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Philippe Oulmont, *Pierre Denis: Français libre et citoyen du monde*. Paris: Nouveau Monde Éditions, 2012. 474 pp. Chronology, archival sources, and index. 25.00€. (pb.). ISBN 2-36583-336-5.

Review by Valerie Deacon, New York University.

Philippe Oulmont begins his engaging biography of Pierre Denis by telling his readers that Denis “avait été un peu partout, sans laisser beaucoup de traces” (p. 3). This tantalizing hint that the life story of Pierre Denis has largely been forgotten is only fully appreciated once the reader comes to understand just how true Oulmont’s statement is. Pierre Denis was one of ten children born to Ernest Denis and his wife, Marguerite. Ernest, unlike his first-born son, is fairly well known both to historians of France and of Central Europe. He had an eminent career as a historian, but is primarily remembered for his involvement in the creation of the Czechoslovakian state after the First World War. Denis *père* created, with the support of the French, Czechoslovak, and Yugoslav governments, the Institute of Slavic Studies in 1919. In addition to this Parisian institute, Denis was primarily responsible for the creation of a French institute in Prague, which bore his name until the Second World War. His scholarship was very well respected, if guided by what were not strictly academic passions. Ernest was fiercely patriotic, republican, anti-German, and a Dreyfusard (though a somewhat anti-Semitic one) and these characteristics informed a great deal of his life’s work.

Like his father, Pierre excelled academically. He was multilingual at a young age, thanks in part to his father’s insistence that his children travel for cultural and linguistic exposure. He was admitted to the prestigious Ecole Normale Supérieure, where he discovered an aptitude and passion for geography—a discipline that was undergoing something of a renaissance thanks to the work of Paul Vidal de La Blanche and his colleagues. Denis took his degree in history and geography and was subsequently awarded a travel scholarship (“Autour du Monde”), funded by the banker Albert Kahn. As he prepared his travel plans, which included stops in Italy, North Africa, South America, and the United States, he met and married Jeanne Hatin. After a great deal of travel, the family moved to Argentina, where Denis began his doctoral research. Although history and geography continued to interest him, Denis’s own work had moved further into the field of economics. The First World War interrupted these studies and the Denis family moved back to France, where Pierre enlisted and became an intelligence officer. Although intending to return to Argentina at war’s end to finish his thesis, Pierre was not invited back. Although he could not have realized it at the time, this turned out to be a pivotal moment for Denis.

Instead of sailing abroad, as he had hoped to do, Denis was invited to join the work being done on the economic conditions for peace and it was here that he met Jean Monnet. The relationship between the two men became a central part of Denis’s personal trajectory, as their paths would cross again and again. Although Denis was offered (and accepted) a senior lectureship at the University of Strasbourg, he opted instead to work for the League of Nations in London and Geneva. Denis was put to work on the Silesian question (the contentious division of Silesia between Poland and Germany) and ultimately joined the economic section of the secretariat led by Arthur Salter. The 1930s were a time of change for the Denis family. Pierre moved from the League into private business, alongside Monnet, and back to the League as the private enterprises failed in the uncertain economic climate of that decade.

The declaration of war in 1939 prompted Denis to enlist, even though he was almost sixty years old. He quickly found himself on familiar economic terrain—working on inter-Allied economic coordination with his old friend, Monnet, and René Pleven. The French defeat affected Denis deeply and his decision to work for Charles de Gaulle put Denis and Monnet at odds with one another for the first time in their relationship. Monnet, of course, was suspicious of de Gaulle and chose to work directly for the British, ending up in the United States to negotiate for American supplies. Denis, sticking with de Gaulle for the entire war, became the head of the Free French economic bureau. This complicated job had Denis traveling to the various territories that rallied to de Gaulle and his interaction with anybody outside the professional realm was limited, including with his family, to whom he only sent a handful of letters during the war. Towards the end of the war, Denis was nudged out of his position and became something of an economic consultant for the Comité français de Libération nationale (CFLN).

Denis returned to France at the war's end and maintained an active professional life that involved further travel around the world as a financial consultant. He also authored several autobiographies and a novel, and continued to mull over the question of postwar economic settlements. Like Monnet, Denis never gave up on his supranational vision, which had been cultivated when he worked in Geneva. Denis struggled a little bit with reintegrating into family life. Interestingly, none of his children had joined the internal resistance or the Free French. His own brother was a Pétainist, who continued to believe that the Gaullists were traitors to France. In 1940, Denis, like many others of his age and situation, could not imagine a resistance growing in clandestinity. What set him apart, however, was his ease with exile. His various careers had prepared him to live and act in a foreign country, something that was much more difficult for the vast majority of French people to accept. His personal and professional past meant that Denis was often annoyed by the chauvinism and Anglophobia that seemed to exist amongst the Free French, even in the face of British hospitality during the war. This global outlook remained a part of Denis's personality until his death in 1951.

Given the richness of his life and his involvement in many of the pivotal moments of the twentieth century, Denis should be a name that is far more familiar to historians. Yet, as Oulmont suggested at the beginning of his book, there are few traces of Denis in the historical record. Other French politicians, economists, geographers, resisters, and historians barely mention Denis in their memoirs. His own personal archives are virtually non-existent, which makes Oulmont's study that much more masterful. Thanks to careful research in archives around the world, Oulmont is able to offer his readers a fairly complete picture of Denis's life. Although there are gaps, where Oulmont is forced to speculate or rely on the perception of others in Denis's life, the work itself is very impressive.

Oulmont's book, in fact, highlights all the valuable contributions biographies can make. No longer just a fairly straightforward tale of somebody's life, the biography can be used to explore the significance of much broader contexts. Via the extraordinary story of Denis's life, readers learn about the Dreyfus Affair, the development of a fiercely republican patriotism, Protestant culture and family life in France, the development of new and revived academic disciplines, France's diplomatic and cultural reach in the early twentieth century, two world wars, the economic parameters of peace-making, the economic challenges of the Resistance, the development of supranational ideas, and the early days of thinking about European unity. I was particularly taken with the vivid description of Denis's navigation between Monnet and de Gaulle. Between these two giants, Denis maintained his modest nature and his commitment to a job well done. But it is clear that making the decision to support de Gaulle, in the face of Monnet's disapproval, was not an easy thing for Denis to do. Fascinatingly, these links to Monnet, even while Denis was at the heart of the Free French, mean that we can't, properly speaking, call him a Gaullist. Oulmont suggests he might be considered a non-conformist Gaullist, which confirms other studies of the past decade that show how diverse attitudes to de Gaulle were, even among the Free French. It is really this tension, between Denis as a member of the Free French and Denis as a "citizen of the world," that shape his experience of the Second World War and beyond.

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