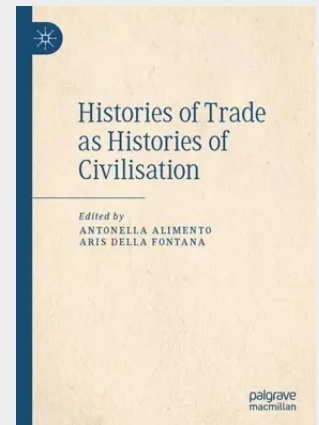


Histories of Trade as Histories of Civilisation

This edited collection explores the histories of trade, a peculiar literary genre that emerged in the context of the historiographical and cultural changes promoted by the *histoire philosophique* movement. It marked a discontinuity with erudition and antiquarianism, and interacted critically with universal history. By comparing and linking the histories of individual peoples within a common historical process, this genre enriched the reflection on civilisation that emerged during the long eighteenth century. Those who looked to the past wanted to understand the political constitutions and manners most appropriate to commerce, and grasp the recurring mechanisms underlying economic development. In this sense, histories of trade constituted a declination of eighteenth-century political economy, and thus became an invaluable analytical and practical tool for a galaxy of academic scholars, journalists, lawyers, administrators, diplomats and government ministers whose ambition was to reform the political, social and economic structure of their nations. Moreover, thanks to these investigations, a lucid awareness of historical temporality and, more particularly, the irrepressible precariousness of economic hegemonies, developed. However, as a field of tension in which multiple and even divergent intellectual sensibilities met, this literary genre also found space for critical assessments that focused on the ambivalence and dangers of commercial civilisation. Examining the complex relationship between the production of wealth and civilisation, this book provides unique insights for scholars of political economy, intellectual history and economic history.

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