

FROM WIDUKIND TO WILDERS

CULTURAL MEMORY AND THE RESOURCES OF THE PAST

In this joint presentation, the members of the HERA-project 'Cultural Memory and the Resources of the Past in the Early Middle Ages' (<http://cmrp.oeaw.ac.at/>) will offer four brief contributions, comparing the uses of the past in early medieval texts with those of contemporary conservative populists. Of course the context, the media and the audience are all different, yet there are surprising similarities in the way in which a newly constructed past offered stability and solid authority in a rapidly changing world. Our four short talks will take 60 minutes; after a break, we hope for a lively discussion.

*Drift 21, room 1.09
26 januari 2012, 14:30-16:30*

*To give us an idea of the number of people attending,
it would be appreciated if you could register @ gw_cultures@uu.nl*

Historians and the uses of the past

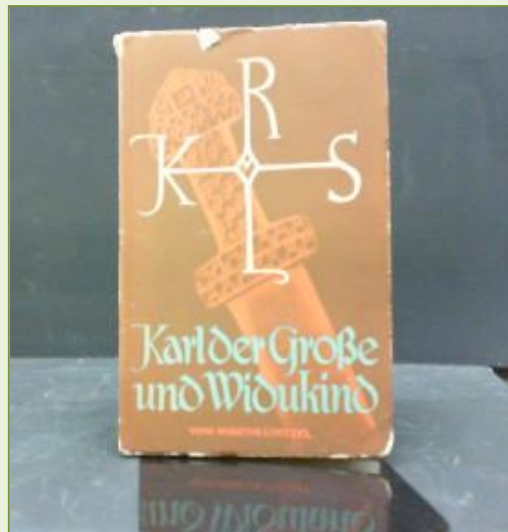
Mayke de Jong (10 min.)

This will briefly introduce CMRP, and a question we would like to debate with you. In our project we investigate Carolingian re-use of the biblical and late antique/Christian past. There is nothing particularly early medieval about the eclectic uses of the past in order to frame present-day experience, or to construct social or political identities; this is an integral part of Western history, be it ancient, medieval or modern. Historians themselves fully engage in this, for they are part of their own cultures. But do historians also have the duty to correct and even publicly denounce misleading or false constructions of the past, and isn't this, to a large extent, their 'societal relevance', as N.W.O. grant forms express it? We tend to answer this question in the affirmative, and think that criticizing modern uses of early medieval history, scholarly and popular, is a central aspect of our research. In other words, an (early) medievalist is by definition also a modernist and a contemporary historian.

“Karl oder Widukind?” Disputing the early medieval past in Nazi Germany

Robert Flierman (15 min.)

Charlemagne's (d. 814) three-decade-long war of conquest and conversion against the pagan Saxons has always exerted a powerful pull on the imagination. Waged with perseverance by both sides, and as potent a witness to war's horrors as to its potential heroism, the Saxon Wars have been remembered in widely diverging ways, for equally diverging causes.



A particularly gratifying object of remembrance has been the Saxon leader Widukind. Little can be said about Widukind's life or his exact standing among the politically fragmented Saxons. But his credentials as the only Saxon leader to figure to any extent in contemporary written sources, have ensured him a lasting, though highly ambivalent reputation.

My talk is about some of the different ways Widukind has been remembered throughout the ages. Its particular focus is on Nazi Germany in the years directly after 1933, when Widukind, together with his renowned opponent Charlemagne, became the object of a heated dispute on what kind of past was required by the new National Socialist order.

The militant Middle Ages From history to political folklore in contemporary Italy

Giorgia Vocino (15 min.)

The past is certainly a bottomless Pandora's box from which images and symbols can be drawn and (re)used for new discourses. This was the case in the Middle Ages when new legends took shape, based on supposedly early Christian history or classical material. Then, as time passed by, the entire Middle Ages themselves were sucked into that bottomless Pandora's box and became fertile ground for plundering symbols and images. This was especially the case from the nineteenth century onwards, and it still goes on. If we agree that evoking the past, and using it, is a perpetual feature of human history, is there any difference between medieval uses of the past and (post)-modern ones? In this talk I will address this question with regard to some medieval symbols adopted by the right-wing Italian political party, the *Lega Nord*, and I will compare this with the medieval use of symbolic images and objects. How is meaning attached to such symbols, and how do they become bearers of a shared identity? Have strategies of (re-)using the past changed over time? If yes, how? And if modern people are "dwarfs on the shoulders of giants", are we any better for this?



Wilders and the Barbarians

Sven Meeder (15 min.)

The past can be a powerful tool when promoting an ideological or political narrative for the present. The application of this tool ranges from the most refined tweaking to the most blatant and outrageous attempts to 'rewrite' history. The latter may yield the biggest rewards, but they also run the real risk of coming into conflict not just with established academia, but also with other people's appropriations of the past, or with the logical consequences of the very same strategy one has adopted oneself. I will explore some of the problems that occur when present-day populist politicians enter into the business of re-using the past. What must an ideologue do when he wants his historical characters to play the roles of

both villains and heroes in his desired narrative, and when the perfidious barbarians in his story are also the main players in the advancement of a venerated Judeo-Christian heritage? And who do we expect to point out such inconsistencies, and how and why?

FOKKE & SUKKE

BIDDEN WODAN OM HULP

