

they do not remember that they are about something more than economics, more than individual profit. He ends up by reminding that we are about creating communities that are committed to making life worth living for all their members.

To conclude this review, I consider this short book as a brilliant and concentrates description of the current situation of the European Union explaining the past and present and even giving future scenarios of what can be the EU in a few years. The author plays all over the text with metaphors that make easier and understandable for the reader to follow his arguments. His clear view shows us a problematic situation (humiliation) where in his opinion all countries have been affected and therefore they play an essential role in order to solve it. We can perceive how Smith invites the lector to make a personal reflexion in order to understand the gravity of the situation. We are being humiliated and this is the time to do something in respect, something to revive the initial essence of the European Union.

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Jacques Le Goff: *Must We Divide History Into Periods?* Columbia University Press, 2015, 184 pages

Many basic aspects of human culture are closely related to the fact that people have to live their lives in time. In fact, the very act of colonizing time is amongst the foundations of all modern civilizations and societies. We are struggling to make sense of the endless time-flow, that we have no choice but to inhabit, in order to interpret the changes and continuities, and to attach meanings and interpretations to events in our shared and private pasts. Dividing time and history into different periods is amongst the most crucial activities in this sense-making effort.

Eminent French historian Jacques Le Goff (1924–2014) dedicated his 2013 essay precisely to the topic of periodization of history. This text had to become the very last work that he was able to prepare for publication himself. It

is not very long, but highly inspirational, neat and sharp, filled with expertise, and not far from being even provocative. The essay is composed of seven chapters and aims to answer a simple but important question: “Is history really divided into parts?”

In order to provide his answer, Le Goff starts with ancient periodizations of the Old Testament and early Christianity. In his approach to periodization of history, Saint Augustine uses six ages of human individual development, from infancy to the old age. According to Le Goff, the world of the Middle Ages is therefore filled with pessimism, stemming from the phrase *mundus senescit* – world is getting old. In this worldview, there was no place for any explicit notion of progress, until the middle of 18th century. However, Le Goff dedicates much of his effort to show that there were some signs of the “progressivist” interpretation of historical development already present in the Middle Ages.

In the second chapter, Le Goff discusses the birth of the concept of “Middle Ages” in the 14th century. It was used to delimit certain distance from the previous age, which was seen as somehow a “middle” epoch between the idealized antiquity and a new era, which had yet to come. Any historical periodization, the author reminds us, is very often ideological, as it provides an interpretation and evaluation of the historical development. Periodization is inherently artificial and provisional, for it also changes itself in time.

The need for historical periodization, in Le Goff’s perspective, results from the establishment of historical education at schools and universities, and he provides a review of these processes in the third chapter. Surprisingly, teaching history is quite a late achievement, and the subject of history was not widely taught until the end of 18th century. Then, during the 19th century, Jules Michelet’s work gave birth to the contemporary conception of the Middle Ages as a dark age, defined in contrast with the later period of “Renaissance”, being (supposedly) the time of growing enlightenment, reason and humanism.

From the fourth chapter onwards, Le Goff proceeds to one specific aim of the essay,

showing that such an approach to the Middle Ages and so-called Renaissance is not correct. This is the provocative aspect of the reviewed essay, which I have mentioned earlier. Le Goff argues that in fact, the “Renaissance” was not a specific historical period itself. Rather, we should speak of a “long Middle Age”, which is delimited by the late antiquity (3rd to 7th century) and mid-18th century (publication of *Encyclopaedia* in France). Le Goff discusses many aspects of the so-called Renaissance, sometimes to show that they were neither groundbreaking nor historically new, including the orientation towards reason and the centrality of human individual. The Renaissance is, in his eyes, certainly an important era, which is to be seen as specific and important, but it was not in any case marked with profound social or economic transformations. In other words, there are more continuities between the Middle Ages and the “Renaissance”, than there are differences. The Western “long Middle Ages” should be seen as a continual period following the fall of Rome, which includes several different renaissances, some of them longer and some of them shorter, sometimes more and sometimes less profound or influential (and the period we are used to call “the Renaissance” is just the last one in a row, and perhaps the most prominent). Rather than being a separate period itself, the Renaissance is an era when certain traits of the new modern period started to manifest themselves, including phenomena like fashion, colonization, national languages, or dietary customs.

In the brief conclusion, titled “Periodization and Globalization”, Le Goff dedicates several paragraphs to the contemporary discussions about “world history”. He does not advocate the elimination of historical periods from historical thought, but he proposes to combine them with Braudel’s concept of *la longue durée*. Historical periodization can only be conceived in relation to certain civilizational areas, and studies in world history should then aim to uncover similarities between periods in different cultural contexts.

I stumbled upon Le Goff’s essay just exactly at the time when I was trying to wrap my thoughts about something that I have

provisionally called “ethno-historiography”, in relation to analysis of oral history interviews, which is part of my doctoral thesis. Periodization seems to be a profound part of the “ethno-historiography” in oral histories. For instance, interview participants naturally and simply refer to general “pre-war”, “war” and “post-war” periods. They seem to know what they are talking about, the knowledge is self-evident, and the basic structure does not only function for time periodization, but inseparably also as the basis for plot development and life story dynamics. Ruptures between the periods are moving the narrative forwards. Outbreak of the war and the liberation several years later mark the borders of the three periods, even though these events often took time on more or less different dates than the political historiography is teaching us. In other words, it is probably very natural and routine approach to past time, at least in Western society, to divide history into periods, and ordinary people themselves tend to do it when they are asked to speak about the(ir) past. There is a certain parallelism of the “great history” and “personal history”; people narrate their pasts on the background of political events, and historians sometime narrate history personified in the story of one person. Individual and collective dimension of human lives merge, as the very distinction is transcended through imagination and metaphors. Le Goff’s essay does not really discuss any of these issues, but it provides basis for such discussions. As I have mentioned earlier, the text starts with the ancient approaches to periodization of history, and amongst the very influential periodizations is Saint Augustine’s conception of history according to the human individual development. Le Goff also acknowledges (albeit marginally) that periodization had become a rule not only for Western historians, but also for anyone else who is providing an account of the past.

Jacques Le Goff’s last work is indeed a thought-provoking and inspirational text, rooted in deep knowledge of secondary literature not only from historiography, but also philosophy (Kristeller, Ricoeur) and historical sociology (Elias). It is a respectable finale of the long and fruitful career of the great scholar,

perhaps one of the most important historians of the 20th century. Even though the essay is meant as a contribution to an expert historiographical debate, it is a pleasure to read even for a non-historian, and – in my opinion – deserves to be read by sociologists, anthropologists,

philosophers and everyone else, who share some kind of interest in different human ways of conquering and grasping the times that people have lived through.

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