

# Long Middle Ages or appropriations of the medieval? A reflection on how to decolonize the Middle Ages through the theory of Medievalism

Longa Idade Média ou apropriações do medievo? Uma  
reflexão para se descolonizar a idade média através do  
medievalismo

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## ABSTRACT

We present an overview of the studies on the Middle Ages that exceeds the traditional chronological milestones of the period. Initially, we present the historiography on the Long Middle Ages, a construct that postulates the idea of a medieval world found in the present and thus, beyond the 15th century and the European continent. In contrast, we seek to present the theory of Medievalism which emphasizes the relationship between the contemporary world and the discursive appropriations of the medieval period. This theory is not quite familiar in the Brazilian academic context, but it offers great possibilities to approach the Middle Ages from a more autonomous perspective, rather than the European historiography, on which, historically, medieval studies have been grounded.

## RESUMO

Apresentamos uma reflexão acerca dos estudos sobre a Idade Média que se estende para além dos marcos cronológicos tradicionais do período. Nesse sentido, analisamos, inicialmente, a historiografia sobre a longa Idade Média na perspectiva de um mundo medieval que se perpetua e se expande para além do século XV e do continente europeu. Em contraponto a essa perspectiva, buscamos expor a teoria do medievalismo, enfatizando a relação entre o mundo contemporâneo e as apropriações discursivas sobre o período medieval. Tal teoria, ainda pouco debatida no meio acadêmico brasileiro, oferece possibilidades para uma abordagem das apropriações sobre a Idade Média em uma perspectiva de maior autonomia em relação à historiografia europeia, a qual historicamente os estudos sobre o medievo estiveram vinculados.

## KEYWORDS

Medievalism; Long Middle Ages; Historiography

## PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Medievalismo; Longa idade média; Historiografia

## Introduction

We have noticed that a white, patriarchal and Christian past, whose political and religious boundaries are non-existent, has been particularly acclaimed currently in Brazil, leading us to believe that the European concept of Middle Ages seems to be in vogue. Such appropriation of the Middle Ages in Brazil can be understood as the unfolding of a worldwide phenomenon related to certain political groups, with special repercussions in the United States and Western Europe.

Discussing the topic on the website Pacific Standard (2019), Paulo Pachá claims that there is a close connection between the new right-wing interests in Brazil and their appreciation for the Middle Ages (PACHÁ 2019). He discusses the term *Deus Vult*, a Latin expression used as a battle cry associated with the First Crusades. The expression means *God wills it* and has reappeared in Brazil in the 21st century linked to national right-wing movements. The author analyzes the interest to disseminate the Middle Ages associated with a hegemonic and Judeo-Christian culture, mostly white and patriarchal, emphasizing a historical continuity between Brazil and Western Europe.

This phenomenon Pachá identified helps us understand that reclaiming the Middle Ages is, in fact, a way to give meaning to a certain interpretation of the current context. Interpretations and reinterpretations of the Middle Ages have been recurrent over the years of western history. The very creation of the term in the 14th century arises from an effort to reinterpret a recent past, identifying it as a period of intellectual depression so as to value a modernity that would be *revived* after centuries of darkness.

This means that the humanists were the first to create a middle period to which they attributed negative features when contrasting it to the moment of splendor of literature and arts they sought to praise. The Middle Ages emerged, thus,

as a concept marked by the decline of the ancient world, the literature, as well as the Latin culture.

The Italian humanist scholar Francesco Petrarca, commonly Anglicized as Petrarch, was one of the first to refer to the concept of the “Dark Ages” while also contributing to its development. Theodore Mommsen states that Petrarch may be considered a pioneer when it comes to the development of the idea of history being divided into three moments (MOMMSEN 1942, p. 241). Indeed, Mommsen explains how Petrarch praises Classical Antiquity and contrasts it with a *middle period*. This interval – that he calls depression – starts after the fall of the Western Roman Empire and ends with the beginning of a *modern* age. Petrarch describes the Middle Ages from a rather pessimistic perspective, characterizing it as a time of decline and decay. Still, in his book *Africa*, Mommsen states that Petrarch hopes for better times: as the *darkness* would fade away, Petrarch’s descendants would return to the “pristine pure radiance.”

An identity had been created to this new movement Petrarch believed he belonged to, opposed to the Dark Age that followed the fall of the Roman Empire. One of the first interpretations of the Middle Ages of western history appears precisely as a middle period between a glorified Antiquity and an intellectual revival, that began to disconnect from the darkness. Although envisioned by Petrarch, he did not define such revival. The Middle Ages arise to affirm a humanist renaissance in the 14th century.

The notion of decline has remained in the debates on the formation of the Middle Age throughout history. In the Enlightenment period, the double conceptual fracture analyzed by Alain Guerreau (GUERREAU, 1980) transforms the medieval world into a completely different one where the notions that characterize it, *ecclesia* and *dominium*, are no longer meaningful due to the Enlightenment concepts of economy and religion. The Middle Age was seen as a period of decadence that started with the arrival of peoples called barbarians that put an end to the greatness of Rome.

In the transition from the 18th to the 19th century, Edward Gibbon's studies spread into the European intellectual sphere. The English historian summarizes the perspective of decadence that characterized the medieval period since its starting point, identifying the imperial decline as a result of the triumph of barbarism. In *History of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire* (1776), Gibbon argues that the splendor of the Roman civilization was interrupted by both the rise of Christianity and the German invasions of Danube-Rhine borders. Therefore, Gibbon becomes a central figure in consolidating the historiographic *topos* of decadence.

In 19th century historiography, the Middle Ages was in the spotlight as historians sought in the medieval past the origins of European national identities. The ideas of decadence were softened, mostly in regions of German culture that sought to recover their heritage brought by Germanic peoples. In these areas, Romanticism contributed to recover themes and characters of the medieval past through a less negative perspective.

Hilário Franco Júnior (FRANCO JÚNIOR 2001) discusses the readings and appropriations of the Middle Age throughout history in the introduction of his book: *A Idade Média: nascimento do Ocidente* (2001). In the chapter entitled "O (pré) conceito da Idade Média", he analyzes the distinct receptions of this period, showing how an era of decline and decay during the Renaissance and the Enlightenment was glorified during Romanticism in the 19th century. In a context in which the national identity in Europe is being discussed, the Middle Ages emerged as the cradle of nationalities: the truth and logical thinking of the Age of Enlightenment gave way to the appreciation of the senses, the instinct, and the dreams. Franco Júnior identifies works of the Romantic Era inspired by or based on medieval themes, such as Goethe's *Doctor Faustus* (1808 and 1832), *The Hunchback Of Notre-Dame* (1831) by Victor Hugo, Walter Scott's historical novels (1771-1832), and Wagner's works, *Tristan and Isolde* (1859) as well as *Parsifal* (1882).

We can observe that the interpretations and reinterpretations of the Middle Ages began as the historical period itself ended, although its concept was still being constructed. Since then, different historical contexts have sought to create and recreate the Middle Ages based on their contemporary interests.

If we consider the discursive appropriations of this period, one may conclude that there have been several Middle Ages or even that the Middle Age is a discursive construction, thus it does not exist (AMALVI 2002 p. 537). Nevertheless, we keep talking or writing about it, actually, about its projection that most suits the present. Having said that, the question of which conception of Middle Age we have to consider remains; whether it is the one from the past, that of the present, the one that connects us to the “cradle of Western civilization” – term used by European historiography –, or the one that sees it as a way to understand the here-and-now, as Francis Gentry and Ulrich Müller propose (GENTRY, MÜLLER 1991).

In this paper, we intend to problematize these two approaches to the Middle Age and concurrently defend its decolonization, *i.e.*, we will present the theory of Medievalism as a way to analyze these constant appropriations of the Middle Ages, by questioning the French theory that supports the existence of a long Middle Age. We use Medievalism, a North-American theory that emerged in the 1970's, as an alternative to the French theory. Our objective is to emphasize the relationship between contemporaneity and discursive appropriations of the Middle Age in post-medieval periods.

As Brazilian scholars are not quite familiar with this theory, it is important to comprehend its definition as well as its historiographic trajectory in North American, European and Brazilian studies, although incipient. To do so, this paper will be divided into two parts. First, we will present the French notion of long Middle Ages. Then, we will introduce the Medievalism theory and its repercussions on the decolonization of the Middle Ages, which is also an effort to promote the decolonization of traditionally colonized historiographies, as the Brazilian.

## The Long Middle Ages and European centrality

Prior to our discussion on the Medievalism theory and the historiographic debates regarding this field of study, first we must differentiate it from the approaches of the French school inaugurated by Jacques Le Goff<sup>1</sup> (LE GOFF 2006). Even though some researches on Medievalism and Le Goff's theory on the long Middle Ages mingle in certain academic texts, it is essential to state that they are different traditions and approaches of distinct historiographical perspectives.

The Medievalism theory is not well-known in the Brazilian academia and it was mentioned in Porto Júnior's paper *As expressões do medievalismo no século XXI* (PORTO JÚNIOR 2018), one of the first to present the discussion in the country. This study, published by *Anais do XVIII Encontro da Anpuh-Rio*, contains a historiographical review of the theories on Medievalism (and Neomedievalism), examining the research developed in these fields. The author analyzes the "academic endeavor in this area", with a particular interest in the 1970's onwards, presenting the North American tradition initiated with Leslie J. Workman along the tradition inaugurated by the medievalist Jacques Le Goff in France. "In the late 1970's, the idea of a contemporary conception of the Middle Ages was also approached by the internationally renowned medievalist Jacques Le Goff (1924 – 2014) ..." (PORTO JÚNIOR 2018, p. 3). By exploring the "contemporary" Middle Ages, the author seeks to understand medievalism, neomedievalism, "medievalness"<sup>2</sup> and the studies on *reminiscences* of the medieval period.

Porto Júnior mentions several theories indistinctly, placing them under the umbrella term studies on a *contemporary* notion of the Middle Ages. This inaccuracy places together different theoretical foundations with different historiographic pathways. In fact, when we analyze the repercussions of the medieval culture in post-medieval times, we tend to find certain terms that refer to it, as *memoirs, recreations, reconstructions, representations, reappropriations, reinterpretations,*

<sup>1</sup> Le Goff developed his theory about the long Middle Ages based on discussions about temporalities, first introduced in the book *Pour un autre Moyen Age* published in 1977. Between 1980 and 2004, he published a series of papers in the academic journal *L'Histoire*, which were later published in the book *Un long Moyen Âge* in 2006.

<sup>2</sup> MACEDO and MONGELLI distinguish *Reminiscências medievais* (medieval reminiscences) from *Medievalidade* (medievalness) (PORTO JÚNIOR, 2018, p. 06).

*recollections, reminiscences, remains* or even *endurance*. It has become common to use such terms to refer to the Middle Ages once the period was over; but it is vital to distinguish them to understand the theories on Medievalism. *Recreate, reconstruct* or *represent* the Middle Ages refer to approaches different from those that investigate the remains, reminiscences or survival of the medieval world in modern or contemporary times. It is not just a subtle difference between terms that are most appropriate to describe the repercussions of the medieval culture – if such “medieval culture” even exists, as we will discuss later. We must differentiate between two fields of research that approach the Middle Ages beyond its chronological limits. Those who seek to understand the remains, reminiscences or endurance of the Middle Ages should be attached to the tradition of French medieval historiography inaugurated by Jacques Le Goff.

Next, we will analyze this tradition in order to understand how precisely this field of concerns arose, helping us to clarify one of the greatest difficulties in understanding the theories on medievalism: the misunderstandings about the medieval reminiscences.

## Jacques Le Goff's long Middle Ages and his heirs

This concept was first introduced by Jacques Le Goff in the preface of his book *Pour un autre Moyen Âge* (1977), according to which the Middle Ages would have started in the 2nd or 3rd century and ended in the 18th century, with the strikes of the Industrial Revolution. For the first time a medievalist defined another conception of the Middle Ages, not aligned with the traditional chronological frameworks: between the Fall of the Roman Empire in 476, and the Fall of Constantinople in 1453, or even with the Reconquista of Granada in 1492 or the arrival of Europeans in America. The long Middle Ages had not just begun a little before the 5th century, but it also ended after the 14th and 15th centuries, according to this new periodization.

In *A la recherche du Moyen Âge*, a book of interviews conducted by Jean Maurice de Montremy published in France in 2003, we find a chapter entitled *The Long Middle Ages*, in which Le Goff discusses the main features and unfolding of this concept that he analyzed throughout his career. He begins by explaining his discomfort with the traditional chronology he found at the beginning of his studies in the 1950's: "As a historian, I inherit a periodization modeled by the past – but I must also ask myself about these artificial time cuts, which are sometimes harmful to the understanding of phenomena" (LE GOFF 2003, p. 39-40, translation). He believes that history is a "continuum": only when a series of changes affect economy, customs, politics or sciences, forming a new system, then it would be possible to talk about a change of period. A single event, date or reference is insufficient to rupture historical periodization.

Based on these principles, Le Goff disagrees that the Renaissance should mark a rupture with the Middle Ages, attributing to Jakob Burckhardt the responsibility of having imposed a notion of rupture with the Middle Ages through his classic study *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (1860) – a notion of rupture he believes to be artificial. Burckhardt believes that, during the Renaissance, a *spirit* that values the arts and antiquity emerges, creating a unique context in the European culture, capable of differentiating it from the previous period; Le Goff, heir to the works of Erwin Panofsky, notes that we should not speak of a single rebirth, but of *rebirths*, since the very logic of renaissance is inseparable from medieval history. In the text *Outono da Idade Média ou primavera dos tempos novos?* (LE GOFF 2007, p. 220), the author states that the renaissance of the 14th and 15th centuries was another rebirth among others that occurred throughout the Middle Ages, such as the Carolingian Renaissance and the Renaissance of the 12th century – it was a singular period in western history, but it did not mark a rupture with the Middle Ages.

Le Goff believes that only with the innovations of the 18th century, e.g., Adam Smith's theories, the development of the stationary steam engine, the concept of progress, the industrialization of Europe, and the theories of Rationalism and Scientism in the *Encyclopédie*, it is possible to consider the end of the Middle Ages.

In short, (...) changes do not result from coups in all sectors and all places simultaneously. Hence my idea of long Middle Ages as, in certain aspects of our civilization, it still prevails and at times it appears after official dates. The same can be said of the economy, as we cannot refer to the market before the 18th century. The rural economy could only make hunger disappear in the 19th century. The vocabulary of politics and economics only changes definitively – a sign of change in institutions, means of production and mentalities corresponding to these changes – with the French and the Industrial Revolutions. It is also a time to build a new science that is no longer medieval (Galileo, Harvey, Newton, etc...). (LE GOFF 2008, p. 66-67, translation).

Among the prominent heirs to the French tradition inaugurated by Jacques Le Goff is the French medievalist Alain Guerreau, who analyzed the elements that ended the medieval world based on the idea of the long Middle Ages. Guerreau claims that, during the 18th and 19th centuries, there was a *double rupture*. On one hand, an aspect to be considered is that, from the ideas of the Enlightenment writers, a new structure defined as *religion* arises and "is simultaneously an element that represents a form of social practice and a specific set of activities and institutions whose articulation did not have any precedents" (GUERREAU 2002, p. 438, translation). The very term *religion* would not make sense if applied to the medieval context. Thus, with the emergence of the idea of religion, the medieval structure of *ecclesia* was broken – a term that in itself meant field of the sacred, the church, as an institution, and the group of men who took part in it.

On the other hand, Guerreau observes that Adam Smith laid the foundations of the classical free market economic theory during the Enlightenment period. The notion of a labor force without attachment or protection was created as the idea of transferable land that could be exploited emerged. Guerreau recalls Adam Smith's ideas on economic prosperity, according to which land and work contracts could be traded – the obstacles were considered medieval practices that had to be overcome. These theories valued liberalism and assumed “the market as a dominant institution in the sense that ‘market mechanisms’ are taken as the basis of social organization” (GUERREAU 2002, p. 440, translation). According to Guerreau, the structure of the medieval *dominium* – by which peasants were bound to the land, to serfdom, and to loyalty to their masters – was broken.

The double fracture of the 19th century put an end to *ecclesia* and *dominium*. Religion and economy gained force and made the idea of Middle Ages almost unrealistic in terms other than anarchy (and similar conceptions) and/or a slow-conflicting gestation of contemporary Europe: incoherence and/or teleology (GUERREAU 2002, p. 441, translation).

For Guerreau, the medieval world has lost its meaning since the 19th century; but until then, one could understand Western European society from the medieval structures of *ecclesia* and *dominium*. In fact, he believes the colonies in America were organized based on these structures.

Another important disciple of the French tradition was Jérôme Baschet, about whom Le Goff wrote:

Evidently I am glad to see that Jérôme Baschet justifies, better than I could, the conception of long Middle Ages that surpasses or rather erases the false rupture of the 16th century, of a rebirth that would be its negation and that would recall it as the darkness of obscurantism (LE GOFF *apud* BASCHET 2006, p. 17, translation).

Taking into account his experience in Mexican lands, Jérôme Baschet studied the conquest and colonization of the new world from the perspective of the long Middle Ages. According to Baschet, the Expansion of Europe beyond the bounds of the continent must be understood from the logic of the dynamism of the feudal system, which was far from declining in the 14th century, but rather expanding its borders towards new worlds.

Baschet considers the year 1492 as a reference to discuss the links between the end of the Reconquista in the Iberian Peninsula and the beginning of the marine adventure that leads to the Conquest: "...Reconquest and Conquest are part of a unity and participate in the process of unification and expansion of Christianity" (BASCHET 2006, p. 27, translation). The year 1492 was not seen as a division between two strange eras, but a point when "two historical moments with a profound unity coincided" (BASCHET 2006, p. 27, translation). The first colonists explored American lands hoping to materialize medieval geography, e.g., when Christopher Columbus sought the earthly paradise in the upstream of the Orinoco river.

As a result, Baschet observes how the medieval world was established on the other side of the Atlantic during the maritime expeditions. He acknowledges the weight of a colonial domination that arises from Western dynamics "leading to the transfer and reproduction of European institutions and mentalities – not ignoring an original reality, but still a reproduction – in the colonies of the New World" (BASCHET 2006, p. 32, translation).

Le Goff, in the preface to the book *A civilização feudal: do ano mil à colonização da América* (*The feudal civilization: from the year one thousand to the colonization of America*)<sup>3</sup>, defines Baschet's perspective:

Jérôme Baschet estimates that despite whatever differences may exist between medieval Europe and 16th-century colonial America, the essence of medieval feudalism is once again found

*3 This book has not been translated into English. It was published in French in 2004 and translated into Portuguese in 2006.*

in America: the dominant and structuring role of the Church; a shift in balance regarding the tension between monarchy and aristocracy, without rupturing with the feudal logic; the increasingly important activities of businessmen – committed to Atlantic trade or the exploitation of mineral and agricultural resources of the colonial world – remain within the traditional corporate and monopolistic frameworks, and these men continue to guide their income towards the acquisition of lands and noble status. However, Baschet accepted the expression “late and dependent feudalism”, since it is a world whose logic is completely different from ours. (LE GOFF *apud* BASCHET, 2006, p. 18, translation).

We must highlight that Baschet was deeply influenced by the studies of Luis Weckmann, a Mexican intellectual who wrote two important books based on the idea of a continuum between feudal Europe and colonial America: *The medieval heritage of Mexico*, published in 1984, and *La herencia medieval del Brasil*, published in 1993. Weckmann aims to prove that feudalism was transplanted to America, particularly regarding Mexico and Brazil, and analyzed how this process permeates colonial culture at all levels. Weckmann brings an original approach to the historiography on the colonial period, which revolved around the transition from the feudal to the capitalist mode of production. In Brazil, the discussion leaned towards an analysis of the characteristics of the mode of production based on slavery – oriented, mostly, by the studies of Jacob Gorender (GORENDER, 1980). Historians besides analyzed the political and legal feudal and lordship institutions, which characterized the colonization in Portuguese America

Weckmann takes part in these debates by analyzing cultural and ideological heritages, observing medieval sciences, geography and mystical and religious experiences. The former debates grounded on economic, political and legal bases shift to a new field: that of the history of ideas. He sees the Atlantic as a “blurred mirror” that shows the Old Continent reflected in the New World – not faithfully, though.

No hubo en la península ibérica el otoño de la Edad Media que con tanta maestría ha sabido Huizinga describir en relación con la Europa central; por ello, los españoles principalmente, pero también los portugueses, pudieron transmitir al Nuevo Mundo instituciones y valores arquetípicos de la Edad Media todavía en plena vigencia (WECKMANN 1993, p. 18).

He argues that the colonial period, both in the Spanish and in the Portuguese Americas, was oriented by maintaining feudal institutions and privileges – many of them already obsolete in the Old World, but here still surviving – and a living medieval culture. However, he believes that the medieval world was not faithfully reproduced: “El océano que dio su nombre a la Civilización Atlántica no fue nunca, en el proceso histórico, un simple espejo que reflejara el Mediterráneo...” (WECKMANN 1993, p. 19). He also affirms that religious life during the early colonial centuries was a “faithful copy” of the medieval structure. For the Mexican historian, the first settlers saw the New World through medieval lenses and carried with them medieval conceptions and legends.

As for the Brazilian long Middle Ages, we can refer to Hilário Franco Júnior’s paper entitled *Raízes medievais do Brasil* (*Brazil’s medieval roots*), published in 2008 by *Revista de História da USP* (a Brazilian journal of History). Here, the historian presents medieval heritages spotted in the foundations of Brazil, not only throughout the colonial period but also currently. The reference to a famous book written by Sérgio Buarque de Holanda does not seem to be accidental. Franco Júnior is able to pinpoint *medieval roots* found in Brazil, such as the personal aspect that dominates social relations in the country, the fragility of institutions, and the difficulty to abide by non-personal regulations. The personalist aspect that permeates social relations led to a sociability Sérgio Buarque defined as a characteristic of the *cordial man* (o homem cordial).

Franco Júnior also notices how the sugar production structures of the colonial period were similar to the organizational frameworks of feudal society: they were

almost entirely self-sufficient, there were people on the land working on crops and raising animals, there were chapels etc. He provides further examples of *medieval roots* in Brazil and believes that what we know as *Coronelismo* is “nothing but a national version of clientelism and patronage found in medieval Europe” (FRANCO JÚNIOR 2008, p. 87, translation). The historian points out some Brazilian cultural aspects whose origins can be traced back to medieval societies. The first is the language, which had more linguistic marks of the medieval period than of Portugal of the 15th to the 18th centuries. He also analyzes music, carnival traditions, and even religion. The worship of saints and the belief in the millennial messiah, as found in American territory, are deeply rooted in the culture of medieval Europe. He emphasizes how “the frustration in transplanting institutions, ideas, and habits to another physical reality led to the pervasive feeling that Sérgio Buarque described as that of ‘being a foreigner in our own land’” (FRANCO JÚNIOR 2008, p. 103, translation).

Studies carried out based on the notion of long Middle Ages accentuate a perception that societies in America are inevitably heirs to the European continent. In fact, by analyzing the presence and reminiscences of the feudal society, taking into account the notion of long Middle Ages, a core issue is the European reality and how it has endured over time.

The Middle Ages appears here as a reference, emphasizing the dependent aspect on the European experience, since the medieval society served as a model to be transplanted to the colonies. From this historiographical view, the reference to the Middle Ages leads us to a colonialist interpretation of the history of territories in the New World centered on a Eurocentric perspective. Considering that the reference to understand the New World’s history lies in the Middle Ages and this connection is still noticeable in the present and future, by medieval reminiscences, a teleology of western history is created, whose core is the European historiography.

Now, if Europe is the core, it is tempting to link America's discovery to the Middle Ages. However, this particular interpretation of the conquest disregards the historical rupture caused by the conquest itself, as well as the underlying process of colonization.

Sans doute que, si l'on regarde depuis le côté européen, il existe toujours la possibilité de projeter son histoire, son système de valeurs etc. pour établir l'idée d'un processus dans lequel, par exemple, la conquête aurait eu un passé, c'est-à-dire, une histoire liée à la guerre contre les Maures. Ainsi, les combats qui ont eu lieu en Amérique étaient, eux aussi, dirigés contre les infidèles, de la « même » façon que ceux de la reconquête.

En outre, du point de vue européen, les Maures, les Indiens, les juifs étaient classés, *grosso modo*, comme des « infidèles ». De cette façon, la conquête, comme la reconquête, fait partie de la même guerre « sainte », qui, à travers tout le Moyen Âge, s'est manifestée par une série de guerres contre les « infidèles ». Si on adopte la perspective européenne, la conquête ne représente qu'une continuation dans un nouveau monde et, ainsi, il n'est pas possible de mesurer la rupture qu'elle a provoquée pour les Indiens.

Néanmoins, les habitants de la Mésoamérique avaient-ils la même possibilité de chercher dans leur passé cette situation pour la comprendre comme une sorte de déjà-vu ? Non. Si on change la place de l'observateur pour prendre le point de vue des Indiens, on est obligé d'admettre une totale rupture avec leur histoire. Une telle expérience doit être associée au sentiment, vécu par les Indiens pendant les premiers contacts entre les Européens et les habitants de la Mésoamérique, d'une totale étrangeté.

Ainsi, l'écriture de l'histoire de la conquête peut, en même temps, montrer une « continuité », pour les espagnols, ou une totale rupture, pour les Indiens, avec le passé. Pour cette raison, au lieu d'affirmer que le Moyen Âge « a continué en Amérique », il serait préférable de voir comment les Indiens ont dû apprendre plusieurs éléments de la pensée médiévale et, ensuite, comment ils ont fait pour les maîtriser. Par ailleurs, on croit que les auteurs soutenant l'idée d'un long Moyen Âge aux Amériques n'ont pas bien compris les détails et les nuances liées soit à la reconquête, soit à la conquête. L'une et l'autre font partie d'un contexte précis (évidemment, il y a plusieurs intersections entre elles), c'est-à-dire que le passé de la conquête est né dans le contexte politique

qui a opposé les royaumes de Castille et de Portugal, surtout depuis la fin du XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle jusqu'à 1411. (AMARAL, ALMEIDA, BERRIEL 2014, p. 10-11).

Thus, questioning the conception of long Middle Ages is an effort to see the medieval appropriations as something original, part of an autonomous historical process, not necessarily associated with the European historiographic paradigms. Here is Baschet's reply to the authors' critiques:

Il y a sans doute une part de malentendu (ou d'incompréhension) dans notre débat. Mon propos se situe à un fort niveau de généralisation, mes interlocuteurs me répondent sur le plan des spécificités (ibériques et surtout portugaises). Nous ne nous plaçons pas à la même échelle de modélisation. Non que l'une soit plus pertinente que l'autre. Elles sont toutes deux nécessaires. Pour ma part, j'admets volontiers le caractère préliminaire de mon travail et le fait qu'un modèle aussi général doive être affiné pour tenir compte d'une multiplicité de situations particulières. En revanche, je me demande si mes interlocuteurs ne tendent pas à récuser le registre de la généralité ou s'ils ne s'emploient pas à rejeter un modèle général au motif qu'il n'aurait pas pris en compte certaines particularités (ce qui me semblerait relever d'une confusion des échelles). La question est bien plutôt de savoir si ces particularités peuvent s'articuler au modèle général, quitte éventuellement à le modifier, sans pour autant le faire implorer. Rappelons au passage ce que Braudel disait des modèles historiques : ils sont strictement indispensables ; mais leur plus grande utilité survient au moment où ils font naufrage...

L'enjeu serait de parvenir à travailler conjointement aux différentes échelles, pour articuler les spécificités des organisations sociales locales ou nationales aux traits les plus généraux d'un système global (BASCHET, 2014).

Baschet insists on the issue of scale, citing Braudel's work, according to whom America should be seen from a global scale articulated with Europe, stating that he established a model that takes Western Europe as reference. From his reply, we can observe how he sees history – associated with great

models, according to the *Annales* –, and by doing so upholds a scientific stance, which allows him to state in an “unbiased” way that the Middle Ages came to America and thus did not consider the authors’ idea to distance the observer from the viewpoint, by embracing the indigenous’ and black people’s standpoints. Other elements found in his text have also been questioned by the theory of Medievalism, such as the excessive appeal to scientific authority as well as the focus on European frameworks.

Although the authors of *Le Moyen âge est-il arrivé aux Amériques ?* (AMARAL, ALMEIDA, BERRIEL 2014) do deserve credit for shifting the perspectives of observation, they were unable to carry the discussion on the Middle Ages to present time, which is one of the core issues we address here.

We propose that the Medieval period be seen *hic et nunc*. To avoid the *present-centrism* – stressed by Baschet as a trend used to understand the Middle Ages by dealing with categories and representations of the present –, our objective is to reflect on the many appropriations of the Middle Ages in the present by the movie industry, religion, videogames, seeking a “living Middle Age”– one that lives in the present and is projected into the future, constantly resignified in light of contemporary issues. As such, the relationship between past, present and future is a way to address the Middle Ages in the Americas, considering that this period was and still is being recreated here and now.

## The trenches opened by the theory of Medievalism

The Medievalism theory has its origins in debates in the United States and it proposes a new perception of the Middle Ages in the present. According to Leslie Workman (WORKMAN 1998 p. 487-488), one of the founders of Medievalism in the US, it is a field of study that focuses on the reception of medieval representations. Therefore, it is not

a question of analyzing the reminiscences of this period; it is rather a continuous process to recreate, recall or re-appropriate the medieval past in relation to the present.

Although the Brazilian medieval historiography has little dialogue with the North American, it is important to mention that this epistemological renovation took place in the Anglophone world. Currently, Medievalism is an independent and autonomous field of historical knowledge, especially among English and North American historians. With the development of this field, we can cite a number of journals and research groups that have published papers, e.g.: *The year's work in medievalism*; *The New Medievalism*; *The Past and Future of Medieval Studies*; *Medievalism and Modernist Temper*; *Medievalism in the Modern World*; *Studies in Medievalism*; and *International Society for the study of Medievalism*. In addition to traditional investigation centers and academic journals, there is a blog, coordinated by Richard Utz, one of the most respected contemporary scholars in this area<sup>4</sup>.

The term *Medievalism*, in English, first appeared in 1844 in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (EMERY, UTZ 2017, p. 2). In the 19th century, the term was associated with the Middle Ages and was perceived as part of national history. It reappeared markedly only in the last third of the 20th century, with Alice Chandler's book *A Dream of Order* (CHANDLER 1970). Before that, medievalism had not been part of the academic repertoire. In addition to being in alignment with several of Workman's ideas, Chandler's papers contained a few definitions which became part of the research field that had just begun.

Elizabeth Emery and Richard Utz (EMERY, UTZ 2017, p. 1) believe that a lot is owed to Leslie Workman and Kathleen Verduin, after all they worked from the late 1970's to the 1990's to promote, within academia, the interest in Medievalism, often seen with distrust by many American and European scholars of the time. In 1979, the first publication of the journal *Studies in Medievalism* came out, under Workman's supervision – a journal that is a reference in the field and that continues to be

4 Cf: <http://studiesinmedievalism.blogspot.com/>, access on October 02, 2019.

published. Workman remained as editor until 1999 when Tom Shippey from St. Louis University took charge, succeeded by Karl Fugelso from Towson University.

In 1981, Workman initiated his partnership with Kathleen Verduin, professor of American literature at the University of Michigan. Out of this partnership, the international conferences through the series *The year's work in medievalism* came up in 1986. This publication was conceived by Workman as a space to promote Medievalism, and it eventually became a tool to circulate articles based on the presentations held in the annual *International Conference on Medievalism*. One of their legacies, after having worked together for decades, is that they were able to establish a connection between the field of Medievalism and the academic sphere. (EMERY, UTZ 2017, p.1).

An interesting aspect of this movement is how Workman saw the relationship with the medieval past, which possibly explains the criticisms that the Medievalism theory received. After all, the historiography of the 20th century – and a significant number of historians in the 21st century – are still guided by the postulates of the “new history” (*Nouvelle Histoire*) grounded on the “science” status. For Workman, Medievalism is more connected to the emotional field, which is intrinsic to it. The intellectual development came only in the first decades of the 21st century, but without the scientific claim of the new history (*Nouvelle Histoire*). As a matter of fact, out of this relationship between subjectivity and the construction of an object several issues came up; they were addressed by Workman and are still being developed by the generation that succeeded him.

At first, Medievalism was related to the perception of the present linked to the everyday life, that is, the focus was (and still is) on the present. This leads to a debate regarding the construction of History as a Social Sciences and the agency of non-specialists, and how the social construction – that is not a monopoly of the academy – defines the limits of reality of our society. Thus, starting with Workman, Medievalism was about the rediscovery of medieval materials by scholars and

laymen and, above all, it was about the way in which these discoveries/reconstructions were (and are) used, recreated, even politically, to create a discourse of self-defining identity (GENTRY, MÜLLER 1991).

According to Workman, Medievalism contributed to the way the Middle Ages was (and continues to be) written, invented, constructed, and interpreted in post-medieval times, including by the social sciences and non-academic individuals. In other words, its contributions are the reflections on the application of medieval frameworks to contemporary needs and the way in which the Middle Ages inspired the various forms of art and thoughts. In the 1990's, Workman wished to delimit the field of Medievalism studies; however, it did not happen as he died in 2001. This project was reshaped in 2017, not in an encyclopedia – as Workman had envisioned it – but as a dictionary, elaborated and organized by Emery and Utz entitled *Medievalism: key critical terms*, in which the terms and concepts that were once questioned by critics received a theoretical foundation to justify their usage. We would like to point out that the authors themselves mentioned that the existence of this book is due to Workman and Verduin's work.

In the 21st century, many issues and even the struggles faced by Workman and Verduin in the past are already "resolved": the tensions between "pastism" and "presentism" views, between memory and subjectivity, deconstruction of authority conceptions, authenticity and the relationship with institutions that disseminate them, historiography itself included. Based on Emery and Utz, we can say that Workman provided the core idea of Medievalism as a theory used currently, *i.e.*, the processes of recreation, reinvention and reenactment of medieval culture in post-medieval periods. Some questions regarding Workman and Verduin's legacy are still left to be answered.

But what is 'medieval culture'? If by medieval culture we mean the cultural productions (art, literature, music, architecture, treaties, memoirs, etc.) produced during the period from the fall of the Roman Empire (476) to the fall of Constantinople (1453),

the historical period roughly considered 'medieval' by historians today, then medieval culture has always been 'received': people of the sixth century discussed earlier events, texts, and works of art just as did people from the fifteenth century. The concept of a uniform period known as the 'Middle Ages' is itself a construct, invented in the fifteenth century by humanists seeking to glorify their own time as superior 'Renaissance' (EMERY, UTZ 2017, p. 2).

One of the contemporary discussions on Medievalism is the focus on how the Middle Ages or the "medieval culture" was (and is) received nowadays, and on the existence of a "medieval culture". We draw attention to the fact that Medievalism also encompasses research on the creation of European national identities, and the relationship with the so-called "scientific" history and medievalism, and the lay uses of the Middle Ages from the 19th century to the present day (ROSA 2017, p. 161).

Among the various constructs that formed/form Medievalism, we highlight the postcolonial studies. Understanding the Middle Ages through the lenses of postcolonial studies helps us reflect on the role of a historiography that claims a scientific and neutral stance, especially based on anthropological studies. Using the postcolonial studies aligned with the constructs on Medievalism helps us identify the ideological character through which medieval history was and continues to be written by European colonists or by the colonized historians themselves – the Middle Ages is a field that was and continues to be colonized.

Here are some questions raised by Dagenais and Greer on the relationship between the Middle Ages and colonialism:

Is it possible to colonize a region of history, as it is to colonize a region of geography? There are many reasons to believe so. The history of "The Middle Ages" begins at the precise moment when European imperial and colonial expansion begins. The Middle Ages is Europe's Dark Continent of History, even as Africa is its Dark Ages of Geography. Colonization of the past is an

indispensable companion of empire. The very moves by which European nation-based empires establish themselves across vast reaches of geography space, constituting themselves by a simultaneous assimilation and othering of this space and the people who inhabit them, involves them at the same time in the invention of a complementary past other to themselves, a past which belongs to, but which can never be granted full citizenship in, the nation of Modernity. A full exploration of the varying ways in which “The Middle Ages” and “medieval” have served the interest of empire over the past six hundred years (and continue to do so today) is beyond the scope of this introduction, or, indeed, of this special issue of the *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*. I want simply to begin to follow some leads among the early discourses which establish The Middle Ages not as a period in history, but as a vastness of time ripe for colonial exploration (DAGENAIS, GREER 2000, p. 431).

These issues paved the way for scholars such as Nadia Altschul and Kathleen Davis who were able to see the Middle Ages not as a period in time but a conception, an idea, a mobile category that, in light of Medievalism, can be used in any society, in any place (DAVIS 2008, p. 7).

In one of her papers, Nadia R. Altschul discusses the medieval temporality in the Spanish America and in Brazil. She argues that “Medievalism Studies has carefully distinguished itself from places that were “medieval” instead of ‘post-medieval’” (ALTSCHUL 2017, p. 3). She argues that Medievalism refers to the Middle Ages that has come to an end. Therefore, according to Workman’s definition, Medievalism presupposes the idea that not only is the Middle Ages over, but also that it stayed in the past, justifying the interest in reliving or imitating it.

Richard Utz believes there are several motivations to recreate the Middle Ages after its end. He has dedicated his career to studying a construction, Rhodes Hall, built by the Rhodes family in 1904 in a noble area of the city of Atlanta (UTZ 2017). Utz wondered about the reasons to recreate a castle in Atlanta in the early 20th century based on medieval

Germany. His research seeks to understand how a medieval castle evokes royalty, the nobility of kings, queens and their lifestyle. He is interested in understanding how “new Middle Ages” are created throughout history based on the creator’s own image and logic.

In Brazil, we can hardly find research done with this association between postcolonial studies and Medievalism. We can mention two manuscripts written by Altschul. First, *Gilberto Freyre e al-andalus*, which is a chapter of her book *Politics of Temporalization* (2020) dedicated to the studies of Freyre’s medievalism grounded on a miscegenated and culturally hybrid past he identifies in medieval Portugal. Second is *Medievalism and the Contemporaneity of the Medieval in Postcolonial Brazil* (2015), in which she problematizes the endurance of the Medieval in Brazil after its independence. To this end, she used the theory of Medievalism and literary criticism to analyze *Os sertões (Rebellion in the Badlands)*, a work by Euclides da Cunha about the foundation of the Brazilian nation as well as the European nations.

5 First published in 1845.

Regarding the Spanish America, Altschul, in a class at the University of Glasgow (2019), when analyzing the book *Facundo or, civilization and barbarism* (2002)<sup>5</sup> maintained that Domingo Faustino Sarmiento constructed a medieval temporality in 19th-century Argentina. She defends that in *Facundo*, Sarmiento divided Argentina into two temporalities: the 19th-century, contemporary with the author; and the 12th-century represented by the countryside. The time division in *Facundo* is also symbolically represented by two cities; the contemporary is represented by Buenos Aires and the medieval by the city of Córdoba. In general, Altschul argues that, for Sarmiento, the countryside, which was occupied by Amerindians or by the medievalized rural forces, represents a primitive land that according to Sarmineto should be conquered and whose culture should be eradicated. The Middle Ages is presented in this work through the author’s appropriation of the medieval, inspired by his contemporary political references.

In short, by decolonizing the Middle Ages, we wish to decolonize the research carried out in this area. We want to explore reinterpretations and re-appropriations of the Middle Ages in the tropics, although we do not deny that the knowledge-power relationship is intrinsic to “scientific” work. Despite studying the Middle Ages of the present, the core of Medievalism is to approach a period that ended and from that it can be evoked or recreated based on contemporary interests of the context in question, *i.e.*, in the light of our “Brazilianness”. To do so, we must question some postulates of contemporary historiography that are still linked to scientism and its 20th-century constructs, the *Annales* school, the new history (*Nouvelle histoire*) among others.

Throughout this paper, we sought to expose the French theory of the long Middle Ages, its repercussions and effects on the study of the colonial period in the Americas. We observed how a Eurocentric historiography aimed not only at understanding the Middle Ages within western Europe, but also at expanding it beyond Europe, in the American continent.

The Middle Ages that goes beyond its chronological and geographical limits has influenced and, many times, even justified medieval studies in Brazil and all over America. From this perspective, it is noticeable that American societies inevitably figure as heirs to the European continent. The medieval society is taken as the model that was transplanted to the colony – this is a colonized and Eurocentric perception of history, since the reference point to comprehend the history of the New World was the feudal institutions and models.

In the first part of this study, we tried to show how this perception of the conquest in America ended up disregarding the historical rupture caused by the conquest itself, especially if we take into account the perspective of the peoples present in the American continent before the arrival of European colonizers.

In order to present the historiography devoted to “decolonizing” the history of the New World, we also presented the theory of Medievalism as an alternative to approach the Middle Ages in the Americas.

## Don't Be Snobs, Medievalists<sup>6</sup>

According to Richard Utz (2015), medievalists experienced an academic growth between the 19th and the 20th centuries. We agree with him from a statistical and symbolic perspective – in terms of prestige – as the medieval historiography was able to demonstrate that its object and practices were “scientific”. But where do we stand today, almost at the end of the second decade of the 21st century?

On one hand, many medievalists are not engaged in any contemporary debates and still support the idea of a scientific or anthropological stem, whatever gives it the scientific aspect; this is done as a way of trying to maintain or regain the prestige it used to have. On the other hand, as professors, we have observed in our practice that our students' interests lie, for the most part, on the enchanted version the Middle Ages found in *Game Of Thrones*, *Harry Potter*, videogames linked to medieval themes. What we see is a huge gap between the Brazilian academia and our students' reality, especially the ones in their first years of undergraduate course. It has been very hard to sustain our legitimacy, as a field of knowledge, based on our conception of medieval heritage or the long Middle Ages, as pointed out by Utz. “We are no longer protected by our involvement in preserving European heritages, an involvement often joined up with primordialist, jingoist, and colonialist mentalities discredited in the Western world by the 1970s” (UTZ 2015).

Any type of academic narrative that is based on the notion of medieval heritage, ends up revealing a rather obscure side of the Brazilian medieval historiography, which is the condition

*6 This topic is an allusion to Richard Utz's text – Don't Be Snobs, Medievalists! (UTZ 2015). We should explain that, initially, Utz's text concerns the reality of the United States. Nonetheless, we believe that it greatly applies to the Brazilian context. Our criticism about the medieval Brazilian historiography – which even applies to the works of the aforementioned authors – is that it still remains attached to a French tradition grounded on scientific criteria, that we believe to be artificial, as all these criteria implicitly consider a possibility to write the “true history of the Middle Ages”. A recently published book, *A historiografia medieval no Brasil*, showed that a significant number of our national production at graduate level still reproduces the theoretical foundations proposed by the medieval French historiography of the 20th century and thus reproduces the idea that it is possible to reach the “true” Middle Ages as long as the right methods are applied (AMARAL, RANGEL 2019). (CONT.)*

of its colonized roots and its involvement with the reproduction of discredited speeches in Europe and in the USA due to its nationalist character.

As Utz warned us when referring to the North American and the European contexts, it is important to realize that we are living in equal or greater isolation from society. After all, paradoxically, it is undeniable that we were able to create a national historiographic field and produce a lot about the Middle Ages at the end of the 20th century and during the 21st century (AMARAL, RANGEL 2019). Nevertheless, we believe it did not solve or improve the isolation condition between the academic production and society, regarding the Middle Age. Paraphrasing Utz (2015), if this had happened, the new Brazilian right wing would not have appropriated the Middle Ages through the idea of *Deus Vult*, according to which a historical continuum between Europe and Brazil is established (PACHÁ 2019).

Underlying the interest the new right wing has shown in the Middle Ages, Brazil has followed a global trend to attract followers to the enchanted Middle Ages. These followers are non-scholar enthusiasts, who do not necessarily have any political position, as in the case of the new right. They are only enthusiasts because, as hard as it is to admit, we cannot deny that:

Instead of disdaining the broad public interest in medieval culture, we should acknowledge and respect that many whom we brand as “amateurs” or “dilettantes” (terms etymologically indicating “love” and “delight”) invest as much or more time, energy, and money in engaging with the Middle Ages than some of us professors do. Collaborating with these natural allies will strengthen, not endanger, the discipline (UTZ 2015).

The stand of our Brazilian medievalists is not different from our American or European colleagues’; we are usually resistant to non-academic spaces, although our students consume the enchanted Middle Ages in movies, TV series, games etc. The

(CONT.)

*There is little work on the reinterpretations and re-appropriations of the medieval, and the few available reveal medieval reminiscences, in alignment with the notion of a long Middle Age, tending to highlight how these appropriations are far from the “true” Middle Ages.*

academic posture has been the same: these scholars quote the mantra of anachronism as if there were any historians on this planet who did not do it daily, in fact, what is the problem with anachronism? Now, is history a science?! Once again, we embrace paradigms of the 19th and 20th centuries. However, we use the work of the Society for Creative Anachronism to illustrate our lessons, because:

The Society for Creative Anachronism has added more to our knowledge of medieval culture by practicing blacksmithing, re-enacting the *Battle of Hastings*, and performing historical dance than D.W. Robertson's decision, albeit substantiated by learned footnotes, that all medieval art was created and needs to be read according to the principles of patristic exegesis. Similarly, Michel Guyot's megaproject of rebuilding a medieval castle, Guédelon, from scratch over a 30-year period, based on 13th-century building plans and without modern technology, yields infinitely more information than another 50 essays obsessing about the authorship of the anonymous *Nibelungenlied* or *Cantar de Mio Cid*. Moreover, sites like *medievalists.net* and *publicmedievalist.com* communicate valuable information more effectively to academic and non-academic audiences than dozens of academic journals accessible at subscribers-only sources like *JSTOR* or *Project Muse* (UTZ 2015).

We conclude by stating that it would be important to reinforce some possibilities that the theory of medievalism has brought us, as well as point out our contradictions as medievalists. As Utz states, we should stop thinking about the medieval theme through a notion of "otherness" – the Middle Ages as the "other" – that supports the idea that our legitimacy would be based on creating forms, methods and techniques, in order to reach this "other", and at the same time take a neutral and distant stance. Would it not be more interesting to consider all current conceptions about the Middle Ages as nothing more than discursive constructions and former conceptions originated in the Renaissance, and that they are in constant and uninterrupted process of re-elaboration?

Moreover, it would be interesting to accept the conception, already presented in the book *How Soon is Now?* by Carolyn Dinshaw (2012), according to whom we are not observers or “omniscient intruders”, but active collaborators in a continuous process of creation of the Middle Ages, that is, we should reflect on the role of the medievalist in this construct called Middle Ages. And since it is a social elaboration, carried out in every period of history, we cannot see ourselves as the owners of history, with the right of censor/inquisitor, who utilizes some scientism, developed over the 19th and 20th centuries, to say what the Middle Ages is or is not. We are left with Utz’ suggestion: we should stop being snobbish. We should be more like lay enthusiasts and manage to establish an ethical relationship, guided by critical thinking. That way, we might be able to decolonize ourselves and contribute to the great area of humanities.

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