

BOOK REVIEW

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The Beginning of History: Anthropological Notes – Main Ideas and Structure

Abstract: *This review presents Prof. Mincho Georgiev's book *The Beginning of History: Anthropological Notes* (2025), an ambitious interdisciplinary work situated at the intersection of anthropology, history, philosophy, and semiotics. The book explores the evolution of human reason through the concepts of syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic minds, proposing a broad anthropological interpretation of history as a process shaped by changing forms of meaning production. Particular attention is paid to Georgiev's distinction between eventful history and anthropological evolutionary history, as well as to his understanding of the transition from metaphysical to anthropological modes of thought. The review outlines the structure of the book, discusses its main theoretical contributions, and examines its distinctive style of argumentation, which combines philosophical reflection, anthropological inquiry, and extensive engagement with literary and intellectual traditions. The book is assessed as a major synthesis of the author's long-standing work in medical and cultural anthropology and as a significant contribution to contemporary debates on history, culture, and human evolution.*

Keywords: *anthropological history; history of reason; ritual discourse; semiotics; cultural anthropology; Mincho Georgiev.*

Георгиев, Минчо (2025). Началото на историята: антропологични бележки. София: Издателство на БАН "Проф. Марин Дринов" (Georgiev, Mincho. *The Beginning of History: Anthropological Notes*. Sofia: BAS "Prof. Marin Drinov" Publishing House) ISBN: 978-619-245-513-2, 320 стр.

The book *The Beginning of History* by Prof. Mincho Georgiev, Dr.Hab. of medical sciences, was published in 2025 by the Publishing House of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (BAS). I had the honour of being its editor and proofreader (in this publisher the two functions have been merged). Let me tell you how the book is structured and what its style is.

The text spans 320 pages, but actually corresponds to 430 standard typewritten pages. The book is available for purchase both directly from the website of the BAS Publishing House and from well-known

commercial platforms such as “Ozone” and “Store.bg”. The last two have tagged it into the genre of “history”, obviously based on the key word in the title, but this is misleading and I will clarify later why.

Prof. Georgiev has devoted about 8 years of his life to writing this book. His path as a scientist is hardly the most typical one. He started as a physician by education at the School of Medicine and spent the first 20 years of his career as a lecturer in social medicine (including history of medicine) in order in the following 20 years to migrate to the field of ethnology in the Ethnographic Institute at BAS, where he did research in medical and cultural anthropology. The current book can be safely described as his *opus magnum*, with which he seeks to channel his search for an all-encompassing logic in the evolution of man both as a biological and as a social and spiritual being, to find out what is the supreme meaning that organizes his life.

The work is articulated in four major parts, the first three of which are devoted to the three types of reason (or minds), which are at the same time phases in the “big history”: *syntactic*, *semantic*, and *pragmatic*. The fourth part, bearing the same title as the book, makes up a summary and builds on this evolutionary-phase narrative, which traces the fundamental ideas about history and draws the line between *eventful* and *anthropological evolutionary history*. The possibility of two different histories: an *eventful* history in the horizon of metaphysical thinking, which places human communities in a “worldly world” according to the measure of God, and an anthropological evolutionary history as a history of reason, whose subject is man in his human-life world according to the measure of historical man himself. In other words, the book attempts to look at the shift from one history to the other as a single form of transition from metaphysics to anthropology.

According to the author’s confession, somewhere in the very first pages, “this book is the final result of my searches in the field of medical and cultural anthropology. The impetus to work on it forced me to reflect on what had already been thought out about the nature of ritual as a form of pre-verbal discursive experience for the production of meaning. My assumption that I was witnessing a pre-verbal syntactic reason became undoubted, and prompted me to look for additional sources testifying to its historical reality. A storm of questions came over me”, acknowledges Prof. Mincho Georgiev by reducing them to six points in total:

a) whether ritual as a non-spoken discourse does not go beyond the cultural and anthropological horizon of its understanding; if words

alone can denote concepts;

b) if the emergence of the ability to speak does not date as back as about 60 thousand years, how *Homo habilis*, Neanderthal and Cro-Magnon Man for hundreds of thousands of years were able to exercise any cognitive intelligence;

c) whether ritual as a non-spoken discourse is not a relic of the pre-cognitive creative mind – an evolutionary precursor and a condition for the possibility of the cognitive one;

d) whether the eventful reason does not take its inception from an evolutionary predecessor other than ‘nothingness’, and therefore – its end in its transition to another (the value-based one);

e) whether the boundaries between long-term historical times have not been blurred by both “ruptures” and “transitions”;

f) whether the exit from a cognitive to a value-based mind does not coincide with the transition between metaphysics and anthropology.

The author highlights the following main ideas in his book:

- History is a dynamic picture of reality types, which evolutionarily unfolds itself under the semiotic legislation of reason (the syntactic, semantic and pragmatic minds).

- Global history is accessible from a perspective outside of historical time.

- The legislation of each individual semiotic type of reason presupposes its own type of long-term historical time, historical man, historical reality and social paradigm. In particular, before the history of time, there is a history of the place, which allows things to be reached and arranged.

- Created as a result of the production of artefacts, human history has a productive purpose, whose content is the so-called *semiophores* of ‘meaning’, ‘sense’, ‘concept’ and ‘value’ and their material embodiments.

- There are grounds to assume that postmodernity constitutes the beginning of an evolutionary transition to a new historical epoch – that of the pragmatic (or value-based) reason, during which global humanity will be a community of equal people and cultures.

In order to illustrate the stages in the history of reason, the author resorts to examples, citing extensive excerpts from iconic works of modern European literature and art, as translated in Bulgarian, namely: *À la recherche du temps perdu* (translated in English as *Remembrance of Things Past* or *In Search of Lost Time*) by Marcel Proust; *Nausea* [La nausée] by Jean-Paul Sartre; *The Man Without Qualities* [Der Mann

ohne Eigenschaften] by Robert Musil; *A Short History of Decay* [Précis de décomposition] by Emile-Michel Cioran. Only *Psychology of Art* [Психология искусства] by Lev Vygotsky is discussed in its Russian original edition.

The language and style of Prof. Georgiev's book are characterized by large-scale thinking. The author consciously pushes away from the characteristic conventions of scientific publishing, such as scholastic citations and minor references. Outside of literary quotations and the excerpts from Plato's dialogues, nowhere one will come across bibliographic sources, year of publication and exact page. What can be interpreted elsewhere as a flaw, here is a winning strategy: the professor utilizes the method of total immersion, drawing the reader into his intellectual universe towards a complete stream of thought, not too far from the Proustian stream of consciousness. The ideas about human destiny are based on sources indicated only by the name of the specific author, who had influenced Mincho Georgiev to further develop this or that thought, e.g. there is use of formulas like *as per*: as per Gadamer, as per Hegel, etc; or another formula is used, namely *in the sense of*, e.g. in the sense of Michel Foucault, in the sense of Paul Ricoeur, etc. A merit of the edition represents the clear font layout of the author's thoughts or of those he has retold in his own words, from the exact quotations drawn from various editions (as per the foreign authors - from their translations into Bulgarian). My person (the editor of the book) also played a role in this decision-making. The publication ends with a reprint of a previously published study in the journal *Балканистичен форум* [Balkanistic Forum, 2, 2018], reproduced with minor editorial corrections and shortenings under the title "The Ritual Discourse", with which the circle of thought is closed. It was this article, according to the author's own confessions, that was the germ from which the present great work germinated. Whether the book has achieved its goal will not be known for a long ahead: because this text is not an easily digestible work. To make sense of it, you need a special mental asceticism, which we are rarely inclined to indulge in today, justifying ourselves with the fast-paced rhythm of our everyday life or simply our reluctance to look at the stars. The book is inevitably doomed to loneliness in the heights: its ideas can only be adequately assessed by those few men who would have managed to get out of the circle of the existential plot and look into the problems of eternity: that timespan in which the moment dissolves and becomes equal to it.