

not study their specific contribution to economic growth: an economic approach is missing. In this respect, it would be interesting to know whether the fact that the historiography has not paid attention to these matters may be because, after all, the profit from these activities was not as high as that which could be obtained from trade in general. There is, in any case, a gap in European historiography concerning the contribution of arms production to growth. Finally, it would have been interesting to offer some comparison: there are no references to other countries, which undoubtedly experienced very similar situations in those years.

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Jean-Claude Daumas (ed.), *Les révolutions du commerce. France, XVIIe-XXIe siècle* (Besançon: Presses Universitaires de Franche-Comté, 2020). 360 p. ISBN 9782848677224.

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Although France is considered essential to fully understand the evolutions of European retailing, distribution and consumption in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the country historiography on these topics somewhat lagged behind, especially compared to the UK or Sweden. Over the past decade, however, research has clearly caught up. Although several ground-breaking studies were conducted, their results, unfortunately, were not always taken into account by international scholarship. This volume, edited by Jean-Claude Daumas (Université de Franche-Comté), offers a transparent guide to this recent literature, including rich bibliographies and a convenient index of company names. Those eager to familiarize themselves with prevailing French scholarship on the field, should definitely consult his book. Daumas is not only a known specialist of French big business but he has also authored several books and articles dealing with the history of distribution and consumption. His introductory essay offers a broad, well-structured and in my opinion comprehensive overview of the prevailing historiography, both for the late modern and contemporary age.

‘Revolutions in commerce’, the somewhat provocative concept in the title of this book, is presented as a common thread throughout the volume’s fourteen contributions. However, the editor immediate-

ly and rightfully questions its validity. In contrast to contemporary media, who eagerly and repeatedly qualify new phenomena in retail as ground-breaking or world-shattering, for instance the current shift towards e-commerce, historians should only cautiously apply such labels. Daumas and his co-authors repeatedly underscore the path-dependency of commercial and consumption practices. They highlight the many failed experiments and stress how cultural and socio-political considerations hampered the implementation of technical and methodological innovations, while nonetheless also recognizing the profound nature of particular shifts in retail practices and consumer behaviour. As for other European countries, the history of French retail modernisation offers many more examples of selective adaption and hybrid innovation than of outright and uncompromising ‘revolutionary violence’.

The first section of the volume, dealing with different retail formats and distribution models, encompasses no fewer than seven contributions. Natacha Coquery (Lyon 2) evaluates the impact on independent retailing of the emerging culture of consumption in eighteenth century France. Julien Villain (Evry-Val d’Essonne) offers the results of an in-depth study of the shop landscape in the eighteenth century Lorraine region. The transformations of independent retail in nineteenth century Besançon are analysed by Marie Gillet (Franche Comté). The groundbreaking role of the emblematic nineteenth century French department store, both in its bourgeois and popular variants, is lucidly summarized by the editor. Somewhat in contrast with the perspective offered by these ‘heralds of modernity’, Anaïs Albert (Paris Diderot) studies the remarkable expansion of credit sales stores, serving a more popular clientele in *Belle Époque* Paris. When surveying the extremely varied landscape of twentieth century food retailing in Europe, France is especially renowned for its many successful grocery chains. They had a profound impact on emerging consumer culture in the nation vast countryside. Two of those *succursalistes* are the subject of a case-study: the Docks Rémois by Denis McKee and Casino by Olivier Londeix. In 2019, the latter’s PhD dissertation (Paris Nanterre) was awarded the French business history price and was subsequently published (2021). Both authors pay due attention to the (complex) identities and organization of these networks, their commercial strategies and innovations and to the divergent profiles of their local outlets and managers.

The second part of the volume contains three contributions applying a sectoral perspective on distribution. Philippe Meyzie (Bordeaux Montaigne) studies the remarkable multiplication and specialization

of food retailing in the years 1750-1850, following the strong growth and diversification of the French population. Sylvie Vabre (Toulouse) offers an interesting analysis of the distribution of Roquefort cheese in the nineteenth century and Nicolas Marty (Perpignan) studies the growing commercial success of bottled mineral waters, both top-notch French products.

The third and last section of this volume encompasses several contributions on postwar mass distribution. Daumas offers another sharp summary, now on the history of the main and often trendsetting French supermarket, hypermarket and discount store chains. Anaïs Legendre, who enjoyed unprecedented access to the archives of the Leclerc group, discloses the main results of her PhD-dissertation defended at the Sorbonne in 2017. Let me also highlight the short reflections of Alain Chatriot (SciencesPo) on how the French state, since the 1930s, tried to legally balance the conflicting interests in distribution, not only those of big and small retailers, but also of suppliers and distributors. Again in 2017, both topics were thoroughly studied in the PhD dissertations of historian Tristan Jacques (Sorbonne) and sociologist Sebastian Billows (SciencesPo). Unfortunately, both monographs remain unpublished. Another chapter by economist Philippe Moati (Paris 7) reflects on current and future developments in French distribution, with particular attention to the crisis (some even claim downfall) of the hypermarket format. In a final contribution Daumas offers some relevant conclusions, points to the blind spots and deficiencies of present-day literature and sketches a research agenda, for instance urging for a study on the interwar *prix-uniqes* or a thorough analysis of the French consumer cooperatives. He also rightfully petitions his colleagues to handle a more explicit international comparative perspective. Indeed, thoroughly understanding the 'revolutions' in French distribution requires a more pronounced look across the country's borders, not only evaluating the international impact of French actors but also paying due attention to the many different processes of transnational cross fertilization in which they were involved.

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