

## Gustave Bloch (1848-1923), a historian in Marlotte

In the middle of the small scholar colony established in Marlotte, an important figure stands out who has been eclipsed in history by the notoriety of his son: Gustave Bloch. In 1919, upon retirement, he followed his friend Gustave Lanson, director of the *École Normale supérieure*, to this small village on the southern edge of the Fontainebleau forest. But who was Gustave Bloch?

### An exemplary academic career

Son of a teacher who became director of the Jewish school in Strasbourg, Gustave Bloch was born in Fegersheim on July 21, 1848. He entered the *École Normale* in 1868 (major of his promotion!) but his studies were interrupted by the 1870 war. He then enlisted to defend the city of Strasbourg and, in the process, opted for the French citizenship (1872). Valedictorian of the literature aggregation in 1873, he taught at the Besançon high school before leaving for Rome, joining the new promotion of the *Ecole française*. In 1876, he was given the responsibility of teaching a course in Greek and Roman antiquities at the Literature school of Lyon university. It was in that capital city of the Gaul empire that he married Sarah Ebstein in 1878, and that his sons, Marc and Louis, were born. Carole Fink, in Marc Bloch, *A life at the service of history* (1997), recalls that Gustave Bloch was then “a popular and



respected lecturer who received the highest ratings for his teaching.” He left Lyon in 1888 to teach at the *École Normale*, before being transferred to the Sorbonne (1904) where he taught until his retirement in 1920. Ultimate consecration, he was appointed to the rank of Knight of the Legion of Honor in 1897, then promoted to Officer in 1903.



### A great historian of the Roman world

Gustave Bloch's work is devoted almost entirely to Roman antiquity. According to specialists of the time, his most important writings are his thesis on the *Origins of the Roman Senate* (1883) and volume 1 of the History of France published under the direction of Lavissee (*Celtic and Roman Gaul*, 1900). However his study on *The Roman Empire - Evolution and decadence* (Flammarion, 1922) was also very well received by specialists: “it gives us in three hundred pages a clear and substantial summary, the reading of

which is as easy as it is fruitful. All those who have followed M. Bloch's lessons will find there the merits of the teaching from which they once benefited..." (A. Merlin, *Journal des savants*, November-December 1922, pp. 271). Gustave Bloch was also renowned for his articles published in collections and miscellanies, as well as in various history journals (*Revue historique*, *Revue des études anciennes*). His last work, barely sketched before his death, was completed by Jérôme Carcopino: *The Roman Republic from 146 to 44 BC*, and published in the General History of G. Glotz (1929).

### Retirement in Marlotte...

It was in the *Puits Carré* house, 2 rue Murger in Marlotte, at the corner of today's rue Armand Charnay and rue Henry Murger, that Gustave Bloch moved with his wife at the end of the First World War. He worked on various projects there, Took long walks in the forest with his wife, assiduously visited his university friends Lanson and Fougères, and entertained his family. But, like Gustave Lanson, he was severely impacted by the death of his son Louis, pediatrician at the Hospital for Sick Children, who died of cancer on March 16, 1922. His students and successors thus summarize the activity of his retirement, in the preface to the last book which he could only barely outline: "Gustave Bloch set to work in his studious retirement in Marlotte, with joyful ardor, when he was surprised by death (in December 1923)."



Photo de la maison de Marlotte



Gustave, son épouse, Marc et peut-être Mme Lanson

Gustave Bloch was buried in the Montparnasse cemetery on December 5, 1923. His wife later continued to stay in Marlotte where she regularly hosted her son Marc, the great historian and founder of the *École des Annales* with Lucien Febvre, who was eventually shot to death by the Germans in 1944 .

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