statistical aspect of his work became the centre of

¹⁹ Hunt, "French History", p. 211.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 211.

²¹ Jacques Revel and Lynn Hunt (eds.), *Histories: French Constructions of the Past*, New Press, New York, 1995, p. 83.

²² Green & Troup, "The Houses of History", p. 90.

²³ Ibid, p. 90.

²⁴ Burke, *The French Historical Revolution*, p. 40.

²⁵ Ibid, p. 45.

²⁶ Ibid, p. 46.

attraction.²⁷ The new trend was called quantitative history. Particularly, the 1950s and 60s were the rise of the quantitative history among the Annales historians. It is generally accepted that Ernest Labrousse was the one of the important persons who influenced and encouraged this trend with his work on quantitative history and he was also “a pioneering researcher on prices and wage series since the 1930s”.²⁸ In his works, Labrousse mainly focused on the economy of France in the 18th and the 19th century.

His two monographs, “the *Sketch* (1933), dealing with price movements from 1701 to 1817, and *the Crisis* (1944), dealing with the end of the old regime”,²⁹ were considered as pioneer studies of what the Annales historians would later call *Conjuncture*.³⁰ As it has been mentioned before, according to Braudel’s three-tiered conception of historical time, *Conjuncture* comprised ten to fifty year cycles such as economic cycle and trade. Labrousse’s works were mainly based on economic history, therefore; his two books were regarded as important works which deal with *Conjuncture*. As a different point, when looking at the quantitative historians’ conception of history, it can be seen that they were pursuing *histoire probleme*, rather than *histoire totale*, that is, problem-solving approach to history.³¹

3. The Third Generation

After Braudel’s retirement in 1972, his influence decreased among the Annales historians and the new trends started to appear. When comparing the third generation with the first and second ones, it can be said that no one had an important effect on this generation as Febvre and Braudel once had.³² Also, there was no trend domination. Some members of the groups insisted on Lucien Febvre’s programme, some of them thought the Annales School neglected political history and turned their interest to political and diplomatic history, which was contrary to the Annales School’s conception of history, and some wanted to “continue to practise quantitative history”.³³ However, in the course of the 1960s and 1970s, an important shift of interest took place from the economic base to the cultural. Therefore, the history of mentalities gained more importance in this generation.

The history of mentalities concentrated on cultural history rather than wars and politics. It became more influential in the 1960s and 1970s. The study of mentalities, as it was called, attached importance to normal people’s own experience of their lives and looked to display the internal working of society.³⁴ There were some important works on the history of mentalities. One of them was *Montaillou*, which was written by Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie. In this work, he searched many records to look at the life of the households of the medieval village of Montaillou. In his research, Ladurie discussed the villagers’ opinions about “love, sex, religion, death, work and magic”.³⁵ “His inspiration was to treat the register as the record of a set of interviews with the twenty-five people”³⁶ from the village and this gave him a chance to get more information about the village of Montaillou’s people. As it has been mentioned before, in parallel with the aim of the history of mentalities, Le Roy Ladurie tried to show ordinary people’s own experience of their lives in his work.

The book consists of two parts. The first chapter was about the material culture of Montaillou and the second chapter of the book deals with mentalities of the villagers. Another point about the book, there are similarities between Braudel and Le Roy Ladurie. Both of them explain and examine the Mediterranean culture and society but as a different from Braudel’s work, Le Roy

²⁷ Green & Troup, “*The Houses of History*”, p. 91.

²⁸ Ibid, p. 91.

²⁹ Burke, *The French Historical Revolution*, p. 54.

³⁰ Ibid, p. 55.

³¹ Green & Troup, “*The Houses of History*”, p. 91.

³² Burke, *The French Historical Revolution*, p. 65

³³ Ibid, p. 65.

³⁴ Green & Troup, “*The Houses of History*”, p. 91.

³⁵ Ibid, p. 92.

³⁶ Burke, *The French Historical Revolution*, p. 81.

Ladurie has not left people out of his book.³⁷ Therefore, this shows that the agent of the history of mentalities is people.

Georges Duby used different sources to examine mentalities through an analysis of medieval art and architecture.³⁸ Furthermore, in his most important book, *The Three Orders*, his interest towards mentalities can be seen. He divided medieval into three groups -“priest, knights and peasant; in other words those who pray, those who fight and those who work-”.³⁹ Duby explained that “this view of society as composed of three groups exercising three basic functions goes back a long way into Indo-European tradition”.⁴⁰ Georges Duby’s is a good example to see the contribution of medieval historians to the history of mentalities. As can be seen, no single trend was dominant in the third generation of the Annales historians. However, as it was mentioned, the study of the history of mentalities had a prominence in this period.

Conclusion

Having considered the different approaches of the Annales historians, it can be said that the Annales School has brought forward a new perspective on the conception of history. The Annales historians’ works have shown that history does not consist only of political and diplomatic relationships and events. Especially, as founders of the Annales schools, Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre had an important place in this pivotal movement. They broadly introduced a dialogue with other disciplines. This was an important development which changed historians’ conceptions of history. Also, Bloch and Febvre have shown that history is not limited to the writing of the historical events, this is not sufficient to evaluate the past. Therefore, historians should consider other aspects of the study of history.

In terms of the second generation of the Annales, Fernand Braudel had a significant influence on these historians. His work, *The Mediterranean*, was a good example of the conception of total history where he introduced a three-tiered conception of historical time. Also, in this period, there was a movement towards economic-centric history. Braudel’s work *Capitalism and Material Life* was an example of this trend. He affected the Annales historians and his works became dominant in the Annales School of historiography. As a result of this, the other Annales historians tended to follow his conception of history. Unlike the first and second generation of the Annales, there was no certain trend in the third generation. However, the history of mentalities became important in this phase. Therefore, the number of works on cultural history increased.

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³⁷ Ibid, p. 82.

³⁸ Green & Troup, “*The Houses of History*”, p. 92.

³⁹ Burke, *The French Historical Revolution*, p. 73.

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 73.

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