

IONUȚ COSTEA, *A existat Jacques Le Goff? Biografie, autobiografie, istorie și memorie* (Has Jacques Le Goff ever existed? Biography, autobiography, history and memory), (Cluj-Napoca: Argonaut, 2016)

A fascinating figure, not only for his prestigious academic activity, and one of the most important representatives of the French historiography of the 20th century, Jacques Le Goff continues to be a true intellectual model, even for today's younger historians. Uninhibited by the French historian's personality, historian Ionuț Costea rhetorically asks the postmodern question of whether Jacques Le Goff truly existed, thus following the course established by the historian himself when he asked whether King Louis IX of France truly existed. Besides the intentionally ambiguous tone of the title, the Cluj-based historian poses a very profound issue, underlining the complex relations between biography, autobiography, history and memory; Ionuț Costea's volume is part of today's debates regarding the role of the historian in society and the crisis/crises of historical interpretations. Elaborated as a deconstruction exercise, the book analyses the avatars of Jacques Le Goff's discourses, from his historical discourse to his self-reflexive one and, without negating the role biography plays in his personal history, the author focuses on the identities present in discourse, discussing them in an interrogative spirit. The two directions of deconstruction in Ionuț Costea's analysis justify his interpretation endeavour. Therefore, the process of deconstruction follows, on the one hand, Jacques Le Goff's interest for biography, hoping to one day write a totalizing biography, especially for the notable individuals who had left a mark on their time periods (much like King Louis IX), and, on the other hand, his interest for autobiography and its testimonial and introspective nature, searching for the meaning of life in relation with the historian profession. One of the major interests of this volume regards illustrating the way in which, through his opus, starting with his personal history, Jacques Le Goff articulated his view on history.

A existat Jacques Le Goff? Biografie, autobiografie, istorie și memorie (Has Jacques Le Goff ever existed? Biography, autobiography, history and memory) includes four chapters, each of which illustrates the effort of deconstructing the historical discourse that uses biography and/or autobiography as mandatory aspects in finding a resumptive view on history. In the first interpretive register, in order to better understand the purpose, changing the perspective of the approach and of the interpretation, Ionuț Costea begins his analysis with Le Goff's historical biography texts, with a discussion on the limits of this historiography genre; in the second interpretive register he presents the relation between the events in the historian's biography and their determinative role in his intellectual biography. Thus, the first

chapter focuses on defining the biographic genre and the relation between biography and history. Marginalised by historical positivism, biography as a genre is revived in the historiography of the 20th century and, together with the new researches in the field of narratology, it will represent an analysis instrument considered by historians to be necessary for the interpretive exercise. Jacques Le Goff experimented with the genre, constructing the monumental biography of King Louis IX, published in 1996, after a decade of research. Transforming the king into a true character, identifying an entire epoch with his image, the way in which the French historian compiled his arguments is analysed by the Romanian historian who, in the second chapter of his work, establishes the entire scaffold of biographic construction, in order to later apply it to his own interpretation of the character Jacques Le Goff. From the biography of King Louis IX, compiled from a summarizing view on the entire epoch, to the studies of the tireless French historian dedicated to Francis of Assisi, the interpretive distance is closely analysed by the Romanian historian, noting the change in narratological nuance in Jacques Le Goff's discourse. This change does not imply an abandonment of the summarising view in making history, but, on the contrary, with finesse, fascinated by the solar image of St. Francis, the French historian dissociates between the different natures of his characters who are entitled to different manners of interpretation in relation with the cognitive constitutive models of the symbolic figures represented by each character: the hero and the saint. In the third chapter, starting with the autobiographical texts written by the French historian, Ionuț Costea analyses the way in which a similarly personal investigation inventory was used, especially in the two autobiographical writings published nearly ten years apart – the text on ego-history published in the volume coordinated by Pierre Nora in 1987 and a volume of interviews, entitled *Un historien de dimanche*, published in 1996. But, after also analysing the autobiographical text *Avec Hanka*, published in 2008, Ionuț Costea concludes that, for Le Goff, the profession of a historian is not without relevance in elaborating an autobiographical discourse, but, in accordance with his view on history, it also had a primary role in the French medievalist's career. In the fourth chapter, all these premises guide Ionuț Costea to define Jacques Le Goff's approach to biographical discourse; the analysis of the French historian's types of narrations – *totalizing biography*, *"another kind" of biography and autobiography* – leads to the interpretation of his approach to summative history. By also using narratology instruments, the Romanian historian describes the narrative identities built by Jacques Le Goff around key concepts such as: time, place, and social environment, all making the autobiographical discourse coherent. Analysing the ways in which these concepts moulded Jacques Le Goff's thinking and view, Ionuț Costea manages to outline the French historian's image, using mostly his testimonies, as well as the discursive possibilities used by the professional historian. In relation with the crisis of historiography declared in the 1980s, the French historian's intention to write an

autobiography is not an action adjacent to the scientific field, but, through his exercises of ego-history, though the narration of his own biography, he stimulates introspection and, due to his talent, Jacques Le Goff presents the role representation has in the lives of individuals and of society in general. Being aware of these debates regarding the crisis of historiography, Jacques Le Goff is also aware of the fact that the historian's role in understanding the past is not limited to interpretations of phenomena, but also that the past, once understood and assumed, is in dialogue with the present.

Preoccupied with the social significances of memory, as well as with the manner in which, in relation with biography, Jacques Le Goff's life and career moulded into a true intellectual model, in this volume Ionuț Costea publishes the first approach of this kind to the personality of the intellectual who was formed by the Annales School and is one of the most representative French medievalists. Understanding memory as a form of representing the past and a form which is not foreign to the idea of deconstructing any discourse about history, but also reconstructing the historical past through a new, assumed discourse, Ionuț Costea's study is part of a larger interpretation perspective that combines the historical and narratological discourse. This publication is not a traditional biography, a simple chronological description of the life and career of the French historian, but, surpassing the presentation of the French historian's personality, through a hermeneutical and deconstructivist investigation, the Romanian historian means to use discourse to deconstruct historicism through autobiographic discussion.

Through a deconstructive and hermeneutic analysis, Ionuț Costea not only manages to provide a well written text about Jacques Le Goff's personality, but to also elaborate a complex discourse on the purposes of history and the historian in today's world.

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