

---

H-France Review Vol. 11 (September 2011), No. 216

Georges Hatton, *Les enjeux financiers et économiques du Protectorat marocain (1936-1956). Politique publique et investisseurs privés*. Paris : Publications de la Société française d'histoire d'outre-mer, 2009. 445 pp. Tables, illustrations, bibliography, and index. 30.00 € (pb). ISBN 978-285-970-040-9 .

Review by Samir Saul, Université de Montréal.

The book is a study of the economic state of Morocco in the two decades preceding independence. It fills a void because scholars have investigated extensively the political history of the sultanate<sup>[1]</sup> and its economic or socio-economic history, mainly prior to 1942.<sup>[2]</sup> The monograph grew out of a doctoral dissertation presented at the University of Paris I in 2005. The author spent his youth in pre-independence Morocco before becoming an external trade official in France's Ministry of Economy and Finance. From 1962 to 1964, he participated in a mission to advise the now independent Kingdom of Morocco on economic planning. He has direct personal knowledge of the country. The doctorate caps his career. He follows a path similar to that of Georges Oved, a Frenchman who was a civil servant in pre- and post-independence Morocco, heading its economic planning department; upon retiring, he produced a dissertation on the French left and Moroccan nationalism during the Protectorate.

One economic history encompassing the entire period of the Protectorate is Albert Ayache's *Le Maroc, bilan d'une colonisation* (Paris: Éditions sociales, 1956). In some respects, Hatton's study can be read as an undeclared counterpoint to Ayache's anti-colonial outlook. Just as subtly, it takes occasional issue with criticism of France's economic stewardship put forward in the other study of the entire period of the Protectorate, Charles F. Stewart's *The Economy of Morocco, 1912-1962* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1964). Hatton undertakes another *bilan*, his aim being to provide an overall portrait of the evolution Morocco's economy prior to independence. His approach is more descriptive, analytical, and panoramic than problematic, argumentative, and focused. The book is a wide-ranging overview that covers the major topics relating to the Moroccan economy, some in greater depth than others. The thesis is more implicit than explicit, in keeping with the author's empirical bent and even-handedness. Specific observations are presented in deliberately measured terms.

The two dimensions of Hatton's book are given in the subtitle. In terms of space allotted to various topics, it is weighted in favor of the public policy and macro-economic angle. The history of private businesses is less detailed. Part I concerning the political and diplomatic constraints on public policy, as well as the economic and financial evolution of Morocco from 1936 to 1956, is 119 pages long. Part II deals with the fiscal, budgetary, foreign exchange levers of public policy, external trade and public utilities; it takes up 101 pages. Business is considered in Part III; the Banque de Paris et des Pays-Bas (Paribas), the Omnium nord-africain (ONA) and the Banque d'État du Maroc (BEM) are allotted fifty-five pages. Part IV, devoted to the industrialization policy promoted by the authorities of the Protectorate, is fifty-six pages long. Debates and controversies are placed at the end, in the twenty-eight page Part V. The length of chapters is uneven, running from seventy-one pages for a chapter in Part I to three pages for another in Part V.

The author is at pains to emphasize France's peculiar status in Morocco. The framework of a Protectorate implied limits on its actions in the sultanate. There were internal constraints, such as the relationship between the Imperial Palace and the French *Résident général*, the difficult natural conditions

of Morocco, and the traditionalism of the Fasi bourgeoisie. External constraints were more daunting because the Act of the conference of Algeciras (1906) made Morocco subject to international oversight and an “open door” free-trade policy that, among other consequences, prevented the establishment of tariff barriers to protect its markets and hampered efforts by French authorities to favor French interests. *Résidents* were far from powerless but they had more consistent success in attaining the latter goal than in circumventing obstacles to protectionism. For example, public works contracts were rarely awarded to non-French tenderers. The author presents the issues at stake in a straightforward, matter-of-fact manner. The same applies to his historical account of the economic and financial history of Morocco from 1936 to 1956, the longest chapter in the book, and to his exposé of fiscal conditions, of the budgetary policy of the state, and of investment, both public and private, of currency regulation, of external trade, and of public works to develop infrastructure (railways, roads, electricity). The seven chapters of Parts I and II are informative. They provide a handy summary of various aspects of Moroccan economic conditions and an outline of public policy. More references to sources might have been helpful, but publishing guidelines no doubt imposed sacrifices.

Part III is more novel because it delves into the history of major private companies operating in Morocco. The Banque d'État du Maroc was a well-known state institution, an outgrowth of the Act of Algeciras entrusted with the issue of Moroccan currency. It was a bastion of Paribas influence in the Protectorate. Paribas had other investments and control of many companies. As for the Omnium nord-africain, it was another pillar of the Moroccan economy, so much so that the conglomerate lasted well beyond the Protectorate; Paribas acquired a controlling interest in 1953, then sold it to the royal family in 1980; ONA was dissolved in the wake of a merger in 2010. Hatton provides a scholarly attempt to go beyond impressions and hearsay about these major actors in Moroccan history. Whereas BEM's archives are still unavailable, Paribas has considerable primary source material which the author consulted. Paribas acted through its arm in the sultanate, a holding company called the Compagnie générale du Maroc (CGM). Like those of the ONA, its investments penetrated a myriad of firms, and the author lists them carefully (pp. 256-258, 278-279) in the form of a “catalogue” (his description, p. 304). Examination of the firms is cursory and business historians might find this chapter sparse, but then the book is not a business history. Data about profits shows that CGM's profitability was below 5 percent on the eve of the Second World War and passed the 10 percent mark in 1952; ONA's was usually well above, rising from 19 percent in 1949 to 34 percent in 1952. As for the BEM, its profits rose 40 percent from 1948 to 1953, and its market value in 1955 was over one hundred times its face value (a 400 franc share fetched 50,000 francs on the market).

In Part IV, Hatton depicts the mining and manufacturing sector. Phosphates were abundant in Morocco, other minerals less so, but in enough quantities to support extensive activity. Morocco was primarily an agricultural country and what industry there was tended to be in food processing, such as beverages, flour and tobacco. Sugar refining, Morocco's premier industry, stood in a class apart, sustained as it was by buoyant demand and served by the country's largest industrial firm. Unrefined sugar was not homegrown; it was shipped in from France and the Caribbean, but local consumption justified recourse to imports. On page 356, the author offers a useful table listing all Moroccan companies worth more than 100 million francs, according to market value in 1954. The last sentence in the last chapter of Part IV states that financial results of industrial companies were, on the whole, positive (p. 359). It is a substantive conclusion, and undoubtedly a valid one, but it seems to have been tacked on as an afterthought and would have deserved a demonstration.

The first four parts are workmanlike and relatively uncontroversial. Part V raises historical problems and interpretations. Did Morocco undergo economic development? In 1950, as compared to that of other African countries, its GDP was surpassed only by South Africa's and Nigeria's; its per capita GDP was the highest in Africa, save South Africa's (pp. 365-366). In 1951, while the European population numbered only 325,000, or 4 percent of the total population, it accounted for one-third of GDP and had an average personal income nine times that of Moroccans (pp. 376, 377, 379). It benefited from the *mise en valeur* of Morocco, unlike investors from France who were penalized by the loss of the purchasing

power of the franc due to inflation and devaluation and French taxpayers who subsidized half of the Protectorate's infrastructure budget (pp. 383-384, 396). Business did better, and it was largely French. Despite the surging nationalist campaign for independence and an uncertain political future, Paribas acquired control of ONA in 1953, a statement that it was in Morocco for the long haul. It is not clear, and probably impossible to ascertain, whether the move was intended to show confidence in and support for French rule, to ensconce Paribas in Morocco in anticipation of French departure, or both according to how events turn out. The author writes that it is "possible, and even very probable" that Paribas took a sympathetic view of the nationalist movement and foresaw independence. In this respect, businessmen proved more attuned to realities than political authorities (pp. 388-389, 395). This is a tantalizing judgment, relevant to debates about the role of business in decolonization, but it remains an opinion requiring archival evidence to carry weight.

The author considers that the economic record of the Protectorate was largely positive. The reason for success lay in the fact that France was compelled by its international obligations to respect equality of opportunity, freedom of enterprise, and competition. It therefore had to give preference to liberal measures, such as offering the best infrastructure, low taxes<sup>[3]</sup> and tariffs, and limited administrative intervention (pp. 304, 391, 394). Hatton's send-off suggests that France's motivations were primarily political and that it is not certain that France as a whole benefited economically and financially in Morocco (pp. 398-399). This is another challenging and intriguing thought, falling within the cost-benefit approach on imperial rule, but one that is tentative at best and calling for research.

The book contains a useful and substantial *Who's Who* of leading personalities of the period.

#### NOTES

[1] Pierre Guillen, *L'Allemagne et le Maroc de 1870-1905* (Paris : Presses universitaires de France, 1967) ; Jean-Claude Allain, *Agadir 1911. Une crise impérialiste en Europe pour la conquête du Maroc* (Paris : Publications de la Sorbonne, 1976) ; Daniel Rivet, *Lyautey et l'institution du Protectorat français au Maroc, 1912-1925* (Paris : L'Harmattan, 1988), 3 vol ; *Le Maroc de Lyautey à Mohammed V. Le double visage du Protectorat* (Paris : Denoël, 1999) ; Georges Oved, *La gauche française et le nationalisme marocain, 1905-1955* (Paris : Harmattan, 1984), 2 vol ; William Hoisington, *Lyautey and the French Conquest of Morocco* (New York : St Martin's Press, 1995); *The Casablanca connection. French colonial policy, 1936-1943* (Chapel Hill : University of North Carolina Press, 1984) ; and John Waterbury, *The Commander of the Faithful. The Moroccan Political Elite—A Study in Segmented Politics* (New York : Columbia University Press, 1970).

[2] Jean-Louis Miège, *Le Maroc et l'Europe, 1830-1894* (Paris : Presses universitaires de France 1961-1963), 4 vol.; André Adam, *Casablanca. Essai sur la transformation de la société marocaine au contact de l'Occident* (Paris : Éditions du CNRS, 1968), 2 vol.; Pierre Guillen, *Les emprunts marocains (1902-1904)* (Paris : Éditions Richelieu, 1972) ; and René Gallisot, *Le patronat européen au Maroc. Action sociale, action politique, 1931-1942* (Rabat : Éditions techniques nord-africaines, 1964).

[3] In order to attract investments, there was no income tax, no tax on dividends, and no capital gains tax (p. 397).

Samir Saul  
Université de Montréal  
samir.saul@umontreal.ca

Copyright © 2011 by the Society for French Historical Studies, all rights reserved. The Society for French Historical Studies permits the electronic distribution of individual reviews for nonprofit educational purposes, provided that full and accurate credit is given to the author, the date of publication, and the location of the review on the H-France website. The Society for French Historical Studies reserves the right to withdraw the license for edistribution/republication of individual reviews at any time and for any specific case. Neither bulk redistribution/ republication in electronic form of more than five percent of the contents of H-France Review nor re-publication of any amount in print form will be permitted without permission. For any other proposed uses, contact the Editor-in-Chief of H-France. The views posted on H-France Review are not necessarily the views of the Society for French Historical Studies.

ISSN 1553-9172