



ENCOUNTERS WITH BOOKS FROM OTHER DISCIPLINES

Alle Thyng Hath Tyme: Time and Medieval Life

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Encountered by Kathryn McNeilly

Professor of Law, Queen's University Belfast School of Law
Corresponding author. Email k.mcneilly@qub.ac.uk
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While time has emerged as a recent focus of much contemporary scholarship, including legal scholarship, it is a topic that has a long history with many landmark developments across millennia. One such landmark, for instance, is the creation of the mechanical clock – an object of enduring temporal significance, not least for law – that occurred during the medieval period. Given this important development, this historical era appears particularly ripe for consideration by those interested in time. However, the salience of, and approach to, time in the medieval context is much richer than this technological innovation alone, evidencing a range of ideas and evolving temporal frames. It is this richness that forms the basis of Gillian Adler and Paul Strohm's *Alle Thyng Hath Tyme: Time and Medieval Life*. Located at the intersection of history, literature and the wider humanities, the book investigates the nuanced and expansive approach to time evident in this period. Diverse literary and broader cultural sources inform the analysis, epitomised in the book's title which features a line found in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*. These sources are drawn upon to expertly paint a picture of the experience of time in medieval society and can also stimulate reflection on our own relationship to time in the current context. The book has potential for various fruitful cross-disciplinary encounters. One of these is with legal scholarship, which has increasingly drawn attention to law, legal concepts, institutions and texts – from the doctrine of precedent to time limitations, from retrospectivity to processes of law reform – as constituted by important temporal elements (Higgins, 1997; French, 2001; Tur, 2002; Rodger, 2005; Lee, 2023).

In the book, Adler and Strohm explore the natural, religious and secular frameworks that guided time for medieval people. They examine how these contributed to the structuring of all aspects of life, inclusive of monastic routines, commercial contexts, rural labour and the individual life-cycle. Analysis does not encompass substantive consideration of law, incidentally gesturing towards a topic that may be of interest for research on medieval legal systems (Musson, 2001; Harding, 2002). Yet, the book holds appeal for lawyers more generally in offering a vehicle, or set of prompts, for exploration of time's relation to law. It does so by raising a number of themes that stand to be reflected on by legal scholars. The first of these themes pertains to the nature of time. In the book's opening chapter, medieval people are introduced as living 'among colliding temporal systems' (p. 9). These are systems based on natural and seasonal change, encompassing the repeating patterns of day and night, changes to the stars and planets, as well as the four rotating seasons; liturgical time linked to the Church, its calendar and the division of the day into devotion and prayer; and broader technological developments related to the measurement of time (p. 12). These ways of engaging with time are detailed as intermingling in nature. For example, bells coinciding with monastic devotional practices could be heard beyond the walls of monasteries, creating a rhythm that generated 'pivotal points' in the secular day (p. 24).

Furthermore, these co-existing time systems evidence a multiplicity of seemingly incongruent ideas of time, including cyclical and repetition as well as linearity and progressiveness. Citing the poem *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and its narrative travel through the yearly seasons, the authors point towards a conception of time that is linear, progressing from winter to spring, summer and autumn, but also circular, ‘doubling round to where it began’ (p. 15). A similar movement is also reflected in liturgical time as ‘within each ceremonial Christian year, the worshipper experienced a linear progress from the expectation of Advent to the consummation of Nativity . . . This linear movement, within any given year, was then rendered cyclical by its recollection and its anticipation in the years preceding and following . . . until the end of time itself’ (p. 18). When it comes to technological development, sophisticated time measuring devices captured both lunar and broader cyclical or cosmological time as well as fractional time as it progressed throughout the day (p. 41). As a result of such layered and co-existent time, the authors conclude that ‘medieval people at all levels of sophistication were, if anything, more keenly aware of simultaneous and contending temporalities than we are, and more skilled at entertaining a range of temporal possibilities’ (p. 10). Time was approached flexibly and creatively, actively rather than passively (p. 210).

Turning focus to law and the contemporary context, it cannot be said that a directly comparable multi-system approach to time exists. Nevertheless, lawyers can consider and be alert to the co-existence of diverse temporalities which appear to be an enduring feature of today’s temporal landscape both within and outside of law. Scholars have signalled towards legal systems as containing elements of cyclical and linearity (Greenhouse, 1989). One example at the international level is cyclical monitoring processes within international human rights law that require states to adhere to a repeating calendar of periodic review, but also frame fulfilment of legal obligations in important ways as a linear activity (McNeilly, 2021a). Work has extended to consider broader co-existing aspects of legal time that on first blush are competing or incompatible; for instance, continuity and discontinuity, temporality and atemporality, forward and backward movement (e.g. Djeffal, 2014; d’Aspremont, 2022). Further discussion might be undertaken on the skill of navigating this nature of legal time. In other words, how actors connecting with law approach time and whether this is a flexible, creative and active approach that is comparable to the one that Adler and Strohm outline. While some work in this vein can be detected in legal scholarship, deeper analysis stands to be undertaken on the consciousness of legal time and its multiplicitous, layered form. This offers a frame through which the complex nature of law’s time can be examined as an aspect that is navigated by those engaging with law and its operation.

The second theme that Adler and Strohm’s analysis raises is the connection between time and objects or devices. In the book’s second chapter, titled ‘Measuring Time’, a range of developments are explored that demonstrate medieval technological advances in this area. These include, with reference to Dante’s journey through purgatory in the *Divine Comedy*, use of the sun, moon and zodiacal signs to measure time (p. 29). Other objects such as candles adjusted to measure hours, sandglasses or hourglasses, the sundial, waterclocks and astrolabes are foregrounded as central temporal objects (pp. 30–32; 54–62). As noted, however, perhaps the most significant device effecting a shift in medieval experiences of time was the mechanical clock which emerged across the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Mechanical clocks came to influence time in religious, commercial and labour settings, eventually effecting a privatisation of time via the later construction of portable clocks and watches (p. 51). The expanding presence of mechanical clocks is evident in the ‘practically audible’ sound of clock bells in late medieval literature and artistic imagery (p. 46). One example discussed is Dante’s *Paradiso* in which the alarm mechanism built into a clock is engaged in his comparison of clock ticking to ‘the rotating circle of blessed souls in the heavenly afterlife’ (p. 46). The picture that emerges, therefore, is one of a changing material context for the measuring of time.

This connection between time and objects is one that is indeed familiar to legal scholars. In this disciplinary location, the significance of the clock has been outlined. This includes foregrounding the railway clock, the embodiment of the standardisation of time in the nineteenth century, to explore the relationship between this temporal development and international law (Gordon, 2018). Broader objects have also been brought into view as holding significance in the generation of law's temporal concepts and rhythms. Amongst these are legal documents (van Oorschot, 2019), physical infrastructure and the location of legal institutions (McNeilly, 2021b) as well as objects such as tests, vehicles, telephones and drugs engaged in the courtroom (Grabham, 2016). What Adler and Strohm's analysis holds potential to stimulate alongside this existing body of thinking is an attention to the changing or evolving nature of temporal objects. Just as technological developments in the medieval context led to new devices being utilised in the measurement and regulation of time, so too can objects that hold temporal significance for law be thought to shift over time. In the operation of law, for instance, while devices such as the clock and the calendar have retained central importance across the centuries, these may take new forms today. This includes in the context of virtual court proceedings and accompanying shifts to the scheduling and experience of time. Other objects such as evidence adduced in legal cases to support temporal work, particularly the construction of past events, have also changed significantly over time in line with scientific and technological advancements. Accordingly, the objects and devices that assist law and legal actors to engage with time and temporal ideas are not static and law's time might be examined as having an evolving material context.

A final theme that attention can be drawn towards is the relationship between time, the individual and broader contexts. In chapter 7, 'Ages of Humankind', Adler and Strohm investigate how the medieval individual's life-cycle and its phases was thought to reflect various natural cycles. These include the elements, the seasons and the humours. The time of the individual was connected to the wider natural world and the universe more generally, 'thus attributing cosmological significance to the ages of life' (p. 157). One example of the interweaving of life-time and world-time is presented in a diagram created by English monk Byrhtferth. This visual illustration highlighted the connection of the twelve months, the days, the solar and lunar calendar, the four elements, the equinoxes and solstices and the four ages of man (*pueritia vel infantia, adolescentia, juvenus* and *senectus*) (pp. 182–184). More broadly, the individual was also thought against a backdrop of the End of Time. Ordinary people viewed their life-time within the imminence of the world's end and literary and cultural materials, such as the work of Bede, Augustine and Joachim of Fiore, presented analysis of the present in light of the envisaged Endtime and Final Judgment (pp. 189–214).

In addition to natural and divine contexts, individual lives and experiences of time also appear closely connected to social contexts. Chapter 4, 'Lives in Time', reflects on life stories told by three medieval figures: Julian of Norwich, Margery Kempe and Thomas Usk. One aspect that these stories have in common is a focus on duration and the use of time. For Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe this appears in discussion of the amount of time they have dedicated to religious service and devotion throughout their lives. Thomas Usk, writing while imprisoned, maps his life against 'the past time of man's fall, the present time of redemption, and, yet to come, the time of grace' (p. 97). Suspended between present redemption and future grace, Usk presents a 'plan for rehabilitation in time' involving a seven-year period dedicated to service and loyalty (pp. 99–100). This common focus is linked to a rising social concern, following the increasing emphasis on measuring time, to avoid wasting time and to spend time well (pp. 43–45). Chapter 6, 'Allegorical Time' further foregrounds these themes by examining the presentation of temporal concepts via allegory: a visual or literary representation that contained an underpinning meaning, usually moral or political in nature. Adler and Strohm elaborate that 'in allegories of time, specifically, this unstated meaning emerged through the technique of personification, which transformed physical and moral issues into human characters with human attributes' (p. 123). The impact of time on

human experience was revealed through this method that appeared in paintings and sculptures, poems and other writings. Familiar personifications included Temperance, Prudence, Fortune, Idleness and Death. Presentations of these figures linked timekeeping to moral self-governance and living ethically. This is evident in work such as Ambrogio Lorenzetti's series of fresco panels *Allegory of Good Government*, presenting Temperance as a figure holding an hourglass, as well as Aquinas's discussion of prudence that connected time and human reason (pp. 125, 128). In these examples, individual engagement with time was closely connected to social frameworks for living a virtuous life. Visual allegory is familiar to lawyers given the frequent personification of Justice as a figure holding scales, a sword and who is often blindfolded. Justice indeed appears as one of the four cardinal virtues alongside Temperance, Prudence and Fortitude (p. 124). Lawyers may be less familiar with the remaining virtues and the visual history of time embodied in two of them. These allegorical figures offer a means to examine the connection between the individual, time and broader social contexts both historically and today.

Following this discussion, lawyers may consider how the legal subject appears linked to temporal contexts that transcend their own individual life. The first of these, familiar from the above, is social contexts. Time in law has been revealed to have a close connection to social and cultural ideas of time more widely (Greenhouse, 1989). Law both reflects conceptions of time that guide the social and influences such conceptions through its acts and pronouncements. One example is law's reflection of social attention and adherence to rules of time that guide everyday life. Law demonstrates this in timelines, time limits or bars, schedules and time-related regulations or penalties that legal subjects must navigate in their interactions with law. In turn, law further embeds an emphasis on individual attention to time rules as an important aspect of contemporary social structuring. Adler and Strohm's discussion can also stimulate thinking on other micro-macro temporal connections made within law. One of these is the connection that is often made between the times of individual lives and the time of law itself. In other words, how individuals come into contact with law's own temporal frames or lenses. An example can be found in the activity of adjudication. In such activity individual legal subjects, and the facts of the cases they are engaged in, are thought via what has been termed as 'adjudicative temporalities' (Chowdhury, 2020, p. 2) or 'judicial chronography' (Bloom 2015, p. 3). For instance, the subject can be conceptualised within the frame of linear and spatially situated pasts and futures or, alternatively, within an understanding of pasts that have an enduring or continuing influence and futures that are open or untimely (Chowdhury, 2020, pp. 69–114). Resultantly, the subject and his/her temporality is brought into the time of law and read through it in ways that shape legal outcomes. Other instances of law bringing individual lives and life-times into conversation with its own temporal registers can be detected. These include the experiences of subjects encountering law at particular points during their life-cycle, such as the child as legal subject. Law must often adapt its standard temporal understandings to effectively respond to such subjects in legislative and adjudicative settings. In such work, the individual's micro experience of time connects with the broader macro temporalities of law.

From encounters with medieval time as skilfully presented by Adler and Strohm, lawyers might look to the *longue durée* of time, consider time's particular connection to law, as well as reflect on how this has changed or evolved and continues to do so. In turn, there is space for law to bring added value to this encounter and offer something to historical and wider humanities work on this topic. This can come in the form of highlighting how legal institutions, texts and the operation of law form part of the rich pattern of time that has developed throughout historic periods and that extends into the present. Through exploring the nature of time, the connection between time and objects, and the link evident between time, the individual and broader contexts this two-way conversation may begin, enriching thinking on time in the present through engaging in closer reflection on its past.

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