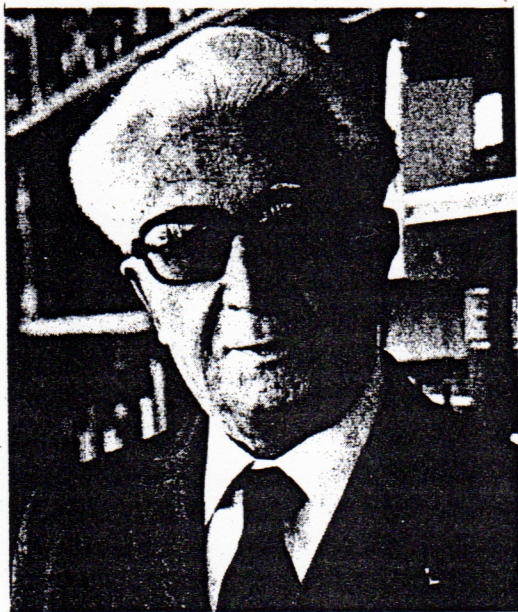


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### Braudel, Fernand (Paul)

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In the opinion of many historians, Fernand Braudel, who is the acknowledged doyen of the large and influential *Annales* school of historiography, enjoys the distinction of being the greatest living practitioner of his craft. Because of the scope, grandeur, and readability of his now classic work, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (1949), and his monumental trilogy, *Civilization and Capitalism, 15th-18th Century* (1979), Braudel has often been compared with such historians as Arnold Toynbee, Oswald Spengler, and even Edward Gibbon. A former professor at the Collège de France, Braudel has also had a marked influence on a whole generation of French historians as editorial director of the journal *Annales: Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations*; as president of the Sixth Section of the *Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes*; as the founder and chief administrator of the *Maison des Sciences de l'Homme*; and as director of the *Centre des Recherches Historiques*. As Peter Scott noted in the *London Times's Higher Education Supplement*

(December 9, 1977) in a typical appraisal of the French historian's career, Braudel is "a powerful, even venerable symbol of a whole approach to history. . . . He is a great institution-builder who has shaped in a decisive way the development not only of history but of all the social sciences in France during the past generation."

A native of the region of northeastern France known as Lorraine, Fernand Braudel was born on August 24, 1902 in his paternal grandmother's "simple peasant house" in the village of Luméville, in the department of the Meuse. He is the son of Charles Braudel, a teacher who later became a school headmaster, and Louise (Falet) Braudel. The historian has credited his familiarity with French rural life, which he acquired during frequent visits with his grandmother, with having profoundly influenced his development as a historian. "Things that others had to learn from books I knew all along from firsthand experience," he has recalled. " . . . I was in the beginning and I remain now a historian of peasant stock."

From 1913 to 1920, Fernand Braudel studied at the Lycée Voltaire in Paris, where he excelled in mathematics and history, took "a lot of Latin and a little Greek," and wrote poetry in his spare time. After giving up the idea of becoming a doctor because of his father's opposition to a medical career, he decided at eighteen to enroll in the Sorbonne as a student of history. With only a few exceptions, Braudel's courses at the Sorbonne were heavily weighted with the minutiae of political and diplomatic history. His teachers were, in his own words, "indifferent to the discoveries of geography, little concerned . . . with economic and social problems; slightly disdainful towards the achievements of civilization, religion, and also of literature and the arts. . . . [They] regarded it beneath a historian's dignity to look beyond the diplomatic files, to real life, fertile and promising."

After receiving his advanced teaching diploma, the *agrégation*, Braudel became a teacher of history in colonial Algeria, where he taught for nearly a decade at lycées in the cities of Constantine and Algiers. During the years 1925-26, he served with French forces occupying the Rhineland, which gave him the opportunity to "learn to know and then to love Germany," despite the anti-German sentiments he had developed while growing up near the German border. After resuming his teaching duties, he published his first scholarly paper, "The Spaniards and North Africa," which was based on research in the Spanish national archives at Simancas.

Braudel's extensive travels throughout North Africa had afforded him an intimate view of the Mediterranean region "as seen from the opposite shore, upside down," and since he was teaching in Algeria, he decided to write his thesis on the Mediterranean policy of Philip II of Spain (1556-98). He projected it as a conventional work of diplomatic history based on archival materials at Simancas, but as he roamed about the Mediterranean region during the years 1927-1933, using an antiquated



movie camera given to him by an American cameraman to photograph thousands of virtually inaccessible documents, he radically altered the scope of his thesis. "Little by little, I grew doubtful about the subject of my labors," he later explained. "Philip II . . . attracted me less and less, and the Mediterranean more and more."

From 1932 to 1935, Fernand Braudel taught at the Lycée Condorcet and at the Lycée Henri-IV in Paris. He then accepted a chance invitation to teach a course in the history of civilization at the newly founded Universidade de São Paulo in Brazil, where he spent three "marvelous years" reading the "kilometers of microfilm" that he had collected with his camera. In 1937 he returned to France to take up a position as a *directeur d'études* at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes in Paris. He also became a member of the editorial board of the journal *Annales d'histoire économique et sociale* (later renamed *Annales: Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations*), which had been founded in 1929 by Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre in an attempt to revolutionize French historiography. Braudel was deeply influenced by the views of both men and especially by Febvre, with whom he formed a close friendship.

After the outbreak of World War II, Braudel served briefly as an army lieutenant on the Rhine frontier. Captured by the Germans in 1940, he was eventually sent to a special prison camp in Lübeck, Germany because of what he has called his "Lorrainer's rebelliousness." While in captivity, he kept up his morale by teaching other prisoners, by occasionally playing pranks on the German guards, and by working on his thesis. Because of his prodigious memory, he was able to write the first draft of the 600,000-word work without any notes or documents at his disposal. Completed portions of the manuscript, written in school exercise books, were sent clandestinely to Febvre, whose advice and encouragement helped Braudel to overcome his nagging doubts about whether he would ever finish the project. In 1947 Braudel was granted the degree of *docteur ès lettres* by the Sorbonne, and his thesis was published in 1949 with the title *La Méditerranée et le Monde Méditerranéen À l'Époque de Philippe II* (Armand Colin; *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, Harper, 1972-73).

Almost immediately, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* was hailed as a sterling example of the "total history" advocated by Bloch and Febvre when they established the journal *Annales d'histoire économique et sociale*. The members of the *Annales* school, as the group associated with the journal became known, tended to reject as inadequate *l'histoire événementielle*, the straightforward chronicle of events that is characteristic of political, diplomatic, and military history. They hoped to supplant the "great men and great events" view that typified history as taught at the Sorbonne with a more scientific approach. The historian would draw on the insights and methods of disci-

plines such as geography, economics, linguistics, psychology, sociology, anthropology, and demography in order to reconstruct a more accurate picture of what life in the past was really like for the average person.

As Lawrence Stone pointed out in his seminal work *The Past and the Present* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* "is significant for two reasons. First, it stresses very heavily geography, ecology, and demography as the constraining factors which set limits on all human action. Second, it frees itself entirely from any national perspective and ranges around the Mediterranean basin, seeing the great clash of Ottoman Islam and Latin Christianity that culminated in the Battle of Lepanto in 1571 as a global whole, without any attempt to take sides." Instead of beginning with Philip II's reign, which is not even covered until the last part of his book, Braudel starts out with an almost lyrical account of the "human geography" of the Mediterranean region—its mountains and plains, coastlines and islands, climate, and trade routes. He then addresses such topics as trade and transport, the role of precious metals in the Mediterranean economy, class tensions, and types of warfare before focusing on the events leading up to the Battle of Lepanto, which is usually thought of as one of the great turning points in European history. Braudel continually goes out of his way to remind the reader that such events are mere "surface disturbances, crests of foam that the tides of history carry on their strong backs," and that the policies of statesmen such as Philip II are of only marginal importance when viewed against the backdrop of the vast geographic, economic, and social forces that represent "the deeper realities of history."

The most original, as well as the most controversial, aspect of the book is Braudel's now famous conception of three different levels of historical time—the *longue durée* (long term), which Braudel defines as a history "of man in his relationship to the environment, . . . of constant repetition, ever-recurring cycles"; the *moyenne durée* (medium term), the "slow but perceptible rhythms" of economic and social trends that last for several decades; and the *courte durée* (short term), which corresponds to the history of events. The three levels are presented consecutively in an attempt "to encompass the history of the Mediterranean in its complex totality." His tripartite framework has been criticized by some historians on the ground that Braudel never makes entirely clear the interrelationship among the three types of historical phenomena. As Eric Christiansen expressed it in *The Spectator* (June 23, 1984), "Each third of the work remains an 'essay in general explanation' connecting with the others in any way the reader chooses, without merging or even locking."

Despite such criticisms, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* has received perhaps more acclaim than any other historical work published in the twentieth century,



with the possible exception of Toynbee's *A Study of History*. It has been accorded the status of a classic ever since the publication in the early 1970s of a two-volume English translation, based on the revised and expanded French edition published in 1966. "As an intellectual and scholarly tour de force it is almost unequaled," J. H. Plumb asserted in a review of the first volume that appeared in the *New York Times Book Review* (December 31, 1972), and John Bossy registered the opinion in *Encounter* (April 1973) that he considered it the "best history book ever written." Writing in the *New York Times Book Review* (May 18, 1975), Richard Mowery Andrews called Braudel's study of the Mediterranean "probably the most significant historical work to appear since World War II . . . both the crowning achievement of postwar French historiography and the fullest revelation of its intentions." And John Kenyon found in the *Observer* (October 22, 1972) that trying to write a brief estimate of Braudel's work was like trying to review Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. "If Gibbon had been born in the twentieth century, this is the book he would have written," Kenyon observed.

A more immediate effect of the publication of Braudel's masterpiece was his elevation to a position of leadership among the members of the *Annales* school. In collaboration with Lucien Febvre, Braudel played a major role in establishing the world-famous Sixth Section of the *Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes* and in setting up a *Centre des Recherches Historiques* under its auspices. He succeeded Febvre in the prestigious chair of the history of modern civilization at the *Collège de France* in 1950 and, on Febvre's death in 1956, was appointed to succeed his former mentor both as president of the Sixth Section and as editorial director of the *Annales* school's "house organ," *Annales: Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations*. During Braudel's tenure in those two key posts, from both of which he resigned in the aftermath of the French student uprisings of May and June 1968, the *Annales* school became the world's most productive and creative group of historians. After retiring from active teaching status in 1972, Braudel continued to serve as the chief administrator of the *Maison des Sciences de l'Homme*, an institution that he founded in the early 1960s to coordinate the work of the Sixth Section and other research centers devoted to the study of the "sciences of man."

Nowhere is Braudel's belief in the inexorability of longterm historical forces more apparent than in his second major work, *Civilisation Matérielle, Economie et Capitalisme, XV<sup>e</sup>-XVIII<sup>e</sup> Siècle* (*Civilization and Capitalism, 15th-18th Century*), an economic and social history of the preindustrial world that was published in its final form in 1979. The 1,750-page work consists of three volumes: *Les Structures du Quotidien: Le Possible et l'Impossible* (Armand Colin, 1979) (*The Structures of Everyday Life: The Limits of the Possible*, Harper, 1981); *Les Jeux de l'Echange* (Armand Colin, 1979) (*The Wheels of Commerce*, Harper, 1982);

and *Le Temps du Monde* (Armand Colin, 1979) (*The Perspective of the World*, Harper, 1984). In those volumes, Braudel tries to chart the growth of early capitalism and to explain the reasons why capitalism took root and flourished in Europe, paving the way for European domination of the world.

According to Braudel, most historians have tended to oversimplify the early economic history of modern Europe by equating capitalism with the cataclysmic upheaval of the Industrial Revolution and by limiting their studies to the "so-called market economy." In *The Structures of Everyday Life*, which is the least technical and the most accessible to the lay reader of the three volumes, he explores "the shadowy zone, often hard to see for lack of adequate historical documents, lying underneath the market economy." A sustained theme of the book, which focuses on such topics as food and drink, the history of fashion, modes of transport, and forms of currency, is the squalor, poverty, and desperation of the average man's life in the period between the end of the Middle Ages and the coming of the Industrial Revolution. In the second volume, *The Wheels of Commerce*, which was awarded the 1983 *Los Angeles Times* book award for history, Braudel concentrates on the "mechanisms of exchange"—shops, fairs, trading companies, and small businesses—that were beginning to undermine the stagnant agricultural economy described in *The Structures of Everyday Life*. He also advances the controversial thesis that the first capitalists were not industrialists but international bankers and traders, essentially parasitic speculators whose vast financial empires endowed them with enormous power and influence.

*The Perspective of the World* chronicles the dramatic rise of European capitalism to world power beginning with the age of the great city-states (Venice, Antwerp, Genoa, and Amsterdam) and concluding with an attempt to explain the phenomenon of the Industrial Revolution. "For Braudel," Keith Thomas commented in an appraisal of *The Perspective of the World* that appeared in the *New York Review of Books* (November 22, 1984), "the instruments of aggression and domination during these centuries were not states and armies, but banks and trading companies. . . . The triumph of European capitalism and the industrialization of the West ahead of the rest of the world are thus the logical culmination of Braudel's story."

Although *Civilization and Capitalism* is in many respects an even more ambitious work than *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, Braudel's method of combining bold theoretical speculation with a seemingly inexhaustible profusion of detail has not been immune from criticism. In reviewing *The Perspective of the World*, Keith Thomas observed that "Braudel's style is musing, conversational, and often indecisive," that "there is a lack of rigor about the argument," and that the book "does not always measure up to normal scholarly standards." He found that *Civilization and Capitalism* was "not as impressive or original a work as *The Mediterra-*



nean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II," but nevertheless concluded that "it has many splendid qualities and its conceptual framework deserves serious discussion." Eric R. Wolf noted in the *New York Times Book Review* (November 11, 1984): "This is a great book by a great historian. But it is not history for everyone. Mr. Braudel's writings are infused with a moral passion, but it is a passion for Olympian knowledge, not for the recognition of a moral purpose in human affairs. . . . [He] has compassion for his fellow humans, but not much concern for their emotions and motivations; he offers cold comfort to those who think people can take charge of their own destinies."

Besides his two major works, to which he has devoted almost a half a century of research, Braudel is the author of scholarly articles, many of which have been collected in book form and published under the title *Ecrits sur l'Histoire* (Flammarion, 1969) (*On History*, University of Chicago Press, 1980). In April 1976 the French historian gave a series of lectures at Johns Hopkins University that have been published as *Afterthoughts on Material Civilization and Capitalism* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977). Braudel has contributed to the *Encyclopédie Française*, the *Encyclopedia Americana*, and *The Cambridge Economic History of Europe*. He was coeditor with Ernst Labrousse of a massive scholarly undertaking by the *Annales* school, the eight-volume *Histoire Economique et Sociale de la France* (Presses Universitaires de France, 1970-82).

Fernand Braudel holds honorary doctorates from Oxford, Cambridge, Edinburgh, Geneva, Brussels, Cologne, Madrid, Warsaw, São Paulo, Yale, Chicago, Montreal, and many other universities throughout the world. He has been decorated as a *commandeur* of the French Legion of Honor. The somewhat belated but nonetheless significant impact of Braudel's achievements on American scholarship culminated in 1977 with the establishment of a Fernand Braudel Center for the Study of Economies, Historical Systems, and Civilizations at the State University of New York at Binghamton.

Considered a master stylist by those who read him in the original French, Braudel tends to write a chapter quickly and then rewrite it as many as twenty times before he is satisfied. He often reads his work aloud to his wife, the former Paule Pradel, for her guidance in matters of rhythm and style. The Braudels, who have been married since September 14, 1933, have two daughters, Marie-Pierre and Françoise. Although Braudel is fully retired from his teaching and administrative duties, he has by no means curtailed his scholarly activities and is currently working on a three-volume history of France.

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