

Fabrice Bensimon, *Artisans Abroad. British Migrant Workers in Industrialising Europe, 1815-1870* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023). 286 pp. ISBN 9780198835844.

DOI: 10.52024/tseg.18794

In this book, Fabrice Bensimon, professor of British History at Sorbonne University in Paris, combines the history of the transfer of industrial skills and technology with migration and labor history. The subtitle is somewhat misleading, as “Europe” is actually confined to “France” (with a sidestep, to the Cockerill family in Verviers and Liège, Belgium). Continental – in this case, more specifically: French – industrialization in the nineteenth century was highly dependent on the import of technologies and entrepreneurship from Great Britain. While acknowledging the importance of entrepreneurship in this transfer, Bensimon focusses on the contribution of British artisans and laborers, who, although quantitatively less important than immigrants from other neighboring countries such as Belgium and Italy, were qualitatively decisive in implanting the new industries in France.

The scope is much broader than the transfer of skills and technology, however. This is a study of labor migration in both its economic and social, as well as cultural dimensions. The first two chapters on the economics of labor migration are followed by chapters on gender; language and cultural practices; transnational political radicalism; and integration or rejection of “foreigners”. Revealing the hidden histories of both industrialization and migration, this pioneering book is based on meticulous research in a range of different sources (the list of consulted archives and printed contemporary works is eight pages long). It has been long in the making. The author spent many years of research on both sides of the Channel, and he has published on this subject before. The book does not just reproduce earlier articles, however. It is a synthesis of its own, in which, of course, parts of research published before are incorporated.

This work is meant to be a “people’s history”, or perhaps more precisely: a history of people’s agency. As far as possible, research has been focussed on the voices of migrants themselves, which are scarce, as historians in this field know, and can only be heard indirectly. “Voices” of migrant workers in writings and other utterances were found, though often from individual artisans not connected to the migrant groups that are the main objects of research. They are nevertheless included

as illustrations of the itineraries and experiences of migrants. One way to find out more about them was via information provided by family historians and local historical societies. A curious example is the 'Australian Society of the Lacemakers of Calais', created by descendants of British lacemakers, who had first migrated from Nottingham to Calais as lace workers but, not being able to find employment back home after the industrial slump in 1848, had emigrated further to New South Wales. Bensimon even notes (p. 252): 'A lot of what we know about the Calais British lacemakers has been exhumed by this society, without which these migrants would probably have remained in the shadows.'

For me, it was new that the famous lace industry of Calais (now one of its touristic assets, for instance, in the Museum of Lace and Fashion) was introduced there by British lacemakers from Nottingham. Exchange of technology, knowledge, and entrepreneurship went hand in hand with the circulation of thousands of workers between these centers of lacemaking, among whom many women. As in many other industries, gender segregation at work in the lace industry in France was copied from the British example. The interconnectedness of the lace industries in Nottinghamshire and the Calais region is one of the best researched cases in this book. Other cases are the jute and linen industries in western and northwestern France (Nord, Brittany, Normandy), relying on migrant workers from Dundee and Ulster; iron and machine industries, in which the skills of the trade were brought to the continent by artisans, such as "puddlers" from South-Wales; and the railway workers ("navvies"), which were taken to France by British entrepreneurs to build the railways.

For labor historians interested in the political aspects, there is much to be gained from chapter 5 on the interactions of French revolutionaries, British Chartists, and other radicals. The chapter opens with a perfect example of the kind of painstaking research Bensimon undertook to reveal something of the lives and trajectories of these border-crossing migrants, in this case of George Good (1824-1848), son of a Brighton Chartist, who died as a participant during the French Revolution of 1848, in Paris. Thanks to Bensimon, 'he briefly emerged out of the archive after a life in obscurity'. While evidence of "contagion" with trade unionism by British workers is scant (though not absent), proof of political interaction is abundant. British migrants in France participated in the Chartist 'Land Plan', and the Chartist newspaper *Northern Star* circulated among them. It was even read aloud in the factory of the *Société linière du Finistère* in Landerneau (Brittany), a

practice not uncommon in other factories and workshops. Some twenty years before British and French workers decided to set up an *International Workingmen's Association* in 1864 (known as the First International), there were attempts to associate internationally.

The migration of British workers, as analyzed in this book, is another example of the transnational dimensions of labor markets, labor relations, and labor movements in the nineteenth century. Though not so long ago, these aspects were studied primarily on a national basis, while a more recent trend in labor history emphasizes the transnational aspects. Bensimon's book is a welcome addition to this trend. The internationalization of labor movements, as in the First International mentioned above, was inextricably linked to the transnational character of the labor markets of the time. From the late nineteenth century, this period of trans- or internationalism was followed by a period of nationalizing labor and labor movements, as a consequence of the increasing prominence of the national state in the organization of society and the control of its borders. Today, these national arrangements are under growing pressure by new, seemingly unprecedented migration movements. It is one of the merits of Bensimon's migration histories that he draws attention to an earlier period of migratory exchange between Great Britain and the Continent. The context was completely different, however. His concluding remark, that 'this book may also contribute to current debates' on migration, however sympathetic, therefore seems a bit artificial and a-historical. There is enough in his book to enjoy from a historical perspective alone.

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Peter Stabel, *The Fabric of the City. A Social History of Cloth Manufacture in Medieval Ypres* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2022). 278 pp.
ISBN 9782503600512.

DOI: 10.52024/tseg.18795

What did the cloth industry look like in medieval Ypres? What does its rise and decline tell us about the forces that shaped manufacturing in the region during the medieval period? Peter Stabel's book attempts to answer these questions using surviving documentary evidence. Mainstream work on Flemish cloth manufacturing has viewed it largely