CENTENNIAL CONFERENCE OF THE COMITE INTERNATIONAL DES SCIENCES HISTORIQUES

Norse, Nordic and National Matters. The Quest for a Usable Past 1830?1930

Programme Event

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

DATE	LOCATION
28 Aug 2026, 08:30 - 10:30	House 3 SR225
THEME	CONFERENCE
C - National and Regional Schools of Historiography	International Committee of Historical Sciences

Overview

History and cultural memory are ideological battlefields, as we are recurrently reminded of. National narratives, material monuments and celebratory jubilees can serve as tools of cultural and societal resilience and reconciliation in times of uncertainty and change, but it can also favour certain patriotic and nationalistic conceptions while silencing others. The use – and misuse – of history for national purposes is nothing new, it is closely related to the development of history as a scholarly field in the age of nation building and nationalism and is continuously calling for critical reflections.

This panel addresses the topic of national memories and usable pasts from a Norwegian and Nordic – and Norse – perspective, through focusing on the Norse revival and imaginaries of the North in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The rediscovering and recreation of the ancient Norse heritage, inspiring historical research, art and culture alike, constituted a useful and usable past for different groups and purposes and contributed to negotiating present challenges.

The Nordic quest for a usable past took on different forms, simultaneously on a national and regional/pan-national level, leading to both uniting and rivalling historical interpretations of the common Old-Nordic heritage. The remediating, reception and recreation of the ancient history of the region, recently termed boreal medievalism (Stahl 2023) – reflecting a broader scholarly interest in medievalism ? is a trans- and cross-cultural and transnational endavour. The panel will discuss tensions between national and transnational interpretations and challenges of methodological nationalism in the study, commemoration and institutionalization of national history. The papers are informed by several recent ‘turns’ within historiography, as the transnational, the material and the emotional turns. Main topics to be analysed are the question of national and Nordic ownership to the medieval Norse legacy, ideological interpretations of religious transitions, the branding of Norse heritage in tourism and national commemoration in transnational perspective in the interwar period.

Participants

Convenor

- Ruth Hemstad (National Library of Norway/IAKH, University of Oslo)

Panelists

- Tim van Gerven (UiT The Arctic University of Norway)
- Svein Ivar Angell (University of Bergen)
- Ulrike Spring (Department of Archaeology, Conservation and History, University of Oslo)
- Ruth Hemstad (National Library of Norway/IAKH, University of Oslo)

Papers

Norse Mythology between Scandinavia and the Nation: A Longue Durée Perspective

Tim van Gerven (UiT The Arctic University of Norway)

Commemorating the ‘Birth’ of the Norwegian State and Church Communities in 1030: Interpreting the Idea of the Nation

Svein Ivar Angell (University of Bergen)

From Saga to Souvenir: Tourism and Norse Heritage in the 19th Century

Ulrike Spring (Department of Archaeology, Conservation and History, University of Oslo)

Usable Pasts, Uncertain Futures: Old-Norse History, Nordic Rivalry and Historical Anniversaries in the Interwar Period

Ruth Hemstad (National Library of Norway/IAKH, University of Oslo)

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