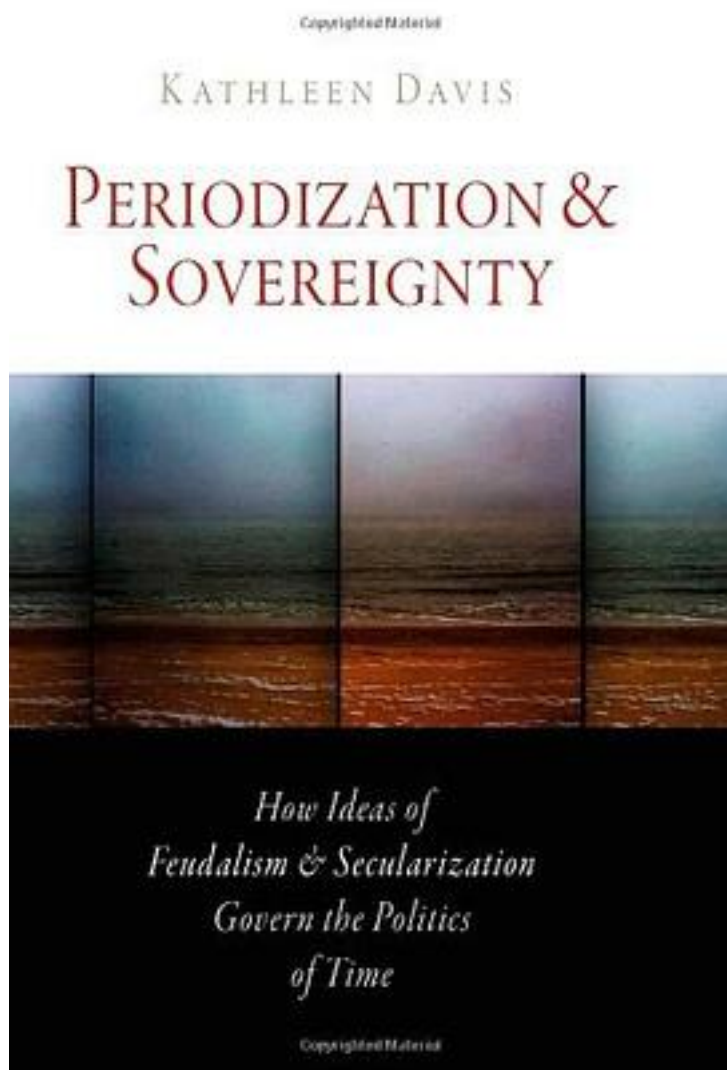


Periodization and Sovereignty



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Periodization and Sovereignty How Ideas of Feudalism and Secularization Govern the Politics of Time Kathleen Davis "Everyone should read this book. There are at least two reasons I think so. The first is the sheer intellectual pleasure of being had in grappling with its challenging and complex argument. The second is the exciting way the book models the kind of comparative, cross-field, interdisciplinary projects that everyone values but that few of us are trained to do." --Criticism "Kathleen Davis, a skilled scholar of Anglo-Saxon and medieval English literature, and a courageously committed dialogist of medieval and postcolonial studies, has crafted a critical analysis of the political-theology of periodization. Her study is as dynamically precise as the structure of a protein. Composed in two parts, it intentionally folds in on itself in order to mark performatively the double bind of periodization--a mimesis of temporality and a Western juridical concept of sovereignty. Her aim is to explicate how the time of periodization is the time of sovereignty, or, put another way, sovereignty is a mode of temporality." --TMR Despite all recent challenges to stage-oriented histories, the idea of a division between a "medieval" and a "modern" period has survived, even flourished, in academia. Periodization and Sovereignty demonstrates that this survival is no innocent affair. By examining periodization together with the two controversial categories of feudalism and secularization, Kathleen Davis exposes the relationship between the constitution of "the Middle Ages" and the history of sovereignty, slavery, and colonialism. This book's groundbreaking investigation of feudal historiography finds that the historical formation of "feudalism" mediated the theorization of sovereignty and a social contract, even as it provided a rationale for colonialism and facilitated the disavowal of slavery. Sovereignty is also at the heart of today's often violent struggles over secular and religious politics, and Davis traces the relationship between these struggles and the narrative of "secularization," which grounds itself in a period divide between a "modern" historical consciousness and a theologically entrapped "Middle Ages" incapable of history. This alignment of sovereignty, the secular, and the conceptualization of historical time, which relies essentially upon a medieval/modern divide, both underlies and regulates today's volatile debates over world politics. The problem of defining the limits of our most fundamental political concepts cannot be extricated, Davis argues, from the periodizing operations that constituted them, and that continue today to obscure the process by which "feudalism" and "secularization" govern the politics of time. Kathleen Davis is the author of *Deconstruction and Translation*. She has taught in the Department of English at Princeton University and is currently on the faculty of the University of Rhode Island.

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