



Italian Medieval Studies Between Tradition and Innovation

Programme Event

International Committee of Historical Sciences | 26–30 August 2026 | Leipzig, Germany

DATE 28 Aug 2026, 11:00 - 13:30	LOCATION House 3 - SR 224
THEME C - National and Regional Schools of Historiography	CONFERENCE International Committee of Historical Sciences

Overview

In the hundred years since the foundation of the CISH, Italian medievalism has experienced a progressive internationalisation. While during Fascism a 'nationalist' view of the Middle Ages, understood according to Gioacchino Volpe as a trait d'union between ancient Rome and the Renaissance, had asserted itself, in the post-World War II period Raffaello Morghen's 'Christian Middle Ages' provided a new generation of Italian historians with the possibility of rereading the history of the medieval Church beyond any apologetic intentions and projecting it into the broader field of political, socio-economic and social history and mentalities, in constant dialogue with German and French historiography. This process of internationalisation also involved the history of the forms of power of the so-called feudal age and the communal phase, which was renewed in the light of social and economic perspectives, thanks to which the categories of interpretation were considerably refined, overcoming the Risorgimento conception of the Commune as the 'seedbed of the Italian nation' and as a democratic experience opposed to the seigniories and principalities of the late Middle Ages, to the benefit of an interpretation of these forms of power in the broader framework of similar institutional experiences that flourished in the medieval West. At the same time, a debate developed on the alleged exceptionality of the Italian case with regard to both the communes and the dawn of capitalism.

These processes of 'denationalisation' of mediaeval historiography were accompanied by a remarkable flourishing of local history studies, based on precise investigations carried out on often unpublished archive sources, which greatly enriched the available data base, but at the same time provoked a sometimes excessive fragmentation of historiographic objects and a tendency towards atheoreticity, denounced by Ovidio Capitani in the 1970s. In this millennium, the redefinition of the relations between history and social sciences by French historiography, followed by German and Anglo-Saxon historiography, and the consequent preponderant weight assigned to the historiographical problematic with respect to precise ascertainment and a purely philological approach have led to a certain marginalisation of large sectors of Italian medievalism, accused of settling on late-positivist positions.

The panel starts from the awareness that only the rigour of the historical-critical method can consider the intrinsic complexities and multi-perspectivity of historical developments and offer common and shared ground for discussion between historiographies, removing them from an excessively evaluative dimension that increases the risk of a political use of history.

Participants

Convenor

- Umberto Longo (Sapienza-Università di Roma, Istituto storico italiano per il medioevo)

Panelists

- Umberto Longo (Sapienza-Università di Roma, Istituto storico italiano per il medioevo)
- Nicolangelo D'Acunto (Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore Milano, Istituto storico italiano per il medioevo)
- Franco Franceschi (Università di Siena)
- Daniela Rando (Università di Pavia, Istituto storico italiano per il medioevo)
- Andrea Zorzi

Papers

Italian research institutions on the Middle Ages in the last hundred years

Umberto Longo (Sapienza-Università di Roma, Istituto storico italiano per il medioevo)

From the “Medioevo Cristiano” to the plurality of Christianities

Nicolangelo D'Acunto (Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore Milano, Istituto storico italiano per il medioevo)

The Debate on the Exceptionalism of Medieval Italian Capitalism

Franco Franceschi (Università di Siena)

Italian and European medievalism between nationalistic closures and global history

Daniela Rando (Università di Pavia, Istituto storico italiano per il medioevo)

The Study of Medieval Forms of Power between Nationalisation and Internationalisation

Andrea Zorzi

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