

Marc Bloch: A Life in History

By Carole Fink



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Few twentieth-century scholars have achieved such widespread admiration as the French historian Marc Bloch (1886-1944). A soldier in both world wars and leader of the Resistance who was captured, tortured, and died a heroic death, Bloch epitomizes the courage and conviction of an old-fashioned good citizen who recognized his obligation to defend France not only against foreign enemies but also against those who sapped its strength from within. In 1929 Bloch co-founded the now legendary journal, the *Annales*: a crusading periodical devoted to removing narrow nationalistic and disciplinary barriers, extending historians' investigations to contemporary events, and covering a broad range of social, economic, and cultural phenomena. Bloch is also renowned for his three major research studies--*Les rois thaumaturges* (The Royal Touch), *Les caractères originaux de l'histoire rurale française* (French Rural History), and *La société féodale* (Feudal Society)--and for his two enduring personal testimonies--*L'étrange défaite* (Strange Defeat), his incisive account of the fall of France in 1940, and *Apologie pour l'histoire* (The Historian's Craft), his inspiring meditations on his life long work, written on the eve of his joining the Resistance. Carole Fink is the translator of Marc Bloch's *Memoirs of War, 1914-1915* (CUP, 1988). She won the American Historical Association's George Louis Beer Prize for her book *The Genoa Conference*.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

This first full-scale biography of Marc Bloch (1866-1944), French historian and Resistance martyr, is a moving, exemplary analysis of the intellectual as man of action. An assimilated Alsatian Jew deeply affected in his youth by the Dreyfus Affair, Bloch joined the Resistance in late 1942 or early '43, driven by ardent patriotism, identification with his Jewish roots and a conception of France as champion of liberty. His capture and murder by the Gestapo was a significant loss to modern scholarship, although his influence lives on in *Annales*, a journal he co-founded with Lucien Febvre. Fink, professor at the University of North Carolina, sheds light on Bloch's close brush with death in WW I, his stormy disputes with Febvre and his desperate efforts to save his family from the Nazis. She limns an independent thinker opposed to all doctrines, a medievalist who understood Hitler's use of rituals, a man of conviction who risked his life for his beliefs, an unmasker of popularly held prejudices. Photos.

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From Library Journal

Drawing on Bloch's unpublished correspondence and notes, Fink has written the first full intellectual and political biography of the brilliant scholar who co-founded the *Annales*, this century's most influential and controversial historical journal. Bloch pioneered in the writing of the "new" social and economic history and the history of mentalities; his best works (e.g., *French Rural History*, *Feudal Society*) merit reading today. A Frenchman and a Jew, Bloch was proud of his family's history and of the decorations he had received in two wars. He moved reluctantly into opposition to the Vichy collaborators in 1944. He became a leader of the Resistance in Lyons, where he was arrested by the Germans, tortured, and executed only months before France's liberation. A work of painstaking scholarship, this is, equally, the story of a true hero. Highly recommended.

- *David Keymer, SUNY Coll. of Technology, Utica*

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Review

"Carol Fink tells this scholar's life with respect but not hero-worship. She makes exemplary use of her sources. She explains the baffling (to Americans) system of French higher education. The history of the almost legendary early years of *Annales* is elucidated. She conjures up the shabby genteel world of European university teaching between the wars. Marc Bloch could scarcely have imagined how precarious that world was." Reid Beddow, *The Washington Post*

"At last, a full biography of one of the great historians of the twentieth century! Working extensively from private papers and little-used documents, Carole Fink gives an absorbing account of the life and career of Marc Bloch, his creation with Lucien Febvre of a new school of historical writing, his service in two World Wars and in the French resistance. This is a fascinating portrait of an assimilated Jewish family, of the French university world and of patriotic political engagement in the first half of the twentieth century."
Natalie Zemon Davis, Princeton University

"...excellent and carefully documented biography..." *Times Literary Supplement*

"...an exemplary analysis of the intellectual man of action, whose courage and conviction as a French patriot and old-fashioned good citizen led to his martyrdom at the hands of the Germans." *Jewish Post and Opinion*

"The meticulous reconstruction of the life of one of the great historians of our century and of his important and--during World War II--heroic role in history. An excellent commentary on the intellectual and political life of France during his time." Foreign Affairs

"This long overdue biography (the first in any language) is welcome." Wilson Library Bulletin

"Well written and meticulously researched, with much of the evidence taken from Bloch's papers, it will appeal to all historians since it deals extensively with the methodological concerns of Bloch and the collaboration of Bloch and Lucien Febvre in the founding and editing of *Annales*....This excellent biography delineates the exceptional intellectual talents and the admirable character traits of Bloch that made him a courageous and true French citizen and one of the most distinguished historians of the twentieth century." Speculum

"Carole Fink has written the first full-length biography of Marc Bloch with thoroughness, sympathy and perceptiveness...an absorbing book..[which would have] pleased Bloch, for whom history was both a fascinating story and a science always in motion." The New York Review of Books

"Scholars will delight in the fact that Fink humanizes a man who has by now begun to take on larger-than-life proportions in legend and lore, and serious lay readers will profit from reading it as well....Fink's tone is casual, her style easy to follow. She paints the canvas of Bloch's life against the larger mural of French Third Republic history. The effect is a remarkable history of an age as told through the life of one man who strove to understand it and teach it to others." Richard Polirer, Washington Jewish Week

"It is difficult to see how one could write a better biography of a complex, courageous, and brilliant man whose impact on twentieth-century historical scholarship has perhaps no equal." Journal of Modern History

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Megan Fairbanks:

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Darrell Mayo:

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