

1975-01-25: [FAMILY] Fortune and Family.

Tracking "family inheritance" has a beguiling aspect for the historian whenever generational transmission occurs on a distaff or collateral (esp. cognate) basis. The family tag can be camouflaged whenever direct agnate succession is not the case.

Too, the fortune may pass out of the family, and the whole issue of "family inheritance" become moot. For this reason, one must consider whether the "family" aspect is actually the critical element, or whether that tag is put upon it only because it operates in 95% of the cases, whereas the social-philosophical principle involved is really the transmission of a unit of power as a gift (*inter vivos* or as a legacy making little difference). The essential matter is the receipt of that unit of power by someone who has not earned it (save by ingratiating himself to the previous owner). There is a trans-generational break in the name, but no degenerating effect upon the mass involved.

The object to be studied, then, is the bloc of power in the form of wealth. It should be considered as an organic unit (of an organism, if you will) having its life course, age, strength, etc.

The age of the fortune has some importance, since the status factor grows usually over generations even if the size of the fortune does not. So, nascent fortunes would be those recently compiled, usually the work of one person, who may be considered the genarch. (A subsidiary problem here is to judge who is the real genarch, the one who creates the modest basis of family fortune, or the one who parleys such a model fortune into super-rich basis, or the like.)

All second-generation fortunes, then, might be called "old fortunes" (thus nascent/old corresponds with nascent/ancien propres), or perhaps better "transmitted fortunes" to indicate the generational exchange. Then, "recently transmitted" or "longtime transmitted" could be qualifications if they provided useful distinctions.

The following might be some "life characteristics" of fortunes:

- 1) Longevity & growth rate; & cause of death
- 2) Level of material growth
- 3) Level of status development
- 4) Perils faced (e.g., multiples heirs)
- 5) Kind of habitation (land, commerce, etc.)
- 6) Family associations (or dissociations)

1) Longevity & growth rate. The chief coordinates are correspondence of growth rate to age of fortune, & correspondence of growth rate between fortunes of a given era. There must be included here, if possible, the fortunes that never got to the highest level, so as to have measure of growth rate averaged out. The cause of death is an obvious consideration, to see if it is a matter of state action, misfortune, profligacy, willful "suicide".

2) Level of material growth. Some hierarchy must be established, if not in advance, then after some idea is got of what are the take-off or acceleration points in fortunes. The equivalence of material level that would allow comparative studies over time & between places is a tricky issue. If one has class A-E fortunes, z.b., it would have to be decided what were the currency values or each lever at different times. It would not do simply to make adjusted monetary equivalents.