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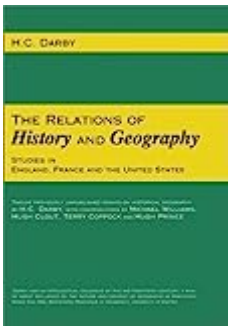

H. C. Darby. *The Relations of History and Geography: Studies in England, France and the United States.* Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2002. xvi + 293 pp. $69.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-85989-699-3.

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Henry Clifford Darby (Sir Clifford in his later years) was–and arguably remains–Britain's most well known historical geographer. Born in Wales in 1909, the young Darby went up to Cambridge at the age of sixteen, and was informed, even before his graduation with a B.A. in 1928, that an appointment in the Department of Geography awaited him. Three years later with Ph.D. in hand, at the (now astonishingly tender) age of twenty-two he was appointed Lecturer in Geography in the University of Cambridge, and a year later he was elected to the Ehrman Fellowship in King's College, where he later became an Official Fellow. After wartime service with the Naval Intelligence Division of the British Admiralty, he left Cambridge for the John Rankin Chair of Geography in the University of Liverpool, relocated to University College, London in 1949, and returned to Cambridge as Chair of Geography in 1966. He retired from the university in 1976, was knighted in 1988, and died in 1992.

Darby is probably best known among those interested in medieval England for his leadership of the massive Domesday project–a careful reconstruction of the geography of England late in the eleventh century, that stretched to seven enormous volumes published between 1952 and 1977–and by others for his two volumes on *The Draining of the Fens* (1940) and his edited works on the historical geography of England (1936 and 1973). Moreover, Darby is also familiar to a small (and diminishing) group of historical geographers in the English speaking world for his concern over the relations between Geography and History (marked most obviously, until the release of this volume, by a paper, "On the relations of geography and history," published in the *Transactions and Papers* in 1953).

This book is focused–as the distorted echo of its title reflects–upon these latter concerns. At its core are a dozen chapters, arranged as three sets of four essays. Each set of essays focuses on a different geographical realm (England, France, and America), and the thrice-repeated titles of the essays in each of these sets are derived (at least approximately) from the 1953 paper. They are, for the record, "The Geography behind History," "Past Geographies," "The History behind Geography," and "The Historical Element in Geography." These chapters are the texts of lectures that Darby delivered in a University of London seminar between 1954 and 1966, and subsequently to students in a third-year course at Cambridge (1966-76). They are, essentially, amplifications of his 1953 paper, written in the 1950s and early 1960s, and they refer only to works published before 1967.

According to the editors of this volume, it is likely that Darby intended to publish these lectures as a book.

He did not, and they were forgotten until they "came to light among his papers after his death." Almost a decade later, and a full quarter century after they were last delivered, these "lectures" are now in print for the first time. They are introduced by an essay on "Clifford Darby and the Methodology of Historical Geography," written by Terry Coppock (now deceased) in collaboration with the other editors of the volume (Michael Williams, Hugh Clout, and Hugh Prince), all senior British academics who were closely associated with Darby. Further, each set of four chapters is followed by short "explanatory and contextual commentary" on "H.C. Darby and the Historical Geography of ...," in which Prince deals with England, Clout with France, and Williams with America. All of this is set around with a small collection of photographs of Darby through the years, a list of his published works, and a short epilogue, entitled "Critique and Evaluation," written by Michael Williams.

Several questions confront the reviewer of such a volume. First there are those related to Darby's dozen: Was Darby on to something in exploring this topic? Do these chapters engage significant questions? Did the "Great Man" (for that is how he appears in some of the later commentaries) illuminate the field? Why was Darby interested in these matters? How did he seek to address them? What conclusions might we take away from these chapters (and are they different from those that the undergraduates who heard them as lectures might have come away with)? Second, there are questions pertaining to the work of the editors: How well do they explain and contextualize Darby's contributions? How pointedly do they fulfill their "critique and evaluation" mandate? What value is added by their work? And finally there are questions relating to the book as a whole: What contribution does it make? Will it influence scholarship in the twenty-first century? Was its publication warranted?

Answers to some of these questions seem clear, but none are easy. As the editors acknowledge more than once, times have changed since Darby delivered these lectures in (what one presumes was) his measured, polished manner. Former students and associates of "the methodological master" (including the editors of this volume) have themselves become prominent. Historical geography has changed almost beyond recognition from Darby's day, which Michael Williams, perhaps inadvertently, describes as its "zenith" (p. 210). Indeed, Darby himself, writing in the early 1980s, recognized that the intellectual discourse of his heyday had moved on, and that "geography would never be the same again." All of this means that the core concerns of this book (expressed in Darby's lectures) are dated; that those chosen to reflect upon and evaluate them (between these covers) are themselves of a generation more attuned to the past of Darby's career than to the concerns of the present into which they write; and that "The Relations of Geography and History" appears thus as a footnote to a largely forgotten era (or a minor exercise in hagiography), rather than as a vital, exciting, challenging contribution to debate over the future of Geography.

To give Darby his due, one needs to appreciate the uncertainties and boundary-riding propensities of most geographers in the second quarter of the twentieth century. Haunted by the excesses of "environmental determinism" and driven by a desire to find firm and distinctive ground for Geography to call its own, many of the discipline's gatekeepers and practitioners wrestled with the "But is this Geography?" question during these years. By and large, their touchstone of legitimacy affirmed area (and its differentiation) as their discipline's domain. Reduced to its essence, this position gave time to History and claimed space for Geography. Clearly this posed difficulties for those who would straddle the boundary between these supposedly distinct fields to explore, for example, the ways in which human uses of space or territory had changed over time. Some such as Darby, and in North America Andrew Hill Clark, sought to fight the boundary-riders on their own turf, to hold open a narrow space for time (or historical rather than strictly contemporary inquiry) within Geography. This won grudging acceptance of the notion that geographers might appropriately seek to describe the Geography (spatial pattern or areal differentiation) of a particular territory at some specific historical period. Such characterizations of places in past times were known as "cross-sections"–they were geographies of former places. But it is important to recognize that this was not the only possible strategy. The intellectual giant among Geographers of the era, the American Carl Ortwin Sauer, metaphorically snubbed his nose at the struggle to squeeze an historical sensitivity into the straitjacket of Geography's disciplinary orthodoxy. Insistently asking whether a piece of work was "proper" Geography, thought Sauer, was the worst form of anti-intellectualism, a type of "pernicious anemia" that would rob inquiry of its vitality.

Darby knew of Sauer's work, and quoted it in his lectures, but revealingly drew from the earlier part of Sauer's *oeuvre*, which focused on "the reconstruction of past cultural landscapes" rather than embracing Sauer's later more radical position. And this is revealing. Time and again, in commenting on the work of others in these

chapters, it seems to me that Darby reports rather than engages. It is not that he is uncritical. In commenting on the study of "sequent occupance" as developed in the United States, for example, Darby places cross-sectional and sequent occupance approaches in the same frame and quotes (p. 180) from Derwent Whittlesey's programmatic statement about the latter: "Such a study is indubitably geographic, and can be judged with propriety by geographers, it is historical in only two senses: it employs techniques of historiography and it presents material of antiquarian interest. It omits the compelling time sequence of related events which is the spark of history." But, Darby avers, this may be "too doctrinaire a standpoint" at risk of losing what it seeks, explanation: "Might not the 'time sequence of related events' provide the 'vital' explanation of some complex of geographical facts?" So too, and elsewhere in his discussion of American work on the borderlands of Geography and History, Darby is led to wonder about the validity of the "fundamental difference" many perceive between the two disciplines, and to ask "need we make an issue of this theoretical distinction?" Befitting the lectures these chapters once were, perhaps, these are questions asked, not answered–except in a sense by the accumulated weight of the twelve lectures themselves, which of course turn on the issue of this distinction.

For all his prowess as an historical scholar, for all his engagements with the past, and for all his programmatic statements about bringing down "tariff barriers" between Geography and History, Darby was a product of his time, shaped by many of the preoccupations of his fellow geographers. While he saw the virtues of convergence in the endeavors of historians and historical geographers, he remained convinced of the need to stake a territorial claim for historical geography. Early in his career he identified the historical cross-section ("the reconstruction of the geographical conditions of past times") as a distinctive approach to historical data and clung to it through thick and thin for the better part of half a century. As these lectures reveal, he knew its warts and short-comings, and he appreciated that other scholars had found other ways of working in the borderlands, but intellectually (and temperamentally) it seems to me, he was loathe to abandon his commitment to the development of a "self-conscious" and distinctive historical geography, and thus to embrace and endorse either Sauer's radical intellectualism or the laissez faire attitudes that produced what Darby himself described, surely pejoratively, as " 'the swinging sixties' of academic life" (p. 204). This explains his firm focus, throughout his career, on the landscape and on "geographical description." He was not–as he said and Michael Williams notes (p. 208)–much interested in moving the focus of his work from "places changed by men to men as changers of places."

What then to make of the dozen chapters at the heart of this book? At best they provide a window onto Darby's views of historical geography, as a field of inquiry, in the three realms over which he cast his gaze. Together they constitute a rather extended bibliographic essay, offering a wide-ranging, but certainly not comprehensive, survey of the literature in the field to circa 1965, relating it to a basic conceptual grid, and pointing to some of the links, emphases, strengths, shortcomings, and possibilities of the identified works. Darby's range was broad. He drew impartially on the writings of historians and geographers who demonstrated an interest in landscapes, maps, and depictions of territory. Throughout the focus is on "how the work was done," rather than on the ideas, interpretations, and conclusions of the works in question. Here Darby sought to expose the "methodology" of historical geography, rather than to engage with big ideas about why and how (say) landscapes were transformed (as for example by the spread of capitalism, the adoption of new technologies, or shifts in energy systems). He wanted his students to ponder the ways in which various scholars grappled both with "the idea" of historical geography, and the challenges of treating space and time in the same study. Was this worth doing? In its time and place, it certainly inspired some students to become historical geographers and offered many others a considered (albeit particularly emphasized) survey of "the Greats" in the field. Some, undoubtedly, found other questions and other subjects more alluring, but it is ever thus. Still, the issues that so pre-occupied Darby in these lectures/chapters are hardly thought about today. There and then they had their place; here and now they are almost completely ignored–at least in the ways in which Darby engaged them.

Some of the reasons for this–some sense of how the world has moved on, of the ways in which new light has been thrown on some of Darby's concerns, and of the implications for his work of new perspectives on the practice of history and geography–might have been explored to good effect in the several chapters contributed to this volume by its editors. So too might these scholars have attempted to connect Darby's discussions of historical geography in England, France, and the United States with recent influences upon, developments in, and examples of geographical study in these areas. By and large, however, they eschew such engagement entirely. Some

of us, dim of eye and grey of beard, may lament how little attention the rising generation affords the wisdom of the elders. But wisdom is a social construct. History, Geography, and indeed learning in general, have changed immensely in the last half-century. The scholarly world of the new millennium–much like poet Al Purdy's Canada–is "a country that no man may comprehend, asking the same questions as in ages past." The salience of old men's musings needs to be demonstrated rather than assumed, and earlier preoccupations need to be linked to contemporary concerns, if they are to interest a new cohort of researchers. But one looks in vain for such bridges here. Coppock, Prince, Clout, and Williams gaze backward and inward. Where they ascribe "lasting importance" to Darby's ideas they trade in generalities and platitudes: one candidate is his "recognition that historical geographers work in a field that is shared with historians"; another the claim that Darby's "intellectual concern to define component types of historical geography offers a metaphor for other still vibrant debates about the structuring of knowledge"; a third that "geographers need to interrogate the past both for its own sake and also to understand better the present."

This is not the place to write chapters that might have been, but I am struck by the range of opportunities foregone in this book. How much more valuable and intellectually rewarding it might have been had some of the ideas that infuse contemporary scholarly debate, and some exemplars of more recent scholarship on topics touched upon by Darby, been brought into critical engagement with his claims and judgements. Thus we might ponder the following. Although he was wedded first to cross-sections, Darby was long interested in the narrative approach to historical writing. How do his comments on this stand in relation to Hayden White's explorations of narrative form? In discussing historical geography in France, Darby quotes Lucien Febvre: "To act on his environment, man does not place himself outside it." For Darby, the historian Febvre was simply the apostle of "possibilism," an advocate of human agency in opposition to the views of environmental determinists, and he made little of this assertion. But what a platform it offers for a turn-of-the-millennium riff on the ideas of Bruno Latour and all that has followed, from *We Have Never Been Modern* and other works, for the practice of (historical) geography. Again, in exploring "The History behind Geography," in his suite of lectures on England, Darby seeks to draw a distinction between the works of geographers and historians by demonstrating that "the geographer asks his own questions which elicit their own replies" (p. 50). One of the planks from which he builds this argument is a study of *The Yorkshire Woollen and Worsted Industries*, completed in 1920 by the economic historian Herbert Heaton. Sixty-two years later, the Cambridge-educated geographer Derek Gregory published *Regional Transformation and Industrial Revolution: A Geography of the Yorkshire Woollen Industry*. Beginning its analysis in the late eighteenth century, and thus covering some (though not all) of the same ground as Heaton's work, this book self-consciously breaks the mold of historical geography created by Darby. In the process, it draws upon contemporary social theory, including structuration theory (as developed by Anthony Giddens), to shape and sharpen its interpretations. It might have provided a superb springboard for meaningful discussion of the here-often-referred-to-but-unexplicated fact that "geography was changing during the 1960s" (p. 25), and fertile ground for exploration and evaluation of these changes. But of White, Latour, Gregory, and other more recent scholars whose ideas might have sharpened the relevance of this book, there is all too little.

Finally, it seems to me that this is a decidedly "English" book. Although Darby explored the literatures of France and the United States at some length, those who reflect on this material here do so from London and Oxford. This is not to deny Hugh Clout's career-long engagement with France or Michael Williams's considerable body of writing on the United States, but it is to suggest that differences in location influence perspectives, or more modestly perhaps, that it is inevitably difficult for those who have been close associates of an important colleague to escape the long shadow of his/her influence. From my perspective, Darby receives rather too much credit in these pages. By Michael Williams's account, Richard Hartshorne changed his views about the possibilities of historical geographical inquiry between *The Nature of Geography* (1939) and *Perspective on the Nature of Geography* (1959) largely because of Darby's 1953 paper. This completely misses the influence of Hartshorne's colleague at the University of Wisconsin through the 1950s, A. H. Clark, upon his views of historical geography. Nor can I agree "that Darby created the whole subdivision of 'Historical Geography' " (p. 205). In the end, this volume is a disappointment. Although it rightly pays tribute to Darby's scholarly craftsmanship, it fails to match his standards in "the careful evaluation of sources [see above], the meticulous citing of evidence [for example, I appear as Graham and my colleague Stephen Hornsby of the University of Maine is rechristened "Derek"], and the well-crafted text [Darby's

writing is the most pellucid in the book]." Sad to say, *The Relations of History and Geography* is–as the French historian Robert Mandrou said of the four-fold schema that provided the organizing framework of Darby's lectures–insipid (fade). It is also parochial, dated, and curiously unengaged with issues of scholarly/intellectual relevance today.

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