

HUINZINGA, Johan. *O outono da Idade Média*. São Paulo: Cosac & Naify, 2010, 656 p.

## **CULTURE AND THOUGHT IN *THE AUTUMN OF MIDDLE AGES* BY JOHAN HUIZINGA.**

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Johan Huizinga was born in 1872 in Groningen, Netherlands. He was the son of Dirk Huizinga, a physiologist married to Jacoba Tonkens. His family formation was based on Christian precepts. His family was made up of anabaptists.

Graduated in Indo-Germanic languages from the University of Groningen. Huizinga also developed research with linguistic studies in Leipzig, where he studied linguistics in the

university of the city and defended his thesis on Indo-Germanic languages. When he returns to Netherlands in 1897, Huizinga spent the next few years working as a teacher in Haarlem, where he had his first contacts with history, as he saw the need to resume the national history with students. Spending the next years studying Western history, Huizinga gradually connects to historical thinking, being instigated by the subject even more years later in a 1902 art exhibition where he found on display paintings by the Van Eyck brothers. Awakening his previous knowledge and critical analysis, the linguist began to reflect on conceptions about the end of the middle ages, period of production of the artists evidenced in the exhibition and the beginning of the resignification of reality by Renaissance humanism Italian. To this end, it was in Jacob Burckhardt's work, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, which Huizinga had known in previous years, where he sought stylistic inspiration from his narrative, in addition to formulating disputes about the approach of the work.

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Influenced by the intellectual “movement of 1880” in Netherlands, Huizinga came to consider relevant the production processes that involved, for example, a concern about narrative aesthetics, from French literature and impressionism.

In 1919, Huizinga released the book considered his masterpiece currently: *The Autumn of the Middle Ages*. Divided into 21 chapters, which discuss from the perception of daily life to the imaginary about the death, the work shows a huge concern with the erudition of the narrative and a plural construction of various facts and elements that make up a panoramic view of the time. The linguist historian now thought the middle ages from an allegorical, romantic and transcendental perspective to the cycle of time.

It is with *Autumn* that Huizinga becomes known. However, this would not be his only great work. According to Naiara Damas, Huizinga’s work is divided before and after his trip to the United States. Prior to his 1926 trip to the *Yanke nation*, Johan was concerned about his studies on the

Renaissance. After his tour of the United States, Huizinga’s concern becomes modern times and his discrepancy about past times, gaining a nostalgic vision.

Being a first-order critic of the fashions of his time, motivated mainly by the horror of the Second World War, under the Nazi spectrum that persecuted him and mistreated his life, we can sum up Huizinga's work using Peter Burke's words in his essay published in *History Today* in 1986, *Huizinga, prophet of “blood and roses”* (HUIZINGA, 2010, p. 599): “Huizinga was a shy, demanding, sensitive and formal man, “an incorrigible dreamer awake” [...] without any sympathy for the twentieth century. He had strong aversion [...] for modern science, abstract art [...], cinema, radio, Marx, capitalism, Freud, and the United States, country in which he saw little order [...]”.

“When the world was five centuries younger, everything that happened in life was endowed with much sharper contours than today’s” (HUIZINGA, 2010, p. 11). Huizinga’s work on the miscellany that made up the 14th and 15th centuries

inside the European continent. *The autumn of the middle ages* proposes to study the forms of life and thought that permeated this region at that time and from a narrative construction of great care, one sees the composition of habits, actions and subjects of a world that was about to suffer the “turn of the tide”.

In Huizinga, the time of rebirth did not correspond to a new era of growth and strength, as stated in Buckhardt. The middle ages written by Huizinga consists of saturated elements that put up a transition.

If in *The Renaissance*, the middle ages gained impoverishing contours, *Autumn* will bring the composition of intensity without, however, contesting the transition period. The resignification of this period can be thought of from the very title of the work: *Autumn*. Unlike the word decline, a betrayal, according to Jacques Le Goff (2010) referring to the French translation of the work, the autumn word expresses the whole metaphor that carries the linguistic content of Huizinga’s production. Autumn is the fall season of leaves, “in which all the

fecundities and contradictions of nature seem to be exacerbated”. The leaves that are exchanged are dry and brittle, loose and lifeless. However, they have an intense and vibrant color, warm and sublime tones.

Even with such divergences between Burckhardt and Huizinga in the composition of their works, both historians had thought based under a cultural view of society. Culture, especially the scholar: paintings, songs are the expressions of the unconscious that reflects the vast communication between the subjects that make up the whole view, the collective of expression.

While emotions were evident, the senses were also elements of profound importance in Huizinga’s work. As Le Goff notes: “The first page of the book brings this fundamental phrase: ‘The contrast between disease and health was greater’; a little further on: ‘The contrast between light and darkness, silence and noise’, was much greater than today. First, life is this:

the use of the body, the use of the senses” (HUIZINGA, 2010, p. 590).

Subjectivity in *Autumn* seems to express the collective imaginary, not making historical production something of an explicit scientific content, this is why, as Le Goff points out in an interview given to Hilário Franco Júnior on October 30 2010, reported by Andrei Netto for *Estadão*, Huizinga made use of methodological practices of analysis “that were more literary than scientific, at least in relation to the type of science that is history”. “The lack of concern of the legitimation of history as a science in Huizinga, as was a concern of methodical scientists and *Annales*, made *autumn* a work for some subjective too much, as Jacques Le Goff notes in the above-mentioned interview.

Shrewd and vehement critic of modernity, Huizinga was frightened by two great wars that reached global proportions and saw it perish, not only lives, but thoughts, expressions. The feeling of war took him as a composition of anguish and

approaching death which he sympathizes throughout his book *The autumn of the Middle Ages*. Such thoughts were expressed in his work and currently Huizinga is recognized as one of the precursors of what we call the History of Mentalities, History of Emotions and Micro History.

Huizinga produced a dangerous history, as it was not just a story of feeling, but a story with feeling. It was with the dose of his emotion, that he composed his work to enter into the lives and thoughts through the margins of the narratives of men over time. The risk of comporting a history that approaches an artistic subjectivity can compose a narrative deeply demarcated by the senses of the historian himself, trapped in his delight of narrating. It was at risk of talking about the extent of the eternal middle world that Huizinga became a scholar who has written the historical narrative of a floating and intuitive aesthetic about life and thought.

*Tradução: Allan Jonhnatha Sampaio de Paula*