Lecture by Prof. Andreas Malm (Lund University): *"The Political Ecology of Charlemagne – Or, What, if Anything, is Special about Capitalism?"*

To celebrate its two years of existence, SHOC has the pleasure to welcome Prof. Andreas Malm for an exceptional lecture on the *longue durée* history of capitalism and its environmental underpinnings.

Practical information
19 May 2026, 6 to 8 PM
Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Pleinlaan 2, 1050 Elsene, Building I, Room I.0.01. Click here for the campus map
Free attendance, mandatory registration via this form.

Abstract

Ecological Marxists have long contended that capitalism is unique for its internal compulsion to degrade the environment, indeed that it is the only mode of production with such a drive. But is that true? Capitalism cannot be understood without contrast cases and comparison with pre-capitalist modes. In this lecture, the focus will be on one turning-point in the environmental history of Europe: the rise of the Carolingian empire in the eighth century. Reversing four centuries of a high degree of wildness in the landscapes of the continent and autonomy for its communities, the empire set off a first pulse of deforestation. Only by clearing land from woods and marshes could it be used to produce surplus for the lords. Mass violence was required for this spurt in environmental degradation – indeed, genocide was a constitutive part of it. Studying the political ecology of the Carolingian empire might give a deeper understanding of the drivers of ecological destruction, the role of Europe in world history and the specificities of the capitalist mode of production.

About the speaker

Andreas Malm (b. 1977) is Associate Professor of Human Ecology at Lund University, Sweden. His writings have reached reach far beyond the confines of academia, turning him into a prominent voice in ecomarxism, environmental activism and anti-fascism. A prolific author, Malm has published nine books with Verso, ranging from handbooks (*Fighting in a World on Fire: The Next Generation's Guide to Protecting the Climate and Saving Our Future*, 2023) to thoroughly researched historical enquiries (*Fossil Capital: The Rise of Steam Power and the Roots of Global Warming*, 2016). *How to Blow up a Pipeline: Learning to Fight in a World on Fire* (2021), which defended sabotage as a legitimate form of climate activism, found a wide audience and stirred multiple controversies. It was adapted into a feature film by Daniel Goldhaber