

**A ESCOLA DOS ANNALES: FRANÇA NA VANGUARDA
DE UMA REVOLUÇÃO HISTORIOGRÁFICA**

**THE ANNALES SCHOOL: FRANCE AT THE VANGUARD
OF AN HISTORIOGRAPHICAL REVOLUTION**

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RESUMO: Através deste artigo, pretende-se explicar como a revista francesa *Annales* revolucionou a historiografia contemporânea, tornando-se conseqüentemente um movimento famoso entre historiadores de todo o mundo.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: França, *Annales*, Historiografia

ABSTRACT: The following paper aims to explain how the French journal *Annales* revolutionized contemporary historiography, and how it consequently became a well-known movement among worldwide historians.

KEYWORDS: France, *Annales*, Historiography

Introduction

Within the scope of the course unit French Culture for Business, we set out to develop the following work about the *Annales School* and its impact in the study of history.

France has always been known, throughout the centuries, for its culture and erudition – it is, and was, house to the greatest artists, scientists, and researchers. We know for a fact that wherever French culture was taken to, it had great impact in society – the example of the Anglo-Norman language speaks for itself, as well as the fact that British Royalty, during almost all Middle Age years, used French as their first language.

As to what concerns historiography, the art of writing history, France is, since the 17th Century, a house to this science. In 1681 the French historian Jean Mabillon publishes *De Re Diplomatica libri sex*, known as one of the first examples of historical investigation, teaching, for the first time, how to date, criticize and determine the authenticity of Medieval Documents.

Thanks to these influences, combined with many others throughout France's historiographical time, in the 20th Century, a group of French historians changed forever the way history is written, challenging old world habits.

So being, we'll see the evolution of the study of history throughout the last centuries, and how the *Annales* impacted the globe.

The *Annales* School

Before addressing the foundation and development of this school, we should keep in mind some factors. During the 20th Century, as we're told by Nicolas Righi, a French historian and philosopher, "la connaissance historique s'est développée autour de la revue des *Annales*" (Righi, 2003, p. 155).¹ However, until then, historiography followed another trend: *l'école méthodique*². This trend looked forward to making history as close as possible to science instead of art – it valued indisputable facts and political history above everything else. The *Annales* will break this cycle, allowing historians all over the world to study society, economy, and, for the first time ever, mentality.

First Phase

Fundamentally, the *Annales* are the result of a convergence of values of several French intellectuals. The French historian Lucien Febvre (1878-1956) was one of the main creators of this new type of historiography – an ally to the ideas of his fellow historian and philosopher Henri Berr³, and sociologist and economist François Simiand⁴ – he aimed to unite the social sciences and revolutionize historiographic methods.

In 1929, Febvre and his colleague and friend historian Mark Bloch (1886-1944) create *Les Annales d'Histoire Économique et Sociale*, where, in its first publication, the two essential guidelines of the journal are presented: the idea of pluridisciplinarity, and practice as a consequence of theory (Bourdé & Martin, 1983, p. 121).

In fact, Bloch was one of the greatest supporters of the mentioned guidelines. He encouraged the combination of all areas of history (and its auxiliary sciences), with neighboring areas such as geography and sociology, for example – as what concerns the topic of geography in history, Febvre was also keen on merging these two sciences, and the trend ended up being perpetuated, making history nowadays always being written within a geographical background (Barros, 2010, p. 9).

¹ This translates to "The historical knowledge developed itself around the *Annales* revues". Free Translation.

² Historiographical trend of the 18th Century, started by Gabriel Monod with the publication of *La Revue Historique*.

³ Henry Berr lived between 1863-1954. A French philosopher known for founding *Revue de Synthèse* and consequently change the way history is seen in France. For more information refer to (Bourdé & Martin, 1983, p. 120).

⁴ François Simiand lived between 1873-1935. A French sociologist and economist who also worried about the portraits of history in social sciences. For more information see (Simiand, *Méthode historique et Science social*, 1903).

Guy Bourd , historian and author of one of the most famous research on Historiography, tells us that, in Bloch’s posthumous published work, *Apologie pour L’Histoire ou M tier d’Historien*⁵, the author deems necessary “compreender o passado a partir do presente” and “compreender o presente   luz do passado”⁶.

In fact, these concepts are now used worldwide, both scientifically (when studying history and even medicine, for example) and commonly (when the people consider in what politician to vote, what country to travel to, etc.). Although only those two factors are pointed out as guidelines, there a few more ideas that mark the *Annales* line of thought. For instance, they try to cease the idea that historical sources hold all the knowledge. In fact, they assume that sometimes these sources can be misread or misinterpreted, and we should always be aware that there’s no truth, only veracity.

Even though this first phase was just the start of the *Annales*, the revue found itself with “allies and sympathizers abroad, from Henri Pirenne in Belgium to R. H. Tawney in Britain” (Burke, 1990, p. 94), giving us a preview of the fame yet to come.

Also, in 1930, the Polish historian Jan Rutkowski (1886-1949) had written for the *Annales* and ended up “founding a similar journal” (Burke, 1990, p. 95), given the fascination the Polish had for the French revue.

Second Phase

Another big name that will help the *Annales* change how history is made is the one from the French historian Fernand Braudel (1902-1985). Under the guidance of Lucien Febvre, Braudel publishes his PhD thesis⁷ titled *La M diterran e et le monde m diterran en   l’ poque de Philippe II*⁸.

For the first time, the case study was not focused on a person, but rather a region. This thesis had a huge impact in historiography – it was now understood that history could be about where or what, instead of always focusing on the who. It also revolutionized the

⁵ Published by Febvre in 1949, it ended up becoming the *Annales* manifesto.

⁶ This translates to “understand the past from the present” and “understand the present in light of the past”. Free Translation from (Bourd  & Martin, 1983, p. 128).

⁷ First date of publication is 1949. A corrected version is published in 1966. However, Braudel defended his thesis in 1945/1946 after returning to France. For more information refer to (Bourd  & Martin, 1983, p. 128).

⁸ This title translates to: *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*.

structure of historical academic works by understanding a need to correlate space, time, and society. Braudel's thesis was a huge success specially in Italy – in 1953 there was already a translation of *La Méditerranée*.

In 1972 *History of Italy* was published – a colossal work, inspired by the *Annales*, and with references to Bloch and Braudel (Burke, 1990, p. 95).

In 1944 Bloch is murdered⁹, leaving Febvre leading both the journal and the movement. One year later, the *Annales* changed their name to *Annales (Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations)*, demarcating its historians favorite subjects (Righi, 2003, pp. 173-174). Braudel joins the *Annales* and ends up leading the academic journal until the end of the 60's, marking its second phase. José Barros, historian and musicologist, tells us that the American historian Traian Stoianovich (1921-2005), who was part of the *Annales*, considered Fernand Braudel the “true founder” of the *Annales*:

Considerando que é aqui que o modelo estrutural que incorpora permanência e mudança sob a égide do conceito de “longa duração” adquire a sua forma mais bem acabada, tornando-se um modelo que seria seguido por inúmeros jovens historiadores seja nas monografias regionais, seja nos trabalhos de recorte mais amplo.¹⁰ (Barros, 2010, pp. 13-14)

Braudel kept on following his predecessors' orientations and ideas, however, he was responsible for introducing the concept of division of history in three times: long-term history (which includes history throughout centuries); a slow-paced history; and history inscribed in a short period of time (Bourdé & Martin, 1983, p. 131).

In this phase, the *Annales* become the largest core of economic history, mainly due to the contributions of social and economic historian Ernest Labrousse (1895-1988), leading to a “geração de historiadores economistas” (Bourdé & Martin, 1983, p. 133).¹¹ In fact, under the guidance of Bloch, Febvre and Braudel, history began to be understood as a crucial social science that should encompass other sciences, in order to come as close

⁹ Marc Bloch was Jewish, and a part of *La Resistance* during World War II. He was imprisoned and tortured by Gestapo, being shot in the year mentioned.

¹⁰ This translates to “Considering that it's here that the structural model that incorporates permanence and change under the aegis of the concept of “long duration” acquires its finest form, becoming a model that would be followed by countless young historians, both in regional monographs and in works with a broader scope”. Free Translation.

¹¹ The meaning translates to “generation of economist historians”. Free Translation.

as possible to the truth. The masses and their lifestyle became important, and political history was now seen as part of a bigger picture.

This second phase made the movement known throughout all Europe. Again, in Poland, in 1962, the historian Witold Kula (1916-1988) published *Economic Theory of the Feudal System*, where he analyzed the structure of latifundia under the light of economic and social history (Burke, 1990, p. 95), following the structure defended by Braudel.

Third Phase

Around the 70's the third phase of the *Annales* begins, being the historian Jacques Le Goff (1924-2014) its leader. Le Goff will be later supported by his fellow historians Jacques Revel (1942) and Roger Chartier (1945), with whom he'll coin the term *nouvelle histoire*¹², around 1978. But before that, in the 60's and 70's, the *Annales* start expanding their horizons, seeing their publications penetrate Western Europe and the United States (Bourdé & Martin, 1983, p. 137).

Their international fame started coming from the use of interdisciplinarity as a way to study history, achieving the revue's ultimate goal, according to Peter Burke, which was becoming the leader in the intellectual exercise of social and economic history through said interdisciplinarity (Rocha, 2010, p. 29).

Fast-forward to the coining of the term *nouvelle histoire*, this new theory will make historians question sources and compare them to one another, as opposed to what happened in strictly scientific history, where sources were analyzed solo. This trend will keep on the concept of long-term history from Braudel and will end up bringing a new concept – serial history. Leading historians to analyze repetitive events, serial history is concerned with maintaining and analyzing the relation between sources (Bourdé & Martin, 1983, p. 147).

The Dutch historian Wim Den Boer (1914-1993) criticizes the *Annales*, saying that the ideas brought by Bloch and Febvre were not originally theirs, affirming that they only provided it means to expand (Bourdé & Martin, 1983, p. 136). This historian is not

¹² See the concept of New History. This notion of history is seen as a complex science that needs data and analysis.

the only one criticizing the *Annales*, provided that a vast majority would criticize their third phase members for focusing only on the study of Western Europe. Also, Dutch historian Henk Wesseling (1937-2018) published, in 1978, a paper on how the *Annales* School does not impact the writing of Contemporary History¹³. English historian Peter Burke ends up agreeing with Wesseling, quoting, however, another author that shows a reason for this event:

The paradoxical conclusion reached by a sympathetic Dutch observer is that an *Annales*-style history of our own century is both necessary and impossible. 'If it is written, it will not be *Annales* history. But contemporary history can no longer be written without the *Annales*'. (Burke, 1990, p. 98)

Indeed, after the 70s, the revue and its historians will be target to a handful of objections and critiques, but the truth is that the *Annales* had already caused a severe impact in the historiographical world. Either way, Jacques Le Goff sees the need to defend Bloch and Febvre, telling us that they were key to an historiographical rupture (Rocha, 2010, pp. 28-30).

Fourth Phase and World Impact

Nowadays, the journal still exists under the name *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, being currently, and since 198), in its fourth phase. There is not a lot of information about this last phase, leaving us to assume that the *Annales* are now just a shadow of what they once were.

As to the *Annales* School impact in the world, Peter Burke gives us a deep explanation about every aspect of this matter. In fact, Europe has deeply felt the influence of the *Annales* in historiography, however, two specific regions kept themselves skeptical between the 40s and the 60s – Germany and Britain.

In Germany's case, political history was crucial until the 70s, until when German historians started to understand the need to study culture and people (Burke, 1990, p. 96). As what concerns Britain, the *Annales* method was seen as "intensely irritating" (Burke,

¹³ An Historical period started in 1789 and ongoing, according to most of the scientific community.

1990, p. 96), leaving those British historians who did support the *Annales* feeling like a minority.

Outside of Europe, there were also impacts – some bigger and some smaller than others. In the case of African historians, almost none seemed to be interested in following the *Annales* trend. Some Asiatic regions showed being close to said trend, such as China and Australia, where a local historian, by 1990, tries to write a total history of his country, from 1450 to 1680, using Braudel's work as model (Burke, 1990, p. 99).

As to North America, its historians showed little or no interest in the *Annales* method, as opposed to European historians who studied North America (Burke, 1990, p. 100). Central and South America do not follow the North's tendency, as Brazil is, among others, an excellent example. Braudel lectured in Brazil in the 30s, and the *Annales* influence persisted throughout the years – Burke gives us the example of the historian-sociologist Gilberto Freyre's works on "family, sexuality, childhood, and material culture" (Burke, 1990, p. 101). Still among the American panorama, Burke mentions Nathan Wachrel, a French historian specialized in Latin American history, a crucial prosecutor of the *Annales* style in the area referred.

However, the *Annales* impact all around the world did not consist only in the study of history. It brought new relevance to many other areas, mostly due to the interdisciplinary trait mentioned before.

Quoting Peter Burke:

By the end of 1970s, if not before, it was possible to find archaeologists and economics reading Braudel on 'material culture', pediatricians discussing the views of Phillipe Ariès on the history of childhood, and Scandinavian specialists in folklore debating with Le Roy Ladurie about folktales. Some art historians and literary critics, in the United States in particular, also cite the *Annales* historians in their own work, which they see as part of common enterprise, sometimes described as 'literary anthropology' or an anthropology of 'visual culture'. (Burke, 1990, p. 102)

Summing up the *Annales* influence around the globe, a set of ideas must be kept in mind. The main critiques brought upon the *Annales* are, as previously mentioned, the focus on a determined period (mostly early modern) and determined areas (Europe).

Nevertheless, in the big picture, it is undeniable that the *Annales* brought change in historiography, among other areas.

Conclusion

As we could see from the research presented, the *Annales* were the propellants of contemporary historiography, changing forever how history is seen and made. They were responsible for the introduction of concepts such as social and economic history, paving way for interdisciplinary historical studies. Even in their own time, they changed ways of making history in the whole world.

In less than a hundred years, this group of French historians was capable of revolutionizing the way we face social sciences, majorly history, but also sociology, human geography, among all others. In fact, this impact was even strongly felt among other areas, like medicine, economy, or psychology. We believe that such a change was possible due to the French fascination with academia, as well as their culture, which have always ruled Europe.

Although there were several facts left unsaid, we can understand by reading this paper that the action of the *Annales* had impact all around the globe, with special emphasis in Europe.

To finish this piece, I invite you to consider the following quote, by Fernand Braudel: « La seule solution d'une certaine grandeur française, c'est de faire l'Europe. »

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