

SOME TRENDS IN MEDIEVAL STUDIES IN THE U.S.A.

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As a Japanese student who is interested in European medieval history, especially in the development of its society and culture, I would like, in this brief article, to deal with some trends of American historians today, and have chosen the following two recently published works as the material for my analysis: *Twelfth-Century Europe and the Foundations of Modern Society*,¹ 1961, and *Perspectives in Medieval History*,² 1963. On account of the limitations of the forms of presentation, the essays included in these volumes may not necessarily be adequate illustrations for the appraisal of the level of research of the American historical world. However, the main purpose of my writing this paper is not to appraise such level but to find the method of approach of American scholars toward European medieval history. In other words, it is hoped that by investigating what and how they deal with the problems we should be benefited in our own research.

Before going into the major theme, two points must be indicated in order to clarify the motivations of this writing. The first is the fact that several works by American scholars of post World War II have drawn my attention in many ways as I have been trying to build a new concept in regard to European history including the medieval. Above all, *The Limits and Divisions of European History*, 1950, by O. Halecki and *The Great Frontier*, 1952, by W. P. Webb present, by their bold attempt at reappraising the whole state of European history, many problems which should be seriously studied, in spite of their lack of persuasive power on some important points. Also, D. Gerhard's splendid work published in the *Historische Zeitschrift*, "Regionalismus und ständisches Wesen als ein Grundthema europäischer Geschichte", 1952, has greatly impressed me as a perfect indicator of the high level of the American scholars. These works have attracted my attention to the American academic world of European history.

The second point that has moved me is the reflection on the attitude of our European historians which has been too indifferent to the trend in America in this particular field of study. It is true that our specialists, even before the War, have certainly been acquainted with such authors and their works as Ch. H. Haskins and his *Renaissance of the Twelfth-Century*, 1927; L. Thorndike and his *History of Magic and Experimental Science*, 1923-53; or J. W. Thompson and his *Economic and Social History of Europe in the Later Middle Ages*, 1928. However, each of these has merely been valued as a separate achievement of an

¹ This is the proceedings of the symposium held in 1957 sponsored by the Division of Humanities of the University of Wisconsin and the Wisconsin Institute for Medieval and Renaissance Studies and was edited by M. Clagett, G. Post and R. Reynolds.

² Five papers contained in the volume were the lectures delivered at the celebration of the Rice University Semicentennial and published with the short introduction by the editors, K. F. Drew and F. S. Lear.

individual, and seldom taken up in relation to the whole trend of the American historical world. Such state can well be understood when one looks back on the past fifty years of the study of European history in Japan, which has developed in close connection with the trend of the historical studies in England, Germany and France. Nevertheless, the dependence thus brought about undoubtedly constitutes a weak point in our study of this branch of learning. Moreover, in order to establish the statue of the world history of our own, we must pay attention to the world-wide trend, not merely that of the European countries but also of the other countries including the U. S. and the U. S. S. R. Thus, with an expectation based on these reflections, I have read these two volumes, which deal with attractive themes mentioned above.

I should think that it was very appropriate for the symposium held at the University of Wisconsin, 1957, to take up the twelfth century in order to clarify some characteristic features of Europe of the period. The symposium is divided into three parts. Part I, Thought in European Society, consists of the articles on the universities and the problems of education prepared by R. Klibansky and U. T. Holmes, Jr., and of another, from the field of history of arts in which A. Katzenellenbogen discusses the firm establishment of Seven Liberal Arts in the medieval world of thought. In the Part II, Transitions in Economy and Society, H. C. Krueger writes on "Economic Aspects of Expanding Europe"; J. R. Strayer gives a survey of the development of feudal institutions as a method of government; and E. H. Kantorowicz carefully discusses various impacts of scientific jurisprudence which took root deeply in the twelfth century Europe on medievalistic concept of kingship. In my opinion this is the most substantial of the three Parts. In the Part III, Eastern Influences on European Culture, the influences of the Hebrew, Byzantine and Islam on European culture are analyzed respectively by Leo Spitzer, M. V. Anastos and G. E. von Grunebaum.

Of course these nine articles all vary in their excellence but every one of them deals with an important problem and suggests some interesting material, interpretation and perspective. Especially Kantorowicz's paper clarifies the important but hitherto not well noticed fact of the limiting effects of medieval Roman jurisprudence upon kingship. It provides an extremely interesting supplement to another significant fact, the influence of Roman law on the establishment of sovereignty, which is given light by G. Post—one of the sponsors of the Wisconsin symposium—in his paper, "Law and Politics in the Middle Ages", included in the Rice Lecture Series which will be taken up later. There is no space here, however, to discuss these papers separately. The problems at present are rather: the reason why this symposium took up the problem of the twelfth century; the way they approached it; and how and where they placed the period in the whole European history.

In the Introduction, the editors explain the reasons for choosing the century as their principal theme and quoting G. Barraclough, they write, "For the twelfth century was indeed a great age, 'one of the great constructive ages in European history.' It was more than another 'renaissance'". Needless to say that it was the great contribution of Ch. H. Haskins to characterize the twelfth century Europe as the age of "renaissance", but in this symposium, one step forward from the standpoint of Haskins is taken, *i. e.*, the standpoint of taking up the twelfth century not merely because it was the period of renaissance of classical culture but rather because it was "a great period of creative, even revolutionary, activity in all aspects of civilization". This viewpoint itself is increasingly supported not only by the European medievalists but also by the scholars of our country, and I for one give a full support to it. Therefore, the question here should be: how and why it is a "great constructive"

and even "revolutionary" age.

In this point, it seems to me that the volume is not quite successful in having the readers form a clear-cut image in regard to the characteristics of the twelfth century and its revolutionary nature. Here, the features of renaissance of classical literature and thought are explained in detail to such a degree as almost to disturb the whole balance, and also the beginnings of universities, the rise of learning, the expansion of economic activities, and consolidation of early national states are told. Nevertheless, the nature of the period as a whole including these phenomena does not clearly come up. Perhaps, the writers were trying to find the characteristics of the period in the activities in each of the field of learning, religion, arts, politics or economy. However, for the purpose of expressing the character of a period, a general idea such as activity, stagnation or recession is meaningless as a historical concept although it must have some bearing on the discussions on business cycle. Again, however exhaustively the enumeration of the various phases of man's activities in a period may be done, the character of a period cannot be grasped by itself. What I hoped to learn from the contributors of the symposium was that what historical place the period called the twelfth century was to occupy in the eyes of the modern Americans who talk about the "end of European History" and "the Beginning of the Age of the Atlantic Ocean". In this sense, the lack of a clear presentation of the problem and the general summary by the editors seems to reduce greatly the value of the whole volume.

As a whole the weakness here is in the method of setting the assignment of subjects in order to approach the basic theme. Since there is no explanation, we do not know the reason why these nine, and no others were chosen, but it seems to me, at least two indispensable points are missing. One is the discussion on the historiographical survey concerning the historical statue of the twelfth century Europe as presented by many scholars and the confrontation with it. The other is the problem of the relationship between State and Church, or secular power and ecclesiastical authority, which came out on various occasions, as the so-called Investiture Contest. As to the former, it seems most appropriate for the American historians to reappraise that epoch-making work of Haskins' at the present level of research, and to give it a right historiographical place. Also, the impressive volume by the Austrian historian, F. Heer,³ and several articles by G. Barraclough⁴ which are filled with rich problems, although brief, must be confronted, to give a few other examples, when one tried to tackle with any problem concerning the twelfth century, with hopes to make any contribution to the history of research. As to the latter, according to the editors, 'twelfth century' is interpreted to be an age extending from the eleventh to the thirteenth, and if so, it seems almost incredible that the volume has neglected to include, among the important problems of the period, those fierce, political and theoretical struggles conducted between the ecclesiastical and the secular powers. Today, the principle of mutual non-intervention policy between Church and State is recognized nearly all over the world and few would deny that it was in twelfth century Western Europe that the first step toward this principle was taken. I believe at this point the final step for the western part of Europe drifting away from the eastern Orthodox group was taken. Moreover, if the process of the formation of unified states which

³ F. Heer: *Aufgang Europas; eine Studie zu den Zusammenhängen zwischen politischer Religiosität, Frömmigkeitsstil und dem Werden Europas in 12. Jahrhundert.* Wien, 1949.

⁴ G. Barraclough: *History in a Changing World*, 1957, especially Medium Aetum: Some Reflections on Mediaeval History and on the term 'The Middle Ages'. (p. 54 ff), Frederick Barbarossa and the Twelfth Century. (p. 73 ff).

are the basis of modern nations, as presented by Kantorowicz and Strayer both from its theoretical and actual phases, is not interpreted rightly in its relation to the Investiture Contest, it seems to me its greatest historical motive is regretfully overlooked.

Perspectives in Medieval History is a collection of a series of five lectures delivered at the Rice University Semicentennial by five medievalists including an Oxford historian of science. Each lecture deals with an independent subject and the themes range from the problems of medieval science, history of technology, legal history to the retrospect of studies on medieval history in the United States. They show considerably high scholastic level as far as the lectures of the kind go, except D. Salmon's which lacks the density of discussion being too general.

The fact that two of the lectures, L. White, Jr.'s "The Medieval Roots of Modern Technology and Science" and A. C. Crombie's "The Relevance of the Middle Ages to the Scientific Movement", handle science and technology seems quite natural as an activity of a university a great part of whose audience are interested in natural science. And moreover, it is most interesting that this fact indicates a trend of American concern toward medieval history. Although some of the points presented in the two lectures overlap, White mainly analyzes the actual state of technology and science in the medieval age while Crombie discusses the ideological, logical and methodological structure of medieval science; and they present very persuasively the new interpretation which is being supported by increasing number of scholars, *i. e.*, the high development of science and technology, the special characteristics of European civilization, was not achieved suddenly in the process of modern European history, but its basis was already prepared for the most part in medieval history. The one by Crombie is well worth reading since it is based on his original and elaborate researches, and the present writer has learned a great deal from his attempt at the new periodization of European history from the viewpoint of history of science, especially his reappraisal of the twelfth and fourteenth centuries, and also from his rightful denial of the sixteenth century Renaissance. Again, White's synthetic description covering the extensive period and area provides a useful perspective since it describes the phase of continuity of medieval science and technology to those in the modern age together with the transition of their mutual relations between the medieval and modern period.

The essay by G. Post mentioned above, takes up the oldest and most complicated problem in the study of medieval history, *i. e.*, the "formation of the foundation of modern state in the Middle Ages" from the standpoint of medieval Roman jurisprudence. Lack of space does not permit me to go into a detailed discussion on the content but he describes how the theories and concepts, which the Europe of the twelfth century onward had inherited from the Roman public law, finally succeeded in overcoming the feudal system of political activities and how they contributed in creating the power of kingship and State, and also how, in the process, the principle of "reason of state" was made use of as an effective political weapon by kings and judicial officers.

Above all, however, I was interested in S. N. Thomson's "The Growth of a Discipline: Medieval Studies in America". He traces the development of the study of medieval history in the United States from the last half of the nineteenth century to the present. He also attempts to explain the reasons why Americans must pay special attention to the European Middle Ages. Since I had had hardly any knowledge to speak of concerning medieval studies in that country, it was a great pleasure for me to find such facts as described in the article:

the overwhelming influence from the historical studies of Germany before the World War I, the expansion of interest toward the historical worlds of England, France and Belgium in the interwar period, the new constructive development symbolized in the founding of Medieval Academy of America and the publication of the *Speculum*, the contributions of European émigrés after the World War II, and the marked development of the researches by native Americans.

Through this historiographical survey he emphasizes the necessity and the possibility of medieval studies in America attaining the level of Europe both in quality and quantity, liberating themselves from a less advanced academic status. Why is it that European medieval studies by Americans are necessary to that extent? After pointing out the trend, even among the intellectuals, of regarding medieval studies as if they were some un-American activities, he writes as follows:

This attitude is fantastic. It overlooks the indisputable fact that we are here dealing with our own past. The Middle Ages are early American history and they should be so presented. From another point of view, the American student has even a better right to interest himself in medieval Europe. All Europe is his *sedes patrum*.

According to him, America and Europe have parted ways since about 1500, but the Europe before that time is, as it were, the historical native land for both and, the origin of American culture, therefore, must be found in its most pure form there.

To tell the truth, I was surprised not a little by this argument. In the eyes of present-day Orientals, in spite of all that is in common between Europe and America, some marked differences between them seem to present the problems which need to be clarified and this, above all else, has a realistic import. The present writer considers that the foundations of the culture truly worthy of the name "American" were laid in the fact that at the time of Independence the Federalists took a critical stand toward modern European history—in my opinion the separating point must come about 200 years later—with a profound historical and political insight rejecting the prevailing political structure of balance of power. Needless to say that the culture of medieval Europe was the most brilliant in the world at that time, just as the ancient Chinese culture was in its day. And just as if it was impossible for the American culture to come to exist without European legacy, it would have been unthinkable that any Japanese culture to be formed without the influence of classical Chinese culture. However, if the Japanese who must make a truly unique contribution in the modern world simply claimed the classical Chinese culture as their own and commended it as the cultural root from which theirs sprang, how would their attitude of study be reflected in the American eyes? Our ways of approach to the classical Chinese culture must necessarily be different from that of the Chinese; and, furthermore, is it not an indispensable basis for international cooperative work to set up unique standpoint and thus promote works of research in our own individual ways?