



Jacques Le Goff, *In Search of Sacred Time. Jacobus de Voragine and the Golden Legend*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2014 (originally *A la recherche du temps sacré. Jacques de Voragine et la Légende Dorée*, Perrin, 2011). 214 pp.

My first impression of Jacques Le Goff's book was that it was surprisingly compact (i.e., slim). Only a master of medieval studies could crystallize *The Golden Legend* (Latin: *Legenda aurea* or *Legenda sanctorum*), dating from ca. 1260 and including 178 chapters that take up more than one thousand pages in a modern edition, in less than two hundred pages. In addition to the size of the research object itself, there is a vast research tradition on *The Golden Legend*, the major part of which is in English, French and Italian. Le Goff notes the existence of the tradition although he makes direct references to it quite sparingly.

In the preface of his book, Le Goff first introduces several categories of medieval literature in which *The Golden Legend* has been placed by various scholars. Le Goff's key idea is that the *The Golden Legend* belongs in none of them exclusively. He sets the text in the category of encyclopedias, although according to Le Goff the legend is not an encyclopedic *summa* in a traditional sense: it is a *summa* on time. This *summa* consists of three dimensions of time; cyclical (according to the *temporale* of Christian liturgy), linear (according to the *sanctorale* or succession of the lives of the saints) and eschatological time (the road on which humanity travels toward Judgment Day). Both cyclical and linear time are, he argues, oriented toward the end of time, i.e., eschatological time. Le Goff emphasizes the complexity of time layers and points out that each of these three principal times can be divided further into several segments. According to Le Goff, this comprehensive understanding of time is a very original perception of Jacobus de Voragine (ca. 1230–1298).

The subject of Le Goff's study, *The Golden Legend*, is, as said, gigantic, and as such, extraordinarily demanding. Le Goff goes elegantly through the content

of the *Golden Legend* following Jacobus de Voragine's work from its beginning to the end although not every chapter or every feast day is included in the analysis. The reason why a certain saint or feast day receives its own chapter but another does not is not always clearly pointed out. Le Goff's choices, however, lead the reader to the conclusion that Jacobus was an original and important medieval thinker and writer on time.

The processing of the idea of *summa* on time takes the main role in Le Goff's discussion. Nevertheless, Le Goff occasionally offers sharp glimpses of sacred place and space, both of which are connected to time. As a reader, I would have appreciated an even wider analysis of the relationship between sacred time and space. This would have given extra depth to the book. Another highly interesting theme on which Le Goff makes numerous remarks but does not follow up in depth is the sensory experience of time in relation to the liturgy of the Church.

The language of the book is vivid and the translation from French into English is mostly well carried out. Among the clear sentences and strong arguments, there are some unfortunate mistakes presumably made by the author, which have an effect on the reading experience as well as the trustworthiness of the facts given in the text. For example on page 16 Le Goff says: 'On the other hand, Jacobus de Voragine seems not to have been aware of one of his own contemporaries, Guillaume Durand, the bishop of Mende (ca. 1230–1296), probably the greatest liturgist of the Middle Ages,' but on the page 27 he says that Guillaume's work, the '*Rational des divins offices*, became the most prominent liturgical manual of the late Middle Ages. One hundred twenty manuscript copies of this work have come down to us, and Guillaume was one of Jacobus de Voragine's favorite authors'.

As a historian who has never been a slave to conventional traditions and who has always given the last word to his sources, Le Goff does not sum up the focal theme of his book in the 'Conclusion'. Nevertheless, he gives a comprehensive conclusion in the two last chapters before that final one. In doing so, he follows the original composition of the *Golden Legend* and Jacobus' aim to conclude his *summa* on time in the two ultimate chapters of his encyclopedia.

Thus, in the first of the two chapters before the 'Conclusion,' named 'Saint Pelagius, Pope: The History of Lombards', Le Goff summarizes Jacobus de Voragine's message regarding the time of humanity. He suggests that this time unit could be also called 'the history of mankind.' According to Le Goff, however, the time of humanity is united with sacred time because medieval man followed the liturgical calendar and understood his terrestrial life to be interrelated with the liturgical cycle. In the last chapter before the 'Conclusion,' namely 'The Dedication of the Church,' the elements Le Goff has treated in his

book regarding the encyclopedic view of time as a whole are gathered together with remarkable clarity and developed further in a controlled and intellectual way. In a few pages Le Goff succeeds to sum up his study and throw light on miracles as the basic element of Jacobus de Voragine's vision on time. Furthermore, he comments on the value of *The Golden Legend* in our modern time. The reading of the last chapters of the book *In Search of Sacred Time* exposes two great intellectuals of their own times, Jacobus and his interpreter, Jacques Le Goff.

Marika Räsänen, PhD  
School of History, Culture and Art Studies  
Faculty of Humanities  
University of Turku  
marras[at]utu.fi