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Rondo Cameron, 1925–2001

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Rondo Cameron died on the first day of the third millennium from a heart attack after a long illness. He was born in Linden, Texas, into a family of Scottish stock. He fought as a pilot during the Second World War and, thereafter, studied economics at Yale University thanks to a grant from the GI bill. After obtaining his M.A. degree in 1949, he went on to the University of Chicago, where he received his Ph.D. in 1952 with a dissertation on French investment abroad. His thesis director was Earl J. Hamilton and his research in Paris was made possible by a Fulbright grant. Rondo kept working on the themes of his dissertation, which in the end, polished and enlarged, became his celebrated *France and the Economic Development of Europe, 1800–1914* (1st ed. Princeton University Press, 1961), later translated into several languages, French and Spanish among them. This monograph already exhibited what would be Cameron's trademarks: thorough research, intellectual ambition, excellent writing style, interest in banking history and in cultural factors of economic development, together with a fond love for the Old World, in particular France.

Rondo taught for many years at the University of Wisconsin where, teaming up with Eric Lampard, he founded the Graduate Program in Economic History, gathering disciples such as: John Coatsworth, Franklin Mendels, Alan Olmstead, Carlos Peláez, David Ringrose, Richard Rudolph, Richard Tilly and others. I was lucky enough to land there in 1963. At that time, in addition to teaching his courses and seminars (one with Lampard on 'Methods and Sources in Economic History', another on financial history), Cameron was working on *Banking in the Early Stages of Industrialization* (Oxford University Press, 1967), with the collaboration of Olga Crisp, Hugh Patrick and Richard Tilly, but with himself as the originator of the main ideas and contributing most of the writing. This book is a remarkable effort at comparative banking history and a brave attempt at building a typology of banking systems in the initial stages of growth with the aim of deriving conclusions that could lead to normative judgements. The idea that history is a field of experience for the social sciences, whose role is to extract positive conclusions from which normative statements could be deduced was among his firmly rooted beliefs. With all due caution, Cameron said in this book that, although no '"one best" banking system for all times and places [existed ...], some solutions [were clearly] more successful than others'. As a reviewer said at the time, in this matter blood was

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patently thicker than wine: Cameron graded the Scottish banking system, free and decentralised, near the top, while the French, excessively centralised and under the Bank of France's thumb, got a barely passing mark.

The number of countries studied in *Banking in the Early Stages* was necessarily limited: England, Scotland, Belgium, France, Germany, Russia and Japan. Some years later a second volume appeared: *Banking and Economic Development. Some Lessons of History* (OUP, 1972), whose subtitle shows Cameron's utilitarian conception of history, and where he counted on a new set of disciples and collaborators. The country sample was enlarged with a clear tilt towards the European periphery (Austria, Italy, Spain and Siberia), but with a chapter on Japan, a revision of the one in the former book, another on the United States and another on Louisiana. The possibilities of quantitative comparison were lesser in the second volume since the quality of the available data was lower, but this enlargement of the sample reinforced Cameron's earlier conclusions, as the new book's introduction made clear. Cameron subsequently edited two vast collections on the topic of banking and economic development: *Financing Industrialization* (E. Elgar, 1991), and *International Banking* (OUP, 1992).

Cameron's textbook *A Concise Economic History of the World. From Paleolithic Times to the Present* (OUP, 1989) was a great success. Product of his years of teaching and his copious reading, it is, in spite of some idiosyncratic traits, such as his relative lack of interest in American history, the kind of book that only a leading member of the profession could write. As was to be expected, its treatment of European history and that of the 'Industrial Revolution' – an expression he abhorred and that only for the sake of brevity I am using here – and after is superb.

His work was not only books. It is to be hoped that some day his students will collect his best articles and edit a volume that should, no doubt, have repercussions. His pieces on nineteenth-century economic history, on the causes of backwardness, on the entrepreneurial function and human capital, were truly pioneering. His disciples and colleagues have developed his ideas, but it can also be said about them what Clapham said of the Industrial Revolution: it is a lemon that, although thrice squeezed, still has a lot of juice left.

The value of his achievement was widely recognised. Although timid and certainly not garrulous, he was sociable, and collaborated with a large number of scholars of many continents and cultures. For many years he was the editor of *The Journal of Economic History*, and was a member and vice-president of the Executive Council of the International Economic History Association. He was a visiting professor at Glasgow, Paris, Santiago, and many other places. After a stay of several years in Chile, he was offered a William Rand Kenan Professorship at Emory University in 1969. He accepted and thereafter resided in Atlanta.

Those of us who knew him well shall never forget him. Not only was he an accomplished scholar, he also was a whole character: he could be at the same time shy and blunt, sensitive and hard, but always kind-hearted, modest and sincere. He was demanding of his students but much more demanding with himself. His fierce

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independence sometimes bordered on eccentricity. He hated neckties and, at some point, forswore them, adopting embroidered shirts and turtlenecks and donned a variety of pectorals or pendants which were, according to him, vastly superior to the traditional knot. His unusual name was of his own choosing: he liked the sound and the musical resonance. His aversion to the term 'Industrial Revolution' no doubt seemed original to many. His love for Scotland ran deep and every year he visited there, attending Clan Cameron meetings, wearing the tartan and playing golf. He was a sportsman: in addition to golf, he played tennis and skied until he broke his leg and a slight limp hampered his mobility. He was hospitable to his students, with the unfailing help of Claydean, and became a true friend of those he appreciated; I would daresay all the more so if they were foreigners. No wonder he left a school of intellectual friends and disciples, because his human qualities matched his intellectual ones.

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