JOURNAL OF INTERDISCIPLINARY HISTORY OF IDEAS

2024

Volume 13 Issue 25
Item 3

– Section 2: Articles –

Medievalism:

Some Historiographical Insights into the Mirror and Its Reflection

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JIHI 2024

Volume 13 Issue 25

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Medievalism:
Some Historiographical Insights into the Mirror and Its Reflection *

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Research into ideological applications of the medieval period is well served by the notion of 'medievalism.' This concept indicates both the set of post-medieval representations of the Middle Ages and the field of scholarship investigating such representations. This is a burgeoning field of research that stands at the crossroads of different disciplines and is the subject of extensive debate. The first part of the article discusses some of the interpretive hypotheses and proposes a set of six hermeneutic tools from a variety of fields of study, which are usefully applied to medievalism: palimpsest, invented traditions, alterity, entangled history, broadened historiography, regimes of historicity. The second part of the article penetrates deeper into the last of these hermeneutic tools, namely the concept of 'regime of historicity' elaborated by François Hartog. Medievalism stands out as a distinct 'regime of historicity' which relates to a significant part of various -isms *(including cultural, social and political movements) from the 19th century to the first decades of the 21st century,* i.e., *from romanticism onward. Three applied examples follow: the essay discusses the relationships between medievalism and three* -isms *of paramount importance for the history of the contemporary age, that are Catholic modernism, socialism, and fascism.*

* This article is published in the framework of the Project of National Interest (PRIN) *FRAME-Framing Medievalisms: Historiography, Cultural Heritage, Media Communication and Languages in Italy (1980-2022)* [Project code: 2022HMH5MJ; CUP: B53D23001570006], funded by the European Union-NextGeneration EU.
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1. A plural concept in need of fine-tuning

All eras and cultures express themselves in both their judgments on the past and the ways they represent it. In this area of analysis, observation of ideological interpretations of the medieval period assumes specific relevance by taking advantage of the notion of 'medievalism,' as we shall seek to clarify in this contribution. This term indicates 'the Middle Ages after the Middle Ages,' *i.e.*, both the set of post-medieval representations of the Middle Ages (which makes it a form of culture), as well as the field of study that investigates such representations.[1] The enquiry into this polysemic concept is especially useful in the current period of crisis in the discipline of History, since it obliges us to reflect on the value attributed in today's world to the relationships we maintain with the past.[2]

Medievalism as a field of study has its own history, which is now quite well understood. It is born in the USA, Great Britain, Germany, France, and Italy almost simultaneously during the Seventies of the last Century. Nowadays, it is studied in several western countries, with a significant presence also in Portugal, Spain, eastern Europe, south America, Australia, and with projections in Japan.

[1] Among the by now numerous studies useful for better defining medievalism, the following can be consulted, listed in chronological order of publication: Karl Fugelso, ed., *Defining Medievalism(s)*, monographic issue of *Studies in Medievalism*, 18 (2009); Ulrich Müller, "Medievalism," in *Handbook of Medieval Studies: Terms, Methods, Trends*, ed. Albrecht Classens (Berlin-New York: De Gruyter, 2010), 852-65; Tommaso di Carpegna Falconieri, *Medioevo militante. La politica di oggi alle prese con barbari e crociati* (Torino: Einaudi, 2011); Elizabeth Emery and Richard Utz, eds., *Medievalism: Key Critical Terms* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2014); David Matthews, *Medievalism: A Critical History* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2015); Andrew B.R. Elliott, *Medievalism, Politics and Mass Media. Appropriating the Middle Ages in the Twenty-first Century* (Woodbridge: D.S. Brewer, 2017); *Medievalismo. Centro studi ricerche*, monographic section of *Bullettino dell'Istituto storico italiano per il medio evo* 122 (2020); Martin Aurell, Florian Besson, Justine Breton, Lucie Malbos, eds., *Les médiévistes face aux médiévalismes* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2023).

[2] On the current numerous forms of crisis in historical science and some of the responses to these crises, see among others: Jo Guldi, David Armitage, *The History Manifesto* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Patrick Boucheron, *Ce que peut l'histoire* (Paris: Fayard, 2016); Tommaso di Carpegna Falconieri, *Nel labirinto del passato. 10 modi di riscrivere la storia* (Bari-Roma: Laterza, 2020), 8-9.

As noted, medievalism is basically 'the Middle Ages after the Middle Ages.' It corresponds to the visceral relationship—positive or negative—that has tied western societies to the idea of Middle Ages since at least the end of the eighteenth century, with some older precursors. Therefore, it can pertain to anything, if the existence of a link with the Middle Ages is recognised. It can correspond to an actual passion for the Middle Ages, whether philologically reconstructed, or dreamed and re-enacted: the Middle Ages become an era full of images of castles and knights, ladies and dragons, magic, and a sense of wonder. Conversely, medievalism may correspond to a horrific view of the Middle Ages, full of violence, plague, and war.

Medievalism. In today's global society, this concept has expanded even further, spreading all over the world and losing any connection with any underlying historical reality: this is the concept of 'made medievalism' or 'neomedievalism' which will be discussed in a few pages.

Medievalism is so kaleidoscopic, that it is not wrong to consider it as a plural concept, i.e., as medievalisms. The contents of this colourful medievalisms can be paratactically listed, without order or hierarchy, from epic to cartoons, from political history to videogames. But can we somehow find an order? Let us first try to deconstruct the contents of medievalism through the examples of the themes proposed by two recent conferences, and then propose some grids that would allow for a logical reordering.

The sessions of the vast conference "The Middle Ages in the Modern World," (MAMO) which was held in Rome in 2018, were organized into as many as fifteen 'threads,' or paths, which corresponded to the following themes: Romanticism, Performing the Middle Ages, Jewish History & Medievalism, Early Modern Medievalism, Reinventing the Middle Ages, Sardinia, Political Medievalism & National Identity, Moving pictures & Interactive Technologies, Earth & Heaven, Arthurian Matter, Monument & Image, Contemporary Fiction, Music, Public History, Gender.[1]

[1] The corresponding volume was published in 2021: Tommaso di Carpegna Falconieri, Pierre Savy, Lila Yawn, eds., *Middle Ages without Borders: A Conversation on Medievalism. Medioevo senza frontiere: una conversazione sul medievalismo. Moyen Âge sans frontières : une conversation sur le médiévalisme* (Rome: École française de Rome, 2021). See the text of the Introduction, p. 1-2: "Pluridisciplinary and in some cases transdisciplinary, it includes contributions on politics, art, spectacle, cinema, costume, ecology, sociology of communications, philosophy, musicology, architecture, lit-

The abundance of possible approaches to medievalism is striking when we compare the sessions of the MAMO conference with those of the "Using the Past: The Middle Ages in the Spotlight" conference held online in 2020, or to those of previous "MAMO" conferences, or even to other conferences held in recent years.[1] In particular, the conference "Using the Past" was organized by dividing the talks into fourteen sessions which corresponded both to macro areas of analysis and to keywords: Myth and History, Academia & Media, Contemporary Politics, Contemporary Society, Collective Memory, Academic Medievalism, Literature, Tourism, Reception, Recreation, Portuguese Medievalism, Heraldry, Music, Art.

As can be seen, the themes are many and disparate. We seem to be facing what Umberto Eco called the "vertigo of the list."[2] Quoting Umberto Eco is not accidental; actually, the *locus classicus* for these possible encyclopaedic classifications remains the small yet precious article, *Ten Ways to Dream of the Middle Ages* (also known as *Dreaming of the Middle Ages* and *Ten Little Middle Ages*), published in 1985. This paper, later reprinted in various editions and in many languages, has become the world's most famous essay on medievalism.[3] More recently, awareness of the vastness and versatility of medievalism has allowed the publication of the *Dictionnaire du Moyen Âge imaginaire*, in which more than 120 encyclopaedic entries are included.[4]

erature, linguistics, religion, gender, and more. Together, its chapters form an ample forum of new scholarship on the perceptions, uses, and abuses of the Middle Ages over the last half millennium."

[1] The "MAMO" conferences were held in Saint Andrews in 2013, Lincoln in 2015, Manchester in 2017 and, as mentioned, Rome in 2018. The edition planned for London in 2020 has been postponed to an undetermined date due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Another vast conference on medievalism was held in Madrid (II Congreso Internacional «Edad Media, edad mass media», Universidad Rey Juan Carlos, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile—Universidad de Buenos Aires, 6-8 september 2023).

[2] Umberto Eco, *The Infinity of Lists: An Illustrated Essay*, trans. Alastair McEwen (Milan: Rizzoli, 2009).

[3] Umberto Eco, "Dieci modi di sognare il medioevo," [1985] now in Umberto Eco, *Scritti sul pensiero medievale* (Milano: Bompiani, 2013), 1093-1108; English translation: *Dreaming of the Middle Ages*, in *Travels in Hyperreality*, trans. William Weaver (New York: Harvest, 1986), 61-72. Cf. Tommaso di Carpegna Falconieri, "Cinque altri modi di sognare il medioevo. Addenda a un testo celebre", *Bullettino dell'Istituto storico italiano per il medio evo* 122 (2020), 407-33.

[4] Anne Besson, William Blanc, Vincent Ferré, eds., *Dictionnaire du Moyen Âge imaginaire. Le médiévalisme, hier et aujourd'hui* (Paris: Vendémiaire, 2022).

So, we approach medievalism from different, even widely divergent, points of view. Do these points of view have elements of connection and homogeneity? The problem is significant.[1] An article by Richard Marsden focuses on this question:

> The study of medievalism transcends existing disciplinary boundaries. It is an arena in which scholars of art, history, literature, music, religion, political science, and sociology have come together, all bringing to bear the methods and approaches associated with their own particular disciplines. Since the Nineties, the field has witnessed an explosion of new publications and approaches. However, in the main, the result has so far been a dispersed and eclectic series of case studies. This is because each contributor tends to bring his or her own subject expertise to bear on examples that happen to sit within their own disciplinary territory.[2]

The debate on the interdisciplinary positioning of medievalism, which is wide and continuous, has so far led to few shared conclusions and many unresolved doubts, but some findings appear solid. The most important conclusion that scholars of medievalism have come to, while going down different paths, is that this concept identifies two interconnected but distant domains. Granted that the Middle Ages exist only because they are continually constructed, the creative process that constructs them may or may not have real links to the medieval period. The underlying Medieval can truly exist—this is what David Marshall labels as "genealogical medievalism," David Matthews as "found medievalism," and Andrew Elliott as "overt medievalism"—or it can be non-existent, and completely made up—this is what Matthews calls "made medievalism," and Elliott "banal medievalism."[3] The same thing can also be said in another way: among

[1] Several contemporary works underline how much the approach to medievalism is and must be inter- and multidisciplinary; among these: Monica Longobardi, Filippo Conte, eds., *Medievalismi. Atti del convegno: Ferrara 20-21 novembre 2019* (Canterano: Aracne, 2020); Carpegna Falconieri, Savy, Yawn, *Middle Ages without Borders*; Aurell, Besson, Breton, Malbos, *Les médiévistes face aux médiévalismes*.

[2] Richard A. Marsden, "Medievalism: New Discipline or Scholarly No-man's Land?," *History Compass* 16, 2 (2018), 6, https://compass.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/hic3.12439. Ionuț Costea, "Medievalism. Historiographic Markers," *Studia Universitatis Babes-Bolyai - Historia* 1 (2023), 131-60, spec. paragraph 3 ("Medievalism: Field of Study or Anti-Field of Study?") and "Closing remarks," 147-60.

[3] David W. Marshall, ed., *Mass Market Medieval: Essays on the Middle Ages in Popular Culture* (Jef-

some scholars writing in English, the distinction between "medievalism" and "neo-medievalism" has arisen. The former concept refers mainly to a placement of medievalism in the field of Medieval Studies, while the latter places it in the contemporary postmodern world, in which representations of the Middle Ages have no connection with medieval history.[1] This second kind of medievalism belongs to a clearly recognizable general macro-area. Considering that a fundamental characteristic of medievalism is that it brings together scholars who, hailing from different disciplines, all address this cultural phenomenon in the context of the society that produces and uses it, we can affirm (and I'm not the first one to do so) that medievalism, when approached outside the relationship with history and historiography, belongs to the wide world of Cultural Studies. This is made explicit, for example, in the title of the journal *Postmedievalism: a journal of medieval cultural studies*, established in 2010, which, as we read, bears from its naming the evidence of its close relationship with Cultural Studies. This is an obvious placement as soon as it is understood that medievalism exists only in the various historical presents that have created the idea of the Middle Ages, without the need for any reference to the "real" Middle Ages.

This macro-distinction is, as can be easily understood, fundamental. Essentially, it implies that there are two different types of scholars dealing with the study of medievalism: those who approach it in *lato sensu* historical terms and those who approach it in actualizing anthropological and sociocultural terms. Much of the debate (and misunderstandings) arise from a lack of awareness that

ferson, NC, McFarland: 2007), 3-5; Matthews, *Medievalism: A Critical History*; Andrew B.R. Elliott, "#Medieval: "First World" Medievalism and Participatory Culture," in *Middle Ages without Borders*, 98-105 and the paragraph "Banal medievalism."

[1] Matthews, *Medievaliam: A Critical History*, 8-9, 39, 165-66; cf. 40: "Neomedievalism represents the decisive point at which medievalism studies floats free of any necessary connection to the Middle Ages and medievalist scholars." "Neomedievalism relocates medievalism as a cultural-studies pursuit, not necessarily a medievalist one". Cf. also Cory Lowell Grewell, "Neomedievalism: An Eleventh Little Middle Ages?", *Studies in Medievalism* 19 (2010), 34-43. This subdivision is not welcomed by all, especially the choice of the term "neo-medievalism," which may be considered pleonastic. In particular, while the subdivision between medievalism and neo-medievalism may perhaps be useful in English, a language in which the term medievalism may include medieval academic historiography, it is of no use in languages such as Italian and French in which the word medievalism is not used in place of the word denoting the academic discipline (medievistica, médiévistique) and, at the same time, connotes the entire field of representations of the Middle Ages after the Middle Ages. A critical summary of the issue in Costea, "Medievalism. Historiographic Markers," 148-57.

there are these two macro areas of interest. As a scholar of history, in the rest of this article I will refer only to the first type of medievalism.

2. Six hermeneutic categories useful to historians (and not only to them)

Medievalism—connecting, as it does, many different disciplines and social practices—requires an approach that is at once comparative and intertextual. That is to say: the different disciplinary points of view can enter into circulation, be shared, offer different interpretive keys, and make them available to others. To do this, a good way forward is to suggest some interpretive tools to share. Among them, I present six that constitute the basic baggage for those scholars of medievalism who, like me, start from the historical perspective-that is, who relate medievalism to the Middle Ages. I do not exclude, of course, that the tools are many more than these six. This list, which must be understood as an open starting point, useful to better define the structural interdisciplinarity of medievalism, can and should be supplemented and completed. The first three hermeneutic categories come from codicology, cultural anthropology and ethnography, respectively, while the second three have been developed within the methodology of historical research.

The first one is the concept of the *palimpsest*, which originated in codicology, migrated to linguistics and the theory of literature, and then landed in history. I am obviously referring most of all to Gérard Genette's theorization of literature in the first, second and even third degree, and on the stratigraphic relations that link the texts together.[1] Under one text we might find another of which some

[1] Gérard Genette, *Palimpsestes. La Littérature au second degré* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1982); English translation: *Literature in the Second Degree*, trans. Channa Newman and Claude Doubinski (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997).

traces remain visible, as it happens with a palimpsest, which is a manuscript where earlier writing has been scraped off so that the parchment may be used again, but the older writing remains visible, as a ghost (as, for instance, in the famous early medieval manuscripts of Bobbio). The addition within historiography of this interpretative key has been fundamental because it enables us to reason simultaneously about varying degrees of adherence (major, minor, or non-existent) of a medievalist element to a historically documented medieval one.

The second hermeneutic tool that scholars of medievalism have borrowed is *invented traditions*. Born within cultural anthropology, this concept was popularized by the studies of Eric Hobsbawm.[1] Many traditions that we consider ancestral are invented and recent, as we well know very well. A famous example is the Scottish Kilt, which — with all due respect to *Braveheart* — is not medieval. Clearly, scholars of medievalism, and especially of political medievalism, have made extensive use of this concept. Sometimes they have applied it exactly as initially intended, unmasking the deceptions behind the many instrumental uses of the Middle Ages encountered during the last two centuries and a half. Other times they have declined it in a less ideological and more pragmatical sense, becoming sensitive to the fact that not everything is an invention of tradition and, often, continuity and discontinuity coexist. We thus speak of *refashioning* instead.[2] This reflection led Umberto Eco to jokingly consider the Middle Ages as subject to a continuous patchwork: "What remains of the Middle Ages is patched together and continues to be recycled as a container to hold something that will never be radically different from what was already there. The bank is patched together, the municipality is patched together, Chartres and San Gimignano are patched together, not so that we can idolize and admire them, but rather so that we can keep living in them."[3]

[1] Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

[2] Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney, *Kamikaze, Cherry Blossoms, and Nationalisms: The Militarization of Aesthetics in Japanese History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

[3] Eco, "Dieci modi" (the translation is mine. The English version "Dreaming of the Middle Ages", p. 67-68, which is not a translation but a rewriting, expresses the same thoughts but employing different examples). On the concept of "utilitarian patchwork" or bricolage ("rabberciamento utilitaristico," in the original), see also Riccardo Fedriga, "Guazzabugli, rabberciamenti e interpretazioni. Per-

The third hermeneutic tool is the concept of *alterity*. This concept was born in ethnographic and anthopological studies, whence it passed to literary and gender studies in the later Eighties, and now we use it continuously. The Middle Ages become something that we perceive as different from us in space and time: past is a foreign country. Dialectic, controversy, distance, rejection, regret, nostalgia, exoticism, otherness, alterity: whatever we want to call it, this inequality between "us" and "them" is a fundamental interpretation of the idea of Middle Ages, that is, of medievalism. It is not a coincidence that medievalism closely resembles orientalism.

The criterion at the basis of the famous concept of invention of the East by the West for its colonial purposes conceived by Edward W. Said is applicable—*mutatis mutandis*—to medievalism. John Ganim has already observed this in his book *Medievalism and Orientalism*.[1] "It is only by interrogating European assumptions about time and historical progress that we can properly understand Western visualizations of non-Western cultures."[2] Reflecting on alterity allows us to analyse the interactions between medieval motifs and postcolonialism.[3] the problem of transnationality and of the planetary dimension of history, including medieval history, a problem hitherto unusual for medieval studies (traditionally Eurocentric), is tackled above all through the category of medieval-

ché abbiamo così bisogno del medioevo?," *viaBorgogna3* 9 (2018), thematic issue *Oltre il pregiudizio: il caso medioevo*: 18-29; Carpegna Falconieri, "Cinque altri modi di sognare il medioevo," 407-11 and 432; Francesca Roversi Monaco, "Medioevo 'medievale' fra stereotipi e storiografia," in *Fortune del medioevo*, ed. Roberta Capelli (Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso, 2023), 123-40.

[1] John Ganim, *Medievalism and Orientalism* (London-New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

[2] Marsden, "Medievalism: New Discipline or Scholarly No-man's Land?," 5.

[3] Kathleen Davis and Nadia Altschul, eds., *Medievalisms in the Postcolonial World: The Idea of 'the Middle Ages' outside Europe* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University, 2009); Maria Eugenia Bertarelli, Clinio de Oliveira Amaral, "Long Middle Ages or Appropriations of the Medieval?: A Reflection on How to Decolonize the Middle Ages through the Theory of Medievalism," *História da Historiografia: International Journal of Theory and History of Historiography* 13, 33 (2020), 97-130; Longo, Umberto Longo, "'Tra un manifesto e lo specchio'". Piccola storia del medievalismo tra diaframmi, maniere e pretesti," *Bullettino dell'Istituto storico italiano per il medio evo* 122 (2020), 383-405, especially 398-400; Nadia Altschul, "Postcolonizing Neomedievalism: An Introduction," in *Iberoamerican Neomedievalisms. The Middle Ages and Its Uses in Latin America*, ed. Nadia Altschul and Maria Ruhlmann (Leeds: Arc Humanities Press, 2022), 1-30; Étienne Anheim et Catherine König-Pralong, "Introduction. Le Moyen Âge des sciences sociales. Médiévalisme, médiévisme et modernités", *Revue d'histoire des sciences humaines* 43 (2023), 7-48, https://doi.org/10.4000/rhsh.8619.

ism. This category allows us to reason comparatively about the relationships between different ways of relating to the Middle Ages in different countries, anywhere in the world, in a veritable 'compass rose' of medievalism.[1]

As mentioned above, medievalism also makes use of some hermeneutic tools that have been elaborated from the methodology of historical research and can be spread to other disciplinary fields as well. Typically related to medievalism is the concept of *histoire croisée - entangled history*, which first arose among scholars of the Middle Ages like Michael Werner, Bénédicte Zimmermann, Patrick Geary, and Gábor Klaniczay.[2] The *histoire croisée* is multi-perspective, much more complex than simple comparativism; born as a riposte to nationalist history, it studies the mutual influences and connections among cultures taking a trans-cultural perspective.

Another concept that can be used is that of *broadened historiography*.[3] This is a way of interpreting the history of historiography that takes into account not only scholarly works on the Middle Ages, but a more socially and culturally inclusive framework, admitting the permissibility of any mode of expression, that is, taking into account any discourse focused on the Middle Ages, regardless of its adherence to medieval *realia*. This does not mean that the scholar stops being an historian and gives up his or her method. The scholar of medievalism

[1] Louise D'Arcens, *World Medievalism: The Middle Ages in Modern Textual Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021); Helen Young and Kavita Mudan Finn, *Global Medievalism. An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022). About the concept of the North, the Borealism, see today Roberto Dagnino, Elisa Nistri, eds., *Usages du Nord dans la communication politique*, monographic issue of *Deshima* 17 (2023); see therein Tommaso di Carpegna Falconieri, "Quand le médiévalisme rencontre le boréalisme", 7-23.

[2] Michael Werner, "Penser l'histoire croisée : entre empirie et réflexivité", *Annales. Histoire, Sciences sociales* 58, 1 (2003), 7-36; Michael Werner, Bénédicte Zimmermann, "Beyond Comparison: Histoire Croisée and the Challenge of Reflexivity," *History and Theory* 45, 1 (2006), 30-50; Patrick J. Geary and Gábor Klaniczay, eds., *Manufacturing Middle Ages. Entangled History of Medievalism in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Amsterdam: Brill, 2013).

[3] Tommaso di Carpegna Falconieri, "Medievalismi: il posto dell'Italia," in *Medievalismi italiani (secoli XIX-XXI)*, ed. Tommaso di Carpegna Falconieri, Riccardo Facchini (Roma: Gangemi, 2018), 9-28: 11; Tommaso di Carpegna Falconieri, "Medievalismo e Public History," in *Il Medievista come Public Historian*, ed. Enrica Salvatori (Roma: Istituto storico italiano per il medioevo, 2022), 41-53: 49; Tommaso di Carpegna Falconieri, "Medioevo falso, finto e sbagliato. Una proposta di ordinamento nella prospettiva del medievalismo," in *Vere storie di medievi falsi. Esempi, pretesti, metodologie*, ed. Marina Gazzini (Roma: Istituto storico italiano per il medioevo, 2023), 23-37: 34.

interprets his own sources, which will not be medieval, but medievalist, that is, produced after the end of the historical Middle Ages. The field of inquiry is not the Middle Ages, but rather its projection of that era into our world. The scholar will act like the lady of Shalott sung by Alfred Tennyson, who could only look at Camelot through a mirror.[1] But that is not to say that he or she will derogate from analytical skill, and criticism of the testimony, wrongly believing that analyzing a medievalist source is easier than analyzing a medieval one. This procedure is by no means easier, but more difficult, because it presupposes a squinting gaze: one must contemplate both the mirror and its reflection. When a medievalist historian tackles a medievalist problem, he or she necessarily connects two eras, just as the historian of historiography does: he studies a phenomenon, but he must also understand how this phenomenon has been interpreted over time. For this very reason, to study medievalism as a historical phenomenon, a background in medieval studies is indispensable.

Considering medievalism as a peculiar form of the history of historiography 'broadened' to include any way of narrating and representing the Middle Ages, rather than simply erudite historiography, some major institutions for medieval studies—such as the École française de Rome, the Istituto storico italiano per il medioevo, the Centre d'études supérieures de civilisation médiévale in Poitiers, and the German Historical Institute in Rome—are also adopting the medievalist study perspective.[2]

In essence, the Middle Ages as a historical period should be studied from medieval history, but the Middle Ages as a conceptualization should be stud-

[1] Alfred Tennyson, *The Lady of Shalott* [1833 and 1842] (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); cf. Renato Bordone, *Lo specchio di Shalott. L'invenzione del medioevo nella cultura dell'Ottocento* (Napoli: Liguori, 1993), 11; Longo, "'Tra un manifesto e lo specchio'."

[2] In 2018, the École française de Rome hosted an international conference, "The Middle Ages in the Modern World," which gave rise to the book by Carpegna Falconieri, Savy, and Yawn, *Middle Ages without Borders*; in 2020, the Istituto storico italiano per il medioevo set up a specific study center focused on medievalism; in 2021, the CESCM in Poitiers organized the conference "Les médiévistes face aux médiévalismes : rejet, accompagnement ou appropriation ?" from which is derived the volume by Aurell, Besson, Breton, Malbos, *Les médiévistes face aux médiévalismes*; also in 2021, the German Historical Institute in Rome organized the conference "Il medioevo e l'Italia fascista: al di là della 'romanità'—The Middle Ages and Fascist Italy: Beyond 'Romanità'," from which a book with the same title will be published, edited by Martin Baumeister, Romedio Schmitz-Esser, and Markus Wurzer (Rome: Viella, forthcoming).

ied from the history of (broadened) historiography, of which the history of medievalism is an indispensable part. And all of this is part of the Medieval Studies.[1]

The latest hermeneutic tool useful for the study of historical medievalism (and not only this), is the concept of *regimes of historicity*. It was elaborated by François Hartog, a historian of ancient Greece who is also deeply concerned with the present.[2] A versatile and very useful key, it is along the lines of this concept that the second part of this article is built, reasoning precisely on medievalism as a "regime of historicity." This key will now be described, then applied to medievalism in general and finally to three of its emblematic cases.

[1] On the necessity of the study of medievalism within medieval studies see e.g. Matthews, *Medievalism: A Critical History*, 178: "The study of medievalism would be greatly advanced by the recognition that rather than existing as a separate and new discipline, it is simply one part of medieval studies—and an inescapable part of it." Several general texts on medieval history now take it for granted that medievalism is part of the discipline, in an innovative position: see e.g. Maria Loudes Rosa, *Fazer e pensar a história medieval hoje: Guia de estudo, investigação e docência* (Coimbra: Imprensa da Universidade de Coimbra, 2017), 158 ff. For Richard Utz, medieval studies are part of medievalism, rather than the other way around: cf. R. Utz, "Recensão a Medievalism: A Critical History, de David Matthew," *Práticas da História* n. 3 (2016), 155-61: 161. See also Carpegna Falconieri, "Medievalismi: il posto dell'Italia;" Aurell, Besson, Breton, Malbos, *Les médiévistes face aux médiévalismes*, and Anheim, König-Pralong, "Introduction. Le Moyen Âge des sciences sociales", paragraph 13: "La porosité entre les deux domaines invite à décrire médiévalisme et médiévistique comme deux pôles d'un continuum, plutôt que comme deux rapports radicalement différents au passé dénommé 'Moyen Âge'". In Italy, Ministerial Decree No. 639 of 2 May 2024 of the Ministry of Universities and Research has included "medievalism" in the official definition of the disciplinary scientific group "Storia medievale" (Medieval History).

[2] François Hartog, *Régimes d'historicité: Présentisme et expériences du temps* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2003); English translation: *Regimes of Historicity. Presentism and Experiences of Time*, trans. Saskia Brown (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016).

3. The cross-fertilisation between past and present in Regimes of Historicity

Through the apt conceptualization "Regimes of Historicity," François Hartog analyzed the ways in which Western culture over time has related to history. Condensing his thinking to a schema, there are three main regimes of historicity. The first, the "antique", proceeds in a present-past direction and held sway until the French Revolution: "La lumière vient du passé antique et le rapport avec ce passé glorieux passe par le devoir-être de l'exemple et de l'imitation".[1] The second, the "modern", goes from the storming of the Bastille to the fall of the Berlin Wall (1789-1989) and takes a present-future direction: "Avec le régime moderne d'historicité, la ferveur d'espérance s'est tournée vers le futur, dont provient la lumière. Le présent est alors perçu comme inférieur à l'avenir [...], l'avenir est dans la vitesse".[2] Finally, the third regime of historicity, our current approach, which Hartog calls "presentism," remains confined within the present-present, exhibiting neither forward nor backward projections: "Aujourd'hui, la lumière est produite par le présent lui-même, et lui seul. En ce sens (seulement), il n'y a plus ni passé ni futur, ni temps historique".[3]

Medievalism certainly has much to do with these three major regimes of historicity, signifying in different ways according to the era in which it manifests. To hold to examples that coincide with Hartog's schema, the medievalism-nostalgia of the first regime is embodied in *Orlando Furioso* ("O gran bontà de' cavallieri antiqui" [How generous those knights of ancient days!][4]); the regime aimed at the idea of progress can be identified in the socialist movements of the late nineteenth century that take the medieval production systems as models (*e.g.*, in the work of William Morris)[5]; while the third regime, presentism,

[1] Hartog, *Régimes*, 218.

[2] *Ibid.*; François Hartog, *Chronos : L'Occident aux prises avec le temps* (Paris: Gallimard, 2020), 224-28 (English translation: *Chronos: The West Confronts Time*, trans. Samuel Ross Gilbert, New York: Columbia University Press, 2022).

[3] Hartog, *Régimes*, 218; Hartog, *Chronos*, 274-8; 274: "La synchronie prime sur la diachronie".

[4] Ariosto, *Orlando Furioso*, I, 22.

[5] Tommaso di Carpegna Falconieri, *The Militant Middle Ages. Contemporary Politics between New Barbarians and Modern Crusaders*, trans. Andrew M. Hiltzik (Leiden: Brill, 2020) 92-93, with the previous bibliography, to which add Mark Girouard, *The Return to Camelot. Chivalry and the English*

can be discerned in the current preponderance of anachronistic visions of the Middle Ages as absolutely otherworldly—observable, for example, in the explosive dissemination of fantasy literature.[1] The coordinates proposed by Hartog are creditable; in the final analysis, they coincide—*et pour cause*—with the three macro-periods of Western history, *viz.*, the *ancien régime*, the global triumph of the West, and postmodern culture. It will be possible, of course, to identify significant junctures where the system breaks down (*e.g.*, the Second World War and decolonization, rather than 1989), but the overall structure remains solid—provided, of course, that it is considered as tendential in nature and not absolute. In fact, the "regimes of historicity" of our cultures are manifold, not all and not always in line with the mainstream and often hybridized by elements that might even be opposed to it. For example, the idea of nostalgia (which is central to medievalism) can take on considerable importance, even when one is posited towards the future or limited to the present.[2]

Accordingly, what might be some of the most easily identifiable regimes of historicity in Western culture during the past two hundred and fifty years? That is, what are the cultural movements defined precisely by the fact that they relate to a time and a culture other than their own, one with which they allege to share a close relationship? In general, their names are formed starting from a main term, that of the culture of reference, to which the suffix *-ism* is added: from *medieval* we thereby get *medievalism*. Some of these cultural movements are very prominent and have had a huge impact; for the West, the most relevant of all is classicism, with its companion neoclassicism. Other *-isms* in our category take on different meanings depending on the cultural context of origin, such modernism, which means different things in Hispanic literature, in Anglo-Saxon literature, in philosophy, in the history of contemporary art, in Italian architecture, and in Catholic culture, as we shall soon see.[3] Still other

Gentleman (New Haven-London: Yale University Press, 1981) 131-6 and 177-96, and William Blanc, "Progressisme", in Besson, Blanc, Ferré, *Dictionnaire du Moyen Âge imaginaire*, 352-6.

[1] A recent discussion on the subject in Anne Besson, "Fantasy médiévale et médiévistique. Une relation à sens unique?", in Aurell, Besson, Breton, Malbos, *Les médiévistes face aux médiévalismes*, 163-71.

[2] Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001); Carpegna Falconieri, *Nel labirinto del passato*, 143-62.

[3] See, *e.g.*, Carla Prestigiacomo, M. Caterina Ruta, eds., *Dai modernismi alle avanguardie. Atti del*

-*isms* are typical expressions of nationalist movements; so, for example, there is Romanian and overall Balkan Protochronism.[1] 'Passatism' is an expression in current use and characterized by conservative or reactionary thought that rejects innovation and remains attached to the past; conversely, Futurism is, of course, an Italian cultural movement; and along with it, avant-gardism claims to always be in advance of society. Another regime of historicity belonging to this same genre is so-called 'recentism,' which invokes certain pseudo-historical theories that compress the past by asserting that history began much more recently than is believed: such is the case with Jean Hardouin (1646-1729), who considered practically all classical works to be medieval, and Anatolij Fomenko (1945-), a Russian mathematician who argues that history began in the Middle Ages (which happen to coincide, in practice, exactly with the start of Russian history).[2] Finally, in our world today, Hartog's presentism, the *présent monstre* that extends in every direction,[3] has a specific expression in the so-called 'actualism,' or rather a confinement to the present that deforms the past, attributing to it responsibilities it does not have, cannibalizing it or canceling it according to the dictates of Cancel Culture, so that Shakespeare becomes a white supremacist and Christopher Columbus the architect of the Amerindian genocide.[4]

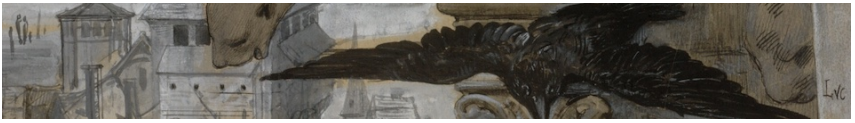
Convegno dell'Associazione degli ispanisti italiani: Palermo, 18-20 maggio 1990 (Palermo: Flaccovio, 1991); Giovanni Cianci, *Modernismo / Modernismi: dall'avanguardia storica agli anni Trenta e oltre* (Firenze: Principato, 1991); R. Howard Bloch and Stephen Nichols, eds., *Medievalism and the Modernist* Temper (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995); Sergio Poretti, *Modernismi italiani: architettura e costruzione nel Novecento* (Roma: Gangemi, 2008). It may be useful to refer to the Wikipedia disambiguation page: `https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Modernism_(disambiguation)` (cons. 30th Dec. 2023).

[1] Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology under Socialism: Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceausescu's Romania* (Berkeley-Los Angeles-London: University of California Press, 1991).

[2] Carpegna Falconieri, *Nel labirinto del passato*, 101-3, 178-9; Marina Gazzini, "*Fake Middle Ages*? Le cronologie incredibili da Jean Hardouin ad Anatolij Fomenko," in *Vere storie di medioevi falsi. Esempi, pretesti, metodologie*, ed. Marina Gazzini (Roma: Istituto storico italiano per il medioevo, 2023), 271-90. Also dubbed "recentism" is the attitude of the authors of Wikipedia aimed at magnifying topics of current but contingent interest and at exaggerating the topicality in the entries, to the detriment of historical depth and enduring relevance: cf. `https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Recentism` (cons. 30th Dec. 2023).

[3] Hartog, *Régimes*, 217.

[4] Antonio Musarra, *Processo a Colombo. Scoperta o sterminio?* (Viareggio: La Vela, 2018); Carpegna Falconieri, *Nel labirinto del passato*, 114-5, 216-7; Antonio Brusa, "Colombo, eroe o malfattore. Stereotipi, false conoscenze, bugie tra epistemologia naïve e storia," in *Vere storie di medioevi falsi*,



4. Medievalism: an Ism par excellence

Medievalism is a special regime of historicity. The connection with the concept developed by François Hartog was realized shortly after the release of his famous book, when an international research team led by Gábor Klaniczay and Patrick Geary was formed to work on a project entitled "Medievalism, archaic origins and regimes of historicity."[1] Although the word *medievalism* dates back to the nineteenth century—it appears for the first time in English in 1844, with a derogatory meaning, while the first to use it in a positive sense was John Ruskin in 1853[2]—nevertheless, its use was rare until recently. Moreover, the first studies explicitly dedicated to the medievalist theme, which are in full bloom today, date only from the 1970s. The preceding observations might lead us to believe, simplistically, that medievalism has been present in Western culture in weak and marginalized forms. Yet, conversely, these observations help us above all to understand that medievalism—although it has been, as will be seen, pervasive—has simply not arrived at its full systemization as a unitary and organic concept. This was the case for essentially two reasons. The first is that during an initial, very long cultural phase, reference to the Middle Ages was considered, as one

39-70. See Hartog, *Chronos*, 278: "Omniprésent, le présent cannibalise les catégories du passé et du futur: il fabrique quotidiennement d'abord puis, à chaque instant et en continu, le passé et le futur, dont il a besoin".

[1] Its primary result was the publication of the volumes of Geary & Klaniczay, *Manufacturing Middle Ages*, and János M. Bak, Patrick J. Geary, Gábor Klaniczay, eds., *Manufacturing a Past for the Present: Forgery and Authenticity in Medievalist Texts and Objects in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2015).

[2] David Matthews, "From Medieval to Mediaevalism: A New Semantic History," *The Review of English Studies* 61 (2011) n. 257, 695-715: 704-5.

of its most characteristic elements, to be part of a concept with a very different impact and diffusion, namely, Romanticism.[1] Romanticism—it is not out of place to recall it in this context—originates from *romance*, a word indicating a work written in a vernacular language dating back to the Middle Ages, and it is decisively opposed to the cultural current that immediately precedes it, *i.e.*, Neoclassicism. The Renaissance idea of a gloomy middle age of ignorance was born dialectically with respect to the idea of the classical; and, by inverting the values, the nineteenth-century recovery of the Romantic Middle Ages was born dialectically with respect to the idea of the neoclassical. The second reason why medievalism has not arrived at a full conceptualization lies in the fact that—except in the case of Catholic medievalism, which we will discuss shortly—it does not correspond to an existing ideology or to a cultural current of which society has been aware. Instead, it derives from a vision of history and an interpretative category that has entered into relationships with and given specific coloring to other *-isms*. Often it goes on to constitute a part of them that is far from negligible, without, however, becoming entirely conscious. The case of Italian Fascism is emblematic of such a development: while the classicist component of fascist rhetoric is blatantly obvious, its medievalist component, although also important, is much less recognized, so much so that it has emerged to historiographical awareness only in recent years.[2] Medievalism is oblique, subterranean, undeclared, and yet it creeps in, pervading most of the *-isms* from the 19th century to the first decades of the 21st century. It opposes Classicism,[3] Futurism[4] and Modernism, since it is perceived as *other* and antithetical, while it is combined in different ways with Romanticism (which, as mentioned, is synonymous with it in various respects), with nationalism (in its numerous regionalist manifestations very present in Eastern Europe: Pol-

[1] *Romanticismo/Medievalismo*, monographic issue of *La Questione romantica. Rivista interdisciplinare di studi romantici* V (1999) n. 7; Mario Domenichelli, "Miti di una letteratura medievale. Il Nord," in *Arti e storia nel medioevo*. Vol. IV. *Il medioevo al passato e al presente*, ed. Enrico Castelnuovo, Giuseppe Sergi (Torino: Einaudi, 2004), 293-325.

[2] Stefano Cavazza, *Piccole patrie: feste popolari tra regione e nazione durante il fascismo* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2003, orig. ed. 1997) and later, D. Medina Lasansky, *The Renaissance Perfected: Architecture, Spectacle, and Tourism in Fascist Italy* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2004).

[3] Carpegna Falconieri, *The Militant Middle Ages*, 3-5.

[4] *Ibid.*, 66; Tommaso di Carpegna Falconieri, "Il medievalismo e la grande guerra in Italia," *Studi storici. Rivista trimestrale dell'Istituto Gramsci* 56 (2015) n. 2, 251-76; Hartog, *Régimes*, 120.

ish Sarmatism, Romanian Dacianism, Balkan Illyricism, Turkish and Hungarian Turanism, Slavism and Pan-Slavism, but also, in Western Europe, Germanism and Pan-Germanism, Celticism, Provencal Felibrianism, as well as in Christianity, Catholicism and Protestantism, Traditionalism, Imperialism, Orientalism, Marxism, Progressivism, Communism, Socialism and National Socialism, Colonialism and Postcolonialism, Fascism and Neo-fascism, Corporatism, Federalism, Populism, Suprematism, Globalism, Environmentalism…

In short, in every *ism* can be discerned a touch of medievalism (and sometimes quite a lot).[1] It can be ascertained whenever, in any cultural current, a specific use of the idea of the Middle Ages, of medieval history and of the cultural expressions associated, rightly or wrongly, with that period is recognized. Thus, medievalism permeates *-isms*, combines with them and is refracted through them into forms that are comparable to each other. All these relationships allow for specific research that ferrets out the junction points: how does medievalism behave—or what is the role that the representation of the Middle

[1] In Besson, Blanc, Ferré, *Dictionnaire du Moyen Âge*, there are numerous entries dedicated to *-isms*: Carpegna Falconieri, "Nationalisme"; Blanc, "Obscurantisme"; Blanc, "Orientalisme"; Blanc, "Progressivisme"; Blanc, "Tourisme". On the medievalism/orientalism relationship, the reference to Ganim's volume, *Medievalism and Orientalism*, is essential. Among the by now numerous studies focused on political medievalisms, one can consult Carpegna Falconieri, *The Militant Middle Ages*; Ian Wood, *The Modern Origins of the Early Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Elliott, *Medievalism*; Daniel Wollenberg, *Medieval Imagery in Today's Politics* (Amsterdam: ARC, Amsterdam University Press, 2018); Véronique Dominguez-Guillaume, Sébastien Douchet, eds., *Moyen Âge et politique aujourd'hui*, monographic issue of *Perspectives médiévales. Revue d'épistémologie des langues et littératures du Moyen Âge* 40 (2019), and Karl Fugelso, ed., *Politics and Medievalisms*, monographic issues of *Studies in Medievalism* 29 (2020), 30 (2021), 31 (2022). On the medievalism/nationalism relationship one can read Patrick J. Geary, *The Myth of Nations: The Medieval Origins of Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002); Benoît Grévin, "Nationalisme et médiévalisme», in *Middle Ages without Borders*, 155-83; the recent Matthias D. Berger, *National Medievalism in the Twenty-First Century: Switzerland and Britain* (Woodbridge: D.S.Brewer, 2023), and Mary Boyle, *International Medievalisms. From Nationalism to Activism* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2023), as well as, we could say, the entire "National Cultivation of Culture" series by the publisher Brill. On medievalism encountering various populisms: Carpegna Falconieri, "Cinque altri modi di sognare il medioevo" (especially the section "Il Medioevo della banalità politica," 420-3) and Elliott, "#Medieval: First World Medievalism and Participatory Culture." In the latter case, the medieval symbols no longer refer to history, but reduce the Middle Ages to an icon, slogan and meme tacked on to the present (on the relationship between medievalism and presentism one can then also see Carpegna Falconieri, *Nel labirinto del passato*, 118-9, where the debate on medievalism and racism is dealt with).

Ages assumes—within a specific political and/or cultural current? Answering this question means studying a protean phenomenon that takes on its own specific dimension within a given climate, conforming to it and, at the same time, conditioning it, sometimes in a commanding way. By way of example, I will introduce in the following pages some succinct reflections—little more than brushstrokes—on the relationships between medievalism and three *-isms* of paramount importance for the history of the contemporary age: modernism, socialism and fascism.

5. Medievalism and Modernism

Interest in the analysis of medievalism in the Catholic sphere is twofold. On the one hand it constitutes a rare case in which the reflection was explicit, while on the other hand it is known that many of the major historians of medieval Christianity have been, in the last century, of a modernist orientation and that application of critical and philological method to the texts that form the tradition of the Churches greatly influenced the study of the Middle Ages. We talk about Paul Sabatier, Louis Duchesne, Francesco Lanzoni, Antonino De Stefano, Ernesto Buonaiuti, Raffaello Morghen… Modernism—a movement that developed between the 19th and 20th centuries among some exponents of Catholic culture (mostly priests) with the intention of adapting religion to the spirit of the time—was harshly opposed by the Roman Church, which considered it the "synthesis of all heresies."[1] Within a heated and complex debate, which it is not

[1] "Nemo mirabitur si sic illud definimus, ut omnium haereseon conlectum esse affirmemus": *Pascendi Dominici gregis,* encyclical issued on 9 September 1907. The text is available at `https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-x/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-x_enc_19070908_pascendi-dominici-gregis.html` (cons. 31st Dec. 2023).

possible to go into, it is worth considering how the notion of medievalism is central to an overall understanding of the phenomenon.[1] *Modernism* is, in fact, a term coined with an initially derogatory connotation in the setting of the traditional Church, while *medievalism* was, in return, invented in a modernist setting with a similarly oppositional intention and negative value; both terms were later accepted and assumed positive meanings, according to their respective alignments. The dispute broke out between the Irish modernist theologian George Tyrrell (1861-1909) and the Belgian cardinal Désiré Mercier (1851-1926). Accused in 1908 by the cardinal of being an example of the perfect modernist, Father Tyrrell reproached him for the error inherent in medievalism:

> The term 'Modernist' has been used in a sufficient variety of senses to cause a considerable amount of confusion [...] Its opposite is Medievalism, which, as a fact, is only the synthesis effected between the Christian faith and the culture of the late Middle Ages, but which erroneously supposes itself to be of apostolic antiquity; which denies that the work of synthesis is necessary and must endure as long as man's intellectual, moral, and social evolution endures; and which therefore makes the medieval expression of Catholicism both its primordial and final expression. Medievalism is an absolute, Modernism a relative term. The former will always stand for the same ideas and institutions; the meaning of the latter slides on with the times.[2]

A few years later, in 1914, the opening article of the first issue of the journal *Vita e Pensiero* was entitled *Medioevalismo*, by Father Agostino Gemelli:

> *1. The reasons for our medievalism.*
> Here is our agenda! We are medievalists. Let me explain. We feel profoundly distant, indeed inimical to so-called 'modern culture', so poor in content, so glittering with fool's gold (...) . This impoverished modern culture moves us to pity (...) . [p. 2]. Instead, we want to disseminate an organic culture, a culture that is the harmonious complex of all

[1] It was the subject of a conference on April 22, 2016, the proceedings of which were collected in Umberto Longo, Francesco Mores, eds., *Medioevo e modernismo*, monographic section of *Bullettino dell'Istituto storico italiano per il medio evo* 120 (2018). See also Fulvio De Giorgi, *Il Medioevo dei modernisti. Modelli di comportamento e pedagogia della libertà* (Brescia: La Scuola, 2009).

[2] George Tyrrell, *Medievalism. A Reply to Cardinal Mercier* (New York: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1908), 143-4. About him: Oliver P. Rafferty, ed., *George Tyrrell and Catholic Modernism* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2010); see also Umberto Longo, Francesco Mores, "Medioevo e modernismo?," *Bullettino dell'Istituto storico italiano per il medio evo* 120 (2018), 237-41: 238.

our spiritual activity (…) . We want a culture that responds to the most legitimate needs, to the deepest and most inextinguishable aspirations of the human spirit, recognizing the supreme values of our life. And a culture having these characteristics, we believe, can only be given by those who demand the principles of life in the Middle Ages. [p. 5] We are medievalists; and we are so because we recognize that so-called modern culture is the most implacable enemy of Christianity and because we recognize that it is useless to speak of adaptations, of penetration.[1]

The opposing use of the two terms (similar to the clash of Futurism and Traditionalism during those same years) corresponds to a porous opposition between two alignments that also had quite a few points of contact, so much so that Gemelli, whose relations with modernism were more nuanced than his medievalist manifesto would suggest, recruited several professors of a modernist orientation to the Catholic University.[2] Broadening the field of observation to subsequent and/or collateral cultural phenomena, it can be argued that the term *medievalism* is useful for investigating and delimiting the complex and frayed network of relationships between Traditionalism—with which medievalism is partially synonymous—and the Progressivism of the Catholic and Anglican en-

[1] Agostino Gemelli, "Medioevalismo," *Vita e pensiero. Rassegna italiana di coltura* I (dic. 1914), 1, 1-24. On his relationship with medievalism see also Carpegna Falconieri, *The Militant Middle Ages*, 160; Carpegna Falconieri, "Il medievalismo e la grande guerra in Italia," 271-2, and Tommaso Caliò, Roberto Rusconi, eds., *San Francesco d'Italia. Santità e identità nazionale* (Roma: Viella, 2011).

[2] Nicola Raponi's studies highlight how Gemelli related to modernism in a dialectical way and was challenged by its demands for the renewal of Christianity as early as the early twentieth century, beginning with his reading of the *Life of St. Francis* by the Protestant pastor Paul Sabatier (1903), with whom he was later in correspondence. His scientific mindset also led him, in later years, to oppose philosophers and theologians who, in the name of anti-modernism, questioned the value of science. Significant in this sense is his relationship with Father Giovanni Semeria whose articles appear, under a false name, in the journals he directed, but also the fact that he called Francesco Rovelli to teach Law at the Catholic University from the very beginning, despite the fact that he was considered a sympathizer of modernism. See Claudia Rotondi, "Cultura economica e azione sociale: l'insegnamento dell'economia nel Seminario di Milano," in *Milano e la cultura economica nel XX secolo*. I. *Gli anni 1890-1920*, ed. Pier Luigi Porta (Milano: Franco Angeli, 1998), 193-237: 225; Luciano Pazzaglia, "Gli studi di Nicola Raponi sulla storia dell'Università Cattolica", in Nicola Raponi, *Per una storia dell'Università Cattolica, Origini, momenti, figure* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2017), 5-120: 34-44; Raffaella Perin, "Padre Gemelli modernista?" [review of Raponi, *Per una storia dell'Università Cattolica*], *Modernism. Rivista annuale del riformismo religioso in età contemporanea* IV (2018), 374-7.

vironments, the two Christian faiths, that is, in which the presence of a medieval legacy is most evident.[1]

5.1. Medievalism and Socialism

Although arising from opposite fronts, the fundamental dynamic of the relationship between medievalism and socialism should also be, at first glance, oppositional in nature, since a political culture projected towards the future, *i.e.*, progressive, should reject the past. Indeed, the text of the *Internationale* reads "Du passé faisons table rase [Let's wipe clean the slate of the past]."[2] On the other hand, the conceptualization of the Middle Ages as a time of abuse is, to a large extent, the brainchild of the Enlightenment. Socialism is among the most homogeneous political doctrines within the second regime of historicity elaborated by François Hartog, the one that moves from the present to the future: the identical initial and final dates he proposed, *i.e.*, the French Revolution and the fall of the Berlin Wall, are meaningful in that sense. It was therefore the conundrum with which I had begun to address the topic during the meetings of the aforementioned research group "Medievalism, archaic origins and regimes of historicity." How could it be that the Communist regimes of Eastern Europe held up the Middle Ages for such praise? I have summarized the reasoning to locate essentially two key concepts: nation and inversion. Socialism becomes medievalist when it assumes nationalist connotations; that is, in the work of nationalist retro-projections. It is an applied socialism, which elaborates ideology to justify consolidating the existing regime; in countries that do not have the conditions for ideal and ideological Marxist Socialism, it needs nationalist glue to sustain itself. In countries that have no history (but only prehistory, since writings are lacking) before the medieval period, as is the case with most of Eastern Europe, the Middle Ages assumes its role as founding myth, so that

[1] Veronica Ortenberg, *In Search of the Holy Grail. The Quest for the Middle Ages* (New York: Hambledon Continuum, 2007), 81-5, 157, 177 ff.; Michael Alexander, *Medievalism. The Middle Ages in Modern England* (New Haven-London: Yale University Press, 2007), 50-64, 212, 245-61; Carpegna Falconieri, *The Militant Middle Ages*, 152-72; Riccardo Facchini, "Sognando la *Christianitas*. L'idea di medioevo nel tradizionalismo cattolico post-conciliare," in *Medievalismi italiani*, 29-51.

[2] Carpegna Falconieri, *The Militant Middle Ages*, 88-104.

medievalism, in the absence of other competing historicity regimes, triumphs. Such a process did not end with the fall of the Berlin Wall, but rather increased in magnitude in the 1990s and during the first decade of this century (Geary and Klaniczay spoke in this regard of "Contagious Middle Ages" widespread throughout the countries of the former Soviet bloc, from the Baltic to the Black Sea)[1] and is still very present today, capable of securing powerful results in Hungary, Russia, Ukraine, as well as in the conflict between the last two nations.[2]

Making the people (or the lower classes, or the proletariat) rise as the protagonist of history is, obviously, the great revolution of socialist thought, which thereby completely reverses the traditional construction of history and historiography. Precisely that inversion is what allows us to understand as a whole and to assimilate the apparently disparate forms by which the Middle Ages are recovered by leftist culture with characteristics that are also positive, rather than, as one would expect, only negative: in the *peoples'* Middle Ages we seek barbaric proto-communism, the will to rebel against established power (the Ciompi Revolt, the Jacquerie, Robin Hood), the solidarity of workers and craftsmen who built cathedrals, which even come to be reimagined as "the people's houses."[3] The movements of Christian Socialism (with chivalrous traits) and Guild Socialism were widespread in Great Britain between the mid-nineteenth and the early twentieh centuries. With their markedly anti-industrial connotations, they contrasted the artisanal and corporative production system with that of modern heavy industry. A few years later, even where industrial production is at the center of the economy and propaganda, *i.e.*, in socialist countries, precisely because the people are always the protagonists and the drivers of history, medievalism easily assumes an eminent position as the expression of state folklore. After a few more years, and back in Western Europe, the trend that distin-

[1] *The Contagious Middle Ages in Post-Communist East Central Europe*, Exhibition, Budapest, Open Society Archives at the Central European University (Osa), 15 September - 20 October 2006; Berkeley University (California), November 1, 2007—January 31, 2008.

[2] See Carpegna Falconieri, *The Militant Middle Ages*, 173-93, with the cited bibliography, to which should be added Timothy Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations. Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus 1569-1999* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), Grévin, "Nationalisme et médiévalisme", and, with reference to the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, Antonio Brusa, "Cronaca dell'invenzione di una tradizione: i miti di fondazione dell'Ucraina, dalla preistoria al medioevo," *Historia Magistra* 9 (2017) n. 23, 33––52.

[3] Blanc, "Progressisme", 355-6.

guishes the use of the Middle Ages by the left-wing culture, especially (but not only) in the sixties and seventies of the last century, is rebellion in the name of reversal. The watchword is "overturning the point of view" in the Bakhtinian sense, downwards and towards the marginalized, the odd and irreverent, the trivial, sailing in an obstinate and opposite direction, denouncing the abuses with a jester's laugh and rediscovering poetry in misery. Here then is anarchist and left-wing medievalism, not infrequently springing from the work of great authors—let us recall, among the many, Georges Brassens, Jacques Brel and Fabrizio De André, Mario Monicelli, Pier Paolo Pasolini and Dario Fo—who left their mark on entire generations.[1]

5.2. Medievalism and Fascism

Finally, we come to a succinct illustration of the relationship between medievalism and the *Ventennio*, the years of Fascist rule in Italy, 1922 to 1943. For that, we start with an important conference held in 2021, which, as far as I know, was the first to focus on this issue.[2] The proceedings of the conference on this complex and multifaceted topic open up, as never before, various avenues of research, organized along four main axes: medievalist "representations" (understood in a very broad sense); the relationship with the Catholic Church and

[1] See Carpegna Falconieri, *The Militant Middle Ages*, 88-104, with the cited bibliography, to which add Tommaso di Carpegna Falconieri, "Les médiévalismes politiques : quelques comparaisons entre la France et l'Italie", in *Moyen Âge et politique aujourd'hui*, monographic issue of *Perspectives médiévales. Revue d'épistémologie des langues et littératures du Moyen Âge* 40 (2019), with the bibliography cited therein in notes 41-49. On "auteur" medievalism (on which see Carpegna Falconieri, "Cinque altri modi di sognare il medioevo," 416-9) there are many studies, but not yet an overall systematization, which constitutes one of the main objectives of the project *FRAME - Framing Medievalisms: Historiography, Cultural Heritage, Media Communication and Languages in Italy (1980-2022)*.

[2] "Il medioevo e l'Italia fascista: al di là della 'romanità'—The Middle Ages and Fascist Italy: Beyond 'Romanità'," Rome, 7-8 June 2021. This is a theme that (incidentally), in addition to being important in itself, also returned to the fore in January 2023, after the Italian culture minister Gennaro Sangiuliano argued that Dante "is the founder of Italian right-wing thinking": see `https://www.ansa.it/sito/notizie/politica/2023/01/14/sangiuliano-dante-il-fondatore-del-pensiero-di-destra-italiano_9e3f3628-22ab-47d0-9b47-751c99b0860d.html`; report 29th May 2023, Marco Brando, "Dante in camicia nera. Un caso esemplare di medievalismo politico," *Historia ludens*, 20 (Jan. 2023), `https://www.historialudens.it/diario-di-bordo/486-dante-in-camicia-nera-un-caso-esemplare-di-medievalismo-politico.html`.

with some protagonists of the highest medieval culture (*viz*., Cola di Rienzo and Dante); and, finally, the comparisons with other fascist movements and totalitarian regimes outside Italy. It can be immediately noted that the central approach was historiographical, which is well justified since the medievalism taken up by history scholars is substantially a history of "broadened" historiography, or, if one prefers, a history of "context" historiography, as we discussed earlier. This approach assumes special importance if we want to understand a regime that not only sees the heads of the municipal administrations as boasting the evocative medieval-style title of *podestà*, but which "if we add the role of Pietro Fedele as minister of public education, is also characterized as one with the largest number of medievalists at the apex of government in the entire post-unification history."[1]

A peculiarity of Fascist Italy is that of having had not one, but three regimes of historicity co-present, exalting classicism first and immeasurably,[2] secondly the Risorgimento[3] and, only in third place (although not for that reason an irrelevant position), the Middle Ages.[4] The latter essentially performed two functions. The first, which we could call spatial (so much so that it was translated into architectural works and folk re-enactments[5]) was that of linking the "small

[1] Riccardo Rao, "Dal comune alla signoria: eclissi e successo di due temi storiografici in età fascista," in *Il fascismo e la storia*, ed. Paola Salvatori (Pisa: Edizioni della Normale, 2020), 73-110: 78. On the corporations and podestas under Fascism: Loreto Di Nucci, "Immagini del Medioevo nell'ideologia fascista. Considerazioni sul confronto tra passato e presente," in *Arnaldo Fortini e la città di Assisi. Atti dell'incontro di studio, Assisi, 9-10 luglio 2021* (Spoleto: Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo, 2022), 21-46: 23-8.

[2] A vast theme, concerning which Andrea Giardina, André Vauchez, *Il mito di Roma da Carlo Magno a Mussolini* (Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2000), and the first 50 pages of Paola S. Salvatori, ed. *Il fascismo e la storia* (Pisa: Edizioni della Normale, 2020), are essential.

[3] *Ibid*., spec. the essay by Belardelli, "Mazzini 'in camicia nera'", 127-40, and by Scotto di Luzio, "Risorgimento, guerra e fascismo nella scuola italiana. Dalla riforma Gentile a Bottai," 183-216. Among other recent studies: Massimo Baioni, *Vedere per credere. Il racconto museale dell'Italia unita* (Roma: Viella, 2020).

[4] Tommaso di Carpegna Falconieri, "Roma antica e il Medioevo: due mitomotori per costruire la storia della nazione e delle 'piccole patrie' tra Risorgimento e Fascismo," in *Storia e piccole patrie. Riflessioni sulla storia locale*, ed. Riccardo P. Uguccioni (Pesaro: Società pesarese di studi storici, Ancona: Il lavoro editoriale, 2017), 78-101.

[5] Cavazza, *Piccole patrie*; Lasanski, *The Renaissance Perfected*; Claudia Lazzaro, Roger J. Crum, *Donatello among the Black Shirts. History and Modernity in the Visual Culture of Fascist Italy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005); Tommaso di Carpegna Falconieri, Lila E. Yawn, "Forging 'Me-

homelands," *i.e.*, the provincial cities, thought of as medieval, to the great national homeland, imagined instead as ancient Roman. The second function of the representation of the Middle Ages, which I will call temporal, was to position itself as a true middle age, far nobler than the modern age, useful for ferrying ancient Rome towards the contemporary. It identified the ancestral Italian spirit of the people in language, art, the martial nature of its leaders as *condottieri* (*i.e.*, military commanders of the Late Middle Ages and Renaissance), the civil industriousness of its municipalities, and—following the rapprochement between Church and State—also in religiosity and proximity to the magisterium of the Church, itself an authentic and imperishable expression of *romanitas*.[1] Therefore, the Middle Ages is above all seen as civic and Christian—and then, certainly, also as national (especially by way of St. Francis and Dante), but only up to a certain point. Thus, the leader in Italy also assumes the form of the medieval and Renaissance ruler,[2] although that image certainly remains subordinate to the far more powerful *dux* of Roman heritage. In Spain, on the other hand, the leader acquires the entirely medieval (*i.e.*, medievalist) form of *caudillo* of the new *Reconquista*, hero of a new Crusade.[3]

dieval' Identities: Fortini's Calendimaggio and Pasolini's Trilogy of Life," in *The Middle Ages in the Modern World: Twenty-First–Century Perspectives*, ed. Bettina Bildhauer, Chris Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 186-215; Luca Morganti, ed., *Gino Zani: L'ingegnere, l'architetto, lo storico* (Rimini: Bookstones, 2018); Tommaso di Carpegna Falconieri, "Liberty Dreamt in Stone: The (Neo)Medieval City of San Marino," *Práticas da História. Journal on Theory, Historiography and Uses of the Past* 9 (2019), 59-93; Alessandro Micocci, "Le rievocazioni storiche, la ricerca dello svago e il regime fascista: il Palio di Asti e Siena," *Storicamente* 18 (2022), n. 29, `https://storicamente.org/micocci_fascismo_palio_siena_asti`.

[1] Carpegna Falconieri, "Roma antica e il medioevo," 90.

[2] Davide Iacono, "Condottieri in camicia nera: l'uso dei capitani di ventura nell'immaginario medievale fascista," in *Medievalismi* italiani, 53-66; Davide Iacono, "Quelle bande così nere. Condottieri di celluloide: nazionalismo e medievalismo nel cinema di regime," in *Cinema e Medioevo*, ed. Franco Cardini, Riccardo Facchini, Davide Iacono, eds., monographic issue of *bianco e nero. rivista quadrimestrale del centro sperimentale di cinematografia*, 600 (2021), 43-50; Davide Iacono "Medievalismo e condottierismo in Italia tra Risorgimento e regime fascista," in *Il medioevo e l'Italia fascista.*

[3] See Miguel Anxo Murado, *La invención del pasado: Verdad y ficción en la historia de España* (Madrid: Debate, 2013); María Ángeles Martín Romera, "Francoism and Medievalism," in *Il medioevo e l'Italia fascista*, as well as Tommaso di Carpegna Falconieri, *El presente medieval. Bárbaros y cruzados en la política actual*, trans. Sara Alcina Zayas (Barcelona: Icaria 2015), 110, 176 (this Spanish edition contains specific bibliography). Also read, by way of example, the article by Ernesto Giménez Caballero (1899-1988), "Il vero volto di Franco," *Gerarchia. Rivista mensile della rivoluzione fascista*

Even within fascism, medievalism, it is well understood, has a thousand faces with a thousand ways to express themselves and just as many to be studied. The channel is wide and open: it is likely that the studies mentioned above will provide the coordinates for research in the coming years. To these, we can add some other research avenues that would merit further discussion. The first of such topics to investigate even more deeply is popular medievalism; not that of festivals and re-enactments, concerning which Stefano Cavazza's previously mentioned work remains seminal, but rather what was learned from the Fascist-era *Testo Unico di Stato*, the manual all school children were given to study. The theme promises to be full of further developments, not least because several authors of the historical section of the manual, men of letters and historians, were or would become very well known.[1] The second theme to be tackled with profit is medievalism in colonialism, which clearly is grafted onto another macro-concept, namely that of orientalism. It will suffice to that recall that Italy presented itself as the hereditary ruler over the medieval "four maritime republics" still present on the Navy's flag, which is a fascist legacy,[2] the appropriation of the Crusader heritage of Rhodes and the Dodecanese,[3] or the sword of Islam brandished in Libya in 1937 by Mussolini.[4] And finally, the third theme promising further de-

XVII (1937), n. 10, 676-86. In it the author tries to describe (p. 677) "that law [he discovered] which I say Franco's Medievalism in the Spanish and Fascist life of the world. In two words, such Medievalism is Franco's God-given ability, by natural and formative qualities, to undertake a war like ours with profound characters of crusade, that is, of medieval cause (…) Franco's profile is matched if we look at our great leaders prior to the 15th century, those of the Reconquista, from the Mozarabic Ben Hafsun to Fernan Gonzáles and especially the Cid. But, for the sake of accuracy, I bring Franco's image closer to his true origins, to his true predecessors: the Leonese reconquerors, from whom the founding enlargement of Castile expanded. Franco is medieval in regard to his native region, his name, his face, his character, his war technique, his way of administering, of speaking, of writing; he is medieval even in his oratory." Again, with regard to his oratory (p. 682): "Franco does not have the Roman, plebiscitary oratory of Mussolini, not even the iron fast and hammering speech of Hitler (…) . However, it is a style, original. What style, then? Simply medieval; such as King Don Denis or Alfonso VI might have had." (The translation is mine).

[1] Carpegna Falconieri, "Roma antica e il Medioevo," 99.

[2] Francesco Pirani, "Le repubbliche marinare: archeologia di un'idea," in *Medievalismi italiani*, 131-48.

[3] Davide Iacono, "L'appropriazione dell'eredità crociata e il mito di Venezia nel Dodecaneso italiano (1912-1943)," in *Middle Ages without Borders*, https://books.openedition.org/efr/27987?lang=it.

[4] Giancarlo Mazzuca, Gianmarco Walch, *Mussolini e i musulmani. Quando l'Islam era amico*

velopment is that of the relationship between medieval esotericism and fascism: which passes through the American poet Ezra Pound (1885-1972) and the Italian philosopher Julius Evola (1898-1974), who theorizes the existence of the sect of the *Fedeli d'Amore* [The Faithful of Love] and leads as such to "magical nazism" in certain medievalist elements typical of neo-fascism,[1] constituting a fourth theme on which much could still be said.

6. Some concluding remarks

Postmodern culture, with its conflictual relationship with history, nonetheless attaches great importance to memory.[2] Furthermore, some socio-political patterns are, whether consciously or not, projected towards the past, so much so that Umberto Eco spoke of movements trying to "turn back the clock" and Zygmunt Bauman of "retrotopia."[3]

As we have seen—after presenting some interpretive hypotheses and proposing a set of hermeneutic tools—*medievalism* is a word that serves to indicate an articulated, versatile and yet cogent concept in its fundamental outlines, corresponding to a regime of historicity that finds its place on its own, or among other *-isms*.

dell'Italia (Milano: Mondadori, 2017). See the photo in the Archive of the Istituto Luce dated 18 March 1937: `https://patrimonio.archivioluce.com/luce-web/detail/IL3000055317/12/` (cons. 31st Dec. 2023).

[1] Among the many titles: Giorgio Galli, *Hitler e il Nazismo magico* (Milano: Rizzoli, 2019, orig. ed. 1989); Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism: Secret Aryan Cults and Their Influence on Nazi Ideology* (New York: New York University Press, 1993); Gianfranco De Turris, *Esoterismo e fascismo* (Roma: Edizioni Mediterranee, 2006); and Carpegna Falconieri, *The Militant Middle Ages*, 105-32.

[2] Among the many titles: Hartog, *Régimes*, ch. 4, "Mémoire, histoire, présent"; Marco Pivato, Stefano Pivato, *L'ossessione della memoria. Bartali e il salvataggio degli ebrei: una storia inventata* (Roma: Castelvecchi, 2021); Marcello Flores, *Cattiva memoria. Perché è difficile fare i conti con la storia* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2020); Hartog, *Chronos*, 288-91.

[3] Umberto Eco, *A passo di gambero. Guerre calde e populismo mediatico* (Milano: Bompiani, 2006); Zygmunt Bauman, *Retrotopia* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017); see p. 65, for a concept of the past as a comfortable and seductive place in which to build comfort zones, and p. 152, for the same return to the past that "originates from […] the scare of the future embedded in the exasperatingly capricious and uncertain present."

The proposed examples shed light on the political, social and cultural significance that the representation of the Middle Ages has assumed and continues to assume. In Catholic modernism, we have found an explicit reflection on the relationship between the Middle Ages and the contemporary world and on the alleged need to re-propose medieval values. Regarding socialism, we have considered the apparent aporia of a forward-looking political culture, and therefore little inclined to celebrate the past, which nevertheless valorises "medieval" organisational and production strategies considering them applicable to the future, and in this sense "progressive." As for the relationship between medievalism and fascism—the subject of several very recent studies— we have seen how the Middle Ages are re-proposed in relation to the need to root in the past the roots, and also the justifications, of a greatness that is intended to be ancestral, never lost, perhaps only dormant: "la lumière (…) produite par le présent lui-même" of Hartog.

Following these acknowledgments, the term *medievalism* proves to be a valid hermeneutic tool for investigating both political and cultural history confirming that research into ideological applications of history is increasingly becoming a task that historians cannot and must not evade.

Luc-Olivier Merson, Notre-Dame de Paris, *ca. 1881 (The Cleveland Museum of Art,* `https://www.clevelandart.org/art/2008.359`*).*