DICTIONARY OF LITERARY INFLUENCES

The Twentieth Century, 1914–2000

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BLOCH, MARC (1886–1944)

Marc Bloch was born in Lyon, France, where his father, Gustave, a renowned historian of Roman antiquities, was lecturing at the University. In 1888 Gustave Bloch was appointed to the École Normale Supérieure in Paris. Here, Marc attended the elite lycée Louis-le-Grand. In 1904 he was admitted at the École Normale Supérieure. After passing the agrégation in 1908, he spent one year in Berlin and Leipzig, studying principally economic history. In 1909 he was granted a fellowship permitting him to concentrate on his doctoral thesis. This work was interrupted by World War I, most of which Bloch spent in the trenches. In 1919 he was integrated into the newly established French University of Strasbourg, where he was appointed as lecturer in medieval history. Having published his thesis Rois et serfs (1920), Bloch was promoted to the position of associate professor in 1921, becoming a full professor in 1927. In the meantime he had published his magistral work Les rois thaumaturges (1924). In 1931 followed Les caractères originaux de l'histoire rurale française, in 1939 and 1940 the great twovolume synthesis La société féodale. After two failed attempts to secure an academic position in Paris, he finally succeeded in 1936, being nominated at the Sorbonne. At the outbreak of war he volunteered, notwithstanding his age. Because of his Jewish origin he was removed from his academic positions and joined the Résistance. In March 1944 he was arrested by the Gestapo and executed at Saint-Didier-de-Formans on June 16. Posthumously were published L'étrange défaite, an astute analysis of the French defeat in 1940, and Apologie pour l'histoire, Bloch's methodological reflections on history, which have been received as the author's professional testament.

Marc Bloch is one of the most influential historians of the twentieth century, even though his fame suffered a partial eclipse until the 1970s and 1980s, when he was rediscovered by the "nouvelle histoire" as one of its ancestors. Les rois thaumaturges were a pioneering example of historical anthropology; in Les caractères originaux Bloch investigated in the perspective of "longue durée" the rural landscape of France, and in La société féodale he explored an entire civilization in an attempt of "histoire totale." Furthermore, Bloch advocated interdisciplinarity and campaigned for comparative history. Essential to Bloch's fame is the fact that he was, along with Lucien Febvre (1878–1956), the cofounder of the Annales journal.

Marc Bloch was a prolific reader, which makes it difficult to single out particular literary influences. Still, among the authors having marked Bloch is Numa-Denis Fustel de Coulanges whose republicanism may have filtered to Bloch through his father, who had been Fustel's student (David 1997, 102–7). Another source of influence may have been the so-called "French geographical school of Paul Vidal de la
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Blache." Its impact, however, was recently minimized in favor of the thriving German "Landesgeschichte" and German economic history (Toubert 1988, 9, 16–24). Indeed, Bloch's familiarity with German historical writing is illustrated by about 500 reviews of German books and articles, including eight substantial review articles for the Revue historique between 1928 and 1938 (Schöttler 1999, 55). As to Émile Durkheim's influence on Bloch, it is not easy to evaluate. It has been claimed that Durkheimian sociology was seminal for Bloch's thinking (Rhodes 1978, 46–51). Indeed, Les rois thaumaturges are built upon concepts such as "collective opinion" or "collective representations," and Jacques Le Goff perceives Durkheim's shadow looming behind Bloch (Le Goff 1983, xxxv). Yet Durkheim is not particularly referred to in this book. On the other hand, Bloch does occasionally speak of Durkheim, for instance in his Apologie. There he acknowledges the methodological rigor of the Durkheimian school, but criticizes its schematism. Bloch reproved positivist historiography for its lack of imagination, though in his own oeuvre he always valued its craftsmanship.

Archives


Printed Sources


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BOHR, NIELS HENRIK DAVID (1885–1962)

Niels Bohr was born in Copenhagen, Denmark, the son of Christian Bohr, professor of physiology at Copenhagen University. His mother was Ellen (Adler) Bohr. According to Bohr, his father greatly influenced his revolutionary and original studies in physics. Bohr matriculated in 1891 at the Gammelholm Grammar School. In 1903, he entered Copenhagen University, where he studied under Professor C. Christiansen, an original and erudite physicist in his own right. Bohr