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978-1-107-62537-2 - The Influence of England on the French Agronomes 1750-1789

André J. Bourde

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BY

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations are used in the text:

A.H.E.S.: *Annales d'histoire économique et sociale.*

B.P.E.: *Bibliothèque physico-économique.*

R.H.D.E.S.: *Revue d'histoire des doctrines économiques et sociales.*

R.H.E.S.: *Revue d'histoire économique et sociale.*

Jour. Oecon.: *Journal Oeconomique.*

Biographie: *Biographie Universelle* (Michaud).

Les Caractères originaux: *Les Caractères originaux de l'Histoire rurale française*, Marc Bloch.

Cours d'Agriculture: *Cours complet d'Agriculture ou Nouveau Dictionnaire d'Agriculture théorique et pratique, rédigé sur le plan de l'ancien Dictionnaire de l'Abbé Rozier*, M. le Baron de Morogues.

Dictionnaire d'Histoire Naturelle: *Dictionnaire raisonné, universel, d'Histoire Naturelle*, Valmont de Bomare.

Dictionnaire de l'Institut: *Dictionnaire d'Agriculture . . . par les membres de la section d'Agriculture de l'Institut.*

Eléments: *Eléments d'Agriculture*, Duhamel.

Essai: *Essai sur l'Amélioration des terres*, Patullo.

Mémoires d'Agriculture: *Mémoires d'Agriculture . . . publiés par la Société d'Agriculture du Département de la Seine* (1801-19).

Nouveau cours d'Agriculture: *Nouveau cours complet d'Agriculture théorique et pratique, par les membres de la section d'Agriculture de l'Institut.*

Traité: *Traité de la Culture des Terres*, Duhamel.

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PREFACE

IN the following pages an attempt is made to examine the relations between France and England in the second half of the eighteenth century in the sphere of agricultural literature. I have endeavoured in this way to broaden and investigate a field opened up by Wolters in a section of his *Agrarzustände und Agrarprobleme in Frankreich von 1700 bis 1790*. I venture to hope that the material now available will justify the emphasis thus placed on this aspect of the period. Although the work of the French Agronomes has not been altogether ignored by modern historians, it has not so far been considered as a subject worthy of an independent study. I have done no more than draw attention to it by pursuing the general trend of historical enquiry initiated by the work of such eminent scholars as George Weulersse and Marc Bloch.

There is an important distinction to be made between two parallel movements in eighteenth-century France—that of the Economistes and that of the Agronomes. In fact there was a school of theoretical or, as it was then called, *speculative*, agriculture with an independent life of its own, a school the existence of which can be traced in the extensive economic literature of the time. It is with this speculative movement, isolated from pure political economy, that this work is considered. It should therefore be considered as a study not of economics, but rather, of the history of agricultural technique. Its scope has, indeed, been limited to the study of a particular influence, the strongest one, on this movement; namely, that of English techniques. It might appear at first sight that, had the Agronomes ignored what was going on in England, they would still sooner or later have arrived at the same conclusions. This however, was not the case and their

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appreciation of the English agricultural revolution certainly spurred them to action and caused them to introduce remarkable innovations in practices which, it is now generally agreed, had been both backward and static. The fillip given by the study of English agricultural technique to French research in that field may be compared, with all due deference to literature, to the impetus which English writings gave to French pre-romanticism.

It is, then, within the domain of theory, or at most within the limits of practical but specialized experiments, that this study should find its place. The date 1789 is therefore an arbitrary one. Naturally, it was, in a sense, thanks to the Revolution that some of the ideals commonly shared by both the *Economistes* and the *Agronomes* were realized. But whereas the Revolution strongly affected the country's economic structure, it did not do so as far as theoretical husbandry was concerned. There is very little difference between the *Mémoires de la Société Royale d'Agriculture* of 1785 and the *Mémoires d'Agriculture* of 1802. The chemical discoveries of the beginning of the nineteenth century are, in this particular respect, much more of a revolution than the political Revolution. However, 1789 is convenient, as a date, and certainly not without significance.

The forerunners of the movement up to 1750 have been dealt with briefly. It has been necessary to go fully into the work of Duhamel du Monceau and his debt to Jethro Tull, as well as into the controversy he aroused. The principles of the *nouvelle culture* once explained, it was difficult to avoid all mention of their connection with problems of rural economy. Here the Physiocrats seem to have been supported by the *Agronomes*, rather than to have determined the Agronomic movement. It is at this point that it becomes necessary to trace fully the influence of England in the various domains of husbandry. Finally an account had to be given on the various means by which the *Agronomes* acquired this practical knowledge and of some of their achievements in

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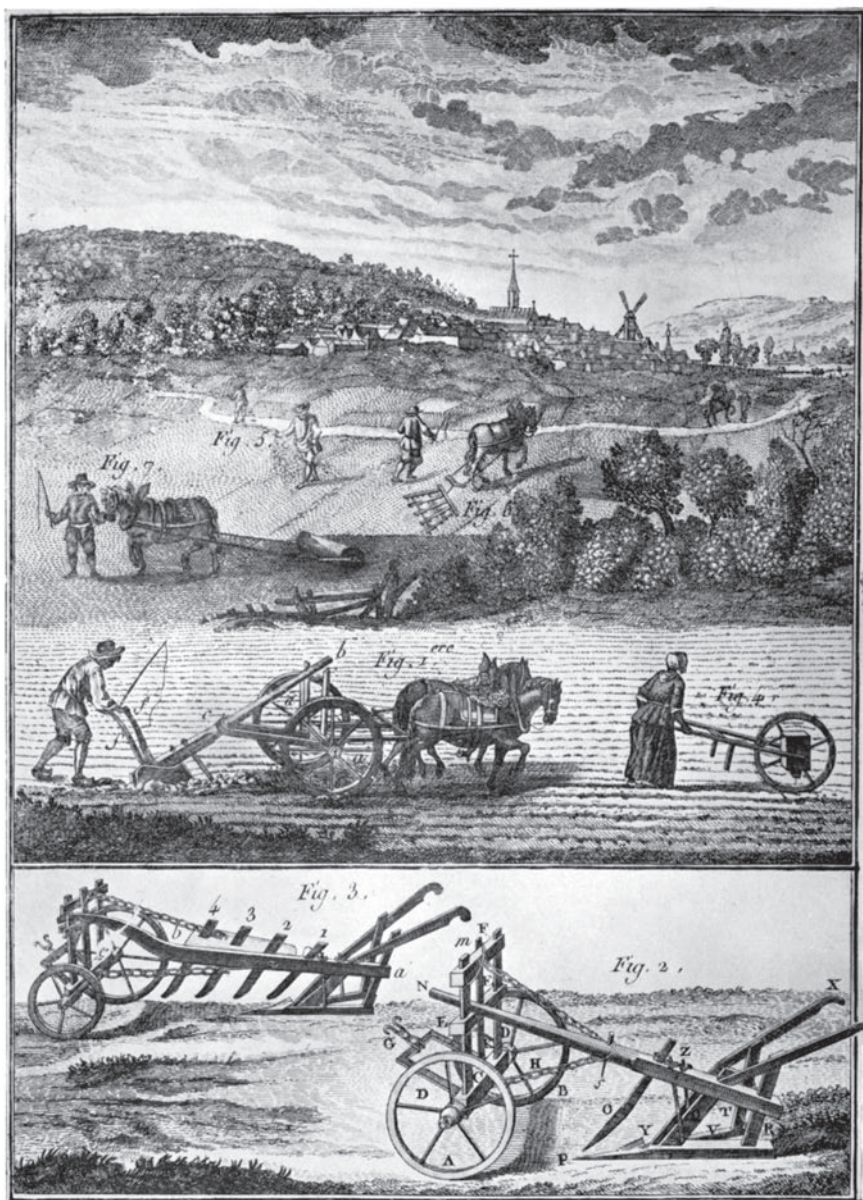
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PLATE I

AGRICULTURE: PLANCHES (*Encyclopédie Méthodique*)

The picture shows specimens of improved ploughs (particularly Tull's four-coultured plough, after Duhamel's *Traité*). Notice the use of horses in the fields of the roller, the harrow and Abbé Soumille's drill (*semoir à bras*) and the exclusive use of horses in agricultural works. This is a picture of farming *as it should be*, practised according to the principles of the new husbandry.

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farming, for the most part at the end of the period. Of the numerous publications dealing with pure agriculture it was necessary to select for analysis only the most valuable ones. Nor has it been possible to include references to a number of studies published since the completion of this work, though some of these are listed in the bibliography.

It is a pleasant duty to express my gratitude to scholars who guided my steps when, at the end of the war, I had the unique privilege of resuming my work under their direction in the inspiring atmosphere of Cambridge. I was fortunate enough to have my research supervised by Professor Herbert Butterfield whose kindness to his disciples is too well known to be recorded. Professor M. M. Postan's help in the later stages of my work was an invaluable asset and it was his encouragement that made this publication possible. I am grateful to the Syndics of the University Press for their willingness to include it in their series of Cambridge Studies in Economic History. Finally such degree of readability as it has achieved is due to its revision by my two Cambridge friends, Miss Ursula Somervell and Mr Anthony Snellgrove. For their patience and devotion I cannot thank them enough.

May 1951

A.J.B.