

# GENERAL HISTORY AND SECTORIAL STORIES. THE CASE OF THE MIDDLE AGES

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## Abstract

A broad and, at times, controversial in recent decades has involved issues related to the usefulness of continuing a general history and its relationship with the sectorial stories.

This debate behind at least two major areas methodological and historiographical and epistemological, which are sometimes intersected, but most often ignored: the current scientific / disciplinary and educational strand / discipline. The history of reality does not exist except as the sum of many stories, which are a complex layering. Not a story, then, if you do not like the combination of so many intertwined stories: political history, economic history, social history, history of institutions, history of mentalities, environmental history, women's history, and so on.

Among the "special" (or sectoral) stories economic history can surely boast an ancient tradition: from Quesnay to Smith, Knies to Marx, Weber and Sombart, Georg von Below an unbroken tradition has led, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, to further growth of interest in economic history both as a subject of research, both as a search for new methods. The period between the late nineteenth century and the sixties of the twentieth century is characterized by the increase in importance of the economic and social history, which sometimes leads to "dethrone the political and cultural history".

The foundation of journals - the 'Economic History Review "(Cambridge 1927) and the" Journal of Economic History, "founded in 1936 by Luigi Einaudi - coincided with the anniversary of the birth and development of the" Annales d'histoire économique et social "(1929). But even if there are many scholars of economic history, slightly in Europe, the tradition of political or cultural history continues to prevail. Only after the Second World War, the economic and social history becomes "the regent discipline of historical knowledge as a whole".

*Keywords: general history, special stories, economic and social history, political and cultural history.*

A broad and, at times, controversial in recent decades has involved issues related to the usefulness of the persistence of a general history or history as a whole and its relationship with the stories sector.

This debate has behind it at least two strands of historiographical and epistemological-methodological reflection, which are sometimes intersected, but most often ignored: the tendency scientific / disciplinary and educational strand / discipline.

The first strand through it, as a sort of leitmotif, the whole historiography of the second half of the nineteenth century to the present day. The "historiographical revolution" that has profoundly changed the craft of history in the last century has brought with it, despite the complexity of the positions of the different schools, a common trait: a steady development of the stories sectoral grown to the point of putting in doubt the same opportunity - and need - to continue to exist a "general history." Continuing specialization of research has taken away out entire sectors, which previously "belonged" to the story, calling them progressively as distinct areas: economic history, religious history, the history of institutions, cultural history, history of science and technique, the history of mentalities, demographics history, etc...

In fact, the border between the special stories and the overall story is not easily definable and varied research itself concretely in the historian.

The political history is the oldest address of historiography from antiquity to the eighteenth century. catalyzed the interest of Western historians. The very notion of political history would have been perceived as tautological at the time, given that the political perspective was considered the only sensible way to investigate the story. Only in the second half of the twentieth century. spread the belief that the political history does not represent just one of many approaches to the study of the past, since the story, according to the medievalist ted. Otto Brunner, must consider "the totality of human action." On the theoretical level, each address has inevitably historiography, next to the cognitive aspects and aesthetic, political implications, both for the effects obtained or desired by the historian, both for the interests that guide his research. For this reason it is impossible to write about the past without even the political history.

Among the stories "special" (or sectoral) economic history can definitely boast of an ancient tradition: from Quesnay to Smith, by Knies to Marx, Weber and Sombart, Georg von Below an unbroken tradition has led, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, such further growth of interest in the economic history both as an object of research, both as a search for new methods.<sup>1</sup>

The social history, even if it is not started in the twentieth century, was defined as such around the thirties, almost coinciding with the birth of the "Annales".

Under the label of the social, L. Febvre and M. Bloch found themselves the inspiration of the "Revue historique de synthèse", founded by H. Berr in 1900, to which both collaborated, and the prospect of comparatist H. Pirenne. The sociological influences on historiography (V. Pareto, M. Weber, but especially E. Durkheim, M. Mauss and the whole group of "Année sociologique") continued to grow and the social sciences and sociology took the place of philosophy propose to the historical research perspectives and interpretive schemes. Studies such as those of J. Huizinga, M. Mauss, but also as an economist F. Simiand, show the interdependence of the phenomena that bind man to society and history, the integration of the sociological concept of economic class on the other hand makes possible a social history far more detailed and complex than the traditional one. In the new research examining the social

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<sup>1</sup> G. Lefebvre, La storiografia moderna, Milano 1973, pp. 296-305

stratification and the cultural, the analysis of the environmental behavior, the survey groups, which are organized in the overall plot of the social continuity, the reconstruction of the mentality, the identification of the myths and values on which rests the coexistence, the observation of consumption are a set of reasons that inspired the whole historical to be pursued and that the category of social business hub has its. In its development the social history it was first focused on the history of economic downturns: thanks to the work of Simiand, E. Labrousse and E.J. Hamilton was clearly demonstrates the need for a quantitative history. Labrousse coerced deeply social history to the economy, thanks to the study of the privileged moments of crisis he dialectically tied the economy short of the price movement along incomes, whose type (rent, profit, wages) coincides with that of social groups. His is a method that allows us to clarify the ongoing reclassifications of individuals and communities within the social formations which implies the primacy of the "material", you acknowledges the influence of Marxist thought, which then P. Vilar said more clearly the role. At this stage, until the sixties, the social history was primarily quantitative, is based on figures, indices and statistical series; never study the subject in isolation, but always human and social groups in their relations of opposition or addiction, inserted in organized societies. In 1955 it was the same Labrousse to achieve a breakthrough by defining, for a history of the European bourgeoisie, other fields to explore, in the social space and time; many works that followed were made possible by the use of new sources, fiscal, demographic, notary, military. P. Chaunu greeted at this stage the second level of social history, the analysis of society, the study of social structures characterized, after 1968, by a greater influence structural anthropology. Twenty years after the budget was much articulated proved excessive hopes in computing and difficult even the necessary collective work. The criticism, beyond the methodologies applied, invested the very validity of certain categories of social history (see the debate started in 1958 between BF and R. Mousnier Porchnev in reference to the definition of "classes" or "orders" in 'ancien regime and in general the possibility of using theoretical definitions developed in other situations). The increased uncertainty regarding the analysis of the marginal, in which the social history does not escape fragmentation of the object and the fields of study and in danger of losing the whole query. The renewal of the social history of the last decade of the twentieth century focused mainly on the metamorphosis of the eye, the move away from an economic approach and the approach to cultural history, which is itself evolving. The quantitative point of view, in this view, has not exhausted its fertility, but has proven its failure and must be supplemented by research of character, descriptive and qualitative studies of the particular case, that regain their worth to put in light, within the statistical series, what is typical and representative. In the debate that emerged then a critique of the isolation in which they moved the French research, especially with regard to the Anglo-Saxon historiography, the lack of knowledge of the proposals of the New American urban history, in the long ignorance of authors such as EP Thompson and E.J.E. Hobsbawm.

The French tradition follows a logical path from the material, to the economic, the social, to the collective behavior and political, while the Anglo-Saxon look is more immediate, intuitive, and takes the group to its specific traits, those susceptible to found a 'identity, no matter what order it belongs. However, it developed the integration of French social history with a reflection at the international level: think of the evolution of historical figures such as M. Agulhon or M. Perrot or to the important role of the Parisian Maison des sciences de l'homme sur la société contemporaine, inspired by G. Haupt, who is credited with introducing the guidelines across the Atlantic and the German school (for example in research on small European bourgeoisie). Reserves of a social history that knows no boundaries are then expressed by Charles and Louise

Tilly, who defended the attachment to the study of the material facts, to avoid the dangers of "subjectivism, low alloy".

According to O. Brunner (1970) and Hobsbawm (1973) social history, beyond its various meanings, is identified directly with the global history. For this, talking about the social history itself refuses to give definitions, but give the above work experience, mostly interdisciplinary, which Hobsbawm identifies the following fields of research: demography and kinship relations, urban studies, classes and social groups, the history of mentalities, the transformations of society (changes / stays, modernization, industrialization), social movements (relations between événement, economic structure, including short, medium, long term). For the British historian social history is certainly story structures, but will have the event and rediscover the policy.

The cultural climate spread as early as the late nineteenth century and in an even more strong in the early twentieth century - the stresses were many, among others the development of the social sciences<sup>2</sup> and the expansion of the interests of historians - in its turn led to an ever wider of "special stories", as demonstrated by the evolution of the Annales school, and the three generations of historians gave priority different fields<sup>3</sup>, chasing suggestions often already present in the founders of the magazine, for example, the history of mentalities, of the collective, the collective psychology, but gradually introducing new elements. In controversy with the "vulgar Marxism" and depending antipositivistic is claimed, first in France, the "new historians", formed in the school of H. Berr (1863-1954) and collaborators of the journal Annales, founded by L. Febvre and M. Bloch in 1929.

H. Berr, against the erudition of the positivists, proposes a scientific summary of the facts through the causal explanation of the history and research of the laws that intuitively are derived from the analysis of the structure, that is, "the identification of the place and role of the various elements in a set."<sup>4</sup>

The second strand instead takes to boot from a closer reflection of educational interest in what was a central approach to history based on the "history-sear.

It is a path that led from the rejection of the use of the manual to its re-evaluation, setting it in a wider context of use of alternative teaching tools, but emphasizing their importance for the acquisition of the minimum historical grammar that allows you to orientate and participat.

The process of diffusion of a socio-economic approach to the history goes hand in hand with the necessary definition of relations with the social sciences (and particularly with the economy). The importance gradually assumed by the economy leads to a necessary confrontation with Marxism, which had emphasized very strongly the importance of economic factors in the development of human history. In this perspective, you must locate the lively debate taking place in the relationship between Marxism and "new history."

In Albania, as elsewhere, the research of economic history begin to become indispensable element of knowledge of the history of a company.

If a macroscopic difference is to be measured between the beginning and the end of the period to which we refer, this is precisely represented by the acceptance by the general

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<sup>2</sup> G. Lefebvre, *La storiografia moderna*, Milano 1973

<sup>3</sup> P. Burke, *Una rivoluzione storiografica. La scuola delle "Annales"*, 1929-1989, Roma-Bari 1993

<sup>4</sup> A. Sciotto, *ideologie e metodi storici*, Marna 2000, pp. 107

historiography, albeit with some isolated but still lively reserves, the fundamental importance of the survey economic history.

Hence the need for reflection on medieval economic history, which involved over the last decades, historians of the new generations, in a constructive work of analysis and attempts at synthesis of specific aspects of the evolution of medieval society (from agrarian history, demographics, from trade to proto-industry, the use of the money to the problems of the loan, etc..). It is, in fact, not necessarily being influenced by the installation of investigations and patterns of development of modern and contemporary society, but to investigate the characteristics proper medieval economy.

In recent years we are witnessing a veritable proliferation publishing of manuals at university level in the fields of history, and in particular medievalist.

In relation to economic history, what is most evident in the scroll - I do not speak of systematic analyzes - the manuals in use is the lack of systematic discussion of the economic aspects (add demographic and social). The manuals continue to have as its theme the political history, to which were added other kinds of knowledge, suggested by sharing an idea of "total history", in which all aspects of society - and therefore the economy - must have a space. But the more strictly economic aspects appear fragmentary, where only seem to be a necessary element: in all manuals you talk about the so-called "ruralization" of the economy between late antiquity and the early Middle Ages, in all the manuals it will be the manorial system (often through addressing on the basis of common areas). On the contrary, what appears to be "normal" is not treated, for example you will not find references to the rural economy in the twelfth century and the thirteenth century, because this time the focus is in a privileged way both on the city and / or on the development of trade.

All the above observations suggest the difficulties of those who want is preparing to reflect on the so-called "minimum knowledge" of medieval economic history and, above all, they want to highlight that it is not possible to deal with a reflection of a didactic nature without taking in mind all the implications of their development of the discipline.

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