

Summaries of articles

Madagascar : linguistic techniques in an oral culture

Françoise RAISON-JOURDE

The present work deals with the Merina society and its first contacts with the LMS missionaries trained in advanced linguistic techniques (1820-1836): transcription of sounds into Latin characters, definition of the alphabet, compilation of an English-Malagasy/Malagasy-English dictionary.

The considerable reworking of the language by the missionaries in the course of translating the Bible is evident in the English-Malagasy section: eg, deliberate modification of semantic fields to admit new meanings. In the second section, reducing words to the state of signs isolates them from their social practice and leads one to believe that linguistic exchange is completely free, whereas in society the use of words is partially a function of the social status of the speakers.

The first grammars present the rules of the language without connecting them to a corpus, as though anterior to grammatical function. Thus, the traditional normative role of several types of expressions, the proverbs, for example, is masked.

The Japanese house

Jacques PEZEU-MASSABUAU

The traditional Japanese house is a completely standardized wood structure: height and spaces, divisions and floor mats. This situation dates back to the very origins of this type of habitation which is, in part, of Chinese origin; but it was also perpetuated and propagated by the feudal authorities, independently of whether or not it offered economic or ecological advantages, because it constituted a simple and efficient means of harmonizing a certain type of existence from one end of the archipelago to the other. The noticeable absence of urbanism in Japanese cities, the lack of concern with the "exterior" is but the other side of this (more or less conscious) policy which—from the end of the Middle Ages up until the last century—concentrated the entire effort of spacial structuring on the "living space" of each family. In this way, in traditional Japanese society, the house constituted the only truly structuring space and was a permanent reminder for each, of the religious, esthetic, moral and technical values which were the condition of the harmonious functioning of the body social.

SUMMARIES OF ARTICLES

Ruling classes in republican Rome: Senatorial and equestrian orders

Claude NICOLET

Roman society was basically uneven: rights and duties, burdens and privileges, were distributed according to the census amount. The two higher ordines, senatorial and equestrian were, in fact, until Augustus, the same one as far as the census was concerned: the equestrian census was required from candidates for the magistracies. In republican times, the ordo senatorius was restricted to membership of the senate. But there was a general trend toward inheritance of the function, and on the other hand, some privileges were extended to sons and grandsons of senators as well: the first step toward the emergence of a senatorial ordo. Some new families also entered this s.o., generally through military charges, advocacy or juridic activities. However, belonging to the Senate implied a specific civic status, including, in the 1st century BC, many financial and even physical risks. The same analysis may be done of the equestrian order: census amount was a requisite, but not sufficient, qualification. Sons and grandsons of equites equo publico belonged to the ordo in the 1st century BC. Some families of plebeian origin also entered this order through military charges, administrative offices or commendationes from influential protectors. Economically, senators and equites constituted a united class of land owners. The true contrast lay between a few families of very great landlords (almost all of them being principes civitatis, influential politicians), and the other senators and knights. As far as we know, the origin of the vast properties was political. Money lending was wide spread among senators as well as among equites. The only specific activity of some equites was the handling of public contracts, legally forbidden to senators.

Socio-cultural aspects of religious conflicts

Denis RICHEL

This study attempts to elucidate the socio-cultural aspects of the conflicts between the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation in Paris during the second half of the 16th century. It seemed to the author that beneath the confessional split, yet another split could be discerned: the struggle to acculturate the masses, at first carried on by the Reformation (from 1555 to 1560) was taken over victoriously by the elite of the Catholic Counter-Reformation at the time of the Ligue. From 1588 to 1594 an ethico-religious system came into being which opened the way for the century of saints.

Witchcraft trials in the Parlement of Paris (1565-1640)

Alfred SOMAN

A study of some 1100 witchcraft trials judged on appeal by the Parlement de Paris yields rather surprising conclusions. The execution rate was one of the lowest in Europe—only 15% before 1600, and 7% after the turn of the century. Long before the magistrates began to entertain "rationalist" doubts concerning the reality of the crime itself, there is clear evidence that the Parlement became suspicious of the methods according to which local trials were being conducted and, as early as 1588, gave serious consideration to making all sentences for witchcraft subject to automatic appeal. Conscientious efforts were made to restrain local judges from engaging in massive prosecutions. The great witch craze was sharply curtailed out of a deep concern with the legality of criminal justice and the maintenance of public order. The

process had little or nothing to do with the "intellectual revolution" of the seventeenth century, unless that revolution be redefined.

The great crisis of 1974

Serge-Christophe KOLM

This paper analyses the present world economic crisis from 1973 to 1976. The 1974 great slump is the result of the strong and simultaneous deflationary policies adopted by all large western countries in order to fight inflation, which reached a very high peak in 1973. The causes of this importance and simultaneity in price increase are analysed. Most of them are aspects of the international monetary system, either events which happened at the end of the former (Bretton Woods) regime and also caused this end, or traits of the new regime of managed flexibility. The increase in prices of raw materials plays only a secondary role. A number of these causes are themselves consequences of the central structure of modern capitalism, the dynamics of the inflation activity relationship in an economy of imperfect markets and government stabilization policies.

New economic history

Jean HEFFER

This article is a review of work of three American new-style economist-historians: Robert Fogel, Lee Soltow and Jeffrey G. Williamson. New economic history is an authentic scientific history to the extent that it can be defined as the science which undertakes to study past economic facts, in light of explicit models, tested according to the rigorous criteria of econometry. Nevertheless, the methods and the depth of analyses vary perceptibly with the researcher. The scientific character of this new discipline makes it necessary to give up aspirations to a total history. However, the use of general equilibrium models makes it possible to tackle such complex subjects as long-term growth.