

Historiography of Peasants Revolts: France During the Early Modern Period

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If ever there was a nation that had a propensity for resistance to government, it was France. While many would examine the modern era for examples of resistance to government, sixteenth and seventeenth century France gives historians a window into fascinating episodes of popular resistance. Certainly for as long as there has been government in France, there has been resistance, but the early modern period of French history experienced an explosion of resistance to authority from rural peasants. Historians have attempted to understand the reasons for this growth through a variety of tools, ranging from class conflict to agrarian cycles. While common conceptions of popular resistance to government authority are usually conflated with epic struggles for freedom under an oppressive monarch, historians have recently disregarded such interpretations in light of the inconsistencies such an interpretation makes on the historical facts. The Marxist interpretation of popular resistance may appeal to these meta-narratives of struggle against oppression; however, more recent trends in historiography have focused on the cultural and economic aspects of popular resistance.

Beginning in the age of Von Ranke, the historian's analysis of history was centered on the nation-state. Nation-state history, the history of military conflict, diplomacy, and great names in the records filled books with great narratives. It is a curious phenomenon of history that the majority of various populations have been left to live and die without their story told. The traditional and many of the contemporary historians of seventeenth-century France have focused on economic or institutional questions concerning the nobility, monarchy, and bourgeoisie. Ironically, these groups made up only a small percentage of the population of France. Much of the population of seventeenth-century France worked long hours farming for meager subsistence, while their surplus was expropriated for the benefit of an upper-class hierarchy. This is not to say that popular resistance was absent from the historical record, but within the traditional historical paradigm the Parlement's resistance of the Fronde saw more interest than the rural peasants in Romans who had risen to show their disdain for the traditional order, and were subsequently massacred.

While there would be signs of hope beginning in the late nineteenth century, it was not until the explosion of social history that early modern French peasants would be allowed to go from condemnation to fascination. The academic research into peasant revolts has centered around two major historiographical trends; Marxism and historical materialism on the one hand, and the French innovation, Annales. Limited scholarship of peasants in early modern France allows us to dig deep into the nuances of arguments presented by the historians of these specific schools of thought. Marxist social history was at the forefront of examining peasants, with Annales historians entering the picture later. Social historians Conze and Wright outline the social historian's mission in the first article of the first issue of the *Journal of Social History* as, "In the biography of not only greats in history, but of the small, unimportant men, social history achieves exemplary individuality and typologization of groups."¹ Similarly, Annales historians, with their attempt to make a total history, focused on long term changes which affected all sectors of life. Some of these studies, such as those by Yves-Marie Bercé and Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, focused specifically on peasants. Scholars of the Annales School sought to examine popular resistance in a greater cycle of agrarian highs and lows, in addition to the *histoire des mentalités* of popular resisters to authority.

Significant research into popular resistance and peasant revolts in early modern France can be traced back to Boris Porshnev's heavily Marxist analysis of the pre-Fronde bourgeoisies and nobility. While it may be tempting to disregard Porshnev's work as hopelessly biased because of the Soviet Union's propensity to intercede in academics that do not toe the party line², Porshnev deserves credit for his research which provided a foundation for peasant studies. It should be noted that Soviet history was not done in a manner different than in countries such as Germany, England, or France. Where the difference lays is in the philosophical presuppositions Soviet historians take to the tale before research even begins, much less during the interpretation of sources.³ As a Marxist social historian, the bulk of Porshnev's work focuses on an attempt to place popular resistance into a Marxist framework of dialectic materialism. Porshnev makes no secret of his intentions by stating:

Bourgeois historiography does not accept this [the significance of peasant revolts]. It sees popular uprisings as the result of social changes, and only minimally as their

¹ Werner Conze and Charles A. Wright, "Social History," *Journal of Social History* 1 (Autumn 1967): 15-16.

² Roger D. Markwick, *Rewriting History in Soviet Russia: The Politics of Revisionist Historiography* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 4.

³ Jerzy Topolski, ed., *Historiography between Modernism and Postmodernism: Contributions to the Methodology of Historical Research* (Amsterdam: Rodopi B.V., 1994), 179.

cause...It sees in these movements only transitory and temporary symptoms of disorder in the State, and in way responsible for all the political and social changes in the established order.⁴

Porshnev even makes several scathing critiques of French historians; claiming that French historians denied the significance of peasant revolts because it represented a threat to the ideal bourgeois republic, the system of government these same bourgeois historians benefited from.⁵ In this extremely polemic wording at the opening of his work, Porshnev would not only dispute the importance of peasant revolts in early modern France, but also argue that class conflict, in this case popular resistance by the bourgeoisies and peasants, was being suppressed by a bourgeois conspiracy!

To begin, Porshnev contends that early modern France was a feudal society in which a bourgeoisie, nobility, and monarchy acted in concert to maintain the class structure that favored their interests. One key aspect of Porshnev's thesis is the argument that venality of office created greater amounts of feudalism. The bourgeoisie, having ennobled themselves, betrayed their class and possible conflict with the feudal state.⁶ The process of ennoblement was not, however, simply the process of buying titles of nobility. Porshnev looks to the celebrated thinker Loyseau as a model of bourgeois thinking and notes that "for Loyseau the word bourgeois has the same sense of a feudal title."⁷ The purchasing of offices not only removed potential liquid capital from industrializing France, slowing the development of a true bourgeois class, but also created only two orders of people: those who rule, and those ruled. In order to explain this apparent deviation from orthodox Marxist theory, Porshnev justifies the flight of the bourgeoisies into the nobility as an economic move. By ennobling themselves, even at high costs, many bourgeoisies were able to gain protection from taxation for their rest of their money, which they could then lend out in the form of credit to the crown or old nobles of the sword.⁸

When Cardinal Richelieu and later Cardinal Mazarin began the process of reforming the French state by attempting to end the venality of office, there was a sudden reaction within the robe nobility who had recently belonged to the bourgeoisies. As Porshnev describes it,

the *officers* of seventeenth-century France carried into the exercise of their offices the ideas and sentiments of the class

⁴ P.J. Coveney, ed., trans., *France in Crisis: 1620-1675* (Totowa: Rowman and Littlefield, 1977), 79-80.

⁵ Ibid., 89.

⁶ Ibid., 73-74.

⁷ Ibid., 107.

⁸ Ibid., 122-124.

among which they had grown up, namely the bourgeoisies. They maintained close links with that class.⁹

With this final piece in place, Porshnev's thesis can take shape. Despite having entered into the nobility, many of these new nobles had done so for economic reasons, and maintained their bourgeoisie identity. The revolt of the Parlement of Paris, and later the bulk of the Frondeurs was an attempt at a bourgeoisie revolution against the stifling control of the old feudal order. Despite having become, in some ways, a part of this feudal order, the bourgeoisie had done so in order to protect their money from taxation and gain power. Once the venality of office was threatened, the bourgeoisies became threatened.

Where do peasant revolts fit into this picture? For Porshnev, the Frondeurs co-opted the peasants desire to rebel against increased taxation, in the form of the *taille*, into their own bourgeoisie revolution. There was an overlapping area of interest among the Frondeurs and peasants to lessen the burden of the *taille* on the third estate. Many of the newly ennobled Frondeurs, as a result of adopting the feudal lifestyle of feudal rents instead of mercantilism and trade, had a vested interest in ensuring that a tenant peasant had enough money to pay their feudal dues or rent. An increase in taxation by the crown threatened this income. As such, many nobles agitated the peasants to resist monarchical authority by providing weapons, leadership, and legal protection for those peasant rebels who wished to join the movement.¹⁰ In a world of diametrically opposed forces, those of the old feudal order pitched against the force of not only the bourgeoisie, but also the mass of peasants, one wonders how it is that the feudal class survived the attempt at revolution. The answer for Porshnev comes from Marx himself: "Nothing could any longer prevent the victory of the French bourgeoisie when it decided in 1789 to make common cause with the peasants."¹¹ The use of this statement reveals much about Porshnev's research. The ultimate failure of the bourgeoisie revolution, that is to say the Fronde, is the result of the alliance brokered by the bourgeoisie with the peasants. Such an alliance is doomed to grow out of hand, according to Porshnev. What evidence does Porshnev use to come to this conclusion? In essence, he has none. The evidence does not seem to suggest that the peasant revolts were growing too tumultuous for the bourgeoisie or nobility to handle; indeed Porshnev admits that it was only as a result of special assistance granted to the peasant that they could revolt on a large scale. In the end, Porshnev's description of the failure of the Fronde as a

⁹ Ibid., 128.

¹⁰ J. H. M. Salmon, *Renaissance and Revolt: Essays in the Intellectual and Social History of Early Modern France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 23-25.

¹¹ Coveney, 133.

result of peasant involvement comes right from the aforementioned statement by Marx. By remolding the Fronde into the framework of Marxism, Porshnev is able to justify the strange events of the 1789 French Revolution that defy an orthodox Marxist bourgeoisie revolution while at the same time present another proof for the validity of historical materialism.

Today one would have difficulty defending the conclusions of Porshnev's work. At the time in which it was published in France, however, it began a controversy with one historian in particular: Roland Mousnier. Mousnier's criticisms of Porshnev are the same criticisms one hears of Marxist history; namely "as a whole they seem to force reality into a framework which distorts it; and they do not seem to give an account of whole reality."¹² Mousnier shows, with numerous examples, that despite the intermixing of nobility and bourgeoisie, peasant revolts were largely the work of various elements of the nobility and bourgeoisie leading peasants against the consolidation of royal authority.¹³ The ambiguity of motivations and class distinctions further deteriorates Porshnev's position. While the defeat of Porshnev's thesis of class conflict as motivation in early modern France nearly collapses the Marxist interpretation of peasant revolts, Mousnier also takes offense to calling seventeenth-century France a feudal society. Mousnier would define feudal society as one in which large land holdings were worked by serfs who owed unlimited service to their lord. By the seventeenth-century however, serfdom had disappeared, and urban growth showed the rise of industrial capitalism.¹⁴ Mousnier would prefer the term seigneurial regime. While it seems as though Mousnier is splitting hairs, he explains the importance of differentiating feudalism and seigniorial forms of government. Seigniorial government is a form of government in which nobles hold power, but in the seigniorial system there is a great deal of usurpation of authority by the monarchy in the way of taxation, administration of justice, and other aspects of society. Along with a seigneurial form of government, Mousnier dismissed Porshnev's society based on classes. Instead, Mousnier advocated a society based on orders. These orders were arbitrarily defined by social esteem and cut across class definitions, with those working for the common good the most esteemed.¹⁵ Just as the circumstances of social relations complicate defining diametrically opposed groups, the economic circumstances of seventeenth-century France defy historian's attempts to define it as simply one mode of production or government over another.¹⁶

¹² Ibid., 144.

¹³ Ibid., 151.

¹⁴ Ibid., 160-161.

¹⁵ William Beik, *Absolutism and Society in Seventeenth Century France: State Power and Provincial Aristocracy in Languedoc* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 8.

¹⁶ Coveney, 162.

Mousnier defeats Porshnev's thesis of peasant revolts by simply showing that the facts on the ground do not lend themselves to properly fit into a Marxist framework; the fact that rebellions and revolts did not rally around a single class is evidence of this fact. Ultimately, while Mousnier's critique offers a solid dismembering of Porshnev's arguments, it shares many similarities. Mousnier and Porshnev agree, for example, that peasant revolts were anti-taxation in nature, generally lead by members of the nobility or bourgeoisie, and both based their research on the reports of the intendants and jurists such as Loyseau and Richelieu. The different versions of seventeenth-century peasant revolts that emerged lay essentially in the presuppositions each brings to the table. Porshnev would like to have a feudal society composed of both nobles and bourgeoisie which create internal inconsistencies leading to a failed bourgeois and proletariat revolution, while Mousnier took the opposite stance, and posited a monarchy attempting to create an absolutist state in order to usurp traditional power and liberties from the nobility. The revolts of both the nobility and peasants which they had fomented into rebellion was a reaction to the usurpation¹⁷

Interestingly, the structure of the early modern French state is still being debated. While Porshnev's descriptions of peasant revolts have fallen out of favor, his assertion of a feudal state has seen significant research. Exemplified most notably in the case of William Beik's celebrated work *Absolutism and Society in Seventeenth-century France* that revives the idea of early modern France as a feudal state. By using the Marxist approach of class analysis to examine peasant revolts, Porshnev had inadvertently opened a new debate that would overshadow the question of peasant revolts. It is another piece of historical irony that even Porshnev's work, which sought to bring peasant revolts to the forefront of analysis, would engender arguments over the political structure of seventeenth-century France and have relegated peasants to passing mentions.

While the Marxist and non-Marxist debate took place, a completely different form of history attempted to account for the popular resistance in seventeenth-century France. Annales history, with its emphasis on *histoire totale* (total history), took an entirely different approach to understanding peasant revolts. Two notable works of Annales history can be combined to understand the massive research undertaken by this school of thought. Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie's *The Peasants of Languedoc* primarily focuses on the long term cycles and influences, or the *conjuncture*, on peasants in the province of Languedoc. On the other end of the Annales spectrum, Yves-Marie Bercé's *History of Peasant Revolts* is an examination of the shorter term events of seventeenth-century France. Although this style of examination is known as the *mentalité* of a society, it is very similar to a

¹⁷ Salmon, 198-199.

work of cultural history.¹⁸ Annales historians, after completing the herculean task of sifting through countless sources all over France, produced dissertations sometimes in excess of one-thousand pages which as a result “[have] the ring of authenticity.”¹⁹

The differences of the history of peasant revolts pre- and post-Annales cannot be overstated. Not only does Annales historiography approach historical research from a completely different angle by incorporating many other social scientific disciplines, but it also abandons contrivances such as periodization and politics as of principle importance. What emerges out of this manner of research are works which examine long time spans concluding with *histoire événementielle*, a summation of social and political events which had been influenced by preceding research into various environmental, climate, demographic, and economic factors.

Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie's *The Peasants of Languedoc* is such an examination. True to the Annales style, Ladurie's book investigates the economic changes that France experienced from the late fifteenth-century through the late seventeenth-century. It is only after Ladurie had outlined the various properties of this time period (things such as population figures, taxation rates, price of foodstuffs, cost of rent payments, tithe rates, land distribution, etc.) that he can begin his examination of peasant revolts. The difference between Ladurie and those who came before him, Porshnev and Mousnier, is that Ladurie has no interest in placing peasant revolts within a debate over the nature of the early modern state of France. Instead, Ladurie understands peasant revolts as spontaneous and resulting from the economic and cultural circumstances of their time, saying that “In reality, this revolt affected a society suffering from material distress but psychologically integrated; any developed concept of a struggle between classes or orders was foreign to these people, even if their actions—their tactics—at times appear as a kind of groping towards revolution.”²⁰ This statement speaks plainly enough: Ladurie rejects both Porshnev's and Mousnier's motivations for peasant revolts. Peasants who revolt do not do so because of order or class antagonism. Nonetheless, Ladurie does not displace agency by reducing revolts to economic circumstances. The culture of peasants in this time period also played an integral factor in fomenting sedition, and once combined with economic hardship peasant revolts erupt. The examination of the actions and rhetoric of peasants in revolt reveals their motivations and cultural influences.

The most well known incident that Ladurie has researched is that of the Carnival at Romans. During this brief and chaotic episode of French

¹⁸ The peculiar institution of the *thèse d'état* in (thesis of the state) French academia has given rise to research into peasant revolts like none other.

¹⁹ Sharon Kettering, “Review: [Untitled],” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 22 (Winter, 1992): 497.

²⁰ Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *The Peasants of Languedoc*, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1976), 269.

history, peasants and urban artisans had made an attempt to turn the city of Romans upside down by inverting the traditional order of things. This aspect of upsetting the traditional order of things is present at every step of the revolt. As with all peasant revolts of this era, increased economic hardship for the peasantry resulted from increased royal taxation and poor harvests. In its early stages, the revolt demanded the elimination of all *taille*, tithe, and manorial dues.²¹ The implications of such demands show a desire to undermine the entire order and government of French society. In the lead up to the carnival, the seditious mob had begun making death and cannibalistic threats towards those whom they saw as “haughty and odious.” Eventually the rebels had gained a level of control of the town - inverting the prices of food; making the food traditionally reserved for the rich affordable for the poor, while the vile food normally consumed by the peasants was fixed at a high price. During the carnival, as the tensions had been mounting, the nobles and bourgeoisie of Romans struck back and quashed the rebellion in a massacre.²²

The theme of inversion is significant to Ladurie because he ties it to the rise of witchcraft in the rural, isolated areas of France that had little contact with Christianity. As Ladurie describes it, witchcraft by its nature is an inversion mythology. The celebration of the black mass was often the inverse of what a Catholic would experience with oddities such as, a black Eucharist, the witch levitating upside-down during pray, the witch facing the crowd instead of the traditional facing of the altar, and reading or reciting the Bible backwards. The predisposition of inversion on the part of folklore religion would influence the manner in which peasants rebelled against authority; such as those described during the carnival in Romans. Ladurie more simply states: “to turn the world upside-down is not the same as to revolutionize it, or even to transform it in a true sense. It is, nevertheless, in an elementary way, to contrast, to deny, to proclaim one's discord with the world as it is.”²³

The rebellion during the carnival in Romans is significant to Ladurie; not because it was a movement towards revolution and egalitarianism, but because the manner of the rebellion was “a long series of symbolic demonstrations, was a sort of psychological drama or tragic ballet whose actors danced and acted out their revolt instead of discoursing about it in manifestos.”²⁴ Ladurie understands the carnival in Romans revolt as not being ideologically motivated. Instead he views the impulsive and symbolic actions of the participants as evidence of the religious and psychological machinations of those indigent peasants who needed relief from their dearth and poverty expressed in the only venue available to

²¹ *Ibid.*, 192-193.

²² *Ibid.*, 192-196.

²³ *Ibid.*, 208.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 196.

them. Ladurie's analysis is a watershed moment in the historiography of peasant revolts. *The Peasants of Languedoc* represents the first time peasant revolts were presented on their own terms, instead of being amalgamated into a debate over the nature of the French political structure or social order. This feat, which not even Boris Porshnev had accomplished, also represented early research into the cultural history of peasant life.

Yves-Marie Bercé's *History of Peasant Revolts* represents the pinnacle of historical research in popular violence during early modern France. Bercé's research brings him close to Ladurie, with notable differences. For instance, both Ladurie and Bercé view peasant revolts as cultural phenomenon, however each understand the revolts as stemming from different cultural aspects, thereby rejecting Porshnev and Mousnier. Where Ladurie sees religion as a primary moving force, Bercé only mentions religion in passing. It may be that Ladurie's focus solely on Languedoc has allowed him to disregard much of the source material Bercé has to work with. Bercé would, in place of religion, emphasize a collective memory or the power of rumor in rural societies. Where Bercé and Ladurie agree however, is that both would describe peasant revolts as non-revolutionary. Not only are peasant revolts not-revolutionary, according to Bercé, but they are also reactionary. Many of the sources used by Bercé point to a longing for the golden age of feudalism in which foreign tax collectors and soldiers were absent from the traditional order of society.²⁵

When Bercé's four categories of revolts (those against bread prices, the tax collector, troop movements, and tax farmers) are examined, apart from human considerations such as basic survival, Bercé finds attempts to properly restructure society. A revolt over the price of bread, ostensibly driven by hunger, also reveals peasant moral outrage, whether real or imagined, towards merchants, bakers, and millers. Many rioters suggested that those who controlled the production of bread and grain were allowing starvation in their community in order to seek increased profits elsewhere. Therefore, the riot was an attempt to correct the behavior of these profiteers. When it was heard that troops would be entering the city, many peasants assisted in repelling the soldiers out of fear that troops would be quartered in their homes or would steal their property in raids. Although the fear of troops could have been exaggerated, the rumors and collective memory of previous injustices and the foreign authority that troops represented inclined many to resist. The theme of resistance to foreign power is significant to the last two categories; that of revolts against tax collectors and tax farmers. The resistance against tax collectors is both a

²⁵ Yves-Marie Bercé, "The Rebel Imagination. Traditions of Insurrection in South-West France," in *History of Peasant Revolts* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 244-319.

function of economic circumstances, such as a high grain prices or expensive alcohol, and also of a popular mentalité.²⁶

For Bercé, rumors and myths prevalent in peasant revolts reveal how peasants viewed ever-increasing rates of taxation. The most significant aspect of the popular myths was the desire to return to a golden age of feudalism. By justifying their rebellions as a defense of the king, peasants alleviated themselves from the guilt of rebellion. The common myth identified by Bercé is that of deceit of the king. In this myth, the king, by his nature a good and just ruler, had been deceived or robbed by his ravenous ministers into creating a new tax. A similar variation of this myth was the remission of taxation; a scenario in which peasants heard news that the king had eliminated the taxes of the peasants to release them from their burden, but tax collectors or tax farmers had suppressed this information for their own profit.²⁷ The nature of these myths is devastating to Porshnev's Marxist interpretation of peasant revolts. According to Bercé, peasant revolts, at best, were attempts to maintain the status quo, or, at worst, reactionary; the very antithesis of Marxism.

Despite both being *Annales* historians, Ladurie and Bercé come to different conclusions about the motivations of peasant revolts. Although both see peasant revolts as the result of the fusion of economic hardship and cultural influences, Ladurie sees peasant revolts as quasi-religious, such as the incident in Romans which sought to undermine the traditional order of society by inverting it. Bercé meanwhile would show the regressive nature of peasant revolts that only sought either to maintain the current way of life or return to a mythological golden age of feudalism. Ultimately, these differences can be reconciled; Ladurie's examination only targeted one province of France, whereas Bercé examined the whole of France. As such, Bercé had many more sources and examples to work with. Therefore, one can conclude that Bercé's examination holds more authority on the subject matter.

All the relevant literature having been reviewed, it remains to see where future historians have avenues for further research. The post-modernism movement which has been waning recently has none the less produced tools which can be used to look deeper into peasant revolts. While some historians have touched the subject, it still remains for a historian to do an examination into the discourses prevalent among the upper echelons of French society that created an ideology of peasant vis-à-vis the other estates in France. A discursive analysis may be done through an examination of the language used by provincial elites in mediums such as speeches to the public, written announcements, laws passed, and institutions created, style of dress, style of architecture, and any number of

²⁶ Yves-Marie Bercé, "Types of Riots in the Seventeenth Century," in *History of Peasant Revolts* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 169-243.

²⁷ Yves-Marie Bercé, "The Rebel Imagination," 244-319.

other forms of expression which seek to convey and maintain a system of subjection. Conversely, a specific discursive analysis of resistance is also open to research. The language that was used among the peasants to understand their station in life could offer a view into the possibilities available them, as it is know that people cannot do what they cannot conceive or speak about. Although the types of sources available are limited, discourses on peasant resistance can be gleamed if sources are properly read against the grain. This type of examination would not only give further insight into the peasant's world, but also allow historians to track the changing discourses of power up through the French Revolution of 1789.

Another similar area of study for seventeenth-century French historians is that of gender. Not only is there no specific research into women's roles in peasant revolts, but there also is lacking research into discourses of gender in peasants and their relationships with each other, as well as relations with the nobility. There are most assuredly sources which can be examined which reveal the status of women in early modern France, both in what the sources say, as well as what they do not say. In addition to these theoretical concepts of history open new avenues for research; there is also need for more focused history in the form of cultural history. Much of the historiography of peasant revolts has been through large scale models which have shown conflicting motivations. Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie sensed this fact and published *Carnival in Romans*, a book which dropped the bulk of his Annales research in favor of the singular event which revealed much of the cultural history of peasants. Natalie Zemon Davis has taken up this banner and written several articles of cultural history about various vignettes in the history of France²⁸; there is further work to be done. The Annales School of historical inquiry has also brought out questions of emotions and memory. These new types of history have left peasant revolts untouched.

After looking into historian's perceptions of peasant revolts, what can one ultimately take from it? The major approaches taken to understand peasant revolts began with an attempt to save them from condemnation and portray them as victims of oppression. Mousnier, a more conservative historian, rejected this outright and within his society of orders put the peasants back at the bottom of the totem pole. When the Annales historians approached the problem, the idea of placing peasants into a hierarchical structure was secondary to contextualizing the reasons for revolt. Although it may look as though Porshnev also tries to contextualize the reasons for revolt, it is only secondary to placing the peasants into a proper social category. This fundamental difference is what gives the Annales historians an edge. By disregarding classes and orders, Ladurie and Bercé are able to understand peasant revolts for what they were. Mousnier falls into the

same trap he accuses Porshnev of falling into; namely imposing a social hierarchy onto a society that is not so easily defined. In doing so both Porshnev and Mousnier must, whether consciously or subconsciously, interpret their evidence to fit these imposed social structures. It is true that peasants always did die, but it is precisely for that reason that historical inquiry into their thoughts and deeds is needed, less we as historians continue to let them die.

²⁸ See: Natalie Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).