

**Discussion on the transition from Antiquity to the Medieval Period and  
the chronological frames of the “Middle Ages” (Abstract)**  
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The study aims at suggesting a new approach in the discussion on the transition from Antiquity to the Medieval Period and for defining the chronological frames of the “Middle Ages”. The first attempts for structuring the “world” history in large time periods (ages) could be seen already in the chronicles of the Early Christian scholars Sextus Julius Africanus (c. 170 - c. 240 AD), Eusebius of Caesarea (c. 260/4 - c. 340 AD), St. Jerome (c. 340/50 - 419-420 AD), and St. Augustine (354/363 - 430 AD). In the “Middle Ages”, authors like Hugo Floriacensis, Johannes Scotus Eriugena (c. 810 - c. 877 AD), and Hugo of Saint Victor (1096/97 – 1141 AD) had most influence of historiography and introduced Biblical-Christian models for constructing historical periodization. In the Renaissance, historical views were further developed by Flavio Biondo (1392 - 1464 AD) and Jean Bodin (c. 1538 - 1598 AD). The introduction of the system of Antiquity - Middle Ages - Modernity is credited to the 17th c. German scholar Christoph Cellarius. Cellarius’ successor Loescher elaborated these views and for the first time set a chronological frame of the Medieval Period from the 5th to the 15th c. Historiographic studies in the following centuries continued this historical tradition, further elaborating it with new conceptions and questioning the exact dates of the historical ages.

In the specialized literature, there is no uniform view neither about the beginning, nor about the end of the Middle Ages. For the beginning of the Medieval Period, the most frequently proposed dates are: 395 AD, regarded as the symbolic date of the political division of the Late Antique Roman world, and the fall of the Western Roman Empire in 476 AD. Concerning the eastern part of the Roman world, the topic

about the end of Antiquity and the beginning of the Middle Ages is focused on the problem of the emergence of Byzantium.

Above discussed conceptions define the existence of a transitional period between Antiquity and Middle Ages that lasted for three or four centuries. For Averil Cameron, the division of the Roman Empire in 395 AD symbolically started the transitional period. According to John Haldon, the seventh century marks the end of the social and economic transformations of the Byzantine society. It is generally accepted that a new cultural, historical and political phenomenon, Byzantium, emerged in the period from 4th to 6th c. Undoubtedly, Byzantium inherited much of the political traditions of the Roman Empire, but in the same time it is something different and took shape in a different historical context. Byzantium is a political formula, through which some structural elements of the Roman world survive in a completely new historical setting. Precisely this fact brings forth the great complexity to understand the phenomenon that is Byzantium – to what extent Byzantium is a continuation of the Roman Empire and to what extent it is something different, where is the border between continuity and change. In this respect, Falko Daim offers a very elegant solution, defining Byzantium as the Roman Empire in the Middle Ages.

The outlined discussion indicates that the beginning of the “Middle Ages” is confronted by the difficult definition of the transition between the two ages. It took place over a considerable period of time, with approximate and conventional limits, allowing for a variety of interpretations. Equally difficult to resolve is the problem of the end of the “Middle Ages”. The

discussion brings forth several major dates, such as the fall of Constantinople in 1453, the discovery of America in 1492, or the beginning of the German Reformation in 1517. Another large group of historians supports the thesis that the divide between Middle Ages and Modern Times is in the 17th c., when the Dutch Revolt and the English Revolution took place.

Assigning exact dates and specific historical events to mark the end of an age and the beginning of another is confronted by numerous hardly surmountable methodological problems. The choice of one or another “historic” event suggest a highly illusive and false notion of “amplitudeness” of the historical process, in which there are historic transitions of one state of the society to another. This is certainly misleading, because the transition of one age to another takes place as a long series of events that gradually disrupt the line of continuity and activate to a greater extent the mechanisms of deconstruction, adaptation and creation of a new social, economic, political, and cultural construction. It is precisely here that archaeology could play the decisive role by taking the analysis out of the magical circle of selective historical “eventness” and to direct it to the study of the transition in its natural “dynamic” context. Frequent political disruptions in Europe that were brought about in the period of the Great Migration of Peoples created conditions for a series of crises that concentrated large creative resources in looking for new solutions for adapting and reformulating the system.

The complex analysis of cultures in transition indicates that the elements of the Classical culture lost their specifics first in the border areas with the “barbarian world” and in the unfortified settlements, but remained longest preserved in the large cities. I.e. the transition took place with unequal dynamics and depth along the lines of peripherycentre and village-city. Identical asynchronicity could be observed along the vertical of the social structure.

The characteristics of the Classical culture were lost first among the lower social groups, while at higher social levels some elements of Classical culture could be identified or reactivated throughout the Middle Ages.

Constructing a historical periodization with exact dates of the ages would be possible only in the framework of the eventness discourse, which considers the historical events as cumulative images of the historical process. The systematic analysis of various spheres of life that is applied in archaeological investigations reveals that society is a dynamic system, in which there are two lines of transformation: gradual (inertial) in economy and culture, and impulsive in politics.

The selective choice of “historic” events is too controversial from methodological point of view, and the limits between ages that are defined in this way are only approximate, but not entirely correct. The historical process is characterized by constant change, both of interconnections between phenomena and of the substance of the phenomena themselves. The analysis indicates that the Medieval Period is primarily a cultural and only then a chronological phenomenon. Because of this specific, it very often takes place asynchronously in different communities, different social groups and even different individuals. However, if one still insists on the chronological aspect of the phenomenon, the limit between ages could hardly be related to specific historical event; the limit is rather the very transition that spans these changes. The “transition” is that historical moment, which is filled with greatest potential for adaptation, rearranging and change of all systems that have lost their former vitality. The point of view that is advanced in the discussion about the transition and the chronological frames of the “Middle Ages” suggests that it is hardly necessary to draw borders in places where we do not find them and where probably there were none.