

## Compte rendu

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Trochet, Jean-René (1998) *Géographie historique. Hommes et territoires dans les sociétés traditionnelles*. Paris, Nathan (Coll. « Fac. Géographie »), 251 p. (ISBN 2-09-29044-4)

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collectifs de la structure sociale. Elle est le fait d'intellectuels, de journalistes, d'universitaires qui, au fond, possèdent cette faculté d'interpréter le réel et d'en révéler les significations profondes. Dans son ouvrage, O. Soubeyran dévoile le rôle des uns et des autres dans la programmation du projet géographique : il ausculte ainsi la part de l'imaginaire.

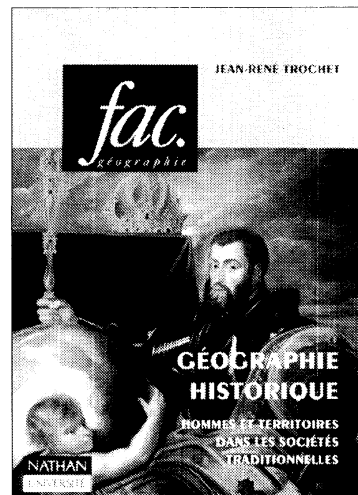
Le livre refermé, le récit de la bataille des *Annales* clos, les interprétations paraissent encore ouvertes tant nous ne sommes pas certains d'en avoir saisi toute la portée.

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INRS-Urbanisation  
Montréal

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This is an innovative and methodologically thought provoking book. As an endeavour in historical geography, Jean-René Trochet's *Géographie historique. Hommes et territoires dans les sociétés traditionnelles* is admirable in its attempt to study and draw parallels and comparisons in the development of relations between humans and territories in traditional societies across a wide swath in time and space — Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Americas, from early tribal societies to the rise of the nation state and modern society.

And yet, while the book deals with issues of time and space — two of the three principal concepts in which the discipline of historical geography is grounded, it is disturbing that the writing shows a significant lack of attention to the third crucial ingredient of historical geography. In this book, in order to simultaneously see and comprehend change both historically and geographically — the third ingredient

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of historical geography — one must be extremely patient and wade through considerable materials. Historical and geographical change is illustrated, not in the space of pages, but only over many chapters.

Innovative and multidisciplinary approaches to the changing landscapes of the past are characteristic of contemporary historical geography, and in this case the author attempts to combine a geographical perspective with an ethnological understanding of the past. The strength of the book is in its attempt to synthesise existing literature on early “traditional” societies and their familial, political, economic, and religious organisation of the landscape. The writing begins with early tribal societies and traces its way to the great city states, the rise of empires, the formative role of religions like Christianity and Islam in organising the landscape, and the birth of the nation state. However, there is little original research to be found in the writing or maps which have been reproduced. The strength of the analysis lies in the attempt to broadly synthesise and show the changing and developing means by which humans have attempted to control and organise the landscape throughout history.

Unfortunately, the secondary literature relied upon by the author, while topically broad and recent in covering a wide array of societies in the Old and New Worlds, is methodologically circumscribed. The writing relies mainly on a few notable works in historical geography, like that of Paul Vidal de la Blanche at the turn of the last century, for its understanding of what actually constitutes historical geography today. Contemporary historical geography is broad in the manner of its development and international support. It is unfortunate, then, that the renowned writings of historical geographers like Carl Sauer, who dealt with issues of ethnicity and cultural transformation of landscapes, is absent. The cross-sectional analysis of landscape changes so well illustrated in the work of H. C. Darby and Andrew Hill Clark is ignored. While the contemporary writings of historical geographers like Serge Courville, who deal with the changing time and spatial meaning of traditionalism and modernity, are not to be found.

It is ultimately a challenging book recommended for mature students and scholars. One finds in the writing broad cultural comparisons over centuries of time and continents of space. But, perhaps for that very reason, it is ambitious and thought provoking. In this broad synthesis, Trochet is able to find noteworthy parallels and differences in landscape organisation between Asia, Europe, Africa, and the Americas. Today, when “traditional” ways of organising the landscape are resurfacing in places like Russia and Yugoslavia, and old and new national states are rising and falling, such a book provides significant insight into the changing human organisation of the landscape over the millennia.

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