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Hervé Joly, Alexandre Giandou, Muriel Le Roux, Anne Dalmasso, and Ludovic Caillet, Eds., *Des barrages, des usines et des hommes. L'industrialization des Alpes du Nord entre ressources locales et apports extérieurs. Études offertes au professeur Henri Morsel*. Grenoble: Presses Universitaires de Grenoble, 2002. 386 pp. €35 (hb) ISBN 2-7061-1063-5.

Hervé Joly and François Robert, *Enterprises et Pouvoir Économique dans la Région Rhône-Alpes (1920-1954)*. Lyon: Éditions René Georges, 2003. 295 pp. €15 (pb) ISBN 2-9519554-3-X.

Review by Daniel Ringrose, Minot State University.

These two rich volumes pay tribute to a long tradition of collaborative research on industrialization and labor in the French Alps and Rhône valley. Both books reflect the distinctive place of the research center, in this instance the Centre Pierre Léon, in connecting French scholars and orchestrating systematic research into the nation's business, enterprise, and labor history.

The first volume, *Des Barrages, des Usines et des Hommes*, is conceived as a scholarly tribute to Henri Morsel, whose extensive career as a scholar, researcher, and professor influenced a generation of scholars. His prolific career spans the complexity and particularities of France's "second industrialization" in the French Alps, where hydroelectric power fueled creation of a wide range of new electrical and chemical industries in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the first eight essays in this volume, we learn that Morsel's research on industrial firms mined public and private sources long before official corporate histories came into vogue. Morsel's major focus was the history of electricity, particularly hydroelectric power, and the aluminum industry.

François Caron's essay shows how Morsel connected these specialized fields of inquiry to broader questions related to the history of Alpine industry, to industrial relations and management, and to the role of the state in nationalizing the French electrical network. (p.40) A striking theme to emerge from these collective contributions is the rich interdisciplinary approach that drove Morsel's work. He practiced a thoughtful fusion of traditional business and economic history, history of technology, and social history that drew on the expertise of geographers, economists, and historians alike.

The influence of this multi-disciplinary approach is strikingly apparent in the themes that emerge in nineteen essays that follow. Several essays ask how existing resources were recombined with newly abundant electricity to transform production and working conditions. Pierre Judet shows how the well-established timepiece industry in the Avre valley made the sequential and relatively smooth transition from water and steam power to electricity, while Anne-Catherine Robert-Hauglustaine demonstrates how the emerging field of electro-chemistry combined existing labor and technical resources with hydroelectric power create entirely new regional industries based on production of calcium carbide and acetylene gas after 1885.

Other essays address tensions inherent in the identity and management of local enterprises as they were integrated into larger conglomerates based in Paris. Hervé Joly's analysis of the origins of electro-metal and electro-chemical firms in the Alpes du Nord reveals how they gradually came to depend on external capital, managerial, and technical expertise, all which drew these regional firms into a much larger national market. The geographic accident that concentrated abundant hydroelectric power in the French Alps allowed such firms to retain their regional identity, a particularity noted by Joly and taken

up further by Pierre Lanthier, who contrasts the diversity and decentralized character of Alpine enterprises with the monopolization of the production and industrial use of electricity in the Mauricie basin in Quebec.

Labor and management form the shared focus of Ludovic Cailluet's essay on Pechiney and Alexandre Giandou's comparative piece on the social politics of labor in three Alpine factories. The latter offers intriguing comparisons of the varied enticements, including subsidized housing for large families and discounts and bonuses paid for recruitment of relatives, used to recruit and retain workers. Jean-François Parent extends this theme in his sociologically influenced study of "l'habitat ouvrier" that traces the evolution of privately constructed worker housing around Grenoble. Begun as private, factory specific projects in the interwar period, Parent's essay pairs the transformation of worker housing into public HBM and HLM projects by the 1970s with the growth of immigrant labor recruited from Eastern Europe and North Africa.

The final group of essays casts the industrial experience in relief against the background of regional educational practices and national corporate activity in the twentieth century. Éric Robert argues that cooperation between industrial leaders and Electro-technical Institute associated with the University of Grenoble was nuanced by conflicting priorities and occasional friction, but that affiliation with university researchers was crucial to securing state resources and investment.[1] In many respects industrial-university relations were strongly symbiotic, especially in the early twentieth century. Engineers from area firms brought practical experience to regular conferences and lectures for students of hydraulic and electro-chemical engineering while graduates provided regional firms with a ready supply of technical labor.

Anne Dalmaso and Catherine Vuillermot's contributions address perhaps the most original and engaging theme of the collection, for each explores the nuances of what it meant for an industrial firm with regional origins and identity to become national in its ownership, management, and purpose. Dalmaso's study of turbine manufacturer NBPP, later Neyrpic, reveals a quintessentially regional enterprise rooted in the Dauphinoise tradition, started by prominent Grenoble families and built upon the region's rich hydroelectric potential. As the company expanded to Lyon, other parts of France, and overseas, its regional roots gave it a competitive edge because it recruited engineers and qualified technical graduates from the Electro-technical Institute of Grenoble. In commercial and financial arenas, however, Dalmaso argues that NBPP's national stature served to compliment its regional assets until the 1960s when international investors and managers sought to relocate control away from the Rhône-Alpes. Vuillermot traces a parallel process in which the Group Durand, which originated as a regional enterprise, acquired and consolidated hydroelectric power plants between 1927 and 1945, only to be incorporated into the national electric grid in the decades following 1945. At what point, Vuillermot asks, did the firm begin to lose its regional identity? Dominique Barjot and Virginie Bodon's essays on dam construction and the EDF's expansion projects address the question in reverse, for they explore how national entities sought to negotiate and act regionally.

The essays in this collection are, for the most part, carefully researched and richly illustrated with quantitative summaries, tables, and graphs. While this volume contains no explicit conclusion or attempt at synthesis, Henri Morsel's interests and legacy shapes the common threads found in these essays. The authors may differ on small points, but, overall, readers will find an implied collective interpretation of regional alpine industrial growth based on neither narrow business nor economic history, but rather a combination of technological factors, local traditions, and social practices that explain how a region with rich geographic assets, particularly hydroelectric capacity, became embedded in a national industrial, corporate, and social milieu by the 1950s.

If the essays in the first of the two volumes under review speak to each other indirectly about the experiences of individual firms, Hervé Joly and François Robert's *Enterprises et Pouvoir Économique dans la Région Rhône-Alpes* offers a rich and satisfying study of the broader patterns of growth, management practices, and regional affiliation of industrial firms during the first half of the twentieth century. At the heart of their project is an attempt to assess the autonomy of regional industrial firms as they entered the national marketplace. In essence, the authors want to understand the process of industrial consolidation, expansion, and national management that saw regional, family-run firms gradually absorbed into conglomerate firms that directed from Paris or points outside the Rhône-Alpes. To this end, Joly and Robert study over 1100 firms from eight departments to understand their geographic distribution, connections between "groups" of factories with multiple sites, the extent of local or family managerial control, and, where possible, the geographic origins each firm's capital or stockholders. The result is a book divided into roughly two sections that pair a massive quantitative and economic survey of firms active between 1920 and 1954 with a complementary study of the geographic origins of the directors, managers, and regional elites who shaped the future of each enterprise.

Chapters one and two sketch the distribution of the firms studied, and reveal a pre-1945 region characterized by well-established firms, the majority of which claimed local administrative control and a single factory site. Chapters three and four study the number of employees and the location of the formal headquarters of each firm to argue that, as a rule, smaller firms relied very little on capital outside the region, while firms over 1000 employees had strong affiliation with Paris. Within the Rhône-Alpes, though, some smaller and medium sized firms felt a strong attraction to Lyon. Joly and Robert argue for a nuanced view of the "predatory" nature of extra-regional companies. Their study reveals that firms with outside capital and direction were more likely to establish additional factory sites than firms located regionally. They also show that most regional firms were incorporated under protective statutes that prevented hostile takeovers without the express consent of local administrators and shareholders.

According to Joly and Robert, the impetus for accepting or resisting consolidation had to come from within the region. In chapter five they explore the overlapping duties and connections between administrators who served on boards of more than one regional or national firm. In the absence of detailed qualitative records for so many of the companies under study, the author's quantitative analysis reveals a process of clustering that drew "independent" regional firms closer together around mutual industries and interests, in effect laying the groundwork for the kind of consolidation Catherine Vuillermot describes for the Group Durand. If such ties strengthened regionally located firms, chapter six suggests that companies located outside the Rhône-Alpes were much less likely to accept local control of the firms they "anchored" locally. While the smallest in number, these firms tended to be larger and concentrated in emerging fields such as industrial chemistry, electro-metallurgy, and power generation equipment.

This volume's final chapter returns to the theme of social and professional networking among regional business elites who occupied two or more administrative posts in different firms. The large size of Joly and Robert's study reveals these "cumular" directors to have been predominately of regional origin, overwhelmingly male, and generally from industrial, rather than financial, backgrounds. Many inherited their positions or acquired them through marriage unions with other elite families. It is in this analysis that Joly and Robert offer a persuasive argument for the rationale behind the eventual consolidation and regrouping of regional firms. In addition to sharing regional origins and administrative ties to other regional firms with similar interests, a vibrant form of social and family networking allowed the region's elites to overlay family and personal interests on industry consolidation.

When considered together the two volumes in this review complement each other in unexpected ways. Both address longstanding French preoccupations with regional identity and pride in the face of

national industrial groups centered in Paris. The focus on hydroelectric power and associated heavy industry in the Rhône-Alpes throws such questions into sharp relief, for the years between 1920 and 1960 saw industrial consolidation and nationalization reshape patterns of regional management. The trajectories of the various firms discussed in the essays in *Des Barrages, des Usines et des Hommes* make more sense when considered alongside the comparative context and experiences detailed in Joly and Robert's study. In effect, Joly and Robert's work makes explicit the thematic organization and premises implied in the Morsel essays: the relationship between old regional firms and new technologies, regional labor and administrative practices, and the persistent control of regional elites over industries that acquired a national character. While the essays in the first volume explore particular firms, drawing on rich qualitative sources and offering narratives that reveal the particularities of each case study, the power of Joly and Robert's work lies in the adept presentation and interpretation of an astounding amount of quantitative data on firms and the regional elites of the Rhône-Alpes. Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of this study is the notion that regional firms retained independence in large measure because regional elites used social networks and multiple administrative posts to retain control and promote family interests even as these industries consolidated.

When read together these two volumes add up to more than the sum of their individual parts, a happy state of affairs that should in part be attributed to the collaborative affiliation of many of the authors with the Centre Pierre Léon. Economic concerns, resources, and technical change, the stuff of traditional business and economic history, all figure prominently in explaining the industrial development of the Rhône-Alpes in the twentieth century. But these authors also consider elements less typically associated with business and industrial history, including the social dimensions of worker housing and labor supply, the importance of local ownership to personalized leadership and regional identity, the personal and family strategies of regional elites, and, most broadly, the changing nature of regional identity in the national context.

To be sure, there are other dimensions that one might add to this rich program. One is to include the role of state agents, including prefects, engineers, and other planners in facilitating or hindering the national integration of the Rhône-Alpes. Also of interest, given the centrality of water, dams, and rivers to the region, would be consideration of regional attitudes about nature, ecology, and resource management, for this theme highlights issues around which regional elites, industrial firms, state and local officials, urban planners, and local stakeholders undoubtedly voiced competing opinions about the design and future of their region.

LIST OF ESSAYS in *Des barrages, des usines et des hommes*

- Hervé Joly (avec Anne Dalmasso, Alexandre Giandou, Muriel Le Roux), "Henri Morsel, l'homme, l'enseignant, l'historien"
- Annette Becker, "L'été 1943 au Chambon-sur-Lignon"
- Maurice Garden, Gilbert Garrier, Yves Lequin, "Pierre Léon, créateur d'un centre de recherche en histoire économique et sociale"
- François Caron, "L'apport d'Henri Morsel à l'histoire de l'électricité"
- Ivan Grinberg, "L'historien médiateur: Henri Morsel et l'Institut pour l'histoire de l'aluminium"
- Sophie Coeuré, "Développer l'histoire de l'électricité: mécénat et recherche universitaire"
- Jean-Pierre Daviet, "Des Alpes et du patrimoine industriel"
- Cécile Gouy-Gilbert, "Pour une histoire du Musée de la houille blanche de Lancey"

Topical and Thematic Essays:

- Pierre Judet, “L’horlogerie savoyarde, l’eau et l’électricité (1860-1914)”
- Michèle Merger, “La brève histoire d’un exploit technique ferroviaire: le système Fell au Mont-Cenis (1865-1871)”
- Anne-Catherine Robert-Hauglustaine, “Le carbure de calcium et l’acétylène, de nouveaux produits pour de nouvelles industries 1885-1914”
- Hervé Joly, “Les origines des entreprises électrométallurgiques et électrochimiques des Alpes du Nord (fin XIXe-début XXe siècles): l’exception au modèle dominant”
- Ludovic Cailluet, “Hiérarches managériales chez Pechiney (1880-1960): Chandler en pays alpin?”
- Pierre Lanthier, “Électricité et industrie: l’exemple des Alpes et de la Mauricie (fin XIXe-début XXe siècle)”
- Arnaud Berthonnet, “La SACER ou l’histoire dauphinoise d’une grande dame de l’industrie routière (1880-années 1920)”
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- Jean-François Parent, “L’habitat ouvrier d’origine patronale dans la région grenobloise (fin XIX-début XXe siècle)”
- Éric Robert, “Les relations université-industrie au sein des écoles d’ingénieurs grenobloises pendant la première moitié du XXe siècle”
- René Favier, *Un tout petit monde. Universités et universitaires grenoblois au début du XXe siècle* (d’après les mémoires de Raoul Blanchard)
- Florence Hachez-Leroy, “Chambéry, première usine de transformation d’aluminium de Pechiney (1912-1947)”
- Philippe Mioche, “La longue santé du chlore à Saint-Auban (1916-2002)”
- Muriel Le Roux, “Les Alpes au coeur de l’histoire de la recherche d’Alais, Frogès & Camargue/Pechiney des origines à la fin des années 1960”
- Anne Dalmasso, “Une entreprise ‘dauphinoise’ dans l’entre-deux-guerres: Neyrpic (NBPP). Ambiguïtés et limites de la notion d’entreprise régionale”
- Dominique Barjot, “Truchetet & Tansini. L’itinéraire d’une PME spécialiste des grands barrages (1921-1976)”
- Catherine Vuillermot, “Le groupe Durand: repreneur d’entreprises électriques alpines (1927-1945)?”
- Virginie Bodon, “EDF et la société française: Étude comparée de l’aménagement des barrages de Tignes et de Serre-Ponçon”

NOTES

[1] Institut électrotechnique de Grenoble, p. 241

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