

## Summary

Beside the usual sections, the papers presented at the conference (May 2010, Szeged) commemorating the launch of *Aetas* 25 years ago are published in the current issue of the journal in two thematic sections.

The first thematic section bears the title “Democratic transition and historiography” and contains papers discussing some of the important problems Hungarian historiography faced after 1990, often presenting these in a wider time perspective. In his essay “The institutions and forums of Hungarian historiography”, Ignác Romsics, looking back on the previous decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, describes the evolution of historical research institutions and historical journals in Hungary. As to the recent past, he emphasizes the increase in the number of research centers as well as the resulting spread of “mediocrity” among scholars. He believes that Hungary does not necessarily need more than seventy universities and colleges, at least two dozens of which has history faculties. Neither quality staff, nor acceptable libraries are available in such quantity. In his views, an obvious structure for history education would be the following: making the BA cycle more like a *basic* level social science with increased emphasis on language education; making the MA level more professional; and taking the PhD level more seriously using a tutorial educational system. Similarly, the number of institutes, independent of higher education, is also unnecessarily high. For example, there is no need for several of those institutes focusing on 20<sup>th</sup>-century Hungarian history that were apparently established with ties to political sides or ideologies. As to publications, the author believes that it is an urgent task to launch an English-language historical journal in Hungary.

In his paper “Hungarian historiography in an international context – in the past and today”, Gábor Gyáni shows that Hungarian historiography remained relatively isolated internationally throughout the whole of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Even after the disappearance of the political confrontation between the East and the West, only a few and inadequate signs of emancipation can be seen in Hungarian historiography. It is despite the fact that a new generation of historians has grown up in the meantime, whose world view is much more international than national provincial. Among them those are the most open to historiographical cosmopolitanism who are more interested in transnational historical approaches than in traditional historical topics and approaches. It is primarily in the areas of social history, the history of mentalities as well as cultural history and theory that international involvement has become almost a natural requirement. Both on the basis of the individual performance of scholars and as a historiographical movement, our social history and history of mentalities seem to be the most marketable internationally. Finally, he asks the question whether the whole or at least a greater part of historiography can be liberated from that prison, allotted to it in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which defines the mission to promote national consciousness as its *only* obligation. There are signs for hope, but the final outcome is still unpredictable today.

László Veszprémy's paper bears the title “Military History's search for its place: international and local experiences”. The author claims that Béla Király – who lived in emigration and did not give up book publishing after his return to Hungary either – did a lot for the international recognition of Hungarian military history. With unsurpassable energy, he published dozens of books in the series *Atlantic Studies on Society in Change* at *Columbia University Press*. Mostly only historians of the Ottoman period had the chance to publish papers in other influential series issued abroad. When it comes to the important forums of

historical research we have a more diverse picture, though. As in so many other areas, Hungarian historians generally have difficulties in finding the approach international forums are interested in. Most papers published in Hungarian journals still use a person-, settlement- or event-centric approach, and accordingly are mostly not very exciting for foreign historians. In spite of this, the author is optimistic about the future: the globalization of this field remains unstoppable, while it becomes more sensitive to the considerations of professional users (the military or politicians), like the problems of terrorism and asymmetric warfare.

According to Zsolt Hunyadi's survey entitled "Once upon a time in the East: Hungarian medieval historical studies in an international context", it is apparent when we consider international involvement that Altaic historians, prehistorians and those who study oriental connections are so much ahead of others. Their lead is secured by a their journal. *Acta Orientalia* published in foreign languages, but even apart from that their foreign-language monographs and papers get their way to foreign historians. The international presence of Hungarian history of art, archeology and local history can also be regarded as exemplary, historians of these areas have been working and publishing in an international environment for a long time. At the same time, the results of the study of Hungarian medieval book culture are rather slow to penetrate into the main current of European research, while in the case of Byzantinology, very little has remained of our one-time international recognition.

The next group of papers is organized under the heading "Periods and periodization in history". In his paper entitled "Periods do exist – how is that possible? Period terms and periodization in historiography", Tamás Kisantal argues that periods do not exist inasmuch as we consider that all period terms, as well as periodization itself, emerge subsequently and reflect the concept of history of a given period. However, periods do exist inasmuch as it is an organic part of our historical thinking to create such narratives that break up into smaller episodes, sequences. Periods are artificial inasmuch as we label them subsequently, we establish the significance of period-defining and period-dividing events afterwards. Periods are natural inasmuch as every historical concept is a construct and reality at the same time, as in the historical narrative it is fairly real that an episode of a story is reality *within the story itself*. That is, even though we are aware of the fact that our history is a construct, in a paradox way, we can only experience it as reality. Periodization is changing inasmuch as every period overwrites the whole or certain parts of history. Yet periodization is constant inasmuch as we are unable to do without certain categories, as most probably entrenched presuppositions unavoidably determine our approach and period terms.

György Kövér's "Aetates Aetatum" studies the periodization practices surfacing in higher education and in historical syntheses published in Hungary. It claims that the university system is characterized by inertia but that does not explain the inconsistencies in the practice of periodization. He believes that historians should think over the following question: if the study of history gave up the previously hegemonic linear concept of time at least half a century ago, and has been using various time levels, time layers and time dimensions, not in sync with each other, then should not it deal just with these "non-simultaneous simultaneities" instead of reproducing sterile periods of political history touched up, with hundred-year-old techniques, to look homogeneous and squeezed between historical events? In this respect, it is basically does not matter if we regard period start and end dates realities or constructs, the narrative of history will in any case structure itself around such end points which, on the one hand, do not pick up their function in their own right but rather

in their “afterlife”, and, on the other hand, it depends on the interpretation of the outcome what kind of time span and dimension it requires as antecedents for its own explanation.

György Galamb in his essay entitled “Periodization and narratives: the case of the Middle Ages” argues that we can get closer to the “essence” of the Middle Ages as a historical period if we define its “content” by using more factors. Among others, we can use a) the dominance of latifundia, which appears as a power organization as opposed to the personally dependent peasantry; b) the possessions, rank and the distribution of powers through descent and personal connections, and the contractual character of the relationships between the groups and the individuals involved. On the other hand, we can list such further phenomena among the fundamental features of the Middle Ages as c) the simultaneous presence, growing rivalry as well as the inseparable coupling and dynamic balance of secular power and the church operating also as a power institution; d) the role of religion to integrate and absorb human knowledge and representations. But using definitions based on too many factors can also be risky. The more we move away, for the sake of precision, from using one or two fundamental factors in our definition, the more imprecise it will become. The period term will lose its explanatory power, will require further explanation and will spark debates.

The paper by Gábor Czoch bears the title “Periodization issues and French historiography”. The author demonstrates that processes in time and the possible interpretations of historical time play a very important role in French historical thinking. Approaches to historical time are divided into three main topics by the author. The first one is the rethinking as well as the critique of Braudel's plural historical time model. The reflections related to François Hartog's concept of “*régime d'historicité*” constitute the second. And third important movement is the complex relationship between history and memory. In this area, the reference point is the several-thousand-page collective enterprise (*Les lieux de mémoire*) published under the direction of Pierre Nora. These three movements together can be seen as typical approaches on the basis of which French historians deal with the issue of time or think about it. The question of periodization essentially arises in all of these approaches, but typically only secondarily, as part of the given approach.

Béla Tomka in his paper “On the periodization of contemporary European and Hungarian history: the unfinished 20<sup>th</sup> century and the broken 20<sup>th</sup> century” claims that in the past decades world wars has become preferred milestones for periodization in international historiography, complemented recently by the collapse of Eastern European communist regimes as another period start and end date. At the same time, it is barely reconcilable with the ever improving methodological standards of historiography to consider wars as period end points as their role as such cannot be justified on theoretical grounds. In Hungarian historiography it is even more common to mark the First and the Second World War as a historical period limit. Moreover, as another specific feature, here it is not the beginning but the end of the First World War that is seen as a historical turning point. In post-1990 Hungarian historiography this represents a dividing line as important as or more important than the end of the Second World War or the middle of the century. In a European comparison, it is also a special characteristic feature of Hungarian historical research that in the periodization of the 20<sup>th</sup> century political historical factors are more articulated. The fact that it is the end and not the beginning of the First World War that plays a significant role in periodization is an evidence for that. However, you can undeniably find some serious historical arguments in support of the theory that the end of the war should be regarded as the beginning of a new period in Hungary.