

This point, which is not addressed in the volume despite being widely discussed in the literature, deserves more attention. It is not by chance that some authors correctly called attention to hermeneutics despite not being discussed in the introduction. In the 1970s, the emergence of microhistory prompted reflection on the meaning of “context” and “explanation”, seeking to overcome the rigid opposition between the two. Unfortunately, the editors just call to mind microhistory and erroneously (as in much of the anglophone historiography) conflate it with the “local”. However, the origins of microhistory aimed at reflecting on the notion of scales, representativity, and context.

Another major insight deserves attention: connections between the scales. Except for some chapters in the third section, two angles are missing: first, the debate on multiple modernities and, second, connected history. In a volume devoted to the multiplicity of the scales of knowledge, one would have expected a discussion on both these points. The mere mentioning of multiple scales in itself does not help to take a position in the first debate: Were there multiple botanics, political economies, and weather forecasting, and how did a presumed universal science impose through its intrinsic ideals the strength of capitalism? This last point is just mentioned in the introduction, but we do not have any discussion and hypothesis between its emergence and the shifts in the scales of knowledge. To this end, one would have needed a deep discussion on the circulation of knowledge – not just, saying, the diffusion of Malthus’s ideas, but something close to connected history and the mutual, though unequal influence

between so-called local and global knowledge (Nuala Johnson’s chapter is one brilliant exception).

In short, this volume identifies some blind spots in the historiographical debates on knowledge and science, yet, further investigation is required to translate intuition into an appropriate epistemological turn.

**Claude Mazauric: D’Histoire et d’Historiens. Préface de Pascal Dupuy et Isabelle Laboulais, Paris: Hermann Editeurs, 2021, 351 pp.**

Reviewed by  
Matthias Middell, Leipzig

Claude Mazauric is one of the defining figures of a generation of historians of the French Revolution who contributed to a prominent strand of historiography, widely received not only between the 1950s and the 200th anniversary of the Bastille Storm in 1989 but also in the aftermath of the historiographical controversies of the bicentenary. On the occasion of his 90th birthday, Pascal Dupuy (Rouen) and Isabelle Laboulais (Strasbourg) compiled a volume documenting the many facets of a highly productive historian’s life, which revolves entirely around the revolution, as well as its political dimensions and its significance for the present (during the Cold War and afterwards). It goes without saying that the 350 pages are only an excerpt from the complete oeuvre. The numerous

important works on François-Noël Babeuf and his conspiracy of 1796, for example, were deliberately left out because Mazauric himself drew the sum of his reflections on this egalitarian, early socialist movement once again in a comprehensive publication in 2020.

About half of the volume, on the other hand, is filled with essays on important historians, from Albert Soboul and Georges Lefebvre to Pierre Vilar, Albert Manfred, Eric Hobsbawm, and Michel Vovelle. This is interesting in view of their very different relationships to and interests in the French Revolution, but above all it offers insight into the diversity of Marxist interpretations and commitments, which were anything but homogenous. These essays are based on reviews or obituaries; nevertheless, they show Mazauric to be above all a master of characterizing basic positions limited to the essentials, so that one finds an entire life's work impressively summarized in five to ten pages. It is a must-read for anyone who is concerned with the development of historiography in the Cold War and does not want to overlook the French school of historiography that were almost hegemonic internationally at the time.

Even if the central historians' dispute about the French Revolution between 1967 and 1983 has become known as the Furet-Soboul controversy, this polemic, which at the beginning was methodologically refreshing in many respects but at the end was perceived primarily as nothing more than paralysing, would not have really taken off without Mazauric's almost 30-page review of a two-volume history of the revolutionary period penned by Denis Richet and François Furet in the columns

of the *Annales Historiques de la Révolution Française* under the title "Reflections on a New Conceptualization of the French Revolution". The dispute revolved around the question of whether the revolution fell into a happy, liberal part up to 1791 and a kind of derailment (*dérailage*) between 1791 and 1795, or whether it could only be understood as a coherent whole (a bloc in Mazauric's words). Neither had Richet and Furet completely reformulated the first position – it was prevalent in many older works of the nineteenth century – and nor did the second position grow out of the late 1960s polemic alone, also continuing a certain view of the French Revolution. What was new, however, was the enormous public attention paid to this debate and the reference to the political conflicts of the late 1960s: Furet and Mazauric certainly knew each other from joint engagement with the French Communist Party, though one left the party after the Russian invasion of Budapest in 1956 and condemned the invasion of Prague in 1968, while the other remained in the party and suffered from the conflict between the Soviet claim to leadership and national communist efforts at emancipation. These contemporary contradictions are introduced in a 2014 letter from Mazauric to students at the University of Rouen, which precedes the reprint of the 1967 review as an explanatory introduction. It is worth picking up the volume for this precise recontextualization alone.

Sometimes this editorial principle of contextualization is reduced to technical aspects in order to explain who commissioned the text in question or why it appeared in that particular anthology or journal, but on the whole the procedure

proves extraordinarily useful because we learn from the author himself with what motives and against what background the printed essays were written. And so we follow him on the path to a theory of the state during the French Revolution, to the role of Maximilien Robespierre, and to the history of the various organizations of French (revolutionary) historians, for example, during the German occupation in the Second World War or after the end of the Cold War. Mazauric and his editors have left the next generation of historians a treasure trove of insights that can help to understand the profession and its peripeties in the second half of the twentieth century and thus perhaps also to realize what this has to do with our own exercise of the profession.

**Raquel Varela: *A People's History of Europe: From World War I to Today*, London: Pluto Press, 2021, 252 pp.**

Reviewed by  
Matthias Middell, Leipzig

“A people’s history” became the hallmark of a new kind of historiography a little bit more than half a century ago. At least two characteristics converged here. On the one hand, many authors not only evoked the tradition of a history from below, which had found a famous pioneer in Edward P. Thompson in the late 1950s, but also, in a broader phalanx, reconceived a history of the early modern period and the era of the French Revolution by asking about

the social and mental history of peasants and sansculottes and the intervention of the nameless in the political history of the elites. Albert Soboul, Richard Cobb, Kalmán Benda, Georges Rudé, Walter Markov, and a whole series of others were concerned with the seemingly insignificant, ordinary men and women, without whom history did not proceed yet who too often appeared only as the “masses”. The demarcation from a liberal historiography that concentrated on the educated and those in power was constitutive for this history from below, which initially took on the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Europe but soon expanded its view to include the anti-colonial uprisings outside Europe. A second characteristic was related to this. Authors of this history from below saw themselves as representatives of a radical history – a social commitment of historians to the cause of the underprivileged.

These histories were to be academically of the highest calibre, but they were to find their audience outside university circles as a means of encouraging those who were the underprivileged of the present. The people’s history advocated the possibility of alternative paths in history and highlighted the moments of forks in the road where the victory or defeat of such alternative paths was decided. The authors of people’s history understood and still understand this as an encouragement to search for such alternatives in the present and future as well and not to resign themselves to the existing conditions. Correspondingly explicit was the reference to the social movements from below, to whom this kind of historiography was intended to offer their own image of history.