

What's in a Name?

(Ab)Use of *Anglo-Saxon* in English-speaking cultures and elsewhere

Padova 6-7 June 2022

Since the seventeenth century, the use of the term *Anglo-Saxon* has been characterised by a strong identity and ideological acceptance. The nationalistic sentiment grown after British imperialism obtained legitimation in the appropriation and re-modelling of Britain's own past, conferring on *Anglo-Saxon* meanings that were increasingly connected with national and racial identity (Horsman 1976, 1981; Greenberg 1982).

This fictitious idea of ancestry has exerted a special fascination on collective imagery also thanks to the cultural movement known as 'medievalism', a recurrent theme in British and American art which also characterises the contemporary political debate in those countries. In America, far-right (pseudo-)political groups make large use of medievalism, and, in particular, of their alleged 'Anglo-Saxon' origins in the attempt to back their xenophobic and racist claims, based on white supremacy.

A connection between *Anglo-Saxon* and *whiteness* has also emerged within Medieval Studies and this gave birth to firm and, sometimes, drastic reactions. In recent years, a movement formed of women researchers of non-Western origins voiced vibrant protests against the treatment they have been suffering in this academic field, which they consider racist, sexist and xenophobic. In this regard, they have identified the terms *Anglo-Saxon* and *Anglo-Saxonist* as the most obvious expressions of this attitude.

This debate concerns the specifically ideological and extremist uses of *Anglo-Saxon*, but little attention has been devoted to the use of this term in all forms of communication and the semantic values it has received in history, not only in English, but also in other languages and cultures. Beyond the ideological dimension that seems to prevail in some contexts, how and to what purposes has *Anglo-Saxon* been employed? And to what extent does this term eventually designate an exclusive and superior racial or cultural origin?

The purpose of this conference is to investigate this phenomenon across time, languages, and media. The topics include (but are not limited to) the use of *Anglo-Saxon* (and its corresponding forms in other languages) in:

- Literature
- Journalism
- Political discourse
- Performative arts (theatre, cinema, TV and web series, etc.)
- Gaming

Please send an abstract (roughly 500 words) and a short curriculum by 20 December to **Omar Khalaf** omar.khalaf@unipd.it