

Reviews & Notices

Le Goff, Jacques. *Il cielo sceso in terra. Le radici medievali dell'Europa*. Translated by Francesco Maiello (original French: *L'Europe est-elle née au Moyen Âge?*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2003; first Italian ed., Roma-Bari: Editori Laterza, 2004), Roma-Bari: Editori Laterza, 2023. pp. 352. (I Robinson / Letture) ISBN 978-88-581-5179-2. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.55997/3007pslxi186br1>

After God's creative act, fashioning the universe, nothing occurs in a vacuum. All have their contexts pointing to their beginnings. At times, these origins greatly explain the present state of things. These propositions are reflected in the work of Jacques Le Goff entitled *Il Cielo sceso in terra. Le radici medievali dell'Europa*.

Jacques Le Goff was born in Toulon on January 1, 1924, and died in Paris on April 1, 2014. Much of his ninety years of existence was spent studying Medieval Western society. In the academe, he is considered one of the authorities when it comes to the Middle Ages. This reputation is backed by publications in the said specialization. Some of his works include: *The Intellectuals of the Middle Ages* (1957), *The Late Middle Ages* (1967), *The Civilization of the Medieval West* (1964), *Merchants and Bankers of the Middle Ages* (1976), *Family and Kinship in Medieval Italy* (Mulino). Le Goff's treatment of historical events remains faithful to the historiographical school that formed him: the Annales School of Marc Bloch. In his work, Le Goff employed different disciplines, dissecting many layers of an epoch by exposing its cultural, economic, sociological, anthropological, and religious dimensions. Through this interdisciplinary historical process, Le Goff recognized human decisions, how they are formed, and their consequences within the broader context of human events.

Le Goff outrightly presents the purpose of his book: "I want ... to demonstrate that Europe first appeared in the Middle Ages, both as a reality and

as a representation, and that this was the decisive period for the birth, infancy, and youth of Europe, even if the men of these centuries had neither the goal nor the will to build a united Europe.” He realizes this intent through the six chapters of the book, each covering the clustered centuries of the classical periodization of the Middle Ages (from the 4th century to the 15th century).

The First Chapter, entitled “The Conception of Europe,” covers the 4th-8th century. The Greco-Roman and Christian (Patristic) beginnings of the Middle Ages reveal the transformative effect of Christianity at the very start of this Age and to the conception of Europe. The works of St. Augustine and St. Isidore of Seville prove to be vital in the Christianization of different people in rural areas, both remnants and invaders of what used to be the Western Roman Empire. This creates a distinct character and consciousness among Christians in the West (Latin Christianity) from those in the East (Byzantine Christianity), coinciding with the drawing of geographical boundaries between and among these Christians.

The Second Chapter on the “Aborted Europe: The Carolingian World” deals with the 8th-10th century Carolingian Renaissance. This movement was initiated by Charlemagne, wishing to revive the Western Roman Empire. In the unified territories under Charlemagne, mostly Frankish areas, he implemented the revival of Greco-Roman culture through education, religious, and governmental structural reforms, through the intellectual and social resources that survived under the care of the Church. Though Charlemagne failed in the creation of Europe, his initiatives helped in the spread of Latin culture and monasticism (institutions that served as means in rolling out these revivals).

The Third Chapter discusses the “Europe of Dreams and the Europe of Power in the Year One Thousand.” From the 10th to the 11th century, different kingdoms of the continent began building churches, reviving pilgrimages, and peace movements against impending wars due to feudalism. Prominent among these efforts were those of the powerful German kings and emperors of the Ottonian Empire. Despite the continues influx of Scandinavians from the North and the rising tension brought by the feudal system, a vision of united Christian Europe began to shape.

The Fourth Chapter is dedicated on the “Feudal Europe” within the 11th-12th century. The feudal system allowed progress in agriculture, village, and parish organization. This period refined the social hierarchy with the nobility insisting on privileges based on blood lineage, laying the foundation of future nation-states. Gregory VII’s reforms of the Church (Sacralization of marriage) and ecclesiastical hierarchy (bishops and priests) served the purpose of further

elevating feudal Europe to a degree of sophistication. The enhancement in the social structure would give birth to the medieval cities, replete with commerce and urban institutions demanding new professions.

The Fifth Chapter focuses on the “Beautiful Europe of Cities and Universities” in the 13th century, the high point of medieval Europe in terms of cultural, economic, and intellectual life. Cities began to flourish through different commercial and educational activities. With the establishment of universities in different major cities, the advancement of learning and critical inquiry was inevitable. In the religious sphere, the Church confirmed the foundation of mendicant orders ready to do ministries outside cloisters, beyond hills and mountains, in the cities and universities. This century is often seen as the foundation of a European union grounded on shared culture and knowledge, albeit with social hierarchy and wars.

The Sixth Chapter concludes the work with an elaboration between the “Autumn of the Middle Ages and Spring of New Times” from the 14th to the 15th century. With the pinnacle reached in the previous century came the decline of Medieval Europe. Several factors, both natural and man-made disasters, contributed to the end of Medieval Europe, such as famine, plagues, and war. These triggered a sequence of events leading to the economic, social, and demographic collapse of Europe. Even Christianity was not spared from being shaken by new heretical and schismatic movements from its own ranks. In these same dark periods, however, hope emerged through the arrival of news about the New World overseas leading to the global Europe.

Through these six chapters, Le Goff demonstrates the development of Middle Ages guided by Christian values, and the intertwined Ecclesiastical-Civil relationship: from its growth from the remnants of antiquity, early revival of what was in the emergence of a unique characteristic that truly belongs to its age (rural and urban development), and culminating in the threshold of a new age (modern global scale). All these are analyzed in view of understanding the contemporary (21st century) predicaments of the continent’s institutions and concepts. These movements and progress in the continent found in Christianity a steady and fertile ground to sustain its development, through her values that descended from heaven to earth.

Le Goff presents a 1100-year history (from the 4th century to the 15th century) in a way still comprehensible to his readers, albeit with the seemingly daunting task of communicating thousands of facts and events spread through a long span of history. In dividing each chapter into intelligible and sizeable parts,

his readers can easily break down and unpack his claims. Linking his discussion with concrete European contemporary situations, concepts, and institutions readily facilitates comprehension. His presentations and arguments are backed by reputable sources such as the works of Marc Bloch, Fernand Braudel, Lucien Febvre, and Umberto Eco. His bibliography includes not only major works of historians but even works pertaining to specific details of discussion, such as agriculture, animals, millenarism, death, etc. His bibliography reflects the manner through which he expounds on historical period by presenting miniscule and seemingly insignificant events and details that truly made a significant societal impact. The Europe of today, as Le Goff argues, for example, is greatly shaped by the Christian values she embraced in her beginnings in the Middle Ages. This feat is not achieved in an instance, but through little actions accumulated together throughout Europe's existence. In the book, Le Goff does not only write about the decisions made by prominent historical figures such as the popes, kings, and nobilities. He substantiates the Annales School's conviction through the accounts of daily life of common people, such as peasants, migrants, weavers, bankers, university students, etc., greatly contributing to events of kingdoms and the continent at large, with repercussions well beyond their immediate context.

Le Goff effectively traces the roots of Contemporary Europe to her beginnings in the Middle Ages by remaining faithful in the historiographical school to which he belongs. He belongs to the Annales School, a historiographical school that treats historical events through the exposition of the different layers of events, either long-term, medium-term or short-term events, these events (may be distant and putative incidents) form mentalities and attitudes that shape the decisions made by people, and eventually the course of history. With the long effects of medieval events, as the author demonstrated through his narrations, the volume supports the unconventional periodization of Le Goff of the Medieval era. As for Le Goff, Middle Ages did not end in the arrival of Europeans in the Americas. It extends to the Industrial and French Revolutions of the eighteenth century, with the Renaissance, in between, being a mode of acceleration (more than a rupture) of the transformation of Medieval institutions. The present volume can aid readers in understanding Le Goff's alternative periodization, known in historiography as the Long Middle Ages, as it illustrates how medieval institutions, ideas, and historical processes shape the continent for centuries thereafter.

In this book, Le Goff is able to find the golden chain that connects historical events in the Middle Ages: the realization of heavenly Christian values in the temporal sphere. Through this, Le Goff overcomes the challenge of presenting an entirety of an epoch (Middle Ages), and exhibiting many ideas without obscuring

their meaning and importance. In weaving a context from the Middle Ages, Le Goff effectively wrote a historical text on the Contemporary Europe, tracing the roots of the latter from heaven that came down to earth.

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Burton, Neel. *The Gang of Three: Socrates, Plato, Aristotle*. Acheron Press, 2023. pp. 392. ISBN: 978-1913260422.

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Why bother with the “Gang of Three”? The author’s choice of words to title the book may somehow *offend* some since the “Three” being referred to are considered great, if not arguably the greatest of Greek philosophers. It may not sound too formal but Burton, as one reads the book, has a way to convey his message: timely and timeless philosophy which has hugely impacted western civilization need not be formal in the way we are used to in standard classical Greek philosophy textbooks. In the outset, the title may seem to imply roughness which leads to violence, dark activities which preserves authority, and power maneuverings which protect self-interests. All of these are not present in the overall message of the book. The author conveys the power of philosophy in a way that can be traced back to the great figures of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. Burton communicates that anyone serious enough in doing philosophy cannot possibly bypass the “Gang of Three.” Almost all aspects of western civilization were influenced by them: religion, metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, politics, art, law, education among others. The title alone makes the readers ponder: what makes the three so impactful in the present even after centuries of death?

The author challenges the readers of his work to dig deep into the past, not for nostalgia and turning back the hands of time which lead to sadness and despair. Burton writes in a way that leads the readers to the past, the history of classical philosophy, and invites the readers to establish his roots: knowledge is good but without wisdom, it is not saved. Not everything that is good is necessarily saved. Apparent goods are goods but not paths to wisdom. The “Gang of Three” has given us points for reference to distinguish the two and thus to strengthen our roots. Here lies the contribution of the book.

This enables us to face the present with renewed vigor and fresh hope. Philosophy is not a discipline disconnected from current events and burning issues of the day. Burton explains the philosophies of the “Three” as confronting their present with so much power that their influence goes beyond even after their deaths. This goes to show that a lover of wisdom is well rooted in the present