

# White Nationalism, Misogyny, and Modern Receptions of the Early Medieval North Atlantic

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In 1998 Abby Ferber called on researchers to “explore the social construction of race, and the centrality of racism and misogyny to this construction,” because when we do not, we “contribute to the reproduction of race as a naturally existing category.” Twenty years on, medievalists have begun to pay serious attention to the popular view of the European Middle Ages as the historical and cultural origin of the constructed racial category of whiteness. This is in no small part due to the visible use of runes and other medievalisms on display with violent anti-semitism in Charlottesville, VA in August of 2017. White supremacists are particularly attracted to early northern European cultures, making this misappropriation of the Middle Ages an immediate responsibility of scholars of these cultures. Furthermore, white supremacy is inextricable from a hierarchical view of gender, as its goal is, in Ferber’s words, “re-articulating white, male identity and privilege.” For example, both Danish and English nationalisms drove an early interest in *Beowulf*, and the study of Old English is partially built on the largely unrecognized work of Elise C. Otte, who fled to North America from England to free herself from the translation labor imposed on her by her step-father. Elise’s step-father was esteemed translator Benjamin Thorpe (Porck 4/8/2016). This panel acknowledges the profound connection between racism and sexism and seeks papers that engage with this intersection and investigate the effects that these under-examined social issues have had on scholarship, the composition of scholarly communities, or pedagogy. This panel further invites contributors to propose or introduce their scholarly and/or pedagogical projects that might improve the inclusivity and nuance of the study of the early medieval North Atlantic.

We welcome papers that use methodologies from literature, history, religion, philosophy, art history, linguistics, archaeology, and the sciences. We are primarily looking for papers that engage with racialized and gendered receptions (in any later time period) of any culture or intersection of cultures from the early medieval North Atlantic. We seek 15-20 minutes presentations that will, in addition to identifying problematic receptions, propose projects and pedagogies that will contribute to more nuanced and inclusive receptions and communities. Topics could include but are not limited to:

- Development of modern academic fields (such as Anglo-Saxon Studies) and the influences of nationalist agendas and gendered hierarchies that shaped these fields.
- Appropriation of symbols, figures, and texts from early medieval English, Celtic, and Scandinavian cultures in ways that further gender and race hierarchies.
- Limitations on the field resulting from unchallenged racist and sexist methodologies.
- Pedagogical techniques that provide nuance to the narratives of early medieval North Atlantic history, culture, and art.
- Popular representations of the early medieval North Atlantic and the effects these representations have had on both popular and scholarly receptions.
- Overlooked/occluded individuals/research.

#### Works Cited:

Ferber, Abby. “Constructing whiteness: the intersections of race and gender in US white supremacist discourse.” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 21:1 (1998): 48-63.

Porck, Thijs. “Benjamin Thorpe: The Man Who Translated Almost All Old English Texts.” *Dutch Anglo-Saxonist*. Blog. 4/8/2016. <https://dutchanglosaxonist.com/2016/04/08/benjamin-thorpe-the-man-who-translated-almost-all-old-english-texts/>