Abstracts

FRANCO CARDINI, Jacques Le Goff. Un ricordo

The French historian Jacques Le Goff, who has died aged 90, specialised in the Middle Ages, which he defined – taking the long view – as stretching from the 5th to the 18th centuries. His case was that the period had a character of its own, and should not be seen as paving the way to modern times: it was during the Medieval Era, he argued, that Christianity, modern languages, towns, universities and the idea of Europe all emerged. His earliest books, Marchands et banquiers au Moyen Age *(1956) and* Les Intellectuels au Moyen Age *(1957), were on conventional subjects but took a fresh approach in highlighting the importance of towns. Universities were located in towns, so intellectuals were as much a part of the urban scene as those engaged in commerce. The title of* Pour un Autre Moyen Age *(1977) expressed Le Goff's aim of remoulding historical approaches to the era. He was heavily influenced by social anthropology, which gave him insights into human relations and ways of thinking.* La Naissance du purgatoire *(1981) showed how the adoption of the doctrine that souls after death spent time in an intermediate state before judgment had wide-reaching social implications. The living could influence the time spent in purgatory and this gave rise to an elaborate infrastructure of funding for clergy who prayed for the souls of the departed. Le Goff also published books and essays on the subjects of time, imagination, usury and memory – now commonplace, but then new ground broken by an author who regarded traditional histories of events as boring. In taking this all – encompassing perspective, he lived up to Bloch's maxim that a good historian should resemble the Ogre of legend in hunting human flesh: all aspects of humanity should be subjected to historical inquiry.*