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Olivier Faron. *La ville des destin croises.* Rome: Bibliotheque des Ecoles francaises d'athenes et de Rome fasc. 297, 1997. x + 603 pp. 560 FF (cloth), ISBN 978-2-7283-0377-9.

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Olivier Faron's exhaustive study of the population of Milan in the first half of the nineteenth century qualifies him for membership of two vaunted historiographical traditions. It is testimony to the positive aspects of the French doctoral system that someone should devote much more than three years of research to producing such a complete picture of the movements of the Milanese population to rank beside the works of French urban historians such as Jean-Luc Pinol and Adeline Daumard. Furthermore Faron has added to, and considerably embellished, the already considerable statistical research on Milan carried out by scholars such as Aldo De Maddalena and Louise Tilly.[1]

For years Milanese historians have known about the wealth of material available in the records of the *Anagrafe*, the local population registers, but none has dared devote themselves to the time-consuming task of ordering and analysing the raw data contained there. After Faron, at least as regards what appears to be the richest period for records between 1811 and 1860, they will not have to do so.

Faron sees the *Anagrafe* as providing the possibility to create a form of collective biography of the city, but his book begins with what is in essence a biography of his source. The period of the French occupation of Lombardy saw a growing involvement of the state in collecting statistical data about the territory, culminating in the institution of the *Anagrafe* in 1811. In its initial form this was a census identifying all the individuals living in the households established in the city, their occupations, and their place of birth and date of arrival in the city, if born outside it. However, these records were to be continually updated by Milanese citizens who were charged with declaring to the registry all pertinent changes in the state of their family (births, marriages, deaths etc.), and by the provision of similar details from all new households established by migrants into the city thereafter. In what Faron, following Habermas, sees as a form of exchange, data was provided to the *Anagrafe* and hence the state in return for the official documentation and classification conferred the identity, status, and benefits of citizenship upon the individual.

Of course, not all residents necessarily saw this as a fair exchange. Under-registration, particularly of births, was rife, while many of the infants whose existence was declared to the authorities seem to have had their sex transposed in order to avoid future obligations of military service. For these reasons, along with its deliberate exclusion of certain categories of resident non-citizens, such as garrisoned soldiers, the *Anagrafe* cannot provide definitive figures concerning the population. The value of the *Anagrafe*, rather, lies in the fact that it permits the construction of longitudinal lifetime studies, rather than merely the snapshots of a simple census. Faron convincingly demonstrates that by sampling the household files held there, a representative portrait of the intersecting destinies of the Milanese population over the period can be assembled. This he then proceeds to do –combining a sampling of one in every ten household files (consisting of the records of 9,000 families and 49,000 individuals) with other sources such as cadastral registers and police reports, to produce both quantitative and qualitative sets of data.

These reveal a society in transition: one released from the corporate economy of the old regime by the period of French rule, undergoing a considerable degree of urban growth as evidenced by a 66 percent growth in city population between 1811 and 1859, but not yet subject to the upheavals that accompanied the growth of large-scale industry in the latter half of the century when population doubled between 1860 and 1900. Symptomatic of this transition period were the spread of birth control practices to a large portion of the Milanese population in the period, and the increasing abandonment of children

in the foundling hospitals provided by the city, rather than at religious establishments. Both might be seen as evidence of declining adherence to the authority of the church and an increasing preference for dealing with the state.

Faron argues for a narrowing of the differences between the various sectors of the city's population which he sees as being at the centre of this post-corporate, pre-industrial age. This was reflected in the very ownership of those buildings that comprised the city itself, as the grip of a compact group of aristocratic landlords was gradually relaxed. This was not the consequence of a 'silent revolution' conducted by urban rentiers, however – rather aristocrats were increasingly choosing to invest in land outside the city, while many of the new proprietors were owner-occupiers of single palazzos in which they both resided and practiced their business or profession, while renting out other floors and apartments. Such trends were reflected by growth of the use of the term *possidenti* (literally possessors) to cover both bourgeois and aristocratic property owners, not least by the *Anagrafe* itself. It was not, Faron notes, until the end of the century that use of this linguistic label declined as industrialists began to refer to themselves as such.

Faron's most persuasive evidence for the erosion of social difference comes from his studies of social mobility and reproduction amongst the Milanese. The *Anagrafe* is unique in being able to provide us with reputable information of this kind, and Faron exploits his source to the full. His starting point is the relatively low degree of what might be called 'perfect' reproduction in which father and son practice the same occupation. This pattern can be discerned across society, albeit in different forms, and is, he argues, indicative of the new open economy. Even among the city's entrenched economic elite the actual occupations followed by fathers and sons frequently differed. Only sixteen percent of the sons of merchants practiced the same activity as their fathers, for instance.

Furthermore, Faron points out, the bulk of the city's population was subject to different experiences of mobility and transmission. In traditional artisanal sectors, social mobility within a single lifetime was possible – thus self-employed masters in these occupations were overwhelmingly former workers from the same sector. Usually, however, they had started their working lives in other activities, shifting occupations until their early thirties when stability and marriage arrived. Their ability to transmit a similar social status to their sons was highly circumscribed with around half of all sons experiencing 'downward' mobility in that they returned to the labour force rather than beginning in their own premises. Only in those sectors where economic growth was greatest – textiles and construction – were heads of households who succeeded in moving up the social scale able to preserve their status for their sons. In some cases this was reinforced by other cultural practices, such as the endogamous recruitment of masons from the zone around Como.

Faron stresses that the lack of permanent social ascension within the artisanal professions means that rather than insisting on the distinction between labourers and proprietors, we should consider the frequent fluctuations between the two positions as indicative of the existence of a menu peuple rather than a stratified society. After all, with the abolition of corporate structures, the decision to set up as an independent might be as reflective of despair at ever finding a position, as of a successful social ascent. The proximity of the incomes generated in these two positions further bears out this assertion.

Spatially too, the Milanese population lived in close proximity to one another. One of the most interesting features of Faron's analysis is the production of a set of maps showing the distribution of the various professions and sectors within the city. With some obvious exceptions such as the cluster of medics around the hospital area, his main thesis is that all social groups lived and mixed together, not just in the same district, but within the same buildings. A typical *palazzo* (building) would have commercial premises on its ground floor, a first floor (*piano nobile*) housing the rooms of the most prestigious resident – often the owner of the building, and a pattern of social descent following the physical ascent up the storeys to the quarters of seamstresses and the like on the top floor.

Faron suggests that these various forms of social proximity and erosion of difference provided the foundations for an era of social harmony and consensus reflected by a relative lack of social disorder, excluding the widespread uprising of all sections of the citizenry against the Austrians in 1848. Only later, he argues, with the onset of industrialisation would this become impossible as the artisans of the menu peuple divided into those who thought and acted as workers, and proprietors who regarded themselves as forming part of a separate petite bourgeoisie. This is an interesting assertion and one which my own work on small proprietors at the end of the century to some extent confirms in that it is clear

that this group became progressively more alarmed by workers organising to defend their interests as workers, denouncing so-called *scioperomania* (strike-mania) amongst hands who had ceased to consider themselves as future proprietors (1) . The evidence that he offers for a distinct era of social harmony is insufficient to consider the point proven, however. For a start, his depiction of both the previous and subsequent eras of Milanese history seems somewhat flawed, and does not draw much on current historiography. It is usually argued that the abolition of corporations in Italy was only a formality as these bodies had long ceased to exercise great economic influence. If so, how much of a departure was this post-corporate society from its predecessors? Conversely, the development of industry in Milan is often portrayed as a more long drawn out process than the sudden earthquake undermining the urban fabric that Faron suggests took place at the end of the century.

Those of a sceptical nature might wonder if the daily contact between the various elements of the Milanese citizenry did not simply cement notions of difference, rather than erode them. The *palazzo* after all provided an object lesson in the structuring of the social hierarchy and, as Adrian Lyttelton has pointed out, the familiarity between classes often remarked upon by visitors to Milan may well have rested on the security of difference, rather than the failure to perceive it.[2] While Faron demonstrates that the incomes of the many occupations that composed the artisanal and commercial economies were relatively close, and that divisions between proprietors and labourers within these were small; his own figures still clearly identify an elite which enjoyed, and successfully defended, a standard of living that was significantly superior to that of the bulk of the populace throughout the period.

This elite, and its agents in the police forces of the state, feared the threat of crime and disorder posed by the poor, and, in particular, from immigrants to the city: indeed the activities of the *Anagrafe* were one response to a desire for increased social control over these elements. Faron demonstrates that these concerns were probably misplaced – crime was much lower than imagined and while petty delinquency was indeed committed by those from 'a variety of backgrounds', 'political crimes' against Austrian rule were the province of the native Milanese suggesting a unity of outlook. Faron's use of these crime figures, however, requires several cautions. Firstly, how can it be that when 64 percent of common crimes were committed by Milan born residents, compared to 69 percent of political crimes, the former is indicative of a diversity of backgrounds, while the latter is suggestive of a concentration of natives? Secondly, when analysing social difference and social harmony, which are more important, actual crime levels, or the perceptions of these? One is inclined to suggest the latter; especially when these contribute to the mental construction of 'dangerous' groups as his own qualitative evidence indicates. Finally, if, as the statistics show, 'political crimes' were the work not only of the Milanese but, disproportionally, of elite groups, while common crime was primarily committed by the artisanal population, how accurate is it to speak of a shared political opposition to Austrian rule?

Immigration was the key life experience that differentiated the various sectors of the Milanese population from each other. Those Milanese who had moved into the city, as opposed to being born there, got married later, continued to bear children for longer, and had larger families than their co-citizens who were born in Milan. This pattern was strongly influenced by the fact that immigrants were concentrated in the lesser skilled positions available in the artisanal, commercial and service sectors, but it should not be assumed that relative affluence was the only reason for these differences. Artisans in the metalworking sector which was largely composed of native born Milanese received incomes in line with those of the labouring workforce as a whole, but exhibited patterns of family formation and limitation that conformed to the native pattern, rather than the immigrant one.

The existence of this clear division within the population predates its spatial reproduction in the second half of the nineteenth century as the city 'hypercentre' within the inner ring of canals became a much more exclusively elite preserve, while the popular classes were concentrated into the zones just inside the city walls, and immigrants formed the overwhelming population of the industrial suburbs that sprang up beyond them. It was to these suburbs, Faron suggests, that migrants came from far and wide with the intention of settling permanently as factory proletarians, giving rise to a new associationism around worker identity, in contrast to the artisanal labourers who had migrated into the city's menu peuple. While there is some purchase to these arguments, Faron oversimplifies these processes, ignoring, for example, the fact that worker identities were most strongly developed amongst skilled (artisanal) labourers who were frequently native born to the city, and that most of the newcomers were drawn from the province surrounding Milan.

A city of crossed destinies is open to multiple interpretations. In his opening remarks Faron thanks Jean-Pierre Bardet for teaching him urban demography, and Yves Lequin for introducing him to social history. We, too, should thank them. In charting how the destinies of the Milanese intersected with each other in the files of the *Anagrafe*, Faron has provided us with much primary material upon which future histories of the city can draw. Social history cannot be written exclusively from demographic evidence, but urban history can hardly be written without it. Faron's book will be an indispensable starting point for all histories of early nineteenth century Milan produced from now on, even if they end up sketching somewhat different pictures of the city during this era.

Notes

[1]. A. De Maddalena, *Prezzi e mercede a Milano*, Milan, 1974; L Tilly, *The working class of Milan, 1881-1911* Ph.D thesis, University of Toronto, 1973, *Politics and Class in Milan 1881-1901*, Oxford, 1992

[2]. Jonathan Morris, *The Political Economy of Shopkeeping in Milan 1886-1922*, Cambridge, 1993.

[3]. Adrian Lyttelton, 'Milan 1880-1922: The City of Industrial Capitalism' in G. Brucker ed., *People and Communities in the Western World*, Vol. 2, Homeward, Ill., 1979.

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