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Week 3-

Marc Bloch's essay, "The Advent and Triumph of the Water Mill," provides a broad history of mills in Europe. He traces the spread of the water mill and describes the benefits of the water mill over horse- and human-powered mills. His work, like that of Braudel, is innovative not for its analysis of previously undiscovered primary sources or archaeological findings, but precisely because of the synthesis of a vast array of pre-existing knowledge. The footnotes and bibliography cover many centuries, multiple languages, and several disciplines. Bloch draws on archaeological evidence as well as literary references to detail the evolution and spread of the water mill. What makes the work interesting, however, is not merely the distillation of copious amounts of material into a cohesive story, it is the reflective nature of the writing. Bloch could have simply told the story of an evolving technology and the society that changed as a prerequisite and as a result. To wit, the cost of the new technology required concentrated wealth in the hands of certain institutions (feudal lords, monasteries, etc.), and the sheer potential throughput of the new mills both presupposed and precipitated some measure of population density. But the simple story of the gradual adoption of the water mill is complicated by several factors; chief among them is the persistence of hand mills through the advent of steam power. From the standpoint of pure efficiency, water mills easily best hand mills. Bloch is forced to reckon with additional factors, particularly the social relationship between the mill owners and the farmers. In doing so, he describes the impact of the new technology on different segments of European society.

Bloch's methodology may be instructive for us trying to trace the evolution of a technology or a policy over a given period. He reminds us that societies are not monolithic and that the simple story is inevitably incomplete. It seems to me that modern historians have moved away from the narrative style of Bloch and Braudel, but I wonder if we moderns have done so out of our inability to replicate their breadth and depth of knowledge. Is modern historical training too limiting in scope?

Braudel's style and approach is similar to Bloch's. His command of languages is impressive, and the voluminous footnotes have left me with the dread that my dissertation will never pass muster. Braudel analyzes the Mediterranean during the age of Philip II, but is certainly not constrained by the dates of his reign. (I can just hear Goldstone complaining that "the age of Philip II" is too loose a term.) He analyzes the region at three scales: 1) the human race, 2) societies, 3) individuals. The time spans involved grow increasingly shorter, as well. The first is concerned with the *longue duree*. The effects of the interaction of mankind with the environment and geography of the region can be measured on a span of decades or more. Changes in society, particularly the economic and political structures become meaningful with years or even months as the unit of measurement. Finally, for individuals, events occurring over a matter of days or even hours can have profound importance. We seem to have discounted the study of the *longue duree*. In telling the story of the battle of Lepanto, Braudel argues that both the short and long term are important for grounding an event and its consequences in history.