

1974-02-13: [BOURGEOISIE] *Fils de riche ou nouveaux riches*. *Annales*, I, 139-153.

A debate over Pirenne's thesis regarding the appearance of the patriciate in towns in Europe. The larger thesis refers to sudden spurts where true "capitalists" appear, one generation only; their descendants then quickly become the patriciate. This has the advantage, says Le Febvre in his introductory remarks, of making the bourgeoisie not a constant class over the centuries, but a constantly renewing element, one of generational passing character. Febvre likes it for explaining the new economic spurt at the end of the 15th and early 16th centuries, when the old bourgeois/patriciate somewhat moribund.

Abbé Lestocquoy concerns himself with the origins of the first patriciates. His main point is that in both northern and southern Europe the towns get their patriciates, properly speaking, at about the same time in the decades of 1170's to 1190's, but we cannot really say much about where they come from. In Italy they come from the countryside, already nobles, as far as we know; and in the newly peopled towns of northern Europe of the preceding centuries they must have been immigrants. But in some towns, like Arras, the patriciate must have come from some older merchant class. Indeed, it seems hard to believe (say I), that the element that becomes wealthy and powerful, by whatever device, does not become noble within a generation or two.

Espinas' reply is to say that Arras is an exception in only four families that Lestocquoy cites. The problem is the change from *castrum* to *civitas*; there may be a few of the inhabitants of the former who form the new nobility, but the reason for the change is commerce, and new settlers are the instrument of it, and they must have provided the basis for most of the new patriciate that emerges in the later 12th century.

The Lestocquoy argument rests chiefly on seeing continuity of commerce in pre- and post-Norman times; that which Espinas depreciates. The moments of surge are more important than the thin lines of continuity, and he rests convinced that it is some new class that brings on these surges.

Missed a part of the Espinas argument about change from *castrum* to *civitas*; the third stage is to *ville economique*. The *civitas* stage, in the immediate post-Norman stage, has an economy without real exchange of goods; the final stage is that of a real market, with trade from outside. So, in the *civitas* stage there can be a patriciate, but it is not a true merchant patriciate; only in the final stage does that appear, and Espinas says it is as much due to foreign influx as to the local old patriciate.

It is, truly, a chicken-and-egg dilemma. The real polar example is that of the Baltic towns founded by German Hansa families, especially from Lübeck, as Rörig has shown. Doubtless some of the same families that were itinerant merchants in this post-Norman phase finally chose to settle in the Lowlands towns and became part of the patriciate, to go along with the older group. There is no reason to believe that hostility between the old and the new merchant groups existed, the more so as the towns joined the Hanseatic League and demonstrated a kind of merchant union, intermarriage seems almost necessary, and the sorting out of old and new very difficult by the time we get to a period of very extensive records.