

PREMIS

15-17, Thursday 13 of December in Helikon (A202), Arken

Commune of Saints: The Remains of Socialist Medievalism

Following the violent far-right demonstration in Charlottesville, Virginia in August 2017, seventeen Medieval Studies associations co-signed a letter condemning the appropriation of medieval European iconography, history and culture by white supremacist, nativist and neo-Nazi groups. Such reactionary and ultra-conservative movements have long indulged in the veneration of the premodern – yet there has also been, conversely, an under-acknowledged tradition of what might be called “left medievalism.” This paper aims to excavate the ruins and sepulchres on which such a political and aesthetic discourse has been founded, tracing a conceptual history of “pastness” that remains at work in such later interventions as Jacques Derrida’s *Specters of Marx*. Moreover, and in light of the re-energised discussions of Catholic distributism which have attended the papacy of Pope Francis in the twenty-first century, the paper seeks to revisit questions of political theology and dissent in connection with the radical and utopian medievalist traditions of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, taking in key Anglophone figures such as John Ruskin, William Morris and Arthur Penty.

The PREMIS autumn series will be closed by Stuart McWilliams, who is Senior Lecturer in English Literature, American and British Studies at the University of Oslo, having previously taught and conducted research at Åbo Akademi University and the University of Edinburgh. His publications include the monograph *Magical Thinking: History, Possibility, and the Idea of the Occult* (Bloomsbury 2013) and articles in journals such as *Rethinking History*. His research has focused on the literary and intellectual histories of enchantment, medievalism and periodisation.