

# Perspectives Médiévales

Revue d'épistémologie des langues et littératures du Moyen Âge

## “Politics and the Middle Ages today”

Call for papers

*Perspectives médiévales* n°39

“We have returned to the Middle Ages”;<sup>1</sup> “These acts are medieval, *moyenâgeux* (worthy of the Dark Ages), barbaric”: painfully revived by the recent terrorist attacks, these expressions have found widespread use in the media over the past few months. They are problematic in many respects: though they describe the “Middle Ages” as “barbaric” and “archaic”, they associate events that are hard to envisage and that are rejected into the sphere of otherness with a period that is nonetheless part of a common history and heritage. In this regard, the Middle Ages seem to act as a filter through which we can express an “unthought known” – the violence of our own society. Conversely, “returning to the Middle Ages”, in TV series or roleplaying games, sometimes means playing/playacting or replaying the period, often in a laudatory manner, through a process that replaces knowledge with nostalgia.

Are the Middle Ages a model or an anti-model? On an ideological level, the same discourses will sometimes use the Middle Ages as a means to designate a despised otherness, while simultaneously invoking them to justify an identity (the “Christian roots of Europe”) or a cultural unity (the Christian West) in contrast with a Europe perceived as fragmented or dangerously multicultural. On an economic level, the Middle Ages may serve as a paradigm for theories of autarky, on the basis of a preindustrial model incautiously associated with the omnipresence of order and power. The Middle Ages thus appear to be the standard-bearer of a rising protest against the current crisis of politics and of the European model.

This underlines how ambiguous the usage of words such as “the Middle Ages”, “medieval” or “*moyenâgeux*” can be in modern day discourses, not least because such usages can also be a way of exploiting the past. What lies at stake is not only our definition of political action but of the concept of politics itself, by determining this notion through the medieval past and its connection to the present.

What can be the position of researchers, of the academic world and, more generally, of intellectuals and artists regarding these representations of the medieval period, of its political thought and of its processes? On the basis of an epistemological investigation of the notions most commonly defined in relation or in opposition to the Middle Ages, through which we both criticize and idealize the period, this issue of *Perspectives médiévales* would like to investigate the current political uses of the Middle Ages. Can the Middle Ages today be anything else than a fantasy, a pretext for justifying all sorts of discourses, far from any real and profound knowledge of the period? Can it still act as a positive point of reference nowadays? Is the definition of man elaborated and cultivated by medieval thought and practice in any way helpful in better understanding a world that constantly refers to the Middle Ages

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<sup>1</sup> For instance : « La Grèce est revenue au Moyen Âge ! », article by Dominique Alberti published on 16 February 2012 in *Libération* ([http://www.liberation.fr/futurs/2012/02/16/la-grece-est-revenue-au-moyen-age\\_796547](http://www.liberation.fr/futurs/2012/02/16/la-grece-est-revenue-au-moyen-age_796547)) or « L'Europe d'aujourd'hui est revenue au Moyen Âge », article published on 16 January 2016 in *sputniknews.com* (<https://fr.sputniknews.com/international/201601161020991076-europe-retour-moyen-age>).

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and compares itself to them, at the cost of numerous misunderstandings, both intentional and unintentional?

The following lines of approach are non-exclusive:

- Against the image of a period that is theocentric and turned inward, is there such a thing as a medieval universalism, in continuous existence to this day, running parallel to the universalism inherited from the French Revolution? Can the Enlightenment notion of perpetual progress, widely criticized and eroded, be cast anew or rebuilt on the basis of a worldview that was mostly banished by the very same Enlightenment?
- Did the Middle Ages develop a form of humanism? If so, what role did subsequent (Renaissance, classic, romantic, modern) historiography play in minimizing this medieval humanism?
- Were the Middle Ages barbaric, i.e. did the period violently expel its enemies from the limits of its language and of its world? Can they serve as an example or a spectre for what is sometimes announced today as a collapse of civilization?
- How can the current fictionalizations of the Middle Ages and the underlying nostalgia be explained? Do medieval and medievalist studies contribute to the creation of a watered down or fantasised vision of the Middle Ages, perhaps even to a renewal of medieval folklore?

The next issue of *Perspectives médiévales* therefore invites its contributors to reflect upon the contemporary political uses of the Middle Ages, both conscious and unconscious.

Scholars, intellectuals, artists and all others who are interested in the presence of the Middle Ages in today's society are welcome to contribute to the 2018 issue of our journal.

Article proposals (a page-long abstract and a bibliography) must be jointly addressed to Sébastien Douchet ([sebastien.douchet@univ-amu.fr](mailto:sebastien.douchet@univ-amu.fr)) and Véronique Dominguez ([veronique.dominguez@u-picardie.fr](mailto:veronique.dominguez@u-picardie.fr)) before 1<sup>st</sup> October 2016.

The calendar is as follows:

- Until 31<sup>st</sup> December 2016: proposal submissions.
- 15<sup>th</sup> February 2016: evaluation by the scientific committee of the journal.
- 1<sup>st</sup> July 2017: articles submitted to the scientific committee for correcting.
- 1<sup>st</sup> December 2017: final versions submitted.
- 15<sup>th</sup> January 2018: issue published online ([peme.revues.org](http://peme.revues.org)).