THE MILITANT MIDDLE AGES

Contemporary Politics between New Barbarians and Modern Crusaders

Tommaso di Carpegna Falconieri
Translated by Andrew M. Hiltzik

The Militant Middle Ages

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Joep Leerssen (*University of Amsterdam*)

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Cover illustration: "Toy knight charging in my study." Photography by T. di Carpegna Falconieri, 2019.

Contents

Preface to the English Edition (2019)

In the Spanish and French editions, both from 2015, I found it opportune to slightly update the text, introducing a few more recent examples of the political use of the Middle Ages, compared to what appeared in the Italian original (2011). Since then, however, many years have passed. National governments, popes, and US presidents have come and gone, balances of power have shifted, many events have transpired, and a new awareness of the fundamental importance of medievalism in the cultural and political life of the West has made itself known. For this reason, I have preferred not to continue the pursuit of a chronology of facts, limiting myself to correcting a few imprecisions and to augmenting the bibliography. Some more recent examples of political medievalism are discussed in the epilogue.

Acknowledgments

I have talked about the many contemporary ways of imagining the Middle Ages with friends, students, and colleagues, in encounters that led me down many interesting roads. The debts I owe to those who study this subject are great: as always, the dwarf sits on the shoulders of giants, even if the giants are squeezed into bibliographical notes, reduced to fine print. I wish to thank Patrick Geary and Gábor Klaniczay, directors of the international program, *Medievalism, Archaic Origins and Regimes of Historicity.* Participating in this working group comprising scholars of over twenty different nationalities has helped me grasp the importance of medievalism and its political repercussions: in various parts of the world the use of myths pertaining to the Middle Ages aids in constructing legitimate feelings of belonging, but also justifies ethnic cleansing, holy wars, and death.

I would like to express my thanks to Amedeo De Vincentiis, who believed in my project and presented it to the Einaudi publishing house, to Joep Leerssen, who wanted to add this English edition to his prestigious book series, "National Cultivation of Culture," and to Andrew M. Hiltzik, who performed the translation. I would also like to thank Alison Locke Perchuk for a final rereading of the English text and Davide Iacono for the new bibliography and index. For the valuable suggestions that emerged in the course of seminars, study groups, and intense conversations, I would particularly like to thank Alessandro Afriat, Lorenzo Ascani, Giuseppe Maria Bianchi, William Blanc, Benedetta Borello, Marco Brando, Elisabetta Caldelli, Franco Cardini, Massimo Ciavolella, Francesca Declich, Marco Dorati, Andrew Elliott, Riccardo Facchini, Valentina Ivancich, Samantha Kelly, Margareth Lanzinger, Umberto Longo, Pedro Martins, Raimondo Michetti, Maria Giuseppina Muzzarelli, Lorena Olvera de la Torre, Francesco Pirani, Salvatore Ritrovato, Francesca Roversi Monaco, Ana Maria S.A. Rodrigues, Matteo Sanfilippo, Raffaella Sarti, Felicitas Schmieder, Piotr Toczyski, Richard Utz, Manuel Vaquero Piñeiro, Maria Elisa Varela Rodriguez, Stefano Visentin, Lila Yawn, Marino Zabbia, and Nada Zečević. My conversations with so many people have allowed me to grasp the depth of the problem and its powerful diversification, contained, however, in a fundamental unity.

I affectionately thank my wife and daughters, for their patience in bearing the theft of time to which I fell victim while writing. Time that would have been spent in other ways, living and laughing together, and that I still like to think was not wasted. Books, indeed, have the virtue of safeguarding ideas, transmitting them, and allowing readers to form them anew; for that reason, this book

and the time it took to write it are dedicated to my wife Anna and to my daughters. So that, when they are a little bit bigger, Livia, Sofia, and Vittoria will know once and for all why I locked myself in my study or ran off to the library instead of playing Red Light/Green Light with them.

Prologue

It's a beautiful day in May, the sun is shining, and the cathedral bells are chiming in the distance. The tournament lists are built, and the taverns have opened their shutters. All around, there is a to-and-fro of people, passing by merchants' boutiques, candy stalls, jugglers, and acrobats. The town mayor, small but stately, is dressing for the ceremony. His garments are so vast that he almost disappears among them. He wears a fiery red greatcloak and a large collar, carries a scepter, and is searching for his fine, plumed hat. When he's finally found it, he marches down the street, accompanied by buglers, bodyguards, and bowmen.

A few hundred miles away, a man with a long beard has just finished an illustration of a knight in chainmail, with a red cross on his surcoat. He looks over the product with satisfaction. Beyond the mountains, a youth with hair shaved down to his scalp (but obviously blond), has put on mail just like the kind drawn by the bearded man and has hidden himself in ambush among the tangled brush of the undergrowth. Even farther, to the East, a green-eyed child is buying bread. He counts his money and hands it to the baker, who glances at it distractedly before putting it away. The cash depicts the face of a sovereign with a crown of gold lilies. Somewhere, in another happy corner of the globe, a girl with red hair and a white dress is singing a ballad, accompanied by a harp: she sings a tale of love, death, and passion. Farther yet, in a land much nearer to the Pole, a group of men are drinking ale and laughing. The warriors bear colorful shields and horned helmets; their camp tents have carved dragons on the pales. Elsewhere, beyond the sea, a zealous preacher speaks to an attentive town square: "God wills it!" he cries to those present. "It is time to launch a crusade to reclaim our civilization and spread it throughout the world!" And then, there is a man wandering about the halls of a university. He catches snippets of lectures and conversations and finally sits, exhausted, with his head in his hands like a gargoyle of Notre Dame.

It's a beautiful day in May, but what year is it? The mayor marches down the street surrounded by a retinue of bodyguards, but then he climbs into a car and drives to the parade that's just about to set off from the historic district. The man with the long beard puts his drawing on a scanner and sees it reappear on the computer screen: it's for the posters he's designing. The hidden boy is playing wargames, along with his merry friends in the woods. When they've finished playing, he'll recount his thrilling adventures on his blog. The boy buying bread with a king's head is using a two-hundred-forint bill from the Republic of Hungary. The girl singing the Irish ballad is interrupted by the untimely ring of a

cell phone. The Vikings with the horned helms are camped out in Australia, and their beer comes in cans, while the preacher shouting in the public square is connected to half the world through the television and is announcing the birth of a social network to round up his new crusaders. The last character has traveled many highways and taken several airplanes to finally reach the campus of a university in Michigan, where he hears fragments of words with his head between his hands like a gargoyle. Across so many anonymous, identical non-places, he has finally found a place where they are talking about a great utopia. This utopia is the Middle Ages.

Introduction

Medieval: the word means very different things depending on where you find it. There is a considerable gap between the Medieval Era studied in research institutions and the one found in newspapers, novels, films, and other media of our contemporary society. While to some it may still seem absurd, the more-or-less fabricated Medieval Era in the media is just as subject to study and interpretation as the one studied and taught in universities. This research should be done not to restore an illusory "effectual truth of things" (as Machiavelli writes), claiming to explain what the Middle Ages really were, but rather because the common idea of the Medieval—also called neo-medieval or medievalism—is a vessel of such vast proportions that we face it every day. There is, perhaps, no other historical epoch that provides our contemporary world with so much nourishment for our own imaginations.[1]

Not only is the Medieval Era present as a trace of the past, it is also a concept that our current age utilizes constantly. And we even use it in the field of politics. In the last decade in particular, themes and topics that are medieval in various ways have come to the fore. Medievalism is not just an innocuous *divertissement,* a more or less fleeting fashion, like the superficial symptom of

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[1] This book makes frequent use of three similar terms, often seen as overlapping: "Medieval Era" (or "Middle Ages"), "medieval history," and "medievalism." The first term is defined as the period extending from the fifth to the fifteenth century. The second term identifies the discipline that has the medieval period as its subject, with the aim of comprehending its historical dynamics. An issue of the journal "Studies in Medievalism" was dedicated to the definition of medievalism, the principal subject of this book: *Defining Medievalism(s),* XVII (2009). See also R. Utz, *Coming to Terms with Medievalism,* in "The European Journal of English Studies," XV (2011), n. 2, pp. 101–113; E. Emery and R. Utz (eds.), *Medievalism: Key Critical Terms*, D.S. Brewer, Woodbridge 2017; B. Bildhauer and C. Jones (eds.), *The Middle Ages in the Modern World: Twenty-first Century Perspectives*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2017. "Medievalism" is a concept that identifies the post-medieval representation, reception, and use of the Middle Ages in every aspect, from revivals to its modernization in a political sense. The study of medievalism thus covers all the forms in which the Medieval Era has been represented from the fifteenth century to today, including historiography, archaeology, and art history. As the bibliography on medievalism is constantly expanding, I refer the reader to the open access review journal *Medievally Speaking*, http://medievallyspeaking.blogspot.it, an excellent and frequently updated resource. Among the more recent books, I must at least mention Andrew Elliott's, which also addresses the relationship between medievalism and politics, but from the perspective of the sociology of communication. A.B.R. Elliott, *Medievalism, Politics and Mass Media. Appropriating the Middle Ages in the Twenty-first Century*, D.S. Brewer, Cambridge 2017. See also: Daniel Wollenberg, *Medieval Imagery in Today's Politics*, Arc Humanities Press, Leeds 2018.

an escape fantasy, or magic or fairy tales. On the contrary, it establishes solid ties to public action.

In the Middle Ages, either as a historical period or a sort of symbolic else-where, contemporary politics finds its preferred source of models, explanatory allegories, and focalizing examples. The Medieval Era is a gloomy time that somewhat resembles our current era: how many people say or think this? The 1970s, for instance, witnessed the use of the idea of the Medieval in terms of class warfare and conflict with the establishment, on both the right and the left. And what immediately leaps to mind (but must be understood on its own terms), is the fact that many Western communities today—especially since the 1980s—use the label "medieval" to attest their own particular identity, whether in terms of laying claim to their origins, or in terms of self-representation. At various levels, in a sort of ascending scale, this happens to civic communities/ identities; to regional communities/identities seeking an affirmation of their autonomy; to national communities/identities reforged in Eastern Europe af-ter the fall of the Berlin Wall; to the European community/identity; and finally to the entire Western community/identity as seen as a counterpoint above all to the Islamic World (and vice versa). Even in America the phenomenon is in full swing, with New Medievalism as a legitimate interpretive category in the study of international relations. Thus, to represent and express one's belonging to a group, the predetermined code of communication is, often, of a medieval hue—a phenomenon that is neither obvious, expected, or inevitable, but its causes can be explained. In this book I would like to offer a panoramic over-view of how the Medieval Era has been perceived and employed in the politi-cal realm in the West in recent decades. The concept of the Middle Ages be-comes a possible key to reading contemporary society and the direction in which it is headed.

It has often been said—and certainly not incorrectly—that the Middle Ages do not exist in reality. In effect, the words represent no more than an idea whose usage may complicate rather than simplify things.[2] The day the Medi-eval Era began to take form was the day that people decided it was over: the time when some men enamored with antiquity became aware of the millennial

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2   For example, V. Branca, *Premessa* in Id. (ed.), *Concetto, storia, miti e immagini del medio evo*, Sansoni, Firenze 1973, p. x: "Truly that of the 'Middle Ages' is a definition and periodization […] that should by now be abandoned"; R. Pernoud, *Pour en finir avec le Moyen Âge,* Seuil, Paris 1977; J. Heers, *Le Moyen Âge: une imposture*, Perrin, Paris 1992; G. Sergi, *L'idea di medioe-vo. Fra storia e senso comune*, Donzelli, Roma 2005. A well-known list of ten ways of repre-senting the Middle Ages was written by Umberto Eco: *Dreaming of the Middle Ages*, in *Travels in Hyperreality*, Picador, London 1987, pp. 61–72 (original edition: *Dieci modi di sognare il me-dioevo*, in U. Eco, *Sugli specchi e altri saggi*, Bompiani, Milano 1985, pp. 78–89).

gap that separated them from the dream they were chasing. Then, for the first time, they thought up the *media tempestas*, the intermediary period situated between antiquity and its *re-naissance,* between the ancient world and the modern one. A middle age, totally unknown to those who found themselves within it and who—a detail always worth repeating—had no conception of being medieval men, but considered themselves "modern," testaments to a world that is aging, awaiting its final redemption. Few were the medieval men conscious of living in the Middle Ages: among them, the Duke of Auge. But he was capable of time travel, and his creator, Raymond Queneau, loved to play with words and dreams.[3]

"An empty between two fulls," from the fifteenth century onward, the Middle Ages have changed shape and meaning like no other epoch.[4] While the classical has consistently represented, even through a thousand regenerations, an ideal of universality, purity, balance, and perfection, the medieval, in a precise dialectic with the classical, has signified, for those who imagined it, a universe of alternative possibilities, charged with ambiguous values.[5] This contrast between the medieval and the classical represents the first pair of oppositions that must be taken into account. Every historical period, in fact, describes itself based on the judgment it pronounces on the past and the way it represents it. It has been written that the rebirth of the classical represents "the rhythmical form" of European cultural history.[6] The classical is born, dies, is born again, always in new forms: as was the case, to cite only the most notable examples, in the Renaissance and in Neoclassicism. To grasp the complete sense of this rhythmic

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3 R. Queneau, *Between Blue and Blue,* trans. B. Wright, The Bodley Head, London 1967 (original edition: *Les fleurs bleues*, Gallimard, Paris 1965). A similar thing happens in the film *The Lion in Winter* (1968), when Queen Eleanor of Aquitaine says to her husband Henry II, "It's 1183 and we're barbarians!" The philosopher Étienne Gilson recalled in 1973, at the age of 89, a cartoon that had made him laugh so much in his youth, an English bowman who tearfully says to his beloved, "Adieu, ma chère femme, je pars pour la Guerre des Cent Ans" ("Goodbye, my dear wife, I'm leaving for the Hundred Years' War"): É. Gilson, *Le Moyen Âge comme "saeculum modernum,"* in V. Branca (ed.), *Concetto, storia, miti e immagini* cit., pp. 1–10: 1.

4 M. Montanari, *L'invenzione del medioevo*, in Id., *Storia medievale*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 2002, pp. 268–279: 269.

5 S. Settis, *The Future of the "Classical,"* trans. Allan Cameron, Polity Press, Cambridge-Malden 2006 (original edition: *Futuro del classico*, Einaudi, Torino 2004). See also Lord Acton's remark (1859), quoted until recently on the homepage of the journal "Studies in Medievalism": "Two great principles divide the world, and contend for the mastery, antiquity and the middle ages. These are the two civilizations that have preceded us, the two elements of which ours is composed. All political as well as religious questions reduce themselves practically to this. This is the great dualism that runs through our society."

6 Cf. S. Settis, *The Future of the "Classical"* cit., p. 76, which analyzes this definition proposed by Ernst Howald in 1948.

model, the Middle Ages must be placed in the middle. In the transitional phase between the birth and rebirth of the classical, there can be found a third age that is, indeed, the Middle Ages. The play on words helps us to better understand the reasoning: our idea of the "Middle Ages" is opposed to that of the "classical" in a number of ways: in a certain sense it is a reaction to it. One who is in love with the classical shuns and condemns the medieval; one who, on the other hand, was until recently fascinated by classical forms and ideals, throws her- or himself head first into the dream of the medieval, unearthing those values that in being seen as subversive are all the more attractive. If the classical is the cradle of rationality, which produces philosophy and law, the medieval serves as the symbol of a positive irrationality, which produces poetry and sentiment. If the classical is the foundation of the idea of universality, the medieval is seen as the root of national identity, as the point of departure for the differentiation between *gentes*, as the forge of myth understood as the authentic expression of an entire people. If the classical is the time and place of the sunny civilizations of the Mediterranean, the medieval becomes the time and place of the Northern civilizations, of the night and the moon. Finally, if the classical is the time of slavery, the medieval will be the time of individual liberty, of barbarian vitality. Thus, the anti-classical medieval becomes, itself, a classical canon, and the *Nibelungenlied*, the medieval epic considered to be the origin of a nation, is transformed into the "Teutonic Iliad" of Romantic Germany.[7]

Just as a community's sense of identity often starts by inventing an enemy, so the very idea of the Middle Ages has acquired its meaning in opposition to another. The one epoch and the other can exist only in contrast: there is no medieval without Renaissance, but the reverse is also true. This reasoning is central, because it shows that the Middle Ages as a concept (and above all as a political concept) is born under the sign of opposition. Our idea of the Middle Ages acquires, however, an extra connotation, of contrast not only with "antiquity," but also with "modernity." This latter, due to its equivalence with the concept of "change," is considered to be generally positive from a progressive perspective and generally negative from a reactionary one. Opposition in the name of medievalism can assume a reactionary character when it turns to the Middle Ages to recover or create a tradition, or it can have a revolutionary character, when it permeates a movement of protest that has a need for medieval symbols in which to find an example of social solidarity and

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7   H. De Boor and K. Bartsch (eds.), *Das Nibelungenlied*, Brockhaus, Wiesbaden 1956; L. Mancinelli (ed.), *I Nibelunghi*, Einaudi, Torino 2006². On the classical-medieval opposition, see also Ch. Amalvi, *Le goût du Moyen Âge*, Boutique de l'Histoire, Paris 2002², pp. 19–22.

rebellion against the establishment. From a historical perspective, the medieval as a metaphor and mirror of the reaction or revolution constitutes the keystone of an interpretive framework that continues all the way up to our day and age.[8]

The uses of the idea of the Middle Ages as a golden age to dream of and possibly reproduce in the current day are many and radically different among themselves, even as they shade one into another: anarchist, progressive, reactionary, conservative, nationalist, secessionist, Europeanist, racist, ecological, existentialist, religious…The vessel is so vast that one might ask oneself if it even makes sense to seek out an internal logic, or if instead this attempt at conceptual reordering belongs only to the specific intellectual habits of those who who find themselves reimagining the Middle Ages daily and seek to render it comprehensible. The object that we struggle to capture with our woefully blurry gaze could be compared to a constellation. Stars separated by unfathomable stellar distances acquire a shape only thanks to the observer's point of view. The stars don't know each other. They have no conception of the logic that unites them. The nocturnal navigator seeks a route across the sea using the sky and from there he begins to tell stories of gods. As so happens now: outside of metaphor, the subject we are preparing to introduce is, to all appearances, free of connections. But the point of view of this book is that of a curious medievalist, who seeks to make sense of the word *Medieval.* It is precisely this word, a fixed reference point, that allows us to propose a unifying interpretation. The medieval necessarily presents a broad frame of reference, as it is seen as the other elsewhere that contrasts with modernity and exceeds it by way of the *nostos,* the return voyage that, for three millennia now, has accompanied our Western existence to bring us back home. The idea of the Middle Ages is an essential and inextricable part of the discourse of the idea of the

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8   The concept of the Medieval Era as a metaphor, allegory, or "mirror" of modernity appears often. See e.g. B. Tuchman, *A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous Fourteenth Century*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York 1978; F. Cardini, *Medievisti "di professione" e revival neomedievale*, in *Il sogno del medioevo* cit., pp. 33–52: 41; R. Bordone, *Il medioevo nell'immaginario dell'Ottocento italiano*, in *Studi medievali e immagine del medioevo fra Ottocento e Novecento*, monograph issue of "Bullettino dell'Istituto storico italiano per il medio evo," 100 (1995–1996), pp. 109–149: 115; E. Menestò (ed.), *Il medioevo: specchio ed alibi.* Proceedings of the conference held on the occasion of the second edition of the International Ascoli Piceno Prize (Ascoli Piceno, May 13–14, 1988), CISAM, Spoleto 1997[2]; G.M. Spiegel, *The Changing Faces of American Medievalism*, in J.M. Bak [et al.] (eds.), *Gebrauch und Missbrauch des Mittelalters, 19.-21. Jahrhundert/Uses and Abuses of the Middle Ages: 19th-21st Century/Usages et Mesusages du Moyen Âge du XIXe au XXIe siecle*, Wilhelm Fink, München 2009, pp. 45–53: 45; K.P. Fazioli, *The Mirror of the Medieval. An Anthropology of the Western Historical Imagination*, Berghahn Books, New York 2017.

modern.[9] Which is obvious, if we think about it for even a moment, in so far as the concept of the medieval was forged precisely to perform this dialectical function: first, in the Renaissance era, then in the Romantic era, invoking it as a brother in arms to represent the renewal of the spirit.

Two general interpretations have emerged from the ternary opposition Classical/Medieval/Modern, ones to which we still turn when we need to assign a value judgment to the Middle Ages. The legacies of the Renaissance, onto which was grafted the culture of the Protestant Reformation, then the Enlightenment, and finally Marxism, have forged the negative idea of the Middle Ages. An age of barbarians, who destroyed the greatest civilization of all time, the negative Medieval Era is an opaque, irrational, and malignant place, degenerate to the highest degree in its inability to permit development, lacking the capacity to produce true art, profoundly unjust in its social systems founded on harassment and oppression, devoid of any state entity worthy of the name, brutal and violent, pounded by the wrath of rival factions, stunted by a superstitious religiosity that burned hordes of innocent people at the stake. It is, in short, the Middle Ages of the *ius primae noctis,* of serfdom, corrupt popes, witches, massacres, famine, and pestilence.

On the other hand, the cultural legacy that originates mainly from the Catholic Counter-Reformation, followed by French and Italian erudition of the modern age and by English literature, and finally culminating in the Romantic movement, has molded the positive idea of the Middle Ages. This one is a universe of symbols: it is the time of castles and fairy tales, of magic and knights, of damsels with pointed hats, of troubadours, bards, and jesters, of industrious merchants, of the regeneration of a civilization founded on the "eternal values" of country, faith, and heroism.[10]

In the same way, and for partially overlapping reasons, the partition between the negative and positive Middle Ages is partly attributable to distinct political and historiographical positions, definable respectively as progressive

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9   In general, see J. Le Goff, *Storia e memoria*, Einaudi, Torino 1977, partially reproduced in Id., *History and Memory*, Columbia University Press, New York 1996, a comprehensive study on the idea of time, and particularly on the opposing pairs of progressive/reactionary, past/present, ancient/modern. See especially pp. 144–149, 204–211, 321–328 of the Italian edition.

10   The contemporary bibliography on the developments of the representation of the Middle Ages is quite vast, starting with G. Falco, *La polemica sul medioevo*, Biblioteca storica subalpina, Torino 1933 (n. ed. Guida, Napoli 1988). Today, many textbooks on medieval history dedicate a chapter, initial or final, to the "idea of the Middle Ages," as it is now a common opinion that even the cultural representation of a phenomenon is a historical datum, and thus open to historical analysis.

and conservative, or rather "left" and "right." Seen from the left, the Medieval is a fundamentally negative period; seen from the right, it is a fundamentally positive period.[11] This strict partition is crude and imprecise, since the points of contact, contamination, and inversion are frequent and significant. Without a shadow of a doubt, there exists a Medieval Era seen as positive by progressive movements and, vice versa, as negative by conservative movements. These positions are often reversed when comparing Anglo-Saxon to Continental cultures: we will have plenty of time to cover this later. Nevertheless, despite the numerous and well-deserved distinguos, the theoretical partition is useful for sketching out the analysis in general terms and understanding the reception the Medieval Era has had in contemporary politics, from as early as the end of the Eighteenth century.

The paths that lead through the Middle Ages to day or night do not run parallel, but constantly intersect, because the very word "medieval" is ephemeral: indeed, we might say it functions precisely because of its ambiguity. Thus, it is easy to chance upon symbols or tropes that are considered medieval, but that permit us say and think things that are diametrically opposed. Knights, for instance, are pure and spotless, or else they are bloodthirsty marauders; they are crusaders filled with a steadfast Christian faith, or else they are colonizers with no scruples; or, along with bards and druids, they are the last testaments to an ancient, pre-Christian, pagan knowledge. The pathways cross each other even in people's consciousnesses, since there is no guarantee that one who approaches medievalism today does so with political intentions. Those who read fantasy novels or listen to goth music, who visit Merlin's castle at an amusement park with the same joy and curiosity as when they visit the European castles of Pierrefonds, Neuschwanstein, and Gradara, those who play role-playing games set in medieval scenarios, who remain fascinated by the mysterious Templars, their secrets, and their treasures, who lead a virtual *Second Life,* along with so many other pseudo-friends connected on the Internet, naming themselves after damsels, dragons, and knights, building castles, artisanal boutiques, or ships that set sail into the unknown—all of them are, generally, passionate for that ancient time, which they recreate in their minds with the aid of stereotyped descriptions. Their principal sentiment—entirely pre-political—is that of nostalgia: nostalgia for green lands, for authentic passions, and, in the absolute virtuality of their lives, for a true life, for a lost Holy Grail.

The Medieval Era, from Romanticism on, is certainly a vessel for nostalgia, without necessarily having a political connotation. Nostalgia, on the other hand, becomes political when combined with a plan to return to the past:

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11   Cf. for instance, in France, Ch. Amalvi, *Le goût du Moyen Âge* cit., pp. 199–201.

when the *laudatio temporis acti* ("praise of times past") that men experience just after growing out of their youth translates into a reactionary impulse. Ultimately, the figures that populate our idea of the Medieval, witches and knights for instance, may or may not be imbued with a political significance: on their own, they remain inert.

These are not the only roads that lead to the idea of the Middle Ages: other interpretive paths intersect with them, forming an even more complex map. In fact, it is even possible to imagine the Middle Ages through another pair of opposites: as a "before" and as an "elsewhere." The Medieval Era is often interpreted as one that is located at the origin of modernity. Situated in a precise period of Western history, a prior time, it contains within itself, *in potentia*, the elements that will later find their mature expression in the institutions and societies of the following eras. For example, the Middle Ages as the age of the foundation and dawn of the West can be considered the mold in which the Franks become French, and the Teutons Germans, in which the nation and the state start to identify with each other, in which social classes and the very idea of Europe are formed. To think of the Medieval Era in this way means attributing to it a precise meaning within the course of history, understood as an ongoing process of construction and becoming. In this case, we cannot formulate any too-rigid distinction between the thought of the right—conservative or reactionary—and the left—progressive or revolutionary: seen from one side or the other, the Medieval Era is considered part of a more or less teleological course, but nevertheless felt to be necessary. A conservative will maintain that the great Middle Ages must be exalted and imitated, and will perceive the echoes of ancient traditions in the institutions of his/her time—the state, the country, the Church, the monarchy; while a progressive thinker will maintain that the grim Middle Ages must be replaced, but not necessarily forgotten, as it remains an undeniable part of the progress of social liberation: without the peasant and artisan revolts, without the heretical movements, without Robin Hood, Cecco Angiolieri, and François Villon, we would never have reached the revolutions that gave rise to democracy. Right and left, in short, are not averse to what Bloch called "the idol of origins,"[12] and both can be Darwinian in their application of historical evolutionism, adapted to the concept of the progressive civilization of societies, states, and individuals: in a word, of humanity.

Alongside the idea of the Middle Ages as a historical time "of before," the precondition and origin of the current world, is another vision—ahistorical,

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12   M. Bloch, *The Historian's Craft,* trans. P. Putnam, Manchester University Press, Manchester 1992 (original edition: *Apologie pour l'histoire ou métier d'historien*, in "Cahiers des Annales," 1949, n. 3).

mythical, and symbolic—that conceives of the Medieval as an elsewhere, a place that has no relation to the contemporary.[13] Its chronological span, its location between antiquity and modernity, holds no importance: it is merely the receptacle that gives shape to the imaginary. It is the hinterland that, not necessarily linked to political interests, gave birth to the Gothic romance, colored the traditional fairy tale, and generated fantasy literature and the recent obsession with the Grail. Yet it is also the Medieval Era that, permeated with political intentions, generates the myth of the primordial hero and the solitary knight, of the existential and antagonistic path closed to the uninitiated—that is, the Middle Ages of so-called "Tradition." And it is the perfect time when men lived in immediate contact with nature not yet contaminated by ecological disasters, in a direct relationship with the sacred, whether it be understood in Christian, ecological, or neo-pagan terms. This is the time/not-time of numerous modernizing and decontextualizing interpretations, to which the course of history is only an accessory.

The fact remains that the Middle Ages cause some discomfort.[14] Its antinomic value endures, unresolved, in every one of us and in our common Western sentiment. Whoever engages with the word *Medieval* attributes to it, time after time, one of the two value judgments evinced above. The Medieval Era of fairs and turreted castles collides in our mind with that of witches and heretics burned at the stake. And, pardon the triviality, the Medieval Era of "courtly love" is exactly the opposite of the one contained in the expression, "I'ma get medieval on yo' ass," a line from Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* (1994) that has become synonymous with the most brutal torture.[15]

The Medieval Era becomes classical by being anti-classical; modern or anti-modern, reactionary, revolutionary, or even anarchist; positive or negative; political or apolitical; a requisite *before* or the absolute *elsewhere*: such, therefore, is the nature of this extraordinary, Janus-faced word. Political

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13   On the Middle Ages as a "fundamentally ahistorical myth" see R. Bordone, *Lo specchio di Shalott. L'invenzione del medioevo nella cultura dell'Ottocento,* Liguori, Napoli 1993, pp. 11–16: 12. See also G. Sergi, *Antidoti all'abuso della storia. Medioevo, medievisti, smentite,* Liguori, Napoli 2010, p. 361.

14   P. Delogu, *Introduzione alla storia medievale*, il Mulino, Bologna 2003², p. 14: "The Middle Ages as a historical period, or, if you will, as a mythic image, constitutes a problem for the modern consciousness; that is, it causes discomfort, presenting itself alternately as a period to be exorcised or an ideal to be sought."

15   See C. Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre and Post-modern,* Duke University Press, Durham (NC) 1999, pp. 183–206. I also found, in a blog, the suggestion that the adjective "medieval" could easily acquire a negative connotation thanks to its rhyme with the word "evil": Ch. Hodgson, *Podictionary, the Podcast for Word Lovers,* http://podictionary.com/?p=533 (cons. Feb. 2, 2010) (the page was found to be inactive when cons. Apr. 28, 2019).

medievalism draws liberally from all of these representations. This has been happening for over two centuries, since the end of the 1700s, but what is presented in this book is much more limited in time. I intend to discuss only the way in which, in recent decades, people have made recourse to the "common sense of the Medieval," conferring on it a hundred different political connotations. The choice of this chronological segment is dictated by two considerations. The first is the fact that the Medieval Era, after a few decades of relative dormancy, returned to the spotlight at the end of the 1960s. Since then, its political uses have not diminished, but on the contrary have been amplified by a sudden mutation of the global political scene and by epochal events carved symbolically into our collective memory by the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the collapse of the Twin Towers in New York in 2001. For fifty years now, the Middle Ages can be found everywhere. A negative meaning is attributed to it, in so far as it is an intuitive metaphor for a civilization about to collapse, or positive, seeking answers in the *exempla* of the past, be they druids, knights or valiant Lombards.

The second reason for my choice of this chronological segment is that since the early 1970s historians—and medievalists in particular—have become aware of the cultural appeal lurking in contemporary medievalism (and not merely in the well-known phenomenon of nineteenth-century medievalism) and have begun to observe this phenomenon attentively. The accelerate construction of medievalism in our years therefore finds a precise correspondence in historiographical analysis. In the case of this book, such analysis is intended to be neither apologetic nor destructive, but rather to involve, as much as possible, constructive criticism.

The chapters that follow are concerned with the principal macro-interpretations of the idea of the Middle Ages. The first two follow the traces of the Middle Ages represented as a time of darkness and oppression, while the other ten address the theme of the Middle Ages conceived as the morning light at the dawn of contemporary political identities. All these chapters will discuss how and why we have constructed these cultural representations for ourselves; since, let us be clear, we are almost always operating within "inventions of tradition" and "imagined communities," anthropological concepts first embraced by historians in the early 1980s.[16] Condensed to the extreme, the former concept expresses the awareness that some Western traditions we believe to be centuries or millennia old are in reality much more recent, generally dating

16   I refer to E.J. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger (eds.) *The Invention of Tradition,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1983; B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, Verso, London 1983, n. ed. 1991.

back only to the nineteenth century. The latter can instead be summarized in the observation that the identity of organized communities is, for the most part, a cultural artifact, the fruit of the activity of leading intellectuals and of the popularization of the media, which together lead to mass movements that follow a modular form always identifiable despite its adaptation to different social situations. Communities become aware of themselves only when they have been described.

Contemporary historiography is fully aware of the foundational role of interpretation and of how the construction of memory is an artificial instrument that can produce falsehoods. Both the individual who remembers, and the society that passes down, reconstructs, or even invents the memory of itself, choose, select, interpret, explain, forget, rediscover, magnify, reorganize, switch the order of anteriority and posteriority, determine and mingle cause and effect, construct or destroy, confer a meaning and a direction to history, even when history, as the song goes, "*un senso non ce l'ha*."[17] Maybe nature does not make leaps (*non facit saltus*), but memory certainly does. This is why studies of the trickery camouflaging the use and abuse of the great word "history", are numerous today.[18] Precisely for these reasons, medieval scholars cannot help but pose questions about the "common sense of the Middle Ages" and about its uses in politics. For such perceptions, which fully contribute to forming our complete idea of that period, even when they are fictions, falsehoods, or inventions of traditions, are partly the fault of historians themselves. And most importantly, they have real, concrete consequences.

This line of reasoning directly affects the task of those who are accustomed to discussing the sources produced during the medieval millennium. Medievalists themselves are holding a winning hand, since they are in a position to establish comparisons between the Medieval Era that emerges from the

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17 V. Rossi, *Un senso*, 2004: "Voglio trovare un senso a questa storia / anche se questa storia un senso non ce l'ha" ("I want to make sense of this history / even if this history makes no sense").

18 Some examples, not necessarily centered around the Middle Ages: D. Lowenthal, *Possessed by the Past. The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History*, The Free Press, New York 1996; U. Fabietti and V. Matera, *Memoria e identità. Simboli e strategie del ricordo*, Meltemi, Roma 1999; M. Sanfilippo, *Storia e immaginario storico nella rete e nei media più tradizionali*, 2001, http://dspace.unitus.it/handle/2067/25 (cons. Apr. 28, 2019); J. Ryan, *Cultures of Forgery: Making Nations, Making Selves*, Routledge, New York 2003; E. Traverso, *Il passato: istruzioni per l'uso. Storia, memoria, politica*, Ombre Corte, Verona 2006; S. Pivato, *Vuoti di memoria. Usi e abusi della storia nella vita pubblica italiana*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 2007; M. Caffiero and M. Procaccia (eds.), *Vero e falso. L'uso politico della storia*, Donzelli, Roma 2008; L. Canfora, *La storia falsa*, Rizzoli, Milano 2010; G. Sergi, *Antidoti all'abuso della storia* cit.

sources they analyze, and the common sense of the Middle Ages that they find expressed in contemporary society. Having developed efficacious terms of comparison, they find themselves equipped to recognize the differences, contradictions, and distortions, and even to grant them a significance in historical terms.[19]

Ultimately, this book is about what Erasmus of Rotterdam called *opiniones*, which are not the reality of things. As Folly says, eulogizing itself, it is opinions, not reality, that grant man happiness.[20] But also, not uncommonly, unhappiness.

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19   Among the most significant texts on instrumentalized interpretations of the Middle Ages determined by political intents, and with which we will weave a continuous dialog in these pages, are: G. Sergi, *L'idea di medioevo* cit.; Ch. Amalvi, *Le goût du Moyen Âge* cit.; P.J. Geary, *The Myth of Nations: The Medieval Origins of Europe*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2002; F. Cardini, *Templari e templarismo. Storia, mito, menzogne*, Il Cerchio iniziative editoriali, Rimini 2005; V. Ortenberg, *In Search of the Holy Grail. The Quest for the Middle Ages*, Hambledon Continuum, New York 2007; J.M. Bak [et al.] (eds.), *Gebrauch und Missbrauch* cit., which collects the proceedings of a meeting held in Budapest, June 30-July 11, 2003, and March 30-April 2, 2005; G. Scarre, R. Conningham (eds.), *Appropriating the Past. Philosophical Perspectives on the Practice of Archeology*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2013. We are still waiting for the acts of some recent conferences; among them: *Medievalism. 22nd International Conference at Western Ontario*, London (ON, Canada), 4–6 October 2007, partially published in J.M. Toswell (ed.), *The Year's Work in Medievalism, 2008*, Wipf & Stock Publishers, Eugene (OR) 2009; *Medievalism, Colonialism, Nationalism: A Symposium*, University of California Riverside, November 7–8, 2008; *The Middle Ages in the Modern World*, University of St Andrew, 24–28 June 2013, partially published in B. Bildhauer, Chris Jones (eds.), *The Middle Ages in the Modern World* cit.; *The Middle Ages in the Modern World*, University of Lincoln, 29 June-2 July 2015; University of Manchester, 28 June-1 July 2017; John Cabot University-École française de Rome, Rome, 21–24 November 2018. In Italy, there are two gatherings where political medievalism is the object of analysis: the annual *The Middle Ages Among Us* conference (*Il Medioevo fra noi*), organized in Urbino and Gradara by the University of Urbino, and the *Festival of the Middle Ages* (*Festival del Medioevo*) in Gubbio. I have had the opportunity to test some of the considerations contained in this book (and above all to receive rich suggestions) during discussions at lectures and seminars delivered between 2008 and 2011 in Italy, the United States, and Hungary, and, since the 2011 release of the original Italian edition of this book, in Catalunia, Portugal, Scotland, England, France, Belgium, Luxembourg, Mexico, and South Africa.

20   "Nimium enim desipiunt, qui in rebus ipsis felicitatem hominis sitam existimant. Ex opinionibus ea pendet" ("Those who maintain that human happiness derives from the thing itself are fools. It depends on opinion"): Erasmus of Rotterdam, *Encomium Moriae sive declaratio in laudem Stultitiae* [1509], apud Andr. Cloucquium, Lugduni Batavorum 1624, p. 66 (Engl. ed.: *The Praise of Folly*, ed. Clarence H. Miller, Yale University Press, New Haven-London 1979).

The Neo-Medieval West

> On the twenty-fifth of September, twelve hundred and sixty-four, at break
> of day, the Duke of Auge appeared at the summit of the keep of his castle,
> there to consider, be it ever so little, the historical situation. It was some-
> what confused. A few odd remnants of the past were still lying around
> here and there, rather messily. On the banks of a nearby gully two
> Huns were camping; quite near them a Gaul, a Haeduan, perhaps, was
> boldly immersing his feet in the fresh, running water. On the horizon
> were outlined the flabby silhouettes of tired Romans, nether Norse-
> men, old Francs, and Christmas Carolingians. A few Normans were drink-
> ing calvados.
>
> R. QUENEAU, *Between Blue and Blue* (1965)

"What is this, the Middle Ages?" is a comment that may pass our lips any time
we're faced with a case of injustice, misappropriation, inefficiency, backward-
ness, obtuseness, ignorance, obscurantism, prevarication, or violence. The met-
aphor of the age of steel serves as an enduring metric for the infamy of the
modern world. Mass exterminations, pogroms against the Jews, and the "clash
of civilizations" between Islam and the West are colored by a sinister *déjà vu* of
the Dark Ages of our progenitors.

Even when dealing with our little daily annoyances, the Medieval Era rushes
to our aid in constructing similes. For example, in Italy, if you want to critique
a university (an institution, incidentally, that has its roots in the twelfth cen-
tury), you call the professors "barons," while the places where they exercise
their dominion—faculties, departments, institutes—become veritable fiefs in
your eyes.[1] And this is because "feudal system" is synonymous with "unjust sys-
tem." If, however, a diligent traffic cop is hiding with his radar gun behind a
bush along a deserted straightaway, to write you up a hefty fine for speeding,
even then our imagination makes us weave a comparison with the unjust lev-
ies, the highway tolls, the harassment and vexations of those legalized bandits
that were medieval lords. All this, naturally, has a touristic feel: in Europe, any
self-respecting castle must instill terror, keep secrets, have a torture chamber

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1 One example: *Baroni e "feudi", la denuncia degli studenti An,* "il Giornale," 30 Oct. 2007, http://
   www.ilgiornale.it/news/baroni-e-feudi-denuncia-degli-studenti.html (cons. Apr. 28, 2019).

and maybe a few trap doors, gears, shackles, cleavers, and chastity belts. Only once you've left and gotten back to the cars and trucks can you begin to breathe again.

The cliché that the Medieval Era is a shadowy land has illustrious origins and remains the most diffuse today by a wide margin. So much so that even its Romantic revision by which the Middle Ages were instead a time of great civilization, is so worn out that it has become the necessary complement to the former in casual conversation. If we want to simplify as much as possible the way that we have represented the Middle Ages as darkness for centuries, we must make exclusive reference to two historical moments; its origins and its ending. As everyone knows, the Medieval Period begins with the barbarian invasions of the fifth century and ends with the great crisis of the fourteenth century. At its debut we find the death of the Roman Empire, the victorious onslaught of cultures held to be inferior, the population collapse, the decline of cities, people fleeing to the country, the economy contracting to a mere subsistence level; at the end, we find the Hundred Years' War and the infinite, devastating skirmishes led by bands of mercenaries, economic depression, recurring famines, the Inquisition, witch hunts, and, above all, the plague. Sandwiched between the barbarians and the plague, the Medieval Era is indeed terrifying: it is a time of brutality, *danses macabres*, flagellants, tortures, and fear of the imminent end of the world.

This idea of the Middle Ages (which comes from the Renaissance, and especially the Enlightenment) was formed by a process that has only taken the beginning and ending of the medieval millennium into account, refusing to consider anything in between even worth mentioning. It is a very effective ideological construction and mental representation. It seems, however, to be as if, in describing the life of a man, we limited ourselves to mentioning his mother's death in childbirth and then, immediately afterward, his decrepit old age. As Francesco Milizia (1725–1798) did, with an extraordinary ellipsis of seven centuries, when he described Gothic art as "a crudeness introduced into the arts after the ruin of the Roman Empire, which was destroyed by the Goths, and thus it is called Gothic."[2]

The interpretation of the Medieval Era as an age of darkness is still useful today—perhaps especially today—in expressing a great variety of lamentations, all converging on the basic idea that the age we live in is somehow unfortunately comparable to that one. We are dealing with shared interpretations that have a considerable impact on public action and, consequently, determine

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2   F. Milizia, *Dizionario delle belle arti del disegno*, [Remondini], Bassano 1797, vol. I, p. 270, *ad vocem* "Gotico."

the idea of the Middle Ages in a fairly definite way. One case, that of the so-called "New Medievalism," even achieves a systematization of the modern/medieval relationship in the arena of political theory. So impressive is this case in its propositions and conclusions that it alone would be enough to justify an analysis of the whole phenomenon.[3]

The sensation that the world is returning to a new Middle Ages is extraordinarily popular in our day and age, and all it takes is a trip to the internet to see it. Aside from talk of the crisis of public administration and absence of moral values, the authors of countless blogs and discussion forums are fond of embellishing their considerations with the most slavish references to medieval barbarism, to the rape, war, and violence of that time. The same even happens with distinguished personalities who write for important papers. Two cases readily come to mind regarding the tough questions of recent years: one can read, for example, that the Mafia mirrors a system of power, and controls its territory, in a way that is simultaneously barbarian and feudal,[4] or that such developing and overpopulated countries as China are acquiring cultivable land in Africa and have established a new kind of serfdom there.[5]

This way of thinking, as I have said, is not actually new, but rather may be the most ancient of all, since the idea of the Middle Ages was born as the bastard child of history. And therefore, perhaps paradoxically, to speak ill of the Middle Ages is the most philologically appropriate attitude. To say that the world is getting worse year after year is nothing new. This trope, which originated in classical antiquity, has been a constant theme throughout the twentieth century, one made quite palpable by its disasters: the World Wars, colonization and decolonization, the terror of the atom bomb, all the way up to such more recent and commonly shared fears as hunger, the under-development of the Southern hemisphere, pollution, the loss of traditions and local identities, the globalization of productive and economic systems, the clash of civilizations, global warming, the hole in the ozone layer, the death of the forest, the emergence of unknown diseases and the return of others that were believed eradicated, at least in the West.

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3 Cf. *infra*, Chapter 2.

4 F. Alberoni, *Se lo Stato ha il consenso è piu forte dei barbari. L'esempio virtuoso della Sicilia negli anni Novanta*, in "Corriere della Sera," June 9, 2008, p. 1. It's worth remembering that between the adjectives "barbarian" and "feudal" lie five centuries of history.

5 D. Quirico, *Africa in vendita in cambio di cibo. La Fao denuncia: rischio catastrofe. Milioni di ettari ad arabi e cinesi per coltivazioni intensive di riso*, in "La Stampa," May 26, 2009; E. Vigna, *2009, Asia e Africa: la nuova lotta alla servitù della gleba*, in "Corriere della Sera Magazine," XXIII (July 23, 2009), n. 29, p. 69.

Even the grave economic crisis in which we are currently floundering has a strong odor of the Middle Ages. In June 2010, Minister Giulio Tremonti, attempting to simplify the legal panorama by modifying two articles of the Italian Constitution in favor of recovery, explained that we are not in a position to operate competitively today because we are hindered by a neo-medieval "regulatory madness":

> As in the old Middle Ages, the whole economy was crippled by duties, by entrance and exit tolls at the city gates, ports, and crossings, so that our current territory is populated by an endless number of legal totems […]. The true Middle Ages are over, as such. But the new Middle Ages, which manifests as the juridico-democratic caricature of the previous one, carries us off to a sweet death.[6]

Testaments to a disgusted attitude toward the world we live in can be found in any age, and are even quite common in medieval literature. They have, however, become ever more pervasive since the First World War. The terrifying Middle Ages of modernity is evoked on various occasions: for example by José Ortega y Gasset, who in 1930 read the phenomenon of mass rebellions in the twentieth century as a new "vertical" barbarian invasion—that is, originating from within and thus self-destructive for society.[7] But the general reception of this kind of imaginary Middle Ages is more recent, as far as I can tell datable to the second half of the Sixties and particularly to the early Seventies—in other words, to the period when the Middle Ages returned to the attention and curiosity of an ever broadening public, a period corresponding to the last years of the postwar Boom and the first economic, financial, and energy crisis in the West after decades of nearly uninterrupted development.

Among the consequences of this crisis in the idea of progress was a symbolic "return to the Middle Ages," which proceeded in two branching directions. The first is a sort of refuge in the Middle Ages, seen as a heroic, fairytale elsewhere to pine over and dream about: once one of the engines of the

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6   The text appears in the speech that accompanies the plan for the new constitutional law for modifying articles 41 and 118 of the Italian Constitution. See, *Tremonti spiega come uscire dal medioevo per liberare le imprese*, in "Il Sole 24 ore," June 26, 2010, www.ilsole24ore.com/art/notizie/2010-06-26/usciamo-medioevo-liberare-imprese-080300.shtml?uuid=AYhEiQ2B (cons. Apr. 28, 2019). But see especially the harsh comment by Emanuele Conte, professor of History of Italian Law: Id., *Medioevo negato*, www.youtube.com/watch?v=VuAqOVvFzCA (cons. Apr. 28, 2019).

7   J. Ortega y Gasset, *The Revolt of the Masses*, trans. A. Kerrigan, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame (IN) 1985 (original edition: *La rebelion de las masas*, in "Revista de Occidente," VIII (1930).

Romantic movement of the 1800s, it has come to drive twentieth- and twenty-first century fantasy fiction and film—which we will speak of at length later. The other direction is the terror of modernity perceived as neo-medieval: this is what we are talking about in these early chapters. The why is clear: hunger, plague, and war—the terrifying triad of Furies that we attribute to the Middle Ages—reappear in the flesh as "world hunger," AIDS (along with SARS, mad cow disease, anthrax attacks, swine flu…), and naturally the "clash of civilizations" and World War III.

From the Seventies until now many novels, films, and comics have appeared that straddle the line between medieval revival and science fiction, providing us with an abundance of macabre details of the possibility of an imminent catastrophe (atomic, economic, etc.) that will hurl us right back to the deepest Middle Ages.[8] They present dystopias, not much different from a thousand others produced in the course of the twentieth century, that evoke alienated societies, world wars, and apocalypses, all thrown together as necessary ingredients for the representation of the Medieval in the future. In the "post-atomic" or "apocalyptic" genre, we come full-circle and the Middle Ages return, bold and barbaric: armed bandits, ruined cities, scattered villages, endless deserts, humanity reduced to a subsistence living and scavenging whatever is left of the old technology, all make up the landscape of this film typology: *Soylent Green* (1973), *The Ultimate Warrior* (1975), *The Warriors* (1979), the *Mad Max* series (1979–2015), *Escape from New York* (1981), up to *Waterworld* (1995) and all the way to *Doomsday* (2008).[9]

As this is an early sketch of the adamantine idea of the Middle Ages as a time of crisis and catastrophe, we can try to reflect more systematically on recent years, when we may glimpse a sometimes asphyxiating use of the medieval

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8   R. Vacca, *The Coming Dark Age*, Doubleday, Garden City (NY) 1973 (original edition: *Medioevo prossimo venturo: la degradazione dei grandi sistemi*, Mondadori, Milano 1972). The same parallelisms between a frightening 1300s and an even more terrifying 1900s are explicit in B. Tuchman, *A Distant Mirror* cit.; cf. N. Cantor, *Inventing the Middle Ages: The Lives, Works and Ideas of the Great Medievalists of the Twentieth Century*, Harper Perennial, London 1993, p. 17. For a much more recent example in the same vein: J.H. Kunstler, *The Long Emergency: Surviving the Converging Catastrophes of the Twenty-first Century*, Atlantic Monthly Press, Boston 2005.

9   See V. Attolini, *Cinema di Fantascienza e medioevo*, in "Quaderni medievali," VIII (1983), n. 16, pp. 137–148. (TN: Several further examples from Hollywood cinema come to mind. In *Reign of Fire* (2002), human settlements struggle to survive when ancient dragons reawaken in London; *The Road* (2009), based on the novel by Cormac McCarthy, *The Book of Eli* (2010), and the popular *Walking Dead* franchise (2010-present) all portray futures in which some form of apocalyptic event has reduced humanity to a medieval existence, complete with walled city-states connected by roads plagued with banditry.)

metaphor. The first way we refer to the Middle Ages today is in a millenarian key.[10] In its simplest form, this concept does not give rise to any real political theory. A huge gap lies between those who are still expecting the end of the world from one moment to the next, and those who invented and thus denigrated the Middle Ages. The men of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries rejected the Middle Ages for the mirage of an even older golden age; in the same way, shifting our point of view, the progressive thought of the last two and a half centuries has largely rejected the Middle Ages in pursuit of the optimistic conviction that mankind can continually better itself. Today, however, many of those who judge the modern age negatively, comparing it to the Middle Ages with disgust, feel imprisoned, gripped in the coils of a dragon that seems impossible to escape. For them, the world is languishing in a decadence that knows no end. We are dealing with an interesting mental attitude, as it gives us the possibility of attempting comparisons between the way people living in the Middle Ages thought of the future and the way many of us represent it in our day: *"Hora novissima tempora pessima sunt: vigilemus."*[11]

The reference point may be that of the post-modern, with its conviction, as popular as it is vague, of living in an age of doubt regarding modernity, pitting the idea of decadence against the positivist, Enlightenment idea of the constant progress of history and the continual perfectibility of human reason. In the Middle Ages, people thought that "the world is aging" and that the things considered best—the incarnation and resurrection of Christ, the height of the Empire—had already happened. Or they also believed, as in the Viking North, that Ragnarok, the fall of the Æsir, was imminent. For this reason, the postmodern attitude has been, not unjustly, equated with the concept of decadence that permeated Medieval society for so many centuries, establishing a sort of equivalence between "postmodernity" and the "neo-medieval." The use of the Middle Ages in this vein may therefore be considered one of the ways—not the only one, but one of the most easily understood—by which current cultures define themselves: the medieval becomes its own interpretive category. Franco Cardini sums up the concept in the following terms:

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10   U. Eco, *Dreaming of the Middle Ages* cit.; G. Duby, *An 1000 an 2000. Sur les traces de nos peurs*, Textuel, Paris 1995; L. Pandimiglio, *"Estote parati." L'attesa della fine del millennio*, in "Quaderni medievali," XXV (2000), n. 49, pp. 64–80; M. Sanfilippo, *Storia e immaginario storico* cit., Part 1, Ch. 6: *Apocalissi di fine millennio*.

11   "It is the final hour, the times are most wicked—be watchful!" Bernard of Morval, *De contemptu mundi* (1140 ca.), v. 1. (*Scorn for the World: Bernard of Cluny's De Contemptu Mundi: The Latin Text with English Translation and an Introduction* by Ronald E. Pepin, Colleagues Press, East Lansing , MI, 1991).

> In search of models, at the very least analogical, to help him more easily understand his woes, the man of today finds them in themes and epochs that to his culture speak the language of the "Medieval."[12]

In the Seventies and Eighties, a belief in the imminent end of the world gave rise to many cults and shaped certain currents of New Age culture. After so many other predictions, an umpteenth apocalypse was supposed to happen in 2012 (on December 21, to be exact), the result of magnetic storms confirmed by the Mayan calendar.[13] Another one should follow in 2036, thanks to the asteroid 99942 Apophis, which will come hurtling towards the Earth—another celestial body of ill omen, like the comets once detested by medieval chroniclers.

Two jarring moments of terror have already come to pass in the transition from the second to the third millennium: 31 December 1999, and 11 September 2001. The fear of an imminent global catastrophe took on a medieval hue in the months immediately prior to the dawn of the year 2000, when the horror of the "millennium bug" (in reality a tiny computing issue due to computers that were programmed to date years with two digits rather than four) gave rise to fear over the fate of humanity. The alarm was sounded online back in 1998, the work of those prophets of misfortune with which the United States swarms, and it spread like an oil stain through the "global village." The transition into the third millennium triggered a veritable state of panic, provoking waves of collective psychosis that were compared—both by those who believed in the catastrophe and by skeptics—to the presumed terror of those men who must have found themselves, trembling, awaiting the dawn of the year 1000. In 1999, the Apocalypse, Joachim of Fiore, and Nostradamus came back into style. It was a tragedy waiting to happen, not divine but man-made, a technological breakdown that *Corriere della Sera* represented in its December 31, 1999, issue with a photo on the front page of carriage drawn by a horse. On the plain of Megiddo (the modern name of Armageddon), in the Jezreel Valley, hundreds

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12 F. Cardini, *Medievisti "di professione"* cit., p. 47. On the relationship between the Middle Ages and post-modernism, see especially F. Alberoni, F. Colombo, U. Eco & G. Sacco, *Documenti su il nuovo medioevo*, Bompiani, Milano 1973; U. Eco, *Dalla periferia dell'impero*, Bompiani, Milano 1977, n. ed.: *Dalla periferia dell'impero. Cronache da un nuovo medioevo*, Bompiani, Milano 2003 (which also includes essays from the early 1970s); B. Holsinger, *The Premodern Condition: Medievalism and the Making of Theory*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2005; *Postmodern Medievalisms*, monograph issue of "Studies in Medievalism," XIII (2005).

13 For example, "il Venerdì di Repubblica" titled their 1,109th issue (June 19, 2009) *2012. È la fine del mondo (e non ho niente da mettermi)* (2012. It's the end of the world, and I have nothing to wear). In Autumn 2009, a disaster movie called *2012* was released.

of American Christians gathered to wage the final battle between Good and Evil. Amid fears that bank accounts would vanish and nuclear missiles would launch out of control, amid fireworks and champagne bubbles, 1 January 2000 arrived like any other astronomical day. The "millennium bluff," as it soon came to be called, made us breathe a sigh of relief much deeper than those of a thousand years before, when almost the entirety of the population hadn't the slightest idea in what year they were living. In Rome, the solemn celebrations of the Catholic Jubilee came only later, a cyclical and perfect time of divine absolution, pronounced for the first time by Boniface VIII in the year 1300.

The real catastrophe happened the following year. On September 11, 2001, the Pentagon was attacked and the Twin Towers fell in New York, the result of simultaneous terrorist attacks carried out with hijacked airplanes. This date is so impressed on our memory as to be much more epochal than 2000: after "September 11," the world transformed and a new era began. For some, a new Middle Ages. The mass of rubble, the number of casualties, the site of civic memory that Ground Zero is today, introduce us to the most politically relevant aspect of the medieval metaphor of recent years, as a perspectival center of gravity. The fall of the Towers came unexpectedly, but was later considered by many a sort of prophesy fulfilled, like an American apocalypse or a new Tower of Babel. The idea of the Middle Ages might seem extraneous to all this, but it is in fact central, operating through a theory of chronological developments. The collapse of the Towers has been interpreted as a point of no return that brought us straight to a long-foretold "clash of civilizations" between modernity and barbarity, a global scenario that, according to post-modern thought, has exploded so many certainties.[14]

One of the theories underlying this analysis is political science's so-called "New Medievalism," which proposes structural analogies between the Medieval and Modern Eras. This framework of thought, already well developed by some Italian authors in the early 1970s, was formalized at the end of that decade by Hedley Bull, and expanded mostly in the 1990s, to the point of becoming a relatively homogeneous doctrinal system useful for explaining the fluid evolution of international relations.[15] Its strong point is the assertion that close

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14   S.P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, Simon & Schuster, New York 1996. The eight "civilizations" in question would be the Chinese, Japanese, Hindu, Muslim, Orthodox, Western, Latin-American, and African.

15   F. Alberoni [*et al.*], *Documenti su il nuovo medioevo* cit.; U. Eco, *Dalla periferia dell'impero* cit.; H. Bull, *The Anarchical Society. A Study on Order in World Politics*, Columbia University Press, New York 1977. A preview of the parallelism between the Middle Ages and modernity in the realm of the privatization of public affairs is already present in V. Branca, *Premessa*, in Id. (ed.), *Concetto, storia, miti e immagini* cit., pp. IX ff. Among the principal

affinities exist between the current and the premodern eras, or in other words, between today and the Middle Ages. The latter is understood in a primarily negative sense, as a paradigm of the break-up and non-existence of the state, although no proponent of this doctrine would think even for a moment of a true "return to the Middle Ages."

There also exists a positive interpretation that determines the orientation of political action precisely in the analogies between the medieval and the modern. In Italy this manifests as federalism in the neo-medieval sense as theorized by Gianfranco Miglio and promoted by the Northern League Party (the *Lega Nord*).[16] This "return" can also be interpreted in a neutral way, its final outcome depending on our behavior: thus the strict comparison between the current European Union and the Holy Roman Empire proposed by Jan Zielonka.[17] From many points of view, in short, we are moving "shrimpwise," as Umberto Eco puts it—in other words, backwards.[18]

The national and territorial state, with its sovereign jurisdiction, army, laws, borders, economy, language, culture, leaders, and citizens is a product of the modern age: in the Middle Ages nothing of the sort existed. The state in the modern sense has now reached a possibly irreversible crisis, one leading towards the dissolution of its prerogatives and functions. Other political subjects unconnected to the state have become the ones who define the balance of power in economic and political terms, in a new order that remains

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studies that propose the concept of New Medievalism: R. Matthews, *Back to the Dark Age: World Politics in the Late Twentieth Century*, School of Foreign Service, Washington DC 1995; St. J. Kobrin, *Back to the Future: Neo-medievalism and the Post-modern Digital World Economy*, in "The Journal of International Affairs," LI (Spring 1998), n. 2, pp. 361–386; J. Rapley, *The New Middle Ages*, in "Foreign Affairs," LXXXV (May–June 2006), n. 3, pp. 95–103; A. Gamble, *Regional Blocks, New Order and the New Medievalism*, in M. Telò (ed.), *European Union and New Regionalism. Regional Actors and New Governance in a Post-hegemonic Era*, Ashgate, London 2007, pp. 21–36; Ph. Williams, *From the New Middle Ages to a New Dark Age: The Decline of the State and US Strategy*, in "Strategic Studies Institute United States Army War College," June 2008, https://www.globalsecurity.org/mili tary/library/report/2008/ssi_williams.pdf (cons. Apr. 28, 2019).

16   Starting with this study, which re-elaborated the jurist Carl Schmitt's thoughts on pre-modern and modern cultures in an original way, see for example G. Piombini, *Prima dello Stato. Il medioevo della libertà*, L. Facco Editore, Treviglio 2004. On the Northern League's medievalism, see especially Chapters 9 and 11.

17   J. Zielonka, *Europe as Empire: The Nature of the Enlarged European Union*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2006. The subject is addressed in Ch. 12.

18   "A passo di gambero": lit. "moving like a shrimp." Cf. U. Eco, *Turning Back the Clock: Hot Wars and Media Populism*, Mariner Books, New York 2008 (original edition: *A passo di gambero. Guerre calde e populismo mediatico*, Bompiani, Milano 2006); today, see also Z. Bauman, *Retrotopia*, Polity, Cambridge 2017.

incomprehensible and, to many observers, tends toward anarchy. We are deal-
ing with systems in competition with one another, with fragmented, overlap-
ping, and intersecting authorities, with geographical and virtual territories not
subject to control by the *res publica* understood in the traditional sense. These
political subjects are peoples and nations who often do not identify with a
state or indeed have no state that represents them; they are the organizational
structures of religions, non-governmental organizations, and multinational
corporations that control politics, the economy, world finance, private armies,
economic cartels, and even drug and terrorist cartels, and any ethnic group,
movement, party, or lobby that may pop up on the political scene to lay claim
to its own role. Ultimately, the Scottish Independence Movement, UNESCO,
the Hague tribunal, the World Trade Organization, Greenpeace, the Anti-
globalization Movement, and Coca-Cola share the same socio-political land-
scape as the Medellin cartel and Al-Qaeda. To this situation we must also add
cyberspace—the web of telecommunications and the internet—which allows
us to view and execute any action in any part of the world, rendering the con-
cept of modern concrete borders obsolete: Rai, CNN, Al-Jazeera, Microsoft, and
Google are, inherently, political subjects. In the end, the ever more accentuat-
ed mobility of persons belonging to different cultures brings with it the prob-
lem of integration, which until recently was addressed in the sense that host
countries—that is, the old colonizers—tried to assimilate immigrants as much
as possible into their own cultural model and their own judicial order. Today,
instead, identities are recognized as multiple. Immigrants and other histori-
cally marginalized groups claim the right to express their own culture, lan-
guage, lifestyle, and religious convictions, thus creating the problem of how to
proceed when these attitudes are unexpected or run contrary to the dominant
order. The motto *cuius regio, eius religio*—whose realm, his religion—that
sums up the 1555 Peace of Augsburg and is confirmed in the 1648 Peace of
Westphalia (an event that theorists of international relations usually consider,
more or less erroneously, the *terminus a quo* of the origin of the modern state)
no longer applies–just as the absolute identity between sovereignty and terri-
tory that was declared in the treaties themselves, and that would define the
general perspective on relations between states for three and a half centuries,
no longer applies.

From all this derives a strong ambivalence towards the legitimacy of power,
the sources of legitimacy, the relationship between public and private, the very
definitions of "public" and "private," the positive attribution of authority, and
even sovereignty itself, which can be held by political subjects of any kind, not
just by state governments.

States may falter; they may no longer be able to govern. The world vacillates between globalization and regionalization, poles of a highly fluid geopolitical axis. And we see how the medieval metaphor reappears, stronger than ever, to explain the phenomenon of this apparent globalization that tends toward anarchy. The proposed similarities between the medieval and the post-modern are many: the absence of territorial states, the polycentrism of power, the coexistence of overlapping and intersecting political actors of various natures, from monarchs and ecclesiasts to feudal lords, citizens, and "peoples," the very notion of a jurisdiction tied to a well-defined territory, the instability of the balance of power, and many more still.

A few examples will suffice to better convey what we are talking about. Just as a large corporation today both is subject to the laws of the country in which it operates and has the power to exert political pressure, a medieval lord may simultaneously swear fealty to multiple suzerains and still sway their politics. In the same way a modern state delegates some public functions to private subjects, a medieval vassal—or rather a lord who would later become a vassal—is assigned some public functions and conflates them with his own patrimony, privatizing the state. A typical case, in Italy as elsewhere, is that of highway tolls, which are accused of perpetuating the nature of "tribute," as the proceeds are appropriated by private companies standing in for the state, and dealing not with citizens but with clients.

In the same way that the state is not capable of maintaining full control over some zones (for example, the dilapidated suburban spaces of big cities that become no-man's lands run by criminal organizations), the dimension of territorial non-control is the most obvious and most common in the Middle Ages: the king has limited power and other, originally illegitimate, subjects step forward. And even the solutions to the modern failure to govern the territory are neomedieval: the same way one might hire mercenaries or "contractors" or, in Italy and other countries, one might organize citizen patrols, in the Middle Ages they enlisted private militias, mercenary troops, and watchmen. Or rather, in the same way that some rich citizens today protect themselves from the dangers of the outside world by enclosing their own residences or even whole communities with walls and suitable defenses (this applies equally to the gated communities in the United States and to the to the fortified villages in Israel), the Medieval Era—as everyone knows—is the time of castles and fortresses. And as in the High Middle Ages, the ancient imperial infrastructure—roads, bridges, fortresses, cities, trade hubs—decays and then vanishes, the same happens, especially in the recent years of economic crisis, to the capillary network of infrastructure that the modern state struggles to maintain. The

connective tissue decays and disintegrates; secondary railway lines, flag carrier airlines, and public services in general close down (or privatize), while, on the other hand, enormous sums are allocated for pharaonic projects with powerful symbolic impact: miles-long bridges and high-speed trains, like great cathedrals among mud huts.

And again, in the same way that in the post-modern age it is no longer possible to speak of borders, in the Middle Ages borders are not solid, but nebulous zones where cultures meet and melt together. Vice versa, tax havens are such precisely because they continue to value their own internal laws, and thus they are comparable to frontier fiefs, where (in the Early Modern Era) smugglers practice their trade. In the same way that corporations with their headquarters in one state can follow the laws of another depending on their regulatory practices, in the same way that drafters of international commercial contracts may decide to apply a "neutral" law, that is, one other than that of the state to which either party belongs, or even to submit parts of the contract to different state laws, so in the High Middle Ages the law was personal, in that the individual does not live according to the rules of the territory he inhabits, but according to that of his own family and community: which is to say that in a single judicial negotiation and in a single civil suit one may use multiple legal systems at the same time. And finally, just as today's "clash of civilizations" pits Islam and the West against each other, the very same clash transpired in the Middle Ages, the time of the Crusades.

The Medieval Era and its post-modern counterpart assume a positive value when a constructive meaning is attributed to their dynamicity, while they assume a negative value when the same concept sinks to a pejorative sense, turning into uncertainty, indeterminacy, and anarchy. From the point of view of historians of the Middle and Early Modern Ages, these analogies are interesting, but in need of some adjustment. Neo-medieval theory has adopted the idea of the fluidity and co-presence of multiple systems and hybrid cultures during the Middle Ages, in other words, of the Medieval Era understood as an age in motion—an approach that is also popular in contemporary medieval studies, following the "dissolution of the myth of the great State as a touchstone for expressing judgments of approval or condemnation."[19] Today, acculturation, dynamicity, processes of construction, and experimentation with political systems and social orders are widely discussed.[20] This is quite the

19   O. Capitani, *Medioevo passato prossimo: appunti storiografici tra due guerre e molte crisi*, il Mulino, Bologna 1979, p. 263. Cf. G. Sergi, *L'idea di medioevo* cit., pp. 101–106.

20   G. Tabacco, *Sperimentazioni del potere nell'alto medioevo*, Einaudi, Torino 1993; S. Carocci (ed.), *La mobilità sociale nel medioevo*, École française de Rome, Roma 2010; G. Sergi, *Antidoti all'abuso della storia* cit., Part 3: *Medioevo senza chiusure*.

opposite of the backwards Middle Ages represented, for example, by the so-called "feudal pyramid," the marvelous structure of vassals, vavasours, and sub-vassals that was erected in the nineteenth century and that remains a persistent cliché, firmly entrenched in even my memory, thanks to the illustrations in my primary school textbooks. The New Medievalism, however, is based on rigid models that in practice fail to take into account the true developmental modalities of medieval and early modern civilizations, making use of them only as a secondary framework whose structure is determined once and for all. Both the medieval and the early modern function as immobile concepts, even as historical research has dramatically complicated the over-all frame of reference. The system of coalition government, defined by shifting equilibriums, multiple subjects, informal management groups, oligarchies, and the lack of rigid borders—even in the presence of a national state—that students of neomedievalism attribute to the Middle Ages in clear opposition to the modern age, for the express purpose of constructing the neomedieval metaphor, is instead a European characteristic of the entire *ancien régime*, in which the peace of Westphalia is an important, but internal, event. Hence, to be more sustainable, neomedievalism should take into account the idea of the Long Middle Ages, which extends to both the French and Industrial Revolutions. The period when people theorized and successfully attempted a form of government where everything was within the State and nothing was outside it lasted a relatively short time, from Napoleon to the Second World War, and even in this case there were numerous exceptions to the rule. And still today, despite the supposed gradual breakdown of the state, the system of national states is still quite strong—so much so that the achievement of national independence is still a widespread political ideal. One need only look at how the states of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union are configured and to what they lay claim.[21] Ultimately, neomedieval theory is crippled by the immeasurability of the frame of reference, yet remains quite effective as a metaphor. If it had not trotted out the medieval with its barbaric evocations, it probably would never have worked.

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21   Cf. Chapter 11.

All New Barbarians and Same Old Crusaders

> "Hurrah for the Holy Imperial crown!" cried Kurt.
> "And down with the sultan!" replied the sentinel. "Please, though, when you get to headquarters, do ask 'em to send along my relief. I'm growing roots out here!"
>
> I. CALVINO, *The Cloven Viscount* (1951)

Here we are again in the Middle Ages: there is nothing to be pleased about. Catastrophism and, in part, New Medievalism give a shape to the feeling of unease and insecurity that comes from the belief that the world is no longer what we once knew. The plunge into the darkness of the Middle Ages is, for some, an actual fact, for others only a metaphor, but even in this second sense it opens onto sinister meditations.

But have we all been thrown back into the Dark Ages? Of course not. "Medieval" is a versatile and polysemic concept, used primarily—in political terms—to identify an opposition. If the medieval is the negative frame of reference, then its corresponding positive would still be modernity. In a globalized society where everything moves and everything is simultaneous, who, then, is medieval, and who modern? The former, evidently, would be those who cause crises that make civilization regress, while the latter would be those who defend their own culture and their own prosperity, and do not want to lose either thanks to recent arrivals: they are the defenders of the classical modernity they have crafted with their own hands. If, therefore, neomedievalism lays out the thesis that the post-modern condition is a sort of collective return to the Middle Ages, in reality a conspicuous part of Western public opinion does not know or does not accept this analogy, which can easily be criticised as absurd. How can anyone think that the wealthy West is returning to the Middle Ages? If such a return happens, the West can hardly be to blame. And if it happens, the West must be defend itself. Precisely from these considerations arises another usage of our political metaphor.

This time, the Medieval Era is not a symbol of the West imploding from self-consumption, as in the catastrophist perspective and in some developments of the theory of New Medievalism, but rather a symbol of the West fearing that it shall succumb to the menace of the Other, the enemy that invades and destroys, first infiltrating in a seemingly innocuous way, then quickly taking the upper hand, and ultimately engineering the collapse of the system. In other

words, a catastrophe that originates from an attack on a healthy body, like an epidemic. The theory of a return to the Dark Ages framed in these terms has very remote origins, deriving first of all from Greek thought—from Hesiod—through late antique and early medieval reflections on history in terms of sweet infancy, prosperous maturity, and horrible senescence, and finally from the application of this biological cycle to the fate of civic institutions. Augustine, Orosius, and Gregory the Great are with us, now more than ever, in these bleak premonitions, already formalized in terms of an anthropomorphized civilization in Oswald Spengler's *Decline of the West* (1918–1922).[1]

Insofar as it pertains to our discussion, these premonitions, already widespread during the 1970s, became even more noticeable as a reality in the course of the 1980s in conjunction with the initial dismantling of welfare and the social state in various Western countries, starting with Great Britain. From the end of that decade onward, their growth becomes exponential. The breaking point can be dated between 1989 and the years immediately following, corresponding with the end of the opposition between the West and the Soviet Bloc.

The victory of Solidarność in Poland (June 4 and 18, 1989), the dismantling of the Iron Curtain in Hungary (August 23, 1989), the demolition of the Berlin Wall (November 9, 1989), the first Iraq War (August 2, 1990—February 28, 1991), the reunification of Germany (October 3, 1990), the break-up of the Warsaw Pact (July 1, 1991), and the Russian Federation's declaration of independence (August 24, 1991) are the principal dates of the new landscape in which the Medieval functions as a grand allegory that explains everything in terms of conflict. Seeing these dates all grouped together (not to mention the uprising in Tienanmen Square in Beijing, in April 1989), I do not deny that this historian of the Middle Ages, accustomed to quarter-century-long chronologies, feels a bit out of place and disoriented, even though he was already an adult at the time.

As Tzvetan Todorov has written, the hope for a new world order in the wake of the end of the conflict between East and West was entirely disillusioned:

> Only twenty or so later, it has to be admitted that this hope was illusory…The great conflict between East and West had relegated various

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1   O. Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, Allen & Unwin, London 1954 (original edition: *Der Untergang des Abendlandes. Umrisse einer Morphologie der Weltgeschichte*, C.H. Becksche Verlagsbuchhandlung, München 1918–1922). See also J. Le Goff, *Storia e memoria* cit., p. 322; F. Cardini, *Rileggere Spengler*, Sept. 1, 2008, www.francocardini.net/Appunti/1.9.2008a.html (cons. Feb. 2, 2010; the page was found to be inactive when cons. Apr. 28, 2019).

kinds of hostility and opposition to the background: these soon started to re-emerge.[2]

The collapse of the Soviet Bloc and communist ideology did not mean the re-unification of the world under a single banner or a single ideology, since a new-yet-old conflict arose immediately and with a vengeance: that between different cultural regions, to which different degrees of civilization were attributed.[3] In other words, a conflict was declared between Western civilization and barbarism.

We arrive at the muddy metaphor of the Imperial Eagle. The civilization *par excellence*, of course, is Rome, and after her, the United States, which, with its vassal kingdoms and colonies, is the true heir to the *translatio Imperii* initiated by Constantine and pursued by Charlemagne and Frederick I, only to finally land across the Atlantic. Some will recall the *incipit* of the letter that an obscure writer from Pontus Ausonius (Italy) sent to Emperor Ford in 1977:

> Ad Geraldum Fordulum Balbulum, Foederatorum Indianarum ad Occasum Vergentium Civitatum Principem. Hail to you, Prince and Emperor, Light of the West Indies, Upholder of the Pax Atlantica, and to the Senate and People of America, hail.[4]

Umberto Eco's irony then yielded the floor to more sinister voices. In 1992, the end was announced in a book by Gore Vidal that evoked the Middle Ages right in its title by paraphrasing Edward Gibbon: *The Decline and Fall of the American Empire*.[5] In recent years the analogy has been constantly re-proposed, in so many other book titles and blogs.[6]

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2   T. Todorov, *La peur des barbares*, R. Laffont, Paris 2008, p. 12.

3   Cf. S.P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations* cit. (but with a long tradition behind it: just think of Arnold Toynbee). In the same years as Huntington's book, the computer strategy game *Civilization*, created by Sid Meier in 1991, was taking off. The objective was to develop a vast empire over the course of millennia. There were fourteen civilizations to choose between. If you chose the American civilization, you received the surprise of beginning the game with an initial advantage. Furthermore, the form of government capable of ensuring the greatest prosperity (but also the most difficult to maintain) was Democracy. You won either by destroying the other civilizations, or by being the first to colonize outer space.

4   U. Eco, *Dalla periferia dell'impero* cit., pp. 7–10. See also *ibid.*, *Crisi della Pax Americana*, pp. 194 ff. (TN: *Pontus Ausonius* is a play on words referring to *Pontus Euxinus*—the coast of the Black Sea in modern-day Turkey, considered the extreme Eastern limit of the Roman Empire's reach—and *Ausonia*, an early Greek word for the Italian peninsula.)

5   G. Vidal, *Decline and Fall of the American Empire*, Odonian Press, Tucson 1992.

6   For example: N. Ferguson, *Colossus: The Rise and Fall of the American Empire*, Penguin, London 2004; among the many blogs and articles online: S. Wojtowicz, *The Fall of the American Empire* (1993), www.slawcio.com/republic.html (cons. Apr. 28, 2019); J. Quinn, *Decline*

If the West is like the crumbling Empire, the other half of the metaphor deploys the external barbarians, who undermine the Empire's foundations and want to destroy it. A new opposition between civilization and barbarism is wrapped up in the conflict between rich peoples and poor peoples, North and South, between the West and the East of the globe. In Europe, a tautological analogy is often constructed around the migrations that distinguish our modernity from the barbarian invasions, the *Völkerwanderungen* of the fourth to sixth centuries. The old communists—Romanians, Poles, Moldavians, Ukrainians, even the isolated Albanians—invade the West and are considered the new barbarians. Since the early Nineties, we have seen a deluge of books, films, and television shows that—usually, but not always, in a comedic vein—inform us of these "new barbarian invasions," turning the metaphor into a widely-believed cliché.[7] And then there are those that come from the South: Africans, Kurds, landless peoples who die on the high seas in leaky barges, floundering in the Mediterranean. Men and women who are even poorer, even more technologically backwards, and thus guilty of being even more barbaric and anti-modern.[8] Men and women who are even more culturally distant: in other words, Muslims, just like their infamous ancestors who split the *Mare nostrum* in half and determined—at least according to Henri Pirenne—the true start of the Middle Ages in the seventh century.[9]

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and Fall of the American Empire, Aug. 2, 2009, www.financialsense.com/editorials/quinn/2009/0802.html (the page required an authorization when cons. July 23, 2018, and was found to be inactive when cons. Apr. 28, 2019).

7 A metaphor anticipated by U. Eco, *Dalla periferia dell'impero* cit., p. 194. In the Italian postapocalyptic film *The New Barbarians* (1982), set in 2019, the fiercest gangs around are called the "Templars." Among the most recent examples: *The Barbarian Invasions*, a television program directed by Daria Bignardi from 2004 to 2011. In the homonymous Canadian film (2003), the attack on the Twin Towers lurks in the background. Its director, Denis Arcand, was previously the director of the film, *The Decline of the American Empire* (1986). For another example, see M. Warschawski, *Les nouveaux barbares*, in "Alternatives International," Feb. 22, 2007, www.alterinter.org/article641.html?lang=fr (cons. Apr. 28, 2019): here, the "new barbarians" are the Israelis and the Americans. Alessandro Baricco considers the "barbaric" transformation of our society not in terms of an invasion or an apocalypse, but as a profound mutation that involves and is caused by everyone: Id*., The Barbarians: An Essay on the Mutation of Culture*, Rizzoli International Publications, New York 2014 (original edition: *I barbari. Saggio sulla mutazione*, Feltrinelli, Milano 2006).

8 On the North-South opposition, especially in this allegorical key: see J.-Ch. Rufin, *L'Empire et les nouveaux barbares*, Lattes, Paris 1992.

9 H. Pirenne, *Mohammed and Charlemagne*, Martino Fine Books, Eastford (CT) 2017 (original edition: *Mahomet et Charlemagne*, Nouvelle société d'éditions - Felix Alcan, Bruxelles-Paris 1937). His thesis, which states that the true Middle Ages only began with the Arab conquest of the Mediterranean, has been refuted, though it continues to represent a question of fundamental importance. See also O. Capitani, *Medioevo passato prossimo* cit., pp. 75–101.

Many political parties ride the wave of fear of the Other, in what manifests now as an inescapable "clash of civilizations." The medieval metaphor plays a not-insignificant role in all this, clarifying—insofar as it leads back to the category of the "dreaded return of something that already happened"—a situation that is far from clear. And indeed that never actually transpired during the late antique and early medieval eras, but is happening now for the first time. The medieval metaphor is an "image of the past [that] modifies the perception of the present."[10] It takes responsibility away from political actors, who carry on with the conviction, shared by that segment of the populace who also subscribe to the metaphor, that they are resisting historical processes imagined as analogous to ancient ones.[11]

The West exports civilization, but at the same time, some say, it gets barbarized.[12] Thus, in the last twenty years, vast sectors of Western public opinion have had the opportunity to create an effective representation of the presumed enemy, the barbarian, the one excluded from "civilization" (an absolutized and undebated term), and consequently the opportunity to create an equally effective representation of themselves: as paladins and crusaders, as defenders of the *Limes*, the ancient imperial border. They cannot accept the opening of borders and the expansion of the European Union to the east in positive terms, as it reminds them all too much of the *Constitutio Antoniniana* of 212, with which Caracalla granted Roman citizenship to all subjects of the Empire, opening the door to its downfall—that is, to the Middle Ages.

If xenophobic parties in the government and anti-immigrant groups are by now common throughout Western Europe, the United States of the previous Republican administration is the country where the melding of the theme of a "clash of civilizations" with the medieval metaphor of the new barbarians has so far reached its most heated level, coming to illustrate above all the US's relationship with Islam. Here too we find a lengthy history, for behind the declared opposition between Islam and the West, which has substituted the Cold War opposition Soviet Union-West, we see a recasting of the old Orientalism, that

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A synthesized presentation of the historiographical debate is in G. Vitolo, *Medioevo. I caratteri originali di un'età di transizione*, Sansoni, Firenze 2000, pp. 104–106.

10   T. Todorov, *La peur des barbares* cit. Perhaps precisely so as not to fall victim to the barbarism/fall of the Empire analogy, which would have negative consequences for his hypothesis, Todorov never uses the concept of "barbarian" in reference to the populations present in the Roman Empire or around its borders, but only the concept of "barbarism" as elaborated by the Greeks.

11   See P.J. Geary, *The Myth of Nations* cit.

12   For example, J. Monnerot, *Racisme et identité nationale*, in "Itineraires," 1990 (online: http://julesmonnerot.com/RACISME_IDENTITE.html, cons. Apr. 28, 2019).

representation of the "East" constructed across the nineteenth century with stereotypical formulas (lax customs, laziness, cruelty, exoticism, irrationality, mysticism, fanaticism, despotism, etc.), a vision that has become the vessel of a universal symbol.[13] This process finds analogy in the earliest ethnographic studies, which considered the indigenous African and American populations to be "primitive"—in other words, objectively similar to our ancestors—except that, as eternal children, they have not evolved, while we have.

A second precondition to the creation of this paradox has to do with the way that the United States presents itself as the paradigm of modernity, precisely in relation to the European Middle Ages as the symbol of anti-modernity. It is, in fact, a way of refiguring the relationship between the "Old Europe" that shows in the periodization of the Middle Ages as ending precisely with the "discovery of America," and that was already quite concrete by the end of the nineteenth century. After having experienced a long season of romantic infatuation with the Middle Ages, the United States, along with the rest of the West, had distanced herself from it.[14] By 1889, when Mark Twain published his novel *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, satirizing the idealization of the Middle Ages and, with it, the Old World itself, the divorce was already final.[15] Oscar Wilde's *Canterville Ghost* (1887) can be read the same way: the contrast between the old, English world and American modernity is produced by a parody of the Gothic romance, and the poor ghost of Sir Simon de Canterville finds himself forced to use the extraordinary Rising Sun Lubricator, made in America, to oil

13   E.W. Said, *Orientalism*, Pantheon Books, New York 1978; cf. J.M. Ganim, *Medievalism and Orientalism: Three Essays on Literature, Architecture and Cultural Identity*, Palgrave MacMillan, New York 2008; W. Calin, *Is Orientalism Medievalism? Or, Edward Said, Are You a Saracen?*, paper in *Medievalism. 22nd International Conference at Western Ontario*, London (ON, Canada), Oct. 4–6, 2007, published in *The Year's Work in Medievalism, 2008* cit., pp. 63–68; see also: G. Leardi, *"La musa m'ispiri, Santa Sofia m'illumini e l'imperatore Giustiniano mi perdoni". L'orientalismo rubato di Edmondo De Amicis e la Santa Sofia di Costantinopoli*, in T. di Carpegna Falconieri, R. Facchini (eds.), *Medievalismi italiani* (*secoli XIX–XXI*), Gangemi, Roma 2018, pp. 67–74.

14   In general: B. Rosenthal and P.E. Szarmach (eds.), *Medievalism in American Culture*, Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, Binghamton (NY) 1989; R. Bordone, *Lo specchio di Shalott* cit., pp. 199–210; M. Sanfilippo, *Il medioevo secondo Walt Disney. Come l'America ha reinventato l'Età di Mezzo*, Castelvecchi, Roma 1993; *Medievalism in North America*, monograph issue of "Studies in Medievalism," VI (1994); A. Lupack and B. Tepa Lupack, *King Arthur in America*, D.S. Brewer, Cambridge 2001. Medievalism in North America is a common theme at the International Congress on Medieval Studies held annually at the University of Western Michigan in Kalamazoo, Michigan.

15   M. Twain, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, Charles L. Webster & Company, New York 1889.

his rattling chains.[16] All the way up to our time: when, in early December of 2009, a young US college student studying Italy was convicted of her friend's murder, some in the United States launched a campaign against the sentence handed down by the Perugian courts, which they accused of being swayed by "medieval superstitions."[17] And what more could you expect, they said, from a small, backwater town in the heart of Italy? Or indeed from Italy in general, since, as one could read on Wikipedia for a short time, "Italian laws are directly descended from the Inquisition."[18] Then comes the media trial founded on the ancient precept *sat pulcher qui sat bonus* (who is beautiful must be good), substituting for the judicial process founded on the examination of evidence and testimony. It makes one wonder where we should really be seeking the "Middle Ages."

To go back before 1989, the accusation of living in the Middle Ages could never really work with respect to the Soviet Union and its allies. They were enemies, sure enough, even baby-eating ogres, and, if you wanted to draw attention to their cruelty and characteristically "Oriental" inefficiency, the members of the Party or the *Politburo* could even be "satraps." But the two superpowers in a race for the conquest of space and control of the planet at least acknowledged the fact that they were both "modern," even though their two developmental models diverged at the root. The West's relationship with Islam, however, is a whole other thing. Even in the early Eighties, the Italian journalist Oriana Fallaci, invited to Afghanistan as a reporter when the Taliban were still heroic warriors against the Red Army (and the Iraqis defended the West against the Iranian lion), could rail against Western *Realpolitik* and claim, regarding the Afghan militants: "To see the word of God coupled with the mortar blast sent shivers down my spine. I felt like I was in the Middle Ages."[19]

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16   O. Wilde, *The Canterville Ghost*, in "The Court and Society Review," III (1887), n. 4, pp. 183–186, 207–211.

17   B. Severgnini, *Amanda e il tifo sbagliato dell'America*, in "Corriere della Sera," Dec. 4, 2009, pp. 1 e 24–25.

18   "Italy's laws are direct descendants of the Inquisition": *Murder of Meredith Kercher*, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Murder_of_Meredith_Kercher. Consulted on Dec. 15, 2009, the site (considered explicitly "non-neutral") did not contain the sentence. Upon a later visit (June 21, 2011) the site turned out to be protected and no longer modifiable. The link between the Amanda Knox's trial and the Inquisition can nevertheless be found on numerous sites. After a long, drawn-out process, Amanda Knox was definitively absolved by the Italian Supreme Court in January 2018.

19   O. Fallaci, *The Rage and the Pride*, Rizzoli International Publications, New York 2002 (original edition: *La rabbia e l'orgoglio*, Rizzoli, Milano 2001, p. 58). The same idea that Afghanistan was dwelling in the darkest Middle Ages, hence the justification for Soviet intervention, was still shared by the militant left: Cf. Ch. Amalvi, *Le goût du Moyen Âge* cit., p. 201.

Since September 11, 2001, the conviction of being faced with a clash of civilizations—namely, a clash between modern and medieval—has become common coin. The United States has lost her invulnerability. New York in 2001 is like Rome in 410, fallen prey to Alaric's hordes. On September 14, 2001, the noted journalist Thomas Friedman wrote that Islam had for years been wracked by a civil war between "modernists" and "medievalists." Between the two, Americans should have backed the "good guys," who certainly weren't the latter.[20]

According to the medieval historian Bruce Holsinger, since September 11 medievalism has become a journalistic and political paradigm for making sense of the first five years of the "War on Terror." All the US's top government officials, from President George W. Bush to Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, employed the medieval metaphor in their speeches on international terrorism in the form of Islamic fundamentalism. They used it whether talking about themselves as "new crusaders" (thus also assigning a positive value to the Middle Ages, a point to which we will return), or assigning to terrorists and the leaders of terrorist countries the label of "medievalists," that is to say, medieval men. Now, in proper English the word "medievalist" refers not to a person living in the Middle Ages, but to a scholar of the Middle Ages: this is where Holsinger's concern stems from, as a historian who found himself equated, at least terminologically, to Osama Bin Laden, Saddam Hussein, and Al-Zarqawi, which spurred him to put his hands to work on an incisive little book.[21]

The chain of analogies is simple and easy to reconstruct: the Medieval Era is barbaric, uncivilized, backwards, violent, fanatical, and anti-modern, and therefore also anti-American, since America represents, traditionally, the future. The Islamic terrorists are equally barbaric, uncivilized, backwards, violent, fanatical, anti-modern, and furthermore anti-American: therefore, they are also men of the Middle Ages. This confirmed, in the hallucinatory days following September 11, 2001, the equivalency between the Middle Ages and Islamic terrorism.[22]

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20   Th. L. Friedman, *Foreign Affairs; Smoking or Non-Smoking?*, in "The New York Times," Sept. 14, 2001, www.racematters.org/friedmansmokingornonsmoking.htm (cons. Apr. 28, 2019).

21   Br. Holsinger, *Neomedievalism, Neoconservatism, and the War on Terror*, Prickly Paradigm Press, Chicago 2007.

22   For references to the French press (from 1998 to 2001): Ch. Amalvi, *Le goût du Moyen Âge* cit., pp. 320–322. The same equivalence, but with a different interpretation, can be found in a book by F. Cardini and G. Lerner, *Martiri e assassini. Il nostro medioevo contemporaneo*, Rizzoli, Milano 2002. See also the review of B. Placido, *I martiri tecnologici dell'Islam ci stanno trascinando dentro a un nuovo medioevo contemporaneo*, in "la Repubblica," Jan. 27, 2002, p. 32.

Holsinger's analysis leads us to consider points of intersection between the vision of US neo-conservatives and the theory of New Medievalism. The terrorists are medieval primarily because they are tribal, culturally and economically under-developed, and fanatical. They act in a tactically medieval way, nimbly, adapting to every situation, conducting a mobile, deviously intelligent, asymmetric war, which combines medieval—in other words, brutal—sensibilities with modern technology, using "dirty" bombs, trying to set off anthrax pandemics, just like the "plague spreaders" and just like in disaster movies. They reject the state, instead joining up with international crime organizations determined to impose a neomedieval landscape and demolish the established order. Indeed, some states where Islamic fundamentalism rules are called "State Sponsors of Terror." From this derives the assumption that, to effectively wage and win the "War on Terror," America must abandon the rule of international law and adopt a new doctrine for its own security, that it must adopt an agile strategy, reclaiming the high ground by accepting the gauntlet thrown down on the new battlefield. One must fight medieval with medieval—in other words, with the non-state.

Thus neomedievalism, in the sense of deregulation, justifies previously illegitimate approaches. For these reasons, a member of the Taliban or Al-Qaeda, or even a mere captured soldier, is subject to unique laws that the US itself can set as if it were dealing with an internal matter. Being a man of the Middle Ages, and thus a man who according to the New Medievalism lives "without a state," the terrorist cannot be considered a citizen of a sovereign state (as article 15 of the Universal Declaration on the Rights of Man has affirmed since 1948); he need not be recognized as a soldier and enemy combatant, nor need he be protected by the Geneva Convention, even if captured in uniform, in Iraq or Afghanistan for instance. Declaring the Afghan state failed redefines the Taliban not as soldiers, but as armed bandits and international terrorists ruled by feudal lords. We see, then, how the New Medievalism, if applied to the War on Terror, allows the United States to arm itself with ideological and legal premises that lead, in two characteristic examples, to "Preemptive War" and to Guantanamo Bay Prison, which does not house prisoners of war, but criminals. Ultimately, according to Holsinger, the medieval metaphor transforms the "ontological nature of the enemy."[23] To find similar examples, it is not necessary to go back to the Middle Ages, for this treatment reflects the kind that was

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23   Br. Holsinger, *Neomedievalism* cit., p. 72. For another interesting comparison between terrorism and the concept of the pirate as a contemporary paradigm of the universal adversary, see D. Heller-Roazen, *The Enemy of All: Piracy and the Law of Nations*, Zone Books, New York 2009.

inflicted on "bandits," that is to say partisans, by occupation forces: it doesn't reflect the Third Crusade so much as the Second World War.

The medieval metaphor is far from the exclusive prerogative of the West. Certainly, the term in question is not truly the "Middle Ages," since Islamic culture (like other not-yet-entirely Westernized cultures) does not employ this periodization. Nevertheless, the references to historical events witnessing conflict between Islam and Christianity that we date to the Middle Ages are numerous.

One important link to the Middle Ages takes us directly back to the Taliban and Al-Qaeda. The declarations by members of the US's Republican administration regarding the anti-modernism and consequent medievalism of the terrorists and Islamic fundamentalists are not born exclusively from comparative analysis, but from facts and claims that originate from those factions themselves. The members of the Taliban and Al-Qaeda actually judge modernity as something impure, they are truly anti-democratic and anti-Western, and they fight for a "return" to the glorious seventh century of Arab conquests under the banner of Islam. The American analysis, therefore, captures an authentic aspect of the Taliban's view of the world.[24]

But from there it's only a short leap to considering all of Islam "medieval" and thus anti-Western, and even inherently terroristic. On September 26, 2001, the Prime Minister of Italy Silvio Berlusconi claimed that Western civilization was superior to Islamic civilization and that Islam was still 1,400 years behind the West.[25] Despite the outcry, this way of imagining the West's relationship with Islam is common everywhere. The risk is of it spiraling out of control, which we have all witnessed. Many may recall the effects of the publication of several satirical cartoons depicting Mohammed in the major Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* on September 30, 2005. Eleven Islamic countries formally protested against Denmark; some ambassadors were recalled, some Western embassies were attacked, and the Danish embassy in Beirut was set on fire; Danish products were boycotted, an Italian priest was killed in Turkey. The cartoons were republished by many Western newspapers under the claim of freedom of the press; one of them was even glimpsed on television, printed on a t-shirt that the Italian minister Roberto Calderoli was wearing under his suit.

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24   L. Wright, *The Looming Tower. Al Qaeda's Road to 9/11*, Penguin, London 2007, pp. 233 ff. and *passim*.

25   See S. Folli, *Tra orgoglio culturale ed equivoco politico*, in "Corriere della Sera," Sept. 27, 2009, p. 9.

After an attack on the Italian consulate in Benghazi, Libya, claimed several casualties, the minister resigned.[26]

Ultimately, the political responses that spring from the neomedievalist analyses of American neoconservatives run the risk of conflating Islam with fundamentalism *sic et simpliciter*, and allowing (even impelling) those of the Muslim faith—every one of them—to consider themselves anti-Western by birth. These analyses do not necessarily have to accept the field of battle chosen by their adversary, which is always and only terrorism: though it may be true that Islamic terrorists are fighting for something like a return to what we would call medieval, that does not mean that we have to medievalize ourselves to oppose them. But that is what we have seen happen, for, aside from transforming the ontological nature of the enemy, the neoconservatives have even tried to transform that of the friend, utilizing the medieval metaphor as a reality and considering the "defenders of the West" as new crusaders. In fact, in addition to the reference to the seventh century, even the Crusades have returned today to represent the minefield where the two sides meet. Since Islam resisted the Crusades, the modernization of those distant events (a *leitmotif* present throughout the twentieth century) leads to the perception of the Americans, Israelis, and Westerners in general as the natural successors of those who perpetrated the invasions that began at the end of the eleventh century and were halted by the Battle of Hattin (July 4, 1187), only to reappear with colonialism.[27] The Muslims won the Crusades, and they know it.

As the Lebanese-born author Amin Maalouf wrote in 1983, "Israel is equated, in both popular opinion and in some official discourse, to a new Crusader state," and "the Arab world cannot simply decide to consider the Crusades a mere episode in a closed past."[28] Already in 1956, the Suez Crisis in Egypt was judged the same way as the Third Crusade, which was predominately Anglo-French. And on May 13, 1981, "the Turkish Mehmet Ali Ağca [shot] at the Pope after explaining in a letter, 'I have decided to kill John Paul II, supreme leader of the Crusaders.'"[29] The Nineties witnessed an escalation in the use of this

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26   For more on the affair, see T. Todorov, *La peur des barbares* cit., pp. 231 ff.

27   B. Lewis, *From Babel to Dragonmans*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2004; A. Maalouf, *Les croisades vues par les Arabes*, Lattes, Paris 1983, pp. 286–288: "Of the three divisions of the Palestine Liberation Army, one still bears the name of Hittīn (Hattin)."

28   *Ibid.*, p. 287.

29   *Ibid.* Furthermore, as soon as Ali Ağca was released from prison (January 2010), he declared himself to be Jesus Christ and announced the imminent end of the world. See, for example *Ali Ağca torna libero: "Io sono Gesù,"* in "La Stampa.it," 18 January 2010, https://www.lastampa.it/2010/01/18/esteri/ali-agca-torna-libero-io-sono-ges-7iAasdvdgpDhXv-28lZHPoK/pagina.html (cons. May 5, 2019).

metaphor, owing to the broadening of the conflict. The Americans are architects of the new "Oil Crusades," as per the title of a recent book.[30] And, while I was searching the web for information, I was struck by a cartoon posted on many sites, depicting George W. Bush dressed as a medieval knight, kneeling, one hand extended in a gesture of benediction and the other resting on a shield emblazoned with an oil pump.

In various communiqués between 2001 and 2002, Osama bin Laden spoke of NATO as the collective of kingdoms that launched the Third Crusade (1189–92), comparing Bush to Richard the Lionheart and his allies to Frederick Barbarossa and Saint Louis of France.[31] The United States is, naturally, the Evil Empire, an epithet previously coined by Ronald Reagan to describe the Soviet Union. In November 2006, on the occasion of Benedict XVI's trip to Turkey, the organization Al-Qaeda in Iraq accused the pope of "preparing a Crusade against the Islamic countries."[32] The same juxtaposition of Westerners and Crusaders punctually returned in March of 2011, during the Libyan Revolution, which received support from NATO. Muammar Qaddafi was not the only one who mocked the missiles launched in this "Crusade against Islam." Even Vladimir Putin declared that UN Security Council Resolution 1973 of March 17, 2011, which authorized the international community to employ any means necessary to protect civilians and impose a cease-fire, "recalls a medieval call to the Crusades" rather than an act of international law, thus justifying Russian rearmament.[33]

The figure of Saladin is the one around which, for the whole of the twentieth century, the myth of heroic resistance to and ultimate victory over the "Western Crusade" was primarily constructed.[34] The unifier of Islam from the Tigris to Cyrenaica and from Yemen to northern Syria, liberator of Jerusalem in 1187, Saladin has become the icon *par excellence* of the victorious unity of Islam.

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30   A.Y. Zalloum, *Oil Crusades: America through Arab Eyes*, Pluto Press, London-Ann Arbor (MI) 2007.

31   O. Guido, *Osama è ancora vivo: ecco il suo nuovo video*, in "Corriere della Sera," May 20, 2002, p. 6. The English Prime Minister Tony Blair, as soon as he initiated military operations in Afghanistan, was dubbed "Tony Coeur de Lion" by "Le Monde": Ch. Amalvi, *Le goût du Moyen Âge* cit., p. 321.

32   *Turchia. Benedetto XVI è arrivato a Istanbul. Al Qaeda: "Sta preparando la crociata,"* www .rainews24.rai.it/it/news.php?newsid=65653 (cons. Jan. 18, 2010, the page was found to be inactive when cons. Apr. 28, 2019). See G. Miccoli, *In difesa della fede. La Chiesa di Giovanni Paolo II e Benedetto XVI*, Rusconi, Milano 2007, p. 318.

33   See, for example, *Medvedev contro Putin: "Astensione scelta giusta, non si tratta di una crociata,"* in "Il Messaggero," Mar. 22, 2011, p. 2.

34   A.-M. Eddé, *Saladin*, Flammarion, Paris 2008, especially pp. 9–10 and Ch. 6, par. 28: *Le mythe du héros arabe*, pp. 570–582.

Both the Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser and the Iraqi President Saddam Hussein (who declared himself successor to the sultan, similarly born in Tikrit), identified with this figure suspended between myth and reality, proposing themselves as new charismatic leaders with the capacity to win the war. And even the Turkish Prime Minister, now President, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has been received in his country as "the new Saladin."[35]

Their failure to comprehend non-religious societies and their rejection of the concept of a secular state allows fundamentalists to believe that the link between current events and the medieval crusades is still firm, insofar as they were opposed and are opposable today by *jihad,* understood as "holy war": in other words, a "war of religion" applicable to both sides.[36] A parallelism between *jihad* and Crusade—which corresponds to a stated parallelism between two societies similar inasmuch as religion is the linchpin to both—is an easy message to spread because it is so basic, but it still does not make logical or historical sense. The parallelism does not hold water, starting with the fact that the Crusades are events datable to a precise era, while *jihad* is a Quranic prescription: the one is past, the other is current. Moreover, it is very limiting to think of *jihad* as a mere synonym for "holy war," as it actually translates to "struggle" and has a much broader spectrum of meaning.[37] But what historians (and Catholics) may judge to be senseless has actually found support in the fact that some Christian traditionalist movements and the US administration itself, led by Bush, have spoken of the conflict as a new Crusade, attributing a religious and positive value to the term. The word "crusade," in fact, condenses in itself our entire discourse: like the idea of the Middle Ages, it is extraordinarily ambivalent. The War on Terror has even been written and talked about as a "Tenth Crusade," positioning the modern war in a logical, chronological

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35   R. De Mattei, Preface to A. Del Valle, *Perché la Turchia non può entrare in Europa*, Guerini e Associati, Milano 2009.

36   Cf. O. Fallaci, *The Rage and the Pride* cit., p. 84: "You don't realize or don't want to realize that a war of religion is being carried out. A war they call Jihad." P. 83: "You don't understand, or don't want to understand, that a Reverse Crusade is on the march." On a Saudi woman's inability to understand secularism, see the anecdote *ibid*, p. 113.

37   S.P. Huntington, *Clash of Civilizations* cit., maintains that religions represent the principal identifying characteristics of civilizations, such that the clash between the latter constitutes a religious war. See, however, T. Todorov, *La peur des barbares* cit., pp. 154–162; M. Meschini, *Il jihad e la crociata: guerre sante asimmetriche*, Ares, Milano 2007. Harsh is the judgment of F. Cardini, *Franco Cardini e il falso scontro di civiltà*, on YouTube, www.youtube.com/watch?v=fZGZMb6ii1k (cons. Apr. 28, 2019): "Lo scontro di civiltà è una balla ideologica travestita da studio sociologico" ("The clash of civilizations is an ideological myth dressed up like sociological study").

sequence with the nine medieval Crusades—despite a temporal gap of more than 700 years.[38]

In Italy, the reaction to Islam has become particularly powerful in recent years and, naturally, often in the name of the new Middle Ages. For example, I found a history book that reads:

> I believe we should be grateful to those who fought the Crusades for two reasons: first of all, because so many centuries later, they prove that one may live and die for one's faith. Secondly, because through their sacrifice our liberty today has been to some extent, but still effectively, safeguarded.[39]

While in 1967 Paul VI restored the banners of the galleys defeated at Lepanto to Turkey, we see now how political parties like the Northern League (*Lega Nord,* est. 1989) and the New Force (*Forza Nuova,* est. 1997) arise in Italy, making Catholic fundamentalism, in an anti-Islamic key, one of their central tenets.[40] The New Force's symbol is two crossed hammers (the same that appear in Pink Floyd's film, *The Wall*). Its adherents believe themselves to be "new knights of a post-modern Middle Ages, crusaders deployed in defense of White Europe."[41] And note the birth of magazines like "Lepanto" and "Radici cristiane" and political circles like Militia Christi, which, in the exact words of Roberto De Mattei, vice president of Italy's National Research Council from 2003 to 2011 and president of the Lepanto Foundation, defines itself as a "Catholic political movement," and has a youth branch called Saint Louis IX.[42] On August 8, 2008, the Leaguist member of the European Parliament (MEP) Mario Borghezio

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38   Cf. *Tenth Crusade*, Wikipedia article, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tenth_Crusade (cons. Aug. 9, 2011). When I visited the page in 2011, the article existed only in English, Japanese, and, significantly, Arabic. On April 28, 2019, I found the entry https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tenth_Crusade_(CounterPunch), published exclusively in English. Consider, however, that the Ninth Crusade (1271–1272) is generally considered part of the Eighth (1270).

39   L. Negri, *False accuse alla Chiesa. Quando la verità smaschera i pregiudizi*, Piemme, Casale Monferrato 1997, p. 127. See U. Eco, *Turning Back the Clock* cit. (pp. 23–27 and 213–242 of the Italian edition).

40   On the Northern League's flag, which presents a white cross on a red field (originally the standard of the city of Milan), see the remarks of E. Voltmer, *Il carroccio*, Einaudi, Torino 1994, p. 28: "Con essa viene espresso molto bene lo spirito di crociata che anima questo movimento di protesta e rinnovamento" ("This expresses so well the spirit of the Crusades that animates this movement of protest and renewal").

41   C. Cernigoi, *Nuova destra, radici vecchie*, in "terrelibere.org," Mar. 21, 2005, www.terrelibere .org/index.php?x=completa&riga=192 (cons. Feb. 4, 2010, the page was found to be inactive when cons. May 6, 2019).

42   Cf. www.facebook.com/miliziachristi/ (cons. Apr. 14, 2019).

announced, in the church of the Commandery of St. John of Pré in Genoa, currently the seat of the Knights of Malta—a church which the city of Genoa planned to transform into an interfaith center—a solemn oath worthy of a Crusader:

> We warrior knights swear to defend, always and forever and by any means necessary, the Commandery of Prè for the defense of Christianity from the profanation of Islam. I swear it.[43]

Thus, crusaders against warriors of the faith and Christianity against Islam. Reasoning this way triggers an interpretive mechanism that, even if founded on updated assumptions about the historical Middle Ages, leads not to a conflict between Islamic fundamentalism's "medieval" vision based on anarchy and a "modern" Western vision founded on the rule of law, so much as a conflict between two visions that, reluctantly embracing the metaphor, become equally "medieval." They in fact justify and adopt illegitimate oppositions and maintain that the conflict is an authentic "clash of civilizations" founded—on both sides—on religion. As if what really distinguishes the West today from the terrorists and Islamic fundamentalist states (and also permits the publication of books like this one) was an alternate faith in a homologous political theocracy, and not in fact the opportunity and capacity to affirm that society, state, and religion are non-overlapping principles—unlike in the Middle Ages.

But, in the end, the Middle Ages are over, while Medievalism triumphs.

Nor should one believe that everyone is in agreement about using the Crusades as an eternal symbol of the defense of the West against Islam. Saint Louis IX, the Crusader king who in immediate post-war France was still considered "one of the providential founders of the colonial Empire," is no longer a political symbol outside of Catholic traditionalist circles.[44] Saladin, who in the Medieval West once represented the ideal of a magnanimous knight (Dante puts him in Limbo, while Mohammed is found in Hell), is today, as Anne-Marie Eddé writes, probably "the only Muslim sovereign in history who Hollywood studios can imagine in the role of a hero."[45] Indeed in 2005 *Kingdom of Heaven* was released, a film on the Crusades with obviously modernized references, albeit in the name of mutual respect, tolerance, and the common goal of peace:

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43   A. Costante, *Rassegna Stampa sul comizio antiislamico dell'eurodeputato della Lega Nord Borghezio*, www.ildialogo.org/islam/BorghezioAGenova10082008.pdf (cons. Apr. 28, 2019).

44   Cf. Ch. Amalvi, *Le goût du Moyen Âge* cit., pp. 91 ff.

45   "Le seul souverain musulman de l'Histoire auquel les studios de Hollywood puissent imaginer de donner un role de heros": A.-M. Eddé, *Saladin* cit., p. 10.

here Saladin, with his wisdom and nobility, is perhaps the most memorable character.[46]

Starting with Voltaire, and especially after the publication of Diderot and d'Alembert's *Encyclopédie* (1751–1772), a positive judgment of the Crusades is by and large rejected by progressive culture, which instead—with simplifications analogous yet contrary to those we have discussed so far—comes to judge them episodes of barbarism and violence by which "western civilization" was imposed.[47] Moreover, the use of the idea of the Crusades to deceptive and anti-Islamic ends is opposed on many fronts, even in conservative or otherwise right-wing circles. There are, in fact, Catholic and conservative historians who describe the Crusades as the time and place of a fertile meeting of cultures.[48] The infamous name "Osama" also belonged to a twelfth-century Arab emir who had a friendly relationship with Knights Templar.[49] There is even an apparently Islamophile current of thought within so-called "post-Fascism": not only, as one might think, because it is anti-Israel, but also because, following the interpretive tradition of Friedrich Nietzsche, René Guénon and Julius Evola, it finds in Islam those traditional, common (and non-Christian) values that are being forgotten in Europe.[50] Its symbol might be Frederick II Hohenstaufen, who negotiated for peace instead of conflict during the Crusades, and who

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46 V. Attolini, *Le Crociate di Ridley Scott*, in "Quaderni medievali," XXX (2005), n. 60, pp. 141–152; A.-M. Eddé, *Saladin* cit., p. 565; S. Kudsieh, *Neo-Medieval Adaptations of the Myth of Saladin: The Case of Sir Walter Scott's* Talisman *(1825) and Ridley Scott's "Kingdom of Heaven" (2005)*, paper presented in: *Medievalism. 22nd International Conference at Western Ontario*, London (ON, Canada), Oct. 4–6, 2007. On cinema and the Crusades: N. Haydock and E.L. Risden (eds.), *Hollywood in the Holy Land. Essays on Film Depictions of the Crusades and Christian-Muslim Clashes*, McFarland, Jefferson (NC) 2009.

47 Cf. F. Cardini, *Le Crociate fra Illuminismo ed età napoleonica*, in E. Menestò (ed.), *"Le Tenebre e i Lumi," Il medioevo tra Illuminismo e Rivoluzione*, proceedings of the conference held on the occasion of the third edition of the International Ascoli Piceno Prize, Ascoli Piceno, June 9–11, 1989, Amm.ne comunale, Ascoli Piceno 1990, pp. 53–95, especially pp. 54–55, 67–78; K. Armstrong, *Holy War. The Crusades and Their Impact on Today's World*, Anchor Books, New York 2001.

48 F. Cardini, *Studi sulla storia e sull'idea di crociata*, Jouvence, Roma 1993; Id., *L'invenzione del nemico*, Sellerio, Palermo 2006.

49 F. Gabrieli, *Le crociate viste dall'Islam*, in V. Branca (ed.), *Concetto, storia, miti e immagini* cit., pp. 183–198: 196 ff.

50 L. Lanna, F. Rossi, *Fascisti immaginari: tutto quello che c'è da sapere sulla destra*, Vallecchi, Firenze 2003, pp. 237–247; U. Eco, *Turning Back the Clock* cit. (p. 225 of the Italian edition). On the Crusades as equivalent to jihad, both being holy wars (but in the Middle Ages) and thus positive symbols of a unity of traditional spirit, though contrasting: J. Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World*, Inner Traditions, Rochester (VT) 1995; original edition: *Rivolta contro il mondo moderno*, U. Hoepli, Milano 1934; new edition (from which we cite): Edizioni Mediterranee, Roma 2007³, pp. 167 ff. On the Middle Ages of "Tradition" see Ch. 7.

"pursued the political and esoteric dream of the meeting—and perhaps fusion—of the Christian West and Muslim civilization."[51] Nothing could be further, then, from the Northern League, who detest not only Muslims but also Frederick II, as he was a bitter enemy of the Lombard League in the thirteenth century.[52]

More complex and controversial is the discourse regarding the Roman Catholic Church's attitude toward the Crusades and their modern equivalent. Here one should keep in mind that, in today's broad usage of the medieval metaphor, the most recent popes have also often been defined as "neomedieval." We may read an example of this in a blog:

> We must be clear: the start of the neomedieval era is marked above all by the pontificate of a great medieval pope: John Paul II.[53]

We find similar judgments expressed by illustrious scholars who have a great deal of familiarity with the Middle Ages: in 1985, Umberto Eco compared Pope Wojtyła to a "pop-culture Heroic Fantasy,"[54] while in 1982, Jacques Le Goff spoke with ambiguous subtlety of the success of the Middle Ages (the Middle Ages being inherently ambiguous), locating it in the pontiff:

> I believe that a particularly spectacular expression of the success of the Middle Ages and its myth today is embodied by the current pope. This pope who, with his behavior, ideas, and words is a man of the Middle Ages, but at the same time a man of mass media, which he uses perfectly. For me, the current Pope John Paul II is the Middle Ages plus television. He is ultimately the symbol, the sum, the very expression of the ties that exist between the modern world and the Middle Ages.[55]

Two days after the pope's death on April 2, 2005, the front page of "Corriere della Sera" published an article by Francesco Alberoni titled *The Arms of the Last Prophet: Faith, Hope, Technology*, which opened with:

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51   L. Lanna, F. Rossi, *Fascisti immaginari* cit., p. 247.

52   M. Brando, *Lo strano caso di Federico II di Svevia. Un mito medievale nella cultura di massa*, pref. by R. Licinio, postf. by F. Cardini, Palomar, Bari 2008; Id., *L'imperatore nel suo labirinto. Usi, abusi e riusi del mito di Federico II di Svevia*, Tessere, Firenze 2019.

53   A. Cavallo, *Il nuovo medioevo. Seconda parte: il Giubileo*, Aug. 18, 2000, www.eurinome.it/medioevo2.html (cons. Apr. 28, 2019).

54   U. Eco, *Dreaming of the Middle Ages* cit., p. 61.

55   J. Le Goff, *Intervista sulla storia*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 1982, p. 132; cf. F. Cardini, *Medievisti "di professione"* cit., p. 33.

> To my judgment there have been three great popes in the history of the Church: Gregory VII, Innocent III, and Pope Wojtyla.[56]

The sunny Middle Ages of the three greatest popes was soon echoed in an article by Primo Mastrantoni, president of the Association for the Rights of Users and Consumers (ADUC), which polemically asked: "Is John Paul II a medieval pope?" thus reversing the point of view with a simple application of the "other way" of understanding the Middle Ages.[57] More recently, in January 2009 the German theologian Hans Küng interpreted Benedict XVI's attempt to bring four Lefebvrian bishops—one of them a Holocaust denier—back into the fold of the Catholic Church as a kind of return to the medieval darkness of the obscurantist Church.[58]

The interpretation of the Church and these two recent popes as medieval—in a decidedly negative sense—challenges the "return backwards" toward hierarchization, the most traditional cult forms, the loss of a role for the laity, and the chilling of dialogue with other religions, criticizing the interpretation of the Vatican II Council as status quo rather than revolution offered by John Paul II and Cardinal Ratzinger, later Benedict XVI. An accusation of a return to the Middle Ages inasmuch as the papacy is experiencing a restoration: which, for those familiar with the papacy of the nineteenth century, has a more metaphorical meaning. In any case, it is worth keeping mind that we are talking about externally defined denominations, which do not correspond to the way the Church itself imagines and uses the Middle Ages, but function well enough because they avail themselves of a convenient and time-tested classification. The pope who is usually called "medieval" today is not Gregory VII but Pius XII, who in his anti-modernism was rivalled only by his recently beatified nineteenth-century predecessor, Pius IX.[59]

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56   F. Alberoni, *Le armi dell'ultimo profeta: fede, speranza, tecnologia*, in "Corriere della Sera," Apr. 4, 2005, p. 1.

57   P. Mastrantoni, *Giovanni Paolo II: un papa medievale?*, Apr. 4, 2005, in "ADUC. Associazione per i diritti degli utenti e dei consumatori," www.aduc.it/comunicato/giovanni+paolo+ii+papa+medievale_8656.php (cons. Apr. 28, 2019). On the judgment of "pontificate of contradictions" declared after 27 years of John Paul II's reign, see G. Miccoli, *In difesa della fede* cit., p. 10.

58   L. Annunziata, *Intervista ad Hans Küng*, in *In mezz'ora*, Rai3 program, Feb. 8, 2009, www .tg3.rai.it/dl/RaiTV/programmi/media/Content Item-62172e41-2f7e-4cd5-b50c-c7537f371 847.html?p=2 (cons. Feb. 2, 2010, the page was found to be inactive when cons. Apr. 28, 2019); *Küng, attacco a Benedetto XVI. "Riporta la Chiesa al medioevo,"* in "la Repubblica," Oct. 15, 2009, p. 27.

59   This topic will be taken up again in Chapter 10.

But turning back to the Crusades, it is widely known that the Holy See opposed the war in Iraq with all its diplomatic means and was careful not to refer to the mission led by the United States as a "Crusade," which would have justified the *theocon* conceit of considering the conflict a religious war—one in which the new Urban II, however, would have been George W. Bush. In this way, John Paul II tried to prevent the creation of an axiomatic opposition between Christianity-West and Islam-East. This goal was so powerful that one might also consider it one of the reasons for his decision to no longer use the pontifical title "Patriarch of the West," a custom that despite its late antique origins might today lead to inappropriate interpretations.[60] It is also noteworthy that the Holy See and other ecclesiastical hierarchies, though they do not display a full unity of intent, have until now reined in—but not halted—the zeal of Catholic traditionalists, mostly in terms of immigration policy: for example, by protesting against the "Crusader's Oath" of MEP Borghezio. In early December 2009, the Northern League railed against the Cardinal Archbishop of Milan Dionigi Tettamanzi, calling him an *imam* because of his openness to Islam, and yet pretending at the same time to interpret the tradition of the Catholic Church authentically.[61]

The Crusades evoked by the Bush administration and extremely common in the political vocabulary of Catholic traditionalists are nowhere to be found in

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60   See the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity's *Press release regarding the suppression of the title "Patriarch of the West" in the "Annuario pontifico"* 2006, www.vatican.va/ roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/general-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_20060322_ patriarca-occidente_it.html (cons. Apr. 28, 2019): "Currently, the meaning of the term 'West' recalls a cultural context that does not refer to Western Europe alone, but extends to the United States of America and all the way to Australia and New Zealand. Clearly, this use of the term 'West' is not intended to describe an ecclesiastical territory, nor can it be employed as the definition of a patriarchal territory. If one wishes to give the term 'West' a meaning applicable to the ecclesiastical juridical language, it would apply only to the Latin Church. Thus, the title 'Patriarch of the West' would describe the special relationship between the latter and the Bishop of Rome, and could express the particular jurisdiction of the Bishop of Rome over the Latin Church. Consequently, over the course of history, the title 'Patriarch of the West,' which has always been somewhat vague, has become obsolete and practically useless. It therefore seems senseless to insist on dragging it with us."

61   *Onorevole Tettamanzi*, in "La Padania," Dec. 6, 2009, p. 1; G. Reguzzoni, *Come un gregge senza pastore*, *ibid.*, Dec. 8, 2009. A reference to the Middle Ages is always possible: cf. G. Zizola, *Un ritorno al medioevo e alla lotta per le investiture*, in "la Repubblica", Dec. 7, 2009, p. 13: "Per come è stata presentata, questa rivolta del potere civile contro una carica ecclesiastica fa regredire la scienza politica moderna alla lotta per le investiture dell'anno Mille" ("As presented, this revolt of the civic power against an ecclesiastical charge reduces modern political science to the struggle for the investiture of the year 1000").

the pope's speeches. Nevertheless, Islam's holy war was given a name on September 12, 2006, in the course of a masterclass on the relationship between faith and religion held by Benedict XVI at the University of Regensburg. The pope cited the Byzantine emperor Manuel II Palaiologus, who at the end of the fourteenth century remarked to a learned Persian:

> Show me, then, what Mohammed brought that was new, and you will find only wicked and inhuman things, such as his directive to spread by the sword the faith that he preached.

The citation of the medieval text, a passage that must be understood within a complex university lecture, raised such violent protests in the Muslim world that the pope had to reaffirm, in the following Sunday's *Angelus* prayer and address, broadcast live on Al-Jazeera, that this did not reflect his own thought, expressing regret for the reactions it provoked.[62] A small correction followed in the adaption from the speech's text to the published version, a phrase added to maintain that the Byzantine emperor's reasoning was not shared by the Roman pontiff.[63] Nevertheless, what was said was said, especially considering that despite the alteration the published lecture continued to declare the irrational character of a faith that insists on asserting itself with violence, and doing so while speaking of Islam and *jihad*, both named directly, and not Christianity and the Crusades, which the pope failed to mention. The silence around the Crusades, in this case, prevents the closure of the parallelism: the judgment on *jihad* is clear, on the Crusades no verdict is passed. And it was a missed opportunity, because in other circumstances the pope has been quick to condemn wars "declared by invoking, on one side or the other, the name of God."[64]

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62 *Meeting with the representatives of science. Lecture of the Holy Father, Aula Magna of the University of Regensburg*, Tuesday, 12 September 2006, *Faith, Reason and the University. Memories and Reflections*, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060912_university-regensburg.html (cons. Apr. 28, 2019). Cf. the considerations of T. Todorov, *La peur des barbares* cit., pp. 256–265; G. Miccoli, *In difesa della fede* cit., pp. 314 ff.

63 The text he read stated: "[The emperor], in a surprisingly brusque tone, *brusque to the point of shocking*, simply turns to his interlocutor with the central question on the relationship between religion and violence in general." The expression quoted here in italics was corrected to "brusque to the point that we found it unacceptable." Note that the unacceptability of the question posed by Manuel Palaiologos lies not in the merit but the method, that is, in the tone of voice.

64 *Meeting with representatives of some Muslim communities. Address of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI*, Cologne, Saturday, Aug. 20, 2005, http://w2.vatican.va/content/

John Paul II and Benedict XVI—with all due respect to those who are more Catholic than the pope—have not turned a benevolent eye on the Crusades.[65] Which does not mean that the Church considers itself in the wrong. If there was a wrong, the responsibility is laid on the men—the Crusaders and members of the clergy—who strayed from the Gospel. Men and even ecclesiastical institutions can err, but not the Church, which is guided by the Holy Spirit and marches toward salvation. The Crusades may be a black mark in the history of the Church, but they do not represent the Church, which is the "mystical body of Christ" whose essence is inscribed in a theological and eschatological—and thus ahistorical—design.[66] As if to say: the crusaders, embroiled in the rhythm of history, were in the wrong, but the Church remained pure. The distinguo is powerful: the pope can ask forgiveness for the sins committed by the sons of the Church, but never lays the blame on her.[67]

The distinction between the purity of the abstract entity and the impurity of her historically bound human sons is certainly understandable, but only within a logic that considers history as grafted onto theology and does not allow for relativism. In acknowledging it, one would have to recognize the fact that the medieval Church, though it was always the same institution that has come down to us over the centuries, expressed different ways of living and thinking that were as common then as they are uncommon today. The idea of the

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benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2005/august/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20050820_meeting-muslims.html (cons. Apr. 28, 2019).

65   L. Accattoli, *Quando il papa chiede perdono: tutti i mea culpa di Giovanni Paolo II*, Mondadori, Milano 1997; Id., *La "purificazione della memoria" da Giovanni Paolo II a Benedetto XVI. Conferenza di Luigi Accattoli ai Mercoledì della Cattolica*, June 6, 2007, www.luigiaccattoli.it/blog/?page_id=430 (cons. Apr. 28, 2019). On May 14, 2001, John Paul II asked forgiveness for the Sack of Constantinople perpetrated by participants in the Fourth Crusade (1202–04). Accattoli repeats a statement from 2002 by then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger: "Speaking of the Crusades we might cite a statement by Cardinal Ratzinger contained in a text on Francis of Assisi, who first dreamed of the Crusade (it was the time when the 'Fourth Crusade' of Wojtyła's mea culpa was being prepared) but then—the cardinal says—when he 'truly knew Christ he understood that even the Crusades were not the right way to defend the rights of Christians in the Holy Land, but it was better to take the message of the imitation of the crucifixion at its word.'"

66   Cf. John Paul II, *Memory and Identity: Conversations at the Dawn of a Millennium*, Rizzoli, Milano 2005 (Italian edition: Giovanni Paolo II, *Memoria e identità*, intr. by J. Ratzinger pope Benedict XVI, Rizzoli, Milano 2010², pp. 29, 93–97, 142 ff., 178, 181–185).

67   Cf. O. Fallaci, *The Rage and the Pride* cit., p. 81: "Tell me, Holy Father: is it true that some time ago you asked the sons of Allah to forgive the Crusades that Your predecessors fought to take back the Holy Sepulchre? But did the sons of Allah ever ask you to be forgiven for having taken the Holy Sepulchre?" In any case, John Paul II asked forgiveness for the Fourth Crusade. Aside from the fact that it was condemned by Innocent III while it was being waged, it was directed against the Byzantine Empire, not the Muslims.

Crusades as a "just war" was perfectly ecclesiastical, though today it no longer is, for we cannot deny that the entire Christian religion has witnessed, over time, a profound process of transformation.[68] Therefore, from a truly historical point of view this reasoning doesn't work: the medieval Church that declared the Crusades was the authentic Church in a phase of its history and the Crusaders were its most devoted children. Fighting to liberate the Holy Sepulchre was a way into Heaven. Ultimately, no discussion of the Crusades can end in an accord. This reference to the Middle Ages remains instrumental in both the East and West, such that it really makes one want to say, along with Giuseppe Sergi: "It could all go well—or almost—but history won't bother."[69]

So where are the Middle Ages taking us now? On January 22, 2009, American newspapers reported that upon setting foot in the White House for the first time, the staff of the incoming president Barack Obama encountered the "Dark Ages" for the absolute lack of any advanced communication technology. The Bush Era, then, was immediately labeled a dark time from which we were finally free, much in the same way Americans speak of the "witch hunts" during McCarthyism in the Fifties. On July 21, 2009, forty years to the day after man first landed on the Moon, plugging the exact phrase "Obama is the Messiah" into Google gave me 80,800 results. Typing "Obama is the Antichrist," I found 57,400. At Christmas in 2010, Pope Benedict XVI compared the crisis of values of our age with the end of the Roman Empire.[70] In that same season between November 2010 and January 2011, the "Bunga Bunga" and "Ruby Rubacuori" scandals, whose protagonist was the Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, renewed the feeling that Italy was plunging into a Late Imperial decadence, that it was plummeting "in free fall towards a television Middle Ages," and that, to paraphrase Dante (*Purg.* VI, 78), it had been reduced to a brothel.[71]

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68   Cf. G. Miccoli, *In difesa della fede* cit., pp. 212 ff.

69   G. Sergi, *L'idea di medioevo* cit., p. 61.

70   A. Riccardi, *Se il papa evoca la caduta dell'Impero*, in "Corriere della Sera," Dec. 21, 2010, pp. 1 and 50.

71   *Silvio Berlusconi ou le scandale permanent*, in "Le Monde," November 1st, 2010, p. 1; M. Brambilla, Basso Impero, in "La Stampa," 12 November 2010, https://www.lastampa .it/2010/11/12/cultura/basso-impero-x7TAy5Zk8wXohrVRR5lAKM/pagina.html (cons. May 5, 2019): Compare to U. Eco, *Turning Back the Clock* cit. (pp. 181–183 of the Italian edition, article appearing in "L'Espresso," October 2002). C. De Gregorio, *Le altre donne*, in "L'Unità. Blog. Invece," Jan. 18, 2011, http://concita.blog.unita.it/le-altre-don ne-1.266857 (cons. June 21, 2011, the page was found to be inactive when cons. Apr. 28, 2019): "This is the harm caused by the five decades we have lived through, this is the political crime committed: emptiness, the flight in free fall towards a television Middle Ages, in the end, Italy reduced to a brothel."

Finally, on July 22, 2011, the thirty-two-year-old Norwegian Anders Behring Breivik detonated a car bomb in downtown Oslo, causing eight deaths and thirty injuries, and immediately afterward went to the tiny island of Utøya and massacred a summer camp full of children belonging to the labor party's youth branch, shooting sixty-nine people to death and wounding sixty-six. Of the seventy-seven people who lost their lives, fifty-five were under twenty years old. The killer declared himself a "knight justiciar grand master of the Knights Templar of Europe."[72] His *nom de guerre* was "Sigurd the Crusader." Ferociously anti-Islamic, his manifesto-memorial of over 1,500 pages, which bears a large templar cross on the frontispiece, describes in minute detail the war that the new militia of the *Pauperes commilitones Christi Templique Solmonici* (Poor Fellow-Soldiers of Christ and of the Temple of Solomon), founded by himself in 2002, must wage from now until 2083 to save Europe from Islam, Marxism, and multi-culturalism. His work—lucid, methodical, and obsessive—can be read online:[73] it proposes, among many other considerations, a history of the Crusades and the need to revive them in the modern era by way of the new Templar order, which must become a triumphant army. He describes the degrees, uniforms, and distinctions of this order, the words of the oath, the rite of initiation, the guarantee of indulgences, all the way to the shape the tombs of the fallen will take. The document even contains a diary of his preparation for

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72 Also "Justiciar Knight Commander for Knights Templar Europe and one of the several leaders of the National and pan-European Patriotic Resistance Movement."

73 Andrew Berwick [alias of Anders Behring Breivik], *2083. A European Declaration of Independence. De Laude Novae Militiae. Pauperes Commilitones Christi Templisque Solomonici*, London 2011, for example at www.slideshare.net/darkandgreen/2083-a-european-declaration-of-independence-by-andrew-berwick (cons. Apr. 28, 2019). On July 26, 2011, in the course of a Radio24 broadcast, the Leaguist member of European Parliament Mario Borghezio (the same who pronounced the "Crusader Oath" at Genoa in 2008) endorsed the positions expressed by Breivik: "Sono posizioni sicuramente condivisibili" ("They are positions that certainly can be shared"); "buone alcune delle idee espresse al netto della violenza, direi, in qualche caso, ottime" ("Some of his ideas on the net result of violence are good, sometimes even great"). "Il sostenere la necessità di una forte riforma cristiana anche in termini di crociata contro questa deriva islamista e terrorista e fondamentalista della religione islamica, e questo tentativo di conquista dell'Europa—il progetto del califfato in Europa—beh, è sacrosanto" ("His belief in the necessity of a powerful Christian reform, even in terms of a Crusade, against the Islamic religion's drift towards Islamism, terrorism, and fundamentalism, and this attempt at the conquest of Europe—this goal of a caliphate in Europe—well, it's sacrosanct"): www.youtube.com/watch?v=_XK8XRezt8E (cons. Apr. 28, 2019). The same day, interviewed by Radio Tehran, Borghezio confirmed his positions, although condemning the heinous act of violence: www.youtube.com/watch?v=ohXOS_6wONE&feature=related (cons. Apr. 28, 2019).

the attacks, up to 12:51 on the day of the killings. At 3:25:22 PM the bomb exploded; less than two hours later, Breivik the Templar started shooting.[74]

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74 It would be an arduous task to catalog the numerous new publications about the current reuse of the medieval dichotomy between Islam and the West, a theme that seems obvious today to a broad public and about which we will say more in the epilogue to this book. I would only like to note, in French: W. Blanc, Ch. Naudin, *Charles Martel et la bataille de Poitiers. De l'histoire au mythe identitaire*, Libertalia, Paris 2015; in Italian: M. Di Branco, *Il califfo di Dio. Storia del califfato dalle origini all'ISIS*, Viella, Roma 2017; R. Facchini, *Sognando la "Christianitas": l'idea di Medioevo nel tradizionalismo cattolico italiano post-conciliare*, in T. di Carpegna Falconieri, R. Facchini (eds.), *Medievalismi italiani* cit., pp. 29–51. As for English, aside from A. Elliott, *Medievalism, Politics, and Mass Media* cit., which is centrally concerned with the theme, I would note that in 2018, the publisher Routledge launched a series called "Engaging the Crusades," comprising short books that "offer initial windows into the ways in which the crusades have been used in the last two centuries; demonstrating that the memory of the crusades is an important and emerging subject" (https://www.routledge.com/Engaging-the-Crusades/book-series/ETC, cons. Apr. 28, 2019).

Once upon a Time in the Middle Ages

> He who controls the present controls the past.
>
> G. ORWELL, *1984* (1949)

We left off with a comment on the Bush Era, which was accused of being dark and medieval no sooner than it was over. Now we are setting off from the Kennedy Era. The same White House that in 2009 was called medieval for its lack of technological equipment, was between 1961 and 1963 referred to as Camelot. In the wake of the enormous success of the eponymous musical by Alan Jay Lerner, which debuted less than a month after the 1960 elections, the President's cabinet became the Knights of the Round Table, while John Fitzgerald and his consort Jacqueline were Arthur and Guinevere.[1] Almost fifty years later, various observers wondered whether Camelot had come again to the White House, weaving parallels between the smiling Kennedy and Obama families.[2] Thus, within a sixty year period, the United States would see four returns to the Middle Ages: twice in the name of darkness (McCarthyism and the Bush administration) and twice in the name of Arthur's splendid chivalry (the Kennedy and Obama administrations). Moreover, in recent years the Bush administration has been censured anew not just because it was perversely "medieval," but also for the exact opposite reason: because it had completely disregarded the great tradition of the Magna Carta, whose lesson on liberty sanctioned by laws still endures today.[3] George W. Bush thus becomes a disturbing character

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1   The comparison was first conceived by John Steinbeck. On that subject: Br. A. Rosenberg, *Kennedy in Camelot: The Arthurian Legend in America*, in "Western Folklore," XXXV (1976), n. 35, pp. 52–59; V. Ortenberg, *In Search of the Holy Grail* cit., pp. 167 ff.

2   For example: N. Tucker, *Barack Obama, Camelot's New Knight*, in "The Washington Post," Jan. 29, 2008, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/01/28/AR20080128 02730.html (cons. May 5, 2019); *"Camelot" Returning to the White House?*, in "The Early Show," Nov. 7, 2008, www.cbsnews.com/stories/2008/11/07/earlyshow/main4581583.shtml (cons. Apr. 28, 2019); N. Bryant, *Obama Echoes JFK's Camelot Romance*, in "BBC News," Jan. 15, 2009, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/7786440.stm (cons. Apr. 28, 2019).

3   Cf. N. Turse, *Repealing the Magna Carta*, in "Mother Jones," Jan. 6, 2006, http://motherjones .com/politics/2006/01/repealing-magna-carta (cons. Apr. 28, 2019); P. Linebaugh, *The Magna Carta Manifesto. Liberties and Commons for All*, University of California Press, Berkeley-Los Angeles-London 2008, pp. 11, 267; see p. 275: "Magna Carta is required to open the secret state. Magna Carta is needed for the prisoners in Guantanamo Bay." Linebaugh's book is a study of

both as a symbol of the dark Middle Ages and as someone ignorant of the en-lightened Middle Ages—even as he himself accused fanatical extremists of sinister, anarchical, and feudal medievalism and claimed to be a Crusader mandated with a mission to defeat them. This is where the two-sided idea of the Middle Ages has led us, even in America, a land that throughout that historical era remained unknown to the West.

The first two chapters presented some reflections on the medieval as a negative concept. In the cases previously considered, the robust Middle Ages serve as a touchstone for the modern age. Apart from the case of New Medievalism, which can take a neutral point of view, and also apart from the positive use of the idea of the Crusades (which nevertheless arises only in the context of bitter conflict), in general the medieval and its correlate the post-modern have been judged as equally sinister. The key word has been "analogy": we are like them, equally wretched. Now, however, our conversation moves in a different direction. The argument of this chapter and those to follow aligns with the preceding, in the sense that here too we find a critique of current events accomplished through constant references to the Middle Ages. The metaphor stands, but turned on its head. "Medieval" becomes not a term of similarity, but a place of opposition. The key word is no longer analogy, but distance. The rhetorical device shifts from parallelism to antithesis. Antithesis between a corrupt civilization—the current one—and a better civilization, which is held to be the medieval one. The Middle Ages return not to frighten, but to enchant. This is made possible, and we cannot say this enough, because the word "medieval," which has become polysemic over the course of the centuries, contains in itself both condemnation and celebration. I now want to discuss this second aspect of the theme, examining the many ways the Medieval Era produces positive reference points for political events of the last fifty years.

Readings of the Middle Ages as a positive period can be found in the vast literature of the critique of progress. We are dealing with a new *querelle des anciens et des modernes* in which, contrary to the judgments passed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the palm of victory goes to the *anciens*. In this sense, our debt to late-eighteenth- and nineteenth-century culture is immense: from Luddism, the movement against the society of machines, through Novalis and François-René de Chateaubriand, through John Ruskin, the Pre-Raphaelites, and William Morris, we can trace a line to contemporary environmentalism,

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the uses, interpretations, and omissions to which two documents from the thirteenth century (the Magna Carta and the Charter of the Forest) have been subjected from the sixteenth century to today.

realizing that the affect is always the same. All tell us of an uncontaminated world, of a lost paradise that precedes the horrors of standardization, consumerism, pollution, overpopulation, and automation: a world of virgin forests, independent heroes, and free peoples sustained by an authentic faith.

Medievalism as a cultural movement was born in England around 1760, has been expressed with greater or lesser intensity depending on the place, and has undergone various metamorphoses. As a unifying element it saw a wide diffusion across Europe and the United States during the nineteenth century—a diffusion possible precisely because of its inherent multiformity.[4] The long, multifaceted nineteenth century, a century of progress and reaction, of poetry and history, of industry, science, and war, was also *the* time of the Middle Ages. This is when the genesis of the "common understanding of the Middle Ages" must be sought, inasmuch as "Romanticism" and "Medievalism" are two terms that have long been interchangeable.[5] This happens not because the idea of the

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4   The bibliography on this topic is growing longer year by year. Among the most significant titles in the Italian language one might recall *Il sogno del medioevo* cit.; R. Bordone, *Lo specchio di Shalott* cit.; *Studi medievali e immagine del medioevo* cit.; G. Cavallo, C. Leonardi, and E. Menestò (eds.), *Lo spazio letterario del medioevo*. 1. *Il medioevo latino*, vol. IV, *L'attualizzazione del testo*, Salerno Editrice, Roma 1997; P. Boitani, M. Mancini, and A. Vàrvaro (eds.), *Lo spazio letterario del medioevo*. 2. *Il medioevo volgare*, vol. IV, *L'attualizzazione del testo*, Salerno Editrice, Roma 2004; E. Castelnuovo and G. Sergi (eds.), *Arti e storia nel medioevo*, vol. IV, *Il medioevo al passato e al presente*, Einaudi, Torino 2004. Among the numerous titles in other languages I must cite at least Ch. Amalvi, *Le goût du Moyen Âge* cit.; M. Alexander, *Medievalism. The Middle Ages in Modern England*, Yale University Press, New Haven-London 2007; V. Ortenberg, *In Search of the Holy Grail* cit. ; V. Groebner, *Das Mittelalter hört nicht auf. Über historisches Erzählen*, C.H. Beck, München 2008; V. Ferré (ed.), *Médiévalisme: modernité du Moyen Âge*, L'Harmattan, Paris 2010; O.G. Oexle, *Die Gegenwart des Mittelalters*, Akademie Verlag, Berlin 2013; T. Pugh, A.J. Weisl, *Medievalisms. Making the Past in the Present*, Routledge, Oxon-New York 2013; D. Matthews, *Medievalism: A Critical History*, D.S. Brewer, Woodbridge 2015; L. D'Arcens (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Medievalism*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2016; K.P. Fazioli, *The Mirror of the Medieval* cit.; *The Middle Ages in the Modern World* cit.; *Medievalism: Key Critical Terms* cit.; A. Elliott, *Medievalism, Politics and Mass Media* cit. A continuously updated bibliography on the topic can be found on the "Timeline" page of the online journal "Medievally Speaking," http://medievallyspeaking .blogspot.com/2009/09/timeline.html (cons. Apr. 28, 2019).

5   The coincidence of meanings is already found at the end of the eighteenth century in Herder: M. Domenichelli, *Miti di una letteratura medievale. Il Nord*, in E. Castelnuovo and G. Sergi (eds.), *Arti e storia nel medioevo*, vol. IV cit., pp. 293–325: 293. Cf. in general *Romanticismo/ Medievalismo*, monograph issue of "La Questione romantica," V (1999), n. 7/8. In Italian, the noun "medioevo" (a translation of *medium aevum*, from the seventeenth century) and the adjective "medievale" cannot be found earlier than the nineteenth century: Cf. C. Battisti, G. Alessio, *Dizionario etimologico italiano*, G. Barbera, Firenze 1975, *ad voces*. Even in English, the adjective "medieval" is first attested in 1827: Cl. A. Simmons, *Medievalism: Its Linguistic History in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, in "Studies in Medievalism," XVII (2009), pp. 28–35: 29 ff.

Middle Ages *per se* was born then—as we have seen it was already centuries old—but because only during this long century do we find the first, full socialization of ideas and the development of a widespread political culture, transferred from the elite environments of the courts and salons to cafés, theaters, squares, and those virtual spaces of society that are magazines and newspapers. The very concept of the Middle Ages, which is far from intuitive in that it presupposes a familiarity with the notion of "history" in which it should be situated, simply could not have had a mass effect before that time. The Middle Ages already existed, but it was enclosed in the minds of an educated few. On the other hand—and this is why we must come to terms with nineteenth-century medievalism in order to truly understand modernity—during the nineteenth century the Middle Ages became a widespread myth at the bourgeois and even the popular level.

Finally the people had both the tools to imagine and reimagine history, and the information to create a secular history. Never before had there been a such a widespread and pervasive way to interpret the journey of man outside of religion. Popular and children's literature were born precisely in that period when all of Europe was pervaded by a Romantic longing for the Middle Ages, with the result that this literature received a corresponding "imprint." We should be clear that this message did not pass through literature to historiographical or theoretical works on medievalism, such as those of Viollet-le-Duc, Pugin, and Ruskin, but rather that both reflect the magnitude of medievalism as an overarching cultural framework. Medievalism was disruptive and omnipresent, and proposed a clear, unitary, and effective message that presented history as a narrative. It was a living evocation of times past and thus of all our ancestors, in every country that subscribed to this model. The medieval was related in a colorful way—moving images that foreshadowed the cinema—the market, the peasants, the village, the knight's garb, the construction of the cathedral, the battlefield, the settlement of a people in their land. Medievalism was present in objects visible to everyone (great monuments, museums, national expositions, scenography *en plein air*), shared culturally (songs, operatic arias), and fairly accessible economically (replica crafts, cheap editions of fables, legends, and novels, prints, even collections of figurines and stamps).

The tremendous impact of this medieval revival is above all tied to the popularity of historical novels, illustrations, and neo-Gothic, neo-Romanesque, and (in Spain and parts of the US) neo-Moorish architecture. Considering that iconographic sources and materials from the final centuries of the Middle Ages are much richer and more abundant than those from earlier times, these centuries of the Middle Ages' "waning" became the visual paradigm containing in itself the entire medieval millennium. A Crusader could don fifteenth- or

sixteenth-century tournament gear and a damsel of the twelfth century could dress like a lady of that later era, wearing a coned hat like a fairy. We are dealing with a process of standardization that has led to stereotypes of medieval fashion derived from the Late Middle Ages, Renaissance, and even the sixteenth century. It is precisely this autumn of the Middle Ages, useful for dressing up even barbarian chiefs and crusaders, that has come down to us, through the illustrations in children's books and especially through cinema, without much alteration.[6]

But why did this medieval myth come to have such a wide reception? The question is fundamental, because the answer can help explain the reuse of the Middle Ages in modernity. The starting point to keep in mind is the following: almost since their end the Middle Ages have been, in Western culture, one of the most preferred settings for the marvelous, whether in a bright and benevolent tone—fairy magic and the knight's quest—or a terrifying and sinister one—as they said in the nineteenth century, "gothic": ghosts, mysterious happenings, and witchcraft. The word "medieval" is so evocative of this fantastical setting that the two are practically synonymous.[7] Such superposition of

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6 For cinema with medieval themes, see in general: V. Attolini, *Immagini del medioevo nel cinema*, Dedalo, Bari 1993; Ch. Amalvi, *Le goût du Moyen Âge* cit., pp. 63–68; G. Gandino, *Il cinema*, in E. Castelnuovo and G. Sergi (eds.), *Arti e storia nel medioevo*, vol. IV cit., pp. 737–755; M. Sanfilippo, *Historic Park. La storia e il cinema*, Elleu multimedia, Roma 2004, pp. 99–134; V. Ortenberg, *In Search of the Holy Grail* cit., pp. 193–223; K.J. Harty, *The Reel Middle Ages: American, Western and Eastern European, Middle Eastern and Asian Films about Medieval Europe*, McFarland, Jefferson (NC) 2006²; N. Haydock, *Movie Medievalism. The Imaginary Middle Ages*, McFarland, Jefferson (NC) 2008; M. Sanfilippo, *Cavalieri di celluloide*, in M. Mesirca and F. Zambon (eds.), *Il revival cavalleresco. Dal Don Chisciotte all'Ivanhoe (e oltre)*, Pacini, Pisa 2010, pp. 243–254, also online: http://dspace.unitus.it/bitstream/2067/950/1/Testo%20Sanfilippo.doc (cons. Apr. 28, 2019); B. Bildhauer, *Medievalism and the Cinema*, in L. D'Arcens (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Medievalism* cit., pp. 45–59. Specific themes have also been the subject of monographs, such as, for example, M. Sanfilippo, *Il medioevo secondo Walt Disney* cit.; Id., *Camelot, Sherwood, Hollywood. Re Artú e Robin Hood dal medioevo inglese al cinema americano*, Cooper, Roma 2006; B. Olton (ed.), *Arthurian Legends on Films and Television*, McFarland, Jefferson (NC) 2008; P. Dalla Torre, *Giovanna d'Arco sullo schermo*, Studium, Roma 2004; M.W. Driver, S. Ray and J. Rosenbaum (eds.), *The Medieval Hero on Screen: Representations from Beowulf to Buffy*, McFarland, Jefferson (NC) 2004; *Hollywood in the Holy Land* cit.; L. D'Arcens, *Comic Medievalism. Laughing at the Middle Ages*, D.S. Brewer, Woodbridge 2014. The journal "Quaderni medievali," active from 1976 to 2005, contains a number of articles dedicated to cinema. One website on the topic is *Cinema e medioevo*, www.cinemedioevo.net (cons. Apr. 28, 2019).

7 G. De Turris, *L'immaginario medievale nel fantastico contemporaneo*, in *Il sogno del medioevo* cit., pp. 93–109; R. Bordone, *Il medioevo nell'immaginario dell'Ottocento italiano* cit.; Id., *Medioevo oggi*, in G. Cavallo [et al.] (eds.), *Lo spazio letterario del medioevo*, 1, vol. IV, *L'attualizzazione del testo* cit., pp. 261–299; M. Oldoni, *Il significato del medioevo nell'immaginario*

meanings does not exist in the idealization of other epochs: the concepts of the ancient, modern, and contemporary ages do not immediately bring about this alignment of thought. Yet the popular fairy tale itself always seems to be set in the middle ages: not the time of the authors, as in the collections of Perrault or La Fontaine, or even in Aesop's fables, but that of traditional folk legends.

When we speak of magic, fairies, and heroes, we are of course referring to archetypal imaginary forms that respond to the profound and universal exigencies of humankind. These archetypes require no precise historical time; it is enough for them to conjure up an "other" time, ancient inasmuch as every myth refers to a remote past. This is the time of "once upon a time." Outside the West the Middle Ages are not a fitting vessel, even though in Persian, African, and American Indian tales we find the same archetypes. The Middle Ages may be the setting of European tales, but it does not represent their essence so much as their color.

To be clear, our basic problem is not understanding how much was truly medieval in the nineteenth century's historical, artistic, and literary re-imagining of the Middle Ages, how much, in other words, historiographical analyses and rewritings respected medieval sources. What is essential is that we comprehend how the entire process carried out in the nineteenth century involved coloring archetypal and fantastical situations with medievalizing hues—even if such situations were not actually medieval. The Brothers Grimm, Victor Hugo, Walter Scott, and Robert Louis Stevenson, along with Gustave Doré, Walter Crane, and a hundred other great and minor authors have, in a word, historicized the "once upon a time," and called it Medieval.

We might call this process of adapting fables and legends in the template of medieval culture a normalization of the fantastic. Yet in coloring the archetypes, the very word *medieval* is transformed into something evocative of myth. The fantastic, the mysterious, and the fairytale are reduced to a standard, a canonical formula, a code of communication understood by all. This is not a new process: during the Medieval Era itself and, *mutatis mutandis*, during the Renaissance, an analogous approach enabled the weaving of bonds with Classical Greece and Rome, through both history and mythology. And already in the Early Modern era, authors like Ariosto, Tasso, Cervantes, Spenser, and Shakespeare, vanguards and precursors to medievalism, recreated *their* Middle Ages. In our case the influence is even more broad, extending even to children and the illiterate.

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contemporaneo, in *Medioevo reale, medioevo immaginario. Confronti e percorsi culturali tra regioni d'Europa*, conference proceedings (Torino, 26–27 May 2000), Città di Torino, Torino 2002, pp. 187–208.

Even absent Romanticism, the pre-existing fantastical motifs would have continued to serve their functions in popular culture: heroes fight and win, we know, just not necessarily in chain mail. These fantastical motifs are nevertheless garbed in courtly dress throughout the long nineteenth century. By the first decades of the next one, the Middle Ages had become the preferred stereotype for fantastic narrative. Thus, we can easily say that the nineteenth century definitively transformed the way that Europeans represented the fantasies with which they supplied the West: they medievalized them, providing them with a "historical" landscape.

And thus we see a canon taking shape, a motif-index of popular imagination pertaining to the Middle Ages that persists almost unaltered to the present day, as one can see, to take a random example, in the comic strip *The Wizard of Id* (1964–). The character types are the king and queen, the dame and damsel (usually in distress), the prince, the knight, the troubadour or minstrel, the jester, the bard, the friar, the merchant, the innkeeper, the peasant, the serf, the pope, the emperor, the fairy, the witch, the inquisitor, the dragon, the mage, the hermit, the saint, the rebel, the wolf, the barbarian, the conjurer, the charlatan, the thief, the churchman... With whom are we dealing, Chaucer? Boccaccio? They are already distant specters, concealed behind so many rewritings. The typical places where these stories transpire are the cathedral, the city, the forest, the tournament list, the battlefield, and, naturally, the castle. Which, to be recognized as canonical, must have its crenellations (Guelph or Ghibelline), its drawbridge, catapults, four towers, possibly cylindrical and preferably with coned roofs. Without crenellations it's not a real castle, or it's at least a shoddy one. And then there must be double- or triple-arched windows, vaulted ceilings, grotesque sculptures, great hearths, tapestries, and pelts. Are we talking about a real fortress? Absolutely not: it's an *Idealtypus* that takes its inspiration primarily from the neomedieval castles of Pierrefonds and Neuschwanstein (this last the one on which Walt Disney's Sleeping Beauty Castle is based) and which is easy to find, even today, in children's books.[8]

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8 The literature on neomedieval castles, which, along with churches, university buildings, and seats of public institutions represent the crown jewels of neomedievalism, is quite vast, starting with K. Clark, *The Gothic Revival. An Essay in the History of Taste*, John Murray, London 1928. Various studies on the subject can be found in the volume of E. Castelnuovo and G. Sergi (eds.), *Arti e storia nel medioevo*, vol. IV cit.; See also, specifically, N.R. Kline (ed.), *Castles: An Enduring Fantasy*, State College Art Gallery, Plymouth 1985; T. Lazzari, *Castello e immaginario dal Romanticismo a oggi*, Battei, Parma 1991; R. Bordone, *Lo specchio di Shalott* cit., pp. 121–137 and 173–184; M. Sanfilippo, *Il medioevo secondo Walt Disney* cit.; R. Licinio, *Castelli reali, castelli virtuali, castelli immaginari*, in "Quaderni medievali," XXII (1997), n. 43, pp. 94–118; R.R. Taylor, *The Castles of the Rhine: Recreating the Middle Ages in Modern Germany*,

Nineteenth-century historians, architects, illustrators, and novelists shaped public opinion and planted the models that have since taken root and ramified *ad infinitum*. Their glossy and, in part, fabricated Middle Ages have remained alive in popular imagination because they had two considerable advantages: they were described in a way that left no room for doubt, and they were ever present before the eyes of the people. The Medieval Era is alive because, during the nineteenth century, it was largely constructed or reconstructed in a mimetic tone that did not bother to distinguish—with some exceptions—the possible original element from the artificial one: a principle that applies equally to architecture as to costumes and scenery. The quantity of products proposed as medieval was so tremendous that they have had continued to condition every interpretation to come. Someone with no philological training still has trouble today distinguishing (and has no reason to do so) between the Middle Ages invented in the nineteenth century and the "real," historically verifiable era—which also has the defect of being less monumental, less complete, and more imperfect, because it has been corroded by the years. Why should an Englishman and a Hungarian know that the seats of their parliaments were both erected in the nineteenth century, seeing as they were both taught that their respective nations—represented precisely by those buildings— date back to the Middle Ages? And why should an Italian know that her festival costumes—the symbols of civic identity—are much closer to the ones found in opera and film than medieval paintings? It is therefore thanks to the nineteenth-century revival that the modern world has been able to construct a collective imaginary and call it, *sic et simpliciter*, medieval.

What are the political implications of all this? Even if we limited ourselves to collecting fantastical elements, the Middle Ages would still emerge as central to the construction of the Western imagination, but our work would stop there. In reality, however, the crucial step with which we have yet to reckon is the mobilization of these feelings of distance, wonder, the sacred, and the arcane in service of an identitarian political sentiment. Medieval does not just mean magic, black or white as the case may be, but above all a historical *patria*, a sense of a place (possibly even physical, with monuments, *lieux de mémoire*), a feeling of belonging to a community, a group, a religion, a sect. This is the hook on which hangs a large part of political medievalism.

The nineteenth-century artistic and literary movements, which at first glance appear out of touch with the hard realities of the everyday life that they sought to transcend, harbor a profound and deep-rooted politics without which they

Wilfried Laurier University Press, Waterloo (ON) 1998; A.-M. Thiesse, *La création des identités nationales. Europe XVIIIe-XXe siècle*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris 1999, pp. 146–149.

do not make sense. If we look but a little bit closer, we see that the medievalism of the Restoration is not that of the July Revolution, nor that of the People's Spring, the Italian *Risorgimento*, the irredentist states of Eastern Europe or the United Kingdom, of labor unions, Russian pan-Slavism, the foundation of the Second Reich or the late, decadent nineteenth century. Its instrumental use can be twisted to any possible interpretation: conservative, revolutionary, patriotic, neo-Guelph or neo-Ghibelline, individualist (the solitary hero) and collectivist (the industrious city, the people in action), such that it has been spoken of as a "great repertoire of ambiguously polyvalent metaphors."[9] In fact, nineteenth-century political medievalism, born with a clear stamp of reaction and counter-revolution, has also been revolutionary, liberal, constitutionalist, and parliamentarian. François-René de Chateaubriand, that great figure of post-Napoleonic Restoration, made use of it, but so too did Freidrich Engels, Marx's co-author for the *Communist Manifesto*; John Ruskin, who dreamed of a return to a Middle Ages of original purity, his disciple Walter Crane, who gave it a socialist reading, and finally Richard Wagner, who constructed the myth of the Great Germany upon it. A veritable shared language, propagated by a hundred "national bards," from the mysterious Ossian all the way to Giosue Carducci and William Butler Yeats.[10]

According to nineteenth-century principles recently returned to fashion, the Middle Ages are the before-time of national kings who ensured the birth of the state in the great countries like France, Spain, England, already institutionalized in this era, or else—in countries that were still "irredentist" in the nineteenth century, like Italy, Poland, or Ireland—the glorious time of liberty before the imperialist invasions of vicious and soulless Others, be they English, Austrian, Spanish, German, Russian, or Turkish. "History is the nation," wrote Guizot. "It is the *patria* across the centuries."[11]

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9   R. Bordone, *Il medioevo nell'immaginario* cit., p. 115. He notes the contradiction inherent in the Italian judgment on the Middle Ages: *ibid.*, p. 128.

10   The studies on nineteenth-century political medievalism are numerous and represented by almost all contemporary nations, to the point that it is difficult to provide even a basic representative sample. See, however: A.-M. Thiesse, *La création des identités nationales* cit.; Ch. Amalvi, *Le goût du Moyen Âge* cit., especially pp. 185–202 and 230–241; J. Leerssen, *National Thought in Europe: A Cultural History*, Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam 2006; V. Ortenberg, *In Search of the Holy Grail* cit., pp. 99–117; P.J. Geary, *The Myth of Nations* cit., pp. 15–40; Id., *Writing the Nation: Historians and National Identities from the Nineteenth to the Twenty-first Centuries*, in *The Middle Ages in the Modern World: Twenty-first-century Perspectives* cit., pp. 73–86. This topic is addressed more fully in Ch. 11.

11   "L'histoire c'est la nation, c'est la patrie à travers les siècles": F. Guizot, *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de mon temps*, Michel Levy Frères, Paris 1858, vol. I, p. 28.

In the course of the nineteenth century, the search for the beginning, the founding day, found a perfect response in the identification of the first settlements of the *gens*, of its most ancient songs, of warrior heroes, of royal coronations and battles won, foreshadowing the new battles that the *gens* is called to fight and the new kings who hope to put themselves on the throne. The Medieval Era, *de facto* timeless even when meticulously dated to the Early and High Middle Ages, serves this process by imposing a historical category and ethics of judgment according to which the present-day winners are not those who truly have justice on their side, but those who "were there first": the peoples who first drained the swamps and cleared the forests, who erected and defended their cities. The conquered are redeemed and return as the potential patrons of their land, bearing their ancestral presence as a deed of ownership. The position according to which justice is on the side of those who were there before and not those who came after with numbers or the force of arms, is at the base of every nationalist and irredentist claim of the nineteenth century and many political movements today: the ethnic conflicts in the Balkans and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, for instance. The Middle Ages become indispensable for demonstrating the continuity that can confirm the right of precedence.[12]

In establishing antithesis, the enemy is the secret ingredient to producing synthesis and creating identity.[13] The Middle Ages are the great time of heroes who fight for their people and their country, both the one that once existed but is now endangered, and the one that must, necessarily, find its final form in the state that one day—hopefully soon—will be reborn: heroes like El Cid, Alexander Nevsky, Robin Hood, Joan of Arc, William Tell, William Wallace, Jan Hus, and Alberto da Giussano. In this manner the medieval hero operates as a highly effective *exemplum* of a whole population understood as an active and combatant subject. And it operates just as effectively for the intellectuals of the consolidated national states as for those leading patriotic movements aspiring to the formation of a governing state: Greeks, Italians, Bohemians, Slovakians, Hungarians, Poles, Serbs, Slovenes, Croatians, Macedonians, Romanians,

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12   See A.-M. Thiesse, *La création des identités nationales* cit., pp. 232–33: "It is difficult to establish, according to the national principle, statute of limitations for the occupation of ancient soil […]. An extreme case would be the Serbian reclamation of Kosovo, declared the sanctuary of the nation because in 1389 the great battle against the Ottoman Empire was fought there, marking the end of an independent Serbian reign." See also P.J. Geary, *The Myth of Nations* cit., p. 13, for the concept of the "moment of primary acquisition."

13   F. Cardini, *L'invenzione del nemico* cit.; G. Ricci, *Il nemico ufficiale. Discorsi di crociata nell'Italia moderna*, in F. Cantù, G. Di Febo and R. Moro (eds.), *L'immagine del nemico. Storia, ideologia e rappresentazione tra età moderna e contemporanea*, Viella, Roma 2009, pp. 41–55.

Bulgarians—in short, those within the Austrian and Ottoman Empires—or Scotsmen, Welshmen, Irishmen, Bretons, Occitans, Basques, Catalans—the independentists active in the British, French, and Spanish Empires. Each movement discovers its own medieval battles, with songs and heroes; each possesses the full (albeit imagined) knowledge that the Middle Ages were the origin of its own nation.[14]

It is this strict contiguity between the historical sense and the sense of wonder, the result of precise cultural operations that have selected and re-interpreted certain medieval elements while omitting many others, that forms the bedrock of nineteenth-century, and with it contemporary, political medievalism—above all because of the perfect alignment of a belief in the primordial formation of identities with foundation myths. Local and national identity, tradition, heroism and a sense of wonder, empirical history and legend: all can converge in the same word, "medieval," today as in the nineteenth century. The historically documented knight , the national symbol, and the legendary or indeed fairy-tale hero come to be represented, and thus received, in the same way. The Battle of Legnano and Joan of Arc have spatiotemporal locations as precise as they are discrete, but they produce emotion because they are perceived as myth, simultaneously "here" and "elsewhere."

They are myths, but they are quite different from those of mythology as generally understood. Unlike in classical mythology, the mythic time of the Middle Ages is presented as a real time that actually happened, that is describable in historical and thus credible terms, and that contains proven (though not always tested) facts. All the clichés about the Middle Ages, many of which we will encounter in the following chapters, have been at times accepted historiographical interpretations.[15] The Middle Ages' real mythographers are the historians and the archaeologists, even when they made judicious use of critical methods and applied philological rigor to written sources and material remains. While substantial doubts around the admissibility of certain interpretations already flourished among nineteenth-century authors

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14   Cf. *infra*, Chapter 11.

15   Overviews in K. Biddick, *The Shock of Medievalism*, Duke University Press, Durham (NC) 1998; N. Cantor, *Inventing the Middle Ages* cit.; *Studi medievali e immagine del medioevo fra Ottocento e Novecento* cit.; E. Artifoni, *Il medioevo nel Romanticismo. Forme della storiografia fra Sette e Ottocento*, in G. Cavallo [et al.] (eds.), *Lo spazio letterario del medioevo*, 1, vol. IV, *L'attualizzazione del testo* cit., pp. 175–221; E. Occhipinti, *Gli storici e il medioevo. Da Muratori a Duby*, in E. Castelnuovo and G. Sergi (eds.), *Arti e storia nel medioevo*, vol. IV cit., pp. 207–228; G. Sergi, *Antidoti all'abuso della storia* cit., pp. 237–338; R. Utz, *Medievalism. A Manifesto*, Arc Humanities Press, Kalamazoo and Bradford 2017, pp. 19 ff., 39 ff.

(and not only professional historians),[16] in actuality the history, archaeology, and museology of the Middle Ages "precisely reconstructed" greatly reinforced the mythopoetic interpretation of the period, because they were simply superimposed on this interpretation without eliminating it. Indeed, they have even legitimized it scientifically inasmuch as they share its "mission" of laying the foundations of the "history of the fatherland" in a true political program.[17]

Born in the same environment, medievalism and medieval studies have necessarily drifted apart over time. The writing of medieval history acquires its characteristic physiognomy from continual reinterpretation, in the present, of historical facts gleaned from the study of the Middle Ages, from new acquisitions in research, and from the questions that historians are called to answer. Hence the fact that the study of history is always a process of becoming: the certainties of one generation can be contested by a following generation, and a scholar has every right to change his/her mind in the course of his/her research,

16   For example, on the high degree of awareness and understanding of historical dynamics on the part of some authors, including of the implausibility of a simplistic understanding of the history of the communes as that of the Italian nation, see R. Bordone, *Il medioevo nell'immaginario* cit., pp. 111 ff.; O. Capitani, *Carducci e la storia d'Italia medievale. Controriflessioni inattuali*, in A. Mazzon (ed.), *Scritti per Isa. Raccolta di studi offerti a Isa Lori Sanfilippo*, Istituto storico italiano per il medio evo, Roma 2008, pp. 101–114; F. Roversi Monaco, *"O falsar la storia…": Massimo D'Azeglio e la Lega Lombarda*, in A. Malfitano, A. Preti, F. Tarozzi (eds.), *Per continuare il dialogo. Gli amici ad Angelo Varni*, Bononia University Press, Bologna 2014, pp. 131–140; Id., *"Il gran fatto che dovrà commemorarsi": l'Alma Mater Studiorum e l'Ottavo Centenario della sua fondazione. Medioevo, memoria e identità a Bologna dopo l'Unità d'Italia* in T. di Carpegna Falconieri, R. Facchini (eds.), *Medievalismi italiani* cit., pp. 149–162.

17   See Cl. Fawcett e P.L. Kohl (eds.), *Nationalism, Politics and the Practice of Archaeology*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1996; T. Champion and M. Diaz-Andreu (eds.), *Nationalism and Archaeology in Europe*, Westview Press, Boulder (CO) 1996; S. Jones, *The Archaeology of Ethnicity: Constructing Identities in the Past and Present*, Routledge, London-New York 1997; A.-M. Thiesse, *La création des identités nationales* cit., pp. 204–210 and *passim*; G. Iggers, *The Uses and Abuses of History and the Responsibility of the Historians: Past and Present*, in *19th International Congress of Historical Sciences, 6–13 August 2000. Proceeding Acts: Reports, Abstracts and Round Table Introductions*, University of Oslo, Oslo 2000, pp. 83–100; A.D. Smith, *The Nation in History. Historiographical Debates about Ethnicity and Nationalism*, Brandeis-Historical Society of Israel, Jerusalem 2000; *Antiquités, archéologie et construction nationale au XIXe siècle*, monograph issue of "Mélanges de l'École française de Rome. Italie et Mediterranée," CXIII (2001), n. 2; Cl. A. Simmons (ed.), *Medievalism and the Quest for the "Real" Middle Ages*, Routledge, London 2001; G. Klaniczay and E. Marosi (eds.), *The Nineteenth-Century Process of "Musealization" in Hungary and Europe*, Collegium Budapest for Advanced Study, Budapest 2006; B. Effros, *The Germanic Invasions and the Academic Politics of National Identity in Late Nineteenth-Century France*, in J.M. Bak [et al.] (eds.), *Gebrauch und Missbrauch* cit., pp. 81–94; M. Baár, *Historians and Nationalism. East-Central Europe in the Nineteenth Century*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2010.

for relativism and methodical doubt, against which many voices are raised to-day, are and remain the cornerstones of the discipline.[18] Even if the word "revisionism" seems negative (as often happens to "isms"), in reality historical writing is unimaginable except as a continual self-correction—always, however (and this is how it differs from revisionism *per se*), tending to the most exact and intellectually honest reconstruction of the dynamics of the past. Medieval studies, then, is a discipline of constant evolution, which discusses itself and has transformed many times in the course of the last two hundred years. The ways that a nineteenth-century historian studied and understood the Middle Ages do not correspond to ours, and not all the questions that our colleague of two centuries ago had to address interest us anymore.

Twentieth-century history writing, filled with opposing tensions, did not offer a unitary and teleological vision of historical processes; on the contrary, it expressed ever more critical and nebulous concepts. Not just that: it found itself competing with other sciences born in the second half of the nineteenth century that quickly rose to the rank of co-star if not leading actor in the interpretation of the world of men: psychology, ethnography, anthropology, sociology. What a century earlier could be theorized in historical terms and presented according to narrative models has become the investigative territory of disciplines that have developmental epistemologies distinct from that of history, seen at times as an elderly aunt. It is not at all by chance that the most illustrious historians of the mid-twentieth century, like Marc Bloch, Henri Braudel, and Lucien Febvre, are those who sought (and found) a compromise in making history a social science comparable to the others: in other words, a sociology particularly attuned to diachronic development.

The enrichment and specialization of the human sciences has had a positive effect in the incredible increase in the possibilities of posing and resolving problems, but the trade-off has been the impossibility of following developments outside one's own specialty with adequate competence. As history (like sociology and other disciplines) becomes academic, it is no longer in a position to speak to everyone. The osmosis between fields of knowledge that marked nineteenth-century erudition has dwindled and at times ceased completely. Seen from a distance of over a hundred years, the architect Viollet-le-Duc, the novelist Stevenson, the art critic Ruskin, and the historian Cattaneo ultimately do not seem to think of the Middle Ages all too differently: they love it, they narrate it, they relive it, and they make it modern. Even to one with full knowledge of their different epistemological bases and methodologies, they always point in the same direction. Not so in the twentieth century: now

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18   See Chapters 7 and 10.

medieval studies addresses carefully delineated themes, changes its mind, corrects itself, seeks new avenues, evaluates new sources, and sometimes considers its scholars' responsiveness to the demands of modernity inappropriate, the risk of falling into reviled anachronisms too great. But the other side of the coin is that the results of historical analysis grow muddled and are received too late, if at all, by those who practice her sister fields (sociologists, journalists, historians who specialize in other periods) and by those "not suited to the task."[19] The professionalization of historiography has thus had an unexpected outcome: the severing of academic knowledge from common understanding. The ways of comprehending and representing the Middle Ages have split into two paths: history as practiced in the university world (not a very influential environment in terms of demographic impact, at least not before 1968), and popular perception. The interaction between these two modes of understanding the past (in this case, the Middle Ages) has always remained relatively limited.[20] Compounding the situation, a certain kind of academia (primarily in Germany and Italy, countries where the tradition of the essay is weak) has and often continues to favor a writing style that, while justifiably technical, can too easily lapse into jargon and even into an intentional esotericism rooted in a real horror at the prospect of its "vulgarization."[21] The consequences are clear: the space of communication about the Middle Ages, which in the nineteenth century was entirely filled with learned historians, has since been occupied by others. In Italy, for instance, the Middle Ages are known largely thanks to the *Storia d'Italia a fumetti* (*History of Italy in Comics*) and books by the journalists Indro

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19   See G. Sergi, Preface to the Italian edition of P.J. Geary, *The Myth of Nations* cit. (*Il mito delle nazioni. Le origini medievali dell'Europa*, Carocci, Roma 2005, pp. 9–15: 10), for the concept of "asynchronous update."

20   G. Sergi, *L'idea di medioevo* cit., especially p. 12, on the "ineffectiveness of professional research on the distortion of collective memory"; B. Stock, *Listening for the Text. On the Uses of the Past*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadephia 1996², pp. 71–72, on the "gap between academic medievalism and general culture"; J. Le Goff, *À la recherche du Moyen Âge*, Audibert, Paris 2003, p. 7: "The florid French school of medieval studies, despite its scientific successes, does not seem to have changed anything in the media or the basic ideas that are broadcast." See analogously S. Settis, *The Future of the "Classical"* cit., pp. 13 ff., which speaks of a true "divorce between the 'science of antiquity' and the use of antiquity in contemporary culture." On clichés, aside from Sergi's *L'idea di medioevo,* see F. Marostica (ed.), *Medioevo e luoghi comuni*, Tecnodid, Napoli 2004; A. Brusa, *Un prontuario degli stereotipi sul medioevo*, in "Cartable de Clio," V (2004), n. 4, www.mondimedievali. net/pre-testi/stereotipi.htm (cons. Mar. 10, 2010, the page was found to be inactive when cons. Apr. 28, 2019); M. Bull, *Thinking Medieval: An Introduction to the Study of the Middle Ages,* Palgrave MacMillan, New York 2005; G. Sergi, *Antidoti all'abuso della storia* cit., pp. 359–364.

21   R. Iorio, *Medioevo e divulgazione*, in "Quaderni medievali," XIII (1988), n. 26, pp. 163–170; S. Pivato, *Vuoti di memoria* cit., pp. 29–36.

Montanelli and Roberto Gervaso.[22] In the same way, and not by chance, the Italian personality most directly associated with the Middle Ages is Umberto Eco, renowned semiotician and accomplished novelist. Consequently, in the words of Giuseppe Sergi, "The Middle Ages of non-medievalists (historians of the Modern Era, anthropologists, literary critics) has great success precisely because it corresponds to the common culture and to what the greater public expects."[23]

Medievalism is a cultural, social, and political phenomenon that responds to a different set of needs and is structured in a completely different manner from the academic study of the Middle Ages. Those who "use" the Middle Ages usually have no intention of discussing and understanding it in its ambiguity, nor of contextualizing it: on the contrary, if they can't find a parallel with the modern world, the medieval is of no use to them. This means that the beloved or exploited Medieval Era does not exist as an object in itself, but only as the measure by which the echoes of modernity are given substance: it is reflected in a mirror that deforms the original image, for "nunc videmus per speculum in aenigmate": now we see as through a mirror, darkly.[24] And all too frequently this reflection in the mirror may have no solid object behind it, for the image may be *within* the mirror, that is, within us. And above all, those who "use" the Middle Ages have no intention of changing their minds about it. To be fully appreciated, their Middle Ages must not be subject to change: the knight, the pope and the emperor, the nation, the community and their identities must wrap themselves up in a tidy bow.[25] It follows that medievalism, with respect

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22 I. Montanelli e R. Gervaso, *L'Italia dei secoli bui: il medioevo sino al Mille*, Rizzoli, Milano 1965; Id., *L'Italia dei comuni: il medioevo dal 1000 al 1250*, Rizzoli, Milano 1967; Id., *L'Italia dei secoli d'oro: il medioevo dal 1250 al 1492*, Rizzoli, Milano 1967; E. Biagi, *Storia d'Italia a fumetti*, vol. I, *Dai barbari ai capitani di ventura*, Mondadori, Milano 1979. Cf. R. Iorio, *Medioevo e giornalismo*, in *Il sogno del medioevo* cit., pp. 119–125.

23 G. Sergi, *L'idea di medioevo* cit., p. 14.

24 Paul, *1 Cor*, 13,12. For nineteenth-century medievalism (but the analogy with the present is sound), see R. Bordone, *Lo specchio di Shalott* cit., pp. 9 e 14: "The tearful history of sorcery, love, death, and chivalry in *The Lady of Shalott* […] in some ways lends itself to being seen as a metaphor for the collective imaginary of the Middle Ages: in fact, we almost never capture a direct image of that fabulous time, derived from contemporary sources, but always and only the reflection of that warped mirror that was nineteenth-century fantasy, faithfully reproduced on the "canvas" of Romantic iconography […]. Certainly, we are dealing with a mirror, this is not the Middle Ages of our sources that are instead standing outside of that window. But we know full well and it is not here that we seek the reality of the Middle Ages. What we seek in that mirror is another story."

25 For analogous considerations on the "Classical": Settis, *The Future of the "Classical,"* cit., pp. 51, 55 ff., 110 ff.; see also B. Coccia (ed.), *Il mondo classico nell'immaginario contemporaneo*, Apes, Roma 2008.

to medieval studies, is a much less versatile thing, and has changed much less over the years.

The Middle Ages, as should now be clear, is an age for all seasons: it is such a vast and remote period that, at least in popular sentiment, it loses any real historical connotation. Its fundamental uncertainty is its defining feature. Its liminal position—suspended between history and fantasy, and therefore able to fill itself with any ingredients—has remained its only constant, even into its contemporary political use. The Medieval is where fable, legend, myth, and history find their point of convergence. Indeed, it is precisely this willful indecision between history and legend, between politics and fantasy, that has allowed it such good fortune. But medievalism is mimetic: it is a myth that presents itself as history. And in the nineteenth century, as today, this is its trump card.

The Middle Ages of Identity

> "What d'you expect to be sure of?" Torrismund interrupted. "Insignias, ranks, titles... All mere show. Those paladins' shields with armorial bearings and mottoes are not made of iron; they're just paper, you can put your finger through them."
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> I. CALVINO, *The Nonexistent Knight* (1959)

At the end of the nineteenth century, the West's passion for the Middle Ages first saw a period of lively coexistence with other forms of cultural expression, and then fell into torpor. Medievalism's decline began with the rise of alternate modes to replace Romanticism. In certain cases a syncretism was achieved, as in the transition from the Neogothic style to Eclecticism and finally to Art Nouveau in architecture and the visual arts, or the Decadent Movement in literature. Even these eventually yielded to an all-out rejection of medievalizing taste in deference to the search for a sobriety of form and to a tendency towards positivism, abstraction, pragmatism, socialism, materialism, progressivism, and all those -isms that Romanticism and its dreamy, languid offspring Medievalism were temperamentally unable to reproduce. The Italian Futurist motto, "We shall kill the light of the moon" also killed the knight Parsifal and Giosue Carducci's Lady Laldòmine:

> O Lady Laldòmine, come to your balcony all dressed in silver, and hear the last love song of the Italian poetry that was. Come out, come out, my lady, before the damp night falls and enshrouds us.[1]

Medievalism was counted as one of the good results of very poor taste: it was sappy, garish, ridiculous, excessively ornate and too colorful, and at the same time too dusty, derivative, and false. Pierrefonds Castle was held up as the

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1 G. Carducci, *Confessioni e battaglie*, Sommaruga, Roma 1884, p. 218; F.T. Marinetti, *Uccidiamo il chiaro di luna!* Edizioni Futuriste di Poesia, Milano 1911; Id., *Abbasso il Tango e Parsifal! Lettera futurista circolare ad alcune amiche cosmopolite che danno dei the-tango e si parsifalizzano*, Milano, 14 January 1914: "Parsifal è la svalutazione sistematica della vita [...]. Purulenza polifonica di Amfortas. Sonnolenza piagnucolosa dei Cavalieri del Graal. Satanismo ridicolo di Kundry...Passatismo! Passatismo! Basta!" ("Parsifal is the systematic devaluation of life [...] the polyphonic purulence of Amfortas. The whining indolence of the Knights of the Grail. Kundry's ridiculous Satanism...Pastism! Pastism! Enough!").

perfect example of how *not* to restore a monument. As with the rest of the long nineteenth century, Medievalism was felled by the machine-gun fire of the First World War, a fratricidal, muddy, and decidedly unchivalrous war that crumbled all the central empires, from whose ashes many modern nation-states were born.[2] The season of the great medieval revival closed with two resounding trumpet blasts. The first was the canonization in 1920 of Joan of Arc, the heroine of those troops in the trenches who saw her shining through the clouds. The second was the 1922 birth of the Irish Free State, whose independence from the United Kingdom was obtained with arms but also with the fundamental contributions of Lady Augusta Gregory and William Butler Yeats, singers of the Celtic epic and of Irish patriotism: in 1923 Yeats received the Nobel Prize for having given "expression to the spirit of a whole nation."[3] But during the interwar and immediate postwar eras, aside from exceptional cases (most notably Germany, which we will discuss later), the political usage of the Middle Ages was much more limited than before.

Medievalism's agony, however, proved long, and in the end, to paraphrase Mark Twain, the reports of its death were greatly exaggerated. Between the 1920s and the 1960s, it fell out of fashion, surviving largely on the cultural margins in children's books and "sword and sorcery" films. Yet it was precisely during this period of dormancy and general regurgitation and rejection that we find some of the most illustrious examples of the idealization of the Middle Ages. These served as a kind of bridge, a counter-trend even, providing philosophical and literary nourishment for the generations that since the

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2 On the topic of medievalism in the First World War, see M. Girouard, *The Return to Camelot: Chivalry and the English Gentleman*, Yale University Press, New Haven-London 1981, pp. 275–293; Ch. Amalvi, *Le goût du Moyen Âge* cit., pp. 235 ff.; M. Domenichelli, *Miti di una letteratura medievale* cit., pp. 322–325; A.J. Frantzen, *Bloody Good: Chivalry, Sacrifice, and World War 1*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2004; M. Alexander, *Medievalism* cit., pp. 210 ff.; St. Goebel, *The Great War and Medieval Memory. War, Remembrance and Medievalism in Britain and Germany, 1914–1940*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2007; V. Ortenberg, *In Search of the Holy Grail* cit., p. 158; M. Passini, *La fabrique de l'art national. Le nationalisme et l'origine de l'histoire de l'art en France et en Allemagne 1870–1933*, Éditions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme, Paris 2012, pp. 191–228; T. di Carpegna Falconieri, *Il medievalismo e la grande guerra*, "Studi storici," 56/1 (2015), pp. 49–78; Id*., Il medievalismo e la grande guerra in Italia*, "Studi storici," 56/2 (2015), pp. 251–276. B. Stock, *Listening for the Text* cit., pp. 62, 69–70, 73, considers the Second World War as the turning point in attitudes towards the Middle Ages as institutionalized by the Romantic conception. For his analysis of medievalism, see especially pp. 63–68.

3 "For his always inspired poetry, which in a highly artistic form gives expression to the spirit of a whole nation": Nobel Prize, official site: https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1923/summary/ (cons. Apr. 28, 2019). On Yeats's medievalism, see M. Alexander, *Medievalism* cit., p. 142 and *ad indicem*. Cf. also *infra*, Ch. 9.

late Sixties, have reworked this material within various mass movements, in some cases even transforming it into proper ideological structures.

We're talking about the Catholic conservative alternative to "Modernism," about the "conservative revolution" in Weimar Germany, about Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, who reported the impossibility of a positive relationship between human progress and the society of machines; we're talking about Herbert Marcuse, philosopher of the "great refusal" of socialism and capitalism alike. We're talking about an extremely varied group of artists and authors who otherwise have almost nothing in common, but who have found in the medieval era the interpretive key to modernity: the existential longing of directors like Carl Theodor Dreyer (*The Passion of Joan of Arc*, 1928), Roberto Rossellini (*The Flowers of St. Francis*, 1950), Ingmar Bergman (*The Seventh Seal*, 1957), of novelists, scholars of myth, jurists, philosophers, and poets like Raymond Aron, Nikolai Berdyaev, Jorge Luis Borges, Italo Calvino, Louis-Ferdinand Céline, Mircea Eliade, T.S. Eliot, Georges Friedmann, Stefan George, René Guénon, Romano Guardini, Ernst Jünger, György Lukács, Jacques Maritain, Attilio Mordini, José Ortega y Gasset, Mervyn Peake, Ezra Pound, Carl Schmitt, Georges Sorel, Oswald Spengler, John Steinbeck, J.R.R. Tolkien, T.H. White, W.B. Yeats. All the way up to Pier Paolo Pasolini.

Pasolini. An uncomfortable author, to be sure: hated by the right as a Marxist and controversial with the left for some of his more reactionary opinions.[4] And before him, Antonio Gramsci, with his reflections on the importance of recovering the *progressive folklore* of the subaltern classes.[5] Two names that are not out of place in this list, for if many of those mentioned have been and are still considered the bedrock of conservative and even reactionary culture, in reality those movements that reject modernity and proclaim the necessity of recuperating previous rhythms of life do not all have identical politics. The evils of contemporary life have been denounced as much by the right as the left, and the Middle Ages, as an immobile and eternal symbol *par excellence* of the preindustrial and anti-modern age, have been trotted out by all parties. Just remember that the environmentalist Green Party, born in Germany in the 1980s and represented in various Western governments, skews clearly to the left.[6]

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4 See A. Baldoni e G. Borgna, *Una lunga incomprensione. Pasolini fra destra e sinistra*, Vallecchi, Firenze 2010.

5 A. Gramsci, *Observations on Folklore*, in Id., *Prison Notebooks*, Columbia University Press, New York 2011, Notebook 27 (It. edition: *Osservazioni sul "folclore,"* in Id., *Quaderni del carcere*, Einaudi, Torino 1948–51; critical ed. of Istituto Gramsci, ed. V. Gerratana, Einaudi, Torino 2008²: Quaderno 27 (xi), 1935).

6 Despite that, its anti-progressive position permits Le Goff to consider the environmentalist movement as "reactionary": Id., *Storia e memoria* cit., p. 222; cf. also U. Eco, *Turning Back the Clock* cit. (p. 140 of the Italian edition).

Or consider that the founder of Greenpeace, David Taggart, "claimed to be inspired to his environmental duty by the struggle of the Hobbits of the Shire against the desolate land of Mordor, the source of all pollution and industrial horrors."[7] In fact, in English-speaking countries, Tolkien is an author beloved by hippy culture and environmentalists.[8] "Frodo lives" could be found scribbled everywhere in the Sixties and Seventies; the Ents, the Shepherds of the Trees, could be considered a symbol of union with nature.[9] In Italy, on the other hand, where Tolkien is seen as an author of the right, his imagination has nourished several generations of neo- and post-fascists.[10] Together with his friend Clive Staples Lewis, Tolkien can also be read in a Christian key.[11] Like the Middle Ages that he is often called to represent, even Tolkien has far more than one meaning.

Medievalism as a phenomenon exploded again at the end of the Sixties and endures today, such that we can say that in the last fifty years we have been witness to many little revivals.[12] Little, compared to the near mania of the nineteenth century, but equally significant as a mass phenomenon. The current reappropriation of the medieval—or better, medievals, since the possible declensions of the idea are many—must be understood in these broad terms.

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7   Cit. by P. Gulisano, *Tolkien. Il mito e la grazia*, Ancora, Milano 2001, p. 172. See also P. Curry, *Defending Middle-Earth. Tolkien: Myth and Modernity*, Mariner Books, Boston 2004, p. 44.

8   J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, Unwin Paperbacks, London-Boston-Sidney 1983[3] (original edition: Allen & Unnwin, London 1954–55).

9   In the vast bibliography on the subject, two relatively recent titles are worth mentioning: M.D.C. Drout (ed.), *J. R. R. Tolkien Encyclopedia: Scholarship and Critical Assessment*, Routledge, New York-Oxford 2006 (on this specific topic, the entry by A.K. Siewers, *Environmentalist Readings of Tolkien*, pp. 166–167); K. Chance and A.K. Siewers (eds.), *Tolkien's Modern Middle Ages*, Palgrave MacMillan, New York 2009.

10   R. Arduini, *Italy: Reception of Tolkien*, entry in M.D.C. Drout (ed.), *J. R. R. Tolkien Encyclopedia* cit., pp. 299 ff. The topic is addressed *infra*, Ch. 7.

11   Br. J. Birzer, *Christian Readings of Tolkien*, entry in M.D.C. Drout (ed.), *J.R.R. Tolkien Encyclopedia* cit., pp. 99–101. For Italian examples: P. Gulisano, *Tolkien. Il mito e la grazia* cit.; G. Spirito OFM Cap., *Tra San Francesco e Tolkien. Una lettura spirituale de "Il signore degli anelli,"* Il Cerchio iniziative editoriali, Rimini 2006; A. Monda, *L'anello e la croce: significato teologico de "Il signore degli anelli,"* Rubbettino, Soveria Mannelli 2008. Cf. G. De Turris, *L'immaginario medievale* cit., p. 107. In his *Chronicles of Narnia* saga (1950–56), Clive Staples Lewis deliberately depicted a Christ allegory. See in general R. Hein, *Christian Mythmakers: C.S. Lewis, Madeleine L'Engle, J.R.R. Tolkien, George MacDonald, G.K. Chesterton & Others*, Cornerstone Press, Chicago 1998.

12   On the Middle Ages, currently "dans le vent" (in fashion): P. Monnet, *Introduction*, p. 17, in J.M. Bak [et al.] (eds.), *Gebrauch und Missbrauch* cit., pp. 15–20. On the "second great return of the Middle Ages in France" since the 1970s, though incomparable in scale with Romanticism: Ch. Amalvi, *Le goût du Moyen Âge* cit., p. 261. The Society for the Study of Popular Culture and the Middle Ages has been active for several years, https://medievalinpopularculture.blogspot.com/ (cons. Apr. 28, 2019).

It can be seen as a cultural expression that, though constantly changing its appearance, has remained the same in its essential traits. These are not to be found in the expanding and increasingly sophisticated historical analyses of the late twentieth century, so much as in the repurposing—exaggerated to an unimaginable degree by old and new modes of communication—of the cultural sediment of the nineteenth century. Without always being aware of it, enthusiasts of the Middle Ages still act the way Giosue Carducci described in the distant year of 1879, in the margins of his *Song of Legnano*:

> The poet is permitted, if he so desires and is able, to visit Persia and India, not to mention Greece and the Middle Ages: the ignorant and the lazy have the right not to follow him.[13]

The Middle Ages are a spatio-temporal elsewhere to which one may wish to return, they are exoticism and sentiment. Contemporary scholars have grasped the Romantic framework of the new medievalism (here with a lower-case n and m)—which yet still lives off of nineteenth-century culture—that characterizes the last decades of the twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty-first. As Franco Cardini writes:

> Our medieval revival is in reality a "new romantic"; the success of Tolkien, Rohmer's *Perceval*, Boorman's *Excalibur,* cannot be explained as neo-medieval, so much as neo-neo-gothic.[14]

In addition to what was said in the previous chapter, to get a sense of how much the nineteenth century has been a filter for current medievalism, one need only think of the *Dark, Gothic,* or simply *Goth* movement, born in Great Britain between the Sixties and the Eighties and still very much alive. Its adherents distinguish themselves by their dress (metal accessories, black clothes, white lace, black and white make-up, black nails) and by a specific musical genre.[15] The Gothic atmospheres, the gloom, the moon, death, ghosts, vampires, witches, stakes, will-o'-the-wisps, eternal fog—in short the fear that lurks behind the negative imaginary of the Middle Ages—are what most profoundly

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13   G. Carducci, *Della canzone di Legnano*, Parte 1, *Il Parlamento*, in *Poesie di Giosue Carducci MDCCCL-MCM*, Zanichelli, Bologna 1908[7], pp. 1035–1046: 1046.

14   F. Cardini, *Medievisti "di professione"* cit., p. 45.

15   *Gothica. La generazione oscura degli anni Novanta*, Tunnel, Bologna 1997. For the connection with Satanism: M. Introvigne, *The Gothic Milieu*, in J. Kaplan and H. Loow (eds.), *The Cultic Milieu. Oppositional Subcultures in an Age of Globalization*, AltaMira Press-Rowman and Littlefield, Walnut Creek (CA)-Lanham (MD) 2002, pp. 138–151.

attract those that profess to be *Goths*. The Middle Ages are attractive because they are frightening, because their light is sinister. This movement is therefore particularly interesting precisely from the point of view of the study of medievalism, since it shows, more than other cases, how the Middle Ages evoked here could not exist if it had not received a dye job (black, naturally) from the Romantic culture. This Medieval Era corresponds to the Gothic novel, to Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* and all its infinite derivatives.[16] It could not exist without Ossian, without Bram Stoker and his *Dracula*, without Victorian fashion, and without Edgar Allan Poe. Tim Burton, perhaps the artist best known for his capacity to evoke Gothic atmospheres (think of such films as *Edward Scissorhands,* from 1990), is simultaneously a neomedieval and neoromantic *auteur*. Or rather, he is neomedieval inasmuch as he is neoromantic.

We are talking about reflections of a distant age, which in turn echoes another age, even more distant; we will see many times over how much this dream of a Neo-Romantic Middle Ages conditions contemporary political events. It must, however, be firmly restated that political connotations are not necessary elements of medievalism. Anarchist, fascist, or communist, Republican or Democrat, Tory or Labour, the political hue does not take on immediate importance. From the second half of the Sixties and across the Seventies, with a first peak between the Seventies and Eighties and a second apex at the end of the millennium, the Middle Ages have recurringly come into fashion among people of very diverse political inclinations. For example, the mania over the Holy Grail and the Templars, so typical of a right-wing usage of the Middle Ages, is in reality shared by many, many people. The mania in itself, however, is neutral and apolitical: indeed, it is the only reason why the vast majority of people today show any interest at all in the Middle Ages.

Medievalism is so universal that, since the end of the Sixties, "fantasy" has become the most diffuse literary genre in the West, a primacy it still maintains due in no small part to the incredible success of the Harry Potter saga.[17] We

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16 The literature on the subject is quite vast. See G. Germann, *Dal Gothic Taste al Gothic Revival*, in E. Castelnuovo and G. Sergi (eds.), *Arti e storia nel medioevo*, vol. IV cit., pp. 391–438; M. Aldrich, *Gothic Revival*, Phaidon Press, London [etc.] 1997; M. Alexander, *Medievalism* cit., pp. 1–49; V. Ortenberg, *In Search of the Holy Grail* cit., especially pp. 27–87, 149 ff.; E. McEvoy and C. Spooner (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Gothic*, Routledge, Abingdon-New York 2007.

17 J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, Bloomsbury, London 1998; *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, Bloomsbury, London 1999; *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, Bloomsbury, London 2000; *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, Bloomsbury, London 2001; *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, Bloomsbury, London 2003; *Harry Potter and the Half-blood Prince*, Bloomsbury, London 2005; *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, Bloomsbury, London 2007.

may plausibly date the explosion of this literary genre (with all its numerous subgenres: Dark, Heroic, Sword & Sorcery, Gothic…) to 1965 with the release of the American paperback edition of John R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, which sold 150,000 copies in one year.[18] The main masterpieces of the genre concentrate around the Seventies: for instance, Ursula Le Guin's *Earthsea Cycle* and the Merlin trilogy by Mary Stewart, who has been called "the twentieth-century Geoffrey of Monmouth."[19]

Fantasy literature, especially when inserted (in best nineteenth-century tradition) into a vaguely medieval landscape, evokes deep emotions on the same level as fairy tales.[20] A passion for a fantastical Middle Ages can be interpreted as a response to a crisis of the idea of progress, in the name of escape. In this sense, "fantasy" literature, with its perennial conflict between Good and Evil, heroes and monsters, works marvelously—as long as its value as a consumer product is not underestimated.[21]

In addition to fantasy literature, we should mention the closely entwined "role-playing games": the acting out of stories, almost always in a fantastical, medieval setting, by a "party" of friends who take on the roles of characters— knights, elves, mages, thieves, etc. Role-playing games had incredible success in the Seventies and Eighties, starting with the celebrated *Dungeons and Dragons* (1974), and that success continues to the present, through many neo-medieval communities who live virtually on the internet and represent the technological evolution of those now ancient dice games. We recall, among others, the popular Society for Creative Anachronism (founded in 1966), which proudly declares itself an "international organization dedicated to the research and recreation of the arts and techniques of Europe prior to the seventeenth

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18   J. Ripp, *Middle America Meets Middle-Earth: American Discussion and Readership of J. R. R. Tolkien's "The Lord of the Rings," 1965–1969*, in "Book History," 8 (2005) pp. 245–286: 256; G. De Turris, *L'immaginario medievale* cit., p. 104; L. Del Corso, P. Pecere*, L'anello che non tiene. Tolkien fra letteratura e mistificazione*, Minimum Fax, Roma 2003, pp. 50–64. Even Peter Jackson's three film adaptations of the novels (2001–2003) have had a resounding success.

19   U.K. Le Guin, A *Wizard of Earthsea*, Parnassus Press, Berkeley (CA) 1968; *The Tombs of Atuan*, Atheneum Books, New York 1971; *The Farthest Shore*, Atheneum Books, New York 1972; the series was continued later. M. Stewart, *The Crystal Cave*, William Morrow, New York 1970; *The Hollow Hills*, Holder & Stoughton, London 1973; *The Last Enchantment*, G.K. Hall, London 1981; the series was also continued later.

20   See for example S. De Mari, *Il drago come realtà. I significati storici e metaforici della letteratura fantastica*, Salani, Milano 2007.

21   D. Marshall (ed.), *Mass Market Medieval: Essays on the Middle Ages in Popular Culture*, McFarland, Jefferson (NC) 2007; L. Del Corso, P. Pecere, *L'anello che non tiene* cit., pp. 132–157.

century." Their "known world" consists of twenty kingdoms, with over 30,000 members.[22]

Nor has the trajectory been different in the field of music. In the mid-Sixties and above all across the entire next decade, the Middle Ages became a land to discover and cultivate. During that period there were many groups dedicated to the philological recovery of popular tradition and to experiments fusing it with rock and pop music. "Folk medieval" became a fashionable genre, represented by such famous bands and singer-songwriters—new minstrels—as Jethro Tull in England, Tri Yann in Britanny, the Chieftains in Ireland, Ougenweide in Germany, and Angelo Branduardi in Italy, who sought out the tradition of medieval texts and melodies drawn predominantly from the repertoire of Celtic countries. But even Pooh, in 1973, released the album *Parsifal,* and in the same year Genesis released *Selling England by the Pound:* an album full of references to the Middle Ages, starting with the song *Dancing with the Moonlit Knight* and continuing with *The Battle of Epping Forest,* which describes a brawl between rival gangs in terms of a medieval battle. Since then, music containing allusions to the Middle Ages has become part of the cultural baggage of the West as a whole, evolving into Progressive Rock, Heavy Metal, Gothic, Electro-industrial, up to Neo-Medieval Music, especially common in the countries of Northern Europe, and pseudo-Gregorian and/or Satanist musical lines.

And now we come to the political implications. Since 1968, this passion for the medieval has gone on to color movements across the political spectrum, often youth movements, which, with dreams of power, raged against the monotony of daily life and attacked the system, from right and left, from anarchy and libertarianism. One significant reason for the rebirth of medievalism since the end of the Sixties is political. And there's no surprise there, seeing as how anything, anything at all, could be considered political back then. As Mario Capanna wrote:

> The central element that emerges is the non-neutrality of culture, science, or technology. It is the political objective (and its management) that decides the nature of knowledge, the character of science, the efficacy of technology, at the service of the proletariat and its emancipation, or against them.[23]

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22   Society for Creative Anachronism: www.sca.org (cons. Apr. 28, 2019).

23   M. Capanna, *Formidabili quegli anni*, Garzanti, Milano 2002, pp. 80 ff. See also p. 268: "Nulla è neutro. Dall'arte alla scienza, alla cultura, alla religione: nulla, nemmeno il concetto secondo cui nulla è neutro: questa è stata una delle maggiori 'scoperte' del Sessantotto." ("Nothing is neutral. From art to science, culture, religion: nothing, not even the very principle that nothing is neutral: this was one of the greatest 'discoveries' of '68.").

The political medievalism that was reborn at the end of the Sixties has since undergone many re-elaborations and has three principal manifestations. The first, characteristic of the Seventies, is linked to the desire to recover popular traditions that have been lost. Expressed principally through music and drama, it is the time of ballads, troubadours, and public theater (cf. Chapter 6).

The second form is, if you will, a sort of specialization of the medieval landscape as a renewed fascination with chivalry, the Great North, and the Celtic world. Even if this is obviously a Romantic tradition common throughout the nineteenth century, it too seems reinvigorated in recent times: it is the "recovery" of Tradition, in other words of medieval spirituality and Christian mystics, as well as myths and beliefs that are non-Christian, but equally connected to the medieval period. It is the Middle Ages of Ireland, Scandinavia, and Germany, the time of pubs now scattered to every corner of Europe, of Celtic crosses, the Holy Grail, Knights Templar, and Druidic and Viking neo-paganism (cf. Chapters 7, 8, and 9). As the first form is strongly linked to the culture of the left, the second appears to be predominantly an expression of the right—although since the Eighties the distinction between right and left seems, in reality, ever more hazy and uncertain. It is precisely this second form of medievalism that seems to constitute, in the Nineties and the first decade of the new millennium, the standard modality of representing the Middle Ages, now borne for the most part on the shoulders of the Knights Templar and the seekers of the Grail.

The third form of political medievalism with which we have to reckon is the one perfectly described by the concept of an "identitarian Middle Ages." As early as the Seventies, but with an exponential growth already visible in the early Nineties, political movements of an identitarian inclination (referring to sentiment for a singular locality, a region, a nation, or even all of Europe) have molded the Middle Ages into a master key for expressing the perception of primordial belonging to their own cultural, linguistic, religious, or even ethnic communities (cf. Chapters 5, 10, 11, and 12). This process too proceeds from the early nineteenth century—when the Medieval Era was reimagined, throughout Europe, as the historical place where citizens and nations were formed—and has never truly halted, such that even today the link between the Middle Ages and the origins of local and/or national identities is a widely (and blindly) accepted historical interpretation. In the last two decades, the word "identity" has become a veritable skeleton key, able to be used everywhere to justify one's own political intentions and supporting the conviction that the community in question has always been distinct from all the others, imbued with unique traits, original and ancient. Traits that must be safeguarded and defended, through the official definition of a true politics of memory that nourishes a

canon in which one may recognize oneself. In May 2007 France notably insti-
tuted the Ministère de l'immigration, de l'integration, de l'identité nationale et
du développement solidaire (Ministry of Immigration, Integration, National
Identity, and Developmental Solidarity).[24] In the same year Spain passed the
Ley de memoria histórica for those who suffered persecution during the civil
war and dictatorship: although in spirit opposed to the constitution of the
French ministry of national identity, this law expresses the same intent to
regulate memory according to a juridical format.[25] Finally, in Italy political
actors have several times incited the burning of books written by left-leaning
historians.[26]

   Political Medievalism represents the majority, if not in some cases the en-
tirety, of the "cultural heritage cult," a little play on words. Originating with
elitist preoccupations—for example, it is the founding fathers of the new
Europe who have refreshed the myth of Charlemagne—the cult of cultural
heritage has expanded into what has been called a "popular crusade" involving
all social groups.[27]

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24   The official site read: "Telle est l'ambition de ce nouveau ministère: lutter contre
     l'immigration irrégulière, organiser l'immigration légale en favorisant le developpement
     des pays d'origine afin de réussir l'intégration et de conforter l'identité de notre Nation"
     ("This is the mission of the new ministry: to combat unregulated immigration, to oversee
     legal immigration in favor of the development of the countries of origin, with the goal of
     achieving integration and consolidating the identity of our Nation"): www.immigration
     .gouv.fr/spip.php?page=dossiers_them_org&numrubrique=311 (cons. Oct. 20, 2009, the
     page was found to be inactive when cons. Apr. 28, 2019). See, on that subject, the harsh
     judgment of T. Todorov, *La peur des barbares* cit., pp. 136–142. The ministry was abolished
     following the election of François Hollande in May 2012.

25   See: R. Escudero Alday and J.A. Martin Pallin (eds.), *Derecho y memoria historica*, Trotta
     Editorial, Madrid 2008. On the social and political significance of the past—even
     medieval—in contemporary Spain, see G. Tremlett, *Ghosts of Spain: Travels through Spain
     and Its Silent Past*, Walker & Company, New York 2007; D. Coleman and S.R. Doubleday
     (eds.), *In the Light of Medieval Spain. Islam, the West, and the Relevance of the Past*, pref. of
     G. Tremlett, Palgrave MacMillan, New York 2008. After three years of parliamentary back
     and forth, in 2016 Italy attached legal penalties to denial of the Holocaust, acts of geno-
     cide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes. This means that such claims are consid-
     ered aggravating factors in the crimes of racist speech, instigation and incitement of acts
     of discrimination committed for racial, ethnic, national, or religious motives: cf. the law
     of June 16, 2016, published in the "Gazzetta Ufficiale," n. 149, June 28, 2016.

26   See for example A. Berardinelli and R. Chiaberge, *Università. La sinistra dei baroni*, in
     "Corriere della Sera," May 5, 1997, p. 27. Cf. also M. Caffiero, *Libertà di ricerca, responsabi-
     lità dello storico e funzione dei media*, in Id. and M. Procaccia (ed.), *Vero e falso. L'uso politico
     della storia* cit., pp. 3–26: 11.

27   D. Lowenthal, *Possessed by the Past* cit.; W. Frijhoff, *Cultural Heritage in the Making: Eu-
     rope's Past and Its Future Identity*, in "Annual of Medieval Studies at CEU," XIV (2008), n. 14,
     pp. 233–246: 233 ff. On the myth of Charlemagne, see *infra*, Ch. 12.

The forms of medievalism that in some way exalt the Middle Ages as a Golden Age and a "Morning Light," though very diverse among themselves and thus demanding discrete investigations, are similar for two reasons: the first is that in them we can see the implementation of a politics of memory; the second is that such a politics does not usually correspond to a historical vision of the Medieval period, but to an ahistorical and mythic reading of a fundamentally nineteenth-century framework.[28]

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28   B. Stock, *Listening for the Text* cit., p. 63.

Merchants and Bowmen: Middle Ages of the City

> Once past, dreams and memories are the same thing.
>
> U. PIERSANTI, *L'uomo delle Cesane* (1994)

It's a beautiful day in May. We find ourselves in Assisi, the city of saints Francis and Clare. The "Nobilissima parte de sopra" and the "Magnifica parte de sotto" (the Most Noble Upper Part and the Magnificent Lower Part), which represent the districts of the city's theoretical medieval subdivision, challenge each other to a series of competitions: solemn processions, feats of dexterity, songs, challenges launched in rhyme, stage shows. In this way, it renews the medieval tradition of *canti del maggio* (May songs), performed in the piazzas and under girls' balconies by bands of youths wandering the city. A young woman is elected *Madonna Primavera* (Lady Spring). We celebrate the end of winter, the return of the sun, flowers, and love. This medieval festival, resplendent with parades, flag bearers, ladies, knights, bowmen, and citizen magistrates, resounding with songs, tambourines, and trumpets, lasts three days and involves the entire population of Assisi, which finds itself, together with tourists and visitors, immersed in the atmosphere of a time that was. At night, when the fires and darkness move the shadows and the natural odors are strongest, the magic of the illusion of the past reaches its highest pitch:

> Three nights of May leave their mark on our hearts
> Fantasy blends with truth among sweet songs
> And ancient history returns to life once again
> The mad, ecstatic magic of our feast.[1]

Attested in the Middle Ages, the Assisan *Calendimaggio* (First of May) reappeared in 1927 and was interrupted by the Second World War, only to resume in 1947. Since 1954 it has assumed a more or less fixed configuration.[2] If, starting

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1 "Tre notti di maggio segnan nostro core | tra preziose note fabula se mischia a veritate | et historia antica se rinnova ancora una volta | folle gaudiosa magia de nostra festa." As on the cover of the magazine, "Calendimaggio di Assisi," I (April-May 2010), n. 1, p. 1.

2 Calendimaggio di Assisi, https://www.calendimaggiodiassisi.com/la-storia (cons. Apr. 28, 2019). On this festival see: T. di Carpegna Falconieri, L.E. Yawn, *Forging "Medieval" Identities: Fortini's Calendimaggio and Pasolini's Trilogy of Life*, in B. Bildhauer, Ch. Jones (eds.), *The Middle Ages in the Modern World* cit., pp. 186–215.

from Assisi, we begin to wander through Umbria, we'll find Terni's *Cantamaggio*, Foligno's *Giostra della Quintana* (Joust of Quintana), the *Palio dei Terzieri* (Palio of the Thirds) of both Città della Pieve and Trevi, the *Palio dei Colombi* (Palio of Doves) of Amelia, the *Festa dei Ceri* (Festival of Candles) and the *Palio della Balestra* (Palio of the Crossbow) of Gubbio, the *Giochi de le Porte* (Games of the Gates) in Gualdo Tadino, the *Mercato delle Gaite* (Market of the Quarters) in Bevagna, the *Giostra del Velo* (Joust of the Veil) in Giove, the *Corsa dell'Anello* (Race of the Ring) in Narni, the *Giostra del Giglio* (Joust of the Lily) in Monteleone di Orvieto, the *Palio di San Rufino* in Assisi, the *Palio di Valfabbrica*… But the decision to start in Umbria is arbitrary. We could start our voyage in Siena, home of the most famous *palio* in the world; from there we might wind up in Arezzo, where they celebrate the Joust of the Saracen, and then continue through Tuscany. Or, we could run through the Marches, attending the *Quintana* of Ascoli Piceno, and then maybe taking a jaunt to the *Palio* of Asti and the *Sagra del Carroccio* (Carroccio Festival) in Legnano, just to name a few notable festivals among the hundreds of imitators. Not to mention, naturally, the Medieval Days in San Marino, the city-state in the center of the peninsula that has uniquely preserved the independence of a medieval commune, and is quite proud of it: here, medieval reconstructions may be false and contrived, but liberty is real.[3] Even in the south of Italy "medieval festivals" are common, if less densely concentrated and often combined with the memory of the Turks or the exaltation of sovereign dynasties: as in the *Sfilata dei Turchi* (Turks' Parade) in Potenza and the *Palio dell'Anguria* (Palio of the Melon) of Altavilla Irpina. The festivals that involve the memory of Frederick II of Swabia in particular are numerous.[4]

To make a long story short: throughout Italy, hundreds of cities and villages celebrate their own medieval festivals, especially during the spring and summer. The same is true in many other European countries, with a density per square kilometer that sometimes, as in parts of France, for instance, rivals that of central and northern Italy. In the regions of Celtic inheritance, the delight in celebrations is especially evident: first and perhaps most importantly, the *Festival interceltique* of Lorient in Britanny (est. 1971). In Champagne, Provins publicizes its *fête médiévale* by reminding you that the city is "The Middle Ages an

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3 T. di Carpegna Falconieri, *Liberty Dreamt in Stone: The* (*Neo*)*Medieval City of San Marino*, in "Práticas da História," 9 (2019), http://www.praticasdahistoria.pt/pt/.

4 R. Iorio, *Medioevo turistico*, in "Quaderni medievali," XXVII (2002), n. 53, pp. 157–166; M. Interino, *Medioevo "reale" e medioevo "immaginario" nelle rievocazioni storiche contemporanee: Campania e Basilicata*, graduate thesis, Università degli studi di Urbino, AY 2004–2005; M. Brando, *Lo strano caso di Federico II* cit.; Id., *L'imperatore nel suo labirinto* cit.

hour from Paris," while in Aigues-Mortes in Camargue the Feast of Saint Louis is celebrated by reconstructing the ship that carried him overseas and then setting fire to the fortifications. In England, they even recreate the Battle of Hastings, along with a hundred similar festivities. Spain hosts a long series of *Fiestas de Interés Turístico Nacional.* In the Scandinavian countries and in Poland we find gatherings of neo-Viking communities, in other Eastern European countries the most famous medieval sites (think, for instance, of the Visegrád Castle and the Ópusztaszer National Heritage Park in Hungary, or the Bohemian town of Český Krumlov) host historical demonstrations with performers in costume, and every year in Croatia they celebrate the naval battle between the Genoans and Venetians in which Marco Polo was captured.[5]

The use of medieval settings for festivals and for community cultural demonstrations in general is clearly a phenomenon in full swing. As Ilaria Porciani has written, even today we see the:

> *revival* of local traditions, many of which, it has been noted, were invented in the last two decades. These are widespread and flourishing, and ever more visible throughout the peninsula, giving life to popular festivals that bring into play divisions into districts and neighborhoods, banners, symbols, and affiliations that do not seem solely geared towards the tourism industry.[6]

This kind of medievalism is found almost exclusively in small and medium-sized communities. It never seems to gain a foothold in the maelstrom of larger cities, where shared identities are weaker and more diverse—except when it comes to sports teams. This medievalism can attract a political meaning when it affirms a partisan affiliation, as is the case in Italy with the historical recreations organized on behalf of the Northern League. Through such festivals participants testify to their living together, their belonging to a community, that is, to a *polis*: these are political events in the original sense of the term, a sense not inherently related to either conservative or progressive positions, but able to encompass them both. Even the contests between factions within the city, which in Italy rigorously emulates the historically authentic competition between the quarters of Siena, has the function of exorcising war and

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5 N. Budak, *Using the Middle Ages in Modern-day Croatia*, in J.M. Bak [et al.] (eds.), *Gebrauch und Missbrauch* cit., pp. 241–262: 258.

6 I. Porciani, *Identità locale-identità nazionale: la costruzione di una doppia appartenenza*, in O. Janz, P. Schiera and H. Siegrist (eds.), *Centralismo e federalismo tra Ottocento e Novecento. Italia e Germania a confronto*, il Mulino, Bologna 1997, pp. 141–182: 142.

conflict, ritualizing animosity, and leading urban factions back to a conclusive peace.

These demonstrations play a significant role in our societies, leading to the discovery of a social amalgam that otherwise is not easily recognizable amid our daily routine. They create social cohesion in the name of the feast, inversion, the masquerade, and renewal: they approximate the festivals of Carnival, a liminal time of joy and mockery, and the feasts that celebrate the coming of Spring, graced with smiling, little May Queens. In various cases, these local festivals can carry religious sentiment, reinventing ancient traditions, feasts of patron saints, and ritual processions. Finally, they also fill a fiscal function, as they prove a consistent source of revenue for the communities that organize them and stimulate additional economic activity in the region.[7] This aspect, connected to mass markets and the Middle Ages of entertainment, is one of which local administrators are well aware, as they generally make it one of their community's top priorities. Each of these festivals is thus simultaneously "a public, touristic spectacle, and a secret event, that only [the citizens] can fully comprehend."[8]

But are we really dealing with medieval festivals, in which we might recognize a continuous tradition dating back centuries? Seen through the lens of an ideal and symbolic relationship, they may be considered in some way inheritors of the civilization that preceded them. In fact, during the Middle Ages (and not only) the public festival was an important event in a person's life. The joyous climate, the feats of skill, the tourneys, the tricks, the grease poles, the wild songs, the costumes, the Carnival, are all not only part of our imagination regarding the *Ancien Régime*, but a constitutive component of contemporary culture. Similarly, the important role that food plays in these feasts is part of a symbolic universe that belongs not only to the Middle Ages but also to much more recent generations, who in the massive feasting concentrated in a few short days (for example, at harvest time or over the winter holidays) find the same satisfaction and happiness that we find wandering the pubs, served by waiters in costume, drinking wine out of earthenware pitchers, eating bean and grain soups with grilled meat. And even this sense of belonging related to the jubilant celebrations—whether religious or secular—was already

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7 S. Cavazza, *La tradizione inventata. Utilità sociali* (*ed economiche*) *della festa e del folklore*, in "Golem L'indispensabile," VII (August 2002), n. 8, www.golemindispensabile.it/articolo .asp?id=952&num=19&sez=269 (cons. Apr. 10, 2009, the page was found to be inactive when cons. Apr. 28, 2019). On the commercial uses of contemporary medievalism see Ch. Amalvi, *Le goût du Moyen Âge* cit., pp. 256–260, 318 ff.; D. Marshall (ed.), *Mass Market Medieval* cit., and V. Ortenberg, *In Search of the Holy Grail* cit., pp. 225–235.

8 E. Voltmer, *Il carroccio* cit., p. 22, with reference to the Palio of Siena.

a fundamental element of society in the Middle Ages: one may recall, to take an example at random, the Games of Agone and Testaccio that were held in medieval Rome and that likewise served the purpose of reaffirming civic identity. Nevertheless, from a historical perspective, the modern demonstrations have no direct connection with the Middle Ages. They rather represent, as Giosuè Musca wrote regarding the *Calendimaggio* of Assisi, "a Middle Ages dreamt-up, imagined, and reconstructed with the extraordinary attendance and mutual identification of a good two thousand people, who transform their city into a living museum of the historical imaginary."[9]

Even if some palios are truly ancient (for example, the horse races attested in Asti and Ferrara in the thirteenth century), in reality insurmountable gaps lie between the Middle Ages and modernity. And even the celebrations that truly date back, uninterrupted, to the Early Modern Era—such as, the best example of all, the Palio of Siena—assumed a Medieval hue only much later. Certainly, they also ran the palio in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but those courts and banners did not represent the Middle Ages so much as the proud city of Siena in its modernity.

So since when have civic festivals and even some religious feasts been dyed with Medieval colors? And when did we start to invent these new traditions? In Italy, the first phase can be traced between the last decades of the nineteenth century and the Second World War. During that period, some still extant traditions were reclothed in medieval or Renaissance garb, while others—either dormant for centuries or simply non-existent—were restored, often on pseudo-philological grounds, to the form that they supposedly had in the Middle Ages. The most acute phase of this "recovery" of civic traditions occurred in the Fascist Ventennio. Among the festivals dating to this period are the Assisan *Calendimaggio* (1927), the *Cantamaggio* (Festival of May) in Terni (1928), the *Giostra del Saracino* (Joust of the Saracen) in Arezzo (1931), Pisa's *Giuoco del Ponte* (Game of the Bridge, 1935), the *Sagra del Carroccio* (Feast of the Carroccio) in Legnano (, 1935), and the *Palio of Ferrara* (1937). While Fascism may be best known for having taken the recovery of the myth of Imperial Rome to the highest possible degree, it did not ignore the Middle Ages after all.[10]

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9   G. Musca, *Profumo di medioevo. Il Calendimaggio ad Assisi*, in "Quaderni medievali," xx (1995), n. 40, pp. 133–152: 150.

10   The ideological parallel between medieval civilization and the formation of Italian identity was actually amplified under Fascism, sustained mostly by intellectuals and members of the local ruling classes. The political significance of this historical epoch was, however, relegated to a level of participation more civic than national, as if to say: the national *patria* will be represented by Rome while the civic *patria* will be represented by the Middle Ages. This allows for the coexistence of otherwise irreconcilable architectural modes: the

In the second phase, which began in the Sixties and continues to the present day, neo-medieval traditions expanded to encompass ever smaller communities. With every year that passes, another village invents a brand-new medieval festival for itself. Even these new traditions, however, are constructed so as to figuratively represent the peculiar Middle Ages of the nineteenth century, when the canonical forms of the epoch were established: this is precisely why we often see knights and ladies in late-medieval or Renaissance costumes in these historical recreations.

Nowadays, cities across all of Europe celebrate the glories of their history, concentrated on the Medieval Era. What are the motives for this choice, which by necessity excludes or absorbs other possibilities? Why is the setting almost invariably medieval, or at the latest Renaissance? The reasons are, naturally, intertwined. The first is simple: typically, the city's most ancient monuments, its walls, castle, or cathedral, date back to that era, representing an illustrious and tangible testament to the past (even if these monuments have been heavily restored, usually in the nineteenth century). Furthermore, many cities, above all those of Germany and Eastern Europe, are essentially medieval foundations. But what happens in cities of Roman, or indeed older, origins? In Italy, Spain, or Provençal France we should see the flourishing of celebrations exalting the ancient Romans. This, however, is not what happens: even here the symbols that express the identity of the community are almost always medieval. Etruscan, Roman, Hunnic, or Sarmatian festivals do not exist, or are

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construction of the EUR on the one hand, on the other the coeval Gothic restorations of cities like Arezzo and San Gimignano. The regime adopted civic medievalism while controlling its representation from on high. It did so for economic reasons—the revival of tourism—but also to educate the populace, to the extent that one may still speak of a fully-fledged "folklorism of the state." Cf. S. Cavazza, *Piccole patrie. Feste popolari tra regione e nazione durante il Fascismo*, il Mulino, Bologna 2003[2]; especially pp. 183 ff., 198 ff., 207 ff.; A.-M. Thiesse, *La création des identités nationales* cit., pp. 267 ff.; M.D. Lasansky, *The Renaissance Perfected: Architecture, Spectacle, and Tourism in Fascist Italy*, The Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park 2004; F. Vollmer*, Die politische Kultur des Faschismus: Stätten totalitärer Diktatur in Italien*, Böhlau, Köln 2007; T. di Carpegna Falconieri, *"Medieval" Identities in Italy: National, Regional, Local*, in P.J. Geary, G. Klaniczay (eds.), *Manufacturing Middle Ages. Entangled History of Medievalism in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, Brill, Amsterdam 2013 (National Cultivation of Culture, 6), pp. 319–345; T. di Carpegna Falconieri, L.E. Yawn, *Forging "Medieval" Identities* cit.; T. 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 R.P. Uguccioni (ed.), *Storia e piccole patrie. Riflessioni sulla storia locale*, Società di studi pesaresi-Il Lavoro editoriale, Pesaro-Ancona 2017, pp. 78–101; D. Iacono, *Condottieri in camicia nera: l'uso dei capitani di ventura nell'immaginario medievale fascista*, in T. di Carpegna Falconieri, R. Facchini (eds.), *Medievalismi italiani* cit., pp. 53–66.

extremely rare. Apart from the little warrior Asterix, even the Gauls are not much appreciated—except in their Celtic guise, which is still substantially medievalized. In general, wherever we go, we almost always run into noble ladies and valiant knights. The motive for this choice in the name (and the dream) of the Middle Ages can essentially be ascribed to the medievalism of the Romantic era, which established a perfect equivalence between the Middle Ages and affiliation with a specific community: this is the true heart of the problem. The same analogy can be applied to all political scales, from the village to the nation (indeed we will see this in Chapters 11 and 12), but the Middle Ages are particularly meaningful with respect to the city. Medieval cities, in fact, were thought of as foundation stones not so much because of their buildings, but rather because of their inhabitants' sense of civic identity, cohesive and strong in their unity. "The city air makes you free," goes the saying, referring to the fact that peasants who moved to the city were delivered from servitude. In the nineteenth-century interpretation, medieval cities represented, above all, the home of those industrious men who, through hard work and intelligence, had overcome their "feudal barbarism": they were the cradle of the free bourgeois and the forge that tempered them. It doesn't matter, then, that the city of stone, the *urbs*, could be Roman or even Etruscan: what matters is that its citizenry, the *civitas,* first gained its communal self-awareness in the Middle Ages, that it founded corporations, wrote its own statutes, fought for its freedom. Thus, at one of his famous lectures, François Guizot took Walter Scott to task for having, in one of his novels, improperly described a burgher from Liège:

> He [*sc.* Scott] created a real joke bourgeoisie: fat, soft, with no experience, no courage, concerned only with leading a comfortable life. The bourgeoisie of that time, the gentlemen, always wore chainmail on their chest, pike in hand; their life was tempestuous, warlike, hard, almost as much as that of the lords they battled.[11]

This interpretation of medieval history applies to a large swath of Europe, but it was thought up specifically to describe those countries in which the urban

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11   "Il en a fait un vrai bourgeois de comédie, gras, mou, sans expérience, sans audace, uniquement occupé de mener sa vie commodément. Les bourgeois de ce temps, Messieurs, avaient toujours la cotte de mailles sur la poitrine, la pique à la main ; leur vie était presque aussi orageuse, aussi guerrière, aussi dure que celle des seigneurs qu'ils combattaient": F. Guizot, *Histoire de la civilisation en Europe depuis la chute de l'Empire romain jusqu'à la Révolution française*, Didier et C.e, Paris 1856[6], pp. 213 ff. On the same subject see today: J.-M. Moeglin, *La bourgeoisie et la nation française d'après les historiens français du XIXe siècle*, in J.M. Bak [et al.] (eds.), *Gebrauch und Missbrauch* cit., pp. 121–133.

network was densest. In this discourse Central and Northern Italy loom particularly large. Since the mid-eighteenth century, the belief that the communal period had represented the most majestic moment in the history of medieval Italy had become increasingly widespread. Powerless to connect a theory of the nation to the existence of a medieval state—as was happening in other parts of Europe—Italian intellectuals of the nineteenth century exalted to the highest degree the identitarian values of the "*piccole patrie*," "little fatherlands," communal cities that were rich, free, proud, industrious, and resplendent with works of art. In a cultural universe that at every turn found in the Middle Ages a new alternative to classical myths of origins, Italy took the course of a dialectical encounter between local identity and national identity, underlining how the nation was formed primarily on the basis of its cities. Medieval, therefore, as in the medieval city: civic identity as the basis and myth-engine of the sense of local belonging as well as the foundation of Italianness. This is the point of departure, in the nineteenth century, for the famous commemorations of the Oath of Pontida and the Battle of Legnano.[12]

This way of imagining the Middle Ages supports, even today, the idea that a sense of civic identity acquires greater force when it is depicted through recreations of a medieval hue. The Middle Ages remain indispensible to the origin story and the glory days of one's community. We are dealing with a cinematographic Middle Ages, the ideal backdrop for historical recreations, and with an identitarian Middle Ages, a perfect symbol for communal identity: despite the intervening five hundred years, things aren't really all that different. Though all references to the birth and maturation of the bourgeois class, which was the battle standard of the nineteenth-century interpretation consecrated by Henri Pirenne, may have long since disappeared, the broader concept remains intact:

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12   Among the numerous studies on the subject see, in particular: I. Porciani, *Il medioevo nella costruzione dell'Italia unita: la proposta di un mito*, in R. Elze and P. Schiera (eds.), *Il medioevo nell'Ottocento in Italia e in Germania*, il Mulino, Bologna 1988, pp. 163–191; Id., *Identità locale-identità nazionale* cit.; J. Petersen, *L'Italia e la sua varietà. Il principio della città come modello esplicativo della storia nazionale*, in O. Janz [*et al.*] (eds.), *Centralismo e federalismo* cit., pp. 327–346; C. Sorba, *Il mito dei comuni e le patrie cittadine*, in M. Ridolfi (ed.), *Almanacco della Repubblica. Storia d'Italia attraverso le tradizioni le istituzioni e le simbologie repubblicane*, B. Mondadori, Milano 2003, pp. 119–130; S. Soldani, *Il medioevo del Risorgimento nello specchio della Nazione*, in E. Castelnuovo and G. Sergi (eds.), *Arti e storia nel medioevo*, vol. IV cit., pp. 163–173; M. Vallerani, *Il comune come mito politico. Immagini e modelli tra Otto e Novecento*, ibid., pp. 187–206; T. di Carpegna Falconieri, *"Medieval" Identities in Italy* cit.; D. Balestracci, *Medioevo e Risorgimento. L'invenzione dell'identità italiana nell'Ottocento*, il Mulino, Bologna 2015; T. di Carpegna Falconieri, *Roma antica e il Medioevo* cit.; F. Pirani, *Le repubbliche marinare: archeologia di un'idea*, in T. di Carpegna Falconieri, R. Facchini (eds.), *Medievalismi italiani* cit., pp. 131–148.

a community of inhabitants, perhaps less clearly defined, but still united in the symbol of the Middle Ages.

But why is it that since the Seventies—and even more so since the Nineties— we have witnessed a massive renewal and recovery of these themes? There is one primary reason: a response to a sense of the loss of traditions by seeking to recover their memory. Hobsbawm writes:

> For eighty percent of humanity, the Middle Ages ended suddenly in the 1950s, or, perhaps still, they were *felt* to end in the 1960s.[13]

These words of the illustrious scholar refer inherently to a negative idea of the Middle Ages, but they can also be read another way: certainly, the world welcomed the end of that dark age with relief, but only a few years later a profound sense of nostalgia set in. This cultural attitude, characteristically postmodern, is exactly the same one that we will encounter in the following chapter as we examine the search for popular traditions by left-wing movements, artists, and intellectuals. In the case of palios and medievalized festivals, however, this combination of relief followed by loss and longing has a different result, as it retraces an already beaten path, so deeply permeated by political idealism in the civic/identitarian sense that it appears clearly neo-Romantic.

No sooner did we realize that blacksmiths, farriers, and basket-weavers no longer existed, than we wished to recreate their open-air shops, like museums preserving traditions and trades that have disappeared. Workshops that exist for just one day, of course, without the stench of poverty. In fact, these selective recreations of the past allow us to skip over its less pleasant aspects, keeping only what we like, providing a new memory to share. Whether this memory is founded on historical facts or entirely fictional is not very important: in order to look backwards, to rewrite or dream of a past that does not exist, one must be powerfully aware of the sense of separation. We must struggle to remember and convince ourselves that the world we left behind, the world that no longer exists, had many positive aspects. This not only brings us the recreations of medieval fairs, but also the advertisements for Mulino Bianco—a place of innocent, ancient, and delicious beauty—not to mention the ads for Nutella, as

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13 E.J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes. The Short Twentieth Century 1914–1991*, Michael Joseph-Vintage Books, London-New York 1994, p. 340. Cf. P.P. Pasolini, *Scritti corsari*, Garzanti, Milano 1975 (ed. consulted: Mondadori, Milano 1988, published in "Epoca," XXXIX, June 20, 1988, n. 1968), p. 31: "Il mondo contadino, dopo circa quattordicimila anni di vita, è finito praticamente di colpo" ("The peasant world, after about fourteen thousand years of life, was finished with almost with a single blow").

good as your mamma used to eat, all inserted into "a fairy-tale past that runs through commercial spots with a series of call-backs to rural tradition."[14]

The colorful Middle Ages work wonders because they are severed from the memory of our forefathers' lives. They are magical, full of jugglers and fire-eaters, jesters and maybe even dragons. It's quite *New Age,* the opposite of that poor and often rural environment abandoned by the generations of migrants from the countryside between the Fifties and Seventies, the memory of which was not passed on to their children.[15] Or perhaps it is the dream told in fables around the fire, which was not history but fantasy in its purest state. Here, however, we are dealing with history. Without the bond of memory between grandparents, parents, and children, the past can easily be reinvented. Since the beginning of time, those who at long last achieve prosperity equip themselves with a new past, more suitable to their new status. The ennobled merchants who bought their ancestors' portraits by the yard did it, the nobles who invented "incredible genealogies" did it, and others continue to do it today.[16] Ultimately, the use of the Middle Ages in a markedly identitarian key may even constitute, in certain cases, both the involuntary declaration of a collective loss of memory and the simultaneous attempt to deny this loss—not by resorting to history, but to its metamorphosis into myth. In the *Canterville Ghost,* Oscar Wilde has the rich American who bought a castle in England say, "I know a lot of people who would give a hundred thousand dollars to have a grandfather, and much more than that to have a family ghost."[17]

Medievalism has been (and still is) this, too: a picturesque ghost, an ecto-plasmic recreation of the past by of those who no longer know the names and trades of their grandfathers. But we do need to be careful not to paint with too broad a brush. Not all historical recreations are completely invented, and some, particularly more recently, even boast an admirable philological accuracy in their reconstruction of the Middle Ages. There are associations that promote specialized historical research and oversee the accuracy of reenactments: for instance, the Italian Federation of Historic Games (*Federazione italiana giochi storici*).[18] The Assisan *Calendimaggio* itself is characterized by an element that we may almost call esoteric, not open to the public but intended to be rigorously evaluated, in terms of historical accuracy, by the judges (often eminent historians) who determine the winning party. The Assisans and the Sienese

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14   S. Pivato, *Vuoti di memoria* cit., pp. 61–74: 61 ff. TN: Mulino Bianco is a very popular brand of cookie in Italy.

15   *Ibid.*, especially pp. 38–41.

16   R. Bizzocchi, *Genealogie incredibili. Scritti di storia nell'Europa moderna*, il Mulino, Bologna 1995.

17   O. Wilde, *The Canterville Ghost*, The Electric Book Company, London 2001, p. 30.

18   Cf. www.feditgiochistorici.it/ (cons. Apr. 28, 2019).

celebrate their feast days with such emotional investment and such a strong sense of identity that they consider the countless tourists almost a nuisance, living as if suspended between the need and the refusal to welcome those who, coming from the outside world, cannot fully comprehend the totalizing nature of the experience.

Nevertheless, when the institution of the festival is recent and unstructured, and when the operative desire is fundamentally economic and touristic, the *force majeure* of identitarian medievalism finds itself in a formidable contradiction, for such medievalism should function as a counterpoint to globalization, not derive benefit from it. The return to more or less imagined origins is a response "to the loss of the 'sense of home' that one feels in great markets."[19] Faced with the alienation caused by malls, fast food, and huge chains of goods and service, the Middle Ages, along with the "slow food" that accompanies it, should facilitate this return. But the contradiction is that even the rebuttal in the name of the Middle Ages is homologizing and globalized. This is nothing new: even the rebellion of rock and roll is a product of the market, and we have all known for a while that "Native American" art boutiques all sell identical products. The model of the medieval marketplace is widely standardized, as much in costume as in cultural content (fantasy literature and cinema), as much in the demonstrations (races that quite often imitate the Palio of Siena, jugglers, acrobats, taverns, and boutiques), as, more than ever, in the objects put up for sale, for instance, fairy and troll dolls. Indeed, since Celticism is one of the keys to reading the Middle Ages in modernity, we frequently encounter strange cases of medieval fairs, palios, and tournaments that, in Italy as in Spain or any other European country, display characters in fifteenth-century costumes like something out of an opera against a backdrop of Celtic music: a sort of "Celtic fusion" that certainly has nothing to do with the Middle Ages, but is performed with melodies, rhythms, and instruments that, in the popular perception, are indelibly associated with that era.[20]

So we're talking about a Medieval Era that claims to define a unique identity, but in reality is modular, repetitive, exportable, and precisely for this reason—insofar as it is immediately recognizable—cherished by those who come to visit. At times it so happens that the neo-medieval framework transforms a place that on its own would be characterized by its elements of originality, its monuments, and its works of art, into a non-place identical to so many others. Ultimately, even the medieval village is often a global village. With at least one difference: at least here the people get together to have fun.

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19   I. Porciani, *Identità locale-identità nazionale* cit., p. 141.
20   Cf. Chapter 9.

Folk and Jesters: Anarchist and Leftist Middle Ages

> It depends, depends on what?
> It all depends on where you see the world from.
> JARABE DE PALO, *Depende* (1998)

It's a beautiful day in May. The year is 1968. Between red flags and tear gas, flower power and protests some might say that the Middle Ages are not exactly at home. But in reality—as we anticipated—the Middle Ages were there, too. In May of 1968, French students marched to the verses of Verlaine:

> It's toward the tremendous and delicate Middle Ages
> That my broken heart should sail
> So far from our days of fleshly spirit and sad flesh.[1]

Onward Middle Ages! Yet nevertheless, we remain surprised. If we look around us, the Middle Ages' role in politics these days comes almost exclusively from right-wing movements. Even in the Seventies and Eighties the political usage of the Middle Ages was primarily a phenomenon of the right, as we shall see in the next three chapters. Another cause for our surprise is of a philosophical nature: unless grafted to proud nationalisms, progressive culture does not judge the Medieval Era in a kind light, for the simple reason that it belongs to the past. The revolution looks forward: as the lines of the *Internationale* go, *Du passé faisons table rase*, "let us make the past a clean slate."

The betterment of the human condition is gradual, and accomplished through processes—class struggle, according to Marxism—that lead us to a perfect society. From this perspective the periods of Western history that come one after the other—Antiquity, the Middle Ages, the Modern Era, all the way to today—are arranged in an evolutionary progression. Medieval, or rather feudal, society is better than the ancient one of slavery, but worse than the

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1 "C'est vers le Moyen Âge énorme et délicat | qu'il faudrait que mon coeur en panne naviguât. | Loin de nos jours d'esprit charnel et de chair triste": P. Verlaine, *Non. Il fut gallican, ce siècle, et janséniste!*, in *Sagesse*, Goemaere-Librairie Catholique, Bruxelles-Paris 1881, vol. X, vv. 2–4; cit. by R. Iorio, *Medioevo e giornalismo* cit., p. 125.

modern one, bourgeois and capitalist (even if the latter may be much more cynical and brutal, its operations no longer veiled by "religious and political illusions"),[2] and much worse than contemporary society, in which the proletariat has acquired class consciousness. In the same way, anarchist thought cannot but reject the Middle Ages, the time of kings, priests, castes and an order as immobile as it was unjust. And thus, what use could we ever make of this Medieval Era, which by convention is a time of shadows?

If things were exactly so, this chapter would be out of order: it would have made more sense to place it among the discussion in the first few chapters of the "dark" Middle Ages. And that certainly would have been appropriate if we were referring only to the Chinese Cultural Revolution (1966–69), or to Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, which, from 1975 to 1979, led to the systematic destruction and massacre "of whoever knew how to read and write, and thus were bearers of that terrible affliction called the past."[3]

But things are not exactly thus, because, as we have already said in reference to Gramsci and Pasolini, thinking about the past and finding value in it is not an exclusively reactionary attitude—the "paper tigers" of Maoist thought—and tradition is not necessarily counter-revolutionary. From the mid-Sixties to the end of the next decade, many left-leaning intellectuals and artists made use of the Middle Ages, attributing positive connotations to it. In fact, Marxism has discussed in depth the relationship between tradition and modernity. In Italy this concept, already mature in the collection of popular Italian fairy tales edited by Italo Calvino (1956), is seen most of all in conjunction with the meteoric economic boom of the Sixties and thus can be considered an effect of the so-called "second industrial revolution."[4]

So writes Anne-Marie Thiesse, discussing folklore in the postwar period:

> The heights achieved by industrialization in the West in the Sixties, at the dawn of a new phase of modernity, and the drastic decline in importance of the rural world as a social category, give rise to a new movement promoting traditional culture, which is presented as oppositional, youthful and leftist. In Italy, ethnologists and militant artists who employ Gramscian analyses seek to give life to a modern, revolutionary folklore, primarily musical, that reclaims the rhythms and melodies of traditional popular

2 K. Marx and Fr. Engels, *The Communist Manifesto,* Pluto Press, London 2017. *JSTOR*, www
.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1k85dmc., p. 53 (cons. May 5, 2019).
3 T. Terzani, *Fantasmi. Dispacci dalla Cambogia*, Longanesi, Milano 2008, p. 246.
4 I. Calvino, *Italian Folktales,* Penguin Books, London 2000 (original edition: *Fiabe italiane: raccolte dalla tradizione popolare durante gli ultimi cento anni e trascritte in lingua dai vari dialetti da Italo Calvino*, Einaudi, Torino 1956).

music yet endows the lyrics with political commentary. In France, during the decade that follows after May of '68, the rural world and its traditions become a cornerstone of the anticapitalist struggle. The progressive-regressive utopia strives to overcome the contradictions of contemporary society by proposing, through the return to a pre-capitalist world, to replace productive values with those of conviviality, communal brotherhood, and respect for nature.[5]

This same tool of reclaiming popular culture through music is a workhorse of the English and American folk movements, with the revival of lays like the *Green Forest Ballads* that retrace the ancient motifs of game poaching and the domination of lords, and the better part of Joan Baez's repertoire.[6] The songs are not always of openly political content and only rarely truly medieval, but nonetheless lie in the vein of popular tradition, of the common people whose choral voice must be restored. During the Seventies, "medieval pop" was quite common even in the countries of Eastern Europe (bands like Sfinx and Transsylvania Phoenix in Romania), although such cases may be interpreted not as an alternative but as a nationalist artform—albeit one allied with the Communist regimes that, after the Prague Spring, began to distance themselves from the Soviet Union.[7]

An analogous discussion pertains to the great diffusion of theater. In Italy, in accordance with the tradition of *commedia dell'arte*, many folk and collectivist theater groups in the Seventies sought to revive popular theater, bringing expressive—often dialectal—candor back into the spotlight, while also recognizing its protest value, like the glorification of peasant tradition in the face of the lie of bourgeois civilization's machines, factories, and history written by the victors. Even if the lyrical content could be variable, the performance in itself came to constitute an eminently political act.

Aside from a few exceptions, the ballads and plays reproduced in Italy and France, as in Romania and the United States, were not genuinely medieval. On

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5 A.-M. Thiesse, *La création des identités nationales* cit., p. 276.

6 See R. Leydi, *Il folk music revival*, Flaccovio, Palermo 1972; Id., *La canzone popolare*, in *Storia d'Italia*, Einaudi, Torino 1973, vol. V, pp. 1181–1249; on this particular subject: P. Moliterni, *Medioevo, musica popolare e "folk music revival,"* in "Quaderni medievali," 11 (1977), n. 3, pp. 175–187.

7 F. Curta, *Pavel Chinezul, Negru Voda, and "Imagined Communities": Medievalism in Romanian Rock Music*, in "Studies in Medievalism," XIII (2005) pp. 3–16, with reference also to other Eastern European countries; Id., *The Reinvention of the Middle Ages in Romanian Rock Music*, in *What, in the World, is Medievalism? Global Reinvention of the Middle Ages* (*A Panel Discussion*), session of the *44th International Congress of Medieval Studies* cit.

the contrary, they usually dated back no further than the sixteenth or seventeenth century, as was the case, to name some of the more celebrated ballads, for *Greensleeves, Geordie, Scarborough Fair,* and *Barbara Allen*.[8] The revival of popular traditions, in fact, has no need to go all the way back to the Middle Ages, but only to the folklore of the rural societies that modern civilization is sweeping away. In this sense, we can grasp the idea of the Middle Ages only in its broadest contours as an extra-long Middle Ages, even more extended than the long Middle Ages of the Annales School (which ends with the French and Industrial Revolutions). This is what Franco Cardini was speaking of when he wrote:

> There's no more fooling ourselves: by now, we men of the nuclear and computer age are much further from our predecessors of two or three generations, from our grandfathers, than they were (in terms of mentality and rhythms of existence) from the people of the thirteenth or fourteenth century.[9]

In the ahistorical reconstructed past, the ballad can be considered medieval even if it is not. This is because it belongs to another time, one that is unknown and in need of reclamation: a time when people kept their animals on the ground floor of their house, dresses were hand-sewn, and people spent their nights around the fire. We are dealing with the same mental and sentimental process that led to the "rediscovery" of thousands and thousands of country fairs, knightly courts, and urban jousts.

But a Middle Ages of the people is even more than that. Popular culture rethinks its own past, which for anarchist and leftist thought is one of tears and blood: completely contrary, then, to the glittering past of urban palios. The people, that is, the proletariat, must preserve their memory precisely in order to reappropriate the tradition that they are losing and to reach the renewed class consciousness that would allow society to be reborn. Anarchists and Marxists do not celebrate knights, they do not raise hymns to the sacred order of the Middle Ages. Quite the contrary. They denounce its horrors, at the same time exalting social solidarity and the rebellion of the sub-altern classes. Their Middle Ages are made of revolts. Within a fundamentally negative judgment, under the oppression of "little lords," the poisoned gold of merchants, and the horrors of monarchy and theocracy, one's attention focuses on that

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8   Fr. J. Child (ed.), *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, The Folklore Press, New York 1957 (original edition: 1882–1898), nn. 2, 84, 209, 271.

9   F. Cardini, *Medievisti "di professione"* cit., p. 50.

social subject, pervaded by an innate positivity, that is the people: the peasants, the miserable, the landless, precursors of the proletariat. A people that suffers, but already strives for its future redemption, not yet in terms of a true revolution but a prefiguration of it: the class struggle that, according to Marxist historiography, would be waged between the serfs and lords in the Early and High Middle Ages, between commoners and elites and between workers and masters in the Late Middle Ages. Ultimately, among *oratores, bellatores* and *laboratores*—the three orders of the medieval imaginary—the Marxists prefer the latter by a long shot, equipped as they are with hammer and sickle.[10]

These are not new ideas. In fact, they are firmly anchored in the Enlightenment construction of the idea of the medieval and above all in its nineteenth-century reworking in a revolutionary key. The people have their history and it will be told! The positive aspects of the Middle Ages, entrusted to the subaltern classes and not to the dominant elites, emerge in two characteristics attributed to the medieval commons: solidarity and rebellion.

The course of the nineteenth century saw the emergence of utopian socio-historical reconstructions that attributed to certain peoples, namely the Slavs and Germans, the existence of a primordial and natural proto-Communism, a veritable class solidarity that had no knowledge of private property and prefigured *égalité* and *fraternité*. This social solidarity expressed itself in the Communes that, according to an interpretation common in the nineteenth century, defeated feudalism, and then in the medieval corporations, presented by some historians as forebearers of the democratic armies of workers. The medieval worker still lived better than the modern one: feudalism certainly represents a more backwards economic system with respect to bourgeois capitalism, but also a less alienating and more human social system, because it was constructed around a vast web of bonds of solidarity that capitalism itself has discarded.[11] Social solidarity therefore came to be reproduced in a neo-medieval sense, for instance in William Morris and Walter Crane's late nineteenth-century "Arts and Crafts" movement, with its anti-industrial system of artisanal

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10   G. Duby, *The Three Orders. Feudal Society Imagined*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1980 (original edition: *Les trois ordres ou l'imaginaire du féodalisme*, Gallimard, Paris 1978).

11   See for instance L. Mumford, *Technics and Civilization*, Harcourt Brace and Company, New York 1934, pp. 153–155, on the subject of the "new barbarism" represented by the "paleotechnic phase," namely the early, inhumane industrialization of the nineteenth century, which led to "the lowest point in social development Europe had known since the Dark Ages" (p. 154).

production that took its model from medieval corporations.[12] The powerful impact of the nineteenth-century "social medievalism" of Morris, but also of Cobbett, Pugin, Disraeli, Ruskin, Hopkins, etc., united in the grand myth of redemption represented by Robin Hood and the social pact sanctioned by the Magna Carta, probably constitutes the fundamental reason why still today, political references to the Middle Ages can assume progressive connotations much more often in Anglo-Saxon countries than in continental Europe, where the key is predominantly conservative, or even reactionary. Thinking more recently, medievalism helps us understand the long gestation of the protest movements of the 1960s: in this sense one might claim that Tolkien represented for the flower children what William Morris, his spiritual ancestor, once represented for the *fin de siècle* English progressives.

The political imaginary connected to social solidarity and to the idea of the collective realization of a vast popular project is a quite prominent motif in the film *Andrej Rublev* (1966) by the Russian dissident Andrej Tarkovskij[13] and is the political theme at the heart of the novel *The Pillars of the Earth* (1989) by Ken Follett, renowned author and English Labour activist.[14] We can even see it in the economic battles and endless strikes that inflamed England under the leadership of Margaret Thatcher, recently compared to the peasant revolts of the fourteenth century.[15]

Now, all this making use of popular traditions and of the identity of the poor perhaps would not have had a long life and especially would not have been anchored so firmly in the Middle Ages if, in addition to marrying itself to the neo-medieval style, it had not found a solid foothold—even in terms of philological accuracy—in historiography. The link between the Middle Ages and the left becomes more evident and politically relevant when we talk about a characteristic feature of the period between the end of the Sixties and the

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12   M.R. Grennan, *William Morris: Medievalist and Revolutionary*, King's Crown Press, New York 1945; J. Banham and J. Harris (eds.), *William Morris and the Middle Ages*, Manchester University Press, Manchester 1984; M. Alexander, *Medievalism* cit., pp. 67–72, 176–180, 219 ff.; V. Ortenberg, *In Search of the Holy Grail* cit., pp. 75–81 and *ad indices*; E. Sasso, *William Morris tra utopia e medievalismo*, Aracne, Roma 2007. On the concept of "feudal socialism," opposed by Marx and Engels who considered it totally reactionary, *The Communist Manifesto* cit., p. 85 ff.

13   V. Attolini, *Andrej Roublev, l'artista e la storia*, in "Quaderni medievali," I (1976), n. 2, pp. 193–202.

14   K. Follett, *The Pillars of the Earth,* MacMillan-William Morrow, London-New York 1989. In 2010 the novel was adapted into a TV miniseries.

15   D. Horspool, *The English Rebel: One Thousand Years of Trouble-Making from the Normans to the Nineties*, Viking, London 2009.

mid-Eighties: the expansion of a vast audience for historical culture.[16] Although this interest was at the time turned primarily toward social history and contemporary politics (thus to history as the study of the present), even the Middle Ages played its part. In a relatively limited time, perhaps twenty years, a handful of historians succeeded in transforming medieval studies into a discipline capable of speaking to everyone and strongly oriented toward the social. While most of the Western world was occupied with fantasy novels based on medievalizing stereotypes taken primarily from the *chansons de geste*, in France they studied the imaginary produced *in* the Middle Ages, analyzing a theme, the history of mentalities, which simultaneously could be undertaken through refined research into sources and would be an appropriate response to the interests of non-specialists.[17] The solidification of university attendance as a mass phenomenon occurred in parallel with the general diffusion of the *Annales* school's historiography, which though fundamentally structuralist and thus Marxist in its initial presuppositions, finds a compelling expression in the return to the historical tale of the *Nouvelle Histoire*. History is no longer just tables and graphs, but stories. Capable of storytelling, the protagonists of the so-called "revival of narrative" were now able to satisfy the public taste, finding the key that was lost.[18] Among the texts that may be considered this way are *The Legend of Bouvines* by George Duby (1973) or Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie's *Montaillou* (1975), which sold 250,000 copies in Italy alone.[19] The channels of communication between universities and the broader public are thus re-opened in the Seventies, turning some history books into actual best sellers—medieval ones above all.

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16   A. Caracciolo, *Il mercato dei libri di storia. 1968–1978*, in "Quaderni storici," XIV (1979), n. 41, pp. 765–777. The popularity of history books peaked, in Italy, in 1975. See also L. Blandini, *Dopo il '68. Editoria e problemi del passato, ibid.*, n. 42, pp. 1152–1164. On the complex relationship between Italian medievalism and Marxism in the 1970s: O. Capitani, *Medioevo passato prossimo* cit., pp. 286 ff.

17   Cf. Ch. Amalvi, *Le goût du Moyen Âge* cit., pp. 249–253.

18   On this topic: L. Stone, *The Revival of Narrative. Reflections on a New Old History*, in "Past and Present," XXVIII, 1979, n. 85, pp. 3–24; P. Burke, *History of Events and the Revival of Narrative*, in Id. (ed.), *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, Polity, Cambridge 1991, pp. 283–300; M. Mustè, *La storia. Teoria e metodi*, Carocci, Roma 2005, pp. 70–72.

19   G. Duby, *The Legend of Bouvines: War, Religion, and Culture in the Middle Ages*, University of California Press, Oakland 1990 (original edition: *Le dimanche de Bouvines: 27 juillet 1241*, Gallimard, Paris 1973); E. Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou. Cathars and Catholics in a French Village*, Penguin Books, London 1980 (original edition: *Montaillou, village occitan: de 1294 à 1324*, Gallimard, Paris 1975). Cf. S. Gensini, *Presentazione*, in *Il sogno del medioevo* cit., pp. 11–17: 13. In France the circulation has exceeded 300,000 copies: Ch. Amalvi, *Le goût du Moyen Âge* cit., pp. 178 ff., 252.

The common people are "without history," because history is always written by the victors. As we hear at the beginning of the film *Braveheart*, "History is written by those who have hanged heroes." And the common people, the working peasants, left no trace, such that the Duke of Auge, while he considers his historical situation standing atop his castle, almost doesn't notice them: "A few vileyns, here and there, were scratching the miserable soil, but they counted for little in the landscape, being scarcely perceptible."[20]

But in this medieval world dominated by social injustice and the tyranny of whoever is in power, voices of disobedience are raised (and from time to time, even the Duke of Auge paid the price). In reality the people have never been silent: the myth of Robin Hood, the bandit that steals from the rich to give to the poor, is this truth's greatest metaphor.[21] Bringing back to consciousness the history of the poor, the marginalized, and the so-called Other, who are so only because they are condemned by a distorted perspective defined by an unjust order, is the task of the intellectuals. Or at least, it is in an environment that saw the creation of works like Nathan Wachtel's *The Vision of the Vanquished* (1971), which recounts the invasion of South America from the point of view of the native peoples; like *The Cheese and the Worms* by Carlo Ginzburg (1971), which relates the worldview of a miller and an entire culture behind him on the verge of collapse; like the books on the wretched by Bronisław Geremek, starting from his study of the marginalized groups of Paris (1971–72), which describe and explain the Middle Ages of the slums and ghettos; like the numerous studies on heretical movements of the Late Middle Ages, understood in a social key as the struggle against the normalization imposed by the Roman Church; and like the analogous studies on witchcraft, understood as a popular and feminine spirit, an alternative and ancestral culture condemned as deviant: well, in this extremely vast cultural environment, even politically oriented

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20   R. Queneau, *Between Blue and Blue* cit., p. 52 ("Quelques manants, çà et là, grattaient le sol misérable, mais il comptaient peu dans le paysage, à peine perceptibles": Id., *Les fleurs bleues* cit., p. 67).

21   See St. Knight, *Robin Hood. A Complete Study of the English Outlaw*, Blackwell, Oxford-Cambridge (MA) 1994; Id., *Robin Hood: A Mythic Biography*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca 2003; in Italian: M. Sanfilippo, *Camelot, Sherwood, Hollywood* cit., which offers a broad perspective. Between 1958 and 1961 the periodical "Past and Present" hosted a debate on the significance of Robin Hood as a symbol of peasant rebellion or, vice versa, of the redemption of rural petty nobility, the "gentry": see Id., *Camelot* cit., Part 2, Ch. 9, *Il dibattito storico*, with bibliography. Since 1977 Veneto has been home to the Radio Sherwood station, founded by a workers' rights collective and still today an extra-parliamentary voice for the left. Cf. *Radio Sherwood*, Wikipedia entry, http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Radio_Sherwood (cons. May 5, 2019).

artists have reproduced, described, and loved the history of the "victims of this world," tracing a long allegorical arc.[22]

If these are some of our historiographical premises, getting into the specifics of texts by authors who are not historians by profession becomes a serious problem. In no case more so than this one, we need to propose effective distinctions within a nebula that is anything but clear. We are dealing with authors who have been lumped into camps or called propagators of ideas they do not share, as is the case with De André, a libertarian anarchist attributed *ex officio* to the left but dear also to the right, and with Tolkien, who has been classified, but only in Italy, as a right-wing author. Nor should this surprise us, since any work of creativity, as soon as it is made public, lives in the interpretations of its consumers.[23]

We can point to any number of cases in which anarchist or left-leaning intellectuals have written, sung, produced, or portrayed on the big screen themes and scenarios that are medieval in various ways necessary for expressing artistic sentiment or exploring existential dimensions, but that do not display—in those contexts—openly politically messages: as, for instance, some songs by Francesco Guccini (*Ophelia,* 1968), Bob Dylan (*All Along the Watchtower,* 1968), Joan Baez (*Sweet Sir Galahad*, sung for the first time at Woodstock in 1969). These examples are interesting, for they reinforce the notion that a fantastical Middle Ages was not a taboo for the left, even though it was far removed from the class struggle and political engagement. Also quite representative are the writings of John Steinbeck, author of, among others, the "Arthurian" novels *Tortilla Flat* (1937) and *The Acts of King Arthur and His Noble Knights* (published posthumously in 1976), Italo Calvino, who wrote his celebrated *Trilogy of Our*

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22   N. Wachtel, *The Vision of the Vanquished. The Spanish Conquest of Peru Through Indian Eyes,* 1530–1570, Barnes & Noble, New York 1971 (original edition: *La vision des vaincus: les Indiens du Pérou devant la conquête espagnole 1530–1570*, Gallimard, Paris 1971); C. Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 1992² (original edition: *Il formaggio e i vermi: il cosmo di un mugnaio del '500*, Einaudi, Torino 1976); B. Geremek, *The Margins of Society in Late Medieval Paris*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2006 (orginal edition: *Ludzie marginesu w średniowiecznym Paryżu XIV–XV wiek*, Wrocław-Warszawa 1971; French ed. *Les marginaux parisiens aux XIVe et XVe siècles*, Flammarion, Paris 1976); Id., *I bassifondi di Parigi nel medioevo: il mondo di François Villon*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 1972 (original edition: *Życie codzienne w Paryżu Franciszka Villona*, Warszawa 1972).

23   Cf. J.R.R. Tolkien, *Foreword to the Second Edition*, 1966, 11: "I think that many confuse 'applicability' with 'allegory'; but the one resides in the freedom of the reader, and the other in the purposed domination of the author." Cf. T. Shippey, *J.R.R. Tolkien: Author of the Century*, HarperCollins, New York 2001: pp. 190–196.

Ancestors in the Fifties, causing much dissent among his fellow members of the Italian Communist Party, and Umberto Eco, who in *The Name of the Rose* (1980) gestured toward the similarity between the peasant struggles of the fourteenth century and the turbulent Years of Lead of Italian terrorism.[24]

So who used the Middle Ages politically in the Seventies? There's no point searching in the factories, unions, picket lines, demonstrations, rallies, and strikes: no traces will be found. The Medieval Era is felt in music and theater, but usually not to such an extent that it is recognized as having a concrete significance that might distinguish it from a more general popular tradition. Only rarely was it strictly and explicitly connected to political conflict; more typically it represented one of many possible fonts of artistic inspiration. This comprehensive picture is complicated by one relevant exception, which constitutes the deepest level of political discourse centered around the Middle Ages. In the Sixties and Seventies, the theme that truly characterizes its usage on the left is rebellion under the sign of inversion. The watchword is "flip your point of view" towards the low and towards the margins, towards the grotesque, the satirical, the irreverent, the sarcastic, even towards a taste for the trivial, licentious, and

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24   J. Steinbeck, *Tortilla Flat*, Covici-Friede, New York 1935; Id., Ch. Horton (ed.), *The Acts of King Arthur and His Noble Knights*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York 1976. On Steinbeck and his refashioning of Malory's work, see V. Ortenberg, *In Search of the Holy Grail* cit., pp. 167 ff. and the collected bibliography of L.F. Hodges, *John Steinbeck's The Acts of King Arthur and His Noble Knights*, in *An Arthuriana/Camelot Project Bibliography*, www.lib .rochester.edu/camelot/acpbibs/hodges.htm (cons. May 5, 2019). Calvino's *The Nonexistent Knight* was considered an allegory of the Communist Party as an empty bureaucratic machine, and the novel contains many references to the class consciousness of the working classes (cf. I. Calvino, *Romanzi e racconti*, under the direction of C. Milanini, eds. M. Barenghi and B. Falcetto, Mondadori, Milano 2000[7], vol. 1, p. 1062). Calvino himself wrote of the sociopolitical significance of his book (*ibid.*, p. 1362): "In the *Knight* [we can see] the critique of the 'organization man' in mass society. I would say that the *Knight* itself, where references to the present seem more distant, says something that hits closer to home." Umberto Eco in 2003 expanded on some political analogies contained in *The Name of the Rose* (Harcourt, San Diego 1983, original edition: *Il nome della rosa*, Bompiani, Milano 1980): "In the course of the writing I realized that—through these medieval phenomena of unorganized revolt—some parallels were emerging relating to that terrorism we were living through at the time I was writing, more or less towards the end of the 1970s. Certainly, even if I had no precise intentions, all that led me to underline these similarities, so much so that when I discovered that the wife of Fra Dolcino's was called Margherita, like Curcio's wife Margherita Cagol, who died in more or less analogous conditions, I explicitly cited it in the text. Maybe if she'd had a different name it wouldn't have occurred to me to mention it, but I couldn't resist this kind of wink to the reader": A. Fagioli, *Il romanziere e lo storico. Intervista a Umberto Eco*, in "Lettera internazionale," www.letterainternazio nale.it/testi_htm/eco_75.htm (cons. May 5, 2019).

pornographic: "A man may seye ful sooth in game and pley," says Chaucer and, after him, Pasolini of the *Canterbury Tales* (1972).[25]

So many films and novels come to mind that breathe this irreverent air, this retelling of a Medieval Era of the marginalized, the poor, the ridiculous knights.[26] They are works that participate in the biting satire of the Seventies, which in Italy translates to the bitter laughter of the *Commedia all'italiana*. Works that may not flaunt a political message, but that were created by authors who openly expressed their belonging to the left, such as Mario Monicelli's two films, *L'Armata Brancaleone* ("The Incredible Army of Brancaleone," 1966) and *Brancaleone alle Crociate* ("Brancaleone at the Crusades," 1970), renowned in Italy, or the novel *Il pataffio* by Luigi Malerba, a "cruel farce" of a popular stamp, and the cycle of seven children's stories by the same Malerba and Tonino Guerra called *Millemosche* (1969–73; the knight's name means "Thousand Flies"), which narrate the adventures of three characters obsessed with hunger.[27] In those same years, the film *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* by Monty Python (1974) took aim at everyone: from the self-governing peasants' "anarco-syndicalist commune," to the valiant knights of Camelot, who trot about on foot while their servants follow behind, using coconuts to imitate the hoof-beats of their absent steeds.

But above all Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Decameron* (1971) is the film in which the Middle Ages and political engagement (albeit still implicit) are joined with the greatest force in the carnal magic of bodies and food and the carefree attitude of people who speak and sing in Neapolitan in dark alleys where time stands still, mocking the bourgeois, clerical world. At the time he was directing the film, Pasolini intended to write an essay he would have called, "How to reclaim some reactionary affirmations for the revolution?" The essay was never written,

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25   The line is spoken by the Cook, who addresses himself directly to Pasolini/Chaucer in the film, *The Canterbury Tales*, and recalls the line spoken by the host in the "Prologue to the Cook's Tale" in Chaucer., v. 31.

26   L. D'Arcens, *Comic Medievalism. Laughing at the Middle Ages* cit:, T. Pugh, *Queer Medievalisms: A Case Study of Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, in L. D'Arcens (ed.)*, The Cambridge Companion to Medievalism* cit., pp. 210–223.

27   L. Malerba, *Il pataffio*, Bompiani, Milano 1978; T. Guerra, L. Malerba, *Millemosche mercenario*, Bompiani, Milano 1969; Id., *Millemosche senza cavallo*, Bompiani, Milano 1969; Id., *Millemosche fuoco e fiamme*, Bompiani, Milano 1970; Id., *Millemosche innamorato*, Bompiani, Milano 1971; Id., *Millemosche e il leone*, Bompiani, Milano 1973; Id., *Millemosche e la fine del mondo*, Bompiani, Milano 1973; Id., *Millemosche alla ventura*, Bompiani, Milano 1974; also: Id., *Storie dell'anno Mille*, Bompiani, Milano 1972 e *Nuove storie dell'anno Mille*, Bompiani, Milano 1981, with the same characters Millemosche, Carestia and Pannocchia. Cf. G. Musca, *Il medioevo di Luigi Malerba*, in "Quaderni medievali," IV (1979), n. 8, pp. 182–194.

but the film is the cinematographic translation of these ideas of his, already expressed elsewhere. Looking to the past is not reactionary, but a form of revolution:

> I am a force from the Past.
> Only in tradition is my love.
> I come from the ruins, the churches,
> From the altarpieces, the villages
> Forgotten in the Apennines or Prealps,
> Where our brothers lived.[28]

The Medieval Era is a poetic place beyond time and antithetical to the present. It is real life, archaic, corporeal, so much so that Pasolini named his films set in the carefree and existential, colorful and ragged Middle Ages the "Trilogy of Life": *The Decameron*, of course, along with *The Canterbury Tales* (1972), and *Arabian Nights* (1974).[29] Death is somewhere else, a place much closer to us, in the bleakness of *Salò, or 120 Days of Sodom* (1975), the first film of a "Trilogy of Death" that Pasolini never brought to fruition because he was murdered.

Along with Pier Paolo Pasolini, the main protagonists of the political use of the Middle Ages, reread in an obstinately human key, were perhaps Georges Brassens, Jacques Brel, Fabrizio De André and Dario Fo.[30] Different amongst

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28 P.P. Pasolini, *Io sono una forza del passato*, in Id., *Poesia in forma di rosa*, Garzanti, Milano 1964.

29 See R. Escobar, *Pasolini: il passato e il futuro*, in "Quaderni medievali," 11 (1977), n. 3, pp. 155–174; A. Blandeau, *Pasolini, Chaucer and Boccaccio*, McFarland, Jefferson (NC) 2006; V. Marinelli, *Pasolini e il medioevo: fuga nell'utopia tra sacro e profano*, graduate thesis, Università degli studi di Urbino, AY 2005–2006; T. di Carpegna Falconieri, L.E. Yawn, *Forging "Medieval" Identities* cit.

30 Ch. Tinker, *Georges Brassens and Jacques Brel. Personal and Social Narratives in Post-war Chanson*, Liverpool University Press, Liverpool 2005; C. Cecchetto, *Médiévalismes d'une sémiose: le Moyen Âge en chanson*, in V. Ferré (ed.), *Médiévalisme: modernité du Moyen Âge* cit., pp. 177–188; Id., *Passages de Villon dans la chanson contemporaine*, in D. Bohler, G. Peylet (eds.), *Le temps de la mémoire II: soi et les autres*, Presses Universitaires de Bordeaux, Bordeaux 2007, pp. 305–322; C. Cecchetto, M. Prat (eds.), *La chanson politique en Europe*, Presses Universitaires de Bordeaux, Bordeaux 2008; G. Guastella, P. Pirillo (eds.), *Menestrelli e giullari: il Medioevo di Fabrizio De André e l'immaginario medievale nel Novecento italiano*, Edifir, Firenze 2012. A comparative reading of De André and Pasolini is proposed by R. Giuffrida, *In direzione ostinata e contraria*, in F. De André, *Parole. I testi di tutte le canzoni*, Ricordi-la Repubblica-L'Espresso, Roma 2009, pp. 3–11: 5 ff. A reading of the reception by the right (among other reasons, because of its "medievalizing repertoire") in L. Lanna and F. Rossi, *Fascisti immaginari* cit., pp. 136–139. On Dario Fo: L. Binni, *Attento te… Il teatro politico di Dario Fo*, Bertani, Verona 1975; Id., *Dario Fo*, La Nuova Italia,

themselves—only Dario Fo can be called a communist consistent with the political movement, while the others were antidogmatic and libertarian—all these authors reclaim the immortal themes of the world upside-down, Carnival, the *charivari*, folly, the tradition of anti-bourgeois satire, the world of the humble, the marginalized, the exploited, the vagabonds, the prostitutes, the slaughtered, who in modernity also include alcoholics and addicts. Their Middle Ages, like modernity, is made of the beggars, hanged men, peasants—genetically inferior beings born from a donkey's fart—and even friars, whose place in Hell is up the Devil's asshole.

The jester, the child of the people, is for Dario Fo the one who "took the people's rage from them and gave it back tempered by the grotesque, by 'reason,' so that the people could become mindful of their own condition."[31] The jester is a revolutionary with a social mission. He is like the peasant Bertoldo, the joker from a deck of cards, the mad saint of Russian tradition, or Erasmus of Rotterdam's Folly, who in the absurdity of his scurrilous jokes is the only one to be sincere and the only one to whom the powerful concede the right to taunt and tell the truth.[32] As, naturally, does Dario Fo, himself a mad and buffoonish jester who denounces the horrors of the modern world. As early as 1968 he wrote a song together with Enzo Jannacci, called *Ho visto un re* ("I saw a king"), which in its simple verses and melody is a powerful assault on the "Overlords." Some years later, recalling the political uproar over the death of Giuseppe Pinelli, who fell out of a window of the Police Headquarters of Milan, Dario Fo compares police chiefs to knights: "To the *milites* belonged those professionals of the established order that we call commissioners, chiefs of police."[33]

In short, Dario Fo, along with his collaborators and the theater groups that followed him, is the one who most consciously employed the popular medieval as a political weapon. In his rereading of the renowned allegorical poem, *Rosa fresca aulentissima* (Fresh and fragrant rose) by Cielo d'Alcamo,[34] and some of his other reinterpretations of late medieval literature as the work of the people rather than a product of the intellectual elite (which in reality it

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Firenze 1977. On his medieval themes: G. Musca, *Il medioevo di Dario Fo*, in "Quaderni medievali," II (1977), n. 4, pp. 164–178; S. Soriani, *Mistero buffo di Dario Fo e la cultura popolare tra medioevo e rinascimento*, *ibid.*, XXVIII (2003), n. 56, pp. 102–137.

31   D. Fo, *Mistero Buffo*, trans. Ed Emery, Methuen Books, London 1998 (original edition: *Mistero Buffo. Giullarata popolare in lingua padana*, Tip. Lombarda, Cremona 1968; n. ed. *Mistero Buffo. Giullarata popolare*, ed. F. Rame, Einaudi, Torino 1997, p. 12).

32   Erasmus of Rotterdam, *The Praise of Folly* cit., 35–36.

33   D. Fo, *Mistero Buffo* (It. edition 1997) cit., p. 16.

34   In G. Contini (ed.), *Poeti del Duecento*, Ricciardi, Milano-Napoli 1960, vol. I, pp. 177–185.

almost always was), he was imitated by the philologist Mara Amara who, altering only two letters of two words in the first tercet of Dante's *Comedy*, restored, in her words, the original meaning of a "feminine masturbation in the absence of an erect penis," also claiming to have found that adulterated text in a fifteenth-century collection of proto-feminist popular songs:

> Midway through the journey of our *finger*
> I found myself amid a dark forest,
> For the straight path had been lost.[35]

On the other hand, the Medieval Era of the *chansonniers* is a place of the soul. Georges Brassens takes up the celebrated *Ballade des dames du temps jadis* ("Ballade of the Ladies of Time Past") by François Villon, while Jacques Brel describes his Belgium with the famous, melancholically Gothic verses:

> With cathedrals for its only mountains
> And black belltowers like maypoles
> Where stone devils clutch at clouds.[36]

But these authors are ablaze with the political medieval metaphor: Brassens sings *Le verger du roi Louis* ("King Louis' orchard," 1960), in which the king's lovely garden is in reality the hangman's field; Brel sings the famous *Les bourgeois* (1962): "Les bourgeois, c'est comme les cochons…" (The bourgeois, they're like pigs); in 1967 Fabrizio De André recorded, with Paolo Villaggio, the song *Carlo Martello ritorna dalla battaglia di Poitiers* ("Charles Martel returns from the Battle of Poitiers")—which cost him a trial—in which the brave victor over the Arabs in 732 is reduced to a womanizer who flees from prostitutes so as not to pay their fee.

Brassens and De André sing again the thundering verses of *The Ballad of the Hanged* by Villon;[37] De André cries, with Cecco Angiolieri, *S'i fossi foco* ("If I were fire"; 1968) and along with Brassens sympathizes with those cursed poets

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35   M. Amara, *Per una lettura femminista della "Commedia" di Dante*, in "Quaderni di contro-cultura," 5 (1974), pp. 3–15. (TN: The play on words revolves around *vita* (life) in the original and *dita* (fingers) in the adaptation.).

36   "Avec des cathédrales comme uniques montagnes / et des noirs clochers comme mâts de cocagne / où des diables en pierre décrochent les nuages": J. Brel, *Le plat pays*, 1962.

37   In F. Villon, *Poesie*, pref. by F. De André, trans., intr., and ed. L. de Nardis, Feltrinelli, Milano 2008², pp. 108–111. *La ballade des pendus* was also sung by Serge Reggiani in 1961 and was reproduced in the a scene of the film *Brancaleone alle Crociate* called *La Ballata dell'intolleranza*.

from a Medieval Era of strong passions, living feelings, and scoundrels with hearts of gold. So much so that, writing a preface to the works of Villon, of whom he declared himself a student, De André addresses him directly,[38] while Brassens writes a song, *Le Moyenâgeux* ("The Middle-Ager," 1966), in which he laments not having lived in the Middle Ages, where he could have retraced Villon's steps:

> Forgive me, prince, if I am hopelessly medieval. Damn! Why wasn't I born in the fourteen or fifteen hundreds? Then I would have been among friends![39]

In a world that has been overturned and thus restored to its rightful order, the people are true. The heroes are the great cursed poets of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. They are the ladies who await their husbands in vain (De André, *Fila la lana* ["Spin the wool"], 1974) or who beg for salvation from merciless judges (the ballad of *Geordie*, in the repertoires of De André and Joan Baez), or who burn at the stake, tired of war (*Joan of Arc* by Leonard Cohen, 1971, translated by De André in 1974). They are the heroic and powerful women in the "feminist fantasy" of Marion Zimmer Bradley.[40] They are those who fight for a better world, like the *Ciompi*, Étienne Marcel, and the characters of the *Jacqueries*. They are those who protest against the Church: Joachim of Fiore, Jacopone da Todi, Wyclif, the *Fraticelli* and Lollards, often cited by Dario Fo, and naturally St. Francis of Assisi, who becomes a protester in the eponymous film by Liliana Cavani (1966).[41] And even Jan Huss, remembered in Francesco Guccini's song *Primavera di Praga* ("Prague Spring," 1970), which sees Huss's death at the stake recreated in the sacrifice of Jan Palach, who set himself on fire in front of Soviet tanks. Vice versa, the enemies are the lords and hierarchies. Above all, Boniface VIII, to whom Dario Fo dedicates a devastating satire.[42]

"A laughter that will bury you all": one of the most fashionable slogans of '78 was perhaps the principal key to reading political medievalism during those years. Even when the laughter left a bitter taste in one's mouth.

Today this mode of representing the Middle Ages is hard to find. One might believe that some fundamental opposition had gotten the upper hand and

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38   F. De André, *Prefazione* a F. Villon, *Poesie* cit., pp. I–IV.

39   "Pardonnez-moi, Prince, si je suis foutrement moyenâgeux. Ah! que n'ai-je vécu, bon sang! entre quatorze et quinze cent. J'aurais retrouvé mes copains!"

40   M. Zimmer Bradley, *The Mists of Avalon*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York 1983. Cf. V. Ortenberg, *In Search of the Holy Grail* cit., p. 132.

41   V. Attolini, *Francesco d'Assisi e tre registi*, in "Quaderni medievali," I (1976), n. 1, pp. 165–170.

42   D. Fo, *Mistero Buffo* (ed. 1997) cit., pp. 105–119.

impeded the construction of a political thought coherent with the model. In fact, the Middle Ages remain an obscure period: the revolts of peasants, heretics, and workers were suppressed in blood and thus represent an immature phase of the revolution.[43] The Medieval Era works if we look at it upside-down, like a world inverted; but if we turn it right-side up again, suddenly it no longer works. If we then refer to medieval sources and try to reread the spirit of the people there, we quickly realize that the documentation available to us transmits the memory of a world pervaded by a sense of the sacred. No profane pictorial art existed in the Middle Ages, and we know it almost intuitively, nor did a theatrical expression that was not *sacra rappresentazione*.[44] To connect Christianity with one's own profound secular vision of the world, one must become heretical even in atheism: we need authors of the caliber of Fabrizio De André, who rereads the apocryphal gospels, Pier Paolo Pasolini, with his *Gospel According to Matthew*, and Dario Fo, who humanizes Jesus to the point that even he becomes "a poor Christ." But we are dealing precisely with Authors with a capital "A," who have moved "in an obstinate and contrary direction."

More than that, and perhaps most of all, the competition from the right for the political use of the Middle Ages, which is more organic although in no way more accurate, has led to its degradation: how can one use the same symbols without running the risk of being, at the very least, misunderstood? Only Dario Fo continues to set his works in the Middle Ages.[45] In 1997 he was granted the Nobel Prize for Literature for the following reason: "[He] emulates the jesters of the Middle Ages in scourging authority and upholding the dignity of the downtrodden."[46]

Apart from civic festivals, the film *Les visiteurs* ("The Visitors," 1993), and a few other cases that are largely apolitical, today the Middle Ages no longer make us laugh: other medieval imaginaries have come forward. The *grammelot*, the linguistic *koiné* of Dario Fo obtained through a reinvention of some medieval Padanian dialects, had a totally unpredictable outcome in the

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43 Cf. K. Marx and Fr. Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* cit., pp. 349 ff.: "The earliest attempts by the proletariat to assert its interests in a period of general unrest, in the period of the downfall of feudal society, were bound to fail, both because the figure of the proletarian was not yet fully developed, and because the general conditions of his emancipation did not exist, which are indeed the product of the bourgeois age."

44 TN: An Italian form of popular theater similar to morality and mystery plays.

45 See for instance his *L'amore e lo sghignazzo*, Guanda, Parma 2007, in which the two tales *Eloisa*, pp. 11–51, and *Storia di Mainfreda eretica di Milano*, pp. 55–67, take place in a medieval setting. Dario Fo passed away on October 13, 2016.

46 Nobel Prize, official website: https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1997/summary/ (cons. May 5, 2019).

creation of the *Padania leghista*, which also uses the Middle Ages as an identitarian binder, but in a very different way. Yet perhaps some traces of this medievalism, which allowed us to revel in the jugglers of the recreational centers and the "medieval fairs" of the hippies and wiccans, may still be found.[47] Only in the last few years has a new progressive use of the Middle Ages come to the fore, in so far as it is considered the time of a historical opening to multiculturalism on the European continent: but to this aspect we will dedicate other pages.[48]

In June 2008, in the midst of an economic crisis, Italy's Economic Minister Giulio Tremonti came up with the "Robin Hood Tax," announcing that the Italian government would tax those who profited from the high oil prices. Tremonti provoked a chorus of disapproval on the left for this appropriation of a hero of the people on the part of a center-right minister. And naturally on the web it is easy to find cartoons in which Barack Obama is the new Robin Hood, or rather, "Obama Hood." Establishing whether Robin Hood is a champion of the people (taking from the rich to give to the poor) or the crown (liege of the legitimate sovereign who will return) is a question perfectly within the scope of medievalism and common even in the historiographical debate.[49] However, like so many other topics adressed in this book, labeling Robin Hood as a hero of the right or left, from the point of view of medieval history, makes no sense at all.

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47   Cf. *infra*, Ch. 9.

48   Cf. *infra*, Ch. 12.

49   M. Sanfilippo, *Camelot* cit., Part 2, Ch. 9.

Templars and Holy Grail: Middle Ages of Tradition

> "I'm talking to you, paladin!" insisted Charlemagne. "Why don't you show
> your face to your king?"
> A voice came clearly through the gorge piece. "Sire, because I do not
> exist!"
>
> I. CALVINO, *The Non-existent Knight* (1959)

Left and right, progressive and reactionary, craft different relationships with
medievalism. Many political movements on the right make it imposing and
eulogistic, betraying an affinity for the Medieval Era, while, as I have been say-
ing, the culture of the left sees it in an ambivalent light. Right and left seem
relatively similar in the way they use the Middle Ages when they use it to try to
construct a counterculture. A certain kind of Marxism sought it in popular tra-
ditions, struck silent and now called upon to speak anew. A certain Right has
instead sought from the Middle Ages examples and models with which to de-
fend an alternative to modern culture, to capitalism, liberalism, democracy,
egalitarianism, and socialism, finding them in the concept of "Tradition," in the
idea of the survival and defense of values perceived as non-transient. In both
cases, we're talking about a Medieval Era imagined as a place of antithesis,
contraposed to the official and orthodox models established by those who
hold the economic and intellectual power in modernity. The people in search
of redemption and the minor protest movement, "Revolutionary by tradition,"
which finds its guide and code of conduct in values attributed to a subversive
Middle Ages, are, with respect to medievalism, two sides of the same coin. The
jester who speaks truth through nonsense is not all too different from Parsifal,
an innocent knight and "pure fool." And Pier Paolo Pasolini hoped to achieve a
revolution through tradition: despite the gulf between them, it is quite under-
standable that some of Julius Evola's readers, in time, could appreciate that.
The similarities may end there, but they are not insignificant.

The main element underpinning the construction of the medieval imagi-
nary in the minds of the Right is chivalry. And thus, having already spoken
of peoples and jesters, we come to the time of knights: no longer the storytell-
ers who turn the world upside down, but faithful warriors. The figure of the
knight encompasses the entire Middle Ages: along with the castle, he is its

most concise synthesis, recognized as such by any person asked to define that era using only two words. Gianfranco De Turris writes on the subject, "I don't believe there can be any doubt that in the common, popular imagination, the Middle Ages *is* chivalry."[1]

Immediately after the release of the film *Excalibur* (1981), a right-wing youth publication read:

> We wish that this return to the Middle Ages was not a passing fashion just waiting for others to come after, an escape from reality that comes from disgust with modernity, but a vision of the world, a style of life, where so-to-speak heroic characters from the Middle Ages are seen as role models and interiorized to resist the squalor of today.[2]

The *topos* of the spotless and fearless knight, invested with a mission of salvation for himself and others—who sets out knowing he must seek truth elsewhere and, along with his small band of brothers in arms, is alone against the world, who is valiant and brave and endowed with a tremendous sense of honor—derives from a complex stratification of myths.[3] Chivalry was a social system and a system of values; projected onto the medieval imaginary already during the Medieval Era through literary channels, it had its own perduring, mutable career in the early modern age and was substantially reforged in the 1800s, when the chivalric imaginary of the Medieval and Early Modern Eras came to be considered not a projection of social systems, but a fact corresponding to reality. The *quête* of the knight became a historical truth in which imagination and everyday life coincided.

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1   G. De Turris, *L'immaginario medievale* cit., p. 101. On the relationship between the Right and the Middle Ages (also addressed in the two following chapters) see M. Revelli, *Il medioevo della Destra: pluralità di immagini strumentali*, in "Quaderni medievali," VIII (1983), n. 16, pp. 109–136. On the subject of chivalry, see *ibid.*, p. 131: "La cavalleria medievale è, in effetti, il vero 'luogo deputato' in cui il neofascismo tradizionalista individua e rielabora il proprio tipo ideale antropologico culturale" ("Medieval chivalry is, in effect, the true 'designated space' where traditionalist neo-fascism identifies and reelaborates its own ideal, cultural, and anthropological model."). See also Id., *Panorama editoriale e temi culturali della destra militante*, in *Nuova destra e cultura reazionaria negli anni Ottanta*, Istituto storico della Resistenza, Cuneo 1983, pp. 49–74; R. Facchini, *Sognando la "Christianitas": l'idea di Medioevo nel tradizionalismo cattolico* cit.

2   F. Pellegrino, *Excalibur: il film!*, in "La Mosca Bianca," 5 (1981), cit. in L. Lanna, F. Rossi, *Fascisti immaginari* cit., p. 163.

3   A vast bibliography on the subject can be found in A. Barbero, *La cavalleria medievale*, Jouvence, Roma 2000. For general works, see *ibid.*, Ch. II, pp. 40–44; for its "reuse" see Ch. X, pp. 120–122.

Historicized, as many medieval myths have been, and thus made out to be the heroic paladin of the people, of the nation and its innate spirituality, not to mention its warlike capacity, the medieval knight has nourished the imaginations of the entire West and, contextually, has represented one of the myth-engines of nationalism. This has happened in nearly every Western nation, but with particular force in France, the Celtic countries, England, Spain, and Germany—that is, in the nations that, directly or in a mediated way, claim the principal medieval sources on chivalry: Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain*, the Welsh tales of the *Mabinogion*, the Irish legends of the *Tuatha Dé Danann* and *Cuchulain*, the *Song of El Cid*, Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*, the countless *chansons de geste* in *langue d'oc* and *langue d'oïl,* and many other literary testimonies.[4] With all his proclamations of *France Libre*, General De Gaulle—himself seen by his contemporaries as a grand medieval knight—was still citing Joan of Arc.[5]

The identitarian-nationalistic component of nineteenth- and twentieth-century myths about knights is indissolubly linked with their religious interpretations, as the knight figures both fatherland and faith to the highest, heroic degree. In many cases—as in the Spanish El Cid the Champion, the French Joan of Arc, the Crusades and the warrior saints (Martin, George, Michael, James Matamoros, Louis IX...) and, in part, the myth of Templars and the Holy Grail—this Christian literature of chivalry has been experienced as a return to the Middle Ages, according to a tradition that has come down to us through the texts of René Guénon, through its Francoist political usage in Spain, and later through the ultra-catholic nationalists in some parties of the extreme right like Jean-Marie Le Pen's *Front National* and the revival of Traditionalist

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4   Some English editions: Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain*, ed. L. Thorpe, Penguin Books, London 1977; S. Davies (ed.), *The Mabinogion*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2009; Wolfram von Eschenbach*, Parzival with Titurel and The Love-lyrics*, ed. Cyril Edwards, D.S. Brewer, Woodbridge 2002; A. Gregory, *Gods and Fighting Men*, John Murray, London 1904; R. Selden Rose and L. Bacon (eds.), *The Lay of El Cid*, University of California Press, Berkeley (CA) 1997.

5   He cited her, however, along with Danton and Clemenceau: J. Touchard, *Le Gaullisme, 1940–1969*, Seuil, Paris 1978, p. 41 (cit. by S. Romano, *Storia di Francia dalla Comune a Sarkozy*, Longanesi, Milano 2009, p. 140) On the interpretations and utilizations of Joan of Arc for the purposes of propaganda up to World War II, the book to read is G. Krumeich, *Jeanne d'Arc in der Geschichte: Historiographie, Politik, Kultur*, Jan Thorbecke Verlag, Sigmaringen 1989. On works that have the French heroine as their subject, see Ch. Amalvi, *Le goût du Moyen Âge* cit., pp. 96–114 (pp. 107 ff. for the most recent political uses) and P. Dalla Torre, *Giovanna d'Arco sullo schermo* cit. On General De Gaulle's "medievalization" as the "constable of France" and "majestic as a Gothic cathedral" in the imagination of his contemporaries (and even reproached by Roosevelt and Churchill for thinking himself to be Joan of Arc), see Ch. Amalvi, *Le goût du Moyen Âge* cit., pp. 140–142.

Catholicism in recent years (see Chapter 10).[6] In still other cases, like that of the Ku Klux Klan in the Southern United States, the myth of Arthur and his medieval knights, now ghostly knights, has provided a symbolic framework to assert the superiority of the white race and the Protestant religion over inferior religions and races—black, Jewish, Catholic.[7] Even the Teutonic Knights have suffered a similar fate: to the Germans, they were the guardians of civilization in the primitive and subhuman world of the Slavs. To the Russians, on the other hand, they represent the "forebears of modern fascists," as we know from the famous film *Aleksander Nevsky* by Sergei M. Eisenstein (1938).[8] The proud and loyal Russian people of the thirteenth century stand opposed to the ferocity of the Teutonic Knights, waging their battle for liberty the year before the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, and three years before the start of Russo-German hostilities (June 1941). The Teutonic Knights are demonic beings and wear the infamous black crosses; the infantry helmets explicitly recall those of the German army. The sinister bishop who blesses the troops, simultaneously a symbol of an evil Roman Church and the Reich, has little swastikas on his

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6   A. Frigerio, *Francisco Franco e la Pietra Filosofale*, in "Storia in Network," 11 (September 2002), n. 71: http://win.storiain.net/arret/num195/artic7.asp (cons. May 6, 2019), with bibliography, focuses on the identification of Franco with the *caudillos,* the Catholic Asturian kings. In 1939, having conquered Madrid, the *Generalissimo* wanted "the choreography and ceremony to be directly inspired by arrival of Alfonso VI and El Cid in Toledo after the defeat of the Arabs" (1085). On the relationship between Francoism and the Crusades: H.R. Southwork, *El mito de la cruzada de Franco* [1963], Debolsillo, Barcelona 2008; J. Andrés-Gallego, L. De Llera, *¿Cruzada o guerra civil? El primer gran debate del regimen de Franco*, in M. Tedeschi (ed.), *Chiesa cattolica e guerra civile in Spagna nel 1936*, Guida, Napoli 1989, pp. 103–128. For Le Pen (who is well known for his veneration of Joan of Arc and the identification of France with Catholicism, starting from the Baptism of Clovis in the early sixth century, along with Vercingetorix, Saint Louis IX, Roland, the soldiers of the First World War, the Indochina Wars, and the Algerian War): J.-M. Le Pen, *Les Français d'abord*, Carrère-Lafon, Paris 1984. On medievalism in the current French far right, see W. Blanc, Ch. Naudin, *Charles Martel* cit.

7   L. Finke, *Knights in White Robes: Chivalry and the Klan*, in *Uses, Abuses and Misuses of the Arthuriad*, session of the *44th International Congress of Medieval Studies* cit. On the relationship between medievalism and white supremacy in the American far right, see the next chapter. See also the publications found in the special series "Race, Racism and the Middle Ages" on the website The Public Medievalist (https://www.publicmedievalist.com/race-racism-middle-ages-toc/, cons. May 6, 2019); A.B.R. Elliott, *Internet Medievalism and the White Middle Ages*, in "History Compass," 16/3 (March 2018), https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/toc/14780542/2018/16/3 (cons. May 6, 2019); J. Schuessler, *Medieval Scholars Joust With White Nationalists. And One Another*, in "The New York Times," May 5, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/05/arts/the-battle-for-medieval-studies-white-supremacy.html (cons. May 6, 2019).

8   Cit. by G. Gandino, *Il cinema* cit., p. 738. See V. Ortenberg, *In Search of the Holy Grail* cit., pp. 114 ff.

mitre. Yet even the hero who defeats them is a knight, the holy knight Alexander Nevsky, whom we find again in the 1990s on Russia's thousand-ruble banknote.

The myth of medieval chivalry has also had outcomes and interpretations of the esoteric variety, be they Christian, non-Christian, or explicitly anti-Christian. Seen from this perspective, they seem characteristic of those movements that—precisely in the use they make of the Middle Ages—recall National Socialism. The starting point always consists in the conviction that the present is a time of crisis, while the medieval past holds treasures of wisdom and truth. To rediscover, transmit, and utilize this patrimony of Tradition is a duty for those who have been enlightened by such knowledge.[9] Many of these spiritual legacies date back to a remote antiquity, were preserved during the Middle Ages when they were made known to a select group of enlightened—Cathars, Templars, witches, alchemists, Love's Faithful—and then during the following age remained secretly alive, through an uninterrupted sequence of initiations that have ensured the continuance of a *philosophia perennis*, of an authentic and original wisdom. The Middle Ages, the time when this wisdom was reified, is therefore the era one must visit in order to come back pure. In it are the archetypes of all things: truth, the sacrality of power, and the identity of peoples. It is the time of heroes, knights, true believers, priestly regality, and the Empire.

The esoteric currents that adopt the Middle Ages as a symbol of return to a perfect age follow a long and winding road, originating between the end of the nineteenth century and the First World War, in a phase of Western cultural history when, alongside the positivism that explains everything rationally, we find its opposite, a pull towards occultism and magic that translates into the birth of secret societies, such as the Golden Dawn, the Thule Society, and the New Order of Knights Templar. These last two are also the first organizations to

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9   A synthetic definition of the "world of Tradition" can be found in *Sein und Werden* (originally published in "Die Literatur," 3, 1935), Gottfried Benn's review of the 1935 German edition of J. Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World* cit., republished on pp. 438–444 of the 2007 Italian edition, p. 440: "What is the world of Tradition? We are talking about, first of all, a new evocative image, not a naturalistic, historical concept, but a vision, a position, a magic. Something universal, other-worldly, and superhuman is evoked, in an evocation that is made possible and survives where the remains of that universality subsist, as approximations of it, to the point of being exceptions and signs of an elitism, a dignity. In the name of Tradition, various civilizations free themselves from what is human and historical, the principles of their genesis lead back to a metaphysical plane where they can be perceived in their purest state and where they provide the image of the primal, superior, and transcendent man, the man of Tradition." See also R. Facchini, *Sognando la "Christianitas": l'idea di Medioevo nel tradizionalismo cattolico* cit.

reintroduce the swastika to the West as a symbol proper to it. Primarily during the Inter-War period, these initiation societies provided nourishment to political movements that declaimed the urgency of recovering ancestral Celtic and Germanic traditions, in order to renew society, the nation, or the whole world, ultimately leading to what Giorgio Galli has called "magical Nazism."[10] Knowledge of the existence of this Nazism concerned with pagan cults, Eastern mysticism, and powerful sacred objects of the past has reached the broader public almost exclusively through the films of Indiana Jones (*Raiders of the Lost Ark* and *The Last Crusade*), but in reality the esoteric and occultist component of the National-Socialist movement contributes to a more complete understanding of its entire ideology, starting precisely from its adoption of the swastika, an "Aryan" solar symbol, and continuing to its eschatological vision of the creation of a new Empire: the Third Reich.[11]

The desire to refound the venerable, medieval Germanic Empire is one of the keys to understanding this leap towards the Middle Ages and its esoteric symbols. In Germany, as opposed to other states, the Middle Ages continued to be presented as the nation's primary distinctive and identifying element from the nineteenth century until the end of the Second World War. The model of *renovatio Imperii* was at the center of German politics in the time of the emperors of the House of Hohenzollern (1871–1918). Just think of the *Kyffhäuserdenkmal*, or Kyffhaüser Monument, erected between 1890 and 1896. On a mountaintop, Emperor William I straddles his horse; beneath him is Frederick Barbarossa on the throne, almost fused with the rock, in the act of reawakening from a long sleep. The former is the *renovatio* of the latter.[12] After the

10   G. Galli, *Hitler e il Nazismo magico* [1989], Rizzoli, Milano 2007[4]; Id., *La magia e il potere. L'esoterismo nella politica occidentale*, Lindau, Torino 2004; N. Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism: Secret Aryan Cults and Their Influence on Nazi Ideology*, NYU Press, New York 1993; S. Lionello, R. Menarini, *La nascita di una religione pagana. Psicoanalisi del Nazismo e della propaganda*, Borla, Roma 2008. On its Italian manifestation: G. De Turris (ed.), *Esoterismo e fascismo*, Edizioni Mediterranee, Roma 2006; F. De Giorgi, *Millenarismo educatore. Mito gioachimita e pedagogia civile in Italia dal Risorgimento al fascismo*, Viella, Roma 2010.

11   M. Stolleis, *Le Saint Empire Romain de Nation Allemande, le Reich allemand et le Troisième Reich: Transformation et destruction d'une idee politique*, in "Francia. Forschungen zur westeuropaischen Geschichte," XXXIV (2007), n. 3, pp. 19–37.

12   On the monument: G. Mai, *Das Kyffhäuser-Denkmal 1896–1996. Ein nationales Monument im europäischen Kontext*, Bohlau Verlag, Wien-Köln-Weimar 1997. On the Romantic premises: O. Dann, *Die Tradition des Reiches in der frühen deutschen Nationalbewegung*, in R. Elze and P. Schiera (eds.), *Italia e Germania. Immagini, modelli, miti fra due popoli dell'Ottocento*, il Mulino-Duncker & Humblot, Bologna-Berlin 1988, pp. 65–82; P. Raedts, *The Once and Future Reich. German Medieval History between Retrospection and Resentment*, in J.M. Bak [et al.] (ed.), *Gebrauch und Missbrauch* cit., pp. 193–204.

First World War and the constitution of the fragile Weimar Republic, although not overt, nostalgia for the Reich was nevertheless present and representative of a nationalist sentiment frustrated by defeat, as revealed in the principal historiographical works of the time (*Kaiser, Rom und Renovatio* by Percy Ernst Schramm; *Emperor Frederick* II by Ernst Kantorowicz), and the poetic works of Stefan George with his Secret Germany movement.[13] These, along with the founding of Oskar Ernst Bernard's Grail Movement (1929) were the preludes. The outcome was the Third Reich: a result that was not obvious—indeed, that the phenomena were in any way linked was firmly rejected by Kantorowicz himself—yet that, in our discussion, must be considered historically consequential, as above all Nazism made the exaltation of the imperial idea its own.[14]

The new Reich, as revealed by its very name, intended to be the historical continuation of the medieval German Empire, but from a perspective of radical renewal that drew part of its own eschatological tension from a rereading of late medieval mysticism.[15] The Germans continued to be the chosen race, on a level of hegemony and conquest that remained prevalently European in dimension and thus could be readily understood through the preferred metaphor of medieval reclamation: Great Germany, Eastern expansion, submission or annihilation of the inferior races, just as the Teutonic Knights had done before. The Swabian emperors were exalted and, in 1943, shortly before the Allied

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13   P.E. Schramm, *Kaiser, Rom und Renovatio: Studien und Texte zur Geschichte des römischen Erneuerungsgedankens vom Ende des karolingischen Reiches bis zum Investiturstreit*, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt 1929; E. Kantorowicz, *Frederick the Second*, Constable, London 1931 (original edition: *Kaiser Friedrich der Zweite*, G. Bondi, Berlin 1927); St. George, *Geheimes Deutschland*, in *Das Neue Reich* [1928], now in Id., *Werke*, Klett-Cotta, Stuttgart 1984, vol. I, pp. 425–428.

14   On the relationship between academia and Nazism, see O.G. Oexle (ed.), *Nationalsozialismus in den Kulturwissenschaften*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 2004. While Norman Cantor, *Inventing the Middle Ages* cit., pp. 79–117, considers Kantorowicz very close to Nazism, Roberto Delle Donne reaches the opposite conclusion, denouncing the incorrect "analogical reasoning" that emphasizes real or presumed common elements among positions that are in reality quite diverse, recalling how Stefan George's "Secret Germany" (*Geheimes Deutschland*) was condemned in 1937 during the XIX Historikertag: R. Delle Donne, *Kantorowicz e la sua opera su Federico II nella ricerca moderna*, in A. Esch and N. Kamp (eds.), *Federico II. Convegno dell'Istituto storico germanico di Roma nell'VIII centenario della nascita*, Max Niemayer, Tübingen 1996, pp. 67–86, especially pp. 68 ff., 72–76. One intention of this chapter is to remind the reader that nostalgia for the Empire (as a historical or mythical place) and its hoped-for return have represented, in Germany, an element in the construction of national identity for a very long period. In this sense one sees an interpretive continuum that reaches to the end of National Socialism and that, without direct points of contact, also involves Kantorowicz (who referred to the medieval Empire) and George (who conflated the Classical with the South).

15   N. Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, Secker & Warburg, London 1957.

landing in Sicily, a plan was drawn up to securely return to Germany the bodies of Henry VI, Frederick II, and their family interred in the Duomo of Palermo.[16]

The principal Medieval symbols dear to Nazi mysticism—the Grail and the Holy Lance—were sought as material objects, with a view to celebrating and reifying pagan Germany and the Ghibelline Empire, that of Frederick Barbarossa and Frederick II. The Grail in particular, considered a magic object of the greatest power, was sought by SS officer Otto Rahn at the site of Rennes-le-Château, where it was supposedly hidden by the Cathars. The same Crusade launched by the papacy against them in the early thirteenth century would have been a "Crusade on the Grail," and the Cathar castle of Montségur would have been the historic location of Montsalvat, the castle of the Grail.[17] The knight Parsifal, made famous by the Wagner opera, is at the precise center of this complicated "quest for the Grail" which, once undertaken anew, would have led to the reflowering of the "wasteland."

From a conceptually rigorous point of view, the valorization of the Middle Ages constitutes one of the principles behind the texts of René Guénon, an influential author in the school of thought still called Traditionalist and common in many right-wing movements.[18] According to Guénon, the current world finds itself in the final phase of the Hindu *kali-yuga*, the dark age corresponding to the last cycle—the negative—of earthly humanity and precedes an epochal renewal. In the course of *kali-yuga*, which lasts six thousand years and can be understood as a progressive obscuring of true knowledge, there

16   M. Brando, *Lo strano caso di Federico II* cit., pp. 77–82.

17   O. Rahn, *Crusade against the Grail: The Struggle between the Cathars, the Templars, and the Church of Rome*, Inner Traditions, Rochester (VT) 2006 (original edition: *Kreuzzug gegen den Graal*, Urban Verlag, Freiburg 1933). On the question of Rennes-le-Château and the strange character of the abbot Saunière, who at the end of the nineteenth century discovered the Templar treasure, that is to say the Grail (which would have been in turn an effigy of Mary Magdalene), as well as on the later counterfeits up to the most recent reflexes of this story in the novel *The Da Vinci Code* by Dan Brown (Doubleday, New York [etc.] 2003), see F. Cardini, M. Introvigne and M. Montesano, *Il Santo Graal*, Giunti, Firenze 2006², pp. 191–212; F. Cardini, *Templari e templarismo* cit., pp. 147 ff., with bibliography; M. Introvigne, *Il "Codice Da Vinci": ma la storia è un'altra cosa*, 2003, www.cesnur.org/2003/mi_da vinci.htm (cons. May 6, 2019); U. Eco, *Turning Back the Clock* cit. (pp. 270–272 of the Italian edition); Id., *The Book of Legendary Lands*, Rizzoli International Publications, New York 2013 (original edition: *Storia delle terre e dei luoghi leggendari*, Bompiani, Milano 2013).

18   See especially R. Guénon, *The Crisis of the Modern World*, Sophia Perennis, s.l. 2004 (original edition: *La crise du monde moderne*, Bossard, Paris 1927). On Guénon: A. Iacovella (ed.), *Esoterismo e religione nel pensiero di René Guénon*, proceedings of the Roman conference, 10 November 2001, Accademia di Romania, postf. by L. Arcella, Arktos, Carmagnola (TO) 2009.

have been some phases of obvious worsening and decadence and other phases of "rectification"—that is, returns to Tradition. The Middle Ages (which for Guénon lasts from Charlemagne to the fourteenth century) represents the most recent age in which, thanks to Christianity, such rectification occurred. Classical Antiquity is inferior with respect to the Middle Ages, because it was more rational and less traditional. During the Middle Ages, Christianity (better yet, Catholicism) restored a "normal order," in which the first position was occupied by the sacred, not by the material. During the Middle Ages, power does not come from below, but from on high; contemplation and action are in balance; the forefront is always reserved for contemplation, spirituality, and intuition as a super-rational mental process; medieval science is not the mere profane calculation of data that excludes the transcendent, but (thinking of alchemy) a sacred approach that leads to an authentic and complete knowledge. The later Renaissance and Reformation have caused the free-fall of Tradition in the West. The current materialist, individualist, and pragmatic age constitutes the final and most terrible stage of human history during this phase of the cycle.

Guénon believed that a rectification of the modern world was possible by returning to something approximating medieval Catholicism, as Catholicism is the only Western religion in which he recognized the residue of a "traditional spirit." Since Eastern cultures, however, are in large part still depositories of an authentic, living tradition uncontaminated by the West, this function of rectification would have had to come through the knowledge of the Eastern spirit, above all that of Muslim civilization, which for Guénon was very close to that of the medieval West. The task of carrying out this rectification, in the sense of a return to an integral Tradition, was entrusted to an intellectual elite, a small group of people with the capacity to understand and act.

The vision of Guénon and other authors near to him stands in contrast to other theories, both the progressive and the many iterations of anti-modernism, because it doesn't recognize the validity of the conception of time as linear development but rather rehabilitates the notion, common in many traditional cultures, of cyclical time, of "eternal return." The use of this temporal structure permits one to think of the recovery of traditional values not as reactionary, as an actual turning back, but as revolutionary: in looking forward one traverses the cycle and thus returns to a better version of the pre-existing condition, which no longers reside in the past, but in the future. From this comes the apparent paradox in the establishment of a "traditional revolution."

Guénon's conception, which has influenced many aspects of anti-modern thought, is still quite present in some "Traditionalist" movements, as can be

easily observed by perusing those movements' websites, blogs, and discussion forums.[19] After all, if one reads the preface to his *Crisis of the Modern World* today without knowing the publication date (1927), one might easily consider it a text of the last twenty years. Guénon's proposal still resonates with Catholic anti-modernism, which we will say more on later, though it evidently diverges in its complete heterodoxy and openness towards Eastern religions and philosophies.[20] Indeed, in 1930 Guénon converted to Sufism, which he judged the religious practice most faithful to Tradition.

A similar proposition gave rise to some of the philosophical positions of France's so-called *Nouvelle Droite* (New Right), an extremist ideological movement (whose principal exponent was Alain de Benoist) that developed during the Sixties and Seventies. Through the studies conducted by the *Groupement de Recherches et Études pour la Civilisation Européenne* (its acronym GRECE is French for "Greece"), the *Nouvelle Droite* proposed a resurrection of European cultural heritage, a rediscovery of itself in its pre-Christian and non-Christian origins, that is, in Greco-Latin and Celto-Germanic cultures. In Italy, the worldview promoted by Guénon and the influence exercised by the *Nouvelle Droite* seem important above all in light of the rereading of their autonomous reimaginings by Julius Evola, commonly considered by Italian Traditionalist movements to be without doubt the most authoritative and influential thinker.[21] In the writings of Evola, who seems the principal architect of the refashioning of Guénon's message into a political and ideological tool, we find all the medieval myths dear to the "Traditionalist" Right described and explained symbolically. Medieval chivalry itself constitutes one of the fulcrums of this discourse.

While Julius Evola adopted Tradition as conceived of by Guénon, he disagreed fundamentally with his master on the Christian interpretation of the

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19 For instance the Centro Studi La Runa (Study Center "The Rune"), www.centrostudilaruna.it (cons. May 6, 2019). A well-known book by R. Guènon, *The King of the World*, Sophia Perennis, s.l. 2004. (original edition: *Le roi du monde*, Ch. Bosse, Paris 1927), takes its title from the song *Il re del mondo* by Franco Battiato.

20 On Catholic readings of the medieval Empire, especially in Germany and Austria between the two wars, see Kl. Breuning, *Die Vision des Reiches. Deutscher Katholizismus zwischen Demokratie und Diktatur (1929–1934)*, Hueber, München 1969. See also P. Tommissen, *Carl Schmitt e il renouveau cattolico degli anni Venti*, 16 December 2006, http://carl-schmitt-studien.blogspot.com/2006/12/piet-tommissen-carl-schmitt-e-il.html (cons. May 7, 2019).

21 J. Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World* cit. (book completed between 1931 and 1932); Id., *The Mystery of the Grail: Initiation and Magic in the Quest for the Spirit*, Inner Traditions, Rochester (VT) 1996 (original edition: *Il Mistero del Graal e la tradizione ghibellina dell'Impero*, Laterza, Bari 1937; n. ed. *Il Mistero del Graal*, with an introductory essay by F. Cardini, Edizioni Mediterranee, Roma 1997[5]).

medieval West. According to Evola, the rebirth of Traditional civilization over the course of the Middle Ages was due not to Christianity (a product of Judaism, which, grafted onto an already decadent civilization, destroyed Rome), but to Nordic-Aryan civilization, to the feudal, chivalric, and imperial—or rather, Ghibelline, in the sacral sense—Middle Ages.[22] An early "syncope of Western Tradition" had, in fact, come to pass with the end of Rome, but it was followed by the translation of Empire into the hands of the Nordic races, who in breathing new life into *romanitas* allowed Tradition one final great appearance in the West. The apogee was the Germanic Holy Roman Empire, where Tradition had "its last bright flicker" with the Swabian emperors.[23] In that institution we see for the last time the fullness of royal tradition, inseparably priestly and warlike. The first significant crisis was caused by the Roman Church, which with its struggle for the right of episcopal investiture undermined Tradition, committing absolute heresy by destroying the unity of the regal and priestly functions. After the Swabian emperors, nothing good is left: imperialism and the state, which – no longer holy – ends up a simple, plebeian organization, take over.

Even medieval chivalry, which swore loyalty to the Empire and thus recognized it (and not the papacy nor the Christian religion) as the sole spiritual authority of universal status, had reproduced in itself the synthesis of the warrior and priestly functions, as its members were a consecrated military caste, belonging to a super-territorial and super-national Order. Anything but Christian, the knights had initiation rites (the vigil of arms, penitence, fasting, the lustral bath, the dressing, the benediction of arms) and performed deeds (the devotion to the beloved lady, the quest for the Grail) that concealed esoteric rituals. Even the seemingly Christian practices served exclusively as a mimetic, cosmetic, esoteric element, adhering only formally to devotional Christianity, which was considered an inferior form of spirituality.

The most representative case is that of the Templars, "warrior monks, renouncing the pleasures of the world for a discipline that was not exercised in the monasteries but on the fields of battle, with a face that was consecrated

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22 TN: The Guelphs and Ghibellines were two factions that dominated Northern and Central Italian politics between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries. In the beginning, the Ghibellines were supporters of the Holy Roman Emperors in Italy, while the Guelphs supported the Popes. As the original allegiances were forgotten, the two groups became mere political factions with their own sub-factions. In Italy, a reference to the Guelphs and Ghibellines suggests a vicious, yet ultimately unfounded, rivalry, much like the Hatfields and McCoys in the United States.

23 J. Evola, *Revolt Against the Modern World* cit. (p. 71 of the Italian edition).

more with blood and victory than with prayer."[24] Their destruction by Philip the Fair and the pope was therefore a second cause for crisis, corresponding with the end of the ecumenical Empire.

Considering that in Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*, which, written in the early thirteenth century, was the first recounting of the story of the Grail in the German language, the castle that guards the Grail is called Temple and its guardians are called *Templeise,* it was not difficult for Evola to finalize the grafting of the Templar myth onto that of the knights of the Holy Grail begun by previous authors, even going so far as to suggest that they were one and the same.[25]

For Evola, the "Grail saga" also possesses a clear connection to the "Royal religion"—not Catholic, not Eucharistic, but on the contrary endowed with a heroic and initiative character which recalls a spirituality of a totally different kind. Seeking and finding the Grail, "the highest ideal of medieval chivalry," in fact signified a "royal recovery," symbolized by the healing of the Fisher King. The knights, therefore, must restore a new order:

> The Middle Ages awaited the hero of the Grail, when the head of the Holy Roman Empire would become an image or manifestation of the "King of the World," such that all the forces would receive a new life, the Dry Tree would bloom again, an absolute power would surge to vanquish all usurpers, all opposition, all wounds, truly a new solar order would be seen, the invisible emperor would also be the manifest and the "Age Between"— the Middle Ages—would also mean the Central Age.[26]

This, for Evola, is "the secret soul of chivalry."

Similarly to the anti-modern Catholic thought that we will discuss in a later chapter, Evola thus considers the last Traditional era to end with the decline of the medieval oecumene, that is, with the end of the universality of the Empire. His Traditionalist Middle Ages correspond to a time that precedes the

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24   *Ibid.* (p. 132 of the Italian edition).
25   Starting with A.E. Waite, *The Hidden Church of the Holy Grail: Its Legends, and Symbolism Considered in their Affinity with Certain Mysteries of Initiation and Other Traces of a Secret Tradition in Christian Times*, Rebman Ltd, London 1909. See on that subject F. Cardini, M. Introvigne and M. Montesano, *Il Santo Graal* cit., pp. 12 ff.; F. Cardini, *Templari e templarismo* cit., p. 122; T. di Carpegna Falconieri, *L'eredità templare*, in G. Andenna, C.D. Fonseca, E. Filippini (eds.), *I Templari. Grandezza e caduta della "Militia Christi,"* Vita e Pensiero, Milano 2016, pp. 225–233; S. Merli, *Templari e templarismo: un mito dalle molteplici declinazioni*, in T. di Carpegna Falconieri, R. Facchini (eds.), *Medievalismi italiani* cit., pp. 93–114.
26   J. Evola, *The Mystery of the Grail* cit. (p. 159 of the Italian edition).

mid-thirteenth century and has its Golden Age in the twelfth century (the century of Templars, Crusades, great emperors, and the earliest legends of the Grail). National states, Renaissance, individualism, "irrealism," the "regression of the castes," collectivism, and all that follows up to nefarious modernity, represented by the Russian and American monsters, constitute the successive phases of the "fall of the West."

There is a cure for all this, albeit one that is temporary and considered, even by Evola himself, ineffective at altering the processes of "degeneracy" that he judges already irreversible, except as a defensive retreat. The solution—the "straightening out" of the modern world by a return to Tradition—cannot come to pass through the endeavors of an ill-defined, Guénonian, intellectual elite, but only through the concrete formation of an aristocratic elite of knights, an Order infused with ascetic and warlike values and ideals. Thus his words in introducing his Italian tradition of Guénon:

> We believe that by far the most suitable and least equivocal concept [with respect to that of the intellectual elite] would be that of an *Order*, on the model of those that existed both in the European Middle Ages, and in other civilizations. In such an Order a tradition of initiation may still exist, albeit alongside a virile formation of character expressed in a precise style of life and in a more real connection to the world of action and history.[27]

In another text, Evola is even more explicit:

> Only a scant minority could understand that just as the ascetic and monastic Orders performed a fundamental role amid the material and moral chaos caused by the collapse of the Roman Empire, the same kind of Order, in terms of a new Templarism, would be of decisive importance in a world that, like the one in which we live, presents forms even more driven by dissolution and internal rupture than that period.[28]

And here we are, having finally come down this road to find the current knights and new Templars: *The Templars are Among Us,* was the title of a book from the Sixties.[29] We were made aware of the truth of this title on July 22, 2011, after the

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27   Id., *Introduzione*, in R. Guénon, *La crisi del mondo moderno*, Edizioni Mediterranee, Roma 2003[2] (Italian edition of *La crise du monde moderne* cit.), pp. 7–16: 13 ff.

28   Id., *The Mystery of the Grail* cit. (p. 224 of the Italian edition).

29   G. de Sède, *Les Templiers sont parmi nous, ou, l'énigme de Gisors*, R. Julliard, Paris 1962.

massacre perpetrated by Anders Behring Breivik (who does not, however, seem to be familiar with the works of Evola). Among these new Templars, some are affiliated with political movements of the extreme right that, having constructed a chivalric self-image, consider themselves, to use the concluding words of Evola's *Mystery of the Grail*, "the only ones who may legitimately call themselves alive."[30] And it is across his same mediation that analogies are made possible between the medieval chivalric orders and the SS, compared by Evola to "an Order, in the ancient sense."[31]

Evola published his most significant texts concerning an imperial and chivalric Middle Ages in the Thirties, at a moment in which Hitler's Germany was already clearly in view. The books that made him most important to Italian neo-Fascism, however, date to 1969 (*Revolt*) and 1972 (*The Mystery of the Grail*). Those are the years—as we have already seen—of a full revival of the Middle Ages, one also tinged with colors of protest. In Italy, Evola's readers listened to De André and read Nietzsche, Pound, Kerouac, Céline. Most of all, they read Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings,* translated in its entirety for the first time in 1970.[32]

Over the course of the Seventies, the youths associated with the movements called the New Right revised their mode of conceiving of militancy and

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30   J. Evola *The Mystery of the Grail* cit. (p. 225 of the Italian edition). The statement is decidedly similar to a line from *Braveheart:* "Every man dies, but not every man really lives." On the current movements that refer to the Templars and the Grail, see M. Revelli, *Il medioevo della Destra* cit.; M. Introvigne, *Il Graal degli esoteristi*, in M. Macconi and M. Montesano (eds.), *Il Santo Graal. Un mito senza tempo dal medioevo al cinema. Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi su "Le reliquie tra storia e mito: il Sacro Catino di Genova e il Santo Graal,"* De Ferrari & Devega, Genova 2002, pp. 191–210; Id., *Mito cavalleresco ed esoterismo contemporaneo*, in F. Cardini (ed.), *Monaci in Armi. Gli Ordini religioso-militari dai Templari alla battaglia di Lepanto: Storia ed Arte*, Retablo, Roma 2005, pp. 160–168; L. Lanna and F. Rossi, *Fascisti immaginari* cit., pp. 153–158 e 459–470; R. Facchini, *Il neocatarismo. Genesi e sviluppo di un mito ereticale (secoli XIX–XXI)*, in "Società e storia," 143 (2014), pp. 33–67. On the long history of Templarism, which starts in the sixteenth century and has seen a number of variants, as well as Templaristic works so common today and links with the "seditious plots," see F. Cardini, *Templari e templarismo* cit., pp. 121–151; A. Nicolotti, *I Templari e la Sindone. Storia di un falso*, Salerno Editrice, Roma 2011; T. di Carpegna Falconieri, *L'eredità templare* cit.; S. Merli, *Templari e templarismo* cit.

31   J. Evola, *Le SS, guardia e "ordine" della rivoluzione crociuncinata*, in "La vita italiana," December 1938, n. ed. Raido, Roma s.a.; see M. Revelli, *Il medioevo della Destra* cit., p. 133; G. De Turris, *Elogio e difesa di Julius Evola: il barone e i terroristi*, pref. by G. Galli, Edizioni Mediterranee, Roma 1997, pp. 63 ff.

32   J.R.R. Tolkien, *Il signore degli anelli*, Rusconi, Milano 1970. On Tolkien's reception by Italian circles of the far right see G. De Turris, *L'immaginario medievale* cit.; L. Lanna and F. Rossi, *Fascisti immaginari* cit., pp. 219–224; L. Del Corso and P. Pecere, *L'anello che non tiene* cit.

presenting it in symbolic forms. Fascism's beloved symbols of the lictors' *fasces* and the Roman salute, its exaltation of the *Ventennio* and the Italian Social Republic, were joined by Evolian models and the exaltation of Nordic, Celtic, and chivalric traditions, for which the role of "creator of myth" was attributed primarily to Tolkien. In the Tolkienian universe, there are indeed many elements that may be appropriated as answers to the New Right's prayers. Among them is the perennial struggle between good and evil, which Tolkien narrates as the victorious battle between the free peoples of the West and the Dark Lord, with his monstrous Orcs that come from the East: it is the war of Gondor and Rohan against Mordor that would become, in the unfolding allegory, the struggle between traditional Europe and the Soviet Union. Then there are the existential dimension of the journey and the trial, and the role of the Fellowship of the Ring, which represents the small groups of free, heroic, faithful, and courageous beings capable of vanquishing evil by flushing it out of even its bleakest depths. There is, moreover, the concept of Middle Earth's decadence, told through a chronology subdivided into four Ages of the world, through the memory of places of perfect and remote antiquity (Numenor and the Undying Lands), through participation in the history of superior races (Elves, Dwarves, the Men of ancient kingdoms) and, vice versa, through the degeneration of the Elves into Orcs, the description of the horrors that Sauron wreaks on the lands and minds that are subjected to him and what Saruman does to the little, green Shire that winds up in his clutches. There is, still yet, the myth of defending to the death, the glory of throwing yourself into desperate conditions in the sieges of Gondolin, Helm's Deep, and Minas Tirith. Finally, there is the most ancient myth of the return of the hidden king, rendered through symbolic archetypes: the deep roots that do not freeze, the White Tree of Gondor that shall bloom again, the broken sword that is reforged, and above all else, the character of Aragorn, the warrior king who, like a leader (*duce*), is predestined to reign.[33]

It is not difficult to glimpse, in these elements of Tolkien's myth, a symmetry with what we find in Evola (who, for instance, also uses the metaphor of the Dry Tree). Which is not to say that Tolkien sought to attribute this kind of political meaning to his work: in fact he explicitly eschewed allegory and moreover blamed Nazism for having perverted the Nordic spirit.[34] It does, however,

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33   Y.-M. Bercé, *Le roi caché. Mythes politiques populaires dans l'Europe moderne*, Fayard, Paris 1990. TN: *Duce* was the title assumed by Benito Mussolini as the leader of Italy's Fascist Party.

34   J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* cit., pref. to the second edition (1966), unpublished in Italy until 2003 (Bompiani, Milano), pp. 10–11: "As for any inner meaning or 'message,' it has in the intention of the author none. It is neither allegorical nor topical [...]. Other

Dean—and clearly so—that Tolkien, a Germanic philologist *cum* author of fantasy literature, had produced precisely the same mythic and literary content that already underpinned Evolian considerations of Tradition. Unlike in other countries, it was precisely the filter of Evola's writings that allowed Tolkien's work to be embraced by the Italian New Right. And this assimilation itself was the reason why, on the left, Tolkien was considered (but again, only in Italy) a reactionary and fascist author. As De Turris writes regarding the reception of *The Lord of the Rings* and its "other world completely realized and realistic":

> From this, from its characters, its implicit and explicit themes, every reader is able to draw out the aspect (or aspects) most dear to him: the rural, anti-industrial, and ecological mirage; the sense of heroism and duty fulfilled, of the mission and camaraderie; spirituality, mysticism, and a profound sacrality; a new liberty in relation to Nature; the dimension of wonder; the esoteric symbolism.[35]

The adoption of Tolkienian mythology on the part of Italian neofascism had a significant impact above all in the second half of the Seventies: there were, from 1977 to 1980, three different "Hobbit Camps," national gatherings in which new musical groups met and previously unthinkable youth organizations were created. In their wake followed, albeit on a much smaller scale, the Gatherings of Elrond and the Gatherings of the Shire. Tolkien's epic similarly gave names to many magazines and specialized publishing houses in an obviously ideological mold: like the magazine *Eowyn,* founded in 1976 and named after the warrior princess of Rohan who kills the King of the Nazgûl.

The political recruitment of Tolkien by the New Right was highly significant, not only because it furnished a new repertoire of images that rendered many historical references of the Italian Social Movement obsolete, but above all because the status of Tolkien's literature as a mass phenomenon created for the

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arrangements could be devised according to the tastes or views of those who like allegory or topical reference. But I cordially dislike allegory in all its manifestations, and always have done so since I grew old and wary enough to detect its presence. I much prefer history, true or feigned, with its varied applicability to the thought and experience of readers." Cf. P. Gulisano, *Tolkien. Il mito e la grazia* cit., pp. 175–177; L. Del Corso and P. Pecere, *L'anello che non tiene* cit., pp. 90, 126–128; A. Cortellessa, *Quando mettono mano alla pistola sfodero subito la cultura, Postfazione, ibid.*, pp. 203–217: 211–213; C. Medail, *Tolkien: Non cercate la politica tra gli elfi*, in "Corriere della Sera," Nov. 1, 2003, p. 31. See also *J. R. R. Tolkien*, Wikipedia entry, paragraph *Politics and Race*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/J._R._R._ Tolkien (cons. May 6, 2019), as well as C.A. Leibiger, *German Race Laws*, entry for M.D.C. Drout (ed.), *J. R. R. Tolkien Encyclopedia* cit., p. 237.

35   G. De Turris, *L'immaginario medievale* cit., p. 108.

first time a correspondence between the cultural references of a small political group and those of a much wider public, otherwise completely separate. Tolkien, in effect, "brought the young Right out of the ghetto."[36]

Thus, a substantial portion of our notion of a chivalric, esoteric Middle Ages and its potential usage in a political key passes, in Italy, through the reading of Tolkien and, concomitantly, of Evola.[37] Starting with the generation of '68, it comes down to us today primarily through musical groups. Various neo-fascist "alternative music" or "identity rock" bands take their names from Tolkienian myths: for instance La Compagnia dell'Anello ("The Fellowship of the Ring"; est. 1976). Some bands were either reconstituted or founded during the Nineties, with reference to the same imaginary world: Contea ("Shire"), Terre di Mezzo ("Middle Earths"), Contea Modern European Folk. Other groups refer directly to the chivalric imaginary: think, for instance, of Amici del Vento ("Friends of the Wind," est. 1975) and their song *Scudiero* (or *Bianco Scudiero*, "White Squire"), or 270bis, a band founded in 1993 by Marcello De Angelis (a member of the Italian Parliament from the People of Freedom party, 2008–2013) that derives its name from the article of the Penal Code opposing subversive organizations and that is known for songs like *Oceano di guerrieri* ("Ocean of Warriors") and *Non nobis Domine*, the latter on the subject of Templars: "Jacques de Molay, now as yesterday, your holy knights do not tremble on the braziers."

After the Italian Social Movement[38] turned into the National Alliance (1994), and then merged with the People of Freedom (2009),[39] hard-right neo-fascist movements became marginalized and fragmentary—but not, however, irrelevant, above all because they express themselves through pre-political

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36   L. Lanna and F. Rossi, *Fascisti immaginari* cit., p. 223. On the history of Italian neo-Fascist movements see N. Rao, *La Fiamma e la Celtica*, Sperling & Kupfer, Milano 2006.

37   The *querelle* over the politicized use of Tolkien in Italy is still going. Other than the book by L. Del Corso and P. Pecere, *L'anello che non tiene* cit., see A.M. Orecchia, *I cacciatori di Frodo. Tolkien tra destra e sinistra nella stampa italiana*, in C. Bonvecchio (ed.), *La filosofia del Signore degli anelli*, Mimesis, Milano-Udine 2008, pp. 153–179. See also, for instance, the skirmish between Roberto Arduini and Gianfranco De Turris: G. De Turris, *Scoop dell'Unità: gli Hobbit sono di sinistra*, in "il Giornale," Jan. 8, 2010, p. 31; R. Arduini, *Liberate Tolkien da De Turris*, in "l'Unità," Jan. 13, 2010, p. 37. See also L. Pellegrini, *Compagno Hobbit. Riprendiamoci Tolkien, non è di destra*, in "la Repubblica," May 20, 2010, pp. 44–45.

38   TN: The Italian Social Movement (*Movimento Sociale Italiano*), also known by its acronym MSI, was founded in 1946 by supporters of Mussolini to continue the fascist political legacy in Italy. In 1972 it was renamed Italian Social Movement—National Right (*Movimento Sociale Italiano—Destra Nazionale*), or MSI-DN.

39   TN: The People of Freedom (*Il Popolo della Libertà*, PDL) split apart in 2013 into *Forza Italia* (FI), the Brothers of Italy (*Fratelli d'Italia*, FDI), and the now-defunct New Center-Right (*Nuovo Centrodestra*, NCD).

signs of an identitarian nature: skinheads, soccer hooligans (*ultras*). They act from an extremist position and propose an alternative culture, even in a political landscape that as a whole seems ever more oriented towards the right.

A medievalism in many ways similar to that of "Tradition" can be seen in the idealization of the Middle Ages that—regardless of political orientation—imposes itself today with ever greater force. I'm talking about the popularity among a broad public of esoteric and symbolic interpretations, a popularity whose significance is not lost on current post-fascists. Thus, for instance, in the book *Fascisti immaginari* ("Imaginary Fascists") we read these words in reference to the esotericism of the Sixties and Seventies:

> They were the intellectual premises of what, in the global imaginary, would be the style of *The X-Files* and *Indiana Jones* and, in Italy, would inspire the successful television program *Stargate*, created by Roberto Giacobbo and Fabio Andriola [...] the road, ultimately, has been long: it took the entire twentieth century, but in the end esotericism came into the public eye. From the bourgeois salons of the early century, to the meetings of *carbonari* between the two wars and the neo-fascist coteries of the 1950s, almost approaching semi-officiality in the Seventies with Elémire Zolla's magazine *Conoscenza religiosa* and many books of Rusconi and Adelphi, esotericism has finally come to dominate the popular imaginary through films, novels, and comics.[40]

Behind this homologization we can perceive structural and long-lasting processes: a reconciliation of very distant positions, including under the sign of adherence to a Traditionalist Catholicism, and an ever more widespread return to interpretative positions that are not only religious but even magical in character. These positions certainly bring greater attention to the sphere of the sacred and mythical, but at the same time, when taken to extremes, they impose exclusively symbolic interpretations on the world, interpretations that are no longer determined by sensory experience nor by investigation and the results of research (necessarily subject to correction).[41] Among the symbols employed, Templars, chivalry, sacred regality, Holy Grail, and Tolkien are always the most prominent.

Given the significance and complexity of the phenomenon of Traditionalist medievalism, at this point in our analysis it seems opportune to reflect

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40   L. Lanna and F. Rossi, *Fascisti immaginari* cit., p. 157.

41   Cf. M. Caffiero, *Miracoli e storia*, in "Micromega," XXII (December 2007), supplement, pp. 126–133; U. Eco, *Turning Back the Clock* cit. (pp. 105 ff. and 261–278 of the Italian edition).

extensively on that "sense of history" which, in reality, it does not possess. The dominant interpretation today of the Middle Ages (and of other exotic and ancient civilizations like the Egyptians or the Maya) on the part of mass culture is very similar to the one we just considered: the Medieval Era is seen as an arcane time of deep mysteries, mysteries that may still survive. Many widely viewed television programs present the Middle Ages in a fundamentally different way than they do the twentieth century. The twentieth century is described in documentaries, through a continuous sequence of facts, coherent in development, provided by first-person testimonies delivered by those who have seen and lived it. At least (but not only) from this point of view, such documentaries can still be readily assimilated into historical culture because their methodological cornerstones are primary sources and diachronic development.[42] The TV Middle Ages are quite different. They are a mystery to unravel. Often, the key to their decipherment lies in the Templar myth and the closely related one of the Holy Grail, or else it lies in heresies, Cathars, alchemists, mages, witches, Frederick II, and all the kings that sleep beneath the mountain. It is a spectacularization of history, certainly, and it is also something more.[43]

To explain the spread of all these ways of approaching the idea of the Middle Ages, one can and must invoke the lack of certainty, the crisis of the idea of progress, and the loss of faith in the full and positive rationality of man that drove the entire twentieth century. In this sense, medievalism is quite New Age, and yet its utilization by exponents of the extreme right of "Tradition" seems not dissimilar to that of either ultra-conservative Catholics or those adepts of "new religions," such that from this particular point of view (but in reality many others as well) the opposition and distinction between right and left, so well-defined in the Seventies, seems ever less clear. Not, however, in the sense of a widespread accumulation of progressive themes and sensibilities: quite the contrary. We find that our bulimic age of consumer goods also has a desperate and highly disordered yearning for the irrational—almost as if, despite science's promise to explain and understand all things, we can sense that part of humanity that by its nature can neither be explained nor understood in rational terms. One of the roles of an organized and widely followed religion is

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42 That they consist of a jumble of documentation and fiction, that the documentary films themselves were in large part cases of propaganda, and finally that the collage of documents demonstrates a biased linearity of development that is quite hard to accept from a historical point of view, are questions beyond the scope of this book. In French there is a play on words between *documentaire* (documentary film) and *documenteur* (docu-liar, mockumentary).

43 Cf. M. Caffiero, *Libertà di ricerca* cit., pp. 3–16; F. Olivo, *Storia. Il grande spettacolo*, in "Il Messaggero," Jan. 3, 2010, p. 21.

to offer a structure of rites and symbols that can serve as a sensible expression of all that. Apart from the revival of traditional Catholicism encountered in several countries, this symbolic structure in the West is largely diminished, leaving a void that tends to be refilled with whatever the market offers. The myth of Paradise Lost (or more prosaically, of childhood innocence lost), sparks an interest in the past, a past dressed up in garments of ineffable perfection. The druids were sages and ecologists, the ancient wisdom has been lost, and so on. We believe much more in the medieval saying, "the world is growing old," than did our grandparents. In this sense, we feel a sort of "sympathy" with the Middle Ages. In short, the average Western citizen is psychologically starved of a "sense of mystery" and a "myth of a Golden Age." The Middle Ages that exists today is thus mostly a post-modern Middle Ages, a benchmark for a culture that considers the vision of the world as ordered progress to be a totally lost cause. From this perspective, it holds hardly any interest as a historical period even as it assumes the giant's role as a myth. Adopting the fundamental distinction seen in the texts of Mircea Eliade, Claude Lévi-Strauss, René Guénon, and numerous other scholars of anthropology and the history of religions, today the Middle Ages are conceived entirely within the category of mythic time rather than historical time.[44]

Behind this use of the Middle Ages, many scholars read a generalized loss of the sense of history. The mythic use of the Middle Ages corresponds to the non-knowledge that we have of all of history, from the ancient to the modern.[45] Today, medieval history is seen as located in an elsewhere, in a space/time that is fixed, deprived of diachronic coordinates and, exactly like the classical, "segmented […] in minimal units, decontextualized and arbitrarily reusable": in this, Doric columns are equivalent to Knights Templar.[46] Its use is of a symbolic and allegorical nature and its primary function is not that of reestablishing some certainty of the past, but of capturing its nexus with modernity through archetypal *figurae*. Ultimately, the discourse that commonly unfolds

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44   See in general L. Arcella, P. Pisi, and R. Scagno (eds.), *Confronto con Mircea Eliade: archetipi mitici e identità storica*, Jaca Book, Milano 1998; *Tempo del mito—Tempo della storia*. Italian-French workshop, Roma, École française de Rome, February-May 2009, February-May 2010.

45   Cf. S. Settis, *The Future of the "Classical"* cit. (especially pp. 109 ff. of the Italian edition); S. Pivato, *Vuoti di memoria* cit., *passim*; A. Scurati, *Un uomo senza storia*, in "La Stampa," Aug. 26, 2008, p. 31; P. Monnet, *Introduction* cit., p. 18. On the rejection of history by the UK's current political class: M. Alexander, *Medievalism* cit., pp. 255 ff. A harsh judgment that takes aim at the entire relationship between politics and culture and between criticism and dogmatism is expressed by A. Asor Rosa, *Il grande silenzio: intervista sugli intellettuali*, ed. S. Fiori, Laterza, Roma-Bari 2009.

46   S. Settis, *The Future of the "Classical"* cit. (pp. 23 ff. of the Italian edition).

today around the Middle Ages is not historical, but magico-religious in nature.[47] As a result, the interpretative categories predominant in our "common sense of the Middle Ages" are those that make use of symbolic analogy—that is, a similarity between two or more elements that allows for the representation of structural links between them on a basis that may be called shamanic, magical, homeopathic, and even poetic, but absolutely not historical and not scientific. A mandrake root must have an effect on human health, not because it is poisonous, but because it looks like a little person. Not because one can empirically analyze the chemical processes caused by its ingestion, but because it encapsulates a formal analogy between two objects.

Precisely for this reason, the selection of sources useful for grasping the deep meaning of that period could equally include testimonies produced back then, like the *chansons de geste* or the Norse *Eddas,* and—completely erroneously—their later revisitations: the courtly romances rewritten in the 1800s, fantasy films and literature, echoes and redundant mirror images of apparently dissimilar objects, a position that arranges everything on the same plane and doesn't allow for any hierarchies. Often, a reader faced with one of Chrétien de Troyes's romances—from the twelfth century—is unable to distinguish it from stories written in the modern age, from Tolkien's novels and fantasy literature. The necessity of grasping the difference between a historical knight, a knight imagined by a medieval author, and a fairy-tale knight reinvented in the nineteenth or twentieth century is ignored, because what is worth understanding, and what is truly fascinating, is the archetype of the knight.[48]

The Middle Ages are sensed to be a transfiguration of infancy, an existential and philosophical alternative to contemporary banality, a time of immortal values: those who approach the problem of the Middle Ages as a *topos* are fully aware of that. In other words, the myth is a real fact and should be understood as such. Gianfranco De Turris, for instance, writes:

> The Middle Ages are not just a historical *topos* [...]; but also a symbolic, mythic, and if you will, spiritual *topos*, and consequently it is possible to

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47 Cf. G. Musca, *"L'altro medioevo" nei "Quaderni medievali,"* in *Il sogno del medioevo* cit., pp. 19–32: 27.

48 Cf. L. Del Corso and P. Pecere, *L'anello che non tiene* cit., pp. 132–157, on the interpretation of fantasy literature, including the most grossly commercial, as "authentic" myth. Perhaps not many know that the character of Wart, that is, the young Arthur who is still doesn't know he is destined to rule, was created by Terence Hanbury White in the novel *The Once and Future King,* Collins, London 1958, and made famous by Disney's *The Sword in the Stone* (1963), but does not exist as such in medieval literature.

interpret it as such with instruments besides those of pure and simple "historical" analysis.[49]

Even though historical analysis is unfortunately not pure and not simple, this reasoning is at its core sound. Having established that knowledge is a universal value and that the ways of reaching it are multiple, each of us is free to take the road that we believe best. Exegesis of a symbolic-structural variety makes use of the criterion of analogy, which places many elements in comparison to find some common meaning among them: the masters of this process were those medieval exegetes of the Holy Scripture. The problem arises when such a symbolic interpretation first presents itself as a historical analysis and then tries to take the latter's place. To be sure, the use of certain elements of the past as a symbolic category is a legitimate operation that leads—among other things— to a vision of the world in an allegorical and poetic key: such is the case in all of Guénon's work. But to claim that the symbolic categories that the poet—as creator—defines of his own accord truly correspond to historical categories found in the "other" era that is evoked—well, that claim is completely arbitrary and incorrect. This anti-historical process can be seen in two cases: when analogy and simile are used to explain a cause-and-effect relationship between several elements without recourse to other proof, and when one tries to use the interpretation of symbols—in reality each easily dated and traced to a specific context—encompassing and lumping together completely different circumstances, to describe a historical process that developed over time, with a before and an after.

A few examples—though far removed from the scope of this book—should suffice to clarify this reasoning. The Mayan and Egyptian pyramids may be studied comparatively and the results—for example, referring to the conception of space, or their applications in astronomy, or the technical abilities of those who built them—may be valuable. This, however, does not authorize us to claim that the Mayans and Egyptians ever met, or that they both possessed some technology originating on another world. Through mere comparative analysis, which constructs *ex novo* a structural relationship between objects that simply resemble each other or are close in some way, one may even go so far as to say, as I happened to discover recently, that Aachen does not correspond to Aix-La-Chapelle, Aquisgrana, but to a village in the Marches region of Italy, and that the fantastical landscapes seen in Leonardo's *Mona Lisa* and the portraits of the dukes of Urbino painted by Piero della Francesca, correspond

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49   G. De Turris, *L'immaginario medievale* cit., p. 97.

to quite recognizable mountains, obviously those that can be seen from the window of whoever's writing.[50]

To return to our current theme, the myth of the Grail has produced a number of symbolic-structural interpretive keys, which are subsequently used to explain consequential relationships of cause and effect and thereby to reestablish a chronology in the sense of origin, duration, and continuity. Among the many possibilities, some are more worthy of note than others: as we have seen, in Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*, the Grail (which is a stone, not a chalice) is kept in a place called the Temple and the knights set to guard it are called *Templeise*. Three similar words and the die is cast: the Grail is the Templar treasure.[51] This treasure would reach Europe, carried by Mary Magdalene and Joseph of Arimathea; or it would arrive with returning Crusades to end up in the hands of the Cathars, who naturally were also closely related to the Templars and guarded it at Rennes-le-Château, unless the Templars had already hidden it at Gisors. But the Grail is also in Valencia, Genoa, Castel del Monte, and among the imperial treasures of Vienna. If the Grail is the Shroud, then it's obviously in Turin. Or else, to follow another lead, the Grail is no longer an object, but, as Dan Brown recently revealed from his perch on the shoulders of so many other authors prior, the tomb of Mary Magdalene, the wife of Christ and thus the mother of his children and guardian/vessel of his descendants, the royal blood, *sangréal*, that comes down to us through the Merovingian kings.[52] Just as the Frankish masons survive from remote antiquity, when they were the builders of the Temple of Solomon and thus also Templars. Still yet, the Grail may originate from an Arabo-Persian tradition, or it may be the Sacred Cauldron of the Celts, passed down through Western tradition (but

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50   Comitato per lo studio della presenza carolingia in Val di Chienti, www.youtube.com/watch?v=6hJ-OZ5JMIQ (cons. May 6, 2019); G. Carnevale, *La Val di Chienti nell'alto medioevo carolingio: fu la "Francia" delle origini e la culla dell'Europa*, Comitato per lo studio della presenza carolingia in Val di Chienti, Civitanova Marche 2003; R. Borchia and O. Nesci, *Il paesaggio invisibile. La scoperta dei veri paesaggi di Piero della Francesca*, Il lavoro editoriale, Ancona 2008: The book, as the cover reads, "has invented a new science: *landscape busting*"; Id., *Codice P. Atlante illustrato del paesaggio della Gioconda*, Electa, Milano 2012.

51   This identification endures in the numerous publications that, since the 1970s, have filled bookstore shelves, and that have as their only ostensible source the writings of Wolfram von Eschenbach, which is certainly not the only medieval testimony of the Grail. The real question is not whether the Templars were guardians of the Grail, but why the poet felt like talking about Templars in his *Parzifal*.

52   D. Brown, *The Da Vinci Code* cit., and *The Da Vinci Code,* 2003 (film). In the same vein today, see for instance D.J. Tabor, *The Jesus Dynasty: The Hidden History of Jesus, His Royal Family, and the Birth of Christianity*, Simon & Schuster, New York 2006.

materially, not just as a tale), by the knights of the Arthurian Cycle of romances and some texts of the Welsh *Mabinogion*. In that case, better to seek it in Glastonbury Abbey, where Arthur's tomb was discovered in 1190, or on the Isle of Avalon, where Arthur waits to be reawakened. Or maybe the Grail is an allegory of the alchemical discipline, or alludes to a fertility ritual: the feminine vessel that is rendered fertile by the Holy Lance, the desolate, wintry land that becomes a garden of Spring thanks to the handsomely endowed sun-Perceval.

All that (and much more) is the Grail today. It, writes Cardini,

> is still wrapped up in the fog from which hypotheses emerge. The fact remains that when we speak of the Grail our subject is a literary construction: its date of birth coincides with the end of the twelfth century, its textual basis is the romance of Chrétien [de Troyes]. And the great success of the Grail theme is certainly not enough to make us pass from literature to myth, nor from literature to history. The links from the first to the second and third, however, remain obscure, maybe arbitrary, perhaps even non-existent.[53]

The traces of a continuity between the search for the Holy Grail or the Templar order and our days are not in any way historically documented—that is, through the research and analysis of sources produced during that period. The traditions that created these fictitious continuities were all forged between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries, in full awareness of the legitimate functions of the past. There are dozens of Grails, as many as there are medieval literary versions of its legend, and hundreds more will yet be produced, thanks to the editorial fervor of our years. The link with the present is powerful: it acts through parallelisms, allegories, and veiled language. But the Grail of Rennes-le-Château and Dan Brown tells us much more about the present than it ever could about the Middle Ages.

And here we come back to the fundamental problem: the attempt to graft an inherently atemporal symbolic-structural exegesis onto specific time period, without recourse to appropriate sources, yet attributing a sense of "historical reality" to the result, is from the historian's point of view an error, a parody of anthropological studies, a reckless comparativism. This process is, however, indispensable to a Middle Ages of Tradition: in order to speak of tradition one must start from the desired locus of origin and reach the present day with no gaps. Any holes in the middle render the course fragmentary, no longer

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53   F. Cardini, *Il Graal evoliano tra simbolismo ed esoterismo*, in J. Evola, *Il Mistero del Graal* cit., pp. 13–28: 14.

intelligible, and incapable of providing answers to the present. The solution to the dilemma is to historicize the myth, and, specifically, the medieval myth. It is a process that, rather than fading out thanks to continual advancements in the field of medieval studies, lives on, with renewed vigor.

That knights had their own code of honor is true; that the Templars jealously guarded their own secrets, including their initiation rituals, is also true. That the Cathars expressed a faith completely at odds with the Roman ministry is incontrovertible, just as it is certain that medieval literature is in part mystical and also possesses some esoteric interpretive keys. But these facts are not playing cards to be shuffled, and still less are they tarot cards for divination.[54] To think that Dante may be understood through the sect of the *Fedeli d'Amore*; that Frederick II built Castel del Monte, with its "strange" octagonal form, in accordance with precise astrological-astronomical revelations that render that castle akin to the pyramids of Giza; that Saint Bernard of Clairvaux belonged to a family of druids, and for that reason the Templars confiscated the Grail, or that Jesus Christ was "Gaelic" in that he was "Galilean"; that instead he was Julius Caesar, since in Latin both names bear the same initials (J.C.), such that "The Gospel of Mark turns out to be the history of the Roman Civil War from the crossing of the Rubicon up to the assassination and apotheosis of Caesar"—well, all this speculation is fascinating and even quite fun, but it is *not* historically true. It did *not* happen.[55]

In the best of the hypotheses, the undocumented links are "proven" through comparative and symbolic reading—a reading which is not, however, seen as capable of responding to every question posed to it: if I condemn someone to death just because he looks like a murderer, I would not be a trustworthy judge.

54 U. Eco, *The Limits of Interpretation*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 1991 (original edition: *I limiti dell'interpretazione*, Bompiani, Milano 1990, pp. 56 ff., pp. 96–99 of the Italian edition for the "analogical recklessness" of R. Guénon, *The King of the World* cit).

55 M.P. Pozzato [et al.] (ed.), *L'idea deforme. Interpretazioni esoteriche di Dante*, Bompiani, Milano 1989 (the title, meaning "the misshapen idea," is an anagram of "Fedeli d'Amore," meaning "love's faithful," on which: L. Valli, *Il linguaggio segreto di Dante e dei "Fedeli d'Amore,"* Optima, Roma 1928); U. Eco, *The Limits of Interpretation* cit. (pp. 90–96 of the Italian edition); M. Brando, *Lo strano caso di Federico II* cit., pp. 211–224. On Christ as Julius Caesar: F. Carotta, *Il Cesare incognito. Da Divo Giulio a Gesù*, May 2002, www.scribd.com/doc/4074287/Il-Cesare-incognito-Da-Divo-Giulio-a-Gesu (cons. May 6, 2019). The article (which was turned into a book) has the air of a pseudo-essay, like those of the publication "HotHair," but some have been taken it seriously: see for example S. Breathnach, *The Jesus Joke*, in "Irish Criminology," 2007, www.scribd.com/doc/10062380/The-Jesus-Joke-Part-1-by-Seamus-Breathnach (cons. May 6, 2019); *Francesco Carotta*, Wikipedia entry, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francesco_Carotta (cons. May 6, 2019).

It should not surprise us if the better part of the interpretations presented in this chapter have no parallels in academic historiography, but rather are found in the avalanches of texts that flirt with the occult. Simply put, these themes cannot be approached historiographically. The evidence is simply not there.

Umberto Eco defines the Middle Ages of Tradition thus:

> The Middle Ages of so-called *Tradition*, or of occult philosophy (or *la pensée sapientielle*), an eternal and rather eclectic ramshackle structure, swarming with Knights Templars, Rosicrucians, alchemists, Masonic initiates, neo-Kabbalists, drunk on reactionary poisons sipped from the Grail, ready to hail every neo-fascist Will to Power, eager to accept as a visual ersatz for their improbable visions all the paraphernalia of the [barbaric] Middle Ages, mixing up René Guénon and Conan the Barbarian, Avalon and the Kingdom of Prester John. Antiscientific by definition, these Middle Ages keep going under the banner of the mystical weddings of the micro- with the macrocosm, and as a result they convince their adepts that everything is the same as anything else and that the whole world is born to convey, in any of its aspects and events, the same Message. Fortunately, the message got lost, which makes its Quest fascinating for the happy few who stand proof-tight, philology-resistant, bravely ignorant of the Popperian call for the good habit of falsification.[56]

Even Michel Pastoureau, author of a book on the symbolic Middle Ages, does not mince words when he writes:

> Perhaps no field of study concerning the Middle Ages has been so compromised by texts and books of mediocre quality (to say no more). In material of "medieval symbolism"—a vague, easily abused notion—the public and students can, most of the time, expect nothing more than superficial or esoteric works that play with time and space, mixing alchemy, chivalry, heraldry, coronations of kings, Roman art, cathedral bells, crusades, Templars, Cathars, black virgins, the Holy Grail, etc. together in a more or less commodified drivel.[57]

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56 U. Eco, *Dreaming of the Middle Ages* cit., p. 71. Cf. L. Del Corso and P. Pecere, *L'anello che non tiene* cit., pp. 129 ("The systematic exchange of analogies with identity") and 171–173.

57 M. Pastoureau, *Une histoire symbolique du Moyen Âge occidental*, Seuil, Paris 2004, pp. 12–13.

In a not dissimilar way, but with even greater intensity, in 1986 Franco Cardini dealt a dramatic blow to the instrumental interpretations originating both from the right and the left:

> That the Middle Ages of the purest knights is the stuff of charlatans, no more nor less than that of feminist witches and syndicalist *Ciompi*, is true: but it is precisely these uses and abuses of history that the Medievalist must combat.[58]

Julius Evola played on other tables and with other rules: his method, which disdains historical analysis as "profane," is detailed by him on several occasions.[59] One the one hand, in certain cases some strong, intellectual, common suggestions enabled this author to reach conclusions similar to those proposed by contemporary historiography: one example is a conception of the divorce between priestliness and imperial regality consummated in the second half of the eleventh century that in effect places the pope, and not the Emperor, in the revolutionary position.[60] On the other hand, in many other cases, as in his

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58 F. Cardini, *Medievisti "di professione"* cit., p. 44. Cf. anche R. Iorio, *Chi si serve del Graal?*, in "Quaderni medievali," XXIII (1998), n. 46, pp. 176–190, especially p. 176: "It is still astounding how in common culture the Middle Ages serve as a vessel for variegated memories and reassurances, and its centuries like woods to be poached for symbolic references and legitimations."

59 For example in the Preface to the *The Mystery of the Grail* cit., pp. 9–10: "The characteristic feature of the method that I call 'traditional' (in oppostion to the profane, empirical, and critical-intellectual method of modern research), consists in emphasizing the universal character of a symbol or teaching, and in relating it to corresponding symbols found in other traditions, thus establishing the presence of something that is both superior and antecedent to each of these formulations, which are different from and yet equivalent to each other […]. Although this is the method I intend to follow, it is not the one favored by most modern scholars. First of all, these scholars establish not true correspondences but opaque derivations. In other words, they investigate the empirical and always uncertain circumstance of the material transmission of certain ideas or legends from one people to another, or from one literature to another, thus ignoring that wherever we find at work influences characteristic of a plane deeper than that of a merely individual conscience, a correspondence and a transmission may take place also through nonordinary ways, that is, without specific temporal and spatial conditions and without external historical contacts." On the method and the relationship between historical time and mythic time in Evola, see his *Introduction* to *Revolt Against the Modern World* (especially pp. 28 ff. of the Italian edition).

60 Cf. C. Violante, *Aspetti della politica italiana di Enrico III prima della sua discesa in Italia (1039–1046)*, in "Rivista storica italiana," LXIV (1952), n. 3, pp. 157–176, 293–314, now in Id., *Studi sulla cristianità medioevale. Società, istituzioni, spiritualità*, collected by P. Zerbi, Vita

extreme defense of a "soul of chivalry," that is exclusively esoteric and indeed pagan, Evola's conclusions cannot find any kind of parallel in the medieval sources. But his exegetical work does not want, necessarily, to be considered historiography, and on this historians can agree.

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e Pensiero, Milano 1972, pp. 249–290, especially 252 ff. See G.M. Cantarella, *Il sole e la luna. La rivoluzione di Gregorio VII papa, 1073–1085*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 2005. Behind this conception is Georges Dumézil's theory on the three functions of Indoeuropean societies, of which the first—royal—encompasses both sacrality and regality. The reception of Dumézil's theory has been very strong in medieval studies: see primarily G. Duby, *The Three Orders* cit.; B. Grévin, *La trifonctionnalité dumézilienne et les médiévistes: une idylle de vingt ans*, in "Francia. Forschungen zur westeuropäischen Geschichte," 30 (2003), 1, pp. 169–189.

Warriors of Valhalla: Middle Ages of the Great North

> "So much history," said the Duke of Auge to the Duke of Auge, "so much history just for a few puns and a few anachronisms. I think it's pathetic. Shan't we ever get away from it?"
>
> R. QUENEAU, *Between Blue and Blue*

At the end of *The Fellowship of the Ring,* the first book of the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, the two gigantic, menacing statues of the Argonath, the ancient sovereigns of Numenor, raise their imperious hands: "The left hand of each was raised palm outwards in gesture of warning; [...] the silent wardens of a long-vanished kingdom."[1] Naturally, the gesture of the ancient kings has also been interpreted as the Roman salute, though they raise their left hands, not their right.[2] The Kings Anàrion and Isildur hold battle axes in their right hands. What goes out through the door comes in through the window: the axe introduces us to a universe of symbols with close ties to the one discussed in the previous chapter. In conventional wisdom, the Medieval Era may be summed up with chivalry, but also with barbarism. The barbarian is a wild man who transgresses the elementary laws of common life; he is the Other, a symbol of divorce from the civilized world; he is the one on the side of chaos, of caprice, who does not recognize the social order and fights with brutality and cruelty.[3] Above all, he must be the mandatory opposite of the knight: we spoke of them in this sense in the second chapter. And nevertheless, barbarism represents, and has for quite some time, a positive myth as well, one which has recently been considerably re-evaluated. The barbarian as a ferocious, yet pure and loyal, warrior who battles injustice, a kind of half-naked knight (who has borrowed a lot from chivalry, but is not nearly as courteous as Galahad), is an integral part of

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1   J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* cit., p. 413.

2   See for example *Se AN non ama il saluto romano*, Jan. 22, 2007, http://santosepolcro. splinder .com/post/10657801 (cons. June 6, 2010, the page was found to be inactive when cons. May 6, 2019). On the other hand, the so-called "Roman salute" itself is a modern invention: M. Winkler, *The Roman Salute: Cinema, History, Ideology*, Ohio State University Press, Columbus 2009.

3   T. Todorov, *La peur des barbares* cit., pp. 34–36, with other examples. See also M. Sanfilippo, *Storia e immaginario storico* cit., Part 1, Ch. 4: *Arrivano i barbari.*

our collective imaginary, made famous by the hero of Robert Erwin Howard's *Conan the Barbarian* (1932) and celebrated in a thousand "Sword and Sorcery" fantasy romances and a thousand illustrations, among which are those of Frank Frazetta. The barbarian, who being the fruit of fantasy can only be called fearsome in his fantastical world, is in reality a symbol that may also carry a political connotation. Indeed, his very origin is political. The concepts of the positivity of violence and the purifying war are much more evident in the image of the barbarian than in that of the knight. The belief in the existence of a barbarian vitality and the innate goodness of people of pure race, closer to the state of nature, not subject to the corruption brought on by mixing with inferior or decadent peoples and cultures—a belief lurking in the West at least since Tacitus's *Germania*, up to Vico, Montesquieu, and Rousseau's Noble Savage—was widely discussed by historians in the first half of the 1800s, was celebrated by men of culture throughout that entire century, and represents one of the most pervasive myth-engines ever created to explain the ethnogenesis of nations and justify the superiority of one people over another, of one race over others. Barbarism is invigorating and leads not to the destruction of civilization but to its palingenesis, as the barbarian is free, strong, and heroic, capable of defeating, with unprecedented but justified violence, the rot within a corrupt society—namely the decrepit Roman Empire—and imposing a new order founded on other, more authentic, ethical values: force, liberty, justice, solidarity, loyalty, purity. Conquest, ultimately, is a right exercised by a superior people, and war is not only just, but an explosive release of force.

This historiographic and philosophical theory, initially created to explain the genesis of the aristocracy in a bloodline of Frankish conquerors, evolved during the early decades of the 1800s and ended up providing a historical origin for all the peoples of Europe, through the elaboration of a doctrine that has been called "theory of conquest."[4] It is known for attributing a fundamental significance to the clash of races, understood as bloodlines or ethnicities: thus precisely to the barbarian invasions. This argument, initially proposed in France by Augustin Thierry, works for any country where the Middle Ages may assume a founding role through a historiographic representation of the conflict between ethnic groups and the entry into a defined territory of peoples who conquer it and transform it into a "national state," under the leadership of a sovereign who, like Clovis, Charlemagne, Alfred the Great, William

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4   G. Gargallo di Castel Lentini, *Storia della storiografia moderna*, vol. IV, *La teoria della conquista*, Bulzoni, Roma 1998; Cl. Nicolet, *La fabrique d'une nation: la France entre Rome et les Germains*, Perrin, Paris 2003.

the Conqueror, Tomislav of Croatia, Mieszko and Boleslaw of Poland, Arpad and Stephen of Hungary, becomes its primordial hero.

In France, England, Spain, Italy, and many other countries, this theory of conquest serves to justify the osmosis and hybridization of various peoples and cultures, from victors to vanquished, who, through their ultimately salutary contact, gave life to a nation with an original and distinctive character. This is the case with the contact between the Franks and the Gallo-Romans in France, and between the Celts and Anglo-Saxons, and then the Anglo-Saxons and Normans, in England. In Germany and to a certain extent in the Scandinavian countries, which did not suffer from Roman domination and saw the advent of Christianity much later, the theory is pushed to its extreme. Rejecting the idea of a "contamination" through contact with other cultures and ethnic groups, its partisans claim that the Germanic "race" has remained forever pure. The "Germans" of Tacitus would be the ancestors of those same people—Goths, Vandals, etc.—who as implacable and supremely just judges delivered the *coup de grâce* to the crumbling, immoral, mongrel, Christian, and Mediterranean Roman Empire. And they would naturally be the ancestors of the current Germans—for this is a perspective that leaves no room for the thought (to which we will return to) that ethnogenesis is a dynamic and continuous process, never settled once and for all. And since these pure peoples would be ethnically and culturally superior to all (necessarily impure) others, they must have the right to impose their own civilization. The Medieval Era becomes, therefore, a consequence of Germanic civilization, an emanation that finds its moment of origin in the great invasions, or rather migrations of people.

To maintain that the nation is formed through conquest, to claim that barbarian populations are the ones that bear the purest and most authentic values, to call upon the Great North as an origin myth, anti-classical, warlike, and victorious, to overturn and overturn again the power dynamics between peoples, to consider the enemy uncivilized, and to confer on all this the character of an anti-historical, ancestral ethnicity, existent *ab origine,* means also being able to consider all that already supposedly occurred in the Middle Ages as repeatable and justifiable. The Germans must go East and conquer the Slavs, because they are superior to them. The Russians must represent, as heirs of Byzantium and the purest exponents of Slavism, the entire Eastern Orthodox world.[5] Therefore, if a people conquers another in order to civilize it (and has

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5   For an Italian-language introduction to Panslavism: D. Caccamo, *Introduzione alla storia dell'Europa orientale*, Carocci, Roma 1991, especially pp. 67–81; W. Giusti, *Il panslavismo*, pref. by D. Caccamo, Bonacci, Roma 1993 (original edition: Istituto per gli studi di politica internazionale, Milano 1941). Cf. also *infra*, Ch. 11.

every right to do so because the former is superior and thus working for the latter's own good), the very concept of European civilization—whose genesis is newly rediscovered in the Middle Ages, starting from the barbarian invasions—becomes applicable everywhere.[6] The individual European nations, invested with a tradition riding on an illustrious past, have the right to conquer and govern the rest of the world. The positivist and colonialist age of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries would lead to the intensification of these theories, born to explain the barbarian invasions—until, as an extreme consequence, they evolved into national-socialist theories on race and their heinous application.[7]

Germanic culture in general, with its exaltation of the North as a symbol of the inevitable conflict between conquerors and conquered, between civilized barbarians and uncivilized Romans, between the proud pagans devoted to Wotan and the weak Judeo-Christians, was the basis for the Nazi's glorification of the *Nibelung*. The great heroes of the barbarian tradition gave their name to vast strategic plans: Operation Attila against France (Attila was actually a character in the *Nibelungenlied*, not a Mongol), Operation Alaric to occupy Italy in the event of its separation from the Axis, Operation Valkyrie to quell a possible revolt of the German people (and a name that would later come to identify the *coup d'état* attempt against Hitler on July 20, 1944). Siegfried is a barbarian, but in the end he's just like Parsifal: he too is a man of war, he is white, he is German.

The defeat of Germany in the Second World War and its division into two states, the secularization of Western society and especially that of Scandinavia, the suppressive fire that for years kept down any manifestation of German nationalism and racist ideology, the attempt to create a multicultural European identity, all rendered this kind of theory and its political consequences dormant. During the Eighties, however, manifestations of this kind began

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6   See especially S. Gasparri, *I Germani immaginari e la realtà del Regno. Cinquant'anni di studi sui Longobardi*, in *Atti del XVI congresso internazionale di studi sull'alto medioevo*, CISAM, Spoleto 2003, vol. I, pp. 3–28; Id., *Prima delle nazioni. Popoli, etnie e regni fra antichità e medioevo*, NIS, Roma 1997; A. Gillett (ed.), *On Barbarian Identity. Critical Approaches to Ethnicity in the Early Middle Ages*, Brepols, Turnhout 2002; W. Pohl, *Modern Uses of Early Medieval Ethnic Origins*, in J. M. Bak [*et al.*] (ed.), *Gebrauch und Missbrauch* cit., pp. 55–70; I. Wood, *The Use and Abuse of the Early Middle Ages*, in *The Use and Abuse of the Early Middle Ages, 1750–2000*, in M. Costambeys, A. Hamer and M. Heale (eds.), *The Making of the Middle Ages. Liverpool Essays*, Liverpool University Press, Liverpool 2007, pp. 36–53; S. Gasparri, C. La Rocca, *Tempi barbarici. L'Europa occidentale tra antichità e medioevo (300–900)*, Carocci, Roma 2002; I. Wood, *The Modern Origins of the Early Middle Ages*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2013.

7   W. Pohl, *Modern Uses* cit., pp. 56 ff., with bibliography.

returning in force to the Western landscape. They fall mainly into three fundamental typologies, which we will briefly describe.

Self-declared neo-fascist or neo-Nazi groups—numerous today primarily in former East Germany, but present throughout Europe and even North America and Australia—make use of symbologies derived not only from National Socialism but also from Celtic mythology, to a much greater extent from Nordic mythology, and from what we might call the barbarian imaginary: the two-headed axe, the hammer of Thor, the runes. As, in Italy, already in the 1970s we find the *Avanguardia Nazionale* ("National Vanguard"), whose symbol was the rune of Othala, the *Terza Posizione* ("Third Position," with the rune of the Warrior), the *Meridiano Zero* ("Meridian Zero," with the rune of Life). All told, the spirit of the Great North is quite common in the movements of the extreme right, including the Traditionalists that we described in the previous chapter. Hence the cover of a book well-known in Italy, *Fascisti immaginari* ("Imaginary Fascists"), is illustrated with a drawing of medieval warriors armed with axes, created in one of those Hobbit Camps.[8]

In the same way, the "naziskin" or "hammerskin" youth movement, born in England at the end of the Seventies as a politicized branch of the more general skinhead movement, is slowly and continually growing. Its marked anti-communist and racist inclinations also find expression in allusions to the barbarian myth, naturally mediated through its Nazi exaltation and, often, through the use of a symbolism adopted from SS units.[9]

The third way of evoking Germanic roots is represented by the neo-pagan religions that take after Norse mythology. Neo-paganism of a Germanic stripe is present in all the countries where communities of Northern European (or, as some still say, Aryan) origin live: namely in Germany, Scandinavia, and all the Anglo-Saxon countries, including Australia and New Zealand.[10] Once again we are confronted with cultural movements and veritable "new religions" whose first reclamation in an identitarian sense was due to the proto-anthropological analysis of nineteenth-century authors, followed by a later, more powerful idealization under National Socialism, which came to constitute a distinctive and defining element of what has been called magical Nazism.[11] The fundamental concept is, however, always the same: those that endorse these cults consider

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8   L. Lanna and F. Rossi, *Fascisti immaginari* cit.

9   M. Blondet, *I nuovi barbari. Gli skinheads parlano*, Effedieffe, Milano 1993.

10   The phenomenon is also attested in Italy: cf. M. Introvigne, A. Menegotto, and P.L. Zoccatelli, *Aspetti spirituali dei revival celtici e tradizionali in Lombardia*, CESNUR, Regione Lombardia 2001, https://www.cesnur.org/celti/ (cons. May 6, 2019), which also provides a general bibliography.

11   G. Galli, *Hitler e il Nazismo magico* cit.

themselves the renewers of an authentic pre-Christian culture with Celto-Germanic roots, one that has survived despite repeated assaults by the world of power and orthodoxy, that is, by the inquisitorial and homogenizing forces of Christianity.[12]

A depiction of this veiled conflict between a more ancient culture and Christianity is present in the film *The Virgin Spring* by Ingmar Bergman (1959), which draws inspiration from a fourteenth-century Swedish legend and opens with the servant's invocation, "God Odin, come, God Odin, come!" The woman lives in a Christian house dominated by the gnarled figure of Christ dying on the cross. Envious of the master's virgin daughter, the servant performs an ancient curse on her life. The daughter is later killed by three shepherds, triggering the guilt of the servant-witch, who considers herself responsible, and unleashing the furious wrath of the girl's father, who performs a pagan rite to prepare himself for vengeance. In this world teetering between Christianity and paganism (where God, however, does not show himself in either of the two religions), a fountain finally bursts forth from beneath the corpse of the blonde virgin, a small miracle of hope.[13]

In the new religions we're discussing, the Medieval Era represents the time of transition that permitted the ferrying of knowledge and rituals from antiquity to the modern and contemporary world. The most ancient sources at our disposal (for instance, the *Edda*), even when they refer to oral traditions that go way back, were in fact fixed in their written form during the Late Middle Ages.[14] From this point of view, these religions are not actually new, but, on the contrary, are ancestral. This goes for the religions of so-called Heathenry, Odinism, or *Asatru* (a neologism meaning "Belief in the Aesir"), in turn

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12 At the heart of this conception—the same one present in "Traditionalism"—lies a theory advanced by the scholar Margaret Alice Murray in the early twentieth century. With the backing of previous authors, she recognizes in medieval and modern witchcraft the continuation of pre-Christian pagan religions. Cf. Id., *The God of the Witches*, S. Low, Marston & Company, London 1933. This theory, though scaled back significantly by historians, is in reality applicable and applied to all contemporary neopagan movements, from Odinism to Wicca. See M. Introvigne, A. Menegotto, and P.L. Zoccatelli, *Aspetti spirituali dei revival* cit.; V. Ortenberg, *In Search of the Holy Grail* cit., pp. 130 ff.; M. Gibson, *Imagining the Pagan Past. Gods and Goddesses in Literature and History since the Dark Ages*, Routledge, Abingdon-New York 2013.

13 On the director's filmography: F. Cardini, *Il medioevo nei film di Ingmar Bergman*, in "Quaderni medievali," III (1978), n. 6, pp. 132–144. Another pagan, Viking prophetess can be found in the film, *The 13th Warrior* (1999); cf. St. Airlie, *Visions of Vikings: Sagas, Cinema and History*, in J.M. Bak [et al.] (ed.), *Gebrauch und Missbrauch* cit., pp. 135–143: 140.

14 *The Poetic Edda*, ed. C. Larrington, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2014².

subdivided into various currents, all of which may be recognized by the common denominator of reproposing pagan, Norse cults in the forms they assume primarily in the *Edda*. These currents are generally apolitical and deny any connection with Nazism and racial theories, in the name of a vision of a tolerant, peaceful, and naturalistic world. Originating in the Forties and formalized in the Sixties, they came to be considered accepted religions (to use a Constantinian term) in the Scandinavian countries in the period from 1974 (in Iceland) to 2007 (in Sweden). They may be considered the spearhead, the most radical manifestation, of a much broader, and to us decidedly more interesting, movement, which may be called a Nordic revival, naturally in the name of the Middle Ages. Some recent musical groups (for instance Faun, The Moon and the Nightspirits, Fayrierie, Omnia) constitute its most expressive voices, conveying poetic and philosophical pagan messages. These groups are usually considered examples of the "Pagan Folk" genre, a term that can be interchangeable with "Medieval Folk." The Middle Ages, therefore, are pagan.

These cults are an integral part of the Viking revival, originally a Romantic phenomenon, which has become especially widespread in recent years.[15] In the Shetland Isles they celebrate Midwinter by setting fire to a Viking ship. In the Scandinavian countries and in Poland one may find numerous neo-Viking communities that reconstruct the weapons, combat techniques, and daily life of the ancient conquerors of the sea, and who even set out on pilgrimages to certain traditional sites, where they celebrate a sort of Medieval festival. But since the common denominator is the sense of belonging to a people who originated in the North and then spread out everywhere on the continent (and beyond, for as we recall, it was the Vikings who discovered America!), similar communities are today common in all the Anglo-Saxon countries, as far away as Australia.[16] We may thus remember that the Society for Creative Anachronism also has a new Viking section, and that associations like the New Varangian Guard (est. 1981) and the Sudhird of Jòmsborg (est. 1988) exist. The first, now based in Australia, commemorates the myth of a Norse military unit that served the Byzantine Emperor in the tenth century. The second refers to the semi-legendary fortress of Jòmsborg in Pomerania, that between the tenth and eleventh century hosted a company of proud Viking mercenaries.

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15   St. Airlie, *Visions of Vikings* cit., with bibliography; S. Trafford and A. Pluskowski, *Antichrist Superstars: The Vikings in Hard Rock and Heavy Metal*, in D. Marshall (ed.), *Mass Market Medieval* cit., pp. 57–73.

16   S. Balliff Straubhaar, *Jómsvikingar and Varangian Guardsmen, from Brisbane to Perth*, in *44th International Congress on Medieval Studies* cit. On medievalism in Australia see St. Trigg (ed.), *Medievalism and the Gothic in Australian Culture*, Brepols, Turnhout 2005.

Even if, as we have said, the revival of the Nordic spirit generally rejects any link with Nazism and racism, there still exist movements that make use of the same repertoire of symbols for strongly politicized ends.[17] The historian of religion Mattias Gardell has studied the American situation, which we only knew of in Europe thanks to the "Illinois Nazis" detested by the Blues Brothers.[18] For these US groups (which belong to religious currents called Wotanism and Irminism) the menace constituted by multi-culturalism can be overcome only by a return to racial purity, as found in the pagan religion of the devotees of Wotan. This creed comes to represent the model of the mythical time when the Aryan race was uncontaminated—for Wotan, in fact, created the White race. These religious racists consider themselves like ancient heroes, the warriors of Valhalla destined to restore the ancestral purity of the age that was. Even with guns. The dimensions of this phenomenon are starting to worry the authorities. Since, as opposed to in the Scandinavian countries, the heathen religions are not officially recognized in the United States, the problem has recently arisen of whether to permit or prohibit prisoners who profess themselves believers to carry around the symbol of their faith: Thor's hammer.

A few years ago, the production of a Beowulf film set off a wave of reactions on the part of neo-Nazi and racist groups, but also on the part of adepts of the *Asatru* religion. Beowulf, the hero who defeats the monster Grendel, is an identitarian myth that works for the entire North, since the medieval poem was written in Old English, but the cultural references it contains are actually much broader. It is therefore a cultural icon of the North Sea, valid for England, Denmark, Sweden, and Germany, known to many people primarily from the 1999 film, starring Christopher Lambert (which is, however, of the "postapocalyptic" genre, set in a neo-Medieval future) and from the 2007 film in which Grendel's mother is played by Angelina Jolie. The problem, however, arose with a third film, *Beowulf: Prince of the Geats*, also from 2007.[19] Here, the actors who portray the hero, both young and old, are not white and have not already lent their faces to a Scottish immortal. They are, instead, two African-Americans, Jayshan Jackson and Damon Lynch III. The choice of a Black character is central to the plot of the film, since this Beowulf is said to be the son of an African explorer who traveled as far as the Northern seas: the creators claim that there was no political intention on their part, nor anything related to the search for a primordial

17   Cf. M. Revelli, *Il medioevo della Destra* cit., p. 130.

18   M. Gardell, *Gods of the Blood: The Pagan Revival and White Separatism*, Duke University Press, Durham (NC) 2003.

19   R. Scott Nokes, *Beowulf: Prince of the Geats, Nazis, and Odinists*, in "Old English Newsletter," XLI (2008), n. 3, pp. 26–31.

African identity.[20] For that reason, they were utterly blindsided by the pandemonium they provoked. As early as 2005, during the film's pre-production, director Scott Wegener received e-mails containing death threats and blogs appeared that railed against this "insult to the white race." There were those who wrote: "What would be the reaction if Bruce Willis was chosen to play the part of Martin Luther King? Or if Brad Pitt played Pancho Villa?" The National Socialist Movement (an American neo-Nazi movement) has claimed that Beowulf represents "the ideal Germanic and aristocratic warrior, and consequently a role model for our society." Heroes perforce must be blonde: like the Norwegian mass murderer Anders Behring Breivik, who did not fail to insert some narcissistic self-portraits into his manifesto-memorial.[21]

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20   As, opposed to, for instance, in the documentary by P.P. Pasolini, *Appunti per un'Orestiade Africana* (1970) and the book by M. Bernal, *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*, Rutgers University Press, Newark (NJ) 1987–2006, 3 vol. Even in the Viking-themed filmed *The 13th Warrior*, we find an "outsider," the Arab Ibn Fadlan, played by Antonio Banderas: cf. St. Airlie, *Visions of the Vikings* cit., p. 139.

21   A. Behring Breivik, *2083. A European Declaration of Independence* cit., pp. 1510–1516. See M. Gardell, *The Roots of Breivik's Ideology: Where Does the Romantic Male Warrior Ideal Come from Today?*, in "Eutopia. Institute of Ideas on Islam, Diversity and Democracy," Aug. 2, 2011, www.eutopiainstitute.org/2011/08/theroots-of-breiviks-ideology-where-does-the -romantic-male-warrior-ideal-come-fromtoday/ (cons. Aug. 9, 2011, the page was found to be inactive when cons. May 6, 2019). Among the recent studies on the imaginary of the Great North, I recall S. Briens (ed.), *Le Boréalisme*, monograph issue of the journal "Études germaniques," 71 (2016), 2; R. Facchini, D. Iacono, *"The North is Hard and Cold, and Has No Mercy"—Le "Nord" médiéval dans les séries télévisées*, in *Moyen Âge et séries*, monograph issue of "Médiévales: Langues, Textes, Histoire," 2020, forthcoming. I also recall the international interdisciplinary seminar *Représentations modernes et contemporaines des Nords médiévaux* organized by Alain Dierkens, Alban Gautier, Odile Parsis-Barubé and Alexis Wilkin, which convened various universities in France and Belgium from 2015 to 2017.

Druids and Bards: Celtic Middle Ages

> The only consolation lies in fragments of medieval mystery plays, in which God speaks Cornish and the Devil English.
>
> C. MAGRIS, *The Fortunate Isles* (1989)

We have spoken of chivalry and the North—that is, of the values of Tradition, courage in war, faith; of the pure and uncorrupted individuals, who know the secrets of runes and the Grail; of the anti-classical, anti-Christian, and anti-modern counter-cultures that emerge in antiquity, last through the Middle Ages and survive up to our day in little "Fellowships of the Ring." There is another *topos* that reflects all these elements, adds distinctive new ones, and characterizes just as richly, if not more so, the contemporary political imaginary of the Middle Ages, juxtaposing and mixing with all the elements identified so far: what we're looking at is a "new Celtic revival."

The phenomenon of the current massive revival of Celtic traditions also dates back to the Sixties, but from the Seventies on it has taken off in a way that shows no sign of stopping.[1] Combined with renewed claims to communal identities, it offers a homogeneous and standardized representation, in a mode analogous to what we have seen in the case of civic festivals. Celtic music marked by fifes, harps, and bagpipes, from Alan Stivell and the Chieftains, founded in 1963, to the famous American radio program *The Thistle and Shamrock*, the enormous musical catalogs available online, Irish pubs, celebrations of Samhein and even the holiday of Halloween, a Christian appropriation of the Celtic feast of Beltane unknown in Italy in its new form until thirty years ago, are today commonplace throughout the West. In contrast to the myths of the North, which are relatively less exportable because of their inherent ethnic component, Celticism is in widespread vogue today for two primary reasons.

The first is because it has been reinvented in conjunction with the fantasy genre: this world is one of its most common settings. We have been inundated with "Celtic" material, presented as the rebirth or remains of an ancient, wise, and perfect mystic tradition. The operation has been so successful that many now associate the concept of a magical and distant past specifically with the Celtic world. As an alternative tradition, Celticism is undoubtedly victorious.

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1   V. Ortenberg, *In Search of the Holy Grail* cit., pp. 119–142, Ch. 5, *The Celtic Bandwagon*, and pp. 143–174, Ch. 6, *King Arthur*, with bibliography.

Like the myths of the North, it also serves today as the basis for new religions that call themselves "old religions" or "traditional religions." Part of the neo-pagan movement, they promote peace and harmony and above all an intimate and universal relationship with nature and its magic: they are Druidism or Celticism, which presents itself as a continuation of the Druidic cults, and Wicca, which claims to be a continuation of the esoteric medieval cults that in turn derived from ancient pagan religions, were considered witchcraft, and were brought to the brink of extinction by the Church.[2] This is where, by the by, we get the suspicions of Harry Potter promoting witchcraft and being anti-Christian: a judgment that seems to have nothing at all to do with Joanne Kathleen Rowling's intentions for the cycle of novels. The author has recently added a further Celtic and medievalizing ingredient to her stories: *The Tales of Beedle the Bard*, attributed to a bard-mage of the fifteenth century.[3]

The second reason for Celticism's current great fortune resides in the fact that it responds to the desire, primarily on the part of American culture, for an ancestral homeland formed through Gaelic myths, the Arthurian cycle, and the ancient Britannic and Irish lands. From this point of view, one might even say that contemporary Celticism is a functional answer to the search for roots and, at the same time, an umpteenth symptom of American culture's impact on the entire West. Thus, in the United States, Medieval and Renaissance Fairs are common events beloved by Wiccans and hippies, who all come together, dressed in long tunics, around booths and stalls where biological, non-GMO products mix with recipes dating to the Middle Ages.

So far we've been talking about Celticism, but not about the Middle Ages proper. In reality, the two are closely connected, as in the cases of the fantasy genre and witchcraft touched on above (though we should always remember that the phenomenon of witchcraft and the persecution of it is not, in reality, characteristic of the Middle Ages). The connection between Celticism and the Middle Ages is not immediately apparent, since when we talk about bards and druids we are referring to an age even more remote than the Medieval Era. Thus, and rightly so, the beloved *Asterix* comics humorously relate the encounters between the proud Gauls of Brittany and the Roman invaders. The

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2   Ph. Carr Gomm, *The Druid Renaissance: The Voice of Druidry Today*, Harper-Collins Canada, Thorson 1996, n. ed. *The Rebirth of Druidry: Ancient Earth Wisdom for Today*, Element Books Ltd, Rockport (MA) 2003; M. Introvigne, A. Menegotto and P.L. Zoccatelli, *Aspetti spirituali dei revival* cit., with bibliography; V. Ortenberg, *In Search of the Holy Grail* cit., pp. 127–137.

3   J.K. Rowling, *The Tales of Beedle the Bard*, Children's High Level Books, s.l. 2007. In the Italian edition (*Le fiabe di Beda il Bardo*, Salani, Milano 2008), the name of the bard has been translated as that of the great Anglo-Saxon writer who lived between the seventh and eighth centuries (St. Bede).

adventures of Asterix and Obelix take place around 50 B.C., but even they have been, and surprisingly still are, bent to political uses.[4]

Nevertheless, Celtic myths—along with German and Norse ones—are considered one of the most popular ways of representing the Middle Ages in modernity. This is for various reasons: first of all, because this new usage borrows a great deal from the Romantic motifs that informed its first revival—the one, just to be clear, that had a prophet in James MacPherson, the inventor of Ossian, and an epigone in William Butler Yeats.[5] It is, in fact, precisely from Yeat's romantically medievalized Ireland that a good part of the recent Celtic revival was born. Another motive for the medievalization of Celticism is linked to a current return to the Norse myths, in that they share the dimension of *continuum* from proto-historic civilization to medieval civilization, without the *caesura* represented by Rome. The proto-historic phase leads into the Middle Ages without interruption. And since the ancestral Celtic tradition, also a Nordic alternative to the classical, has reached us through stone monuments of remote antiquity and written texts that originate no earlier than the Middle Ages, see then how dolmens and menhirs, tales and ballads come to be interpreted uninterruptedly, as the enduring traces of an ancient civilization. A final motive for the link between the Celtic world and the Middle Ages lies in the fact that the most famous medieval literary saga, the Breton cycle of Merlin, Arthur, and his noble knights, is simultaneously Celtic and medieval. Thus the Holy Grail, whose legend reaches us through medieval texts, must conceal a much more ancient substrate, and the Grail itself must be none other than the magic cauldron of the Druids, font of prosperity, magic, and wealth: in other

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4   Being Celtic means being anti-Roman, and this means taking Asterix seriously, and Assurancetourix (Cacofonix/Malacoustix in Britain and America) even more seriously, insofar as they are "bards." Cf. A.-M. Thiesse, *La création des identités nationales* cit., p. 17: "France of the Gaullist years granted a great success to Asterix, who, in a comic and anachronistic key, projected on their ancestors the banner of national identity." Asterix, then, serves just as magnificently for French nationalism as for Breton separatism. On Asterix as a myth of the right, a symbol of deep France, defender of identity: L. Lanna and F. Rossi, *Fascisti immaginari* cit., pp. 41–44. However, at the end of the 1800s the cult of Vercingetorix was characteristic of the left: cf. Ch. Amalvi, *Le goût du Moyen Âge* cit., pp. 127 ff., 163. On the fiftieth anniversary of the comic, Asterix and his Gauls were accused of being extremists, localists, and enemies of all forms of cultural *mélange.* The good guys are the Romans again, the symbol of multiculturalism and modernity: cf. D. Naso, *Altro che Asterix. Noi stiamo con Cesare*, in "Ffweb Magazine," Oct. 27, 2009.

5   J. Leerssen, *Remembrance and Imagination: Patterns in the Historical and Literary Representation of Ireland in the Nineteenth Century*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame (IN) 1997. On Irish political medievalism, see today E. Byers, St. Kelly, K. Stevenson, *"The North Remembers": The Uses and Abuses of the Middle Ages in Irish Political Culture*, in *The Middle Ages in the Modern World: Twenty-first-century Perspectives* cit., pp. 45–72.

words, the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow.[6] Next to the Grail, even traditions that are characteristically Irish (such as the Little People, Leprechauns, and the *Túatha Dé Danann*) or Welsh (the tales of the *Mabinogion*) can be set in a Celtic and magical Middle Ages. Or, indeed, a Middle Ages that is magical *because* it is Celtic. In Celticism we find everything we need: tradition, mystery, mysticism, fairy tales, magic, the Grail. *Fantasy*, which as a literary and film genre doesn't need to base itself on historical reconstructions, is perhaps most responsible for the synchronic superposition of places, times, and characters that have obviously never met: in a work of fantasy, Druids, bards, ladies, counts, and knights (not to mention orcs and dragons) may live together in peace, in a setting that is, according to the laws of narrative, medieval.

This new, medievalized Celtic revival is so pervasive that it has a decisive influence on current representations of the Middle Ages. The general notion that we have of the Middle Ages today is once again the Romantic one. The fantasy genre has progressively shifted the standard image of the Middle Ages from grim, inquisitorial, and violent, to fantastical and fairy-tale, but at the same time it has homogenized it into an imitative proposition valid for every latitude. The greatest influence of this medieval Celticism lies in its characteristic script. When I was a child, and up until about thirty years ago, the script most identified with the Middle Ages was Gothic. Today, however, the scripts best suited to representing the Middle Ages *tout court* are another: I'm referring to uncial, along with semiuncial.[7] These Early Medieval scripts were common in the British Isles until the Norman conquest. After undergoing some modifications, they even transitioned to print: they are the Gaelic fonts that one finds all over contemporary Ireland. It is in precisely this kind of Anglo-Irish type-setting, derived in turn from Roman models (following the evangelization of the British Isles by Saint Augustine of Canterbury) that one recognizes the typical writing of the Middle Ages as imagined today. We can even see the ogre Shrek (protagonist of the eponymous 2001 film) using a book limned in uncial as toilet paper. This is an obvious shot at the old fairy-tale films produced by Disney, which all opened with the pages of a lovely, ancient book; but the writing in these was more Gothic, certainly not uncial. The same script

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6 For example, R. Sh. Loomis, *The Grail, from Celtic Myth to Christian Symbol*, University of Wales Press-Columbia University Press, Cardiff-New York 1963; N. D'Anna, *Il Santo Graal. Mito e realtà*, Archè-Edizioni PiZeta, San Donato Milanese 2009.

7 T. di Carpegna Falconieri, *Dalla gotica all'onciale. Considerazioni paleografico-sociologiche sulla tipizzazione attuale della scrittura medievale*, in "Quaderni medievali," XXVII (2002), n. 54, pp. 186–195; M.H. Smith, *Du manuscrit à la typographie numérique. Présent et avenir des écritures anciennes*, in "Gazette du livre médiéval," XXVII (2008), nn. 52–53, pp. 51–78: 59–61, 72 ff., www.menestrel.fr/IMG/pdf/Smith_Paleotypo.pdf (cons. May 12, 2019).

is also employed in the title of the *Lexikon des Mittelalters*, one of the monuments of contemporary Medieval scholarship.[8] The adoption of uncial characters, round and far from harsh, may derive precisely from the association of the Middle Ages with a legendary, Celtic time, populated by gnomes, fairies, and fauns. Not for nothing does the Elfish script invented by Tolkien, also rounded and graceful, resemble uncial. In short, Celticism is such an important phenomenon that it has profoundly altered this most basic aspect of our current representation of the Middle Ages.

Now, all that has been said thus far also has connections to politics. This does not mean that Celticism today is relevant only in that sense; quite the opposite is true, and for many readers of fantasy novels and drinkers of Guinness, the idea that their gestures could be considered markers of political identity is probably news to them. When Angelo Branduardi "sings Yeats" and Fiorella Mannoia titles her song *The Skies of Ireland*, it really doesn't seem like politics should be shoved into the middle of it.

Wicca and the new Celtic religions are apolitical or prepolitical cultural expressions, which in the Anglo-Saxon countries, at least, show some affinity with movements of democratic inspiration, with anarchism, and most of all with New Age culture. Our New Medieval Era, therefore, produces neo-pagans quite different from one another, even in a political sense: while Odinists may not champion progressive thought but cling tight to their ethnic models, Druidists and Wiccans (particularly in their feminine component, the result of a broadly feminist culture) only rarely identify themselves in such terms.[9] Yet even they can be considered in a certain sense "reactionary," in that they believe they are passing down ancient secrets and returning to an ancestral, matriarchal order.

Nevertheless, the origins of the political usage of Celticism can be found in that Romantic "reawakening of nations," in the contemporaneous search for epics, songs, romances, artworks, historical sources, and monuments, and in the related independence movements that coursed through the 1800s and that in all of Europe identified the Middle Ages as the historic site of the origin of the nation.[10] Communities that have a clan structure, like those of Scotland

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8   *Lexikon des Mittelalters*, Artemis-&-Winkler-Verlag, München-Zürich 1980–1993 (voll. I–VI); LexMa-Verlag, München 1995–98 (voll. VII–IX).

9   Cf. V. Ortenberg, *In Search of the Holy Grail* cit., pp. 131 ff. Now and then, witches cast curses on Donald Trump: see, e.g., C. Keck, *What Witches Can Teach Us about Fighting Back against Trump*, Jan. 17, 2017, https://www.bustle.com/p/what-witches-can-teach-us-about-fighting-back-against-trump-30574, and *Witches cast "mass spell" against Donald Trump*, BBC News, Feb. 25, 2017: https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-39090334 (cons. May 12, 2019).

10   See Chs. 3 and 11.

and Ireland, developed in relatively ancient (but not necessarily medieval) times a sentiment distantly comparable to contemporary nationalism, since they already possessed such identity-defining elements as distinctive languages, characteristic garments, and a pronounced feeling of otherness with respect to the kingdom of England. Above all, this feeling of a collective past was powerful because the clan structure made everyone, lords and peasants, part of the same group, conceived in its genealogical continuity with mythicized common ancestors: which ultimately leads us, however, to a fragmentation of identity rather than to a coherent national sentiment in the modern sense.

In the Celtic countries (especially Scotland and Ireland) the common feeling of belonging may be more ancient than in other countries, but it is equally subject to the vicissitudes of history: even these supposedly ancestral identities are in reality mutable. To actually arrive at the Middle Ages, or indeed antiquity, by following a continuous thread of traditions is impossible, because the breaks are centuries-long. The kilt is not attested earlier than the 1700s; Druidism is a religion that originated in the same century and was refounded only in the last few decades; during the nineteenth century, Wales was filled with miniature Stonehenges; the Breton flag with ermine spots was designed in 1923.[11] The universal Celtic character is a modern philological construct, based on the fact that peoples of truly ancient origin, but otherwise very distant from each other, are linked by the circumstance of speaking (or trying to rediscover) languages belonging to the same family; and it is a political construct based primarily on the identification of a "common enemy," namely the French for the Bretons and the English for the others. Thus, current Scots call the English "Sassenach," or Saxon, pretending to still be in the position of that Early Middle Ages that sees the Celts fortifying against the Saxon invasion; yet Lowland Scots of the 1700s and early 1800s, such as Walter Scott, did not actually consider themselves "Gaelic," but "Teutonic."[12]

Celticism remains one of the most remote myth-engines of national identity, but it is almost entirely of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century manufacture.

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11   C. Bertho, *L'invention de la Bretagne. Genèse sociale d'un stéréotype*, in "Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales," VI (1980), n. 35, pp. 45–62, www.persee.fr/web/revues/home/prescript/article/arss_0335-5322_1980_num_35_1_2099 (cons. May 12, 2019). See in general the essays contained in E.J. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* cit., in particular H. Trevor-Roper, *The Invention of Tradition: The Highland Tradition of Scotland*, pp. 15–43; Id., *The Invention of Scotland: Myth and History*, Yale University Press, New Haven-London 2008. See also A.-M. Thiesse, *La création des identités nationales* cit., pp. 198–201; V. Ortenberg, *In Search of the Holy Grail* cit., pp. 123 ff.; W. Pohl, *Modern Uses* cit., pp. 62 ff., with bibliography.

12   V. Ortenberg, *In Search of the Holy Grail* cit., p. 127.

Deeply intrinsic to medievalism, it represents, along with the German movement, perhaps the greatest national epic ever constructed, existing in opposition to "Englishness" and in a partial dialectic with the sentiment of "Britishness," whose foundation was pursued by the Empire in the Victorian Age.[13] And here we state the obvious: Merlin, Arthur, and the noble knights of the Round Table are founding figures not just for the Celtic nationalist myth, but also for the identitarian construction of Englishness and its broader form of Britishness. One need only recall (among so many other even more venerable manifestations) Alfred Lord Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*.[14] The Arthurian myth may function just as perfectly to represent the monarch of the United Kingdom of "Great" Britain, as to symbolize secession, exclusive identity, and strenuous defense from invasion. This is one reason, for instance, for recent disputes surrounding historic sites in Cornwall, which can be part of *English Heritage* or, vice versa, of a quite distinct *Cornish Heritage*.

A prolonged early Celtic revival in a political key can be dated to the period between the mid-1700s and circa 1922, when the Free State of Ireland separated from the United Kingdom. The second Celtic revival, on the other hand, started in the early Seventies, coeval with the resumption of bilingual instruction in Ireland—and continues today. This revival corresponds, politically, to Breton, Welsh, Scottish, Irish, and Cornish irredentism, which inevitably makes use of the Middle Ages to express itself—insofar as Celticism is constructed in an essentially medieval setting—and which connects to the identification of

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13   On "Britishness" and "Englishness" see *ibid.*, pp. 107 ff.; 146. Veronica Ortenberg recalls how "Englishness" was sacrificed in the nineteenth century to the broader ideal of "Britishness," such that even today, historical references that are characteristically English, like the figure of Alfred the Great, are perceived and promoted as generically British. On the current revival of specifically English nationalism, which makes use of the symbol of St. George, for example, cf. *ibid.*, pp. 108 ff. The Scottish identity itself, as is known, does not necessarily lead to a separatist vision, since Scotland has been considered, since the 1800s, "the guardian of the ancestral values of the United Kingdom," with its Balmoral Castle, its whisky, the bagpipe, and the kilt, worn by soldiers and princes of the blood alike: cf. A.-M. Thiesse, *La création des identités nationales* cit, pp. 198 ff.

14   A. Tennyson, *The Idylls of the King*, 1856–85, now in the edition of J.M. Gray, Penguin, London 1983. On the Arthurian myth in Anglo-Saxon countries there is a nearly boundless bibliography: cf. V. Ortenberg, *In Search of the Holy Grail* cit., pp. 143–174 (pp. 158 ff. on the subject of Tennyson; pp. 171 ff. on the earliest years of the new millennium). See also D.L. Hoffman and E.S. Sklar (eds.), *King Arthur in Popular Culture*, McFarland, Jefferson (NC) 2002; B. Olton (ed.), *Arthurian Legends on Films and Television* cit.; W. Blanc, *Le roi Arthur, un mythe contemporain: de Chrétien de Troyes à Kaamelott en passant par les Monty Python*, Libertalia, Paris 2016. In Italian it is helpful to refer to M. Sanfilippo, *Camelot* cit., which analyzes and comments on interpretive threads up to 2006.

historic sites of the Round Table (at Caerleon), the Isle of Avalon, and Tintagel.[15] The release of Mel Gibson's film *Braveheart* (1995), which relates the fourteenth-century epic of William Wallace and Scotsmen against English presented as simply evil beings, created a tense environment.[16]

Precisely because it is a broad construct with a structured tradition, as well as a purveyor of independentist and libertarian messages embedded in a Middle Ages already loved and shared for other reasons, political Celticism is received far beyond the geographical borders of its proper regions. As opposed to America, where Celticism does not generally have any real political connotation and, when it does have one, is in an anarchist or progressive mold, and as opposed to Scotland, Brittany, or Wales, where its motivation is markedly patriotic, its political uses on the continent are often of a conservative orientation. Here Celticism is seen as a return to shared traditions and a European Golden Age, as one could say that all the Western countries of the Old Continent had, at some point, a Celtic phase: not just in Wales and Brittany, but even in the rest of France, and in Germany, Italy, or Spain.[17] The same cannot be said, for instance, of the Basque independence movement, which makes similar claims and identifies itself with the Middle Ages in the Kingdom of Navarre, but is lacking that common myth-engine that serves as a bond and that resides, at least in part, precisely in the medieval imaginary standardized in a Celtic key. Almost all Europeans, at a certain point in their history, can claim to have been Celts. They all know of King Arthur and Merlin the Wizard and think of these characters almost as childhood friends. Few Europeans, however, can claim to have been Basque.

The Breton, Welsh, Scottish, and Irish are considered the epigones of a once dominant ancient civilization, who fought and still fight against the invader: they become symbols of a struggle against oppression in an anti-modern key, and thus particularly close to Traditionalist thought, as in Belgium's *Jeune Europe* ("Young Europe," est. 1962) and in Italy's far-right movements of Evolian

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15   On which see the ironic article by J. Nobel, *Tintagel: The Best of English Twinkie*, in D.L. Hoffman and E.S. Sklar (eds.), *King Arthur in Popular Culture* cit., pp. 36–44; B. Earl, *Places Don't Have to Be True to Be True. The Appropriation of King Arthur and Cultural Value of Tourist Sites*, in D. Marshall (ed.), *Mass Market Medieval* cit., pp. 102–112; V. Ortenberg, *In Search of the Holy Grail* cit., p. 173.

16   T. Shippey, *Medievalisms and Why They Matter*, in "Studies in Medievalism," XVII (2009), pp. 45–54: 50.

17   J. Markale*, The Celts: Uncovering the Mythic and Historic Origins of Western Culture*, Inner Traditions, Rochester (VT) 1993 (original edition: *Les Celtes et la civilisation celtique. Mythe et histoire*, Payot, Paris 1969); V. Kruta, *Aux racines de l'Europe: le monde des Celtes*, Kronos, Paris 2001; E. Percivaldi, *I Celti. Una civiltà europea*, Giunti, Firenze 2003.

inspiration.[18] In Italy, in fact, we can easily see the presence of two usages of Celticism, opposite in their political intentions, yet all but identical in setting. The first is that of the neo-fascists and post-fascists (and one that in truth is not limited to Italy), who since the early Eighties have displayed an affinity with Scottish and above all Irish independence, who share the same medieval imaginary represented by the Grail and Excalibur, and who declare their Celticism in a pan-European key, quite often (and paradoxically, given its origins as a mass phenomenon) with an anti-American function. They consider Celtic music the "European dimension of ethnic music"[19] and have adopted the Celtic cross as their own primary symbol. While the origin and fate of this political sign must be sought elsewhere, with time it has acquired this simultaneously Celtic and Nordic meaning, as one may deduce, for instance, from the song *Terra di Thule* ("Land of Thule"), recorded in 1980 by the band La Compagnia dell'Anello ("Fellowship of the Ring"):

> On a sun-kissed plain
> The Northern folk are all arrayed
> Blonde warriors in silver helms
> The Circle and the Cross are fluttering in the wind.[20]

As we have already spoken of this particular use of the Middle Ages in previous chapters, we turn instead to consider another employment of Celticism in Italy, one that is much more recent and that is founded on a presumed ethnic basis. We speak of the political party known as the Northern League (*Lega Nord*), which has provided itself with a new remote past appropriated in a

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18   Note however that René Guénon did not believe in a preserved Druidic tradition: cf. *The Crisis of the Modern World* cit., p. 21: "We do not dispute the survival of a certain 'Celtic Spirit' which is still able to manifest itself in various forms, as has in fact happened from time to time; but when people try to convince us that there still exist spritual centres where the Druidical tradition is preserved intact, we cannot but demand proof of an assertion which in the meantime certainly appears extremely doubtful, if not altogether out of the question." Cf. also *ibid.*, pp. 24 ff.

19   L. Lanna and F. Rossi, *Fascisti immaginari* cit., pp. 259 ff.; see also M. Martelli, *La lotta irlandese. Una storia di libertà*, pref. by F. Cardini, Il Cerchio iniziative editoriali, Rimini 2006; G. Armillotta, *I popoli europei senza stato. Viaggio attraverso le etnie dimenticate*, Jouvence, Roma 2009, pp. 15–18 (Brittany), 39–44 (Cornwall), 63–68 (Wales), 145–152 (Scotland).

20   The Celtic cross came to Italy through France, as one of the symbols of Jean Thiriart's Young Europe, and had already made an appearance during the Algerian War. With no original connection to Celticism, this symbol took root in the peninsula by the end of the 1970s. Reproduced infinite times, partly thanks to its simplicity, in Italy it was declared illegal in 1993. See L. Lanna and F. Rossi, *Fascisti immaginari* cit., pp. 132–135; N. Rao, *La Fiamma e la Celtica* cit.

singular way from the Celtic revival.[21] Since Northern Italy was inhabited by Celtic populations (Insubres, Libui, Hardoni,[22] Cenomani), it follows that Padania itself must be a Celtic country, and therefore that Roman civilization was no more than a foreign invasion.[23] The fact that Milan was capital of the Empire, that Virgil was born in Mantua, Catullus in Sirmione, and Livy in Padua—all locations in the north of Italy—has no place in their narrative: the only hero worth remembering is Brennus the Gaul who sacked Rome in 390 B.C. There's no point in mentioning that these Celts were invaders themselves, having reached Northern Italy in the fifth century B.C., and were entirely and definitively assimilated with the Romans. Besides, we're not really think of these Italian Celts when we organize fairs with bagpipes and characters in horned helms, but the Welsh, Scottish, and Irish, with whom they share the fate of suffering in the clutches of the invader.

The treasure of Manerbio,[24] the most important discovery of Celtic coins in Europe, was perhaps the common safe and sanctuary of a federated people. From that it follows that:

> These remains lead one to believe that [the Insubres, Libui, and Ceno-
> mani] had an interest in important federated projects (*importanti progetti
> federativi*) [...] and had autonomy in negotiating their relationship with
> the Romans.[25]

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21   Cf. A.-M. Thiesse, *La création des identités nationales* cit., p. 286. See, for example, G. Ciola,
      *Noi Celti e Longobardi. Le altre radici degli Italiani. L'Italia celtica preromana, l'Italia ger-
      manizzata dei secoli bui*, Edizioni Helvetia, Spinea (VE) 1997². Numerous articles on an-
      cient and medieval history can be found in the publication "Quaderni padani" of the
      Libera compagnia padana, since 1995, http://www.laliberacompagnia.org/_old_site/pub
      blicazioni/quaderni_01.html (cons. May 12, 2019). TN: In 2018 the *Lega Nord*, whose full
      name is the *Lega Nord per l'Indipendenza della Padania* ("Northern League for the Inde-
      pendence of Padania," Padania being its mythical homeland in the Po River plain)
      rebranded itself as simply the *Lega*, "League," without officially changing its name. Until
      August 20, 2019, it formed part of Italy's ruling coalition, together with the *Movimento 5
      Stelle* (The Five-Star Movement, M5S).

22   TN: In Italian the name is "Celoduri," which permits a clever, but practically untranslat-
      able, play on words based on the Italian expression "ce l'ho duro," meaning "I have an
      erection." In the 1990s, "La Lega ce l'ha duro!" ("The League has a hard-on!") became a
      rallying cry for followers of the Northern League, and its leader Umberto Bossi coined the
      term "celodurismo" to describe his party's aggressive, stubborn, unilateral approach to
      politics.

23   TN: On Padania: see note 21, above.

24   TN: Manerbio (BS) is a town in Lombardy; the horde was discovered in 1955.

25   Thus in the foreword by the mayor of Brescia, Paolo Corsini, to the book E.A. Arslan and
      F. Morandini (eds.), *La monetazione delle genti celtiche a nord del Po tra IV e I secolo a.C. Il
      tesoro di dracme in argento di Manerbio*, Et, Milano 2007, s.p.

Federalism becomes a fundamental characteristic of the Padanian Celtic populations, just as it would be for the League of Lombard cities in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. In this manner a *continuum* is constructed with the current demands for federalism of the Northern League and its accusation leveled at Rome as the "Thief."

Amid the vast wash of renewed claims to national identity that have swept through the world since the early 1990s, the case of Leaguist Celticism seems particularly interesting because it arose practically from nothing. It represents, therefore, an example of an invented tradition whose very recent genesis is patent. Its emergence should essentially be attributed to a conscious mimesis rooted in an understanding of the effects of Celticism on a mass culture from which it yet tries to distance itself, inasmuch as the Northern League is also a strongly anti-European party. Thus, side by side with an identitarian construct founded on autochthonous movements (the Lombard League and its war against Barbarossa, whom we will meet in Chapter 11), the Northern League has invented a Celtic identity for itself, for instance, introducing a marriage rite during which the bride and groom drink apple cider and exchange bracelets in place of rings.[26] Moreover, it has adopted the emblem of the so-called "Sun of the Alps," a rotating solar symbol similar to one of all too unhappy memory. To all appearances, there are even Padanian bards.[27]

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26   See, for example, E. Rosaspina, *Un rito celtico per le prime nozze padane*, in "Corriere della Sera," 21 September 1998, p. 5.

27   Giovani Padani "Primule Verdi," *Scrivi anche tu le storie Padane, diventa un bardo Padano*, 2001–2002, http://digilander.libero.it/primuleverdi/fantasy/bardopadano.html (cons. May 12, 2019). Cf. L. Del Corso and P. Pecere, *L'anello che non tiene* cit., p. 7.

Popes and Saints: Catholic Middle Ages

> He thought […] of old Madame de Tremouillac, who, having wakened up one morning early and seen a skeleton seated in an armchair by the fire reading her diary, had been confined to her bed for six weeks with an attack of brain fever, and, on her recovery, had become reconciled to the Church, and broken off her connection with that notorious sceptic, Monsieur de Voltaire.
>
> O. WILDE, *The Canterville Ghost* (1887)

After having delved into the uses of the Middle Ages on the part of those who have found in it a political and/or spiritual meaning structured as an alternative, a return, or an elsewhere, it is time for an analysis that may be even more complex, that of the political use of the idea of the medieval in Christian—and more specifically Catholic—culture of the last few decades. Among the many themes contained in this book, this is perhaps the most difficult to develop, albeit for a reason that is quite simple: while the political, cultural, and religious movements we have spoken of so far are experiences that were born and matured during a period between the 1700s and 1900s, Christianity is not. Christianity in the Middle Ages was already adult; indeed, the Medieval Era only constitutes one long segment of its history. The institutions that gave shape to the Christian religion, the churches, the Orders, the communities of the faithful, have deep origins in a time that predates the Medieval Era, and many of them were empirically founded before then.

As opposed to the myth of an enduring Wicca, Druidic, or Odinist religion, the Roman papacy was truly—historically—an operating institution in the Middle Ages as today. The Catholic tradition is presented so coherently that it has itself served as a model for those who found themselves needing to rethink their own history as a continuum without having any proof. But the question of the relationship between Christianity and the Middle Ages is highly complex. As, for example, we invoked the concepts of historic time and mythic time to explain the relationship between a medieval phenomenon (like chivalry) and its current reappropriation, we could do the same here, but only with the caveat that the intersections are much deeper and thus it's not easy to distinguish where the course of history ends and the atemporal dogmatic dimension, and from there the mythical sphere, begins.

Continental Protestantism (Lutheran, Calvinist) requires a "positive" Middle Ages only in a limited form, as it always has recourse to a much higher and older model, that of the first *sequela Christi*, the primitive Church. Except for a few necessary exceptions—above all the recovery of an individual dimension of medieval spirituality—one can argue that Protestantism fundamentally rejects the Middle Ages as a positive politico-religious and public category, considering it instead a decadent period of superstitious religiosity, which made use of images and basely material objects, and of the corrupt Roman Church: such a view informed the sixteenth-century histories of Matthias Flacius Illyricus and the *Magdeburg Centuries*.[1] The Middle Ages are identified with tradition and stasis, while the reform represents modernity and dynamism: its function is thus eminently oppositional. The celebrated work of Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905), radicalized this ideological polarization.[2] Perhaps this is why, in the countries of Protestant tradition, the myth of the Middle Ages, while quite common, does not tend to manifest as a politico-religious category, and when it does, it usually takes either generic themes (chivalry) or non-Christian ones (pagan religions, esotericism) as its points of reference. Or, alternately, it takes up ancient motifs of anti-Catholic and anti-Papist conflict, as encountered in several recent novels and feature films, such as *The Da Vinci Code* (2003) and *Pope Joan* (2009).

The case of Anglicanism, which Veronica Ortenberg and Michael Alexander have touched on, is completely different.[3] This Anglo-Saxon Protestant culture, aside from making fundamental contributions to medievalism in general, has also offered a supreme image of medieval religiosity which it adopts as its own, insofar as its relationship with tradition, perceived as autochthonous, is presented in a continuous and not in an oppositional key. Hence the great Pre-Raphaelite artistic movement of the 1800s, which was also profoundly mystical; hence the launch of the traditionalist revival of the High Church, summed up in the popular expression "smells and bells."[4] Hence the recovery of a Middle Ages shines forth in construction of great, neo-Gothic Cathedrals— almost like towering forests of the North—and university buildings, places of

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1 Cf. Ch. Amalvi, *Le goût du Moyen Âge* cit., pp. 215–218.

2 M. Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism and Other Writings*, Penguin, London 2002, original edition: *Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus*, in "Archiv für Sozialwissenschaften und Sozialpolitik," I (1904–1905), nn. 20–21. Cf. B. Stock, *Listening for the Text* cit., pp. 117–119.

3 V. Ortenberg, *In Search of the Holy Grail* cit., pp. 81–85, 157, 177 ff.; M. Alexander, *Medievalism* cit., pp. 50–64, 212, 245–261.

4 V. Ortenberg, *In Search of the Holy Grail* cit., p. 83.

culture associated with monastic spirituality.[5] We're dealing with a religiosity that continues well into the twentieth century, for instance, through the adoption of the chivalric ethics of Saint George by Lord Baden-Powell's scout program, and through the literary works of countless authors.

But in countries of Anglican culture, the Middle Ages cannot serve to reproduce values that embrace adherence to a universal, Christian community subject to the Roman authority, which is the node of the Catholic interpretation of the Middle Ages. If from the level of the highest spirituality translated into symbols, one proceeds to consider the ecclesiastical institutions and hierarchies operative in these territories, then one comes rapidly up against Anglicanism's almost insurmountable problem of establishing a balance between continuity—necessary for celebrating its own heritage—and caesura—also necessary, but this time to mark the rupture with Rome and thus with the Medieval Era itself. Not for nothing is the Anglo-Saxon revival, to a not-insignificant degree, Anglo-Catholic (think of Cardinal Newman in the 1800s, or authors like G.K. Chesterton and J.R.R. Tolkien in the 1900s). And not for nothing have those Protestant thinkers who refer to the higher meaning of the Christian Middle Ages often been suspected of being papists and crypto-Catholics.

We come then to evaluate, in broad strokes, a Catholic Middle Ages. Here the discourse presents itself in the guise of linearity, because tradition, which includes the original Church and the entire medieval period, is not under discussion. All of history is *historia salutis*, the history of salvation, and knows no interruptions. The model of medieval *christianitas* is that of a society divided into perfect (that is, unalterable) *ordines*, which coexist harmoniously and synergistically, each one respecting its own role, adhering to a single creed, and obeying a single hierarchy. According to Catholic philosophy and historiography, this *Societas Christiana* is one of the original and originating characteristics of medieval civilization, and the Medieval Era becomes "the age of a global civilization, tending towards an organic realization of itself."[6] From ethical and political points of view, returning to the spirit of the Middle Ages thus means returning to the unitary ideal of society, which corresponds once and for all to the Church, the perfect society. The theme of medieval Christianity as a unifying period for society is one of the cornerstones of the debate, quite heated in

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5   C.A. Bruzelius, *Il gotico nell'architettura universitaria*, in E. Castelnuovo and G. Sergi (eds.), *Arti e storia nel medioevo*, vol. IV cit., pp. 483–490.

6   R. Manselli, *Il medioevo come Christianitas: una scoperta romantica*, in V. Branca (ed.), *Concetto, storia, miti e immagini* cit., pp. 51–89: 89. On that subject today, see also R. Facchini, *Sognando la "Christianitas"* cit.

recent years, over the "Christian roots" of Europe, a theme we will address in a later chapter.

In order to lay this design out in all its limpid clarity, we must obviously consider Papal primacy as existing *ab origine* and not as the result of a historical process, which it actually was. We must consider the apostolic tradition as univocal and uninterrupted, relegate the emperors to the role of simple laymen and the anti-popes to the role of schismatic heresiarchs, and judge everything that in the Middle Ages was opposition, dissent, or even simple diversity as extraneous to the social communion. The other religions practiced in Europe are incongruous and mere demonic leftovers: *omnes dii gentium daemonia* ("All the gods of nations are demons"). The heresies turn into the crime of *lèse majesté*, a failed attempt to subvert the divine and natural order. The idea that multiple Christianities existed throughout the Middle Ages is unacceptable, except to the extent that one then recognizes that the true Christianity was the one that triumphed. Thus, John Paul II, celebrating the first millennium of Hungary's Pannonhalma Archabbey in 1996, gave a speech affirming that "to commemorate the thousand years since the foundation of Pannonhalma means [...] thinking back to that state of unity among believers that characterized the first millennium."[7] Certainly, the pontiff meant to refer to the fact that the Great Schism between East and West (1054) had not yet happened, but thinking of the first millennium of Christianity as a long, original period of unity among believers is not historically sound: if anything, the opposite is true, but after bitter conflict they finally settled on a few distinct orthodoxies.

Rather than an inverted, antagonistic, and heterodox Middle Ages typical of some of usages that we have seen on both the left (Ch. 6) and right (Ch. 7), here we find ourselves before an official, orthodox, and legitimate Middle Ages. To ensure the decidedly organic nature of this model, we must make reference primarily to the period from the mid-twelfth to the early fourteenth century, that stretch of time that in 1997 John Paul II called a "Golden Age"[8]: the period,

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7   John Paul II, *Con grande gioia sono venuto pellegrino*, in J. Pal and A. Somorjai (eds.), *Mille anni di storia dell'arciabbazia di Pannonhalma*, Accademia d'Ungheria, Roma 1997, pp. 7–11: 7 ff.

8   "Medieval Christianity in its Golden Age, reflecting on the facts of Revelations and the influence of Greek philosophy, expressed its vision of reality through the 'transcendentals': every entity, as a participant in Being, is true, good, and beautiful [...]. The primary acquisition of medieval thought was that man, in the act of knowing, opens himself to objective reality, which places itself before him as the limit of his wonder, and thus his respect, in addition to his creativity. Thus the fundamental lines are drawn not only of a conception of the real, but also of man's very engagement with the world. Modern thought, whatever interpretation you wish to give it, has replaced the principle of reality with the search for certainty through so-called 'methodical doubt.' The consequence has been that man, having progressively lost his

that is, of effective Roman primacy, of hierarchical, juridical, liturgical, and theological unity in the Church.

Now, concepts of a Christian empire and a *Societas Christiana* were in fact widespread in the Middle Ages. Even the myth of the universality of Christian and Imperial Rome is authentically medieval and pervaded the entire epoch: the Middle Ages loved Rome more than the Renaissance did, because they considered themselves its continuation and not its recreation. They kept it alive as an illustrious elder rather than trying to resurrect the dead.[9] Even Francis of Assisi is, to be sure, a man of the Middle Ages, but his message perdures, and not through any later, intellectual reclamation, but through institutions that have been kept alive for centuries. The hidden gaps exist and they are numerous: the example of Francis was not chosen by chance, but because the recollection of the saint has in fact changed many times over the centuries, until he became the saint of peace.[10] The fabric of his memory has been mended so many times already that it is hard to recognize the stitches that might allow one to glimpse the restoration work and the labor of recomposition that, *a posteriori,* presents a neat design and a unified plot.

In reality, a not insignificant part of what we consider authentically medieval in religion is the fruit of the Restorationist, neo-Thomist, anti-Enlightenment, anti-Progressive, and anti-Modernist Catholic and Anglican thought of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: only since the 1800s have people thought

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sense of wonder and respect for the reality external to and independent from him, has started to erect himself as the center of the cosmos with a growing presumption of dominion." John Paul II, *Messaggio al XVIII Meeting per l'amicizia tra i popoli*, Rimini, Aug. 24–30, 1997, in "Tracce. Rivista internazionale di Comunione e Liberazione," www.tracce.it/?id=338&id_n=4689&pagina=7 (cons. May 13, 2019). Cf. L. Negri, *Controstoria. Una rilettura di mille anni di vita della Chiesa*, San Paolo, Torino 2000, pp. 9 ff. See also John Paul II, *Memory and Identity* cit. (pp. 118 ff. of the Italian edition).

9 A. Giardina and A. Vauchez, *Il mito di Roma da Carlo Magno a Mussolini*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 2000; *Roma antica nel medioevo. Mito, rappresentazioni, sopravvivenze nella "Respublica Christiana,"* Vita e Pensiero, Milano 2001.

10 See C. Frugoni, *Francesco e l'invenzione delle stimmate: una storia per parole e immagini fino a Bonaventura e Giotto*, Einaudi, Torino 2010; R. Michetti, *Francesco d'Assisi e l'essenza del cristianesimo. A proposito di alcune biografie storiche e di alcuni studi contemporanei*, in *Francesco d'Assisi fra storia, letteratura e iconografia*, Proceedings of seminar, Rende, 8–9 May 1995, Rubbettino, Soveria Mannelli 1996, pp. 37–67; Id., *François d'Assise et la paix révélée. Réflexions sur le mythe du pacifisme franciscain et sur la predication de paix de François d'Assise dans la société communale du XIIIe siècle*, in R.M. Dessì (ed.), *Prêcher la paix, et discipliner la société: Italie, France, Angleterre (XIIIe–XVe siècle)*, Brepols, Turnhout 2005, pp. 279–312; T. Caliò, R. Rusconi (eds.), *San Francesco d'Italia. Santità e identità nazionale*, Viella, Roma 2011; A. Marini, *Controstoria: Francesco d'Assisi e l'Islam*, "Franciscana," 15 (2012), pp. 1–54; Ch. Mercuri, *Francesco d'Assisi: la storia negata*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 2018³.

of the Middle Ages as the great age of united faith, free from those later struggles among various denominations.[11] The idea of a Europe united in Christianity is the dream (and indeed also the project) of Innocent III (r. 1198–1216) and, six hundred years later, it is the dream (and regret) of Novalis: it is a territory that lies between the dream of a future that was never realized and the dream of a past that never was. This medieval project and its Romantic regret are what truly united Europe in Christianity:

> They were beautiful, splendid times, when Europe was a Christian land, where a sole Christianity lived in this part of the world, humanely constituted; a single, great, common interest united the most distant provinces of this vast spiritual realm. Without great worldly possessions a sole, supreme head directed and unified the great political forces. A bountiful body, to which all had access, was placed immediately beneath him and heeded his gestures and zealously labored to consolidate his beneficent power.[12]

Thus, the *Santa Romana Repubblica* (to cite the title of a book by Giorgio Falco) was the expression both of a culture dominant from the eleventh to thirteenth centuries in particular, and of much more recent cultures that revived these plans, dreams, and grievances with a political intention: these recent cultures are the children of Innocent III, but also of Novalis and Chateaubriand.[13] They

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11   R. Manselli, *Il medioevo come Christianitas* cit.

12   "Es waren schöne glänzende Zeiten, wo Europa ein christliches Land war, wo Eine Christenheit diesen menschlich gestalteten Welttheil bewohnte; Ein großes gemeinschaftliches Interesse verband die entlegensten Provinzen dieses weiten geistlichen Reichs.— Ohne große weltliche Besitzthümer lenkte und vereinigte Ein Oberhaupt, die großen politischen Kräfte.—Eine zahlreiche Zunft zu der jedermann den Zutritt hatte, stand unmittelbar unter demselben und vollführte seine Winke und strebte mit Eifer seine wohlthätige Macht zu befestigen": Novalis, *Die Christenheit oder Europa* [1798, first ed. 1826], now in Id., *Schriften. Die Werke Friedrich von Hardenbergs*, ed. R. Samuel [et al.], Kohlhammer, Stuttgart 1960–77, vol. III, pp. 507–525: 507. The work was written in 1798, but only published in 1826; see on that subject R. Manselli, *Il medioevo come Christianitas* cit., p. 64: "To be considered the true manifesto of Romantic historiography on the Middle Ages in Germany"; F. Cardini, *Europa. Le radici cristiane*, Il Cerchio iniziative editoriali, Rimini 2002[2], pp. 23 ff.

13   G. Falco, *La Santa Romana Repubblica: Profilo storico del medioevo*, Ricciardi, Milano-Napoli 1954. Cf. R. Manselli, *Il medioevo come Christianitas* cit., especially pp. 63–69, 74–82. On the positions of Falco, Morghen, Manselli, and Miccoli regarding the "equation" that Medieval=*Christianitas*, see O. Capitani, *Medioevo passato prossimo* cit., especially pp. 304 ff.

are, at least in part, the result of an *ex post* reelaboration that created a sense of unity by cherry-picking the most appropriate historical material.

From this perspective, the post-Middle Ages is a progressive undoing: the nation-states undermined the pontifical *auctoritas* and Christian universalism; the Renaissance introduced a naturalist neo-paganism; the Protestant Reformation destroyed the unity of Christians, gave life to the nefarious germ of individualism, and invented capitalism; the Enlightenment and Revolution are the parents of atheism, statism, and historical relativism: all these are the stepping stones of a descending path that has distorted humanity. The French Revolution marks the radical turning point. It must represent "the highest degree of corruption that has ever been reached,"[14] burying what still remained alive of the Middle Ages, that is, the concept of the sacred nature of authority and power, the "feudal" institutions based on interpersonal relationships of loyalty and not on the abstract bureaucracy of a sinister and oppressive state: a medieval Kafka would have had nothing to write about.

This, then, is the judgment expressed to various degrees by many Catholic thinkers.[15] Above all Jacques Maritain, who rejected modernity for a hopeful return to the Middle Ages. For him, the radiant first age of Christianity was followed in modern times by the second, which would have brought on the eclipse of sacred. The "third age," however, would have seen the dawn of the new Christianity.[16]

The Catholic Church was the only institution in the twentieth century to pose an effective resistance to "Modernism," this latter understood as the philosophical defense of positivism, historical relativism, historical-critical reading of the sacred scriptures, and, simultaneously, of subjectivism. The Church offered an alternative that affirmed the preeminence of the social body—that is, the community of believers subject to the ecclesiastical mastery—over the state and over the individual. The term "Medievalism" itself joins in the bitter

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14   Cf. J. Le Goff, *Storia e memoria* cit., p. 211, on the positions of the realist reactionaries, the *ultras*.

15   For example, R. Guardini, *La fine dell'epoca moderna*, Morcelliana, Brescia 1954 (original edition: *Das Ende der Neuzeit: ein Versuch zur Orientierung*, Hess, Basel 1950); cf. A. Kobyliński, *Modernità e postmodernità. L'interpretazione cristiana dell'esistenza al tramonto dei tempi moderni nel pensiero di Romano Guardini*, Pontificia Università Gregoriana, Roma 1998; A. Mordini, *Il tempio del Cristianesimo*, Cet, Torino 1963; E. Malynski, *Fedeltà feudale-dignità umana*, pref. by M. Tarchi, Edizioni di Ar, Padova 1976; Cf. M. Revelli, *Il medioevo della Destra* cit., pp. 118 ff.

16   J. Maritain, *Antimoderne*, Édition de la Revue des Jeunes, Paris 1922; Id., *Humanisme intégral. Problèmes temporels et spirituels d'une nouvelle chretienté*, Fernand Aubier, Paris 1936. See: M. Grosso, *Alla ricerca della verità: la filosofia cristiana in É. Gilson e J. Maritain*, pref. by P. Viotto, Citta Nuova, Roma 2006.

querelle with the publication of Pius x's encyclical *Pascendi* (1907), "On the Doctrines of the Modernists."[17] As an opposition to "Modernism," George Tyrrell gave "Medievalism" an entirely negative and retrograde meaning, while Agostino Gemelli debuted the journal "Vita e Pensiero" with the polemical article *Medioevalismo,* in which he exalted the medieval period as the most organic and radiant one in the history of man: "This is our plan! We are medievalists."[18]

The debate on what meaning to ascribe to the "Christian Middle Ages" was blazing, in the heart of the Catholic world, for the entire twentieth century. The Medievalist or Traditionalist position was strongly opposed by a Modernist one—expressed in Italy by historians like Ernesto Buonaiuti, Raffaello Morghen, and Raoul Manselli—that essentially claimed that it was permissible and necessary to understand religion from a historical perspective, analyzing the sources, presenting detailed hypotheses and considering them falsifiable, using the scientific method and evaluating the medieval period not as the consummate expression of the universal Church, but as a dynamic process in which spirituality and institutions manifested in complex and diverse ways.[19] This is the fundamental reason why two distinct types of university disciplines

17   The text of the *Pascendi Dominici gregis* can be found online on the official site of the Holy
      See: http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-x/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-x_enc_190709
      08_pascendi-dominici-gregis.html (cons. May 13, 2019).

18   G. Tyrrell, *Medievalism. A Reply to Cardinal Mercier*, Longmans, Green & Company, Lon-
      don 1908, especially pp. 143–146, www.archive.org/details/medievalismreplyootyrriala
      (cons. May 13, 2019); cf., for example, pp. 143 ff.: "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 intellec-
      tual, moral, and social evolution endures; which therefore makes the medieval expression
      of Catholicism its primitive and its final expression. Medievalism is an absolute, Modern-
      ism a relative term." A. Gemelli, *Medioevalismo*, in "Vita e pensiero. Rassegna italiana di
      coltura," I (1914), n. 1, pp. 1–24: 1. See for example p. 2: "We want a culture that responds to
      the most legitimate exigencies, the most profound and inextinguishable aspirations of
      the human spirit, recognizing the supreme values of our life. And a culture with these
      characteristics, we believe, cannot be achieved except by those who seek the principles of
      medieval life." Or, p. 5: "We are medievalists; and we are so because we recognize that so-
      called modern culture is the fiercest enemy of Christianity and that it is pointless to talk
      about adaptation and penetration."

19   For works on medieval subjects produced by modernist historians between the end of the
      nineteenth century and the first two decades of the twentieth, see F. De Giorgi, *Il Medio-
      evo dei modernisti. Modelli di comportamento e pedagogia della libertà*, Editrice La Scuola,
      Brescia 2009.

emerged (and still exist) in Italy: the "History of the Church," and the "History of Christianity."[20]

At the same time, the idea of the Middle Ages is not necessarily beholden to the idea of an opposition between the defense-to-the-death of tradition and corrupt modernity: Catholic philosophers like Étienne Gilson have maintained that modern science did not arise as a victory over medieval ecclesiastical "obscurantism," but instead grew from a continuity, a unitary tradition, a course that proclaims the Christian roots of modern scientific and philosophical thought.[21] Indeed, for Gilson the men of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the inventors of the scholastic *quaestio*, are much more modern than the humanists, who, precisely because they worshiped the cult of antiquity must have detested modernity. It's not for nothing that to them, *modern* architecture and *modern* letters were the horrible, Gothic constructions and characters.[22] The Middle Ages, then, not as Tradition but as modernity.

If the twentieth-century Church rejected Modernism (Buonaiuti, who was a priest, was excommunicated and reduced to a layman), the very same Church is, however, the only institution in that century to have sought to shape prospectively the relationship between modernity and tradition, through the Vatican II Council (1962–65). The years of that reform (which also provoked a broad historiographical debate on the Middle Ages) were considered a time of spiritual regeneration, in which the symbol of medieval Catholicism changed meaning by becoming, as Christian Amalvi wrote, "ouvert et polyphonique."[23] And the Franciscan message of peace, just like the attempt at reconciliation with other Christian denominations and Judaism, went in that exact direction.

Despite the two-thousand-year tradition of the Church and its desire to recover the Pauline ecumenism of its origin, the Vatican II Council and its liturgical reforms enacted in 1970 must also be considered the two fuses that reignited the dialectic between defenders of tradition and innovators. But this time the roles are reversed, with the Church as the one guiding, at least initially, the changes. These, while presented in the groove of tradition as a project of reform, have in point of fact also been interpreted as a profound

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20   TN: While both refer to historical, rather than theological, disciplines, the History of the Church has always been more closely affiliated with the Catholic world, while the History of Christianity tends to take a more secular approach.

21   Among his many works: É. Gilson, *Études sur le rôle de la pensée médiévale dans la formation du système cartésien*, J. Vrin, Paris 1930; see M. Grosso, *Alla ricerca della verità* cit.

22   É. Gilson, *Le Moyen Âge comme "saeculum modernum"* cit., pp. 8 ff.

23   Ch. Amalvi, *Le goût du Moyen Âge* cit., p. 218.

renewal—that is, as a revolution.[24] On the one hand, Vatican II prepared the Church for '68, helping it to live it or to deal with it by several means: otherwise, not only would there not have been the "basic Christian community" nor the presence of guitars in church, but maybe the number of Catholics would be even more diminished. Many believers and many intellectuals were on board, such that Paul VI addressed his message for men of science to Jacques Maritain himself. At the same time, however, Vatican II catalyzed a reactionary process on the part of those who rejected it utterly, considering it not a reform, not a new ecclesiastical Pentecost that respects tradition, but an unwarranted and absolute *novatio*.

The traditionalist hemorrhage, strongest primarily in France, united around the figure of Monsignor Marcel-François Lefebvre, who founded the Society of Saint Pius X in 1970, officially broke ties with the Roman Church in 1975, and was excommunicated in 1988. His tomb reads, "Tradidi quod et accepi" (I passed on what I received).[25] By the early Seventies, Catholic integralism was already linked with the formation of far-right political movements, like Jean-Marie Le Pen's *Front National* (1972), but it remained in the margins for twenty years, seen only in traditionalist aristocratic and curial environments.

All this discussion, then, would seemingly belong to the final phase of the long *querelle* between modernity and tradition, if the traditionalist front had not gained ever broader support from the 1990s onward, presenting itself as one of the elements of strong affirmation of political identity in those countries that still have a Catholic base: France, Spain, Portugal, Poland, Austria, and Italy. Catholic Traditionalism, in fact, presents itself today as an organic and structured response to the theme of the "clash of civilizations," understood primarily as the defense of the "Christian roots" of Europe and its individual nations or regions from the risk of "Islamization." According to this way of thinking, "Turkey in Europe" sends shivers down the spine and the attempts at dialogue with other religions of the time of John XXIII and Paul VI are seen as unfeasible, both from a historical perspective—because of the fear of a

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24   Cf. G. Miccoli, *In difesa della fede* cit., p. 16; R. Facchini, *Sognando la "Christianitas"* cit. It's important to recall that Christianity admits to the need for a conscious return to the past, to the perfect time of purity, employing the category of reform, of *re-formatio* and *re-novatio*. This happened so many times in the Middle Ages, in addition to the Modern Age and contemporary times, that even in the continuous thread of tradition, which is never rejected, the Church becomes the conscious architect of epochal gaps in history. The ecumenical synods signaled profound changes, such that re-form, re-action, and re-storation are concepts that can, in fact, be translated into undeclared revolutions.

25   Paul, *1Cor*, 11,3.

contamination that would lead to annihilation—and from a theological one—because the Catholic religion cannot be one among many, as it is the sole authentic faith.[26]

Today, more so than in the recent past, a desire for a spirituality sometimes called "medieval" has returned to the heart of the Church, finding its symbolic expression in the observance of mass in Latin, the polyphonic Roman and the monodic Gregorian chant, the vestments and solemn gestures of the ancient Catholic liturgy, since "barbarized" by guitars and applause at the end of the ceremony.[27] Medievalism plays an important role in describing a traditionalist political identity that considers the medieval period an ideal era, when European society was ordered in the Christian name and battled against the non-Christian. Hence traditionalism's return to the Crusades, the Templars, and naturally the saints that defended and still defend the West. Perhaps also because it uses medievalizing symbols otherwise present in the common imaginary, this culture, considered extremist until a short time ago, is now seen less as antagonistic and more as responding to needs for control and social defense, can now surround itself with support originating from sectors that in the past were less likely to come together. With the exception of the blunt fact of religion (if such a thing is possible), the Catholic traditionalist movement today shows close links, including in their adopted symbologies, with American Protestant neo-conservatism.[28] Even some post-fascist right-wing circles, which for decades in the spirit of Traditionalism identified with references alien to Christianity, now seem to be converging on traditional Catholicism. We are obviously talking about a phenomenon that is far from new, for we can recognize it already in the medievalized rural France of the Vichy regime's propaganda, in Francoist Spain, in the precocious marriage of primordial and Catholic tradition found in some thinkers of the Fifties and Sixties, in Jean-Marie Le Pen's ultra-reactionary movement. In Italy, between the late Sixties and early Seventies, the neo-fascist, extremist organization *Movimento Politico Ordine Nuovo* ("Political Movement of the New Order"), in addition to the "barbarian" symbol of the two-headed axe and the SS motto "my honor is called loyalty," took as its anthem *La Vandeana*, an old counter-revolutionary ballad that celebrated

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26   See, for example, A. Del Valle, *Perché la Turchia non può entrare in Europa* cit.; *La Turchia in Europa. Beneficio o catastrofe?*, monograph issue of "Lepanto," XXVIII (2009), n. 178. Cf. also G. Miccoli, *In difesa della fede* cit., pp. 318 ff.

27   See, for example, E. Cuneo, D. Di Sorco, and R. Mameli, *Introibo ad altare Dei: il servizio all'altare nella liturgia romana tradizionale*, Fede & Cultura, Verona 2008.

28   U. Eco, *Turning Back the Clock* cit. (pp. 254–257 of the Italian edition); L. Copertino, *Spaghetticons. La deriva neoconservatrice della destra cattolica italiana*, Il Cerchio iniziative editoriali, Rimini 2008.

anti-Jacobin insurgence. The impression that emerges is that this syncretism between generally unrelated political traditions is much more prominent today than it was in the past. One may thus refer to the Italian *Forza Nuova* ("New Force") movement (est. 1997) and the *Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs* ("Freedom Party of Austria"), that under the leadership of Jörg Haider became the number two party in Austria in 1999. A pertinent example seems to be that of Gianni Alemanno, former Minister of Agriculture and later Mayor of Rome, who in May 2006 showed his necklace with a Celtic cross on television. When asked by the newscaster Daria Bignardi why he wore it, Alemanno replied that it was a symbol of Celtic Christianity and a memento of a murdered friend. Two years later, he claimed he had the cross blessed during a visit to the Holy Sepulchre. That the circled cross is an emblem of Celtic Christianity is a fact, but to some commentators it seemed improbable that, in earlier years, Alemanno would have worn it for this wholesome meaning, rather than for its militant neo-fascist significance.[29] The supporters of the Northern League can, as has been proven, be at one and the same time Crusaders ready to battle for their faith and Celtic pagans who raise hymns to the god Po around a High Priest.[30]

The Medieval Era offers a convenient space-time for the sharing of symbols in the name of Christianity: knights, Crusades, and the pious Celts of *Braveheart*. Filippo Burzio wrote about this already in 1935, admonishing Julius Evola for his anti-Christianity:

> Leaving aside the metaphysical question—in the historic landscape one ideal unites us: Chivalry. But Chivalry was not just warfare, it was also generosity and piety; in it, the "Christian synthesis" was fully realized […]; now, you all forget this point.[31]

New militias of the Temple are forming today, new knightly orders that are shared, as we have seen, by political movements of a different stamp, but this time we come to them in the name of Catholic orthodoxy. The Templars are not the guardians of an arcane and anti-Roman knowledge (or even anti-Christian: *Militia Templi* is also the name of a Satanist rock band), but the Catholic defenders of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem, exalted in the *Praise of the*

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29   Cf. F. Ceccarelli, *Gianni crociato eclettico tra Evola e il Santo Sepolcro*, in "la Repubblica," April 22, 2009, p. 9.

30   A. Tornielli, *Il Carroccio prega il dio Po ma non tradisce la Chiesa*, in "il Giornale," Aug. 23, 2009, http://www.ilgiornale.it/news/carroccio-prega-dio-po-non-tradisce-chiesa.html (cons. May 13, 2019).

31   F. Burzio, review of J. Evola, *Rivolta contro il mondo moderno* cit., www.centrostudilaruna .it/evolaburzio.html (cons. May 13, 2019).

New Knighthood of Bernard of Clairvaux.[32] The fact that they were absolved by Pope Clement V in the course of the trial against them—a recent historical discovery that in turn absolves the pope, as it lays the greater responsibility for their condemnation and destruction on the King of France, Philip the Fair—has been particularly welcomed in the climate of these recent years.[33] Thus the Templars are beloved by people of very different political creeds, who often have no love for one another.[34] Like "Crusade," like "Tolkien," and like "Medieval," "Templar" is a word of many meanings.

The Catholic hierarchy's answer and proposal in the face of these demands are quite articulate. From many perspectives the Church continues to march under the banner of ecumenism and dialogue between religions: the gap between it and those who appeal to an inescapable "clash of civilizations" is stark. In the same way, even the great Medieval season of evangelization in the East is presented in a multicultural dimension, as a successful mission carried out in the name of respect for those cultures with which the missionaries made contact.[35] And this change of direction happened before everyone's eyes, and the accusations of a "return to the Middle Ages" to which we alluded to in the second chapter point precisely in this direction.

What seemed during John Paul II's papacy like a problematic return to pre-Vatican II positions grew more intense under his successor Benedict XVI, whose Traditionalist ideas were already known during his tenure as cardinal. Benedict placed the blame on the "cacophonous" years following Vatican II, when the council itself would be distorted and misinterpreted as an indiscriminate and anarchical breach.[36] Moreover, in a radical manner the pontiff held up Enlightenment culture as primarily responsible for the critique of Christianity, which is the sole guardian of truth.[37] In this telling, Enlightenment philosophy is considered irrational and thus cannot lead to the truth but only

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32   Bernard of Clairvaux, *In Praise of the New Knighthood. A Treatise on the Knights Templar and the Holy Places of Jerusalem*, ed. C. Greenia, De Gruyter, Berlin 2010 (Bernardus Claraevallensis Abbas, *Liber ad milites Templi de laude novae militiae*).

33   B. Frale, *Il papato e il processo ai Templari. L'inedita assoluzione di Chinon alla luce della diplomatica pontificia*, Viella, Roma 2003.

34   F. Cardini, *Templari e templarismo* cit., p. 122; S. Merli, *Templari e templarismo* cit.

35   John Paul II, Encyclical *Slavorum Apostoli*, June 2, 1985, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_19850602_slavorum-apostoli.html (cons. May 13, 2019); Id., *Memory and Identity* cit. (pp. 115, 125–128 of the Italian edition); *I santi Cirillo e Metodio precursori dell'inculturazione,* conference, Roma, Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 3 December 2009; cf. G. Miccoli, *In difesa della fede* cit., pp. 165 ff.

36   G. Miccoli, *In difesa della fede* cit., pp. 18 ff., 28 ff., 147.

37   J. Ratzinger, *Verité du Christianisme? Conference à la Sorbonne* (Nov. 27, 1999), in "La Documentation Catholique," LXXXII (2000), n. 97, pp. 29–35. Cf. G. Miccoli, *In difesa della fede*

to the horrors of the last three centuries, while Christianity—presented as the true heir to Greek philosophy—is the rational one. In accordance with the neo-scholastic model of the long nineteenth century, the great Late Antique and medieval philosophers are brought back to the fore: Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and Bonaventure, with whose exegeses the pontiff himself has long grappled, recognizing in St. Thomas the achievement of "harmonic synthesis" between faith and reason.[38]

Even the choice of the name Benedict—which aside from the homony-mous saint recalls the name of Benedict XV (1914–1922)—seemed ancient, a harbinger of a restorative impulse that predated the Johns and Pauls. The pope tried to bring the Lefebvrian schismatics back into the fold of the Church, an action that caused controversy, as it was considered the result of a reactionary plan hatched when he was a cardinal. He resumed the use of some vestments that had not been seen since the papacy of John XXIII, and he once more granted permission to hold mass according to the Tridentine rite (the version of 1962 presented in the Roman missal of John XXIII, itself an update to that of St. Pius V). The Tridentine liturgy accentuates the distance between clergy and laity: the priest turns his back to the faithful and the people of God cannot sing the mass. The reinstatement of certain prayer formulas, above all for the salva-tion of the Jews, provoked widespread incertitude. This was accentuated by the fact that the religious freedom of all believers, recognized by Vatican II, is again substituted with the clear affirmation that the Catholic Church is the only possessor of truth: a hardening of doctrine that makes it difficult to follow the ecumenical path of religious tolerance, not to mention collaborating with non-believers.

People today are reiterating with renewed energy the basic anti-modernist interpretation of the *Pascendi* encyclical (1907), and going still further back, the *Syllabus of Errors* of Pius IX (1864) and all the anti-Unification, anti-Rationalist, anti-Enlightenment Catholic apologists who make negative myth-engines of the specters of the French Revolution, the Jewish-Masonic conspiracy, and the lie of Italian unification, and positive myth-engines of the anti-Jacobin insur-gence (above all the Vendée) and Bourbonophile brigandage.[39] Thus, while

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cit., p. 275. For John Paul II's position—more balanced although also strongly critical—regarding the Enlightenment, see his *Memory and Identity* cit. (pp. 18–21, 120–122, 133–136 of the Italian edition).

38   Benedict XVI, *Insegnamenti di Benedetto XVI*, vol. 1 (April-Dec. 2005), Libreria editrice vaticana, Città del Vaticano 2006, p. 175, cit. by G. Miccoli, *In difesa della fede* cit., p. 311.

39   Pius X, *Pascendi Dominici gregis* cit.; Pius IX, *Quanta cura* (1864, Dec. 8), https://w2.vatican .va/content/pius-ix/la/documents/encyclica-quanta-cura-8-decembris-1864.html (cons.

the atlases and theories of state founded on ancestral ethnicity lead Eastern Europe back to the 1800s and early 1900s (as we will see in the following chapter), in Rome the Church follows a parallel path. The simultaneity of the two phenomena is striking: on the one hand a neo-medieval neo-Romanticism, on the other an anti-modernism that in the early twentieth century was already called "medievalism."[40] This undoubtable "powerful thought" lays the groundwork for radio stations (like Radio Maria in Italy) that spread messages like the one that seeks to stamp out the frequent recourse to magicians and fortune-tellers by branding these practices not as superstitions but as the work of the devil. In denouncing their sinister origin, they give them credit for efficacy. But they also reject scientific theories that "make less of God": we come back to creationism as the sole doctrine that can explain the birth of the universe, categorically excluding the scientific theory of evolution.[41]

None of this, however, is truly medieval, except in the negative and extrinsic sense that we have recognized and discussed in the second chapter. It is instead the expression of a now centuries-old discomfort that the Roman Church harbors toward modernity, and that today returns in force and with the power of persuasion, presenting itself as the main reference (courtesy of its solid institutional and media profiles) for other ways of representing the world in a mystic, esoteric, and symbolic key, and thereby finding itself in alliance with

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May 13, 2019). Cf. M. Caffiero, *Libertà di ricerca* cit., pp. 13–16. It's not easy to understand whether Benedict XVI was talking solely about a restoration project promoted by this pontificate, or a reality that truly concerns the Catholic Church in its global dimension. Now we feel more strongly the disconnect between the Romanocentric positions and the orientation of many Episcopal conferences and believers. See, for example, R. Chiaberge, *Lo scisma. Cattolici senza papa*, Longanesi, Milano 2009.

40   G. Tyrrell, *Medievalism* cit., especially pp. 143 ff.; A. Gemelli, *Medioevalismo* cit.

41   John Paul II, *Memory and Identity* cit. (p. 99 of the Italian edition): "The origins of history—the believer knows—can be found in the Book of Genesis." See, for example, M. Blondet, *L'uccellosauro ed altri animali: la catastrofe del darwinismo*, Effedieffe, Milano 2002; R. De Mattei, *Evoluzionismo. Il tramonto di una ipotesi*, Cantagalli, Siena 2009. Cf. however G. Filoramo, *La Chiesa e le sfide della modernità*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 2007, especially Ch. 6, not to mention P. Odifreddi, *In principio era Darwin. La vita, il pensiero, il dibattito sull'evoluzionismo*, Longanesi, Milano 2009, and furthermore the site *Dimissioni del vicepresidente del CNR Roberto De Mattei*, www.activism.com/it_IT/petizione/dimissioni-del-vicepresidente-del-cnr-roberto-de-mattei/4563 (cons. May 13, 2019). On the other hand, it's well known that, in Raymond Queneau's ironic interpretation, the cave paintings of primitive man were painted by the infamous Duke of Auge at the end of the eighteenth century. They too were essentially the products of the Enlightenment. R. Queneau, *Between Blue and Blue* cit. (pp. 221 ff. of the French edition)

other post-modern modes of rejecting the modern—an alliance that, only twenty years ago, could not be conceived of in such dimensions.[42]

But what, then, is the Middle Ages that the Church truly feels to be its own and translates into a political message? Here the most interesting thing to consider is a peculiar and distinctive element: the fact that the pope still participates today in that distant epoch, adding new characteristic traits, ultimately modifying it. We are referring to the canonization in recent years of saints of the Medieval Era. In truth they are few in number, but they are significant indeed. John Paul II canonized 482 saints, more than had received the Honors of the Altar during the several previous centuries. Most of them lived in the 1800s and 1900s; a not-insignificant number date to the early modern era; the medieval saints are no more than ten. If the Sicilian Saint Eustochia Smeralda Calafato (1434–1485), canonized in 1988, cannot tell us much, the plot thickens when we remember Saint Agnes of Bohemia (1211–1282), the daughter of King Ottokar I, canonized on November 12, 1989. An Eastern European princess becomes a saint three days after the fall of the Berlin Wall, in a precarious Czechoslovakia that only a few days later would experience the "Velvet Revolution" that overthrew the socialist government.[43] Along with her we find Saint Hedwig, queen of Poland (1374–1399), canonized June 8, 1997, and Saint Cunegonda (Kinga) (1224–1292), another queen of Poland, raised to the Honors of the Altar on June 16, 1999. These sainted princess and queens were joined by the revival of the Cult of Saint Meinhard (1134/46–1196), the first Bishop of Livonia, now Latvia (September 8, 1993), and the canonizations of the Dominican tertiary Zdislava of Lemberk (Czech Republic; 1220–1252, canonized May 21, 1995) and the priest Jan of Dukla (Poland; 1414–1484, canonized June 10, 1997).

Now, ascertaining the sanctity of a man or woman who lived in the Middle Ages, and thus allowing masses to be celebrated and churches built in their name, is an act that can be described as political. Proclaiming the sanctity of a medieval person seems to represent an even stronger gesture than canonizing a contemporary one, as the act exalts the concept of the continuity of the Church and reaffirms its right to interfere with tradition. Here we are not talking about characters often defined as "neo-medieval," such as Saint Pius of

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42   Cf. M. Caffiero, *Miracoli e storia* cit., and R. Michetti, *La Chiesa romana, le modernità e la paura della storia tra medioevo e nuovi tempi*, in "Studi storici," XLVIII (2007), n. 2, pp. 557–568.

43   P. Pitha, *Agnes of Prague. A New Bohemian Saint*, in "Franciscan Studies," LXVII (1990), n. 72, pp. 325–340; Ch.-F. Felskau, *Samtene Revolution und "našy středověk." Das mittelalterlichen Böhmen in der Forschung Tschechiens und auf seinem Buchmarkt während der Transformation* (*ca 1990–2000*), in J.M. Bak [et al.] (ed.), *Gebrauch und Missbrauch* cit., pp. 263–278.

Pietrelcina (canonized June 16, 2002),[44] but authentically medieval figures, who lived in that distant age and—according to Catholic thought—restored the glory of their faith in those Eastern European countries that had just escaped from the atheist, Marxist, Soviet yoke. In Slavic countries, both Catholic and Orthodox, the medieval Christian is once more seen as indispensable to the construction of national identity. In these countries a real "history" does not exist before the medieval evangelism that came from Rome or Constantinople, before the introduction of writing thanks to Christian texts, and before the conversion of the chiefs. As opposed to Western and Northern Europe, where sometimes ancient Rome and sometimes Celtic, Anglo-Saxon, Germanic, or Scandinavian culture may represent a historic alternative, among the Slavic peoples the only alternative to the Middle Ages, to the Christian Middle Ages, is "prehistoric"—that is, tribal and not documented by written sources.[45] In the next chapter we will address some of these aspects from a regional point of view; now we consider that, from the perspective of the Roman Church, establishing the sanctity of medieval kings and queens of Eastern Europe means reaffirming the historical national identity of those countries in the name of the apostolic authority, the Catholic faith, and sacred royalty, tracing a continuous thread that starts precisely from the Middle Ages and judges the period of actual socialism to be a mere parenthesis. These kings and queens are presented, to use the title of a book by Gábor Klaniczay, as *Holy Rulers and Blessed Princesses*, testaments to a faith as ancient as it is authentic and eternal, one that goes from Saint Stephen of Hungary (969–1038) all the way to the newly beatified Charles of Austria (1887–1922).[46]

John Paul II gave Poland, Bohemia, and Latvia their sainted queens, bishops, and priests, thus seeking to reconnect Rome with Catholic Eastern Europe by way of the Middle Ages and its tradition of faith. Benedict XVI, who on May 1, 2011, beatified his predecessor, did something similar, albeit with his eyes on

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44 Cf. R. Michetti, *La Chiesa romana, le modernità e le paure* cit., p. 567.

45 See John Paul II, *Memory and Identity* cit. (pp. 96 ff. of the Italian edition): "Speaking of baptism [...] we're not just talking about the sacrament of Christian initiation received by the first historical sovereign of Poland, but also the event that was decisive for the birth of the nation and the formation of its Christian identity. In this sense, the date of the Baptism of Poland signals a turning point. Poland as a nation, then, emerges from its prehistory and starts to exist in history [...]. From the moment of the Baptism, the various tribes begin to exist as a Polish nation." Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 80 ff., 107, 164.

46 G. Klaniczay, *Holy Rulers and Blessed Princesses: Dynastic Cults in Medieval Central Europe*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2002. On the beatification of Emperor Charles: *Homily of John Paul II, Beatification of Five Servants of God*, Sunday, Oct. 3, 2004, official site: http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/2004/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_20041003_beatifications.html (cons. May 13, 2019).

the West. The saints canonized by him who had lived in the Middle Ages are Szymon of Lipnicza, Bernardo Tolomei, and Nuno de Santa Maria Álvares Pereira (1360–1431), who interests us most at the moment.[47] This knight, commander in chief of the army, was the architect of Portugal's independence from Castille and is considered the forefather of the royal and imperial House of Braganza. Already venerated as a saint immediately after his death—he was called *o Santo Condestável*—his deeds were sung by Camões. Becoming friar after a life on the battlefield, he founded the celebrated Carmo Convent of Lisbon.

The canonization of Saint Nuno has a significant political importance and has caused conflict with Spain, which has always been opposed to counting among the saints the general who inflicted the unforgivable defeat of Aljubarrota (August 14, 1385). But above all the canonization of a man of war provoked general reactions of shock and disapproval, even as it produced very favorable comments in traditionalist Catholic circles. In the words of Massimo Introvigne, president of the Center for the Study of New Religions and member of the traditionalist Catholic Alliance movement:

> If, then, there were those who sought to diminish the long "military and warlike" phase of Saint Nuno's life—almost as if only "the sunset of his life" in a convent demonstrated his sanctity—Benedict XVI on the contrary highlights the "exemplary figure" of the Commander more as a knight, a *miles Christi*: a vocation of which chivalry is the emblem and *nomen*, which certainly manifests in various ways in various epochs, but remains an eminent path to sanctity for the Catholic layman who consecrates his life "to the service of the common good and the glory of God."[48]

And in effect, the text of the pontifical sermon delivered on the occasion of his canonization (April 23, 2009) contains a direct reference to the *militia Christi*, though the link it establishes between sanctity and military service is in reality more subtle. The fact that he was an outstanding Christian military captain is considered the main character of Nuno's sanctity, but the context of war is also defined as "apparently" unfavorable to a life of faith and observance:

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47   On Portuguese political medievalism, including Saint Nuno, see P.A. Guerreiro Martins, *History, Nation and Politics. The Middle Ages in Modern Portugal (1890–1947)*, PhD dissertation, Universidade Nova de Lisboa, 2016.

48   M. Introvigne, *Benedetto XVI e San Nuno Alvares Pereira. Le lezioni di una canonizzazione*, 2009, www.cesnur.org/2009/mi_nuni.htm (cons. May 13, 2019).

"Know that the Lord has set apart the godly for himself; the Lord hears when I call to him" (Ps 4: 3). These words of the Responsorial Psalm express the secret of the life of Bl. Nuno de Santa María, a hero and saint of Portugal. The 70 years of his life belong to the second half of the fourteenth century and the first half of the 15th, which saw this nation consolidate its independence from Castille and expand beyond the ocean not without a special plan of God opening new routes that were to favour the transit of Christ's Gospel to the ends of the earth. St Nuno felt he was an instrument of this lofty design and enrolled in the *militia Christi,* that is, in the service of witness that every Christian is called to bear in the world. He was characterized by an intense life of prayer and absolute faith in divine providence. Although he was an excellent soldier and a great leader, he never permitted these personal talents to prevail over the supreme action that comes from God. St Nuno allowed no obstacle to come in the way of God's action in his life, imitating Our Lady, to whom he was deeply devoted and to whom he publicly attributed his victories. At the end of his life, he retired to the Carmelite convent whose building he had commissioned. I am glad to point this exemplary figure out to the whole Church, particularly because he exercised his life of faith and prayer in contexts apparently unfavourable to it, as proof that in any situation, even military or in war time, it is possible to act and to put into practice the values and principles of Christian life, especially if they are placed at the service of the common good and the glory of God.[49]

This speech, which recalls the providential design of Portuguese colonialism, the soldier's faith in divine aid, and the victories that the saint attributed to the Virgin Mary's intercession, seems difficult to reconcile with the pontifical speech of August 20, 2005, already mentioned in the second chapter:

How many pages of history record battles and wars that have been waged, with both sides invoking the Name of God, as if fighting and killing, the enemy could be pleasing to Him. The recollection of these sad events should fill us with shame, for we know only too well what atrocities have

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49   *Homily of His Holiness Benedict XVI, Holy Mass for the Canonization of Five New Saints*, St Peter's Square, Third Sunday of Easter, April 26, 2009, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2009/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20090426_canonizzazioni.html (cons. May 13, 2019).

been committed in the name of religion. The lessons of the past must help us to avoid repeating the same mistakes.[50]

There is no doubt that at Aljubarrota the King of Castille Juan I also trusted in the aid of that same God and the same Virgin who, on that occasion, would have offered their support to Dom Nuno. It falls to us to make the final comparison. In 1969, Paul VI downgraded the Feast of Saint George, the Christian knight who defeated the dragon, whose historical existence is now in doubt, to an optional memorial.[51] In 2009, however, Benedict XVI canonized a medieval knight. In forty years, the world seems to have made a complete turn, but not a revolution.

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50   http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2005/august/documents/hf
      _ben-xvi_spe_20050820_meeting-muslims.html (cons. May 13, 2019). Cf. *supra*, Ch. 2. On
      evangelization outside Europe, "a glorious epic, over which the question of colonization
      still casts a shadow": John Paul II, *Memory and Identity* cit. (pp. 128–130: 128 of the Italian
      edition). For a radical position in the name of integralism, see for example *1492–1992:
      Cinque secoli di epopea missionaria e civilizzatrice*, monograph issue of "Lepanto," XI
      (Sept.-Nov. 1992), n. 125.

51   On St. George and his political interpretation, see today G. Oneto, *Il santo uccisor del dra-
      go. San Giorgio, patrono della libertà*, Il Cerchio iniziative editoriali, Rimini 2009, pp. 101–
      108 for its uses in contemporary times, as in Soviet Russia and Catalunia. For England:
      M. Girouard, *The Return to Camelot* cit.; V. Ortenberg, *In Search of the Holy Grail*, pp. 108 ff.,
      135 ff.

Peoples and Sovereigns: Middle Ages of Nations

> History is falsified in its essential facts, in the interests of the ruling class. Libraries and bookstores are cleansed of all works not considered orthodox. The shadows of obscurantism once more threaten to suffocate the human spirit.
>
> A. SPINELLI, E. ROSSI, and E. COLORNI, *Ventotene Manifesto* (August 1941)

On June 28, 1989 (June 15 in the Orthodox calendar, the Feast of Saint Vitus), exactly six hundred years after the Battle of Kosovo Polje (the "Field of Blackbirds"), where the Serbs were defeated by the Ottomans, the newly elected president of the Republic of Serbia, Slobodan Milosevic, on the exact site of the encounter, gives a solemn speech before a million of his countrymen. That medieval battle, a symbol of the chiefs' disunity and betrayal, but also of the heroism and the courage of the Serbian people throughout history, offers a striking counterpoint to contemporary claims:

> The heroism of Kosovo has inspired our creativity for six centuries, it has nourished our pride and keeps us from forgetting that we were once a great army, courageous and proud, one of the few that were never beaten, even in defeat. Now, six centuries later, we are again engaged in battles, and we must face them. They are not armed battles, though we cannot count those out yet. But, no matter the kind of battles, none of them can be won without determination, courage, and sacrifice, without the noble qualities that were present here on the Field of Kosovo in times past [...]. May the memory of the heroism of Kosovo live forever![1]

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1 The official presentation of the event still had a Yugoslavian character, although its intention was to exalt the Serbian people. The speech can be read in English: http://emperors-clothes. com/articles/jared/milosaid2.html (cons. May 13, 2019). See on that subject, V. Ortenberg, *In Search of the Holy Grail* cit., pp. 90–92 and 117; T. Shippey, *Medievalisms and Why They Matter* cit., p. 51; W. Pohl, *Modern Uses* cit., pp. 67–68, and above all Ch. Mylonas, *Serbian Orthodox Fundamentals. The Quest for an Eternal Identity*, CEU, Budapest 2003, pp. 152 ff.; D. Djokic, *Whose Myth? Which Nation? The Serbian Kosovo Myth Revised*, in J.M. Bak [et al.] (eds.), *Gebrauch und Missbrauch* cit., pp. 215–233, with bibliography. It should be emphasized that this same day of the Feast of Saint Vitus, a day which Serbians consider particularly holy, was that on which in 1914 the heir to the throne of Austria-Hungary, the Archduke Franz Ferdinand, was assassinated in Sarajevo by a pan-Serbian nationalist: the event that launched the First World War.

This speech is a spark in a gasoline canister. After two years of smoldering tensions in the heart of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, on June 25, 1991, Croatia and Slovenia declared their independence, followed by Bosnia in 1992. The wars in Croatia and Bosnia—the first waged in Europe since 1945—continued into 1995. In 1999, NATO bombed the Serbians until they completely retreated from Kosovo. The expression heard most often in those years was "ethnic cleansing": a meticulous purging operation horrible enough to even be labeled "medieval."[2]

Through the grisly example of Yugoslavia, we can start to talk about the exploitation of the Middle Ages today in service of nationalism. In the Eighties, when the global system of two superpowers was still going strong, the situation was completely different. The nation states in Western Europe, already in the middle of a decades-long identity crisis, refused to reaffirm the eternal and immutable principles of national sentiment, but rather worked to create the European Union. In doing so, they willingly eschewed the Middle Ages as a myth-engine for that identity, with the effect that it was left almost exclusively to the movements of the extreme right.

Independence movements were also common in Western Europe, but until the 1980s historical regions that sought emancipation were willing to operate under a form of controlled autonomy and so were no longer considered dangerous to integrity of their ruling nations, which themselves were in the middle of broad processes of decentralization. In Eastern Europe the nationalisms that smoldered under the ashes in Yugoslavia, Romania, and Poland were still reined in under the great Soviet cloak and the superior ideal of socialist internationalism.[3] But no sooner did the Berlin Wall fall (1989) and the Soviet Union disintegrate, than nationalisms reappeared, in a limited manner in Western Europe, in more dramatic forms in Eastern Europe, as well as in other parts of the world.[4] Just when we thought we were moving towards globalization, suddenly the lid blew off and we found ourselves with an explosion of "little nations."

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2   Cf. J. Le Goff, *À la recherche du Moyen Âge* cit., p. 15: "Carla Del Ponte, Chief Prosecutor of the UN tribunal, denounced the 'ethnic cleansing' performed by Slobodan Milosevic as a 'medieval' practice."

3   Obviously we're talking about profoundly different social realities, comparable only in perspective: the liberty felt in Hungary in the 1980s had nothing to do with the Romanian or Russian situations.

4   B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities* cit. Cf. P.J. Geary, *The Myth of Nations* cit., p. 169, regarding the use of the Zulu "myth" in modern Africa and its parallels with Europe: "This attempt to make history serve politics recalls the machinations of certain European nationalists, for instance Slobodan Milosevic's exploitation of the anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo and that of Clovis's baptism by Jean-Marie Le Pen."

In the West, the states of political subjects were gradually weakened in the face of the advance of the new, so-called "medieval disorder" (we discussed this aspect in the early chapters of the book), and the separatists were fully persuaded that the origins—ultimately ethnic—of their suffering peoples were to be sought in the Middle Ages. Requests for autonomy and independence, at times accompanied by forms of xenophobia and tinged with medievalism, began to make themselves heard with renewed force on the part of stateless peoples from historical regions, while other "ancient nations," like Carinthia, began to raise their once-silent voice.[5] Others, however, have arisen from nothing: for instance, in Italy, the Padanian nation proclaimed its independence as the "Northern Republic," on June 16, 1991, and with its name "Padania," on September 15, 1996.

In addition to movements linked to Celticism, about which we have already spoken, the phenomenon of identitarian medievalism in the Romantic fashion is still present in the French *Midi* and some valleys of the south-western Piedmontese Alps. The Occitan movement, quite strong in the 1800s and tending to a Pan-Provençalism that identifies with the troubadourish tradition and the ancient county of Toulouse (just remember Frédéric Mistral, winner of the 1904 Nobel Prize in Literature), gained autonomistic political capital in the post-war years with the creation of the *Partit Nacionalista Occitan* (1959). This movement still exists: March 24, 2007, saw the announcement of the "Gouvernement Provisoire Occitan pour la République Fédérale et Démocratique des Pays d'Oc," which, watched with interest in Catalunia, is considered by its members "an important act to bring awareness to the world of the existence of an Occitan nation."[6] Nevertheless, the movement today is decidedly diminished; in general those who speak the many variations of Provençal and Occitan languages are often intent on their specific cultural identities, having

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5   Thus, for example, Jörg Haider, the leader of the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ), appeared on April 21, 2001, at the exhibit of medieval art and customs of Friesach in a falconer's costume, with a magnificent royal (or imperial) eagle perched on his glove. Or else, another extreme example, a certain Franz Fuchs—who sent some letterbombs in the mid 1990s—used to follow up these missives with normal letters, in which he declared himself to belong to the "Odilo of Bavaria Liberation Army," in reference to a figure who lived in the eighth century and battled against the Slavs in Carinthia: see *Die Geschichte der "Bajuwarischen Befreiungsarmee" des Franz Fuchs*, www.antifa.co.at/antifa/bba.pdf (cons. Mar. 12, 2010, the page was found to be inactive when cons. May 13, 2019). TN: The historical Duchy of Carinthia spanned not only the eponymous Austrian province, but also parts of northern Slovenia.

6   *Es constitueix el Govern Provisional Occita per a la República Fédéral i Democràtica dels Països d'Oc*, in "Radio Catalunya," May 2, 2007, www.radiocatalunya.ca/noticia/1629/ (cons. Mar. 13, 2010, the page was found to be inactive when cons. May 13, 2019).

become aware that a "Greater Occitania" never existed linguistically, socially, or institutionally.[7]

By contrast, this type of identitarian medievalism is quite alive in Catalunia and adjacent regions of France, like Roussillon, as well as in the zone of Alghero in Sardinia. In this "Gran Catalunya," in addition to a keen sense of linguistic distinction, the memories of its early adherence to the Carolingian world and its immense late medieval Mediterranean kingdom are constantly revived.[8] Such medievalisms resemble Celticism more than a little, because they likewise color separatist events with neo-Romantic hues. The main difference is that they are less exportable.[9]

In Spain and Great Britain the process of decentralization has long been underway, in France it is much less perceptible, and in Italy it is the subject of unending debate. Whether in historical regions like Catalunia, Brittany, and Scotland, or pseudo-historical ones like Padania, the separatists have not fully achieved their goals, such that the geographic map of Western Europe (with the obvious exception of Germany) remains the same as it was in 1945. The landscape of Eastern Europe and the ex-Soviet Union, on the other hand, is completely different: here, new nationalistic claims have led to the reaffirmation of a strong identitarian consciousness in those countries that already existed, and a rapid emancipation and independence—at times with resistance—in many other cases. When Yugoslavia and the USSR shattered, dozens of smaller and larger states started popping up on the maps again:

> That we were sliding backwards already seemed obvious after the fall of
> the Berlin Wall, when the political geography of Europe and Asia radi-
> cally shifted. Atlas editors had to turn all their stock (made obsolete by

7   See especially A. Touraine, F. Dubet, Zs. Hegedus, and M. Wieviorka, *Le pays contre l'état: Luttes Occitaines*, Seuil, Paris 1981; Ch. Amalvi, *Le goût du Moyen Âge* cit., pp. 173–180. For the harsh positions against nationalist Occitan ideology, see the site for Consulta Provenzale, www.consultaprovenzale.org/ (cons. Mar. 13, 2010, the page was found to be inactive when cons. May 13, 2019).

8   A. Balcells, *Història del nacionalisme Català: dels origens al nostre temps*, Generalitat de Catalunya, Barcelona 1992; D. Conversi, *The Basques, the Catalans and Spain. Alternative Routes to Nationalist Mobilisation*, Hurst, London 1997; G. Armillotta, *I popoli europei senza stato* cit., pp. 23–33. See, however, what I write in the epilogue of this book regarding the Catalan secession movement in 2017.

9   In any case, even Provençalism has had, in the past, close ties with "esoteric" fascism, through the memory of Cathar persecution and troubadourish tradition exalted by Ezra Pound, a memory that also passes through the court of Frederick II. See R. Facchini, *Il neocatarismo* cit.; see also S. Cavazza, *Piccole patrie* cit., pp. 55 ff. for the contact (except for the separatist aspects) between Italian Fascism and the "Felibrism" founded by Frédéric Mistral.

the presence of the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, Eastern Germany, and other monstrosities of the sort) to pulp and turn back to atlases published before 1914, with their Serbia, Montenegro, Baltic states [sic], and so on.[10]

The Europe of the Nineties and the first decade of the new millennium, then, resembles the one we knew ninety years ago, except that is even more complicated, because if on the one hand Yugoslavia was dissolved, on the other the German, Austro-Hungarian, Russian, and Ottoman Empires no longer exist.

After having served as the backbone of almost all nationalisms, in Western Europe the Middle Ages are seen no longer as essential in defining the identity of the nation-state, but instead as useful in constructing a sense of "little homelands" and one "great European homeland," institutions that want to be strongly identitarian but not organized in the form of a traditional nation-state.[11] In Eastern Europe, the Balkans, and Russia, however, a comprehensive rethinking of history has been underway for twenty years, in which the reclamation of distinctive historical state and national identities in the name of the Middle Ages performs a central role. This is a medievalism that has been defined as "contagious" and involves all the ex-communist European states, from Estonia in the north all the way to Bulgaria in the south.[12]

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10   U. Eco, *Turning Back the Clock* cit. (p. 6 of the Italian edition). Cf. P.J. Geary, *The Myth of Nations* cit., p. 3.

11   On Europe see the following chapter.

12   *The Contagious Middle Ages in Post-Communist East Central Europe*, Exhibition, Budapest, Open Society Archives at the Central European University (OSA), Sept. 15-Oct. 20 2006; University of California Berkeley, Nov. 1 2007-Jan. 31 2008, www.osaarchivum.org/files/exhibitions/middleages/index.html; www.osaarchivum.org/images/stories/pdfs/activity_reports/rferep2006.pdf (cons. Mar. 30, 2010, the pages were found to be inactive when cons. May 6, 2019): "The exhibition presented the resurrection of the Middle Ages in post-communist countries: in political battles, state and church anniversaries, millennial celebrations, the canonizations of national saints, the revival of archaic traditions as well as the ideologies that they embodied, the reemergence of pagan cult sites, wax-puppet shows, martial arts, tournaments, touristic and gastronomic commodities, films, rock musicals, festivals." See G. Klaniczay, *Medieval Origins of Central Europe. An Invention or a Discovery?*, in R.G. Dahrendorf and Y. Elkana [et al.] (eds.), *The Paradoxes of Unintended Consequences*, CEU, Budapest 2000, pp. 251–264; A. Ivanišević, A. Lukan, and A. Suppan (eds.), *Klio ohne Fesseln? Historiographie in östlichen Europa nach den Zusammenbruch der Kommunismus*, P. Lang, Frankfurt am Main 2003; G. Klaniczay, *Political Use of the Middle Ages in Post-Communist Central and Eastern Europe*, in *Uses and Abuses of the Middle Ages, 19th-21st Century*, Budapest, Central European University, Mar. 30-Apr. 2 2005; S. Antohi, P. Apor, and B. Trencsényu (eds.), *Narratives Unbound. Historical Studies in Post-Communist Eastern Europe*, CEU, Budapest-New York 2007; J.M. Bak [et al.] (eds.), *Gebrauch und Missbrauch* cit., *passim*. A separate question is that of medievalism in Greece, for which see: D. Ricks

State and nation—respectively, the institution and the social body—are still thought of as necessarily corresponding, in contrast to the rest of the Western world.[13] And the Medieval Era, which in the Western European countries is now a metaphor for the non-state, is seen in Eastern Europe as the foundation of both the state and the nation. The examples may be numerous, but we will limit ourselves to a few notable cases, starting with symbolism. Banknotes printed since the early Nineties and circulating in Bulgaria, Moldavia, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Ukraine, Hungary... (all republics) represent medieval sovereigns as fathers of the nation. In Russia we find rubles with the likeness of Saint Alexander Nevsky, in Macedonia denars with the Byzantine icons of Archangel Gabriel and the Virgin, in the Czech Republic the koruna with Saint Agnes of Bohemia. The very names of coins current in Croatia and Ukraine—kuna and hryvnia—recall those attested in the Middle Ages. When Slovenia began minting Euro coins (2007), it stamped the two-cent coin with the image of the "Prince's Stone," the upturned base of an ionic column once used during the High Middle Ages in the coronation ceremony of the Duke of Carantania. And which is found, however, in Carinthia in Austria, not Slovenia: thus the "preoccupation" expressed by the Austrian government and the clear stance of Haider, who moved the site of preservation of this symbolic object so important to both nations.[14]

In Poznań, in Poland, they argue endlessly over whether to reconstruct the royal castle—and according to which blueprints.[15] In Hungary they restored the national monument in Ópusztaszer, which houses an immense circular painting narrating the settlement of the Magyars in their territory in the tenth century with powerful visual impact. The Archabbey of Saint Martin in Pannonhalma, *Mons Sacer Pannoniae*, which in the 1800s became the world center for Hungarianness and celebrated its thousandth year in 1996, today reassumes its unifying function. In July 2011, the heart of Archduke Otto von Habsburg (1912–2011), son of the last Austro-Hungarian emperor, was buried there.[16] The Republic of Hungary itself has readopted as a national symbol the crest of

and P. Magdalino (eds.), *Byzantium and the Modern Greek Identity*, Centre for Hellenic Studies—King's College, London 1998.

13   Cf. A. Gamble, *Regional Blocs* cit. Excluding, of course, extreme cases like those of Jean-Marie Le Pen's National Front and, later, Marine Le Pen's National Rally.

14   *The Prince's Stone*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prince%27s_Stone (cons. May 13, 2019). Cf. W. Pohl, *Modern Uses* cit., p. 68.

15   R. Grzesik, *The Middle Ages as a Way of Popularization of a Region—The Case of Poznań*, in J.M. Bak [et al.] (eds.), *Gebrauch und Missbrauch* cit., pp. 278–285: 281 ff.

16   The body was instead interred in the Imperial Crypt in Vienna. Cf. M. Ricci Sargentini, *Muore Otto, ultimo erede dell'impero asburgico*, in "Corriere della Sera," 5 July 2011, p. 19.

the Royal House of Arpad, flanked by a double cross, all topped with the ancient crown of Saint Stephen—which since the year 2000 has been kept not in a museum, but in the seat of the national parliament. Another crown and another saint, George, occupy on the crest of the Republic of Georgia, while Cyril and Methodios return triumphantly to the Orthodox countries. In Serbia we find Saint Sava (thirteenth century), a member of the Nemanjic dynasty, as a central element in the formation of national identity. In Bosnia the memory of Blessed Catherine (fifteenth century), wife of the penultimate king Stephen Thomas, who lived in exile in Rome as a Franciscan tertiary after the Muslim invasion of her country, has come back to life.

Behind these symbols, with their invocations of the past and often of the Middle Ages, one may glimpse the revival of precise political ideals. In Bulgaria, the historiographical myth of the proto-Bulgars has come back into vogue, with which Bulgarians reaffirm their own identity against the Slavic paradigm typical of the Socialist era.[17] In Hungary, many scholarly studies address the history of the medieval monarchy.[18] Between 1995 and 2000, in celebration of the first millennium of the Hungarian state, seventy-seven new monuments were dedicated to the king Saint Stephen.[19] The unresolved knot of Transylvania—Hungarian or Romanian—is heating up again, with each side claiming the right of the region's hypothetical "first arrivals." In Slovakia the Great Moravia of the ninth century is considered "the only possible national predecessor" of the new state.[20] In Ukraine, pro-Russians and pro-Ukrainians fight over who is the true heir of the principality of Kiev and thus of true Ukranian identity.[21] The director of the Institute of Russian History at the Academy of Sciences insists "aggressively" on the fact that the Varangians, the Viking founders of the Rus', along with their prince Rurik, were, in reality, Slavs.[22] But Russia is a case in itself: it celebrates the Tzars of every age. In 2000 it proclaimed Nicolas II and his family holy martyrs and started referring to itself

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17 Cf. *The Contagious Middle Ages* cit.

18 P. Kovacs, *Storiografia politica, nuove prospettive*, in "Bullettino dell'Istituto storico italiano per il medio evo," 113 (2011), *IV Settimana di studi medievali. La Storiografia ungherese dal 1989 ad oggi*, pp. 315–321.

19 G. Klaniczay, *Studi medievali in Ungheria dopo il 1998 nel contesto dell'Europa orientale*, *ibid.*, pp. 323–337; J.M. Bak, *Vorwort*, in Id. [et al.] (eds.), *Gebrauch und Missbrauch* cit., pp. 9–13: 9.

20 W. Pohl, *Modern Uses* cit., p. 68, with bibliography.

21 M. Kizilov, *"Autochthonous" Population, Ethnic Conflicts and Abuse of the Middle Ages in Ukraine and the Autonomous Republic of Crimea*, in J.M. Bak [et al.] (eds.), *Gebrauch und Missbrauch* cit., pp. 297–311.

22 S.A. Ivanov, *Medieval Pseudo-History and Russian National Identity Crisis*, in J.M. Bak [et al.] (eds.), *Gebrauch und Missbrauch* cit., pp. 235–239: 238.

again as holy Mother Russia. And in any case—in clear opposition to other Eastern countries—both the public and the government are once again exalting the greatness of the more recent past: the national anthem of Russia is, once again, the Soviet one.[23]

The examples could go on for pages and pages—and could also remind us that the use of the Middle Ages and of history in general has led in periods of war to the systematic destruction of monuments to the enemy, of their places of memory.[24] The evidence provided, however, should suffice to give an idea of the air we've been breathing for the last thirty years, only partially tempered by the Europeanism that we will see in the next chapter.

This reclaiming of national identities, often under the sign of the Middle Ages, is a counter-response to the leveling and repression once imposed by the socialist regimes.[25] In the Eastern countries, except in Russia, the rejection of communism is complete (though often the senior management still originates from the ranks of the party) and the *damnatio memoriae* of its symbols is total: before the parliament of Budapest waves a banner with the colors of Hungary and a large hole in the center, where the emblem of the Socialist Republic once was.[26] The recent past is erased in the name of a nationalism and symbolism that directly recall the period prior to the First World War.

This does not actually mean that nationalism did not exist under the socialist regimes, along with a political use of history, principally through state-promoted folklore: it would be absurd to believe such thing. For instance, in Romania Ceauşescu pushed for an extreme cult of great ancestors and the

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23   *Ibid.*, p. 235. On the return of religiosity in the patriotic sentiment of Eastern countries: A.-M. Thiesse, *La création des identités nationales* cit., pp. 279 ff. and G. Klaniczay, *New Religious Cult and Modern Nationalism*, in *Uses and Abuses of the Middle Ages in Central and Eastern Europe: From Heritage to Politics*, a Program for University Teachers, Advanced PhD Students, Researchers and Professionals in the Social Sciences and Humanities, Budapest, Central European University, June 30-July 11 2003; for Serbia: Ch. Mylonas, *Serbian Orthodox Fundamentals* cit. and D. Djokić, *Whose Myth?* cit., p. 216; For Bohemia: Ch.-F. Felskau, *Samtene Revolution* cit.; for Romania: A. Pippidi, *Anniversaries, Continuity, and Politics in Romania*, in J.M. Bak [et al.] (eds.), *Gebrauch und Missbrauch*, pp. 325–335, especially pp. 333 ff.; for Russia: J. Garrard, C. Garrard, *Russian Orthodoxy Resurgent: Faith and Power in the New Russia*, Princeton University Press, Princeton-Oxford 2014[2].

24   For Croatia: N. Budak, *Using the Middle Ages* cit., p. 243; for Crimea: M. Kizilov, *"Autochthonous" Population* cit., pp. 309 ff.

25   J. Le Goff, *La vieille Europe et la nôtre*, Seuil, Paris 1994, p. 59; F.P. Tocco, *Europa: complesso di identità. In margine al processo di unificazione monetaria europea*, in "Quaderni medievali," XXVII (2002), n. 53, pp. 140–156: 146.

26   The flag with the hole in the middle also, and above all, recalls the anti-Soviet revolution of 1956, of which this modified flag was the emblem. See D. Lowe, T. Joel, *Remembering the Cold War: Global Contest and National Stories*, Routledge, London-New York 2013, p. 95.

celebration of the national spirit.[27] Polish Marxist historiography was notably *avant-garde* in its studies, but under the socialist regime it stood out for its attention to the Piast dynasty (which held power in Central Europe), rather than the Jagiellonians, who conquered a good half of European Russia.[28] Polish historians studied the class struggle of the peasants and the birth of the state, so that in 1962 Poland celebrated its first millennium triumphantly: obviously not in memory of the "Baptism of Duke Mieszko," which happened in 966, but as the veritable founding date of the state, following the concession of the ducal title by the emperor. Any discussion of ecclesiastical history, religiosity, symbolism, the sacred power of the king, and ethnicity (if not in the Russian and Soviet form of Pan-Slavism and all that entails) was unacceptable. New symbols and new founding myths were (re)invented, in part to produce conscious syncretisms with previous traditions: these were the myths of industrial superproduction, the heroes of the Bolshevik revolution and the anti-German resistance. In Russia, as they proceeded with the destruction of the Orthodox Church and the Cathedral of Christ the Savior itself, "the mummified cadaver of Lenin becomes the relic of the new regime."[29] But if the past remained, its role was marginalized as they looked to the future: "The past is disqualified, as an alienating archaism destined to vanish in the new communist society."[30] There were, without a doubt, independent spirits like the director Andrei Tarkovsky, the historian Aron Gurevich, and the historians of the Warsaw School, Bronisław Geremek and Karol Modzelewski, who occupied themselves with medieval history precisely to avoid constant conflict with the present era and who thus hoped to protect "the organic fabric of the national patrimony."[31] But

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27 A.-M. Thiesse, *La création des identités nationales* cit., pp. 277–282; A. Pippidi, *Anniversaries* cit., especially pp. 330–332. On identitarian conflicts in Yugoslavia before the eruption of the Balkan War: G. Troude, *Conflits identitaires dans la Yougoslavie de Tito, 1960–1980*, Association Pierre Belon, Paris 2007, with bibliography.

28 A fact that remains important in contemporary political dialectic: in December 2004, the Russian Duma switched the national holiday from November 7, which marked the start of the October Revolution, to November 4, which commemorates the liberation of Moscow from Polish occupation in 1612. Cf. S.A. Ivanov, *Medieval Pseudo-History* cit., p. 239.

29 A.-M. Thiesse, *La création des identités nationales* cit., p. 278. On medieval millenarianism transferred, not just to Nazism, but also to Marxism: N. Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium* cit.; F. Dimitri, *Comunismo magico. Leggende, miti e visioni ultraterrene del socialismo reale*, Castelvecchi, Roma 2004.

30 A.-M. Thiesse, *La création des identités nationales* cit., p. 278.

31 K. Modzelewski, *Bronisław Geremek storico polacco nel contesto europeo*, in *Lo storico Bronisław Geremek, protagonista dell'89 polacco ed europeo*, conference, Rome, Accademia dei Lincei, April 21, 2009. The conference presentations are reproduced audiovisually on the site of Radio Radicale, www.radioradicale.it/scheda/277258 (cons. May 13, 2019).

the partial openings of the Fifties and Sixties, ushered in with the end of Stalinism, were closed by the end of the decade with the Prague Spring.

After 1989, however, nations turn medieval and Christian again, and rather than being metaphorical, references to the Middle Ages become their very foundations.[32] The difference with respect to past usage is notable, first of all for the degree of diffusion of the concept, especially over the course of the 1990s, and second for the way in which the nation and the medieval are described: "blood and soil reach an importance unthinkable in the official Communist discourse."[33] In 1998, the president of the Republic of Croatia, Franjo Tudman, expressed as much in his introduction to a volume on King Tomislav:

> What he [Tomislav] achieved in the first quarter of the tenth century is attained today by the Croatian people with its army, on land and on sea [...]. Croatia is resurrected in our time, after many centuries, by keeping alive the memory of King Tomislav, which is therefore sacred to every Croat.[34]

According to some commentators,

> We are faced with an ethnic reawakening, the blooming of those organic nationalisms and the widespread polemological system that they gave life to: the national State [...]. The century closes with the rebirth [...] of ancient Nations, harkening directly back to their traditional cultures and beliefs.[35]

From our point of view, however, we find ourselves on a continent marching at two different speeds: while Western Europe is building the European Union (politically and culturally, and with considerable difficulties), seeking solutions that can mediate between the old sense of the state and the emergence of regional homelands, in Eastern Europe nineteenth-century themes of hard

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32   J.M. Bak [et al.] (eds.), *Gebrauch und Missbrauch* cit., *passim*. For the Balkan region, numerous examples in N. Budak, *Using the Middle Ages* cit., especially pp. 243–244. For Slovenia: M. Verginella (ed.), *Fra invenzione della tradizione e ri-scrittura del passato: la storiografia slovena degli anni Novanta*, monograph issue of "Qualestoria," XXVII (1999), n. 1.

33   S.A. Ivanov, *Medieval Pseudo-History* cit., p. 238. See R.W. Ayres and S.M. Saideman, *For Kin or Country. Xenophobia, Nationalism, and War*, Columbia University Press, New York 2008.

34   Cit. by N. Budak, *Using the Middle Ages* cit., p. 258.

35   C. Risé, *Julius Evola, o la vittoria della Rivolta*, in J. Evola, *Rivolta contro il mondo moderno* cit., pp. 17–22: 21.

and fast nationalism are taken up again, with the same inventions and inversions. And with all the nefarious consequences that derive from it: as Eric J. Hobsbawm writes, with the Treaties of Versailles and Trianon that followed the First World War,

> in Europe the basic principle of re-ordering the map was to create ethnic-linguistic nation states […]. The attempt was a disaster, as can still be seen in the Europe of the 1990s. The national conflicts tearing the continent apart in the 1990s were the old chickens of Versailles once again coming home to roost.[36]

This theme reinforces, if there was ever any need, the concept of the "short twentieth century" (1914–91) theorized by Hobsbawm himself: from the perspective of historic-political categories, the current countries of the East tend to ignore the century completely, throwing out not only the Stasi and the Stalinist purges, but much, much more. This can cause some real mystification, as one can observe in that strand of contemporary Russian historiography closely aligned with the government and in the face of which a historian can do nothing but throw up his hands, as no sooner was the communist censorship ended than "an avalanche of pseudo-academic literature flooded over the Russian readers."[37] We find the mathematician Anatolij Fomenko, author of various books on Russian "history," whose contribution to our knowledge was summed up in *Corriere della Sera* on July 12, 2008:

> Fomenko claims to have studied the position of the stars through the centuries and compared them with ancient documents. It seems all of history must be rewritten, because what we believed happened in antiquity is instead shifted to the Middle Ages. Christ, then, was born in 1053 and crucified in 1086. The first Rome was in reality Alexandria, Egypt, which moved across the Bosporus in the eleventh century and became Byzantium (the name, naturally, comes from the Russian *Bis Antik*, Second Ancient). The mathematician then maintains that this city was also known by other names, Jerusalem and Troy. With astounding temporal acrobatics, he maintains that the war described by Homer was none other than the Sack of Constantinople by the Crusaders. But moving forward, when Byzantium grew weak, Moscow was born, its direct heir, and what we

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36   E.J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes* cit., p. 31.
37   S.A. Ivanov, *Medieval Pseudo-History* cit., p. 236.

know as Rome, on the coast of Latium. It is obvious that this theory reinforces the theories of Slavophiles. The Russian Empire, indeed, is not born as the heir of Rome (and thus of the West), but parallel to Rome and for that reason has nothing in common with our civilization.[38]

The danger is not only in the excesses, which the critical spirit (if and where it still exists) can easily recognize—despite Fomenko's ramblings being still quite popular today in Russia, a land that seems to possess not its own national memory but an Imperial kind of non-memory.[39] The danger is primarily in its obviousness—that is, in proposing historical interpretations that conform to common sentiment, insofar as they are profoundly conditioned by narrative themes and motifs that have held sway for some time. Through this popular understanding of history, one finds in the Middle Ages the origin of the nation, its sentiment, and even its immutable, ancestral ethnicity.[40]

Thus, instead of directing itself towards experimentation with new forms of affiliation, the yearning for liberty on the part of Eastern Europe has found its reference symbols in the period preceding the recent past that it strives to forget. These states have returned not only to atlases printed before 1914, but also to the political projections of the nation via the Middle Ages that were typical of the nineteenth century and the decades before the Great War.[41] The principal modalities of imagining and using the Middle Ages in the countries of Eastern Europe and the Balkans start there.

The conviction that there were any ethno-cultural continuities from the deepest Middle Ages up to our day is really the result of Romantic culture. Even the identification of the nation with its people, or rather the claim that nation and people have always been the same thing and hence that a "national sentiment" exists primordially among the population, is primarily a creation of

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38 F. Dragosei, *Così il Cremlino riscrive la storia*, in "Corriere della Sera," 12 July 2008, p. 41, in response to A.T. Fomenko, *Antiquity in the Middle Ages. Greek and Bible History*, The Edwin Mellen Press, Lewiston-Queenston-Lampeter 1999. See S.A. Ivanov, *Medieval Pseudo-History* cit., who writes of Fomenko (p. 237): "It is completely impossible to render Fomenko's arguments: all of them, from the first word to the last, are absolute nonsense."

39 S.A. Ivanov, *Medieval Pseudo-History* cit., pp. 237 ff. The Ukrainians refuse to be outdone: according to a pseudoscientific theory, the Ukrainian language is one of the oldest in the world, the precursor to Sanskrit, and the Ukrainian mythology is the most ancient Indo-European mythology: M. Kizilov, *"Autochthonous" Population* cit., pp. 299 ff. Some Romanians, however, consider the foundation of Troy to be the work of the Dacians: A. Pippidi, *Anniversaries* cit., p. 333.

40 Cf. *supra*, Ch. 3.

41 See today M. Baár, *Historians and Nationalism* cit.

nineteenth-century culture. That today we know that these theories are sub-
stantially false is the result of historiography of the last thirty years: until rela-
tively recently, almost everyone—historians included—was convinced of
their full validity. How could one not believe the obvious conclusion that the
Germani were the progenitors of the Germans and that the French were once
Franks? That is, that these historical peoples constitute the ancient, but al-
ready perfectly defined, counterpart to contemporary ones?[42] We're dealing
with a misunderstanding that confuses planes of reality, that disregards the
infinite gaps in history, that confers ethnic unity on fluid, amalgamated, and
diverse populations, that ignores that constructions of memory may vary cul-
turally according to the social groups that produced them, and that, in the end,
attributes to the people an uninterrupted historical memory. In fact, even
when a certain territory has been home to a single people (and no more than
one, of course), a people that has been ethnically continuous from the Middle
Ages to our days—and such a thing does happen here and there—how can
one think that this same people has had a continuous identity, that they have
felt the same way for centuries, and centuries, and centuries? And that, pre-
cisely in virtue of this ancestral identity, they could have developed a political
orientation that would lead them *necessarily* to self-determination?

The Middle Ages as a necessary and indisputable premise of contemporary
nations is an axiom that just does not work. Benedetto Croce, in times now
distant, already connected nationalism, especially the German variety, to Ro-
manticism and its "religion of the medieval," coming to the conclusion that he
was dealing with "perverse" interpretations of history:

> But if the religion of the medieval was the principal and most widely
> known, it was not the only one; next to it, and sharing some features with
> it, was once exalted the religion of bloodlines and of the people, of those
> people who, based on scant evidence and historical meditation, were
> deemed the creators and dominators of the Middle Ages, the Germanic
> race, whose virtue is now sought and found and celebrated in every cor-
> ner of Europe [...]. All those, considered in their origins, were perversions
> in that they substituted the particular for the universal, the contingent
> for the eternal, the creature for the creator.[43]

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42   Cf. W. Pohl, *Modern Uses* cit., p. 56.

43   B. Croce, *Introduzione alla Storia d'Europa nel secolo XIX* [1931], now in Id., *Filosofia, Poesia,
      Storia.* Pagination from the author's complete works, Adelphi, Milano 1996, pp. 1262–1314:
      1306 ff.

Today, historians follow with great attention the processes of redeployment of those nineteenth-century cultural categories that created nationalism by basing it instrumentally on the Middle Ages.[44] Among these, medieval historians, many of whom are active in Eastern Europe, maintain a critical vigilance that seems more necessary now than ever.[45] There are scholars who believe that

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44 P.J. Geary, *The Myth of Nations* cit., pp. 15–40. Cf. for example A.-M. Thiesse, *La création des identités nationales* cit., p. 133: "At the dawn of the nineteenth century, nations have no history yet: even those that had already identified their ancestors only possess a few incomplete chapters of a narration whose core remains to be written." Equally eloquent are the words of N. Budak, *Using the Middle Ages* cit., p. 242: "The political rhetoric of almost the last two decades was not based on current knowledge about the Middle Ages, but rather on its reinterpretation by nineteenth- and early twentieth-century historians and politicians." Cf. P.P. Pasolini, *Scritti corsari* cit., pp. 45–48, *8 luglio 1974. Limitatezza della storia e immensità del mondo contadino* (Open letter to Italo Calvino, published in "Paese Sera"), p. 46: "The peasant's universe […] is a transnational universe: which indeed does not recognize nations. It is the remains of a previous civilization (or an accumulation of previous civilizations, all quite related), and the dominant (nationalist) class dominated these remains according to their own political ends […]. It is this unlimited peasant world, prenational and preindustrial, which survived until a few short years ago, that I mourn." See above all B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities* cit.; E.J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780. Programme, Myth, Reality*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1983; J. Ryan, *Cultures of Forgery* cit.; J. Leerssen, *National Thought in Europe* cit., as well as P. Rossi, *L'identità dell'Europa. Miti, realtà, prospettive*, il Mulino, Bologna 2007, pp. 119–134 (the Ch. *Identità locali, identità nazionali, identità europea*). In the course of the 1990s, many international journals were founded to study nationalisms: for example "Nations and Nationalism" (1995) and "National Identities" (1999). For a review of the principal historiographical positions: J.M. Faraldo, *Modernas e imaginadas. El nacionalismo como objeto de investigacion historica en las dos ultimas decadas del siglo XX*, in "Hispania," LXI/3 (2001), n. 209, pp. 933–964.

45 The research projects are numerous, important, and interrelated. Among the most significant publications the following should be mentioned at least: S. Gasparri, *Prima delle nazioni* cit.; Id., *I Germani immaginari e la realtà del Regno* cit.; P.J. Geary, *The Myth of Nations* cit.; A. Gillett (ed.), *On Barbarian Identity* cit.; W. Pohl, *Le origini etniche dell'Europa. Barbari e Romani fra Antichità e Medioevo*, Viella, Roma 2000; Id., *Aux origines d'une Europe ethnique: identités en transformation entre Antiquité et Moyen Âge*, in "Annales: Histoire, Sciences sociales," LX (2005), n. 1, pp. 183–208; G. Cracco, J. Le Goff, H. Keller, and G. Ortalli (eds.), *Europa in costruzione. La forza delle identità, la ricerca di unità* (*secoli IX–XIII*), proceedings of the XLVI week of Centro per gli studi italo-germanici in Trento, Trento 15–19 September 2003, il Mulino, Bologna 2006; F. Bougard, L. Feller, and R. Le Jan (eds.), *Les élites au haut Moyen Âge. Crises et renouvellements*, Brepols, Turnhout 2006; I. Wood, *The Use and Abuse of the Early Middle Ages* cit.; G. Klaniczay, *Medieval Origins of Central Europe* cit.; I. Garizpanov, P.J. Geary, and P. Urbańczyk (eds.), *Franks, Northmen, and Slavs: Identities and State Formation in Early Medieval Europe*, Brepols, Turnhout 2008; J.M. Bak [et al.] (eds.), *Gebrauch und Missbrauch* cit.; P.J. Geary and G. Klaniczay (eds.), *Manufacturing Middle Ages* cit.; S. Gasparri, C. La Rocca, *Tempi barbarici* cit.; I. Wood, *The Modern Origins* cit. Among other studies one may recall the American project *Creating Ethnicity: The Use*

a "hard core" of national sentiments existed as early as the Late Middle Ages, but only with a precise recontextualization and limitation to governing elites.[46] Other historians, the larger contingent by far, instead maintain, with excellent intellectual foundations, that the birth of *our* concept of national identity is no earlier than the eighteenth or even nineteenth century and that it is the fruit of deliberate political and cultural operations. Both, however, deny that one may speak of biologically ethnic continuities from the Early Middle Ages to today, affirming in every case the absolute preeminence of cultural factors and acknowledging that even these factors were fluid and changeable across time.[47]

In fact, under the *ancien régime*, the feeling of belonging was founded on premises other than the nation: such as religious faith, loyalty to one's lord or sovereign, identity based on the city or at least a defined place, and most of all affiliation with a social class. There can be no doubt that ethnicity existed as a distinguishing factor, even in the Middle Ages, and that it became relevant primarily in episodes of direct contact, for instance during military or commercial expeditions; but in any case it was not predominant. A much stronger

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and Abuse of History, directed by Patrick Geary (1994–96, UCLA, Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies) and numerous projects directed by Gábor Klaniczay at the Collegium Budapest (est. 1992) and Central European University, which have contributed significantly to the internationalization of such studies. In particular, *Medievalism, Archaic Origins and Regimes of Historicity. Alternatives to Antique Tradition in the Nineteenth Century in Europe*, directed by G. Klaniczay and P. Geary, unified many European and American research entities: www.colbud.hu/medievalism/ (cons. Mar. 31, 2011, the page was found to be inactive when cons. May 13, 2019). Operational in Holland is the *Study Platform on Interlocking Nationalisms* (SPIN), directed by Joep Leerssen (since 2008), www.spinnet.eu/ (cons. May 13, 2019). For Italy we should mention the research project (Cofin) *I Longobardi e l'identità italiana: riflessione storiografica, prove materiali, memoria locale e falsificazioni tra '800 e '900*, coordinated by Stefano Gasparri (Università di Venezia Ca' Foscari, 2004). For an overview of recent developments in historiography in Eastern European countries, see M. Saghy (ed.), *Fifteen-Year Anniversary Reports*, in "Annual of Medieval Studies at CEU" (Central European University, Budapest), eds. J.A. Rasson and B. Zsolt Szakacs, XVII (2009), n. 15, pp. 169–365. Among more recent studies: L.A. Berto, *I raffinati metodi di indagine e il mestiere dello storico. L'alto medioevo italiano all'inizio del terzo millennio*, Universitas Studiorum, Mantova 2016 (a dissenting voice against the ideological exploitation found even in those studies cited above) and S. Losasso, *Identità interpretate: la cultura materiale dei barbari. L'influenza del contesto nella lettura del passato*, in *Medievalismi italiani* cit., pp. 75–92.

46   For example J. Le Goff, *L'Europe est-elle née au Moyen Âge?*, Seuil, Paris 2003, pp. 230–233. Cf. G. Sergi, *L'idea di medioevo* cit., pp. 59–61; Id., *Prefazione* cit., pp. 9–12.

47   On the intermediate position of "refashioning," according to which historical processes always entail both continuity and discontinuity, and thus the "invention of tradition" is never that simple: E. Ohnuki Thierney, *Kamikaze, Cherry Blossoms, and Nationalisms: The Militarization of Aesthetics in Japanese History*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2002.

element of shared identity could be, for instance, the veneration of a patron saint. The "nation" exists, naturally, even during the old regime, but it is a social marker much more than an ethnic one and an almost exclusively aristocratic concept. The term *nation*, in fact, does not identify a people, but its lords. This appears especially evident in Poland, in the concept of *Szlachta*, which referred to the nation-as-nobility. One might think of the ideas of race, origin, and genealogy developed by all the European aristocracies from the Late Middle Ages onward—from the time, that is, that the aristocratic class enclosed itself within the ranks of nobility and patriciates. Nobility is antiquity: everyone knows it. The further back into the mists of time a family can trace its origins, the more it can be considered illustrious. One may reach back to Ancient Rome, the classical heroes, or, more frequently, to the Middle Ages: all the aristocratic houses boast a Crusader grandfather, at the very least, if they don't decide to go all the way back to consuls or barbarian chieftains. The mechanism of inventing tradition, by which ancient origins are even attributed to the *parvenus*—albeit financially well off—is the exact equivalent, in the *ancien régime*, of what happened at the end of the 1700s when the concept of the nation transferred to the people. The same slippery slope of meaning happened to the word *race*: during the old regime, race signified aristocratic bloodline (for instance, *race capétienne*), and had nothing to do with any ethnic connotation. From the historian's point of view, we are faced with a democratization of the "incredible genealogies," which we encounter in many authors of the early nineteenth century. They didn't find themselves heirs to the Middle Ages so much as its biological children.[48]

This same reasoning may be presented in a more immediately intelligible way if we refer to language as one of many principal elements in the construction of identity. In 1807–1808, Fichte wrote that language determines the nation, and in effect the totality of nineteenth-century nationalist movements relied on the "language question" as the most obvious banner to wave in support of the existence of a secular identity shared among the people.[49] But if this is true, and if contemporary nations were effectively constructed with the aid of a national language, it is also true that these national languages were, everywhere, constructed languages, sometimes invented around a table, sometimes even founded *ex novo* by the discovery (that is, essentially, the fabrication) of some national epic. Languages have also been, for centuries, elements of demarcation much more social than ethnic: *My Fair Lady* can still testify to

48   S. Soldani, *Il medioevo del Risorgimento* cit., p. 152.
49   J.G. Fichte, *Reden an die deutsche Nation*, Berlin 1808.

that. The Italian people (the ones who are supposed to be the nation) did not speak their own national idiom, Dante's Italian, but infinite local variants.[50]

This is not the occasion for correcting such an erroneous assessment; let's leave that to other authoritative studies, for the problem of the identity of medieval European populations is one of the most debated topics in contemporary Medieval Studies. The fact remains, however, that this earlier historiographical interpretation, which has lived long enough to become a cliché, is the basic framework on which political medievalism was founded—and is still founded today—in its role as the container of national identities; the suit that, cut to measure like a beautiful *redingote* or a sparkling dragoon's uniform, is best suited to our contemporary medievalism. Currently, two opposing heirs of nineteenth-century culture, always so close by despite the passing years, are often found expressed alongside one another and by the same movements: on the one hand, the denial of evolution, scientific rationalism, and thus certainty in modernity, but on the other hand the clear assertion of the biological determinism of race and ethnicity, which finds its inspiration in Darwinian evolution itself.

Naturally, studies published today do not in fact propose "an idyllic picture of a multicultural Middle Ages," as this epoch was indeed intensely marked by interethnic conflicts.[51] What is reconstructed and affirmed, however, is the fundamental Otherness of the Middle Ages with respect to the modern world. Pressed by the urgency of modernity (because ethnicism and nationalism have set off wars even in the name of the Middle Ages, and because even in Venice—a Mediterranean port that was the capital of an empire!—some chase after the genetic code of "Venetians DOC"),[52] historians are faced with the task of responsibly evaluating whether, how, and to what extent declared cultural and ethnic "Medieval" identities may correspond with verifiable historical facts. And these identities have been welcomed into the ample bed of the "invention of tradition," belying their deceptive nature and their

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50   Cf. for example A.-M. Thiesse, *La création des identités nationales* cit., pp. 67–81 and 113–131; T. Todorov, *La peur des barbares* cit., pp. 102 ff. On falsifications in particular J. Ryan, *Cultures of Forgery* cit.; J.M. Bak, P.J. Geary and G. Klaniczay (eds.), *Manufacturing a Past for the Present: Forgery and Authenticity in Medievalist Texts and Objects in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, Brill, Amsterdam 2014.

51   W. Pohl, *Modern Uses* cit., p. 70. Cf. also G. Sergi, *Antidoti all'abuso della storia* cit., pp. 161 ff.

52   R. Bianchini, *Caccia al dna dei veneziani doc*, in "la Repubblica," 12 Nov. 2009, pp. 1 and 23. TN: DOC stands for "denominazione di origine controllata," or "controlled designation of origin." It is a certificate of quality assurance confirming that a product—chiefly wine—was produced in the region specified on the label.

far-from-remote origin. Thus Patrick Geary, in his book *The Myth of Nations: The Medieval Origins of Europe*, broadly showed that ethnogenesis is a dynamic and continuous process, certainly not an acquisition granted once and for all. What do Early Medieval European populations have to do with the pretensions to ethnic nationalism of our day? Geary's answer is clear: "Nothing."[53]

Similarly, Giuseppe Sergi writes:

> It is unacceptable for the European Middle Ages to be treated like a river-bank to be fished—with often uninformed discussions of convenience—for the legitimate origins of great, nineteenth-century, national formations or the unknown roots of regionalistic reclamations in a neo-nazi vein. That world must be read from within and, when not treated as a crutch, does not provide much for the propagandists or non-historians to find [...]. The Middle Ages are quite a long way from "national," and not only because they were so fractured, but also because there is nothing evocative in the reconstructions that bloom in its final centuries: in the drawing up of new states there was, ultimately, nothing found preconstituted in the presumed enduring identities of the people who predominantly lived there.[54]

This return to the nineteenth-century interpretation, a medievalizing neo-Romanticism, is omnipresent today, but it appears particularly clearly in two otherwise dissimilar cases. The first is that of the Serbs, with which we started this chapter. Its obviousness springs from the fact that current Serbian nationalists, aside from referring to the medieval Greater Serbia, explicitly call themselves "neo-Romantics," proving they are aware of the debt they owe the 1800s. Today in Serbia, centers for studying the genealogy and history of the people are popping up everywhere, and history books from the nineteenth century are being published in their unaltered forms.[55]

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53   P.J. Geary, *The Myth of Nations* cit., p. 156. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 170: "The history of the peoples of Europe in the early Middle Ages cannot be used as an argument for or against any of the political, territorial, and ideological movements of today."

54   G. Sergi, *L'idea di medioevo* cit., pp. 60 ff.

55   R. Radić, *Srbi pre Adama i posle njega, Istorija jedne zloupotrebe: Slovo protiv "novoro-mantičara"* [The Serbs before Adam and after: A History of Abuse, a Word against "Neoromantics"], Stubovi kulture, Beograd 2005. See also D. Djokic, *Whose Myth? Which Nation?* cit. Ivan Djurić (1947–1997), president of the "Liberal Forum of Serbia," was in the early 1990s the first academic to denounce the instrumentalization of history, recalling how distant our mental categories are from those of persons of the past and how the *topoi* that characterize nations are so recent, resistant, and erroneous. See I. Djurić, *Vlast, opozicija, alternativa* [Power, Opposition, Alternative], ed. S. Biserko, Helsinški odbor za ljudska

The other case is that of the Northern League. The foundational myth of Padania, one that coexists with Celticism, is that of the Lombard League, which waged a victorious war against the Emperor in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The Battle of Legnano, the Oath of Pontida, and the *Carroccio* are the symbols of this new nation. In October 2009, the film *Barbarossa* appeared in movie theaters, a tableau of the "Padanian people's" aspirations to independence already in the twelfth century.[56]

The phenomenon of medievalism in the Northern League comes from a political doctrine, formulated by Gianfranco Miglio, that foretells the end of the modern state and the need to rethink society in a federalist way, reconsidering the validity of earlier political systems and in particular those of the corporative and territorial institutions—free cities, federations—through which Late Medieval society was articulated. Despite this theoretical approach, which one might define as post-modern, the Northern League's medievalism in reality constitutes a tremendous example of the lasting effect of nineteenth-century medievalism on Italian political culture. And indeed this party assumes as its own origin myth not so much the historical Lombard League founded by the Communes against the Emperor, but the "idea of the Lombard League" forged in the 1800s.[57] The Northern League (which in the 1980s, before becoming an

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prava u Srbiji [Helsinki Committee for human rights in Serbia], Kragujevac 2009, for example pp. 50 ff., 62 ff.; see also Id., *Istorija: pribeziste ili putokaz* [History: Refuge or Compass], Svjetlost, Sarajevo 1990; Id., *Les racines historiques du conflit serbo-croate*, in "Études," IV (Oct. 1991), n. 3754, pp. 293–303. A synthetic bibliographical review of the pseudo-historical writings of Serbian nationalists can be read in M. Vukašinović, *At the Beginning, There Were Serbs—The Concept of Magnifying a Nation's History, the Case of a Publishing Agency Catalogue*, www.1989history.eu/upload/1247826070.pdf (cons. Aug. 12, 2010, the page was found to be inactive when cons. May 13, 2019). Most "Neoromantics" today are linked to Vojislav Koštunica's Serbian Democratic Party and Vojislav Šešelj's Serbian Radical Party.

56   T. di Carpegna Falconieri, *Barbarossa e la Lega Nord: a proposito di un film, delle storie e della Storia*, in "Quaderni storici," XXXIV (2009), n. 132, pp. 859–878.

57   E. Sestan, *Legnano nella storiografia romantica*, in Id., *Scritti vari*, ed. G. Pinto, Le Lettere, Firenze 1991, vol. III, *Storiografia dell'Otto e Novecento*, pp. 221–240; M. Fubini, *La Lega lombarda nella letteratura dell'Ottocento*, in *Popolo e stato in Italia nell'età di Federico Barbarossa: Alessandria e la Lega lombarda*. Speeches and communications of the XXXIII Congresso storico subalpino per la celebrazione dell'VIII centenario della fondazione di Alessandria (Alessandria, 6-7-8-9 Oct. 1968), Deputazione subalpina di storia patria, Torino 1970, pp. 399–420; E. Voltmer, *Il carroccio* cit., pp. 13–21; P. Brunello, *Pontida*, in M. Isnenghi (ed.), *Luoghi della memoria. Strutture ed eventi dell'Italia unita*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 1997, pp. 15–28; N. D'Acunto, *Il mito dei comuni nella storiografia del Risorgimento*, in *Le radici del Risorgimento*, Acts of the XX Convegno del Centro di studi Avellaniti, Fonte Avellana, Aug. 28–30, 1996, s.n., s.l. 1997, pp. 243–264; C. Sorba, *Il mito dei comuni e le patrie cittadine* cit.; S. Soldani, *Il medioevo del Risorgimento* cit.; M. Vallerani, *Il comune come*

umbrella party for federated movements, had its heart in a party actually called the *Lega Lombarda,* "Lombard League") uses medieval stereotypes coined in the 1800s to wage its own political war. For instance, the knight found in all its logos—Alberto da Giussano—is not a historical personage, but a statue erected at the end of the 1800s, and the party's website shows the poem *The Oath of Pontida* by Giovanni Berchet: a poem from the *Risorgimento* era that until recently all Italian children learned by memory.[58]

This way of presenting the political Middle Ages remained the stock-in-trade of schoolbooks until at least the time that I finished elementary school in the Seventies. When we talked about Communes, we were already talking about Italians; the wars of the Lombard League against the Emperors were equal to the Wars of Independence; when we studied the Battle of Legnano, we never would have thought of using the historian Rahewin as a source, as our authentic sources were the *Risorgimento* poets, the compositions of Prati, Berchet, and Carducci, or the paintings of Massimo d'Azeglio.

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mito politico cit.; P. Grillo, *Legnano 1176. Una battaglia per la libertà*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 2010, pp. 192–198.

58   Movimento Giovani Padani, *Il Giuramento di Pontida. Giovanni Berchet*, www.giovani padani.leganord.org/articoli.asp?ID=5260 (cons. Mar. 12, 2010, the page was found to be inactive when cons. May 13, 2019). The new oath, declared by Umberto Bossi on May 20, 1990, has this tone: "I swear loyalty to the cause of autonomy and liberty for our people who today, as for a thousand years, are incarnated in the Lombard League and its democratically elected organs": Movimento Giovani Padani, May 20, 1990, *Il Rinnovo del Giuramento di Pontida del 7 aprile 1167*, www.giovanipadani.leganord.org/articoli.asp?ID=5807 (cons. Mar. 12, 2010, the page was found to be inactive when cons. May 13, 2019). For a political analysis of the early years (when recourse to identitarian medieval motifs was already perfectly structured): R. Biorcio, *La Lega come attore politico: dal federalismo al populismo regionalista*, in R. Mannheimer, *La Lega Lombarda*, Feltrinelli, Milano 1991, pp. 34–82, especially pp. 67–72. For some analyses of Leaguist medievalism, see R. Iorio, *Il giuramento di Pontida*, in "Quaderni medievali," XV (1990), n. 30, pp. 207–211: 211 (on Leaguists as "apocryphal successors to Pontida"); S. Cavazza, *L'invenzione della tradizione e la Lega lombarda*, in "Iter-percorsi di ricerca" (1994), n. 8, pp. 197–214; E. Voltmer, *Il carroccio* cit., pp. 24–31; I. Porciani, *Identità locale-identità nazionale* cit., pp. 142 ff.; T. di Carpegna Falconieri, *Barbarossa* cit., pp. 874 ff.; A. Spiriti, *L'Alberto da Giussano*, in F. Benigno and L. Scuccimarra (eds.), *Simboli della Politica*, Viella, Roma 2010, pp. 85–98. Cf. Ch. Duggan, *The Force of Destiny. A History of Italy since 1796*, Allen Lane-Penguin Books Ltd, London 2007, pp. 582ff: "Under Bossi's charismatic leadership, the League promoted a strong pseudo-ethnic culture, postulating the existence of a north Italian nation called Padania, celebrating Lombard and other local dialects, and drawing selectively on history to support its claim to the essential unity of the north. Much was made (ironically, given how it had been used by the 'Italian' patriots in the Risorgimento) of the twelfth-century Lombard League."

Bolstered by the knowledge of this great and basic narrative, the Northern League has overturned the Risorgimental rhetoric according to which the Lombard League of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries represented the glorious Italian epic against the foreign oppressor, transforming it into the epic of the Lombards against the centralizing oppressor that is Rome. Thus, using the same stereotypes of the Middle Ages, in the 1800s one could speak of unifying the fatherland, while today one speaks of the secession of Northern Italy. The Battle of Legnano, ultimately, is exactly like Arthur and Merlin for the Welsh as opposed to the English: like many other coins that fill the coffers of our Medievalism, this one too is double-sided. Among other things, this means that without the *Risorgimento* that unified Italy, the Northern League today would not have the rhetorical tools to declare that it wants to secede. Its hero is Alberto da Giussano, an imaginary character concocted about a hundred and fifty years after the period in which he would have lived. These, like many other personalities of the identitarian Middle Ages, resemble Comrade Ogilvy, a war hero invented from nothing that George Orwell describes in the novel *1984*:

> Comrade Ogilvy, unimagined an hour ago, was now a fact. It struck him as curious that you could create dead men but not living ones. Comrade Ogilvy, who had never existed in the present, now existed in the past, and when once the act of forgery was forgotten, he would exist just as authentically, and upon the same evidence, as Charlemagne or Julius Caesar.[59]

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59   G. Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four,* Harcourt, Brace & World, New York 1949: p. 48.

Emperors and Wanderers: Middle Ages of a United Europe

> Finally, there he was, they glimpsed him advancing down below, Char-
> lemagne, on a horse that seemed larger than life, with his beard down to
> his chest, his hands on the pommel of the saddle. He reigns and battles,
> battles and reigns, on and on, he seemed a little bit older than the last
> time those soldiers had seen him.
>
> <div align="right">I. CALVINO, The Non-existent Knight (1959)</div>

It is a beautiful day in June, the year is 1767. Twelve-year-old Cosimo Piovasco di Rondò is climbing a tree in protest because he does not want to eat a plate of snails. From then on, the Baron in the Trees carries out all his business in the canopies of the woods between Ombrosa and Olivabassa. But his territory is much vaster, as he explains to his beloved sitting on her swing:

> "As far as you can go if you move through the trees—this way, that way,
> beyond the wall into the olive grove, up the hill, to the other side of the
> hill, into the woods, into the bishop's lands…" "Even as far as France?" "As
> far as Poland and Saxony."[1]

Let's turn this great, green forest that is Europe upside down: at the foot of so many trees, we can imagine myriad, intertwining roots. They are "the roots of Europe": an expression that, in recent years, has become quite popular in political and cultural debates.[2] A very similar concept is that of European identity, which encompasses the former. If the roots are those constitutive components accumulated throughout the historical process of becoming, which continue

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1   I. Calvino, *The Baron in the Trees,* Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, New York 2017, p. 23.

2   B. Geremek, *Le radici comuni dell'Europa*, il Saggiatore, Milano 1991; J. Le Goff, *L'Europe est elle née au Moyen Âge ?* cit.; F. Cardini, *Europa. Le radici cristiane* cit.; Id. and S. Valzania, *Le radici perdute dell'Europa. Da Carlo V ai conflitti mondiali*, postf. by L. Canfora, Mondadori, Milano 2006; R. De Mattei, *De Europa: tra radici cristiane e sogni postmoderni*, Le Lettere, Firenze 2006; M. Introvigne, *Il segreto dell'Europa. Guida alla riscoperta delle radici cristiane*, SugarCo, Milano 2007. See also T. di Carpegna Falconieri, *Il discorso pubblico sulla Storia medievale nell'Europa contemporanea: tra unioni "carolinge" e specifiche identità locali*, in G. Cordini (ed.), *Europa: cultura e patrimonio culturale*, ESI, Napoli 2018, pp. 25–37.

to nourish European culture—as long as they are kept alive and don't wither—the identity is the tree in its entirety: what defines us and grants us the awareness of being European. Cosimo Piovasco attempted to write a "Planned Constitution for an Ideal State Founded in the Trees"; it falls to us, however, to discuss the no-less-intricate topic of constructing a Europe that has so many roots.

The interest in knowing and understanding identity through the past starts with the confirmation that the forest of Europe is not very lush. So many roots, in fact, do not correspond to a shared identitarian sentiment and Europe continues to be a fatherland that does not exist.[3] Ever more integrated from an economic point of view, ever more uniform (across the Continent we eat the same products, dress the same way, and watch the same kinds of TV programs), Europe is still not united, for it lacks the pillars that would make it a community, like a legal system, single government, foreign policy, and, naturally, the sense of belonging and brotherhood expressed through a symbolic patrimony.

The process of cultural integration, launched successfully in the early Fifties, has seen various phases of stagnation. The Maastricht Treaty of 1991, with the transformation of the European Economic Community into the European Union, did not lead to an effective cultural politics in the name of cooperation, which thus far has resulted only in a common flag (hoisted for the first time in 1986). The later expansion of the Union to numerous countries of Eastern Europe only aggravated dormant tensions. Certainly, the introduction of a single currency, the euro, has meant an important development in the *idem sentire*, including from a symbolic point of view, but nevertheless, as has been said, "The euro is not an ideal."[4] And besides, the euro is not even the currency of all European countries, nor indeed of all those within the Union. In short, now that we have made Europe, we must make Europeans.[5]

The interest in realizing and transmitting the sense of a European identity also derives from the fact that its limited capacity for involvement does not

3 A.-M. Thiesse, *La création des identités nationales* cit., p. 288; P. Rossi, *L'identità dell'Europa* cit., pp. 12–25 e 268; F. Cardini, *Europa. Le radici cristiane* cit., pp. 8 ff.; Id., *Introduzione*, in S. Taddei, *Per quale Europa? Identità europea, fisco, prevenzione, assistenza. Una sussidiarietà praticabile*, Jouvence, Roma 2006, pp. 9–16: 15. See F. Chabod, *Storia dell'idea d'Europa*, Laterza, Bari 1961; A. Pagden (ed.), *The Idea of Europe from Antiquity to the European Union*, Woodrow Wilson Center Press-Cambridge University Press, Washington-Cambridge 2002; G. Delanty, *Inventing Europe: Idea, Identity, Reality*, MacMillan, London 2005.

4 A.-M. Thiesse, *La création des identités nationales* cit., p. 18.

5 TN: A reference to a famous 1861 remark by Massimo d'Azeglio: "We have made Italy; now we must make Italians."

simply leave a hole, but also triggers reactionary mechanisms. These in turn further diminish Europe's importance inasmuch as they tend to fall back on national or local identities, as we saw in the previous chapter. The failure to ratify the European Constitution in France and the Netherlands (2005), where popular referendums were held, speaks volumes. Thus, while from one perspective we must regard the world as globalized, having already moved beyond the idea of nation-states, the leaders of countries in the European Union often continue to express primarily national interests. After half a century, the "long-exorcised" specters of nationalism, ethnocentrism, and racism have reappeared.[6] Similarly, the current crisis in Europeanism helps to reinforce the well-known "identities of reaction" that are first defined by identifying an adversary. This is the now-classic case of Islam: as if European citizens of Islamic faith did not participate in the formation of a common identity. The constantly restated urgency of recognizing—including legally—the "Christian roots of Europe" can, among those who do not recognize its historical importance and most of all its interconnection with so many other roots, be equivalent to a declaration of war against all that is not Christian. In the end, our increasing difficulty in defining the West also amounts to an identity crisis of immense proportions. The West, which once meant Europe alone, then Europe plus the Anglo-Saxon countries and some Latin American countries, now also includes non-Western cultures while, at the same time, the differences between Europe and the United States appear—according to many observers on either shore of the Atlantic—ever vaster.

What, then, is Europe today? And, above all, who are the Europeans, and what makes them so?

For some time, recourse to a common historical patrimony, drawn from the construction of Europe, was seen with suspicion. The shadow of the Second World War encouraged a prudent approach to history when proposing to use it as a unifying subject. European history, in fact, is made up of fratricidal wars, perversely "medieval" even when waged in the twentieth century.[7] On April 21, 2009, a commemoration was held in Rome for the great historian and politician

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6   P.J. Geary, *The Myth of Nations* cit., p. 17.

7   See for example O. Fallaci, *The Rage and the Pride* cit., p. 154, which presents the Italian resistance against the Germans as a war between equals, belonging to the same culture: "I felt as if I were fighting in the Middle Ages, when Florence and Siena made war and the waters of the Arno [sic, instead of Arbia] ran red with blood." Cf. Ch. Amalvi, *Le goût du Moyen Âge* cit., p. 237; M. Brando, *Lo strano caso di Federico II* cit., pp. 92–95; A. Osti Guerrazzi, *Unni! I tedeschi nella percezione degli italiani*, in *Abgehort—Intercettazioni. Krieg und Nachkrieg der faschistischen Achsenbundnisses im Lichte neuer Quellen. Guerra e dopoguerra dell'Asse alla luce di nuove fonti*, Convegno Internazionale, Roma, Istituto storico germanico, April 1–2, 2009;

Bronislaw Geremek, author of a book dedicated to the common roots of Europe and vehement proponent of the idea that European parliament must take direct responsibility for its historical memory.[8] On that occasion, Romano Prodi, former Prime Minister of Italy and ex-President of the European Commission, underlined the impossibility of using history as a glue, since looking back we find nothing but war and division. According to his thought, the construct of Europe foundered at the start of the new millennium, precisely when we set about seeking our common roots.[9] The past leads us to a dead end—but historians must above all have a sense of the future. And indeed it was a historian, Girolamo Arnaldi, who reiterated that in all of Altiero Spinelli's *Ventotene Manifesto* (1941)—the first attempt to imagine a Europe united against every form of totalitarianism, penned while it was in the middle of full-on war—there is not a single word spent on the past as a motive for the unity of Europeans.[10] The past, in fact, divides us. And, in effect, the problem of arriving at a necessary, historical, shared memory cannot be resolved, as is sometimes desired and sometimes attempted, either by the dismissal of the wounds that have lacerated the continent, or by an unjustifiable reevaluation of responsibility, which at best leads to a sugar-coated revisionist history and at worst to denial.[11]

Nevertheless, the course undertaken in recent years on the part of the European Union and numerous intellectuals is precisely that of emphasizing the role of culture—and even of history, with all the weight of responsibility—in the blueprint of what Mikhael Gorbachev called "our Common European Home."[12] We may thus recall Geremek's dream of creating a European university; the prospect of achieving a "European research space"; the programs sponsored by the Union to develop a common history in French-German school books; the editorial project titled *Making Europe,* promoted by editors of five nationalities, and the volumes of the "Yearbook of European Studies" series; the launch of common projects in a historical setting, supported primarily by the European Science Foundation; and the *Musée de l'Europe* in

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W. Pohl, *Modern Uses* cit., p. 64; P. Grillo, *Legnano* cit., p. 197; Id., *La falsa inimicizia. Guelfi e Ghibellini nell'Italia del Duecento,* Salerno Editrice, Roma 2018.

8   B. Geremek, *Le radici comuni dell'Europa* cit.; *Lo storico Bronisław Geremek* cit.

9   R. Prodi, Testimony, in *Lo storico Bronisław Geremek* cit.

10   G. Arnaldi, Testimony, *ibid.* (at the end of R. Prodi's testimony); A. Spinelli, E. Rossi, and E. Colorni, *Manifesto per un'Europa libera e unita* [*Manifesto di Ventotene*, 1941], in A. Spinelli, *Il Manifesto di Ventotene e altri scritti*, il Mulino, Bologna 1991.

11   See, for example, on contemporary Italy, A. Del Boca (ed.), *La Storia negata. Il revisionismo e il suo uso politico*, Neri Pozza, Vicenza 2009.

12   M. Gorbačev, *La casa comune europea*, Mondadori, Milano 1989.

Brussels (est. 1998), which puts itself forward as the *lieu de mémoire* for all Europeans.[13] Culture, therefore, must become "the third pillar of the European construct, next to the economy and the political and legal institutions."[14]

But in which cultural legacy should Europeans recognize themselves? The possibilities are, naturally, endless. For example, the founding role of the Romans has been highlighted, or vice-versa, as we have seen, that of the Celts and the Arthurian myth, or else that of philosophy in general and above all the Enlightenment, or better yet the Law, whether "common law" or Roman codes.[15] Even Romanticism, despite being the architect of nationalisms, is assigned a relevant role in the construction of European identity: one need only recall Guizot, author of *The History of Civilization in Europe*. The Brothers Grimm themselves, aside from being fathers of the German nation, can be considered among the earliest unifiers of Europe.[16]

The desire to affirm common, Christian roots is the one that has provoked the most heated political debate in the present day. It has been pronounced numerous times by the popes. First by Paul VI, who in 1964 gave Saint Benedict the title of Founder of Europe, then by John Paul II, a Slavic and Polish pope, who in 1980 conferred the same title on Saints Cyril and Methodius, architects of an "outstanding contribution to the formation of the common Christian roots of Europe."[17] John Paul II exhorted Europeans on many occasions—first

13   P. Morawski, *Geremek e l'Europa: tra memoria e sfide*, in *Lo storico Bronisław Geremek* cit. On Franco-German manuals, cf. P. Monnet, *Introduction* cit., p. 15; on the European Science Foundation: http://www.esf.org/ (cons. May 14, 2019). In particular, I recall three research projects from the ESF on the subject: *The Transformation of the Roman World*; *Representations of the Past: The Writing of National Histories in Europe*; *Technology and the Making of Europe, 1850 to the Present* (*Inventing Europe*). On the Musée de l'Europe: http://europa-museum.org/ (cons. May 14, 2019). See also P.J. Geary, *The Myth of Nations* cit.

14   T. Todorov, *La peur des barbares* cit., p. 281.

15   Some recent examples: E. Percivaldi, *I Celti* cit.; V. Kruta, *Aux racines de l'Europe* cit.; P. Grossi, *L'Europa del diritto*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 2007; J.-N. Robert, *Rome, la gloire et la liberté. Aux sources de l'identité européenne*, Les Belles Lettres, Paris 2008. On the Arthurian myth and its difficulties in representing the formation of a united Europe "through aggression and war": K. Gerner, *King Arthur, Charlemagne and Soros: Aggression and Integration in Europe*, in *Yearbook of European Studies*, Rodopi, Amsterdam 1999, vol. 11, pp. 37–68 and P. Toczyski, *Carolingian References in the Europeanization Process*, in *What, in the World, is Medievalism? Global Reinvention of the Middle Ages* (*A Panel Discussion*), session of the *44th International Congress of Medieval Studies* cit. On the identitarian value of philosophy: P. Rossi, *L'identità dell'Europa* cit., pp. 13, 114–117, 232.

16   R. Romano, *Europa*, Donzelli, Roma 1996, p. 15; A.-M. Thiesse, *La création des identités nationales* cit., pp. 64 ff.

17   Encyclical *Slavorum Apostoli* (1985) cit., VII, 25. Cf. G. Miccoli, *In difesa della fede* cit., p. 164.

when it was divided into two blocs and then after the fall of the Wall—to find in Christianity their reasons for unity, pursuing the mission of a new evangelism as the goal of his entire pontificate.[18] A moment of acute tension transpired in 2003–2004, following the request, promoted by some countries of the Union and opposed by others, to insert an explicit mention of their common Christian roots in the preamble to the European Constitution. Finally, the penultimate pope aimed to label himself Christianly European even through the choice of his assumed name, Benedict, which he intended to evoke the figure of the patriarch of Western monasticism, "a fundamental reference point for European unity and [...] a powerful reminder of the indispensable Christian roots of his [sic] culture and civilization."[19] The road to ruin down which he believes Europe has embarked starts with forgetting that its own identity is founded on Christian values.

In this general debate, the Medieval Era assumes a dominant role and even academic historians are deeply involved. The Medieval Era is, in fact, a historical period recognized as foundational—from the Romantic Era onward—by almost all the nations of Europe: and as such, it should be possible to trace in this epoch some of the original characteristics of common European society. Which is possible, naturally, provided one approaches the task with due caution.[20]

Substantially speaking, there are two ways that the Middle Ages can be mined for the common roots of a modern European identity. The first is to search for those things that were unifying elements; the second is to evaluate these unifying elements in their diversity. We're dealing with two ways of understanding the Middle Ages that at first glance may seem contradictory, but that in actuality have numerous points of contact, as long as one does not try to take these positions to their extremes. When that happens, we are faced with the conflict between two Medievals: the first immobile, hierarchical, socially and religiously cohesive, the second chaotic and casual. Naturally, neither one nor the other position shows any awareness of historical nuance, which cannot take an axiomatic approach that holds only one explanation

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18   See John Paul II, *Memory and Identity* cit. (pp. 113–131 of the Italian edition). Cf. G. Miccoli, *In difesa della fede* cit., pp. 160–195.

19   *Reflection on the Name Chosen: Benedict XVI,* general audience of Wednesday, Apr. 27, 2005. Official website: http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2005/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20050427.html (cons. May 14, 2019). See also G. Miccoli, *In difesa della fede* cit., pp. 273 ff.

20   Cf. J. Le Goff, *L'Europe est elle née au Moyen Âge ?* cit., p. 13: "The centuries between the fourth and fifteenth have been definitive and [...] of all the legacies vital for Europe of today and tomorrow, the medieval is the most important."

valid, but rather necessitates a complex and thus, one hopes, comprehensive approach.

The first medieval symbol of the European Union is Charlemagne.[21] Recourse to the ancient sovereign in his role as founder is encountered as early as 1949, in the immediate post-war period, in the establishment of one of the most prestigious acknowledgments awarded annually to those great citizens—the vast majority politicians—who have helped to build Europe: we speak of the Charlemagne Prize (Premio Carlomagno, Karlpreis, Prix Charlemagne) of the city of Aachen. Recently (since 2008), the award has been enhanced by a section recognizing young Europeans aged 16 to 30. There is also the "Médaille Charlemagne pour les Medias Européens," bestowed on distinguished persons and institutions in the communication sector. 1965, the Nineties, and 2003 saw important exhibitions on the emperor, on the Franks and Alemanni, and on the relations between Christians, Jews, and Muslims in the time Charlemagne.[22] Even the initial proposal for the European flag was an imitation of Charlemagne's standard.[23]

Charlemagne has the credentials to be recognized as one of the fathers of Europe—it is a fact that cannot be denied.[24] In fact, sources in his day called him *Pater Europae*, "Father of Europe," and it is clear that the Carolingian Empire, whose duration, idealism, and fragility are certainly debatable, was an institution that transformed for centuries—in the name of unity—societies that were just beginning to become European.[25] At the height of its expansion,

21 K. Gerner, *King Arthur, Charlemagne and Soros* cit.; P. Toczyski, *Carolingian References* cit.; V. Ortenberg, *In Search of the Holy Grail* cit., especially pp. 110 ff.; K. Oschema, *The Once and Future European? Karl der Große als europäische Gründerfigur in Mittelalter und Gegenwart*, in *Alte Helden—Neue Zeiten. Die Formierung europäischer Identitäten im Spiegel der Rezeption des Mittelalters*, ed. A. Schindler, Königshausen & Neumann, Würzburg 2017, pp. 39–67.

22 K. Gerner, *King Arthur, Charlemagne and Soros* cit.; P. Toczyski, *Carolingian References* cit.; V. Ortenberg, *In Search of the Holy Grail* cit., especially pp. 110 ff.

23 P. Toczyski, *Carolingian References* cit.

24 F. Cardini, *Carlomagno. Un padre della patria europea*, Rusconi, Milano 1998; A. Barbero, *Carlo Magno. Un padre dell'Europa*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 2000 (note how in both cases, the noun *padre*, "father," is preceded by the indefinite article); G. Andenna and M. Pegrari (eds.), *Carlo Magno: le radici dell'Europa*, monograph issue of "Cheiron. Materiali e strumenti di aggiornamento bibliografico," XIX (2002), n. 37; R. McKitterick, *Charlemagne. The Formation of a European Identity*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2008. See also D. Balestracci, *Ai confini dell'Europa medievale*, B. Mondadori, Milano 2008, pp. 21–24 and bibliography pp. 40–43.

25 Among the main bibliographic references, one work that still seems relevant to me is *Nascita dell'Europa ed Europa carolingia: un'equazione da verificare*, Acts of the XXVII Settimana di studio del Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo, Spoleto 19–25 aprile 1979,

the Empire comprised the greater part of continental Europe, from Northern Spain, to Northern and Central Italy, and all the way east to modern-day Hungary. It was therefore the only successful post-Roman attempt at uniting a large portion of the continent under a single political institution. The standardization of relationships to the sovereign power and authority, of the legal system, of weights and measures, of liturgies, of monastic and canonical life, of language (Latin) and script (Caroline) are elements that have contributed equally to the formation of a cultural *koiné* that has survived for centuries the disappearance of the Empire as a political entity. An entity that was truly European, as its barycenter was not the Mediterranean region, which had become a boundary and line of contact with the Islamic world, but continental Europe.

The Carolingian Era functions so effectively as a precedent and *exemplum* primarily because during the ninth century there was a revival of the concept of Empire, which while it had nothing to do with a modern state, did long for universality. With the exception of some obvious differences (like an authority considered to be of divine origin), the ideal of the medieval empire finds a precise correspondence in the way that European consciousness may be constructed today, as the synthesis of populations that, even in the mutual recognition of their peculiarities and identities, agree on the existence of a higher organizing principle. That is how the idea of Empire, translated into a modern macroregion (one among several on the globe), is employed by some interpreters of New Medievalism. Aside from talking about the American Empire, they also make use of the Holy Roman Empire as a precedent to the European Union, even as they keep in mind the obvious differences, the primary of which in a geopolitical sense is the fact that a medieval empire was generally a closed economic and cultural space.[26] The parallelism is expressed in a book by Jan Zielonka: for this author, the years following 1989, when the European Union began to incorporate former member states of the Warsaw Pact and Soviet Union, entailed a transformation of the imperial connotation of the old European Union.[27] Thus, the very notion of the union has changed, definitively superseding the era of nationalisms that followed the peace of Westphalia (1648). If Europe in the modern era is seen as a well-defined structure and hierarchy, Europe of the medieval empire is the paradigm for the neo-medieval, postmodern one, of variegated political situations, multiple identities, cultural heterogeneities, untidy and shifting borders: we have already discussed all this in

CISAM, Spoleto 1981. On the concept of Europe developed in the Middle Ages, see today K. Oschema, *Bilder von Europa im Mittelalter*, Thorbecke, Ostfildern 2013.

26   A. Gamble, *Regional Blocs* cit.

27   J. Zielonka, *Europe as Empire* cit.

the second chapter. The European Union is not transforming into a new state, but into a much more complex organism in which the recently joined member nations of Eastern Europe play a fundamental role.

Aside from Charlemagne, other emperors could also claim their place: from the Ottonian dynasty, which pushed the borders of Europe much further east, to Frederick Barbarossa, refounder of Roman law (if it had not been judged so German), all the way up to the sovereigns of the House of Habsburg and Napoleon, if the latter had not been so French and the formers so Catholic. But only to Charlemagne can a truly founding role be attributed, and this is because the emperor is considered transnational, whether in the west in France, in the center in Germany, or in the eastern nations. The name of Charles is so evocative that, in Polish, the word for "king" is *król*, in Hungarian *király*, in Lithuanian *karalius*—words that all derive from *Carolus*. It's just a shame about Charles's wives, whose names do not commonly designate queens, perhaps because he had five of them.

Uniquely among medieval and modern sovereigns, Charles appears in the mythopoetic cycles of numerous nations as both a national king and an emperor. And he does so by recourse to that formidable element of cultural exchange that was the Carolingian Cycle. Through this, Charles makes his way to Sicily, which was never part of his Empire but which sings the deeds of his paladins in the *Opera dei Pupi* ("Opera of the Puppets"), which in 2001 was declared a UNESCO "Masterpiece of Oral and Intangible Heritage." Some countries of Eastern Europe resort to the Carolingian Cycle to signify their belonging to Europe and to support their petition to join the Union. In Dubrovnik (*olim* Ragusa), in Croatia, one may find "Orlando's Column," erected in 1419 and employed for four centuries to fly the banner of the Republic of Ragusa. This column and its statue depicting the paladin had to wait till 2013 to "join Europe," as they erroneously say, along with the nation of Croatia, which had already joined NATO in 2009. And thus, as has been observed, "Dubrovnik is self-presenting as linked to Western Europe through the medium of a legendary character."[28]

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28   P. Toczyski, *Carolingian References* cit. Cf. A. Kremenjaš-Daničić (ed.), *Orlandovi Europski Putovi, Rolands Europäische Wege, Les sentiers européens de Roland, I sentieri europei di Orlando, Roland's European Paths*, Europe House Dubrovnik—Europski dom Dubrovnik 2006. Toczyski has brought in examples of uses of the Carolingian myth in other European countries, such as Slovakia, France, and Germany. In 1998, Gregory Peroche wondered why Charlemagne, "Emperor of the Franks," wouldn't also consider himself "Emperor of the Croats." Id., *Croatie-France, 797–1997. Douze siècles d'histoire*, pref. by G.-M. Chenu, François-Xavier de Guibert, Paris 1998, pp. 21 ff.; see on that subject F. Borri, *Francia e Chroatia nel IX secolo: storia di un rapporto difficile*, in "Mélanges de l'École française de

Many, then, are the reasons and methods for which and with which Charlemagne and his literary cycle are, even in Europe of the third millennium, employed as useful and meaningful symbols. Recourse to the figure of the sovereign functions not so much because one may use it to imagine a medieval and thus also contemporary Europe as culturally homogenous, but on the contrary: because the emperor was the head of a political entity as powerfully idealized in its feeling of unity, as it was multicultural in its overall physiognomy. Reference to Charlemagne is therefore legitimate only if does not become a shortcut to believing that Europe was once united in essence in the Early Middle Ages, or indeed that the Carolingian Empire was once our Europe, a highly absurd notion, historically speaking.

Even the figure of Charlemagne is very easily abused, mainly because, as it always bears recalling, the Carolingian Empire was somewhat "abortive," as Jacques Le Goff writes, and a "false start," according to Duccio Balestracci.[29] The Carolingian Empire declined toward the end of the ninth century, and to think of it as a direct precursor to the European Union, perhaps through a lens of continuity, is unacceptable, just as it would be completely unacceptable to claim a kind of birth of identitarian sentiment on the part of a presumed "European people" in the ninth century. Otherwise we commit the same neo-Romantic error of judgment that we analyzed in the previous chapter on nationalisms. We are not European because Charlemagne existed, but *also* because Charlemagne existed. In fact, every *exemplum* is imperfect. Rivers of ink have been spilled on whether the emperor was French or German.[30] The English, certainly, have little use for Charlemagne: except perhaps to convince themselves once more that this Europe is nothing but a precarious accord drawn up by the Paris-Berlin axis. And this may not be so hard, considering that, during the Second World War, a volunteer unit from Vichy France, integrated organically into the Waffen SS, called itself the *Charlemagne Division*, or

Rome, Moyen Âge," CXX (2008), n. 1, pp. 87–103: 87. On the usage of the Middle Ages in Croatia, see in particular N. Budak, *Using the Middle Ages in Modern-day Croatia* cit. Budak addresses two distinct usages: the first, typical of the 1990s, is the well-known nationalist rhetoric (today relegated to the extreme right), while the second, coexistent with the first and characteristic of the early years of the third millennium, applies parallels between the Middle Ages and modernity in favor of new ideology of European integration: see especially *ibid.*, pp. 248 e 260 ff. (on stamps depicting Charlemagne and the exhibit *Croats and Carolingians* held in 2000).

29   J. Le Goff, *L'Europe est-elle née au Moyen Âge?* cit., pp. 47–59; note that the author has an anti-Europeanist view of Charlemagne; D. Balestracci, *Ai confini dell'Europa medievale* cit., p. 23. Cf. also G. Sergi, *L'idea di medioevo* cit., Ch. 6, *Il medioevo come infanzia dell'Europa*, pp. 51–62, and F. Cardini, *Europa. Le Radici cristiane* cit., pp. 43 ff.

30   Cf. W. Pohl, *Modern Uses* cit., pp. 60 ff.

that in the 1960s Charles de Gaulle labored to construct the project of a "Caro-
lingian Europe," as opposed to an "Atlantic Europe."[31] But even in today's
France there are those who fear that the European Union will translate into a
new, imperial, German supremacy.[32] The Turks who would like to join the Eu-
ropean Union must not be happy with Charlemagne and Roland, slayers of
Muslims, much less those countries in the area once subject to the Byzantine
basileus and where the Carolingian Empire represents the manifestation of a
sacrilegious act of hubris on the part of a barbarian Frankish king who wished
to arrogate the name and insignias of the Roman Emperor. Not to mention the
Avars, a people of Eastern Europe with no defenders in modernity, having suf-
fered a now-forgotten genocide perpetrated by Charles himself.[33]

The history of united Europe may lend itself to improper uses, the simplest
of which—as we have seen many times, for instance regarding neo-medieval
festivals—is that of recourse to a mythical and golden age as an expedient to
silence the more recent—insidious and cruel—past. Thus, in 1335 at Visegrád
an important meeting was held between the kings of Hungary, Poland, and
Bohemia. On February 15, 1991, in the same Hungarian city, the leaders of Hun-
gary, Poland, and Czechoslovakia met, giving rise to the "Visegrád Group,"
which, on the model of Benelux, had the primary political goal of reinforcing
economic exchange among these countries and working in harmony to join
the European Union simultaneously, which eventually transpired in 2004.[34]
Appropriately, on the official site of the "V4" (as the members of the group are
called, Czechoslovakia having divided into two states) one can clearly read:

> This high-level meeting held at Visegrád, Hungary, created an imaginary
> historical arch linking the idea of this meeting to the idea of a similar
> meeting, which took place there in 1335.[35]

The historical arch is imaginary and links two ideas, which is both possible and
legitimate. Less legitimate, and historically impossible—this is the objection a

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31   Cf. G. Mammarella, *Storia d'Europa dal 1945 a oggi*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 1992, Ch. 12, *Europa
      atlantica ed Europa carolingia*, pp. 294–317, especially pp. 315–317.

32   Ch. Amalvi, *Le goût du Moyen Âge* cit., pp. 240 ff., citing A. Minc, *Le Nouveau Moyen Âge*,
      Gallimard, Paris 1993, pp. 33 ff., 200 ff.

33   For other critiques, even ironic, of the contemporary use of Charlemagne in the construc-
      tion of Europe, see P. Toczyski, *Carolingian References* cit., for the Avars: W. Pohl, *The Av-
      ars. A Steppe Empire in Central Europe*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca 2018.

34   See Visegrád Group, official site: www.visegradgroup.eu/main.php (cons. May 14, 2019).

35   *Ibid.*

medievalist historian might make—is charging the Middle Ages with meanings that do not belong to it, with the inappropriate goal of establishing a past-present connection that omits an intermission of 656 years.[36]

Quite similar, from this point of view, is the way the Congress of Gniezno, a formal encounter between Emperor Otto III and Duke Boleslaw of Poland that took place in the year 1000, is celebrated. At that meeting the first archiepiscopal seat and the first ecclesiastical metropolis in Poland were founded upon the tomb of Saint Adalbert. In recent decades, Gniezno has often been mentioned for its symbolic significance as a place of communion. Pope John Paul II visited there in 1979 and 1997, on the second occasion raising a prayer for the unity of Europe. On March 3, 2000, the first millennial of the Congress of Gniezno was celebrated with all due pomp in the presence of the presidents of the Polish, German, Hungarian, and Slovakian Republics, the Cardinal Secretary of State of the Vatican, and numerous other prelates. Two quite memorable events, therefore, whose usage is symptomatic of a transition to Europeanism even on the part of some countries of the former Eastern Bloc. And all the same we are dealing with events that are not modifiable *ad usum Delphini*, as has already been observed.[37] Some historians and politicians have greeted the Congress of Gniezno as a testament to the fact that "the beginning of Polish-German relations was marked by intimacy and unity." Patrick Geary, astonished at such an exaggeration, exclaims:

> It is truly astounding that a thousand years of bloody history of Polish-German antagonism can be so easily erased by some medieval incident![38]

Even when, as in these cases, the goal is to represent a joining of forces antithetical to the nationalistic perspectives discussed in the previous chapter, the use of the medieval past in a contemporary key is exploitative. It's all right to use these symbols, but always keeping in mind that they are just symbols. Otherwise the Medieval Era risks becoming a siren that sings of ancient knights

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36 P.J. Geary, *The Myth of Nations* cit.

37 TN: *Ad usum Delphini* is an expression derived from a series of Classical texts modified for use in the classroom, including through the elimination or rephrasing of passages that were deemed not suitable for the sensibilities of children.

38 *Ibid.* Cf. Z. Dalewski, *Medieval Past and Present Politics in Post-war Poland*, in *Uses and Abuses of the Middle Ages* cit. Cf. also John Paul II, *Memory and Identity* cit. (p. 104 of the Italian edition), which recalls how in 1979 at Gniezno he spoke in patriotic tones of the *Bogurodzica* (Madre di Dio) hymn, attributed to Saint Adalbert: "The *Bogurodzica* song became the national anthem, which again in Grunwald [Tannenberg, 1410] led the Polish and Lithuanian troops into battle against the Teutonic Order."

and bishops to make us forget the twentieth century. As the Polish medievalists did so they wouldn't have to mention Lenin. As once happened, according to Benedetto Croce, during the Restoration:

> And because the recent past, that of the *ancien régime*, was still too clear in the records, too precise in its boundaries, and resistant to idealization and sacred sublimation, yearning carried us to a more remote past, […] to the Medieval Era, in which we saw or imagined shadows as solid things, marvels of faith, loyalty, purity, generosity […].[39]

The second symbolic nucleus of contemporary European identity in which the Middle Ages plays a role of capital importance is the concept of Christian Europe. Obviously intertwined with the idea of empire (whether Carolingian or Ottonian, as the Holy Roman Empire is properly called), the belief in the pre-eminence of Christianity in medieval Europe is today widespread, and in fact it would make no sense to claim the contrary. To the question, "Was the medieval West […] conscious of representing an entity?" Jacques Le Goff responds: "There certainly exists a Europe, naturally Christian, that has the consciousness of common values and interests."[40]

Monasticism, cathedrals, saints, and art (which in the Middle Ages was almost exclusively sacred), are the elements that reinforce this conviction. It is not for nothing that, in common Italian parlance the term "Christian" has for a long time been equivalent to "person." Not only was profound religiosity one of the original characteristics of medieval civilization, but vast sectors of the population were conscious, and for many centuries, of their Christian identity: it is society understood as *Societas Christiana*, a position particularly dominant in the eleventh to thirteenth centuries. The idea of a Europe that was Christian makes sense, as it was formed around the territorial extension achieved by Roman and Constantinopolitan Christianity, a geographic area (and two cultural areas) quite distinct from that of the Ancient Roman Empire, but also from the vast reach Christianity achieved in the Middle Ages, as it spread into Asia

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39   B. Croce, *Introduzione alla Storia d'Europa* cit., p. 1305.
40   J. Le Goff, *À la recherche du Moyen Âge* cit., pp. 115 ff. See for example A. Geretti (ed.), *Il potere e la grazia. I santi patroni d'Europa*, exhibition catalogue (Rome, Palazzo Venezia, Oct. 7, 2009-Jan. 10, 2010), Skira, Milano 2009. According to Veronica Ortenberg, the first three politicians who in the 1950s pushed for European integration, namely the French Robert Schuman, the Italian Alcide De Gasperi, and the German Konrad Adenauer, "probably had in mind to recreate one day a modern version of 'Christendom', as had been the spiritual and the political union of the West under Charlemagne": Id., *In Search of the Holy Grail* cit., pp. 110 ff.

(Assyrians, Armenians, Maronites) and Africa (Copts). And Christianity itself was the principal medium of an early shared identity.[41]

If this is the general consideration, other additional reflections will nuance to the argument in important ways, primarily regarding the political uses—renewed today—that one can make by calling upon the Christian Middle Ages. In Europe (in a purely geographical sense) from antiquity to today, there have been many Christianities, including some now exterminated for which we no longer know even the origins. Cultic forms, devotional practices, and social impact have varied greatly through time and space. These various Christianities also coexisted with other religions—Islam, primarily in Spain, and Judaism, not to mention more-or-less formalized cult forms that, especially among rural populations and the generally more peripheral ones—where evangelization came late—have maintained characteristics syncretic with other ancient religions and customs.

In the 1970s and above all in France, during the heated historiographical debate provoked by the Vatican II Council, the entire so-called "myth of the Christian Middle Ages" came under question and its historical reality was largely refuted. Needless to say, this position, which would reduce even medieval Christianity to a Romantic invention, is extreme and not credible except in its most general outlines—for Christianization did not entirely encompass the masses until mendicant preaching in the thirteenth–fourteenth centuries and this process was not completed until the sixteenth century. It is, in fact, true that medieval popular culture was quite different from that of the cultural elite, that is, the clergy, which perceived and proposed a learned homogeneity. This is, however, not the same thing as saying that the medieval European populations in almost their entirety were not and did not feel Christian.

The debate on these topics cannot be said to be closed yet, and the fundamental idea that "Medieval Christianity" is a vast concept and one not reducible to a formula remains valid for us. The existence of a single Christianity (always referred to, primarily after 1054, the year of the schism, as the Latin West) was an ideal mainly sought by an intellectual, spiritual, and ruling elite who had the ability to disseminate certain principles, to a certain extent still present in the Catholic world, that could be the basis of integration, and to tenaciously battle any opposing forces, whether religious (the numerous heterodox currents, strongly associated with the notion of heresy) or social and political (conflict with the secular lords, cities, and kingdoms), through a gradual appropriation of all that was linked to sacrality. But these conflicts, frictions, struggles, and opposing points of view were quite present during the

41   See D. Balestracci, *Ai confini dell'Europa medievale* cit., pp. 16–20.

entire Middle Ages and they cannot be ascribed to the deviation from a norm given once and for all. To say, then, that in the central Middle Ages there existed a *Societas Christiana* is without a doubt true, but not for everyone. It is particularly true for the Roman Church, and on this topic Franco Cardini has underlined the centrality of Rome rather than of Europe:

> It must in any case be clear that between Christianity (especially in its Catholic form) and Europe there is no intrinsic link, while there is, profoundly, between Catholic tradition and Romanness.[42]

Charlemagne himself—now become a symbol of unity in the name of European Christianity—was made a saint, though not by Pope Alexander III, who was recognized by history as the legitimate pope, but by his adversary, the imperially sponsored Antipope Paschal III. Thus, Charlemagne may still be the patron saint of European unification, but as a saint *per se* he has a whiff of heresy: canonized by an anti-pope, he must be an anti-saint. And if we turn to examine the modern and contemporary age, this discourse loses consistency and grows ever more volatile. Christianity embarks on new roads—reform, evangelization of distant peoples—making it quite reductive to consider it a distinctly European trait. Christianity retreats before the Turkish advance, which conquers a considerable slice of the continent and provokes, on the other side, a new thrust towards the Atlantic that leads, as early as the late 1300s, to "an interesting detachment, at the limits of unfamiliarity, of the most Western part of Europe."[43] Europe itself—the part not subject to the Sultan— becomes in the 1700s a territory where religion is no longer the only way to give meaning and direction to life. It is in this vein that Cardini wonders: "Since when, and until when, can we speak of a 'Christian Europe'?"[44] Having established the *terminus a quo* in the Carolingian Age, he proposes a shifting set of *termini ad quem*: in the "first configuration of modernity as the era of philosophical-scientific rationalization," therefore between the 1500s and 1600s; in the deeply rooted popular imagination of the peoples of Western Europe, until the French Revolution; while for peoples living in other parts of Europe, above all the central and eastern ones, this same phases lasts until the early 1900s. And the end of the Thirty Years' War (1648) is generally considered the moment

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42   F. Cardini, *Europa. Le radici cristiane* cit., p. 16.
43   G. Sergi, *L'idea di medioevo* cit., p. 58.
44   F. Cardini, *Europa. Le radici cristiane* cit., especially the Chapter *Europa e Islam*, pp. 115–149: 115.

in which Christianity was superceded by Europe as the framework for the balance of powers among the various states.[45]

After these reflections, it becomes difficult to share such sentiments as: "Europe is none other than what was once called 'Christianity,' but simply secularized."[46] These historically insufficient declarations must in any case be taken into consideration, as they have been formulated by movements that, for the efficacy of their draconian message, find ever more ample ground.[47] In fact, in the past twenty years or so, the debate has abandoned libraries and taken to the streets. Affirmations of this type provide an answer to the conflicts derived from immigration, above all Muslim, creating an "identity through difference" that is once again reactionarily Christian.[48]

Now we see why the request to insert a mention of "Christian roots" in the European Constitution provoked such a colossal ruckus, a reaction we did not anticipate in response to a problem that, all told, seemed mostly cultural. Thus there was a debate over what sense to give the "roots," how to interpret them as a simple metaphor, and how to clearly distinguish them from the concept of "origins" with the idolatry that it notoriously entails.[49] The recollection of roots, in fact, need not entail any deterministic aspect, hypothetically necessary to the course of history. But if this is Franco Cardini's judgment, in reality there are many who hold that the roots should be remembered precisely because from them it is possible to trace a continuous historical line defined by eternal values that must be not only defended, but reclaimed in opposition to that which is different and new, and therefore negative, in secularized society: these are "the deep roots [that] are not reached by the frost," from a poem by Tolkien, often cited in some Italian right-wing circles. They are the baptisms of King Clovis and Duke Mieszko, from which the nations of France and Poland originate.[50] Christianity, therefore, comes to be proposed as a measure and norm, one that should be inserted into a legal document with binding power: a "fundamental criterion to which European society, and thus the newborn

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45 Cf. G.V. Signorotto, *Interessi, "identità" e sentimento nazionale nell'Italia di antico regime*, in *Studi in memoria di Cesare Mozzarelli*, Vita e Pensiero, Milano 2008, vol. I, pp. 399–420: 417.

46 S. Taddei, *Per quale Europa?* cit., p. 18: "Europe, in essence, is not constructed, it is known and discussed, because Europe is nothing but what was once called 'Christianity,' simply secularized, which nevertheless gradually reacquires a new consciousness, and first of all is the Greco-Roman civilization that imposed itself as a universal empire with concrete details."

47 G. Miccoli, *In difesa della fede* cit., p. 173.

48 P. Rossi, *L'identità dell'Europa* cit., pp. 12 e 103 ff.

49 *Ibid.*, p. 54; F. Cardini, *Europa. Le radici cristiane* cit., pp. 168 ff.

50 On Clovis: Ch. Amalvi, *Le goût du Moyen Âge* cit., pp. 125–130; 316.

Union, must conform."[51] Which may be valid for all Christians (not just European), but why should it be for all Europeans? And, to go further, to what form of Christianity are we referring? Many indeed are the Christianities throughout history. Precisely for this reason, in relation to the proposal to insert the reference to "Christian roots" in the European Constitution, Giovanni Miccoli declared:

> There remains a powerful doubt toward a generic reference to Christian identity, regarding its meaning and importance, as two thousand years of history prove it to be fragmented in extraordinarily diverse models, manifestations, and customs.[52]

Many are the Christianities throughout history, but the proposal to insert a mention of Christian roots comes from a Catholic environment. Since the Roman pontiff, who is the "universal shepherd" and "the father and teacher of all Christians," holds the charge of safeguarding an authentic tradition understood as neglected by many, and since he declares the Catholic and apostolic faith to be the original one, it follows that in speaking of "Christian roots," the pope cannot mean anything but "Catholic roots." One may thus comprehend why the proposal to insert the reference to "Christian roots" was rejected not only by the secular governments, and not only as an acknowledgment of the non-Christian religions practiced in Europe, but also because it was perceived by Protestant and Orthodox believers as an undue assertion of pontifical primacy.

The decision not to explicitly allude to Christian roots in the preamble to the European Constitution was taken after long discussion.[53] Instead, the provision established that the Union would be formed by:

> Drawing inspiration from the cultural, religious and humanist inheritance of Europe, from which have developed the universal values of the inviolable and inalienable rights of the human person, freedom, democracy, equality and the rule of law.[54]

In this there is *also* much of Christianity.

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51   P. Rossi, *L'identità dell'Europa* cit., p. 13.

52   G. Miccoli, *In difesa della fede* cit., p. 195; cf. in general *ibid.*, pp. 160–196.

53   T. Todorov, *La peur des barbares* cit, pp. 298 ff.

54   *Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe*, signed Oct. 29, 2004 in Rome, in "Official Journal of the European Union," vol. 47, C 310, Dec. 16, 2004, p. 3, https://eur-lex.europa .eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:C:2004:310:FULL&from=EN (cons. July 23, 2018).

The last way that the Medieval Era is called to arms in response to today's political exigencies is by inserting it into the debate on multiculturalism, understood not as the mere co-presence of many cultures in the same territory, but as a continuous process of interaction and integration. Even this Europeanism, more thoroughly permeated by progressive thought than almost all the examples of medievalism presented so far, proposes in some capacity to validate the thesis of a Europe formerly united in the Middle Ages.

Historical and sociological studies on this subject ought—in a purely theoretical vein—to have cleared the field of misunderstood interpretations, derived for the most part from the Romantic belief that cultures and ethnicities possess unique and characteristic identities, immune to change except by force, and dating back to very remote eras. It has been widely shown, in fact, that immutable, collective identities do not exist, that on the contrary identities are inherently plural (as Guizot wrote already in 1828, in opposition to his contemporaries), and that they are continually shifting.[55] Consequently, "the idea of constructing a European cultural canon, common and immutable, is preposterous."[56]

Cultural plurality is the basis of how the European Union imagines itself, since belonging to a nation does not prevent one from belonging to Europe: its official motto is "United in diversity."[57] This is symbolically and effectively represented by the euro, whose two faces testify, on the one hand, to the common belonging to Euroland, and on the other, to the retention of national identities. Thus, for example, France is European and solidly anchored in republican values; Germany is European, but perhaps still a bit nostalgic for the Deutsche Mark; nations ruled by monarchies continue to stamp the face of the sovereign; and Italy has chosen to present itself as a nation founded on culture: Castel del Monte, the Mole Antonelliana, the Colosseum, Michelangelo's Campidoglio,

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55   F. Guizot, *Histoire de la civilisation en Europe* cit. (1856 ed.), pp. 37 ff.: cf. P. Rossi, *L'identità dell'Europa* cit., pp. 13, 27–39, 131; T. Todorov, *La peur des barbares* cit., especially pp. 282 ff. The idea of ancient times as diverse, hybrid, and dynamic, useful for understanding antiquity today, is also present in S. Settis, *The Future of the "Classical"* cit. (pp. 101, 115, 119, 123 ff. of the Italian edition).

56   T. Todorov, *La peur des barbares* cit., p. 289. On Apr. 16, 2011, in Pisa, the Italian Society of Medieval Historians organized a roundtable on the theme of *A European "canon" for medieval history?*, with the participation of medievalists of various nationalities who, almost unanimously, spoke against the construction of a European "canon," which they found impossible and perhaps unhelpful. Nevertheless, they observed that, in point of fact, this common canon already exists, not in the traditional metanarrative of national histories, but in the contents and chapter structures of introductory textbooks.

57   Preamble of the European Constitution, art. 5.

Leonardo's Vitruvian Man, Dante as painted by Raphael (though it's a shame that such culture is relegated to small change).[58]

But if the general political project of the European Union is that of recognizing plurality as the basis of unity (always with our old Charlemagne in mind), in reality this process, as we have seen in the previous chapter, is opposed by nationalist movements and by those who in general want to proclaim the absolute Otherness (if not superiority) of their culture. Even the Europeanism that some movements champion is ruined by being reduced to a mere "faithfulness to the past":

> Selecting the most convenient characteristics from Europe's abundant past, refusing to see the necessarily mutable aspect of cultures, all those who identify its nucleus as fundamentally stable, in reality pronounce on the past a judgment anchored to the present [and] reiterate their contemporary ideal by seeking ancient prefigurations of it.[59]

And thus, the Middle Ages loom large once more. It is the firm, ethnic, nationalist, selective Middle Ages: it is a manor that stinks of mildew and disuse even when decorated with picturesque images. It is against this idea of the Middle Ages, largely fabricated, that numerous medieval historians are writing today. The same working groups that occupy themselves with the uses and abuses of medieval history and the Romantic and neo-Romantic processes of inventing traditions by referring to ethnicities and national cultures as if they had existed in the Middle Ages, are also interested in the significance that such processes and invented traditions assume in contemporary Europe. A Europe that in the Middle Ages was not only multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, and characterized by uninterrupted dynamic processes, but that was also profoundly "mixed race." Thus Stefano Gaspari describes the Early Middle Ages as "an epoch characterized by a tremendous ethnic shuffling. If you wish, this may indeed by a useful key to understanding the sense of the period as a whole."[60] In the same way, Girolamo Arnaldi wrote a book on *Italy and Its Invaders*, concentrating his

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58   See also F.P. Tocco, *Europa: complesso di identità* cit.

59   T. Todorov, *La peur des barbares* cit., p. 289.

60   S. Gaspari, *Prima delle nazioni* cit., p. 16. *Quante madri e quanti padri. Matrici, conflitti e retaggi di un medioevo multietnico* (roundtable, Università di Bologna, Festa internazionale della Storia, Oct. 22, 2009), was a session organized at the 2009 International Festival of History in response to declarations by the Italian government in favor of the idea of a "non-multiethnic" Italy. See for example, *Berlusconi: "La nostra idea dell'Italia non è multietnica,"* in "Il Sole 24 Ore," 9 May 2009, https://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/SoleOnLine4/Italia/2009/05/berlusconi-no-italia-multietnica.shtml (cons. May 5, 2019).

attention on it as a land of conquest, but also of encounters between cultures.[61] On February 16, 2010, at a conference organized by the Italian Historical Institute for the Middle Ages on the subject of political strife in medieval Italy, then Speaker of the House Gianfranco Fini compared Italy to a great pier thrusting into the Mediterranean, recalling that our identity has always been open.[62]

Plurality, complementarity, circulation, exchanges, webs, and relations are concepts that describe the Middle Ages. And these are what render that ancient age similar to our contemporary Europe, the one and the other characterized by a "mobile polycentrism" that makes them like a kaleidoscope.[63] Thus, one effective symbol of this mobile and vital epoch might be its roads. Europe was a great web of land and sea routes, which have drawn and defined the territory, uniting among them people and ideas.[64]

Like roots, roads reflect values. Like roots, roads, as they trace certain routes, are metaphors for flowing time, evoking the past, the present, and the future. Unlike roots, however, roads are a symbol of sharing, exchange, and openness. Furthermore, they are physically, empirically present in the European territory. Since the second half of the Eighties ever more projects have arisen—promoted by both the European Union and individual nations—aimed at rediscovering and reevaluating the web of medieval routes, with the intention of "activating the 'adhesive' elements of national states, such that [they may] recognize and discover an identity and a European cultural diversity together, open a dialog, and enrich each other in turn."[65] Such as the most famous of these projects, the

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61   G. Arnaldi, *Italy and Its Invaders*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (MA) 2008 (original edition: *L'Italia e i suoi invasori*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 2002).

62   "The work of historians offers, among its many merits, the important opportunity to remind today's Italy how its past is always marked by dialogue and thus by the meeting of religious, ethnic, cultural, and socio-economic realities profoundly different from one another. The great pier of the Mediterranean, the Peninsula has been, through the millennia, a dock and conveyor belt for various peoples who met, confronted, perhaps fought, but always fused into a long series of new, sometimes dramatic, but also fertile, synthesis. It follows [...] that the Italian identity has never been closed and impermeable to the heterogeneity of influxes that have passed through it over the centuries." G. Fini, *Prolusione*, in *Lotta politica nell'Italia medievale*, giornata di studi, Roma, Feb. 10, 2010, Istituto storico italiano per il medio evo, Roma 2010, pp. 11–16: 12.

63   G. Sergi, *Antidoti all'abuso della storia* cit., pp. 51–58: 58.

64   R. Greci (ed.), *Itinerari medievali e identità europea*, Acts of the International Congress, Parma, Feb. 27–28, 1998, Clueb, Bologna 1999. Not without reason, the primary contemporary Italian website for medieval studies is called "Reti medievali" ("Medieval Networks"). On the use of a metaphor other than "roots," namely that of a river with its tributaries, see M. Bettini, *Contro le radici. Tradizione, identità, memoria*, il Mulino, Bologna 2012.

65   *Via Francigena: la strada del turismo culturale europeo*, Nov. 18, 2009, www.tafter.it/2009/11/18/via-francigena-la-strada-del-turismo-culturale-europeo/ (cons. Dec. 22,

recreation of the Via Francigena, the ancient road that connected France to Rome, which concluded its *iter* (and it is truly appropriate to call it that) with its official recognition on November 11, 2009.

Without a doubt, even in these cases we find ourselves all too often before a massive reinvention of the Middle Ages. Some itineraries are total fabrications with no correspondence to ancient viability. Historical revisionism is all too evident, as precedents to our age of webs and communications are sought in a medieval Europe (in reality, a Europe of every time, up to yesterday) that had to grapple with very difficult means of communication and exchange. Villages accessible solely by dirt paths and mule tracks are not an exclusively medieval experience and the roads have always been infested with bandits. Thus, to simplistically imagine that the European Middle Ages is its roads is a fabrication like any other. Likewise, in constructing these routes we often make use of disparate, ahistorical ingredients that echo the usual Romantic medievalism, with its goal of attracting tourists and turning cultural histories into money-making machines. This can be rectified by intervening philologically: which does not mean denying the value of the symbol and its function, but making both adhere to the course of history. When we speak of roads, in fact, there is no need to invent elements of cohesion: when they were there, they were actually there.

The Medieval Era was *also* a time of travelers, starting, traditionally, with the great migrations of peoples and ending, symbolically, with the great voyage of Christopher Columbus. The composite physiognomy of medieval travelers—merchants, lords, clerics, students, pilgrims, soldiers, families, and migrant peoples—permits a reception of the symbol of the voyage by contemporary men and women of almost any political orientation. The voyage may be undertaken like an existential or religious journey. From this comes the recent revival of slow and suffering pilgrimage towards the traditional goals of medieval devotion: the ancient *Camino de Santiago*, rediscovered by Catholics and by those who, in the labor of going on foot down a path trodden for centuries and centuries, seek a more authentic dimension for their life. And, along with Santiago, the return of the pilgrimage to Rome and to the Michaelic sanctuaries of Normandy and Apulia, the cultural routes of monasticism, also like the

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2009, the page was found to be inactive when cons. May 14, 2019). Today there are twenty-three official European cultural itineraries, many of which recall the Middle Ages: cf. P. Carboni, *Itinerari culturali in Europa e in Italia*, May 3, 2007, www.tafter.it/2007/05/03/itinerari-culturali-in-europa-e-in-italia/ (cons. Dec. 22, 2009, inactive when cons. May 14, 2019).

pilgrimages of New Age travellers to the most remote and secret zones of "Celtic Arcadia."[66]

The journey is also a testament to the identity of cultures in contact with one another: thus the already existing routes dedicated to the rediscovery of Jewish patrimony, of Southeastern Europeans, of Celts, Vikings, Normans, Arabs of al-Andalus, Catalans and Castillians, up to the routes dedicated to material culture, to rites and popular European festivals. Children *also* of Geoffrey Chaucer's pilgrims, so different from one another, today's Europeans continue to travel roads—and this is the beautiful thing thing—that may lead anywhere. If we wish, we may even travel through the canopies, like the Baron in the Trees.

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66   On New Age travellers cf. V. Ortenberg, *In Search of the Holy Grail* cit., pp. 135–137.

Epilogue

It is a bright May evening. In the midst of a clearing stands a wizard who possesses a mighty and precious magic: the power to summon things past. A king arrives and says: "I have conquered the realm of another king. I have slain many men and now my conscience has begun to gnaw at me."

And the mage replies: "Feel no remorse, for the realm you have conquered once belonged to your ancestors. Your subjects dwelt there for centuries, before they were driven out. You have done the right thing."

> "Can it be true?" asks the king.
> "If it is not true, it will soon be."

This is only the prompt for a legend that has not been written, but it encapsulates the principal problem addressed in this book, where we have encountered so many mages and kings made in this mold.

When I set out on this project I had much clearer ideas than when I finished it. The man "with his head in his hands like a gargoyle of Notre Dame," mentioned in the prologue, is me while I wander lost around the campus of the University of Western Michigan in Kalamazoo, seeking the Middle Ages in America, between the plains of Michigan and Chicago's neogothic skyscrapers. And Notre-Dame's gargoyles as we know them are, as should now be obvious, a creation of the 1800s.[1] I have babbled so much about all the impossible pasts I have come across that, from time to time, I have gotten the impression that history truly is as Raymond Queneau describes it: that it has been thrown about *en vrac*, willy-nilly. The constant coming and going of the Duke of Auge and his alter ego Cidrolin between the Middle Ages and modernity is perhaps the pendular motion that most resembles this book. Along with, naturally, the laborious non-existence of Italo Calvino's Non-existent Knight.

Even if seen as much as possible as a unified whole, the discourse that I have attempted to set forth has resolved itself in a not entirely systematic way, at times approaching a broad overview, at others restricting the field of vision to themes that my personal research has already examined in somewhat greater

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1 Cfr. M. Camille, *The Gargoyles of Notre-Dame: Medievalism and the Monsters of Modernity*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2007. The gargoyles, a translation into stone of the dreams of Viollet-le-Duc, are a wondrous symbol of Paris; I hope that the devastating fire that consumed the roof of the cathedral on April 15, 2019, as this book was headed to press, has left them unscathed.

depth elsewhere. It follows that even the degree of understanding that I have been able to achieve is not homogeneous: some of this book's considerations and conclusions will doubtless require correction and further confirmation. And in the laborious synthesis of data I have doubtless succumbed more than once to errors and omissions, for which I now ask your indulgence.

Often I have asked myself, living as I do in the modern world, why I am so fascinated with the Middle Ages, to the point of dedicating more than thirty years of study to it. In this book, which deals with the relationship between our today and that ancient yesterday, I have tried to seek an answer. The reasons that moved me to write are in fact far apart yet convergent: personal reflections, conversations, readings, movies. Number one on the list of cultural motivations is the encounter between me as a medievalist and the people with whom I speak about the Middle Ages. This encounter operates on multiple levels and always arrives at different viewpoints and conclusions. I have spoken with people who, though not specialists, prove to have quite a clear idea of the Middle Ages, something that does not typically happen when dealing with, let's say, algebraic geometry. Like when a mayor wanted to convince me to write a pamphlet to demonstrate his town's belonging to Romagna rather than the Marches, thus granting a "historical" basis for a tiny secession. Or when, during a television broadcast, I was invited as a medievalist to speak about chastity belts, a subject on which I do not have an iron grip. Often, when discussing the Medieval Era with the students in my courses on historical research methods and medieval history, I have started the first class meeting by asking: "What do you think the Middle Ages are?" I have taken note of their answers: the time of fairies, castles, and knights, the time of witches, darkness, and oppression... I do not correct their claims, because, as we have seen, they are not wrong, in that they correspond perfectly to contemporary ideas about the Middle Ages. I do, however, try to historicize these ideas by reflecting on them together with my students, introducing the concept of medievalism and working on the relationship between that and medieval history. To tell them: "See how the Middle Ages are something different" would be both harmful and incorrect.

Analyzing medievalism and its impact on the contemporary world means reinforcing the foundations of the bridge that links the writing of history to modernity, bringing medieval history back to the center of the debate. Vice versa, failing *also* to carry out this historiographic analysis runs the risk of leaving medievalists on the other side of the bridge, thereby giving license to that opinion by which they are nothing other than antiquarians in search of curiosities: useless people because they do not produce goods for immediate consumption, but only conduct research.

I suggest that this type of historical analysis is all the more beneficial in current times, when in so many countries the relationship between the political class and the world of culture, research, and education has become rather fraught.[2] In Italy, Berlusconi's fourth administration (2008–2011) tried multiple times to eliminate the Istituto storico italiano per il medio evo (Italian Historical Institute for the Middle Ages) and, along with it, some of the country's other leading cultural institutes, such as the Accademia dei Lincei (Lincean Academy). In September 2011, special funding legislation came to the rescue of certain cultural institutes studying the Middle Ages; but, as Petrarch has sung for over six hundred years, "the wound is not healed by the loosening of the bow" (*Canzoniere*, xc, 14). In Hungary, the Collegium Budapest-Institute for Advanced Study, an entity centered primarily around medieval history and whose seminars on the construction of national identity were highly influential for this book, was not so lucky. It was shuttered in 2011. As of 2017, the ultranationalist government of Hungary began its notorious policy of chicaneries against the Central European University, considered a sort of American beachhead. This cultural crisis is deeply connected to historical studies.[3] And among these, medieval history often assumes the role of Cinderella. In England, as Michael Alexander wrote, "a Cambridge-educated New Labour Minister of Education did not want people to study medieval history."[4] In the US, in June 2018, the College Board removed medieval history from its Advanced Placement Program, which introduces students to university-level work. A number of protests followed, including an open letter from the Medieval Academy of America.[5]

Evidently, we are faced with a paradox. The eclipse of the discipline of medieval history does not, in fact, correspond to a silence surrounding the Middle Ages. On the contrary, the Middle Ages are always in fashion. In the years that have passed between the original Italian edition and the present English edition, I have collected so many examples of the modern reuse of the Middle Ages that I seriously considered writing a whole extra chapter. Such a decision would have been motivated, for instance, by the great success of the *Assassin's Creed* videogame, set during the time of the Third Crusade, and the even

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2 Cf. T. di Carpegna Falconieri, *Medioevo, quante storie! Fra divagazioni preziose e ragioni dell'esistenza*, in *Medioevo quante storie. V Settimana di studi medievali 130 anni di storie. Giornata conclusiva*, Roma, May 21–23, 2013, ed. Isa Lori Sanfilippo, Istituto storico italiano per il medio evo, Roma 2014, pp. 109–137: 126–128.

3 Cf. J. Guldi, D. Armitage, *The History Manifesto*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2014.

4 M. Alexander, *Medievalism* cit., p. 243.

5 http://www.themedievalacademyblog.org/an-open-letter-from-the-medieval-academy-of-america-to-the-college-board (cons. May 15, 2019).

greater success of the TV series *Game of Thrones*, which has nailed half the world to their couches, but also by the silver brooches and soft chain mail offered by Dolce & Gabbana, or the Crusader costumes worn by England fans at the World Cup in both Brazil (2014) and Russia (2018).

In any case, I convinced myself that it wasn't necessary—at least for now—to write additional chapters, keeping in mind that the reactivation of the Middle Ages in the world of today proceeds along the same lines elaborated across the course of this book. The case studies that have popped up enrich the picture, but the general framework of medievalism remains unchanged. This is true of political medievalism in particular. To make things clearer, it is worth proposing some final examples, pertaining to the years leading up to 2018.

One particular case allows for some reflection on what may seem, as Jorge Luis Borges wrote, like "a secret kind of time, a pattern with repeating lines."[6] As we know, on February 28, 2013, Pope Benedict XVI abdicated the papacy; then, on March 13, 2013, the new pope was elected and took the name of Francis. Quite a few commenters observed that while Benedict's abdication could be compared to that of Pope Celestine V in 1294, the new pope claimed to have chosen his name in honor of Saint Francis of Assisi. Amid the media frenzy, the formal analogies between current events and medieval events emphasized supposedly eschatological meanings: the return of a poor Church in the name of Saint Francis, or, vice versa, the coming of the end of times heralded by the election of a "black pope" (Pope Bergoglio is in fact the very first pope to come from the Jesuit order, and the Superior General of the Jesuits is often referred to as the Black Pope). These analogies may not be the fruit of mere chance, but may in fact derive from an intention on the part of the two popes to suggest connections between current events and medieval ones. Indeed, some years prior to renouncing the papacy, Benedict XVI made a gesture of laying his own papal pallium—that is, the symbol of pontifical dignity granted to him on the first day of his papacy—on the tomb of the now sainted Celestine V. Likewise, in the Middle Ages, the name of Francis was associated with the hope of an "angelic pope," a Saint Francis reborn who would free the Church from worldly corruption. This belief, quite common in the Late Middle Ages, including around the time of Celestine V, has seen a powerful revival since 2013, in the name and the dream of the Middle Ages (and Pope Francis).

The summer and fall of 2014 brought the tragic events connected with the founding of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), which on June 29 of that year proclaimed the restoration of the Caliphate, an ancient medieval

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6   J.L. Borges, "The Theme of the Traitor and the Hero," *Collected Fictions,* Penguin Books, London 1999, pp. 143–146.

memory—and which wages jihad and considers Westerners as Crusaders in need of beheading. On September 22, 2014, a spokesman for ISIS levied threats against what to them, in a clear manifestation of the Middle Ages, remains the preeminent symbol of the West: "We will conquer your Rome, break your crosses, and enslave your women."

The conflict between the West and Islam framed as an updated medieval Crusade shows no sign of stopping, and recollecting the attacks leaves a long trail of blood. Like Copenhagen on February 14, 2015, when a shooting took place at a talk about satirical cartoons featuring Mohammed that had been published ten years prior by the newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* (see Ch. 2). Like the slaughters in Paris on November 13, 2015, and in Nice on July 14, 2016. Like, sadly, the massacres perpetrated in many other places in the West and the East. ISIS claims to be the heir to the Caliphate, but in the West, reactionary and populist parties are in bed with this kind of thinking and gladly share its opinion: in France, after the attack on the headquarters of the magazine Charlie Hebdo (January 7, 2015), not only was the motto "Je suis Charlie" born, to denounce the horror of what happened and to proclaim the desire to defend the free world, but also the motto "Je suis Charles Martel," claiming the victor over the Arabs at the Battle of Poitiers (732) as a hero for the modern West.[7] Our West, which sees a "crusader subculture" among troops deployed in the Near and Middle East, who sew patches on their uniforms with offensive slogans in English and Arabic (so as to be understood), like "Pork-Eating Crusader." Our West, where, with the tacit encouragement of the Trump administration, neo-medievalist culture from the extreme right has risen with a vengeance, provoking—the only positive thing to come from all this—a healthy realization of the problematic relationship between contemporary politics, alt-right, white supremacy, and medieval studies on the part of American academics.[8] In an America where it is well known that the KKK's newsletter is called "The Crusader," and where a Republican candidate, Carly Fiorina, went so far as to claim that her degree in medieval history could be helpful in defeating ISIS. Some might even say that fortunately we still have Melania Trump, who in June 2018 "played the role of a medieval queen," interceding with her cruel consort in favor of immigrant children who had been separated from their parents.[9]

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7   W. Blanc, C. Naudin, *Charles Martel et la bataille de Poitiers* cit.

8   We are referring primarily to the site www.publicmedievalist.com. As this book was going to press, the *New York Times* published an overview of the issue: see J. Schuessler, *Medieval Scholars Joust With White Nationalists* cit.

9   S. Drimmer, *Melania Trump Plays the Role of Medieval Queen*, "The Atlantic," June 21, 2018, https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2018/06/trumps-medieval-queen/563381/ (cons. May 15, 2019).

But let's go back to Europe. In the same Hungary that closed one important research center and is threatening another, the medievalizing nationalism of the extreme right is standing strong. And the same thing is happening in France, where the *Rassemblement National* (National Rally) is gaining more and more approval, and where on the six-hundredth anniversary of Joan of Arc's birthday (January 2012), the parties of the right and left wrestled to lay claim, each in their own way, to the image of the Maid of Orleans, either an ultranationalist symbol or one of unity and concord. In the Ukraine, the bloody events of the war waged there in the spring of 2014 have been represented as a great, neo-medieval narrative. In Great Britain, Westminster and Big Ben are literally sliding into the Thames, and some have even proposed selling them (January 2012), while in the days leading up to the Scottish referendum that secured the continuation of the United Kingdom (September 18, 2014), many were the medieval references, both to the glorious legends of the Middle Ages, and to the "New Middle Ages" into which we would have plunged if the secessionists had won. In Spain, since 2012 they have been debating whether to offer citizenship and passports to descendants of the Sephardic Jews expelled by the Catholic monarchs in 1492. And if the government in Madrid is leaning towards rectifying a medieval mistake, the medieval Adriatic has been domesticated for tourism: it has been claimed that the great explorer Marco Polo was not Venetian and in August 2012 a museum dedicated to him opened on the Croatian island of Korčula. Any Chinese citizens who visit—they announced—will enjoy free admission.

But is something changing? In reality, I believe so. In Europe today, things seem different compared to ten or fifteen years ago. The Middle Ages are still on the march in some circles of the extreme right, and still work well for expressing affiliation at the level of the *piccole patrie*, the little homelands: a case in point is the fact that medieval/renaissance fairs continue to proliferate. Apart from this kind of expression, however, in recent years the separatist claims have ceased to speak the language of the Middle Ages. In Italy, the *Lega* ("League"; which has abandoned the modifier "Northern" and is now a government party of thinly veiled neo-Fascists) no longer makes use of these symbols, and even in the rest of Europe things are moving in this direction. The proof is in the propaganda that in 2016 led to "Brexit" and in 2017 to an attempt at independence in Catalunia. In both cases, references to the need for re-separation (from Europe and from Spain) could have found abundant material in their respective medieval histories: the English, for instance, could have easily invoked the substantial alterity of the English Middle Ages compared to that of the rest of Europe, and the Catalans could have recalled that Catalunia was never conquered by the Arabs, that they were part of the Carolingian Empire—and thus represented the furthest tendril of the Northern world—or still yet

that the crown of Aragon in the Middle Ages reigned over a Mediterranean empire. Instead, the English and the Catalans did not make use of these national narratives, or in any case they did so with much less enthusiasm than we might have expected: in point of fact, in both cases all of history, not just medieval history, played a secondary role.[10] Little remains in Western Europe these days of the political infatuation with the Middle Ages that we saw even quite recently. And so, we must wait and see what happens. I conclude by citing an event to which I would like to attribute an auspicious significance: in January 2018, the French Prime Minister Emmanuel Macron agreed to loan the celebrated Bayeux Tapestry (which depicts the Norman conquest of 1066) to England. This has never before happened: it is a gesture of detente, in the name of the Middle Ages.[11] But I remain a scholar, and so I take my leave of you, dear readers, with the words that Bernard of Clairvaux wrote nine hundred years ago, which apply to all researchers: "With that, let us put an end to our book, but not to our search" (*De Consideratione,* XIV, 32).

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10   References to history were generally limited to the modern era (in Catalunia, in particular, the most popular date is 11 September 1714, the last day of the fourteen-month Siege of Barcelona during the Spanish War of Succession). It should still be underlined that in May 2015, the intellectual society Historians for Britain emphasized the powerful differences between British history and that of the continent. On May 11, David Abulafia published a kind of manifesto, *Britain, apart from or a part of Europe?* (https://www.histo rytoday.com/david-abulafia/britain-apart-or-part-europe, cons. May 15, 2019) in which, among other things, one may read the incredible phrase, "The British political temper has been milder than that in the larger European countries." Since we can't ask the ghosts of Edward II, Henry VIII's wives, the Tasmanians, and the Iroquois for their opinion (just to name a few), we may respond with a phrase that Walter Scott puts in the mouth of the beautiful Jew Rebecca: "The people of England are a fierce race, quarreling ever with their neighbours or among themselves, and ready to plunge the sword into the bowels of each other" (W. Scott, *Ivanhoe* [1820], Ch. 44). Another good answer, signed by 250 British historians and published the following May 18, is found here: https://www.historytoday.com/various-authors/fog-channel-historians-isolated (cons. May 15, 2019).

11   https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jan/17/emmanuel-macron-bayeux-tapestry-loan-britain (cons. July 10, 2018).

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Index of Personal Names