

Temporalities and History in the Renaissance

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Abstract

The article aims at showing the complexity and diversity of the perception of time during the Renaissance in numerous sources, mainly from France. More than a simple rediscovery of the Antiquity we should consider it a multiplicity of temporal conceptions. Since the question of time in the Renaissance is entirely embedded in the complex Christian order of the world, we need to consider this historical question through both theological and philosophical approaches. I contend that time is apprehended through various scales, from the one-time event to the eternity of the hereafter, with a combination of a cyclical and a linear conception, a divine periodicity and an earthly time of the rhythms of the world, an expectation of a brilliant future in an eschatological perception combined with a deep interest for the past in order to understand the present. The peculiarity of the Renaissance is essentially in the affirmation of the pre-eminence of the present. I will analyse these issues by studying the relationship between the time of God and the time of the world, then the question of the disenchantment of the world, and finally the question of a new regime of historicity, gradually built around a present emerging from the past.

Keywords: History, Regime of Historicity, Renaissance, Temporality, Time

1. *Introduction*

The fifteenth and sixteenth centuries represent a great change in the writing of history and the perception of time. Various cultural changes affecting this period, especially in the field of knowledge, reveal a new relationship between man, the world and its past. Numerous sources help us tackle these aspects: universal histories, histories of France, regional histories or histories of cities, thriving at the time; works of historical methodology such as Jean Bodin's start to appear, but also the imposing cosmographies from Sebastian Münster, André Thevet and most of all, in this article, François de Belleforest. These cosmographies aimed at describing the world in the most accurate and complete manner possible, show its infinite diversity, past and present. Through their encyclopedic aspirations, they aim at gathering the entire



knowledge available in each region of the world. For the Renaissance reader, these various sources express and build up a vision of the world in which time, temporalities, rhythms, regimes of historicity, the order of time, history and memories overlap significantly to narrate the past and the multiplicity of its approaches. Beyond the simple question of a reassertion of the ancient past, I want to show the complexity and diversity of the Renaissance relationship to time. Incidentally, I contend that, rather than an idea of Time, we need to consider a multiplicity of temporal conceptions, highlight the rhythms of the world at various scales, from the one-time event to the eternity of the hereafter, from a cyclical to a linear time, from divine periodicity to earthly time. The issue of time in the Renaissance is entirely imbedded in a Christian order of the world and can therefore only be thought of both theologically and philosophically. These multiple conceptions of time in the Renaissance are far from the linear and biased reorganization of absolute and physical time, developed later. This took place in parallel with the process of the disenchantment of the world when human history stops telling the religious meaning of the world. I will discuss this concept below. Through the separation of the celestial and earthly spheres, divine and human realms, it contributes to the assertion of a more autonomous knowledge with respect to religion. However, the time of God does not disappear. It unfolds next into other temporalities, inscribing the world from this point forward in complex, multiscale interactions, with an increased consciousness of the resurgent present, reorganizing to its benefit the relationship to the past. I will therefore address some of the major questions on the relationship between temporalities and history in the Renaissance: first the question of the relationship between the time of God and the time of the world, then the question of the disenchantment of the world, and finally the question of a new regime of historicity, gradually built around a present emerging from the past.

2. *The Time of God and the Time of the World*

The first temporality encountered in the history of the world narratives during the Renaissance is of course the time of God. From the first verses of Genesis, God appears like the creator of time at the precise moment when He separates light from darkness to create day and night, evening and morning, defining the first day. However, His Creation also leads to the temporal theatre of the history of the world: Jean Mansel's *La fleur des histoires*, written between 1459 and 1463, considers human history from the Creation to Charles VI, king of France (1380-1422). Sebastian Münster's *Cosmographia*, first published in 1544, also starts with a chapter called 'On the Creation of the World' ('De la Création du monde'). Yet, rather than a single time of God, I argue that multiple temporalities can be inferred from narratives about the relationship of man to the divine, and that a single time of God can be diffracted into a

plurality of times of the divine, succeeding one another from the Creation to Salvation to the Last Judgment. Human history presents itself through different ages of the world following each other, as we can already see in Jacobus de Voragine's remarkable *Golden Legend*, a thirteenth-century book printed in forty-nine versions between 1470 and 1500 in Europe (Le Goff 2014, ix). As a result, men went through a first 'time of deviation or turning from the right way' (from Adam to Moses), to a 'time of renewal or of being called back' (from Moses to Christ's nativity), to a 'time of reconciliation' with God (from the Incarnation to the Pentecost), to a 'time of pilgrimage' followed by a fifth period defined by the end of time into eternity, after the Last Judgment (Duffy 2012, 3). The time of God is not only this long linear course towards the end of times. It is also the cyclical time in a pastoral year through which man can live biblical history again, or the cyclical time of the week going through the chronology of Creation. Therefore, the time of God is not only a theological temporality but also a socially defined time.

We can see that the history of mankind is inscribed in a divine plan, highlighting strong links between theology and history up to the beginning of the sixteenth century, yet to a lesser proportion and in a different way than the relationship between theology and geography. From the point of view of natural theology, whose goal is to know God using mainly ordinary means of knowledge through science and philosophy, cosmography and history both aim at knowing the work of God and therefore His Power and Greatness. This is why François de Belleforest's dedication to the future Henry III (king of Poland from 1573 to 1575 and king of France from 1574 to 1589), opening his *Grandes Annales* in 1579, describes human history as only one aspect of History with a capital H:

My Lord, it appears that History, which is the true image and master of men's lives, and the truthful secretary of past events, possesses and includes three parts. One relates to man, and to the preservative actions of human society; the other pertains to nature, unfolding its origins and evolution. The third one, having its aim and ambition in heaven, strives to discuss celestial matters, and the order established in this world by God Author of the entire universe.¹

François de Belleforest clearly distinguishes three dimensions of History: human history, natural history and divine history. Any believer must be

¹ 'Sire, comme ainsi soit que l'Histoire, qui est la vray image & maistresse de la vie des hommes, & le veritable secretaire des choses passees, ait & comprenne en soy trois especes, l'une desquelles se rapporte à l'homme, & aux actions conseruatrices de la societé humaine: l'autre qui contemplant la nature, declare les causes & le progres d'icelle: & la troisiemesme ayant sa visee & son but au Ciel, s'efforce aussi de discourir des causes celestes, & de l'ordre mis en ce monde par Dieu Auteur de tout cest univers' (Belleforest 1579, I, aij). Unless otherwise specified, translations are mine.

able to acknowledge divine power and can do so thanks to the virtue of ‘cosmographic panopticism’ (*panoptisme cosmographique*; Lestringant 1991, 201), encompassing the historical dimension or, more specifically, universal history. As a result, through the pretence of saying everything about the world, about what it was (history) and to whom it belongs (geography), cosmography makes the knowledge of God’s work possible. Through countless biblical passages and the works of the Christian apologetics, the invitation to believers of God’s work is in itself an introduction to a temporal consideration of the world. *The Book of Wisdom*, for instance, reminds the reader that ‘For he hath given me certain knowledge of the things that are, namely, to know how the world was made, and the operation of the elements’ (Wis 7:17-21).² For Saint Bonaventura, God has created all things ‘in order to show and communicate this glory’ to men.³ Saint Bonaventura was made Doctor of the Church by Pope Sixtus V in 1587. Through their shared ambition to describe the work of God and its visible parts, geography and history act as representations or narratives of men’s course from Genesis to the end of times, structuring the Christian thought of the world.

Beyond natural theology, revealed theology seeks to know God through study of the Revelation, namely the way God chose to manifest Himself to men (history of Israel, especially in its relation to Christ), thus allowing a strong link between history and theology. God’s extra-worldly nature is what appears fundamental, as defined in the theology on the Incarnation. From the temporal dimension of earthly existence, the Christian God predates the time of man and is external to his temporality. In order to enter mankind’s historical time, God had to make himself human, to be Jesus, the ‘God made man’. There are therefore two worlds and two ‘meta-temporalities’ (Milet 2006, 261):⁴ the world and the earthly temporality on the one hand, heavens and divine temporality on the other, kept apart from the very first day of Creation.⁵ With this in mind, telling the history of the world is also telling the work of God and God’s will, as well as approaching an understanding of the divine. This conception of time is based on a Christian temporality stated by Augustine, geared towards the hope for salvation and eliciting a decisive tension towards the future (Augustine, *Confessions*, XI). This Christian realm

² Quotations from the Bible are from *The Bible, Authorized King James Version with Apocrypha* (1997), Oxford, Oxford University Press.

³ ‘propter gloriam manifestandam et propter gloriam suam communicandam’ (Sent. lib. 2, distinct. 1, pars 2, art. 2, quaest. 1).

⁴ On the question of the Christian ‘metatemporality’, see Stan 2009, 251.

⁵ Clearly stated from the beginning of Genesis, on the first day of Creation: ‘In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth ... And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament: and it was so. And God called the firmament Heaven’ (Gen 1:1-8).

of historicity is founded on the principles of memory and expectation. The Incarnation of Christ creates a gap in the time of the world, which, henceforth, appears to be a course, geared towards the Last Judgment. As sixteenth-century Europe is torn apart by denominational tensions, this dialectical concept of time is central to the Renaissance culture, where human events are seen as signs of the divine (Crouzet 2005 and 2008).

The different levels of reading of historical events reinforce this Christian conception of time. Moving from natural to revealed theology, textual exegesis gives historical events a universal value. The thoughts of Augustine and Thomas Aquinas have largely structured medieval teaching; they still influence fifteenth- and sixteenth-century thought as we can see in the anonymous *Rudimentum Novitiorum*, first published in 1475. Its French translation, published in 1488-1489 under the title *La mer des hystoires* presents the four levels of reading necessary to the study of the time of the world and the time of men:

In his comment to the first chapter of Genesis, Saint Augustine says that the Holy Scripture has two meanings. Namely, the literal meaning and the spiritual meaning. From which the spiritual one is divided into three others. Where the first one is the allegorical meaning and shows the mysteries which we must understand and believe through the Scripture. The second one is tropological, namely moral, through which we are taught what we must do to behave and govern ourselves as we should. And the third one is anagogical, that is to say divine. And the Scripture is revealed through this meaning, touching on celestial and divine matters. Whereas the literal or historical meaning shows only history according to the word, without any commentary or development.⁶

The Renaissance draws from Augustine the fact that a literal reading permits understanding historical events in their factual dimension, while spiritual reading only reveals the spiritual meaning, which entails three levels of reading: the interpretation of the mysteries of the Holy Scripture (allegorical), moral (tropological) and divine (anagogical) readings. These various levels introduce a temporal game between human actions, historical facts and the meaning of the world, where the actions of men unfold in a linear time, always in motion and

⁶ 'Et pour avoir clerement la saincte escriture, dit Saint Augustin sur le premier chapitre de Genese que en icelle y a deux sens. C'est assavoir le sens litteral et le sens espirituel. Desquels lung qui est espirituel est divise en trois autres. Dont le premier est le sens allegorique lequel monstre les misteres qu'on doit entendre et croire par l'escriture. Le second est tropologique cest adire moral par lequel nous est enseigne quelle chose nous devons faire pour bien nous conduire et gouverner. Et le tiers est anagogique cest a dire divin. Et selonc tel sens est l'escriture exposee touchant les choses celestielles et divines. Mais le sens litteral ou historique montre tant seulement l'histoire selonc la lettre sans glose ne quelque exposition' (Anonymous 1488-1489, I, fol. ar).

framed by an eschatological discourse, where meaning is shaped by a timeless, unalterable revelation of an eternal (perpetual) God, with no beginning and no end. A good example is François de Belleforest's description of the Gauls in his *Histoire des neuf Charles*:

When will we finally value the fate of the Gauls, their glorious destiny and success? We will then be able to realize that God was the first driving force who extended, enriched and made this people invincible under the conduct of their sacred and fateful Kings, for the sake of Its glory, the preservation of religion and the spreading of the Christian seed.⁷

Further in his description, François de Belleforest refines his conception of history in which he sees the possibility to reveal divine mysteries in human actions:

A good historian offers the truth, condemns and loathes vice and vicious people, praises virtue, justice and the faithfulness of righteous people. Now, the holy mysteries of things become patent to whoever dedicates himself to contemplating the actions of the Ancients, which become obvious in the same way priests were granted the sight of the most holy and sacred things. Therefore, he is awarded the highest benefit since such reading disseminates true science on the spirit, whence all happiness in life lies.⁸

This idea of a divine direction given to human actions fits into a theology of history, such as the one presented in Augustine's *City of God* (Lettieri 1988). In his wake, theologians and historians interpret Clovis' coronation as a divine will to favour France and make her the 'eldest daughter of the Church'. The divine intentionality mentioned by François de Belleforest implicitly draws on Gilbert de Nogent's *Dei gesta per Francos* (1107-1108), where it is identified with the First Crusade (1096-1099), and where the four levels of reading identified by Augustine are intertwined. The same conception prevails in the understanding of the battle of Lepanto in October 1571 in the Greek Gulf of Patras, where the Ottoman army was defeated by the Holy League led by Pius

⁷ 'Quand donc nous mettrons en avant la fortune Gauloise, le destin de leur succez & grandeur: l'on jugera incontinent que c'est la volonté de ce premier moteur qui pour sa gloire, pour l'établissement de sa foy, entretien de la religion, propagation de la semence Chrestienne' (Belleforest 1568, 2).

⁸ 'Un bon Historien propose la verité, accusant, & detestant, & le vice, & les vicieux, & louant la vertu, justice & fidelité des gens de bien. Or tant plus clairement y veoit celuy qui s'addonne à la contemplation des faicts des anciens, de tant les haults mysteres des choses luy sont manifestes, & mis à descouvert, tout ainsi qu'aux seuls sacrificateurs, ausquels estoit permis de veoir les choses plus sacres & saintes, & de là il cognoist purement le profit plus grand, & plus à priser que telle lecture espond, & comme distille sur les esprits desireux de la vraye science, en laquelle gist la felicité de nostre vie' (1568, aiiij v).

V, with a coalition including the Papal States, the Spanish Empire, the Duchy of Savoy, the Republic of Venice, the Republic of Genoa, and Malta. François de Belleforest celebrates this Christian victory which is an ‘honour awarded by God the day of the battle when He granted them victory’.⁹ Even more so, the cosmographer regrets that the troops of the Holy League did not pursue the Turks further to potentially fulfil the ‘Prophecy of the Twelve’ and their final submission since: ‘several people thought it would be the end of the Turkish Empire; had our troops pushed further, the Prophecy of the Twelve ruling over the Turks would have been fulfilled’.¹⁰ More generally, God’s power is revealed through the entire history of kingdoms and empires. This is why Sebastian Münster titled the last introductory chapter of his *Cosmographia* (1544) ‘How Monarchies have risen to the World, & have since been destroyed’ by divine will. François de Belleforest took over this title for his own chapter. All Münster and Belleforest do is update Daniel’s words to King Nebuchadnezzar, reminding him that wisdom and power belong to God, ‘for wisdom and might are his. And he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings’ (Dan 2:20-21). Because divine will and intention would predate any human action, it explains how such a prophecy could have become a type of war weapon used in political and geopolitical discourses (Redondo 2000).¹¹ Indeed, history contributes not only to an understanding of human and earthly realities, but also to the sense of events and their purpose, the ultimate understanding of what lies behind life and the world. The reality of the world is told and established through discourse by this very semantic crossing, establishing the Christian temporal order.

3. *The Secularization of Time*

However, this inherently Christian reading of time gradually disappears from historical narratives in the Renaissance, giving way to a true secularization of time and focusing on the earthly temporalities of human facts.¹² The shift is wide-ranging and has been studied in philosophical, literary and artistic sources (Quinones 1972; Bellenger 1986, 2002; Heck and Lippincott 2002; Mooij 2005; Madelpuech-Toucheron 2012; Cohen 2014). Throughout the sixteenth century, religious discourse becomes less visible within the discourse about the past. A history of mankind more independent from the divine

⁹ ‘honneur que Dieu leur donna le jour de la bataille, lors qu’il leur en octroya la victoire’ (1575, t. 2, 581).

¹⁰ ‘plusieurs pensoyent que ce fut la fin de l’Empire Turcquesque : & peut estre que si les nostres eussent poursuivy leur pointe, que la prophetie des douze qui doivent commander sur les Turcs, eut eu alors son accomplissement’ (1568, 580).

¹¹ Regarding the Battle of Lepanto more specifically, see Redondo 2000, 117.

¹² See in particular Jones-Davies 1995.

comes to the surface during the Renaissance, corresponding to a greater autonomy for the time of man. For history is not only sacred but also profane or, according to François de Belleforest in his *Histoire universelle*, it is the description of human facts. It is a history of the high politics and deeds of war, of great princes as well as of the assertion of the States. This process appears clearly in the comparison between the works of two historians writing half a century apart from each other. The first one is Robert Gaguin's *Les croniques de France*, published in 1520. The references to Christian temporality are pervasive, mentioning the 'most Christian kings & princes', especially the 'most Christian, virtuous & Magnanimus king Francis the First' to whom 'God gave a very good life', and again 'may Louis the Twelfth ... be welcome and kept by God in His kingdom of paradise'. Incidentally, the work aims 'to praise God and His glory and honour all noble Christian princes'. It is a history dotted with miracles and divine interventions. For the Merovingian period, Robert Gaguin lists the victory of Tolbiac, 'how the holy flask or *Sainte Ampoule* ... was sent from heaven' to Clovis, 'the erection of the so-called church St-Genevieve on the mount in Paris', as well as the 'royal coat of arms of the French kings sent from heaven, and their pennon'. We can also see the 'stag who showed the way to Clovis' soldiers', Chilperic's cruelty provoking the divine wrath and the 'flood of water sent from the sky on the Limagne [Auvergne region], a storm in the Touraine region and an earthquake in Bordeaux, fire, hail, windstorm in Orleans and in the Berry region' in addition to the 'persecutions sent to the house of King Chilperic'. In return, Robert Gaguin evokes the 'wonderful signs that occurred in the cities of Soissons, Paris and Senlis' at the time of 'the birth of the second Chlothar', and finally the 'canonization of Dagobert'.¹³ Contrary to Gaguin's edifying list, François de Belleforest does not refer much to Christian temporality in his *Les Grandes Annales et histoire générale de France*, published in 1579. The functions of Robert Gaguin, Doctor in Theology and General Minister of the Trinitarian Order, contribute to impose an essentially providential reading of temporality and historical events, even if Pierre Desray defines him as a 'supreme orator and scientific historiographer'.¹⁴ Conversely, François de

¹³ 'treschrestiens roys & princes'; 'treschrestien vertueux & magnanime roy Francoys premier'; 'dieu doit tresbonne vie'; 'Loys douziesme ... lequel dieu vueille mettre & colloquer en son royaulme de paradis'; 'A la louenge et gloire de dieu et a lhonneur de tous nobles princes chrestiens'; 'comment la sainte ampoule ... fut du ciel envoyee'; 'ledification de leglise sainte geneviesve au mont de Paris'; 'armes royales des roys françoys envoyees du ciel et de loriflamme'; 'cerf qui enseigna le chemin aux gens darmes du roy Clovys'; 'déluge deau envoyee du ciel sur la limaigne dauvergne, tempeste tombee en touraine et mouvement de terre à Bordeaux, feu gresle, flux de ventre a Orleans et en Berry'; 'persecutions envoyees en la maison du roy chilperic'; 'signes merueilleux advenuz a Soissons, Paris et Senlis'; 'la nativité du second clotaire [Clotaire II]'; 'canonization ou saintete dicelluy dagobert' (xii-xxix).

¹⁴ 'souverain orateur et scientifique historiographe' (Gaguin 1520, 1).

Belleforest is a secular cosmographer and introduces himself as the ‘Chronicler of His Most Christian Majesty’ (‘Annaliste de la Majesté tres-Chrestienne’, 1579, title page) Henri III. Once in the description of the events, and beyond the Christian background previously described, François de Belleforest insists on the political and public dimension of human affairs. An explicit discourse has the organized State succeed divine determination. Points found in the paratext are also symptomatic since Robert Gaguin, on the other hand, includes kings Dagobert, Charlemagne and Saint Louis, for they all fought to defend the papacy, extend Christianity and drive away the Infidels. All three were canonized and are depicted in their holiness on the frontispiece.

In contrast, the frontispiece of François de Belleforest’s *Great Annals* bears the following motto: *Mecum porto omnia mea* or, ‘I carry everything within me’. It refers back to the usefulness of knowledge as a source of spiritual wealth and wisdom, as shown by the portrayal of an elderly man. Buildings also appear on the engraving, which is a double reference to ancient authors. According to Cicero, this sentence was uttered by Bias, one of the seven wise men from ancient Greece, when he had to escape hurriedly from the city of Priene, just seized by enemies: ‘What is, then, good, somebody might ask. If anything is done rightly, honestly and virtuously, that we think and say to be good; and I believe to be good only what is rightful, honest and virtuously done’. As all citizens were fleeing, carrying their most precious belongings, it is believed that he was carrying with himself everything he possessed and all that was valuable. Cicero then concluded that the only things worth anything were what is honourable, virtuous and righteous.¹⁵ In the same manner, Seneca attributes to the Greek philosopher Stilpo the following words, right after he had lost all relatives and personal belongings in the attack of Poliorcetes: “‘I have lost nothing, ... all my belongings are with me’: justice, rigor, caution’.¹⁶ Through this selection of *exempla*, Belleforest turns history into a tool of moral elevation rather than a sign of divine determination. The references to ancient wisdom are chosen over that of Christian providence. Therefore, and contrary to a number of medieval chronicles, history is no longer just a mere succession of events performed by princes fulfilling a divine design. What is at stake here is the surfacing of the temporality of the State instead of a mere succession of

¹⁵ ‘Quid est igitur, quaeret aliquis, bonum? si quid recte fit, et honeste, et cum virtute, id bene fieri, vere dicitur: et, quod rectum, et honestum, et cum virtute est, id solum opinor bonum’ (Cicero 1946, I, 1, 8).

¹⁶ “‘Nihil” inquit “perdidi” ... “Omnia mea mecum sunt”: iustitia, virtus, prudentia’ (Seneca 1475, IX, 19). Seneca uses the same scene in ‘On the Constancy of the Wise Man’: ‘After he took Megara, Demetrius, known as Poliorcetes, asked Stilpo the philosopher if he had not lost anything: “Nothing, he said, for all my possessions are with me”’ (Megaram Demetrius ceperat, cui cognonem Poliorcetes fuit: ab-hoc Stilpon philosophus interrogatus, num quid perdidisset, “Nihil, inquit; omnia namque mea mecum sunt”), *De constantia sapientis*, VI, 6.

the king's deeds. The same goes for the miracles and other divine interventions that are bound to disappear from the works of geography in the seventeenth century. Even great events such as the collapse of the Granier mountain in 1248 are not mentioned as divine sanction but as mere geological events, in this instance, as a rock slide. This return to the time of God in the works of history also materialises through a progressive disappearance of the first chapters dedicated to Biblical history. Even if Creation is still mentioned in the cosmographies by Sebastian Münster (1544) and François de Belleforest (1575), it is absent from the one by André Thevet (1575). Biblical history tends to limit itself to the field of religious and theological discourse.

These trends contribute to set aside a biblical and, more generally, Christian reading, from the historical field. In the long run, some sociologists and historians identify this as a true disenchantment of the world. This concept was first expressed by German sociologist Max Weber in his *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905) and in 'Science as a Vocation' (1922). More recently, the concept was revisited by French philosopher and historian Marcel Gauchet in two milestone books: *The Disenchantment of the World: A Political History of Religion* (1997) and in *Un Monde désenchanté?* published in 2004. These two works define the disenchantment of the world as a general process of the decline of religions against modernism, leading the world to a total loss of spiritual meaning and therefore reduced to a material knowledge. According to Gauchet, this shift applies to both nature and mankind. The disenchantment happens at the very core of the Christian religion and culture. It is a long process, stretching over several centuries; set off in the eleventh century, it becomes visible in the sixteenth century due to the double crisis of mediation both religious (the Reformation) and political. History unavoidably holds a very important place in this process since time as a constructed concept, claimed by a human community, constitutes one of the fundamental elements of any society. As a result, the historical discourse contributes to the assertion of the State and to the building of political, social, and religious identities but revolves also, from a more philosophical point of view, around questions of Time and temporality (Conche 1992, 2014). Eventually, as clearly shown by Michel Foucault, the link between knowledge and power is particularly strong in the realm of history. Like any constituted knowledge, for a long time, history played an important role as mediator between God and mankind. Through the human gaze on the history of the world, at one time, this discipline contributed to the implication of man in the Creation. History therefore fell within the interlocking of the divine and earthly worlds, asserting the unity and hierarchy between the human world and the divine realm (Gauchet 2004, 57). It offered a cognitive support to the mediation between men and God, thus contributing to a 'sacral economy of the world' (64). It is precisely because of this strong hierarchy between Heaven and Earth, carried by an 'ontological dissociation of the orders of reality' (50)

that man was able to take hold more easily of the world here below, which is not sacred in itself. It is the meaning of Gauchet's expression 'Christianity is the religion of the end of religion' (1997, 103). A deconfessionalised history surfaces within the very Christian vision and order of time, providing the frame within which to engage its emancipation process. From the Renaissance on, the historical discourse is also in line with the humanist discourse granting man a high human dignity (Pico Della Mirandola, Erasmus and Montaigne especially) as well as – and as a result of – the promotion of a historical knowledge. History therefore becomes a way to reduce the 'extreme metaphysical devaluation at the lowest degree of being' and to recover 'the ontological economy of the One' (58). It allows the emancipation of the discourse on reality, or the tangible world, in relation to meaning, or the realm of the invisible. Human history, like geography, permits to move from a religious interpretative paradigm to a political paradigm, which accounts more accurately for the complexity of the reality of the world, made of a torn Christianity, split up states, and political rivalries sometimes transcending religious and confessional divisions. Eventually, what is really happening here is a secularisation of history, a partial emancipation from the religious sphere and not, strictly speaking, a disenchantment of the world. For it all depends on temporal scales and paradigmatic analysis. Just as during any other period, men in the Renaissance do not use the same analytical grid in all given circumstances. If divine temporality remains an essential and decisive element in the theological field or confessional argumentations in a context of religious wars, it fades away and appears only implicitly in the historical discourse. Yet, whether implicitly or explicitly, the time of God does not disappear from the perception of the temporalities of the world. The same goes with the religious, or even theological, meaning of human actions. Secular history cannot narrate or elucidate that other history. The religious vision of the world remains in a number of works (life of the saints, sermons, orations ...), personal writings (travel diaries ...), pamphlets, especially during the wars of religion, but tends to disappear in the history of human actions.

4. Present of the Past and Celebrating the Present

However, the conception of time in the Renaissance is not limited to a linear plane, starting from the origins and leading to the 'horizon of expectation' (Koselleck 1985) of the New Jerusalem. Philosophical or theological debates (Mooij 2005, 121-129) are not exactly the places to look for this new relationship to time, but rather in the everyday experience of time, its social, political and intellectual applications, the passing of the days and hours. A multitude of experiences and relationships to time filters not only from the historical and cosmographical descriptions of the world (Forero-Mendoza 2002; Bohler and Magnien-Simonin 2005). There is also a renewed interest

in chronology, the classifying of facts within ‘the true order of times’ as stated by Nicolas Vignier (1579) in the introduction of his *Sommaire de l’histoire des François*; and there is renewed interest also ‘in the order of time’ so ‘nothing can be altered or mistaken’, assures François de Belleforest.¹⁷ There is also a more acute and demanding sense of time expressed through the spread of calendars, urban and table clocks (Landes 2000), the desire to set the beginning of the year on January 1st (1564 in France; Giry 1925, 103-129; Guyotjeannin and Tock 1999), the understanding of errors in the calculation of the passing of time and the need to reform the Julian calendar and substitute it with the Gregorian calendar (1582; Delatour 1999). The need for punctuality emerges, next to the ancient fear of wasting time, particularly in Protestant practices, humanist writings and works from the Reformers (Engammare 2010). Some aspects of this new relationship to time in the Renaissance have already been studied. A new order of time, a new regime of historicity, rhythm and temporality are put into place. There is of course a promotion of Antiquity encouraging a retrospective gaze and valuing of the actors and their work in this founding period, eliciting a desire of imitation. Ancient times are seen as prestigious and their authors benefit from a status of *Auctoritas*, thus becoming major intellectual and educational references. Consequently, the transitional time of the ‘Middle Ages’ is contained, named and defined as a transition, a parenthesis, interrupting the temporal continuity within which the previous centuries were inscribed (Hartog 2003, 227-228). The *renovatio* also implies the objectivation of Antiquity, organized into a whole concept with a clearly limited beginning, not ignored entirely but obscured by the following centuries. Antiquity is defined temporarily, identified and described with wonder, but at the same time it is also limited and covered up. As such, it constitutes a breach in the linearity of historical time. For the Renaissance historian, the goal is to rediscover Antiquity in its original purity, to rid it from what it is not and find what it may have been. In this context, we see the beginning of the interest in monument preservation in fifteenth-century Italy, reaching the literary circles and humanist scholars. Ancient ruins are seen as relics of the past, witnesses of the glory of past centuries. Numerous men of letters such as Gabriel Simeoni went to Italy in order to discover ancient ruins and bring back home their descriptions and other lists of medals and epitaphs (1558). Incidentally, this interest in preserving the past corresponds to the rearranging of the ancient Maison Carrée (1533) and its surroundings in Nîmes, ordered by Francis I, right after the king ordered the destruction of Philip Augustus’ medieval dungeon at the Louvre (1528; Hartog 2003, 218).

¹⁷ ‘en l’ordre du temps ... rien changer ny confondre’ (1579, II, 1185r, see also and in particular 1552r).

Nevertheless, even though the desire to exhume the facts, to find an interest in ancient ruins, and to go back to the linguistic roots of Latin and Greek are all driven by historical interest, what is left from the past can only celebrate the supremacy of Antiquity over the renescent present for a limited time. Nostalgic evocations of ancient times in literature are not to be taken as a definitive judgment, such as Montaigne's expressed regret not to live in Antiquity, or Ronsard's celebration of ancient Greece, 'which never had nor will it ever have anything like it' in *Le bocage royal*.¹⁸ Mistakes or obvious lack of knowledge from ancient authors in some fields appeared quickly. Even though these authors are still celebrated, their works were rapidly edited, challenged and surpassed. It is the case in numerous fields: in *Le vite de' piu eccellenti pittori, scultori, e architettori* (1550), Giorgio Vasari considers that Michelangelo exceeded ancient artists; in 1507 Martin Waldseemüller is able to map a new continent named *America*, which so-called discovery during Antiquity could only come from a false and biased line of argumentation. Entire regions at the heart of Europe, such as the Alps, appear in cosmographies and in map making, while they were still poorly known by ancient authors (Bourdon 2011); in 1578, Jean de Léry offers ethnographical descriptions of the Tupi native tribes of Brazil, completely unknown to Ptolemy; in 1570 Abraham Ortelius publishes the first entirely modern atlas *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum*, deprived of any ancient maps. Through mere observation, between 1551 and 1558, Conrad Gessner and Pierre Belon describe animals unknown during Antiquity. In 1547, Andreas Vesalius is able to detect over two hundred errors in Galen's work; in his *De re metallica* (1556), Georgius Agricola highlights that Pliny's *Historia naturalis* left out numerous minerals. The list could go on and consider astronomy and military or nautical technology. If the rediscovery of Antiquity exhumes the past, it also brings forth the realisation of man's ability to uncover the past, discover the world and produce new knowledge, correcting or embracing the past, never mastered before. Therefore, not only does the Renaissance temporality cast an admiring look towards the past, it is also a realisation of the indisputable superiority, in the field of knowledge, of the present time. The Renaissance period can therefore settle in a 'fullness of the present', to quote Alphonse Dupront (2001, 49; see also Hermann de Franceschi 2014). This conception of time in terms of interruption rather than continuity also appears in the context of the Reformation, questioning the meaning of history (Dubois 1977, 26-68).

The progressive surfacing of the concept of heritage or *patrimoine* in the Renaissance should be understood through this desire to enhance the past. Rather than anchoring the works of art in the past, their cultural uses connect them to the present. Incidentally, even if the concept already exists,

¹⁸ 'qui n'eut jamais, ny aura de semblables' (1554, III. 11).

the preferred term is ‘monument’, for ‘heritage’ (*patrimoine*) remains linked to family possessions.¹⁹ The term ‘monument’ goes back to its original Latin meaning *monumentum* or *monimentum* and offers a semantic richness referring back to this new relationship to time. It describes at the same time a building, a funeral monument and more generally anything evocative of a memory, a proof, a testimony, a mark as seen by La Popelinière in his *Histoire de France* (1581), or in Nicolas Vignier’s *Sommaire de l’histoire des François* (1579).²⁰ Guillaume Paradin uses the expression ‘monument of honour’ to refer to an ancient inscription in the memory of a great man (1573, 421). By extension, the word ‘monument’ also refers to works of history, the ‘monuments of ancient historians’²¹ according to Pierre Boaistuau, or to Émile Piguerre, who evokes the high deeds ‘recorded in writing on monuments, in order to preserve the memory for posterity.’²² In other words, as stated by Roberto Valturio in his 1472 *De re militari*, ‘Monvmenta, from the mutation of the I into V, are sepulchres, statues, titles, books & other things commanding us to remember the past.’²³ In his *Discours sur les antiquitez*, Gabriel de Lurbe, on the other hand, reminds the reader that the work of the historian brings him glory for ‘each will admire the ancient monuments, and learning from you their author & the time, your glory will not wander and disappear.’²⁴ The term ‘monument’ refers to the concept of ‘heritage’ or *patrimoine* until the end of the eighteenth century.²⁵ The monuments thus indicate much more than an imprint left in the past. They send us back to the historical presence and remembrance of the past (mausoleum, building), to whatever makes it possible for the present to know the past (clue, memory, testimony, history book) and finally to the intergenerational link through which the living are

¹⁹ See for instance Estienne 1539.

²⁰ La Popelinière 1581, for instance 84v or 276r; Vignier 1579, 105. See also Belleforest 1575, I, 350, 18, and II, 925.

²¹ ‘monuments des anciens historiens’ (Boaistuau 1564, 106v).

²² ‘rédigez par escrit és monumens, pour en conserver la mémoire à toute la postérité’ (Piguerre 1581, 136).

²³ ‘Monumenta par mutation de l’I, en, V, sont les sépulchres, statuës, tiltre, livres & autres choses qui nous amonnestent nous souvenir du temps passé’ (Valturio 1555, 121v).

²⁴ ‘chacun admirera les anciens monumens, et apprenant de vous leur autheur & le temps, votre gloire ne peut se perdre vagabonde’ (Lurbe 1594, 2).

²⁵ In the seventeenth century, these various meanings of ‘monument’ are clearly formulated in Furetière’s *Dictionary* (1690): ‘MONUMENT. sub. Evidence from some great powerful nation or of the greatness of past centuries. The Pyramids of Egypt, the Coliseum, are fine monuments of greatness, of the kings of Egypt, or the Roman Republic. MONUMENT, can also refer to surviving records in Histories and authors of past actions. Many great bastions have perished, of which we still have some monumental records in books. Writers have handed down to posterity eternal monuments of the glory of great men. MONUMENT, also means a tomb, especially in Poetry’. The word ‘monument’ is still used in this way in Bernard de Montfaucon (1729-1733) and in the entries of Alexandre Lenoir’s *Musée des monuments français* in 1791.

the heirs of their elders and custodians of an inheritance to be transmitted to the generations to come. The word 'monument' therefore does not limit itself to tell what the past was but the way the present time meets part of its identity. Patrimonial discourse is a discourse in the present tense. This can be seen in the engraving representing the ancient Roman aqueduct Pont du Gard, which François de Belleforest comments in his *Cosmographie universelle* (1575). The structure is not depicted according to its ancient appearance but in its present state, partially worn and filled with weeds. Besides, Jean Nicot, 'the King's Counsellor, & Master of the Ordinary Requests in his house' who provided the cosmographer with this engraving, is described as a man 'of great research, and rare erudition, & mindful of the well-being of the future generations'.²⁶

Moreover, there is a deep feeling in the Renaissance of an ontological permanent feature which defines man. This is the reason why the historian can see a *Historia magistra vitae*, in the past. François de Belleforest says it very clearly regarding sacred and secular histories alike in his *Histoire des neuf Charles*:

If we consider what touches upon and belongs to true devotion, resting on the fear of God, nothing could touch us & allude more to the divine punishment of our unhappy life than the examples of either God's mercy or wrath, His patience, or punishment of men's misdeeds and transgressions, which are plentiful and well-illustrated in the holy histories. And by history, I mean both the sacred & so-called profane one, which are both the representation from life of both the punishment of the evil doers, & the reward for those who followed the virtuous track, and embraced justice.²⁷

The study of the past is significant in the present. This is the reason why François de Belleforest draws on the past so often to justify some contemporary events in the context of the wars of religion. His limited rendering of the slaughter of the Protestants in Wassy, on March 1st, 1562, is a good example of this process, where the cosmographer compares Duke Francis of Guise's action to that of Theodosius the Great to defend the power in place. Belleforest's take of history leads to a levelling of the interlocked temporalities, organizing therefore the speaker's present and moral awareness. This consciousness of

²⁶ 'Conseillier du Roy, & maistre des requestes ordinaires de sa maison'; 'de grandes recherches, & de rare erudition, & soigneux du bien, & profit de la posterité' (I, 354).

²⁷ 'Car si nous prenons esgard à ce qui touche & appartient à la vraye piété, laquelle est assise & appuyée sur la crainte de Dieu, on ne sçauroit rien trouver qui tant nous esmeuve, & induise au chastiment de nostre vie mal'heureuse, que les exemples qui nous sont proposez soit de la misericorde au courroux de Dieu, de sa patience, ou punition sur les forfaits & transgressions des hommes, desquelles choses toutes les saintes histoires sont pleines & illustres. Et parlant de l'histoire j'y comprends, & celle qui est sacre, & l'autre que nous appellons profane, lesquels sont la vive peinture, & de la punition des mauvais, & du salaire de ceux qui ont suuy le trac de vertu, & embrassé la justice' (Belleforest 1568, aiiij r).

history is not new, for it can already be seen in the centuries before and it goes on until the seventeenth century (Guion 2008). But, in the Renaissance, it contributes to assert the prevalence of present time, the legitimacy of judgment beyond knowledge. It also implies a kind of submittal of past events to a useful and meaningful reading of the present. It is, to a certain extent, Augustine's 'present of past things'. Present, namely the temporality of consciousness and study, is therefore inscribed into a timeless realm where great principles transcend the passing of time and give human actions an axiological power. This is the reason why Jean Bodin clearly states that:

If we refer to historians' conclusions, rather than poets', we realize that human revolutions are similar to the ones in the universe and we go back to the precepts from the old master of wisdom, that there is nothing new under the sun.²⁸

Jean Bodin goes back over the very words from the Book of Ecclesiastes, which notices that 'What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again', to conclude: 'there is nothing new under the sun' (Eccl. 1:9; see also 3:15). What matters here is not so much a cyclical time than the timelessness of certain aspects of life in general, and therefore life in the past, which is the very object of history. It is also in alignment with Jean Bodin's idea of 'the people's nature' according to which there is a principle of stability in the people's identity regardless of the era considered. It is what allows François de Belleforest to identify permanent features in people already described by Herodotus, Strabo or Pliny the Elder, and seemingly confirmed by observation. One of the crucial goals of history also lies here since, as Jean Bodin reminds us, 'the present time can be easily explained thanks to history, just like the future can be uncovered, so it is possible to obtain very dependable indications on what needs to be searched for or avoided'.²⁹ Since history can uncover the past, the past allows us to see into the present more clearly (Couzinet 1996, 66). Pierre Droict de Gaillard pushes the idea even further when he organizes his *La méthode qu'on doit tenir en la lecture de l'histoire*, published in 1579, into a thematic outline revolving around moral values illustrated by historical facts presented as a 'true and exemplary mirror of our life'.³⁰ Therefore, we can talk about a permanent present time during

²⁸ 'Si l'on s'en rapporte aux conclusions des historiens et non des poètes, l'on s'aperçoit que les révolutions humaines sont semblables à celles de l'univers et l'on en revient aux préceptes du vieux maître de la sagesse, qu'il n'y a rien de nouveau sous le soleil' (Bodin 1951, 427).

²⁹ 'c'est grâce à l'histoire que le présent s'explique aisément, que le futur se pénètre et que l'on acquiert des indications très certaines sur ce qu'il convient de chercher ou de fuir' (1951, 13).

³⁰ 'vray miroir et exemplaire de nostre vie' (Droict de Gaillard 1579, titlepage; see Dubois 2005).

the Renaissance, which is that of Christian consciousness of Heidegger's 'Being-in-the-World'. This conception of temporality, anchored in the present, is also echoed in the writing of history. But it builds on a long philosophical tradition predating Augustine. As noticed by Michel de Montaigne, drawing upon the Stoic heritage, the past is no longer; the future has not yet come and is only in the making. All that remains is a history to be written today, thanks to the work of erudition, especially philological, in order to say what the past was, to uncover it through the current thought, in an ever-present present time. In the third century BCE, Chrysippus maintains indeed that 'only the present exists; the past and future remain, but they do not exist at all' (Chrysippus, quoted by Arius Didymus, *Epitome*, 26). According to the Stoics, past and future belong to the category of the intangible, they only exist through present discourse as it is uttered (Bréhier 1951, 24-25). Sextus Empiricus uses this idea when he considers that the past only exists according to the imprints left behind which are uncovered in the present time, like 'a sign of the past' (1569, VIII, 254-256). Drawing on Plato and Lucretius, Montaigne adds that the world is always moving, that it is but 'a perennial movement', and that 'all things in it are in a constant flow, movement and constant variation'.³¹ Montaigne further observes that we are always in an in-between state. He depicts it as the passage from one state to another, what is now, not what was or will be. It is a life flow between two different states, but happening now. This is Montaigne's essential vision on time. It is also what Ronsard expresses when he states that: 'Time flies, time flies, madame! / Alas, time? No, we it is, rather'.³² Beyond Montaigne's introspection, his reflection leads to the assertion of a legitimate priority of the speaker and his own time, therefore an assertion of the self, the here and the present time. In this selective choice of past elements, we can easily grasp how the writing of history is both prospective, since the present time was built upon the past, and retrospective, since all history has been written in the present time.³³

5. Conclusion

The relationship to time appears to have shifted at the Renaissance. It is centred on present time, which organises to its own benefit the subordination and submission of the past to the present. The Last Judgment is of course

³¹ 'une branloire perenne'; 'toutes choses sont en fluxion, muance et variation perpetuelle' (Montaigne, *Essais* III, 2, 398).

³² 'Le temps s'en va, le temps s'en va, ma Dame, / Las! le temps non, mais nous, nous en allons' (1555).

³³ Regarding this topic, see the particular case of traditions. (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Chittolini 2003; Simay 2009).

still looming over the horizon to end the experience of earthly existence, but it does not prevent the rearranging of temporality in the Renaissance. Therefore, we can see the combination of an oriented time, purposeful and tensed toward the future and the New Jerusalem, with a retrospective look on Antiquity, marvellous yet to be surpassed, on the chronological time of human history, on the cyclical time of the liturgical calendar, each of them being brilliantly orchestrated by the polarization of the present time. The religious celebration in itself is a realization rooted in the present of the past Alliance. It is a human time within a divine time, a transcending temporality, exterior and superior to the world, and – from a scholastic and transcendent point of view, sending back to the attributes of the Absolute One and the Being – a time of the self, of the being-to-the-world, of the present consciousness of the Christian being and of the Renaissance man of letters, infused with humanist principles. In the books of history and cosmographies, it appears clearly that the new relationship to time emerges from a present consciousness, which interrogates the past in order to make sense of itself. From this point on, the Renaissance man is equipped with a renewed and enhanced dignity. The past is submitted to the present through a flow, linking the ‘now’ to what used to be, for the Renaissance reads the past through its present significance. This is the reason why talking about the past is talking about the present. Escaping this submission is only possible through a time exterior to the experience of the world, developed in physics in later centuries. But for the time being, the display of temporalities and the spreading of the various conceptions of time happen within the realm of the disenchantment of the world, with the emergence of a time of man, the only one used by historians and cosmographers, leaving the rest to theologians and men of the cloth. The Renaissance is only a step, but certainly a decisive one, in the very slow process of exiting the Christian order of time. Even if human history emancipates itself gradually from sacred history, there are still an articulation and a fusion of the frontiers between the time of God and the time of men. Indeed, the process of the disenchantment of time in the field of history happens in the realm of the Christian order of time.

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