CONTEXTUALIZING THE MUSLIM OTHER IN MEDIEVAL CHRISTIAN DISCOURSE

Edited by Jerold C. Frakes
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When we think of the academic study of the Muslim Other, we tend to think of a field of study more or less invented by Edward Said with his landmark book *Orientalism*, published in 1978. But there had of course been attention to the subject before Said, even in medieval studies—albeit generally with a narrower scope of interest, with far less theoretical sophistication, and certainly with far less academy-wide impact. Nonetheless, one might here point to the pioneering studies by William Wistar Comfort of Muslims in Old French *chanson de geste*, more than a quarter century before Said, Jürgen Brummack of the representation of the Orient in medieval German versions of that most orientalizing of medieval genres, the tales of Alexander the Great in the East, Helmut Loiskandl of the dynamics of representation of the foreign in medieval German literature a dozen years before Said’s book, and Dorothee Metlitzky’s study of the larger issue of the representation of the Islamic Orient in medieval English literature, the year before Said’s *Orientalism* appeared. But more broadly known and in general more significant for the field of medieval studies as a whole were the pioneering publications of Norman Daniel and R. W. Southern, which, albeit again without Said’s theoretical aplomb, in some ways made as strong a polemical case against Western racism as did Said more than a decade and a half later. Likewise, in the field of art history, contemporary with Said’s publication was Ladislas Bugner’s monumental *The Image of the Black in Western Art*.

After the initial identification of the issue of the medieval representation of Muslims by non-Muslims (Europeans, Christians) as one worthy of study, there is, not surprisingly, a certain trajectory of analytical modes that can be traced over the course of the ensuing decades up to the present. Many of the early treatments of the issue belong to what one might designate a descriptive phase illustrated by selected examples, followed by a second phase in which the description itself is all but submerged by a flood of examples cited from medieval texts with more or less interspersed commentary, comprising in some sense almost a categorized
catalog of examples. While such studies now often seem somewhat flat in what appears to our sensibilities almost a refusal to make a political commitment—since their motivation was a quasi-empirical descriptive “objectivity” rather than overt political polemic—studies such as Daniel’s and Southern’s and the exhaustive range of Paul Bancourt’s study of the *chanson de geste* even today make powerful political arguments, if nothing else than with their relentless accumulation of evidence.

Such studies obviously already tend toward classification and analysis of the “image” of Muslims, but in the next phase, attention to the political ramifications of the construction of such images becomes paramount. This shift is earlier to be discerned beyond the bounds of Anglophone scholarship and is already present in the work of Bancourt and Philippe Sénac, for instance. In art history, John Block Friedman’s early *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought* constituted a mini paradigm shift and, like Daniel and Southern, is still very useful today. Likewise, the painstakingly meticulous work of Benjamin Z. Kedar, still not fully appreciated in medievalists’ studies of the discourse of the Muslim Other, was pioneering.

Thereafter, and quite clearly as a result of the development of postcolonial studies that itself grew out of Said’s work and the academy’s response to Said’s theses over the course of two decades, medieval studies began to grapple with the issue of the relevance of postcolonial studies for similar constellations of issues in the Middle Ages. It took quite a number of years before medievalists were able to overcome the academy’s resistance to an engagement with medieval material by means of twentieth-century cultural theory, however, whether in Marxian theory, feminism, queer theory, or postcolonialism. It was not, one might say, until a generation of medievalists had made its way through graduate coursework and reading lists that made them as conversant with the work of Said, Foucault, and Homi Bhabha (but also scholars such as Benedict Anderson, Samir Amin, and Rana Kabbani, for instance) as an earlier generation interested in such topics had been with Norman, Daniel, and Bugner that the study of the “image” of Muslims in medieval Europe could be reconceived as an issue of overtly political discourse.

This field is now so well sown that any attempt even to cite the most significant studies threatens to become nothing more than a bibliographical list. Essay anthologies such as those by David Blanks and Michael Frassetto; Jeffrey Jerome Cohen; Ananya Jahanara Kabir and Deanne Williams; and Miriam Eliav-Feldon, Benjamin Isaac, and Joseph Ziegler have brought this field of study into the mainstream, and recent studies such as Suzanne Conklin Akbari’s *Idols in the East* have established this
subfield as one in which large-scale research projects no longer need be defensive or apologetic in their use of “pre-postcolonial theory.”  

Finally, one might note a developing trend in contemporary engagements with issues of the Muslim Other in medieval literature in the attempt to view such material from the perspective of Bhabha conception’s of cultural interstices and liminal zones, by means of which the Other is not merely viewed by scholars as the object of Euro-Christian representation but rather realized as a subject who has established a position for himself or herself to “write back” against the hegemonic “discourse of the Other” as constructed by those in positions of power. Gayatri Spivak’s “Can the Subaltern Speak” was a fundamental early exploration of this issue in contemporary cultural studies. In the field of medieval European studies, this mode of analysis is severely limited given the simple fact that the marginalized, interstitial space of, for instance, the postcolonial South Asian Muslim intellectual living in London or Paris or New York is a position or category that did not and could not exist in the thirteenth century. The facts on the ground are simply quite different. Important and far-reaching studies of this kind are nonetheless beginning to appear in medieval studies, adapted to the pertinent local conditions, for in fact the interstitial cultural space—even the Bhabha-esque sense of creative interstices—did indeed exist for Muslims in medieval Iberia and Sicily and for Jews especially in medieval Iberia, central Europe, and somewhat later in the Venetian republic. In a work of nonfiction, novelist Amin Maalouf forced a pioneering scholarly reconception of the Crusades themselves with his *Les Croisades vues par les Arabes*, whichanthologized a broad range of Arabic responses to medieval Christian invasions of Muslim territory. More broadly conceived was Janet L. Abu-Lughod’s insistent challenge to medievalists’ perspective on the territories and cultures of Europe, Asia, and Africa and their relative importance in the medieval world economic and cultural system in her groundbreaking study *Before European Hegemony*. Maria Rosa Menocal has more recently addressed the specifically European locus of Arabic cultural agency for both a scholarly and more popular reading audience. With respect to the cultural interstices of medieval Jewish life in Europe, Elisheva’ Baumgarten focuses squarely on the Jewish seizure of cultural agency and the rejection of Christian objectification in her study of medieval Jewish family life in majority Christian Europe, as expressed in Hebrew texts of the period, while in an early example of Yiddish life-writing, the late seventeenth-century Jewish businesswoman Glikl Haml creates a vibrant literary portrait of Jewish professional and family life in, not of—and generally in a position of resistance to—a majority Christian culture.
The discerning reader of the previous pages will have noticed that—with the exception of the studies of the Other as subject—most (not all!) publications on the representation of, construction of, and discourse of the Muslim Other have focused on what, from the Anglo-American perspective, have historically been construed as the “core” fields of medieval studies, that is, texts and images from France and England in Old French, Middle English, and Latin, with only occasional attention to anything beyond those languages and cultures. Indeed, such studies have become so numerous that they have come to define the subfield. Concealed behind what seems a pan-European conception under titles including such phrases as “the medieval representation of Islam,” these analyses are often limited to a single genre or single author or single decade in a single national tradition in a single language, almost always in Middle English, though occasionally also in Old French or Latin. There are obvious historical and disciplinary reasons why such studies predominate in English-language scholarship, of course, but it is indeed time for our gaze to extend beyond these narrow boundaries. While there is no question of the medieval significance of French textual culture for most of Western Europe—with translations and adaptations of Old French chanson de geste scattered from Iceland to Muscovy, to note but a single genre—it is just as clear that, particularly for issues surrounding the discourse of the Muslim Other, there are other voices that have been dampened if not altogether ignored in this subfield that is becoming a part of the mainstream. Thus, just as newer studies of interstitial “writing from the margin,” noted earlier, have begun to change some aspects of this exclusive focus, it seems time to broaden the range of general medievalist conceptions of this cluster of issues. This volume gestures toward broadening the perspective and seeks to provide a stimulus toward the integration of scholarly work going on in other subfields and national traditions of medieval studies. Thus, I have attempted in this volume to provide a forum for studies that treat core subfields, such as medieval French, Latin, and English, but also German, Spanish, Welsh and Irish, Armenian, and Serbo-Croatian. There is obviously no pretense of providing comprehensive “coverage” of relevant national language traditions in “handbook” format but rather simply an attempt to indicate the range of neighboring fields of inquiry—neither all that distant nor without relevance for work in the conventionally core subfields of medieval studies—by means of a collection of chapters that investigate the discourse of the Muslim Other as it is locally defined and manifested in the texts currently at the center of the individual contributors’ research.

This contextualization of the “local” functions to tie the concerns of the volume’s chapters together and to link the work of scholars in a number
of disciplinary subfields, encouraging the forging of further links by forcing us all to take other subfields beyond our own into serious account in our own research. In addition to the volume’s broader-than-conventional scope of language traditions represented, I have also attempted to bring together a wide range of approaches that vary from traditional philological analysis to postcolonial and Lacanian theory, including such topics as the process of medieval textuality and post-medieval myth construction (Taylor, Zlatar, and Fra-Molinero), quasi- or protogenetics (Ramey), the ideologies of cartography (Tinsley), textual translation and versus ideology transfer (Boyd), and interstitial Christian creativity under Islamic hegemony (La Porta). While the primary focus remains explicitly on medieval materials, two chapters devote at least some attention to the issues of transition from the medieval to the early modern period and its evolving conception of the matters at issue. Since the strategies and discourses of the Muslim Other that developed and have been deployed in Europe for the last millennium were definitively established in the period of the Crusades, the focus on the medieval period is well placed, but at the same time, the gestures toward the reimagined use of that discourse in the post-medieval period (by Cervantes and the South Slavic epic, for instance) demonstrate the enduring significance of medieval conceptions.

It is thus not a backward-looking volume, merely summarizing a range of scholarly work done in the past, but rather forward-looking in that it presents the current research concerns of the contributors, whose own previous essay and book publications already constitute a bibliography of essential reading in the field. Lynn Ramey’s chapter treats the intellectual tradition that underlies an essential aspect of the representation of the “domesticated” (generally former) Muslim in medieval romance: medieval conceptions of the biology of human reproduction—that is, how and what characteristics can be inherited from the two parents. In this particular subset of parental identities, it is not merely sex (male and female) but also cultural identity (Christian and Muslim) that is at issue in the discussion of the miscegenation found in the Middle English King of Tars, the Old French Fille du comte de Pontieu, and the Middle High German Parzival. The Aristotelian “one-seed theory” (paternal dominance), the Galenic “two-seed theory” (equal parental input), and the Isidorean “psychomachian theory” (a battle for the soul of the infant takes place in the womb) are thus narratively enacted in the texts. While these three texts have long been key to analyses of issues surrounding the representation of Muslims in medieval Christian literature, Ramey adds another layer of complexity to this consideration of the texts by situating them in a larger and longer tradition of scientific conceptions of quasi-/protogenetics.
Matthieu Boyd’s chapter articulates the tangled complexities of traditions and influences that comprise the conceptions of Islam in the medieval Celtic cultures of Brittany, Wales, and Ireland, which include Latin biblical and patristic input, Old French romance, and Middle English historiography and adaptations of continental romance, as well as Old Norse terminological input both via Middle English and through direct contact with Norse settlement in Ireland. He situates this historically dynamic discourse in a striking frame by gesturing toward the modern postcolonialist politics of Celtic (especially Irish) marginalization and identification with the Palestinian political cause.

In Christopher Taylor’s chapter, one of the most important complexes of medieval European myth construction is examined: the Prester John legend. Taylor brings something new to the already long and broad discussion of this issue through his own conception of the function of the various relevant texts to reimage spatial relations and their ideological and geopolitical implications. Proceeding from an examination of the constructed purposes of such texts as Robert of Ketton’s *Lex Mahumet* and the “Letter of Prester John,” Taylor proposes a medieval Christian deferral of ideological confrontation with Islam, for which a strategy of “enclosure” was substituted. Just as Robert’s contentious refutational paraphrase of the Qur’an attempted to neutralize the core text of Islam by recasting it as encapsulated in a Christian context, so, too, did the Prester John legend enable a conception of the Islamic world as surrounded and enclosed by Christianity, such that “spatial boundaries are consonant with ideological systems under which they are produced.”

David Tinsley’s chapter takes the thirteenth-century Ebstorf map’s view of the world, derived essentially from the late-antique traditions of tales of Alexander the Great’s journeys in the Wondrous East—which thus effectively elides the very existence of Islam from the map—as evidence for a fundamental absence of anti-Muslim prejudice (at least) in medieval Germany, which then enables a construal of the representation of Muslims in Rudolf von Ems’s *Weltchronik*, Wolfram’s *Parzival*, and the Stricker’s “Die Königin von Mohrenland” as emblematic of “a world of uncertainty, ambiguity, and constant transition” (131). The chapter is in general a reformulation of the classic argument against a generalized anti-Islamic prejudice in medieval Europe and thus a chapter that in its conception and purpose forms a clear counterpoise to others in the volume.  

Sergio La Porta’s chapter, examining a key period in the development of Armenian discourses of the Muslim Other during the course of the eleventh through thirteenth centuries, while obviously still treating the Christian-Muslim engagement, extends the bounds of the present
volume toward the eastern extreme of medieval Christendom. The political situation parallels in some senses that found at the extreme southwestern end of Christendom centuries earlier, following the Muslim conquest of Iberia. Following close on the heels of the Byzantine annexation of Armenia, Seljuk Turks invaded and put an end to both the Byzantine political presence and the independent Armenian kingdoms themselves, bringing about the emigration and extinction of much of the Armenian aristocracy that had played a central political role in the society, leaving a void into which new Kurdish, Persian, and Seljuk powers moved. This new situation radically transformed the conception of Islam that had developed over the course of a lengthy earlier period of Armenian-Muslim engagement, which, not surprisingly, led to a newly developed discourse of the Muslim Other. Although dehumanization and an identification of Seljuk conquests as an eschatological sign of imminent apocalypse characterized the period immediately following the conquest, those modes receded by the thirteenth century as hope grew of aid from the West (the Crusades); and cultural assimilation and loss of cultural identity became primary themes, even as some texts (such as Yovhannēs Erznkac’i’s “Yovhannēs and Aša”) embodied a kind of Armenian-Turkic hybridity in both poetic form and cultural content.

As Baltasar Fra-Molinero points out in his chapter, unlike any other Western European state, Spain was consistently at war with Islam during the late Middle Ages and at the dawn of the modern period, which more than merely complicates the transformation of its medieval to modern conception of Muslims, as is clearly refracted in numerous ways in Miguel de Cervantes’s Don Quijote. It is this modern conflict mediated by medieval modes of representation—especially of the mythified Charlemagne—that appears in the puppet show (II, 26) and had been employed in Spain for centuries as the teleological mode of representing the Christian-Islamic conflict, ever since Charlemagne’s expedition in Spain (as narrated, for instance, in the Chanson de Roland) initiated, it was thought, the reconquista. It is this cluster of contradictions between the medieval and the early modern realities of Christian-Muslim relations that are problematized in the representations in Quijote, whose hero is incapable of comprehending that new reality (too), thus superimposing his own contorted conception of medieval relations onto the modern situations. The multiple layers of contradictions and complications ultimately make it difficult to determine for which side Quijote—that most Christian of knights—actually fights.

Zdenko Zlatar reviews the mythification of the Battle of Kosovo (1389) in two stages: first the impossible tangle of early accounts and then the classic codification of the myth in the epic Gorski Vijenac (The
Mountain Wreath) by Peter II Petrović Njegoš (1813–1851), prince-bishop (vladika) of Montenegro. This process of mythification is here a fascinating and well-told story and one that in its systematic construction of the interpretandum of the accounts themselves (the actual facts of the battle seem to have disappeared behind multiple mythifications within a few generations) interweaves philological, historical, and literary interpretations that constitute the invention of the “myth of Kosovo.” By means of this myth, the Montenegrins/Bosnians were scapegoated and ultimately demonized by Balkan Christians for the loss of the battle and subsequent subjugation to the Turks, especially because of their alleged voluntary conversion to Islam and “becoming like Turks” (poturice). The myth has had continuing repercussions even up to the present, particularly horrific during the Bosnian War (1992–1995). Zlatar’s chapter demonstrates just how effective—under certain circumstances—literary texts can be in constructing ethnic myth with its long-term political consequences.

One of the more significant shifts in recent studies in this subfield has been the recognition that the medieval Christian discourse of the Muslim Other was not a monolithic anti-Muslim diatribe, nor a single, unified discourse, but rather a multiplicity of such discourses, all sharing some aspects of the preceding historical tradition—as is ever the case with discursive traditions—each in fact proceeding from its own local circumstances, whether geopolitical, ideological, or otherwise. One of the more fascinating current modes of inquiry is thus to determine shared and distinct aspects of various discourses of the Muslim Other. In the present volume, too, one notes the shared interests and complementary methods of a broad range of contemporary scholars of issues surrounding the multiple discourses of the Muslim Other in the Middle Ages and early modern period. It is clear that there is still much work to be done to breach the barriers among subdisciplines and national traditions and thus modify the parochial Anglo-Franco-Latin mode of study. This volume is not the first to suggest the need to do just that, nor will it be the last. In its particular composition, however, let it function to encourage us to look beyond our own narrow fields of professional interest.

Notes


17. This is one of the more serious problems with Sharon Kinoshita’s ambitious and highly praised but troubled study, *Medieval Boundaries: Rethinking Difference in Old French Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006).


23. While I respectfully disagree with most aspects of Professor Tinsley’s interpretation, the editor’s foreword is not the proper place to attempt a refutation. I refer the interested reader instead to my *Vernacular and Latin Literary Discourses of the Muslim Other in Medieval Germany* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), where the salient issues are addressed from rather a different perspective.
CHAPTER 1

MEDIEVAL MISCEGENATION: HYBRIDITY AND THE ANXIETY OF INHERITANCE

*Lynn Ramey*

Writing about medieval notions of motherhood, Clarissa Atkinson asserts that “medieval Europeans inherited a complex and diverse set of ideas that included widely different interpretations of basic processes.”1 Because medical theorizing was limited in the Western medieval period, sources of medieval ideas on procreation often come from commentaries on selected philosophies from antiquity. Depictions of reproduction in literature show that medieval writers imagined the process in very different ways, at times following the basic tenets of recorded philosophy and in other instances using unique combinations and variations on known currents of thought. Although Greek and Roman philosophies teach much about ways that Western medieval people may have viewed parenthood and the biological construction of gender, the philosophical record is largely silent on the question of miscegenation or mixed-race offspring. Medical writings address miscegenation rarely or obliquely, but the literature of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries seems particularly preoccupied with intermarriage.

Following Atkinson’s thinking on motherhood, medieval views on miscegenation should be seen as many and varied, given the competing currents of thought concerning reproduction located in medical writings of the Middle Ages. One of the central questions for scientists and philosophers was whether reproduction involved one seed from one parent or two seeds, involving both parents. Both camps had adherents, and a third camp emerged that saw reproduction as a flexible process that could accommodate one or two seeds, depending on the “strength”
of the seeds. Medieval literature reflects the importance of this debate, leaving stories that point to inheritance coming largely from one or the other parent, or sometimes both. Children could inherit any number of attributes, from gender to nobility to skin color. After first looking at the importance and intricacies of medieval thought on inheritance, I extrapolate those thoughts to the notion of miscegenation by exploring attitudes toward reproduction as seen in three thirteenth-century texts from England, France, and Germany.

The one-seed theory is largely attributed to Aristotle, who saw the father as the sower of seed. For Aristotle, the mother supplied the body of the child, or the “material,” whereas the father’s contribution to his offspring is the soul. From this account, the role of the woman in the outcome of the child would be minimal. Women were viewed as defective men, humans who did not have the capacity to generate life but simply to provide the physical space and material from which the male seed actually formed the child. In On the Generation of Animals, Aristotle presents a body that some have termed a one-sex body. According to Aristotle, the male body is the ideal, perfectly formed expression of the human body. However, the bodily fluids are not always hot enough to produce a male, and when they are not, a female is generated. As Laqueur elucidates, while Aristotle does not mention women changing into men when they are sufficiently heated, his argument allows for just that claim to be made by others.

Although the Generation of Animals is rife with the clearly stated notion that women are inferior variations of the perfect male body, Aristotle does not make analogous judgments about variations in other aspects of the human body. He does, however, treat the notion of hybridity and inheritance in plants, animals, and humans. He writes of the vine that produces both black and white grapes. For Aristotle, this is not a monstrous occurrence, as some of his contemporaries thought. The commixture of black and white grapes points to an ability for different types of grapes to mix, showing that different colors do not make incompatible partners.

Interbreeding of horses and donkeys, however, gives Aristotle pause. The mule that is produced is often, but not always, sterile. For Aristotle, breeding between species is not possible, so he discounts the notion that a union of a woman and a dog could produce a child with a dog’s head. He allows that these things do occur but that they cannot occur from interspecies breeding. Instead he suggests they are due to a problem with the male or female contribution to the child, and mostly likely, according to Aristotle, the problem arises with the material supplied by the female.

Aristotle’s ideas on inheritance stem from questions about what happens during the reproductive process, largely focusing on the question of
where the “seeds” come from that grow into a child. For Aristotle, there can only be one seed, but his theory falls short when it comes to inherited qualities. If there is only one seed, why would a child look like the other parent at all? Similarly, people noticed that at times a child will resemble a grandparent or even more distant relative who clearly added no seed at all to the reproductive process. Another theory was needed to account for those characteristics, physical and otherwise, that came from the non-seed-donating parent and distant relations.

Galen, who saw his work as an extension and clarification of his intellectual predecessor, Hippocrates, represents the two-seed camp. For Galen, both men and women contributed materially and spiritually to their progeny. The Hippocratic tradition asserted that children were formed from seed contributed by both parents, seed drawn from all parts of the parental bodies. This process, known as pangenesis, explains family resemblance based on the contributions of each parent. Hippocratic notions on reproduction permeated scientific culture of the Middle Ages. Though some works were available as early as the sixth century and others not until the sixteenth century, the influence of Hippocratic ideas clearly marked the Latin West from antiquity.

Heir to the traditions of antiquity, Isidore of Seville composed his seventh-century *Etymologies* to pass on and adapt to the Christian experience some of the ideas of the past. Isidore’s *Etymologies* were read from the date of their writing until the end of the Middle Ages, unlike the works of Aristotle and Galen, whose writings were not widely available until much later, following the interest in translation of Arabic materials begun by Peter the Venerable in the twelfth century. A strong manuscript tradition of *Etymologies* indicates that his ideas were available early on to medieval thinkers, depicting and forming medieval thoughts on reproduction up until the twelfth century. Isidore discusses the possible outcomes of mixed marriages, though he specifically treats marriages that are mixed in terms of power and class. For instance, he notes that a child produced by a couple in which the father is noble and the mother is not will take on the characteristics of the father. Isidore declines to decide the one-seed or two-seed problem, opting instead for a third choice: the seed that produces a child is located in the father, in the mother, and/or in both. This combination of possibilities provides an answer to the problem of family resemblance. When intercourse takes place, the seeds of the father and mother do literal battle in the womb, and the more powerful seed will determine the resemblance of the progeny. Isidore describes the process:

> They say that children resemble their fathers if the paternal seed be stronger; the mother if the maternal seed be the stronger. This is the reason
faces are formed to resemble others; those with the likeness of both parents were conceived from an equal admixture of paternal and maternal semen. Those resembling their grandparents and great-grandparents do so since, just as there are many seeds hidden in the soil, seeds also lie hidden in us which will give back the figures of our ancestors. Girls are born from the paternal semen and boys from the maternal, because every birth consists of two seeds. When its greater part prevails, it produces a similarity of sex.  

Following Isidore’s theory, extrapolating it to marriages between people of different faiths, reproduction between a Christian and a Saracen or Jew could be similar to a *judicium dei*, yet another battle between conflicting forces, this one taking place in the bedroom rather than on the battlefield. This battle between good and evil is typical of medieval thought and found throughout European literature of the period. One of the best-known literary battles is Prudentius’s *Psychomachia*, and indeed, romance epic abounds with examples of Christian right doing battle with pagan wrong. To follow the logic of the epic, one would expect that in the epic battle of the seed, children would take after their Christian parent, showing the strength of the Christian seed (and thus Christian thought) over that of Jewish or Muslim seed.  

However, not even in the most optimistic epic do Christians win every battle, even if they triumph in the end. The possibility of the “wrong” side winning in the battle of reproduction implies that children of mixed unions could indeed take after the non-Christian parent, particularly in cases in which the Christian partner was in some way weak or flawed and thus susceptible to losing the battle based on lack of moral superiority. The resulting child would most likely be monstrous, however, rather than a reproduction of the positive characteristics of the non-Christian participant.  

All three views on reproduction and inheritance find their place in Western literature of the thirteenth century. Aristotle’s one-seed view finds a home in the late thirteenth-century Middle English romance *The King of Tars*, which tells of a Christian–Muslim union that results in a child. A Christian king at war with a Muslim ruler has a beautiful maiden daughter, said to be “as white as feþer of swayn” (white as the feather of a swan) (12). The Saracen sultan of Dammas hears of her beauty, falls in love with her, and agrees to stop fighting the Christian king if his daughter will marry him. She refuses, because he is not Christian, and a huge battle ensues. Showing that right does not always prevail, the Christian king’s army is decimated. Thirty thousand and seven Christian knights are killed before the princess decides that she needs to put a stop to the killing. She will, she informs her father and mother, marry the
sultan in order to save Christian lives. The king and queen allow this, and the daughter goes to the sultan. The narrator of the story provides an interesting bilateral view of the mixed-faith marriage, stating it to be unacceptable to both Christian and Muslim societies; the Christian man is loathe to marry a heathen woman, just as the sultan does not wish to marry a Christian woman:

Wel loþe was a cristenman,  
To wedde an heþen woman,  
Þat leued on fals lawe;  
Als loþ was þat soudan,  
To wed a cristen woman,  
As y finde in mi sawe. (ll. 406–11)

(A Christian was very reluctant to marry a heathen woman who believed false law. Equally reluctant was that sultan to marry a Christian woman, as I find in my story.)

The sultan instructs her in the ways of Islam while she feigns being a sincere pupil. Soon she becomes pregnant, and the child is a formless blob that does not appear to be alive:

& when þe child was y-bore  
Wel sori wimen were þer fore,  
For lim no hadde it non;  
Bot as a rond of flesche y-shore  
In chaumber it lay hem before,  
Wiþ outen blod & bon.  
For sorwe þe leuedi wald dye,  
For it hadde noiþer nose no eye,  
Bot lay ded as þe ston. (574–82)

(And when the child was born, the women were very sorry about it for it had no limbs but was a shorn round of flesh. In the chamber it lay before him without blood and bone. For this they believed it would die, for it had neither nose nor eye, but it lay as dead as a stone.)

Jane Gilbert argues that the monstrous child results from an inability of the sultan to impose a patrilineal line of descent; the sultan’s paganism prevents him from occupying a paternal position. Gilbert’s focus on the father, however, neglects the important role of the mother. Rather than showing that Muslims cannot reproduce properly or that the father is flawed, this formless child is an indictment of the mixed marriage. Had
the sultan married a Muslim woman, the child would no doubt have been properly formed. By the lack of form that the child exhibits, the sultan knows that his wife has never embraced Islam:

“O, dame,” he sayd bi forn,
“Oyain mi godes þou art forsworn,
Wiþ riyt resoun y preue:
Þe childe, þat is here of þe born,
Boþe lim lip it is for-lorn,
Alle þurch þi fals bileue.” (586–91)

(“O, lady,” he said, forlorn. “You are forsworn against my gods. With right reason I prove it: the child that is born of you is bereft of limbs and thus is shown completely your false belief.”)

The sultan places the blame squarely on the mother as a result of her suspected (and, in fact, actual) lack of faith. He misreads the clues; the child is indeed affected by the lack of agreement in faith, but it is equally his fault.

The wife rejects her husband’s espousal of a reproductive model that would allow a woman to influence the form and soul of the child; she can only provide material. She chastises him and reminds him of his role in creating the monstrous child, telling him that the child has come from both of them—“Leue sir, lat be þat þouyt; / Þe child, was yeten bitven ous to” (Dear sir, let be that thought. The child was begotten between the two of us.) (600–601)—and sends the sultan to pray to his gods over the child. Despite his sincere efforts, the sultan is unable to heal the child through prayer to his gods, and when his wife suggests that they try the Christian god, he relents. A priest is found who baptizes the child. Upon baptism, the child is miraculously transformed into a beautiful, perfect boy. After the christening, the author notes that no child is fairer, that he now has all his limbs and is well shaped:

Þe prest toke þe flesche anon
cleped it þe name of Jon
In worþschip of þe day;
& when þat it cristned was,
It hadde liif & lim & fas
& crid wiþ gret deray,
& hadde hide & flesche & fel
& alle, þat euer þer to bifel,
In gest as y you say.
Feirer child miyt non be bore;
It no hadde neuer a lime forlore,
Wele schapen it was wiþ alle. (766–77)

(The priest took the flesh and named it immediately the name of John in worship of the day. And when it was christened that [name], it had life and limb and face and [he] cried with great force and had hide and flesh and skin and all that ever there was appropriate in a tale I might tell you. A fairer child might never be born. It had no limb missing, and it was very well shaped.)

The sultan rejoices, but his wife cuts short his joy by denying that he has any part in the child: “Ya, sir, bi seyn Martin, / Yif þe halvendel wer þin, / Wel glad miyt þou be” (Yes, sir, by Saint Martin. If the half of it were yours, well glad you might be.) (802–4). While the wife earlier stated that both she and her husband were responsible for the deformed child, when the child is transformed, the part of the child that was attributable to the black Muslim father is no longer found in the son. Since the sultan is not Christian, the wife reasons that he has no part either in the child or in her:

“Bot þou were cristned so it is,
Dou no hast no part þeron, y-wis
Noþer of þe child ne of me.” (808–10)

“… & yif þou were a cristen man,
Boþe were þine,” sche seyd þan,
“Þi childe & eke þi wiue.” (816–19)

(“Unless you were christened, so it is. You have no part in this thing, neither the child nor me… And if you were a Christian man, both would be yours,” she said then, “the child and also the wife.”)

In addition to the rejection of the sultan’s paternity case, the marriage that the narrator has already condemned is now shown to be nonexistent.

The role of the sultan in this paternity case follows closely Aristotelian notions of paternal agency. At the risk of conflating two very different concepts, race and gender, the one-sex notion of mankind that can be drawn from Aristotle’s writings on reproduction sheds some light on what medieval people may have thought as they considered this story of remarkable transformation. Aristotle’s writings led to the belief that the internal organs of women, if properly heated, could result in the organs dropping out of the body and transforming what was once considered a woman into a fully equipped man. Stories of just such transformations were recorded in the Middle Ages. The woman was a necessary, but
always inferior, version of an imperfectly finished man. In the case of race, the miraculous transformation moves the child from the inferior position of a soulless heathen toward the more perfect, ideal Christian. Since the father is to supply the soul and form to the child, this child, before baptism, clearly has no form and thus no soul. It takes God the (literal) Father to provide the child with those attributes.

It would be tempting to say that this story is not about a one-race view of mankind but rather a case of religious superiority that does not allow for the human status of nonbelievers. Though the union between the Christian and the Muslim might appear on the surface to be simply a conflict of differing religions, the story color-codes the conflict. The daughter is said to be “white as the feather of a swan” (12). On the night the maiden is sent to the sultan, she dreams of being attacked by black dogs and eventually saved by Jesus, dressed in white, a dream that shows a fear of miscegenation. While Muslims were commonly represented as dogs, the overdetermined blackness of the dogs reflects the negative connotations of black skin. When the child is baptized, the father becomes Jesus, the white apparition in the girl’s dream who saves her from the black hounds. Though the child has form and soul, they do not derive from the sultan, who would normally be considered the father because only he has had sexual relations with the mother. This miraculous rebirth is made legitimate when the sultan follows through with his promise to his wife and receives baptism. At this point, the miracle is double, for he assumes the status as father of his son but is also washed white by the baptism; his “hide,” which was black and loathly, is changed to white and clear:

His hide, þat blac & loþely ws,
Al white bicom þurch godes gras
& clere wiþ outen blame. (922–24)

(His skin, which was black and loathsome, became completely white through God’s good grace and fair without blame.)

The black skin is to be hated, but the white skin is morally coded as without blame. Just as the sultan knew that the formless child could only have come from a lack of belief on the part of the mother, the mother recognizes the conversion of her husband by the external sign of his whitened skin:

Þan wist sche wele in her þouyt,
Pat on Mahoun leued he nouyt,
For changed was his hewe. (937–39)
(Then she knew very well in her mind that he did not believe in Muhammad because his color had changed.)

The *King of Tars* is consistent in its portrayal of the one-race view of mankind; just as heat would allow a woman to turn into a man, baptismal water could change the color of one’s skin.

Roughly the contemporary of *The King of Tars*, *La fille du comte de Pontieu* contradicts Aristotelian notions of conception and offers instead a medieval notion more closely akin to Isidore’s *judicium dei*. Like the *King of Tars*, *La fille du comte de Pontieu* is from the outset deeply concerned with genealogy. On the first folio, it is revealed that there is an inheritance crisis in Saint Pol, where the count has no heir: “Il n’avoyt point d’oir de sa char” (he had no blood heir) (II, 4–5). His sister has a suitable son, Thibaut, who will inherit his uncle’s lands, but in the meantime, Thibaut serves the count of Ponthieu. The count of Ponthieu’s wife dies after giving birth to a daughter, a potential crisis in a patrilineal society, but the count soon remarries and has a son. Thibaut is promised the hand of the daughter of the count of Pontieu, a woman who is never named but referred to as the *fille*.

Thibaut and the *fille* suffer their own reproductive problems. God’s role in this potential conception takes center stage: “Dieus! dont vient çou que jou aime tant cele dame et ele moi, et ne poons avoir hoir de nostre car dont Dieus soit servis et au siecle bien fais?” (God! How does it happen that I love this woman so much and she loves me, and we have no blood heir to serve God and do well for our time?) (II, 47–9) and “dont Diex soit siervis en cest siecle et Sainte Eglyse essaucie” (to serve God and honor the Church) (II, 60–61). After five years of marriage and no heir, Thibaut decides that a pilgrimage to Saint James of Galicia (Santiago de Compostella) would perhaps yield the much-desired result. Despite objections by her husband and father, the *fille* insists upon going on the pilgrimage as well. Before the pair can reach the shrine, however, the *fille* and Thibaut are set upon by brigands, who rape her in front of her husband. Though the couple survives the attack, the *fille* attempts to kill her husband, presumably because he has witnessed her rape. When the *fille*’s father hears of her attempt on her husband’s life, he responds by throwing her overboard in a barrel, condemning her to death without actually killing her. She survives once again, saved by merchants and sold to a Muslim ruler. Like the princess in the *King of Tars*, the *fille* learns Muslim religious law and even learns to speak the local language. In the thirteenth-century version of the tale, the *fille*’s conversion is apparently real. The text does not mention any ruse on the part of the *fille* and states simply that she realized she should accept the
sultan’s offer of marriage out of love rather than by force and that she renounced Christianity: “Ele vit bien ke mieus li venoit faire par amours ke par force, se li manda ke ele le feroit. Quant ele fu renoie et ele ot relenquie sa loy, li soudans le prist a feme a l’ussage et a le maniere de la tieire de Sarrazins” (She saw that it would be better to come to him by love than by force, so she announced that she would do it. Once she had renounced and relinquished her law, the sultan took her as a wife in the usage and manner of the land of the Saracens.) (II, 357–61). With no conflict between Christianity and Islam, the children she bears in rapid succession to the sultan are born whole and well formed. When her father, husband, and half-brother fortuitously happen to fall into the hands of the sultan, the fille insists that they not “humble themselves before her” because she is “Sarrasine.” In order more clearly to show the sincerity of her conversion to Islam, when she is eventually returned to Christian lands, she recommits herself to Christianity and maintains a sympathetic view toward her Muslim husband.

An important difference between the two extant thirteenth-century manuscripts highlights the problem inherent in conversion. When the fille tells her Muslim husband that she wants to speak to the foreign prisoners, in the first case she says simply that she knows French and wants to talk to the condemned man. In the second version, Nature seems to beckon to the fille, and though she does not know the man to be her father, she is somehow moved at his sight. She announces to her husband that she “is” French, an admission that should have registered some surprise, as she had never before identified her origins:

La dame dont vous avés oï, ki estoit fille le conte et feme a cel soudan, estoit en la place u on en mena le conte, ki ses peres estoit, pour ocire. Lués ke ele l’ot veu, se li mua li sans et li cuers li atenri, ne mie por çou ke ele le couneust, fors tant ke Nature l’en destraignoit, et dist la dame au soudan: “Sire, jou sui francoise, si parleroi mout volentiers a cel povre homme ançois ke il morust, s’il vous plaisoit.” (II, 451–57)

(The lady about whom you have heard, who was the count’s daughter and the sultan’s wife, was in the place where they brought the count, her father, in order to kill him. As soon as she saw him, her mind and heart softened, not at all because she recognized him, so much had Nature distanced her from the matter. The lady said to the sultan, “Sir, I am French and I would willingly speak to this poor man before he dies, if it is pleasing to you.”)

Fertility, however, remains at the forefront of the text. The fille manages to engineer her escape (along with her brother, husband, and father) by feigning a pregnancy craving that requires her to return to her homeland,
called her “terre de droite nature” in both manuscripts. While the fille leaves her youngest child, a girl, the Muslim-sired son who accompanies the fille back to France is baptized and renamed Guillaume. Unlike in the King of Tars, in this text the color of the child and of his biological father are never mentioned, so there is no explicit contrast between black skin and white skin. Inheritance, the eternal preoccupation of the story, enters again into play as the Muslim-sired son Guillaume is married to the daughter of Raoul de Praiau, becoming Lord of Praiau because the knight has no male child. Guillaume, the child from the mixed marriage, by rights should provide the continuation of the Christian family tree because he is the first legitimate grandson of the Count of Ponthieu. However, Guillaume, while provided for with the lands of his wife, is not made count as his two half brothers are, one taking on the county of Ponthieu and the other of Saint Pol. Although baptism converted Guillaume and may have washed him clean, it was clearly not sufficient to overcome his Saracen paternity.

Just as the Christians were concerned with questions of inheritance (thus provoking the pilgrimage in the first place), now Muslim society has a genealogical crisis, since the sultan, whose son (now known as Guillaume) was taken by the fille to live in Christian lands, no longer has a male heir. Just as her brother, Guillaume, bears the taint of his Muslim father, the fille’s daughter suffers for the actions of her mother: “Et pour cesti aventure mains en ama sa fille, ki demouree li estoit, et mains l’ounora, et nanpourquant la damoisele devint mout sage et crut en grant sens, ensi ke tout l’amoient et prisoient por les biens ke on en disoit” (And because of this adventure, he loved his daughter less, who stayed where she was, and honored her less. Nonetheless the girl became very wise and grew greatly in common sense, so that everyone loved her and prized her for the good things that were said about her.) (II, 744–47). Despite insistence on the conversion of the fille to Muslim law, a residue of Christianity seems ineffaceable. The fille refers to her need to be on her “terre de droite nature” during her false pregnancy, and, perhaps more tellingly, her daughter with the sultan is forever after referred to as “la belle caitive” (the beautiful captive), despite the fact that she has never known any other native land or law. The mother has passed along to her daughter a Christian inheritance that will always make her an outcast in her own society.

The sultan marries his daughter to his favorite knight, who asks for her hand in the same manner that Thibaut had requested to marry the fille. In the first manuscript, the sultan seems all too glad to rid himself of a painful reminder. The sultan asks the knight what he wants as a boon, and he responds: “Sire,” fait il, “la Bele Cetive, vostre fille.” “Malaquin,
et je le vous dourai volentiers” (“Sir,” he said, “the Beautiful Captive, your daughter.” “Malaquin, I give her to you willingly.”) (I, 614–15). In the second version, the sultan announces the girl’s heritage with a certain amount of pride and expresses great concern for her:

Li soudans estut et pensa, et vit bien ke Malakins estoit preus et sages et bien poroit encore venir a grant houneur et a grant bien, et ke bien i seroit fille emploiee, se li dist: “Malakin, par ma loy, vous m’avés grant cose requise, cor jou aim mout ma fille et plus n’ai d’oirs, si comme vous savés bien, et voirs est ke ele est nee et estraite des plus hautes gens et des plus vaillans de Franche, car estes vaillans et mout bien savés servir, joule vous donrai volentiers, s’ele le veut.” (II, 796–805)

(The sultan stood there and thought and realized that Malaquin was noble and wise and could very well come to great honor and wealth, and that his daughter could be well used there, and so he said, “Malaquin, by my command, you have asked me a great favor because I love my daughter greatly and have no other heir, as you well know. You see very well that she is born directly from the most noble and valiant French families. Since you are valiant and know how to serve well, I will give her to you willingly if she wants it.”)

He sees her as his sole heir, and the seed of the mother is equally present in the girl’s genealogy. The text of both manuscripts continues to valorize the maternal seed, given that the daughter born of the union between the fille and the sultan will eventually be the maternal grandmother of the renowned Saracen knight Saladin.

Unlike the judicium dei model of La fille du comte de Pontieu, the early thirteenth-century (ca. 1211–1212) German Parzival by Wolfram von Eschenbach reflects a medieval view of reproduction that is largely consonant with the Hippocratic and Galenic notions of pangenesis. The image of the magpie is central to the story, as Book I opens with an introduction that goes straight to the mixing of black and white:

Ist zwîvel herzen nâchgebûr,
daz muoz der sêle werden sûr.
gesmaehet unde gezieret
ist, swâ sich parrieret
unverzaget mannes muot,
as agelstern varwe tuot.
der mac dennoch wesen geil:
wand an im sint beidiu teil,
des himels und der helle.
der unstaete geselle
hât die swarzen varwe gar,
und wirt och nâch der vinster var:
sô habet sich an die blanken
der mit staeten gedanken. (I.1.1–14)

(If inconstancy is the heart’s neighbor, the soul will not fail to find it bitter. Blame and praise alike befall when a dauntless man’s spirit is black-and-white-mixed like the magpie’s plumage. Yet he may see blessedness after all, for both colors have a share in him, the color of heaven and the color of hell. Inconstancy’s companion is all black and takes on the hue of darkness, while he of steadfast thoughts clings to white.)

The conflation of blackness with blame, hell, and inconstancy leaves little room for mixed-race marriages, yet Gahmuret, the eventual father of Parzival, weds the black Moorish Queen Belacane of Zazamanc.

Lest this tale be confused as one of cultural acceptance or color blindness, Wolfram clarifies that despite the fact that Belacane is virtuous and without moral flaw, Gahmuret is repulsed by black skin, and the skin color of the people of Zazamanc is a source of anxiety throughout Book I. The story notes upon Gahmuret’s arrival that he was uncomfortable around the Moors:

Liute vinster sô diu naht
wârn alle die von Zazamanc:
bî den dûht in diu wîle lanc.
doch hiez er herberge nemen:
des moht och si vil wol gezemen,
daz se im die besten gâben. (I.17.24–29)

(Black as night were all the people of Zazamanc, and he felt ill at ease; yet he gave orders for lodgings to be taken. It pleased them to give him the best.)

In addition, the queen’s skin color is described as a potential liability for her relationship with Gahmuret:

Ist iht liehters denne der tac,
dem gîchet niht diu künegin.
si hete wîplîchen sin,
und was abr anders rîterlîch,
der touwegen rôsen ungelîch.
nâch swarzer varwe was ir schîn. (I.24.6–11)

(If there is anything brighter than daylight—the queen in no way resembled it. A woman’s manner she did have, and was on other counts worthy
of a knight, but she was unlike a dewy rose: her complexion was black of hue.)

Gahmuret’s beauty, however, is unequivocal but likewise linked to his coloring:

Der küneginne riche
ir ougen fuogten höhen pîn,
dô si gesach den Anscchein.
der was sô minneclîche gevar,
daz er entslôz ir herze gar,
ez waere ir liep oder leit. (I.23.22–27)

(The great queen’s eyes caused her grievous pain when they beheld the Angevin, who, being of Love’s color, unlocked her heart whether she wished it or not.)

Clearly Gahmuret’s whiteness is the standard of beauty; the text notes that the people of Zazamanc claim “aldâ wîp unde man verjach, / sine gesaehn nie helt sô wünneclîch; / ir gote im solten sîn gelîch” (they had never seen a knight so handsome; their gods were supposed to look like him) (I.36.18–20).

Although Queen Belacane is never described as beautiful, she is held up as a model of womanly virtue. Before meeting Gahmuret, she had loved Isenhart, whom she implies would have been a more suitable match based on his skin color (“er was gein valscher fuore ein tôr, / in swarzer varwe als ich ein Môr” [to all false conduct he was deaf, and in blackness of hue he was, like me a Moor] (I.26.21–22). Belacane withheld her love while Isenhart proved himself on the battlefield, where he was eventually killed before the two could be united. Interestingly, it is her love for Isenhart that makes her an acceptable match for Gahmuret, as this love and concomitant grief perform a metaphorical baptism of her soul:

Gahmureten dûhte sân,
swie si waere ein heidenin,
mit triwen wîplîcher sin
in wîbes herze nie geslouf.
ir kiusche was ein reiner touf,
und ouch der regen der sie begôz,
der wâc der von ir ougen flôz
ûf ir zobel und an ir brust.
riwen phlege was ir gelust,
und rehtiu jâmers lêre (I.28.10–19)
(Gahmuret reflected how she was a heathen, and yet never did more womanly loyalty glide into a woman’s heart. Her innocence was a pure baptism, as was also the rain that wet her, that flood which flowed from her eyes down upon the furs about her bosom. The practice of sorrow was her delight and the true instruction received from grief.)

This baptism is apparently insufficient for Gahmuret’s purposes. In the end, Gahmuret leaves Belacane, despite the love he claims to have for her and the fact that she is pregnant with his child. He writes in the letter that he leaves her that he is abandoning her because of religious differences and, should she convert, she might be able to win him back. Belacane, who apparently had never been asked to convert before, immediately agrees to do so, but the story never fulfills the promise of return. The mixed-race child is guaranteed a bright future, Gahmuret contends, if he should resemble his father, whose genealogy is filled exclusively with kings. In fact, the child, Feirefiz, emerges as bicolored, both black and white. The image of the magpie is resurrected at the end of Book I to describe the child: “Als ein agelster wart gevar / sin hâr und och sin vel vil gar” (Like a magpie was the color of his hair and of his skin) (I.57.27–28). As with the magpie who set the scene for Book I, the primacy of the white part of Feirefiz is underlined by the black queen herself, as “diu küngîn kust in sunder twâl / vil dicke an sîniu blanken mâl” (the queen kissed him over and over again on his white spots) (I.57.19–20).

The part of Feirefiz that was drawn from Gahmuret and distributed throughout his body in the form of white spots allows Feirefiz entry into the hall of Anfortas and the company of the Grail. Despite his being the eldest son of Gahmuret, there is no chance that Feirefiz could be deemed the Grail king, a position destined to his younger brother, Parzival. In fact, as a heathen, he cannot even see the Grail (XVI.16.813). Feirefiz receives baptism in order to marry the beautiful white Grail maiden, Repanse de Schoye, effectively leaving his first wife—Secundille, the queen of India—just as his father before him rejected a black wife in favor of a white one.

These thirteenth-century stories—the King of Tars, La fille du comte de Pontieu, and Parzival—depict radically different conceptions of the mixed-race child. Perhaps this should not be surprising, since from the outset the title of the King of Tars indicates that it is chiefly concerned with paternity, embracing the Aristotelian notion of the father, while the other stories’ two-seed notion of procreation provides for matrilineality. Although the King of Tars might in a modern sense appear to be what one would term the more racist of the stories because of its
emphasis on skin color, the one-race view of mankind leaves the reader in a vexed position. While white skin is valorized, it is available to all through God’s mercy. If mankind is all part of the same race, this in some sense negates the possibility for racism and focuses instead on a universal community of believers. To return to the comparison with gender, the idea that women are really just men and that blacks are really whites could be interpreted as inclusive, advocating a redemptive possibility. The assertion of superiority for the categories “man” and “white” is no less insulting, however. By holding out an impossible hope for redemption (women must be men and blacks must be white), this one-race view participates in the worst sort of oppression. With the two-seed or judicium dei notions of reproduction, one racial tradition must defeat the other; this would on the surface indicate not racial superiority but rather a notion of religious entitlement. However, this model of conflict and battle can lead to the conclusion that annihilation is preferable to conversion, and that the differences between the embattled seeds are so great that not only is complete conversion impossible (and thus the universal brotherhood of believers no longer pertains) but that there are also indeed different races. Although Parzival contains mixed-race offspring who in the Hippocratic tradition exhibit spiritual and physical characteristics of both parents, it is perhaps the bleakest of the medieval views on miscegenation. The black and white never mix to form a gray but remain distinct aspects of an individual, and Wolfram makes clear that black is bad and white is good. While Feirefiz is valorized in the story, he lives in a world that is separate and will never be equal to the one his younger brother inhabits until the moment that he converts and marries Repanse. A mirror of the magpie that opens the text, Feirefiz combines the praise of the white with the blame of the black, leaving the impression that all that is good in him can be traced to his white father, Gahmuret.

These differing views on reproduction, as embodied in three thirteenth-century romances, are not sufficient to indicate that specific people felt one way or another about mixed marriages. What they do show us is that there was no consensus about what happens when different peoples form physical and emotional alliances. Although it may be tempting to see the Middle Ages as a privileged, color- or race-blind period, it is apparent that writers were attuned to somatic difference and felt a need to account for what happens when colors are mixed. Like Aristotle’s grapes, the offspring of a mixed-race couple could be seen as a marvel of God’s creation or a monstrosity, depending on the attitude of the writer.
Notes

4. Ibid., 21.
8. See, for example, in the *Chanson de Roland*, “Paien unt tort e chrestïens unt dreit” (pagans are wrong and Christians are right) (l. 1015), Luis Cortés, ed., *La chanson de Roland* (Paris: Librairie Nizet, 1994).
10. All citations taken from *The King of Tars* (late thirteenth century), The English Poetry Full-Text Database (Cambridge, England: Chadwyck-Healey Ltd., 1994). This romance is found in three MSS: Auchinleck MS (National Library of Scotland Advocates’ MS 19.2.1), Vernon MS (National Library of Scotland Advocates’ MS 19.2.1), and MS Additional 22283.
12. Jane Gilbert’s fascinating Lacanian analysis of this childbirth links the monstrous child to the lack of the father (“Unnatural Mothers”). While Gilbert calls the conversion and color change of the father deeply racist (336), she does not note the fear of miscegenation that the text, and particularly the princess’s dream, implies.
13. John Block Friedman notes that the Muslim is often portrayed as a dog, both in image and word in the Middle Ages, in *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 67.

15. In the citations that follow, the two manuscripts of the text are differentiated; I is Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, français 770, and II is Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, français 12203.


18. The thirteenth-century MSS diverge in wording here: “Quant il oïrent chou, si furent molt lié, et si firent sanllant d’umelier vers li, et ele leur desfendi et dist: ‘Je sui Sarrasine, et si vous pri que de cose que vous aïé soïe nul plus biau sanllant n’en faites.’” (When they heard that they were very happy and so started to humble themselves before her, and she refused to let them do that and said, “I am Saracen, and so I ask you because of what you have heard that you not make any further noble gesture.’) (I, 493–97), while the second reads, “Et quant il oïrent çou, si en furent mout liét, et en fisent mout grant joie, et s’umelierent viers li. Elle lor desfendi k’il n’en fesissent nul samblant et dist: ‘Jou sui Sarrazine renoie, car autrement ne poioie durer, car jou fuisse piech’a morte, mais or vous prie jou et chasti, si chier com vous avés vos vies et houneurs a avoir greignours ke vous eustes onques, ke pour cose ke vous aiiés veue ne oïe nul plus biel samblant n’en faites.’” (And when they heard that they were very happy about it and made great joy and humbled themselves toward her. She told them not to do it in any way and said, “I am a renounced Saracen, for otherwise I would not survive, thus I am a mortal sinner, thus I beg you and chastise you, so dear are your lives and honors to have greater than you ever were, that for this reason that you have seen or heard, do not make a grander gesture.’”) (II, 609–17). Brunel, *La fille du comte de Pontieu*, 39.

19. “[Li Apostoiles] reconcilia la dame et remist en droite crestientét” (The legate reconciled the lady and returned her to proper Christianity). Ibid., 45.

20. She says to her husband and father, “jou ai mout mesfait enviers le soudan car jou li ai tolu mon cors et son fil k’il mout amoit” (I have done a great misdeed to the sultan because I took from him my body and my son whom he loved greatly) (II, 705–7). Brunel, *La fille du comte de Pontieu*, 44.

21. “La dame qui feme estoit au soudant estoit la, et se le vit et li atenri li cuers, et dist: ‘Sire, je sai fransois, si parleroie a cest pvre home, se vos plaisoit.’” (The lady who was the sultan’s wife was there and saw him and softened her heart to him and said, “Sir, I know French and so I will speak to this poor man, if it pleases you.”) (I, 348–50).

23. Kinoshita asserts that the lack of color coding in the text is due to a historical situation in which Muslims were indistinguishable from Christians; Kinoshita, “Romance of MiscegeNation,” 118. Jacqueline De W eever, however, has noted that the absence of color coding can also be read as ethnic or racial erasure; Jacqueline De W eever, Sheba’s Daughters (New York: Garland, 1998), particularly chapter 1, “Whitening the Saracen: The Erasure of Alterity.” Since many texts from as early as the Chanson de Roland do note color difference and black Muslims are consistently seen as morally inferior, the absence of color marking is significant.

24. Kinoshita sees Guillaume as different from his mother—he retains the taint of Saracen blood while she is able to integrate into either culture without problem; Kinoshita, “Romance of MiscegeNation,” 125. Yet she, too, seems to retain her Christian heritage, drawn inexplicably to her “terre de droite nature.” While Kinoshita notes that Guillaume does not receive the inheritance he is due, she still sees this period as a golden age of medieval acculturation and finds the fille to participate in a pre-Eurocentric order (126).

25. Each landless knight had been offered a boon due to their loyal fighting, and each said they wanted nothing other than the hand of their lord’s daughter.


27. Despite the extent to which the people of Zazamanc go out of their way to ingratiate themselves with Gahmuret and his men, the Angevins retain a sense of repulsion. For instance, Gahmuret unenthusiastically allows himself to be kissed by the governor’s wife: “The governor of the city then graciously bade his guest not to refrain from making any claim whatsoever upon his goods and person. Next, he conducted him to his wife, who kissed Gahmuret, little as he relished it” (Wolfram 1.20). The repulsion toward black skin is echoed later in the book, as when the ladies of Arthur’s court encounter Feirefiz; they are reluctant to kiss him at first and send women of lesser rank to test the waters. Parzival’s own children refuse at first to kiss their uncle, citing fear of his mottled skin. Wolfram notes, “Noble children feel fear even today” (Wolfram 16.805–6).
The contemporary Irish-language poet Michael Davitt, in his poem “Ó Mo Bheirt Phailistíneach” (“O My Two Palestinians”), describes how, on “18/9/82, having watched a news report on the massacre of Palestinians in Beirut,” he went upstairs and looked at his own sleeping children, visualizing them as corpses, “mo bheirt Phailistíneach ag lobhadh sa teás lárnach (my two Palestinians rotting in the central heat).”

This example typifies the sympathy that modern Celtic-language writers have for oppressed, marginalized, or misunderstood cultures throughout the world; as Grahame Davies observes, “many culturally-active Welsh speakers…have an acute consciousness of their political status as members of a minority culture” and “seem noticeably anxious to be affirmative and non-critical of non-English-speaking cultures—not just specifically Muslim ones—possibly partly as a generalized rebuke to perceived Anglo-American cultural imperialism.”

One wonders if this might have been the case in the Middle Ages as well. After 1066 the Celtic-speaking peoples (although at the time they did not share an overt “Celtic” identity) endured centuries of “domination and conquest” as they were annexed by “the first English empire.” Furthermore, in Old French texts such as the Chanson d’Aiquin (late twelfth century) and Middle English ones such as King Horn (mid-thirteenth century), the Celtic lands were the battlefield on which familiar French and English heroes, such as Charlemagne and Horn, confronted “Saracen” invaders. These “Saracens” were, in one sense, a cultural memory of the Scandinavians who occupied much of Brittany and Ireland during the
Viking Age, but the audiences of *Aiquin* and *Horn* would have understood them in a variety of ways: as Saxons, as Muslims, and perhaps also as Celts, given that the territory they occupied was essentially the Breton-speaking west of Brittany (in both *Aiquin* and in *The Romance of Horn*) and Gaelic Ireland (in *King Horn*). The French term *pâien* covered all the bases, as Nicolas Lenoir explains: “Norrois, Romains, Arabis, Anglo-normands, n’importe: l’altérité disqualifiante de l’ennemi ne saurait être plus radicalement soulignée qu’en la situant sur le plan religieux, où elle peut rencontrer son écho dans tout l’Espace et tout le Temps.”

The Middle English term *Sarazin* likewise extends to “one of the pagan invaders of Britain” or “foreigners in general”; the Irish and Scots are referred to as “Saracens” in *Gloucester Chronicle A* (ll. 5550–51, 5592–94), along with the Saxons and Danes. Additionally, Diane Speed points out that the entries for *jaianz* (giant) in the Tobler-Lommatzsch *Altfrianzösisches Wörterbuch* refer mainly to “Saracens” and then to “biblical figures (located in lands which in the Middle Ages were part of Islam) and figures from the Celtic past (perceived through Christian eyes as non-Christian beings).” This systematic marginalization and exoticization of the Celtic lands—which also took place without reference to Muslims in texts such as *The Topography of Ireland* and *The Description of Wales* by Gerald of Wales—may explain why a fifteenth-century Anglo-Irish parliament thought it appropriate to petition Henry V to launch a crusade against Gaelic Ireland, even though the Irish were Christians and the grounds for military action were political and not religious.

Under these circumstances, one might have expected the Irish, Welsh, and Bretons to examine their relationship to the “Saracens” who were said to occupy their lands or with whom they were identified. It appears, however, that they did not do so. In fact, the depictions of the Muslim Other in Irish and Welsh literature are essentially the same as those found in France and England, recently surveyed by John Tolan and Suzanne Conklin Akbari. In most cases, this was because the Celtic-language literature depicting Muslims was *translated* literature dealing with Charlemagne, Bevis of Hampton, and other favorites of the French and Anglo-Norman aristocracy; the attitudes of Celtic speakers were thus almost wholly derivative.

Early contacts between the Irish and the Muslims were facilitated by the Vikings, who established themselves in Ireland in the ninth century and founded many of the major towns. Islamic coinage, textiles, ceramics, glass, and other exotic items found their way to the Norse settlements in Britain and Ireland as trade goods or plunder. A black glass Islamic seal, inscribed with *shāʿa Allāh* ([as] God wills) or a similar phrase in a minimalist form of angular script and set into a ninth-century
Carolingian cross brooch, was found at Ballycotton in County Cork. Andrew Petersen calls this artifact “one of the earliest and most spectacular examples of the inter-relatedness of British and Irish culture with that of Islam,” but it was probably the Vikings who brought it to Ireland, either directly or via Britain. Likewise, when the Irish retook Limerick from the Vikings, they supposedly recovered “a magnificent Moorish saddle and colored silk garments from Arabia.”

The Vikings also traded slaves: captives from Ireland and Britain were used to satisfy the high demand from Islamic countries, and captives from Islamic countries were likewise brought to Ireland. The prime piece of evidence we have of direct contact between the Muslims and the Irish is an entry from the so-called Fragmentary Annals of Ireland, which Smyth describes as “the Irish version of Ragnars saga [lóðbrókar].” Two of Ragnarr’s sons set out from Ireland to plunder Muslim Spain and then move on to North Africa, where they confront the “Mauritanians” in a pitched battle. In the aftermath of the battle,

Ro chuattar...na Lochlannaig fon tír, 7 ro airgsiot 7 ro losgsiod an tír uile. Tugsad dna slúagh móir dhíobh a mbrait léo go hEirinn: i siad-sín na fir ghorma. Uair is iónann Mauri 7 nigri; Mauritania is iónann is nigrí-tudo. As inbeachtain ma térna Ma[urí] 7 aird in neach ra marbhaid 7 ro baidhit dibh 'san muincinn muridhe Gaditanna. As fada dna ro badar na fir ghorma sin i nEirinn. As ann atá Mauritania contra Baleares insulas.

(The Norwegians swept across the country, and they devasted and burned the whole land. Then they brought a great host of them captive with them to Ireland, i.e. those are the black men [literally, “blue men”]. For Mauri is the same as nigri; “Mauritania” is the same as nigrí-tudo. Hardly one in three of the Norwegians escaped, between those who were slain, and those who drowned in the Gaditanian Straits. Now those black men remained in Ireland for a long time. Mauritania is located across from the Balearic Islands.)

The phrase fir ghorma (blue men), meaning “black men,” corresponds to Old Norse blámenn (sg. blámaðr), from which the Welsh word blowmon or blewmon (negro, blackamoor, Ethiopian) may also (indirectly) derive. The color blár, which means “blue” in Modern Icelandic, was more of a dark blue-black and signified black rather than blue; it was used, for example, of the color of ravens or of the clothes a medieval Icelander would put on when intending to kill someone. The term blámem in Old Norse–Icelandic literature is associated with berserks and supernatural adversaries as well as dark-skinned Muslims, and a similar development occurs in Irish.
The “blue men” reappear in the late Middle Irish (i.e., twelfth-century) tale *Aided Muirchertaig meic Erca* (The violent death of Muirchertach son of Erc). The story describes how Muirchertach, king of Tara (the pre-eminent kingship of Ireland), is seduced and destroyed by a woman with magical powers, who is avenging the deaths of her family. The woman, who gives a multiplicity of names but is most often referred to as Sín, prevails upon Muirchertach to expel his wife and children and all Christian clerics from Tara. When Muirchertach asks her where she comes from and whether she believes in “the God of the clerics,” she asserts that she is descended from Adam and Eve and that she believes in “the one true God.” Nevertheless she boasts of her miraculous powers, and Muirchertach asks her for a demonstration. She creates two battalions of warriors in combat and provides the onlookers with enchanted wine made from the water of the River Boyne and enchanted pork made from ferns. They realize upon waking the next day that this diet has sapped their strength. Their entertainment resumes: “Do-rigne Sín immorro ann sin firu gorma dona clochaib 7 fir eli co cennaib gabur (but then Sín made blue men from the stones and other men with the heads of goats)” (14, §21; translation mine), and Muirchertach goes out to fight them. They rise up again as soon as he strikes them down, and so he spends the whole day in fruitless exertion (only to be fed the water-wine and the fern-pork again at the end of it). Later Sín entertains the king and his household with a fight between two more magically created bands of warriors: there were “fír gorma isin dara cath 7 fír cen chind isin cath ele (blue men in the one battalion and headless men in the other one)” (16, §23). A group of clerics come to take Muirchertach’s confession, and when they convince him to make the sign of the cross, he sees that the warriors he has been fighting are only stones, ferns, and fungus. Notwithstanding his sincere repentance, Muirchertach is induced to return to Sín, and she ultimately betrays him to his death: he is pierced through with a spear, half-burned in the incineration of his hall, and half-drowned in a vat of wine where he seeks refuge from the fire. The way the “blue men” are portrayed in this text, summoned up together with goat-heads and headless men by Sín’s malevolent power, has only the faintest connection to actual Muslims: they are exotic, otherworldly beings. Monstrous races of this type are featured in texts such as the Irish *Sex Aetates Mundi* and the Welsh *Delu y Byd* (a translation of Henry of Huntingdon’s *Imago Mundi*), often placed near the beginning of manuscript compilations of “native” literature as a kind of general orientation. Such texts also mention black Ethiopians living in places that are constantly scorched by the heat of the sun.

In surveying Welsh attitudes toward the Muslims, one may begin with *Brut y Tywysogion* (*The Chronicle of the Princes*). As Grahame Davies
points out, this native Welsh chronicle demonstrates how the Welsh took advantage of their Anglo-Norman neighbors being occupied elsewhere to assert their independence:

The chronology is suggestive: the Crusades began [thirty] years after the Norman Conquest of England, and lasted for the same two centuries, give or take a decade, during which Wales then stayed independent. . . . For those two centuries, for the Kings of England, Wales was a sideshow. Only after the end of the Crusades in the late thirteenth century was Anglo-Norman power concentrated enough to finally conquer Wales: in 1282, under the ruthless recently-returned Crusader, Edward the First. Perhaps Wales owes two centuries of independence, indirectly, to Islam.

Likewise, it appears that some Welsh nobles were reluctant to go on crusade for fear that the Anglo-Normans would try to steal their lands while they were gone. A few, such as Owein Cyfeiliog of Powys, even braved excommunication. Others, however, did join, and Gerald of Wales records that some three thousand Welshmen took up the cross in response to the preaching of Archbishop Baldwin of Canterbury, with whom he traveled through Wales in 1188. One non-Welsh chronicler tells an amusing anecdote about a Welsh archer encountering a Parthian and agreeing to trade shots at one another; the Parthian went first and missed the Welshman, but when he demanded another try instead of awaiting the Welshman’s shot, the Welshman shot him dead for his perfidy. But the firsthand testimony of Welsh crusaders does not loom large in the surviving literature.

Brut y Tywysogion does comment briefly on the Muslims. Initially, they are conflated with the Jews, just as in the Anglo-Norman romance Boeve de Haumont the “Saracen” Escopart, “as representative of the ‘heathens’ who put Christ to death,” is said by Boeve to have allowed Christ to die on the cross. According to the entry for the year 1184 (recte 1185), “deuth Patriarch Caerussalem hyt yn Lloegyr y eruenneit nerth y brenhin rac distryw o'r Jdewon a'r Sarassinyeit holl Gaerusalem (the Patriarch of Jerusalem came to England to beg for help of the king, lest the Jews and the Saracens should destroy all Jerusalem)”; and for the year 1186 (recte 1188), “deuth y Sarascinyeit a'r Idewon y Gaerussalem, gann duyn y Groc gantunt dyw Merchyr y Lludu a goresgyn Carussalem; a chymeint ag a gawissant o Gristonogyon yndi, llad rei a wnaethant a dwyn ereill y geithiwt (the Saracens and the Jews came to Jerusalem, carrying off the Cross with them on Ash Wednesday and gaining possession of Jerusalem; and of as many Christians as they found in it, some they slew and others they carried off into bondage).” The vivid description provided elsewhere by the poet Elidr Sais (ca. 1195–1246) of the desecration
of Christ’s grave by the “Saracens” under Saladin is in fact part of an indictment of Llywelyn ap Iorwerth, the ruler of Gwynedd, whose deeds the poet considers equally heinous.33

Later in the Brut chronicle, the “Saracens” reappear (without the Jews) as instruments of divine vengeance upon the Crusaders. The entry for 1221 reads,


(That year the host of the Christians went from Damietta in Egypt towards Babylon with intent to lay siege to it. But God’s vengeance did not allow them: for the river Nile flooded their way and shut them in between two rivers so that countless numbers of them were drowned. And then the Saracens came upon them and slew many of them and carried others off into bondage. And then they were compelled to restore Damietta again to the Saracens for their lives and the liberty of the captives and to make an eight years’ truce with them. And thereupon the Saracens escorted them to Acre, where naught was known of the Cross of Christ, but God’s own mercy restored it to them.)34

This portrayal of the “Saracens” is dehumanizing, in a sense, because they act only within the limits that God has set for them, but it is nothing compared to the dehumanizing rhetoric in some of the translated romances. These include the Song of Roland, Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle, Pèlerinage de Charlemagne, and Boeve de Haumtone, whose Welsh versions all date from the thirteenth century. The dehumanizing mode is exemplified in the description of the “Saracen” Copart from Ystorya Bown o Hamtwn, the Welsh version of Boeve:

Ef a wyl ar diwycyat dyn ryw aniueil gobraff y veint ar nys gwelsei eiroet y gyfelyb. A ffon hayarn braff oed yn y law, ac ny allei degwyrr crfyf y dwyn un cam rac y thrymet. . . . Y rwg y deu lygat yd oed teir troetued elhaeth a thal mawr amhyl, a duach oed no’r muchyd. A thrwyn praff-froenuoll oed idaw a choesseu hir-lymony yscyrnic. Gwallt y ben oed vegys rawn meirych gre. Y lygeit oedyn gymeint a’r dwy sawsser vwyaf ry welsei neb eiroet. Hw y oed y ddanned noc ysgithred y baed coet hwya y ysgithred, a geneu gobraf oed idaw. A ffn dywettei dan agori y safyn vegys hen ellgi bwn, aneglu agharueid y dywedei. A breicheu hirion cadarn ac ewined
calet-lym, a chyn galettet oed y ewined yn wir ac nat oed mur maen yn y Gristonogaeth nys diwreidei ef yn gwbyl yn vn dyd.\textsuperscript{35}

([The hero, Bown] saw some sort of animal in the guise of a man, huge in stature: he had never seen the like. And he [Copart] had a great iron staff in his hand, and ten strong men would not have been able to carry it one pace because of its weight... Between his two eyes, there was a three-foot expanse and a big, broad forehead, and he was blacker than jet. And he had a big, wide-nostrilled nose and long, bare, bony legs. The hair on his head was like the rough hair of stud-horses. His eyes were as big as the two biggest saucers anyone ever saw. His teeth were longer than the tusks of the wild boar with the longest tusks, and he had a huge mouth. And whenever he spoke, opening his jaws like an old bird-dog, his speech was indistinct and foul. And [he had] long powerful arms with hard, bare nails, and his nails were so hard, in truth, that there was no stone wall in Christendom that he could not demolish in a single day.) (translation mine)

The substance of this description scarcely differs from the Anglo-Norman text, although the narrative style is that of traditional Welsh prose, as Erich Poppe has repeatedly shown.\textsuperscript{36} It is afterward made clear that Copart—whose physical appearance he claims is typical of his race—is a pagan who swears by Terwygawnt (Tervagant) (l.579); defeated by Bown, he becomes Bown’s faithful page and is duly baptized.

From a Celtic studies perspective, what is most interesting about the portrayal of this ugly gwr du (black man) (l. 589) is the degree of overlap with the description of the otherworldly forester in the Mabinogion romance Owein, who is also a gwr du:

A gwr du mawr a wely yn penn yr orssed ny bo llei no deuwr o wyry byt hwn; ac yn troet yssyd idaw, ac yn llygat yg knewillyn y tal; a ffôn yssyd idaw o hayarn, a diheu yw ytti nat oes deuwr yn y byt ny chaffo eu llwyth yn y ffôn. Ac nyt gwr anhygar yw: gwr hagyr yw ynteu.\textsuperscript{37}

(And you will see a big black man on top of the mound, no smaller than two men of this world; and he has one foot, and one eye in the middle of his forehead; and he has a staff of iron, and I assure you that there are not two men in the world who would not find their burden in the staff [i.e., who would be able to lift it]. And he is not an unamiable man; but he is ugly.) (translation mine)

In her recent translation of this tale, Sioned Davies declines to render gwr du mawr literally, as “a big black man”: she writes “black-haired man,” arguing that in Welsh, “an adjective denoting colour, when employed to describe a human, usually denotes hair colour or colour of clothing”—this is true of the Gaelic languages as well.\textsuperscript{38} But the corresponding passage in Chrétien de Troyes’s Yvain calls the giant “uns vileins qui
resanbloit Mor (a churl who looked like a Moor)” (l. 287), with elephant ears. Although the relationship between Yvain and Owein has still not been fully elucidated, it appears that Owein responds to some degree to Chrétien’s romance. Notwithstanding the Celtic affinities of the one-eyed forest dweller (which Davies mentions in her note), it is possible that the marvels of the Celtic otherworld have begun to fuse with those of the mystic East in this Welsh romance, as has already been observed to happen in medieval French and English texts.

Furthermore, consider a reader of Owein in the famous White Book of Rhydderch and Red Book of Hergest, the major compilations of medieval Welsh prose. Such a reader would (if browsing through these codices from start to finish) have come across Owein only after many texts featuring “Saracens” and dark-skinned races, usually in conflict with Christians. For example, in the White Book as reconstructed by Daniel Huws, one reaches the Mabinogion tales only after working through about five quires of religious literature, including the translation of Imago Mundi; four quires of translated literature dealing with Charlemagne and the Matter of France; and five quires of Bown o Hamtwn. The Red Book similarly contains Ystorya de Carolo Magno, a Welsh version of the Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle into which Cân Rolant (The Song of Roland) has been inserted, prior to any of the Mabinogion tales; and the Welsh version of the Pèlerinage de Charlemagne immediately precedes Owein. Regardless of the composer’s original intention, Owein, as it was codicologically performed for a fourteenth-century readership, could expect an audience primed to understand the gwr du as a black-skinned rather than a black-haired man, suggestive of a “Saracen” or Moor.

The Welsh translation of the Song of Roland, Cân Rolant, invites some further comment. One “Reinallt Vrenhin yr Ynyssoed”—to be identified as Reginald, king of Man and the Western Isles (1188–1226, d. 1229)—is apparently credited with giving the first impetus to the Welsh translation of texts about Charlemagne, so that once again there is a Scandinavian catalyst for Celtic–Muslim relations. The Welsh translator stays close to his source, and there are iterations of the standard chanson de geste refrain that if a particular Muslim had only been Christian, he would have been an exemplary knight. For example, we are introduced to “Marsli, vrenin yr Yspaen, . . . yr hwnn petvei ganthaw fyd Catholic ni ellid caffel gwr brudach na gwell noc ef (Marsli, king of Spain, than whom, if he had the Catholic faith, it would not be possible to find a man wiser or better).” The translator drastically shortens static scenes, such as the “Saracens” arming for battle, and focuses his attention on individual scenes of combat, where “he spares no detail, no matter how gruesome.” Some of his phrasing evokes the traditional diction of the Mabinogion tales, such as
Furthermore, Erich Poppe has pointed out that there is a uniquely Welsh concern for bonds of social cohesion:

[Archbishop Turpin explains the Christian knights’ obligation to compensate Christ for his death for them on the cross, and the insistence on the social concept of gift and counter-gift, from which arises kedymdeithas [companionship] with its duties and obligations, is absent from the parallel passages in the French versions in the Oxford and Venice manuscripts as well as in the Old Norse version. The importance of companionship and solidarity between the warriors is again highlighted in a situation when Rolant feels that kymydeithas “companionship” and vnolder “unity” between himself and Oliuer are threatened, and such a discussion of their relationship is [again unique to the Welsh text]. Interestingly, the most striking innovation in this respect would appear to occur in the scenes depicting the forging of the alliance between the Spanish pagans and Gwenlwyd with the aim to destroy Rolant. References to gifts and the obligations arising from them abound and make explicit the socially binding powers of such arrangements.48

The Muslims qua Muslims are not themselves a matter of particular concern for the Welsh translator.

Poppe has noticed a number of similar instances in the Early Modern Irish tale of Bevis of Hampton, in which the translation, apparently from a Middle English source, has been changed to conform not only to the traditional prose style of Irish sgéalta rómánsaíochta (romantic tales) but also to the cultural values of the target audience. One example relates to the portrayal of Muslims. After killing the knight Grainnder and taking his horse, Bibus (the Irish Bevis) arrives at the castle of Grainnder’s brother seeking food. In the Middle English text, it is specified that the castle’s owner is a pagan who hates Christians and will attack them on sight (the killing of his brother merely aggravates him further), whereas in the Irish text, his household extends hospitality to Bibus at first, and he attacks only when he learns that Bibus has killed his brother.50 The anti-Muslim element has been muted by Irish insistence on the fundamental importance of extending hospitality to everyone; esáin (driving away; i.e., refusal of hospitality) was a serious offense under native Irish law.52 Likewise, Bibus forbears to make a joke about killing Grainnder that occurs in the Middle English text (that he tonsured the pagan and “made him a priest” by splitting his skull) and instead attempts to justify his possession of Grainnder’s horse as a prize taken lawfully in combat rather than by theft, an accusation to which the Middle English Bevis simply does not respond. In general, readers may observe that the Irish tale of Bibus, though still having the hero kill great numbers “d’Erristinibh
d’Iubulaib (of Saracens and Jews),” is not preoccupied with the religious aspects of his battles. His opponents are more like the giants of traditional Irish wonder-tales: Escobard, the Escopart/Copart character, is first described as “in fomoir ficha, forniata, sirgrana, 7 in t-atch ainmín, anaccarrach, 7 bile bunnremur, barlethan, re gualaind (a fierce, warlike, horrible giant, and a rough, savage champion, with a stout, broad-topped tree on his shoulder)” — notice that there is no mention of “blueness” or “blackness.” Although giants in general are more likely to figure in the “Fenian” tales associated with Finn mac Cumaill (Finn Mac Cool), the term fomoir (giant) used here actually has a great deal of traditional resonance: the Fomoiri (pl.), a race of supernatural maritime invaders, were the opponents of the ancient gods of Ireland, the Túatha Dé Danann, in the core text of the early Irish “Mythological Cycle,” Caith Maige Tuired (The [Second] Battle of Mag Tuired). Like the heroes of the Irish Arthurian romances, Bibus adventures in a world both international and culturally familiar. It is to be noted, again in connection with hospitality, that immediately before meeting Escobard, Bibus has stopped to make food for the princess he is escorting, something he does not trouble to do in the French, English, or even Welsh versions.

Although the episode involving Grainnder’s brother was not revised in the same way in Ystorya Bown, hospitality was also a major issue for the Welsh. The fourteenth-century poet Iolo Goch composed a satire on Madog ap Hywel, supposed by Dafydd Johnston to be “an ecclesiastic in the diocese of St Asaph . . . who had refused to welcome the poet in his house,” in which he calls his target “Mahomet’s heart”:

Cail mail mileinddeddf, neud cynneddf caff,
Cwlm ysgwthr, twnffed, calon Mahumed

... Cymwrn burm ysgai, cymaint à dimai
I gan y bawai ni graffai’r graff.

(Churlish sheep trough, it’s a grasping nature, carved knot, funnel, Mahomet’s heart,

... pile of scummy yeast, pincers could not seize so much as a halfpenny from the filthy wretch.)

The sense of calon Mahumed may simply be that Madog is unchristian in his lack of hospitality, or it may be more specific, meaning that he is greedy or stingy.

It is not clear how much, if anything, the Welsh or Irish understood about the Prophet Muḥammad. There are relatively late (fifteenth-
sixteenth-century) translations of Mandeville’s *Travels* into Irish and Welsh, both derive from the so-called Defective Version in Middle English, and these ultimately give the most explicit accounts of Islamic belief that can be found in any of the Celtic languages. However, a comparison of chapter fifteen of the Irish text, on the beliefs of the Saracens, with the corresponding chapter (thirteen) of the Defective Version indicates that the Irish translator stuck closely to his source; there are no significant differences. More intriguing, perhaps, is the way the translator, Fingin O’Mahony (d. 1496), modifies the introductory material; as Higgins remarks, he “do[es] not make [his] changes within the authorial form; rather, [he] alter[s] the form itself, calling text, audience, and author into being in [a] different way.” After giving the location of the book as Ross Broin in the territory of the Uí Echach of Munster and the author’s name as *Seon Mandauil* (John Mandeville), “a knight of the king of England’s household” (later he locates it in time by giving the names of the Gaelic chieftains then living), O’Mahony names himself and states, “Óir iss é do chuir an lebursa a berlai 7 a Laidin, a Greigc 7 a h[E]abra a nGaeidhilgc do thseolad na sliged ar muir 7 ar tír co Hierusalem da gach aen le budh mían dol da oiliethri ann (For ’tis he that put this book out of English and Latin and Greek and Hebrew into Gaelic to shew the ways, on sea and on land, to Jerusalem unto every one who may desire to go in pilgrimage thither).” This multiplicity of languages is a fiction but one that was calculated to raise the status of the work in the eyes of the Irish. Fénius Farsaid, said to have fashioned the Irish language by cutting out the best parts of the different languages that arose at the Tower of Babel, was also credited with the invention of the Latin, Greek, and Hebrew alphabets together with the Irish *ogam* script. In claiming to have derived his text from these three sacred languages as well as English, O’Mahony boasts of a similar feat: a synthesis of international discourse.

Earlier I referred to Celtic-language literary depictions of the Muslims as almost wholly derivative. But it may be more productive to see them as participatory. As Grahame Davies puts it with regard to the Welsh, “Welsh people are shown sharing, for good or ill, the attitudes of their island and their age” in their literary attitudes toward Muslims; “[t]hat the attitudes they expressed were largely similar to those of English, or indeed European, contemporaries does not make them less Welsh.” The Celtic-speaking peoples are often perceived as being somehow mystical, uniquely attuned to nature and the supernatural, and uniquely tolerant of other cultures. This nineteenth-century perspective overlooks the fact that, the richness of their original compositions notwithstanding, a very great deal of the extant literature in the medieval Celtic languages
consists of translations from Latin, French, and English. Borrowing—and, in a limited way, responding to—literary depictions of Muslims was one of many ways in which Celtic-language writers, themselves implicated in similarly exoticizing and unflattering depictions by their proto-imperialist neighbors, joined in broader European discourse.

Notes


2. Davies is the author of *Wales and Islam* (Bridgend, Wales: Seren Books, forthcoming 2011), which, for the first time, will survey Welsh attitudes toward the Muslims as expressed in literature from the Middle Ages to the present. I am grateful to him for generously sharing some of his unpublished work with me, including “The Welsh and the Muslims: Contact, Coexistence and Conflict in Nine Centuries of Literature,” a lecture delivered at Harvard University on April 8, 2009. My quotations of Grahame Davies are from this lecture or the opening chapter of his forthcoming book.


5. “Regardless of whether they were (supposed to be) Norsemen, Romans, Arabians, Anglo-Normans: the disqualifying alterity of the enemy could not be more radically emphasized than by situating it on the religious plane, where it resonates [with descriptions of the religiously articulated Other] throughout Space and Time.” Lenoir, *Étude sur la Chanson d'Aiquin*, 536 (translation mine).


7. Ibid., 579. Geraldine Heng argues that the giants of Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia Regum Britanniae* are expressions of both Welsh-Breton narrative traditions and the trauma of the First Crusade and might in that sense be regarded as Muslim-Celtic hybrids; see her *Empire of Magic: Medieval Romance and the Politics of Cultural Fantasy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 19–21.


16. Ibid., 62.

17. According to Smyth, *Scandinavian Kings* (162), these events can be dated from Arabic sources to between 859 and 861.

Ancient Sources by Dubhaltach mac Firbisigh (Dublin: Irish Archaeological and Celtic Society, 1860), 162–63.

19. Geriadur Prifysgol Cymru, s.v. “blowmon.” Blewmon/blowmon is the term for “black man” used in texts like Henry Lewis and P. Diverres, eds., Delwy Byd (Imago Mundi) (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1928), or the translated Charlemagne material; it is attested from the fourteenth century on and appears to be borrowed from Middle English (Middle English Dictionary, s.v. “bleu-man, blō-man”) rather than Old Norse. The bleu-/blō-part of the English word is probably from Old Norse blá- but could also be from French (Middle English Dictionary, s.v. “blō, adj.”).


24. The headless men should perhaps be understood as blemmyae, or chest-faced men, familiar from more “mainstream” medieval writings, rather than decapitated men. It is possible that there is some connection between the “blue men” here and modern Scottish Gaelic folklore about supernatural Blue Men in the Hebrides (see Donald A. Mackenzie, Scottish Folk-Lore and Folk Life [London and Glasgow: Blackie & Son Ltd., 1935], 85–98), but the connection is by no means as clear as Mackenzie claims. Alan D. Macquarrie discusses Scottish Gaelic traditions associated with the Crusades: “The Crusades and the Scottish Gaidhealtachd in Fact and Legend,” in The Middle Ages in the Highlands, ed. L. Maclean (Inverness: Inverness Field Club, 1981), 130–41.

25. Dáibhí Ó Cróinin, ed., The Irish Sex Aetates Mundi (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1983); Lewis and Diverres, Delw y Byd. Famous examples of the codicological placement of these texts include the Irish Lebor na hUidre (Book of the dun cow) (beginning of the twelfth century), which opens with Sex Aetates Mundi, and the Welsh White Book of Rhydderch (ca. 1350) and Red Book of Hergest (ca. 1400), in which Delw y Byd appears early on.


40. I would add *Huon de Bordeaux* (in which the fairy king, Oberon, has a Celtic genealogy), *Huon de Méry’s Tournoiement Antécrist* (in which the protagonist is taken prisoner by a Moor in the forest of Brocéliande after throwing water on the fountain from Chrétien’s *Yvain*), and *Les Merveilles de Rigomer* (in which King Arthur’s knights discover Eastern heretics, black monks, and cynocephali landing in the west of Ireland) to the stories of “Saracen” encounters mentioned earlier in this chapter.

41. *White Book of Rhydderch* (National Library of Wales, MSS Peniarth 4 and 5; ca. 1350) and *Red Book of Hergest* (Oxford, Jesus College MS 111; ca. 1400).


45. Ibid., ll. 6–7, pp. 102–3.

46. Ibid., 89.

47. A similar understanding is expressed by the eighth-century Irish poet Blathmac, son of Cú Brettan, when he condemns the Jews for crucifying Christ; he says they violated legal bonds of clientship (célside) and “violated their counter-obligations” for the favors they had received from God. See James Carney, ed. and trans., *The Poems of Blathmac son of Cú Brettan together with the Irish Gospel of Thomas and a Poem on the Virgin Mary* (Dublin: Irish Texts Society, 1964), 34–37, for the text, and Tomás Ó Cathasaigh, “The Sister’s Son in Early Irish Literature,” *Peritia* 5 (1986): 130–32 [128–60], for analysis.


49. The range of Early Modern Irish, the standardized language of the bardic schools, is ca. 1200–ca. 1650. The Irish tale of Bevis is preserved in a fifteenth-century manuscript, Trinity College Dublin MS H. 2. 7 (= 1298), which also relates the adventures of various Irish kings and heroes, Hercules, and Guy of Warwick. See Fred Norris Robinson, ed. and trans., *The Irish Lives of Guy of Warwick and Bevis of Hampton* (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1907). On the general subject of translations...

54. Ibid., 193, 216.
60. For the Irish text, see Stokes, “Gaelic Maundeville,” 226–37; for the Middle English text, see Michael C. Seymour, ed., *The Defective
Version of Mandeville’s Travels (Oxford: Oxford University Press for the Early English Text Society, 2002), 56–64. For general discussion of Mandeville’s Travels, see Ian Macleod Higgins, Writing East: The “Travels” of Sir John Mandeville (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997); Tzanaki, Mandeville’s Medieval Audiences; and Akbari, Idols in the East, especially 20–68). The kinds of differences that do exist in the Irish text are sometimes intriguing. At the end of chapter fourteen, when describing the frozen land that one must cross to reach the land of the “Saracens” from Prussia, the Irish text asserts that “ní bí duine ’sa tír sin cin luirg (there is no one in that country without a club)” (62–63); Stokes remarks that “club” should read “stove.” Vernam Hull, in his notes on the text in the Fred Norris Robinson Celtic Seminar Library, Harvard University, suggests that the translator read *stave* rather than *stove* in his English source.

61. Higgins, Writing East, 58. This observation is also true of the Welsh Mandeville; see n58 in this chapter.
CHAPTER 3

PRESTER JOHN, CHRISTIAN ENCLOSURE, AND THE SPATIAL TRANSMISSION OF ISLAMIC ALTERITY IN THE TWELFTH-CENTURY WEST

Christopher Taylor

The Other of the Other only exists as a place. It finds its place even if we cannot find it anywhere in the real, even if all we can find to occupy this place in the real is simply valid insofar as it occupies this place, but cannot give it any other guarantee than that it is in its place.

—Jacques Lacan

Nec ignoro equidem, quoniam scriptura ista quae perditis illis in propria lingua prodesse non potuit, in Latinam versa minus proderit. Sed proderit fortassis aliquibus Latinis, quos et de ignotis instruct, et quam damnabilis sit heresis, quae ad aures eorum peruncerat, impugnando et expugnando ostendet.

—Peter the Venerable to Bernard of Clairvaux (Letter 111)¹

In 1142 Peter the Venerable (also known as Peter of Montboissier), abbot of Cluny, traveled to Spain at the request of Emperor Alfonso VII with the ostensible goal of visiting the Cluniac monasteries of Spain.² Having established a reputation for reform during his twenty-year abbacy (a crucial time in the history of Cluny), Peter had also recently emerged as a powerful international figure, shadowed in influence perhaps only by his friend (and sometimes rival) Bernard of Clairvaux. Although contemporary records show that Peter did indeed perform his immediate duties as a visiting abbot, he fulfilled the major goal of his trip elsewhere in Spain—that of assembling a group of scholars who would together produce a systematic Latin account of Islamic doctrine.
Despite the inauguration of a Crusade against Islam nearly fifty years earlier, very little knowledge about actual Muslim beliefs circulated in the Latin West prior to these military engagements. Not until the twelfth century did Christians north of the Pyrenees begin truly to understand and domesticate what had hitherto been figured as a mostly foreign danger.\(^3\) The Visigoths who fled to the kingdom of the Franks during Charlemagne’s rule must have imparted at least a vague sense of the cultural and military competence of Islam, but because Spanish Muslim expansion tended to the west rather than the north, Latin Christians seemed to return the imperial gaze of Islam with little more than a cursory glance.

As late as the twelfth century, the Latin texts circulating around the idea of Islam tended to focus on Muḥammad and inserted the prophet into a highly imaginative genealogy of heretics and pagans hostile to the Christian faith.\(^4\) Peter’s was the first attempt to identify and translate the actual doctrine of Islam into the language of the Catholic Church. Sensing that a military engagement with Islam had its limitations, Peter maintained, in opposition to his friend Bernard, that the elimination of the Islamic threat could only be achieved if its doctrinal relationship to Christianity could be understood and refuted.\(^5\) In his estimation, the reconciliation of Islam to the Christian faith would prove a far more impressive feat than vanquishing the Muslims.

At the center of the so-called Toledan Collection was Englishman Robert of Ketton’s *Lex Mahumet pseudoprophete*, the first Latin translation of the Qur’an. Framed with texts that related the genealogy, deeds, beliefs, and errors of Muḥammad, Robert’s translation rendered a primarily orally transmitted religious code into a speculative object to be studied alongside Christian texts. For the first time in Latin Christendom, Islam was granted an ideological space. Once recognized, this space could be Christianized. Compared to Bernard of Clairvaux, Peter expressed a comparatively nonviolent attitude toward religious conflict; yet Bernard and Peter shared a fundamental belief in the importance of surrounding the Islamic Other in order to undermine its efficacy—militaristically on the one hand and linguistically on the other. After all, although Islam wavered in the Christian imagination between a “divine scourge” and the belief system of a heresiarch meant to usher in the Apocalypse, Islam’s military impact testified to its significance in the narrative of Christian history.

The decade that produced the 1143 Latin Qur’an pivotally challenged the possibility for a united Latin Christendom, which Pope Urban II had promised to a mostly French audience at the Council of Clermont in 1095. As an exhaustive outline of alterity, Peter’s translation project
reflected the historical Christian uncertainties under which it was produced and received: unstable leadership (four popes in the decade), the ascendancy of the Cistercians, the fall of Edessa (1144), the unsuccessful Second Crusade that resulted therefrom (1145), and the seeds of the now infamous legend of Prester John (1145). Latin Christians in the twelfth century began to express a hope that as Islam emerged out of abstraction in the Christian imagination, borders between Islam and Christian could be properly marked, a distinctive Christian identity could be produced, and the new ideological space granted to Islam could be recaptured under the banner of a newly united Christendom. When hope gave way to experience, however, Christians began to rely increasingly on prophecy and legend to make intelligible the difficulties faced during the crusading movement and to situate war with Islam within a Christianized teleological narrative.

In this chapter, I will discuss two coterminous spatial fantasies aimed at flattening the relationship between Christianity and Islam. The first, Robert of Ketton’s *Lex Mahumet*—which encapsulated the message of Islam in the language of the Church and surrounded it with glosses, commentary, and marginal notes—makes an explicit connection between the linguistic and spatial representations of Islamic alterity. Robert’s Qur’an presents its reader with a series of enclosures: Islam is enclosed into Latin, and each sura is enclosed into Robert’s distillation of its meaning. Along with the twelfth-century preoccupation with heresy, the Latin Qur’an shows that during the twelfth century, the Church often valorized the peripheral as a more urgent theological concern than the central identity delimiting the outside from inside in the first place. I hope to show that the *Lex Mahumet* seeks the preservation and territorial extension of a *societas Christiana* in such a way that it comes to resemble the violent efforts of the crusading movement that it was formulated to subtend.

The emphasis on the spaces *outside* Latin Christendom provides a transition to the second spatial fantasy that I consider—that of the Prester John legend. Specifically, I turn to the opaque political and religious anxieties expressed in the Latin *Letter of Prester John* (ca. 1165), which detailed the plans of a heterodox Christian king ruling over an East untouched by Islamic expansion. At the most basic level, Prester John comprises the other half of a Christian geographical enclosure of Islam that offers the West imagined support in the project of vanquishing Islam. By providing an anchoring point from which the events of religious conflict might be cast into their desired eschatological significance, the arrival of Prester John becomes the Latin Christian event meant to signal the reality of universal earthly salvation. Upon closer examination, however, the continual dissemination of the legend despite Prester John’s perpetually
belated arrival reveals a version of Christian enclosure that simultaneously contains and reifies crucial questions of otherness embodied by Islam.

Through Prester John, I explore Cary Howie’s contention that medieval attempts to enclose alterity ultimately produce an identity crisis “where it is unclear whether we who find ourselves in these spaces possess or are possessed by them.” In other words, rather than projecting a confident Latin Christian identity, the Prester John legend ultimately signifies the Latin Christian reluctance to engage ideologically with Islam in a direct manner and instead posits an imagined Christian community from which the West can better control the relationship between Christian and Muslim identity. I end the chapter by arguing that this spatial desire for a delimited and finite alterity bears back on language, specifically via the metalinguistic fantasy of an Other of the Other.

A War of Words

Although Peter planned the codex (referred to now as the Toledan Collection MS 1162 of Bibliotheque de l’Arsenal in Paris) primarily for use at Cluny, the creative labor and the eventual historical audience for the project were much more diverse. Peter assembled a research and translation team that included an English theologian and scientist (Robert of Ketton), a French academic (Peter of Poitiers), a Mozarab Christian (Peter of Toledo), a Dalmatian astronomer (Herman of Carinthia), and an Iberian Muslim named Moḥammed. The twenty-five extant manuscripts containing the Latin Qur’an itself testify to the popularity it gained and mark it as the most successful of the three earliest translations of the Qur’an. Some of the texts in the original codex predictably reflected the most common refutations of Islamic doctrine, including the popular Apology of al-Kindi (a disputatio between a Nestorian Christian and a Muslim about the relative merits of each faith). Peter the Venerable added a synthesized refutation of the major tenets of Islam (Liber contra sectam sive haeresim Saracenorum) along with four other texts that attempted to situate Islam—usually as Christian heresy rather than a separate faith—into the logic of Christian eschatology.

The care and respect that Robert exercised in the execution of the Latin Qur’an is quite astonishing. Robert took the translation process seriously, which resulted in a final product that actually resembled a work of Christian theology. Thomas Burman notes that Robert wrote in an elevated register of Latin usually reserved only for texts regarded with high esteem, which resulted in a text that “bespoke prestige and cultural validity,” even though readers were instructed to read the Qur’an as heresy. Burman remarks on the resemblance between
the Toledan Collection and a contemporary Christian scholar’s Bible, which exemplifies the extent to which the author-compiler worked to assimilate Islam into a Christian cultural paradigm. The coding of the Muslim faith as Christian heresy established a facile and tautological relationality between the two faiths—Islamic doctrine is known to be incorrect because it disagrees with the Christian doctrine to which it is so clearly indebted. In such a critical move, it is paradoxically the similarity, the intimacy perpetuated by negation and tension between Christianity and Islam, that provides the most stringent proof of the latter’s deviance from the true faith. Yet despite the book’s dependence on its inevitable refutation, the stylistic prestige bestowed upon the Toledan Collection legitimates the text itself as theologically significant—a testament to its centrality in the process of Christian identity formation during a time when the solidity of Latin Christianity was challenged by East-West divisions, heresies, the study of Islamic texts from within, and the threat of a militant Islam from outside.

Perhaps to avoid polemic, Robert interestingly writes that the translation was intended for Latinitas, which, as Burman points out, indicates a conscious decision to address his audience with a linguistic-cultural term rather than a religious category. Operating under the expectation that theologians (or other such religious figures at Cluny) would constitute the immediate audience for this text, Robert’s choice actually fused cultural-linguistic and theological communities. That is, an address to Latinitas implies that shared language (rather than shared belief) establishes the most important community for the interpretation of Scripture. Both Peter and Robert intended the translation to be regarded seriously, and, in fact, Robert’s translation later became a popular Scholastic text.

The integration of linguistic and religious interests reveals the proximity of these two modes of discourse for the meaning-making process. As a translator and editor, Robert took many liberties with the text, not necessarily with the intention of polemic but in order to provide Western Christians a sense of traditional Muslim exegetics. The result was a doctrinally accurate although highly paraphrased treatise translated “by sense, rather than the word” that nonetheless showed careful philological and hermeneutic considerations. Moreover, not only did Robert paraphrase each sura into a traditional sense of its meaning, he reorganized the structure and even excised entire passages in an effort to make the text his own. In dismantling and reconfiguring a revealed text, Robert situated a Christian hermeneutics at the center of Muslim identity while simultaneously deconstructing the charismatic integrity of the object against which Christian identity was buttressed.
Linguistic and theological interests coincide also in the relation between Robert’s sober text and the prescriptive commentary provided in the margins. As Rita Copeland has shown, manuscript marginalia bestow a final interpretive authority across space and time and sometimes overshadow the text itself. In this vein, Burman writes, “Robert’s Latin Qur’an finds itself, therefore, encircled within a hedge of marginal notes and jarring rubrics, hostile illustration and polemical accompanying works, all shedding light both on how the compilers of this manuscript read the Qur’an and how they thought other readers ought to and would read it.” Commentary not only guided the readers through an unfamiliar text but also assured them of the existence of an interpretive auctoritas aimed to disarm the equivocations of the reading process. Given the often noted relation between reading correctly and living correctly in the Middle Ages, this desire for textual assurance might represent a more urgent desire for stability at a time when the Christian identity faced ideological and military danger. The importance of reading correctly shifted the reader’s attention from the text itself to the marginalia. In the case of Lex Mahumet, the marginalia colored the neutral tone of Robert’s paraphrased translation with necessary polemical anti-Islamic warnings, which in turn, cemented shared Christian values.

The tension between the text and the commentary that refuted its doctrines showcases the process of hermeneutic violence while simultaneously betraying a more intimate relationship between the two faiths than had been historically considered. Despite the scrupulous respect awarded to the presentation of Qur’anic sura, the marginalia ultimately rendered the translation itself secondary. In a sense, the translation served only to catalyze the apologetic Christian glosses, which provided a refutation and a strict delineation of what distinguishes sanctioned doctrine from heresy. In fact, the original glosses themselves were copied into a large number of later manuscripts. In the words of Burman, “the heretical scripture of Christendom’s principal rival thus became an authoritative source of arguments against that very rival.”

Emphasizing the dialectical nature of identity formation, much late twentieth-century “theory” emphasizes the importance of the relation between subject and the Other that determines its place in the world. What results is the paradoxical production of a subject that cannot be dissociated from its constitutive Other—this closeness shared between subject and Other is known through Lacan as extimacy—the idea that what seems most foreign is often the most fundamental to our being. Although Peter and his team rendered the Holy Book of Islam into the language of Western Christendom in order to establish the separation between the two religions, its ultimate effect attests to a desire to see
them more intimately bound. The physical layout of *Lex Mahumet* provides the very visualization of extimacy: the details of Islamic doctrine were located at the very center of a codex that resembled a Christian theological work and was surrounded by the authoritative Christian language. Within the confines of the codex, the fantasy of clear separation was spatially apparent: the marginal glosses reinforced the Christian doctrine from which the Qur’an heretically deviated. Yet these separate doctrines also shared, for the first time, a language, and because Islam remained genealogically dependent on Christianity in the codex (it is consistently coded as heresy), they also shared a common origin. Far from clarifying the separation between the Christian subject and “the most diabolical of heresies,” the Toledan Collection instead highlights their codependence and suggests that Latin Christianity is best understood relationally through its deviation from heresy.

Meanwhile, as scholars pursued Christian meaning textually, widespread crusade and travel helped enact the search for, and expansion of, a Christian universe. Earlier European discovery of Eastern Christians during pilgrimages to and from the Crusader territories had created an expectation that Christians were, in fact, achieving global presence. The importance of crusading was expanding, now implicated in larger political, religious, and cultural developments. Latin Christians were not only battling for territorial security; they were also fighting on behalf of the nascent notion of universal Christendom and the fantasy of ideological and theological supremacy associated with these power structures. Viewed in this light, the belief in a Christianized East—of an Orient controlled by a powerful Christian sovereign—reflects a desire not unlike the attempt to encapsulate the text of Islam within a larger Christian paradigm. The persistent survival of this geographical fantasy beyond any rational belief of its possibility testifies to the strength of a faith in unity, especially in periods of extreme duress.

**The Persistence of (Fabricated) Memory**

Although the crusading period birthed numerous prophecies and divinations, no narrative has sustained its audience’s interest quite like the Prester John legend.\(^{24}\) As a product of cultural imaginings and questionably recounted historical events, Prester John has commanded consistent interest, both popular and scholarly, since the inauguration of the legend in 1145.\(^{25}\) The fictional Latin *Letter of Prester John*, which detailed the magnificent Christian kingdom beyond the threat of an ever-expanding Islam, has inspired a literal and metaphorical hunt for the elusive patriarch from the twelfth through the eighteenth century.\(^{26}\) The *Letter* survives in
over three hundred manuscripts, which makes it one of the most enduring and popular texts of the Middle Ages (compare it, for example, to the seventy-seven manuscripts of Marco Polo). Although more than one hundred of the manuscripts are Latin, the Letter also appears in French, Italian, German, English, Hebrew, Serbian, and Russian. Centuries of subsequent travel narratives about the East have required at least a mention of John’s kingdom in their accounts.

The first record of Prester John occurs in the German Bishop Otto of Freising’s 1145 chronicle of Christian history, *Chronica sive historia de duabus civitatibus*, based loosely on a comparison between the heavenly kingdom of Jerusalem and the earthly kingdom of Babel. In the *Historia*, Otto (generally considered a reliable historical authority) recites a compelling story given to him by Bishop Hugh of Jabala. Hugh tells Otto that while he was at the court of Pope Eugenius III, he heard talk of a Nestorian Christian prince, Iohannes. Iohannes was descended from the Three Magi and living beyond Armenia; he had recently conquered Persia and began a mission to Jerusalem when, thwarted by a flooded Tigris River, he was forced to return to his kingdom.

Twentieth-century historians have shown that Hugh’s account refers to the 1141 defeat of a group of Seljuk Turks by the Qara Khitai. Hardly a group of utopian Christians, the Qara Khitai, a nomadic tribe from Manchuria, actually included large concentrations of Nestorian Christians and Muslims. This group represented the vestiges of the Chinese Liao dynasty and had recently established an empire in Central Asia (though they were themselves on the verge of destruction by the Mongols of the steppe). Like the later prophecies of the Fifth Crusade, which mapped the ascension of Genghis Khan onto the arrival of Prester John, Otto’s *Historia* betrays the zeal of Western Christians to translate the happenings of the East into discernibly useful material for Christian eschatology to support the desire for a universal *societas Christiana*.

Given that Edessa, the earliest established Crusader territory, had been lost to the Seljuks months before the completion of Otto’s *Historia* in 1144, Crusaders were in fact seeking divine support for their actions. Not coincidentally, as Muslim expansion continued, Prester John began to attain legendary status in the Christian imagination. The narrative potential of the legend began to reflect its real use value such that the location and itinerary of Prester John became mapped (often belatedly) onto current events to keep alive the hopes of Christian universalism. Strange narrative similarities between Christian Edessa and Christian India suggest a topographical alliance between the known Western and unknown Eastern spheres of Christianity, which strategically enclosed a Muslim threat between two Christianized limits,
though the Western legend of Prester John shows these borders to be hardly impermeable.

In the Letter itself, John boasts of an Eastern Christian kingdom bordering paradise that surpasses the power and virtue of any other Christian principality. Although ostensibly addressed to the Byzantine emperor Manuel, with whom “John” takes a hostile tone, the Letter likely circulated around Latin Europe rather than the territories of the Greek Empire—a more implicit nod to Latinitas. Throughout the Letter, the author balances Occidental familiarities (Christian values, crusading promises) with the inscrutable limit point from which those ideals are perfectly manifest. The superlative wealth of Prester John’s kingdom that surpasses “all the riches which are under heaven” aligns John with traditional accounts of Eastern wealth and yet sets his kingdom apart as somehow surmounting the limits of Eastern opulence. In terms of (Christian) virtue and power, Prester John eclipses all worldly kings. The spatial landscape of the kingdom is plotted as thoroughly Christian even as it asymptotically approaches the very bounds of the earth: “From the farthest India, where the body of St. Thomas the Apostle rests, to the place where the sun rises.” The Letter contends that Prester John plans to visit the Holy Sepulchre and destroy all enemies of Christianity. The riches of John’s realm confirm Western fantasies of an exotic East teeming with treasures, which are then imaginatively appropriated for Western hopes by way of John’s Christianity.

Throughout the Letter, the author mentions the fantastic sites found in John’s land: a pseudoparadise, the shrine of St. Thomas, the Tower of Babel, Mt. Olympus, the tomb of the prophet Daniel, the fountain of youth, and the dwelling place of the ten lost tribes of Israel, as well as the residence of the Amazons and Brahmans. The Letter’s presentation of the topography of Prester John’s kingdom via notable cultural-historical markers accords well with the way mappaemundi indicate topographical relationships through stories and legends inserted on a map. But it is one thing to say that the Letter contextualizes Prester John within a space of well-known geographical markers in the medieval imagination and quite another to realize that John does not merely exist among these markers but rules over them: “If you can count the stars in heaven, if you can count all the sands of the desert, you can calculate the extent of my kingdom.”

The content of the Letter draws upon content from traditional accounts of the marvelous, including Alexander narratives, lapidaries, bestiaries, and legends ranging from Herodotus to Isidore of Seville—material concerning the East that would be familiar to a Western audience. The Letter’s use of circulating legendary material establishes a precedent for
the kingdom and positions John, the ruler of this entire land, as a sovereign powerful enough to absorb this history of the unfamiliar without remainder. Despite the fact that seventy-two kings pay tribute to John, the Letter makes a point to mention that “few are Christian” (*quarum paucae sunt christianorum*). Indeed, John’s ability to manage difference is exemplified by the impressive catalog of creatures in the realm, which range from the familiar (camels and elephants) to the well-known mythical (griffins, phoenix, and satyrs) and the monstrous (dog-headed men, giants, one-eyed men). Prester John not only resides in the mysterious East; he owns and has domesticated a fantasy space that is the accumulated product of more than a millennium of travel accounts, legends, myths, and tales of the Oriental marvel.

John’s ability not only to withstand but also, in Hegelian terms, to sublate the Other offers Western Christianity a model of how to deal with its estimate Other, Islam—to strip it of power while granting its difference from Christianity. Prester John’s military policy valorizes humiliation and defeat (*humiari et debellare*) over the annihilation of threats, allowing John to make this alterity work under the banner of Christianity without destroying its productive potential. The Letter reveals that the popular idea of Islam as a Christian heresy—a formulation that the Letter patently rejects—may be an inaccurate description of a Western fantasy that redirected Islam’s power simply by disavowing its alterity.

Prester John’s significance as a figure of mediation has been addressed in Michael Uebel’s work on the legend. Uebel positions John’s kingdom as an intermediary between the Christian West and Muslim culture to help dissolve anxiety over Islamic alterity. For Uebel, the Prester John legend created a utopia in which “Western Europe embraced, rather than disavowed, the differences confronting it.” Marking a point at which “the suspension of disbelief becomes the activation of belief,” Uebel sees John’s kingdom as a neutral space where Latin Christians could confront otherness. Admittedly, Prester John’s Christianized otherness afforded Western Christians some security about their own identities, but an emphasis on mediation seems to ignore the geographic detail of the Letter and the military influence of the Prester John legend. If Prester John only offered Latin Christians a neutral space from which they might resolve anxieties about otherness and identity, the legend would not have factored so powerfully into crusading decisions. Although Uebel’s work makes a valuable contribution to studies of medieval approaches to alterity, I disagree with the arguments of neutrality and of the utopian character of John’s kingdom within the Letter and legend at large. Through an analysis of a series of doubles catalyzed by Prester John’s dual role as arbiter of the foreign and redeemer of the familiar, I hope to offer an
There Is No Other of the Other

Although both the Latin Qur’an and the Prester John legend posit a Christian presence that geographically haunts the very borders of Islamic possibility, they also betray the possibility that Muslims might occupy the center of Christianity. Islam had already once taken the navel of Christianity, Jerusalem, and was primed to retake it twenty years after the *Letter*’s initial appearance. Though the desire for Prester John indicates a drive for Latin Christians to overpower the Other by attempting to absorb it topographically, the legend’s preoccupation with borders (shared with the Latin Qur’an) also suggests a still-ductile Christian identity. Even as the Prester John *Letter* offers hope to the ideal of a universal Christendom, it admits a lack or loss of a stable Christian identity, as evidenced by the heterogeneity of John’s kingdom, including his own Nestorianism. Yet despite all the talk of heresy in the genres that help shape the *Letter*, the *Letter* itself never mentions the word. Instead, descriptions of the monstrous assure readers that, like Prester John, Christianity has seen everything and can therefore withstand anything. The *Letter* even proves the stamina of Christianity as it subtly incorporates Islamic influences into the construction of John’s realm and ruling practices.

The *Letter* follows the description of the realm’s creatures with a key phrase that invokes, for the first time, a trope familiar to the traditions of both Old Testament Israel and later the Islamic paradise: “Our land flows with honey and abounds with milk” (*Terra nostra melle fluit lacte habundati*). Whether or not this description alluded explicitly to the shared qualities between biblical Israel and the Qur’anic paradise, the image of rivers of milk and honey does stress the uncanny hybridity of Prester John: Christian, but a ruler of (mostly) pagan lands; ally and potential hero, but one whose presumably heterodox faith might gesture toward the most abhorrent of heresies, Islam. Here, the traditions of the biblical Israel and the Qur’anic paradise converge and ascribe to John’s realm a disjointed temporality that simultaneously represents the past and future. Consequently, the present becomes a no-place, a territory that begs for Christian presence and reclamation, the spirit of which paralleled the coterminous drive to fully inhabit Christian identity by retaking Jerusalem once and for all.

The description of the rivers of milk and honey opens a foray into the paradisiacal elements of John’s kingdom. Although the *Letter* states that this area is not itself “Paradise,” the mention of a river called Ydonus...
(suggesting Eden) winding around the entire province intimates the paradisiacal landscape mentioned in Genesis as well as in the Qur’an and Hadith. According to the Letter, the area is devoid of any venomous creature, contains magical plants, and is littered with precious gemstones. Each of these elements figures prominently in conceptions of the Islamic paradise.\footnote{45} The overt lack of scorpions and serpents evokes the imagery used in popular Islamic narratives about the perils of the grave for those who remain unbelieving.\footnote{46} The fountain of youth mentioned in the Letter keeps its users perpetually thirty-two years old: in at least one description of the Islamic paradise, the male inhabitants likewise remain permanently in their thirties.\footnote{47} The pseudoparadise is only one fantastic location among many in John’s realm, which works rhetorically to convey the immense topographical span of the world only to condense and encapsulate that vastness within John’s kingdom. The act of Christianizing the imaginative spaces of alterity implies that these spaces are not to be feared but rather ought to be recognized as mere cogs in the Christian cosmological machine.

The descriptions of John’s kingdom that echoed the Islamic conception of paradise seem to be especially in dialogue with the famed gardens of the Old Man of the Mountain (Rashid ad-Din Sinan, ca. 1132–1192). The Old Man of the Mountain, another figure of crusading lore, was a mysterious Muslim leader who, not unlike Prester John, occupied a heterotopic space in the crusading imagination and was even rumored to consider converting to Christianity.\footnote{48} Like John, the Old Man was thought to have created an artificial paradise on earth. At the center of this oasis was a palace protecting an ornate garden built in an immense and highly geometrical manner. At the top of the structure, the Old Man and his followers reveled in the finest in food, drink, and women. There the Old Man trained his devotees, known to the West as Assassins, to kill his enemies and promised reentrance once their missions were accomplished.\footnote{49}

The Letter of Prester John reveals a structure at the center of the kingdom that, though similarly geometric (a stacked series of halved columns), is strangely doubled. Uebel notes that this palatial tower remains a central organizing point in almost all versions of the Prester John legend and helpfully reduces the Letter’s wordy description of its construction to an image of “an inverted pyramid with another pyramid resting on its base.”\footnote{50} Rather than a giant orgy at the top of this geometric structure, there appears a giant magical mirror, which in the Latin Letter is guarded by 12,000 soldiers both day and night—curiously, the same number of angels guards the top of the ladder that leads into the afterworld in stories of Muḥammad’s ascension.\footnote{51} By way of this panoptical mirror, Prester
John oversees the doings of the entire world, and, moreover, the mirror shows what will occur in the future, allowing John to track the machinations of presumed enemies of Christianity everywhere.\textsuperscript{52} Whereas Muslims utilize their architectural genius for what Christians consider hedonistic pleasures, John, unaffected by the lure of material pleasure, achieves in earthly life what Islam can only guarantee in the afterlife.

It would be tempting to say that John merely represented a supreme Christian patriarch strong enough to carry the hopes of all of the Latin West; yet, if this were true, why not make Prester John the paragon of doctrinal Christian virtue? If the \textit{Letter} was intended to bolster crusader morale, why attribute theological arrogance to John and why imbue his kingdom with some of the same qualities (polygamy, Nestorianism, monstrosity) that Latin Christendom tried to cast out? Prester John’s reputed unorthodox faith posed a problem for at least some twelfth-century Christians, as evidenced by Pope Alexander III’s decision to send an envoy to Prester John in 1177 in order to educate him on the practices of Catholicism.\textsuperscript{53} Logically, twelfth-century Christians would associate deviance from Catholicism with heresy, so even if Prester John did embody the idealized potential of Latin Christianity, Latin Christians would be hard put to embrace him. To accede to John’s heterodoxy would force Latin Christians to recognize the functional legitimacy of a Christian alterity. However, the longevity of the belief in Prester John testifies to a cultural undercurrent that valorized the potential of an inclusive Christian subject over one split by doctrinal disputation. In other words, the legend’s desire to move beyond a typological view of the Christian subject destabilized the epistemological importance of heresy by emphasizing the natural spatial variance of the Christian landscape.

As mentioned earlier, most versions of the \textit{Legend} in some way orient Prester John’s kingdom around the site of the tomb of St. Thomas, which hints at a Christian precedent for the origin of John’s legend.\textsuperscript{54} According to Slessarev, the legendary elements that shape the stories of Prester John and St. Thomas forge a critically overlooked connection between the two Christian figures.\textsuperscript{55} Much contemporary geographical lore situated Thomas’s tomb in John’s India, and the \textit{Letter} establishes an even more thorough connection between the two figures. The \textit{Letter} compares John’s palace to that which Thomas built for King Gundafor and mentions John’s daily meal with the patriarch of St. Thomas. Most Latin Christians would not have been familiar with the St. Thomas tradition: the \textit{Acts} were Syrian in origin, and although later translated into Latin, they did not have much of a Western readership.\textsuperscript{57} Curiously, popular Latin legends about St. Thomas did not begin to circulate in the West until the time of the Prester John legend. Whereas traditional writings
about Thomas and the “Thomas Christians” (sometimes Nestorians) situate the apostle in India, at least four twelfth-century accounts of the deeds of the apostle locate the miracles of St. Thomas on a mountain just outside of the recently lost Crusader county of Edessa. The original third-century Syrian Acts of Thomas supports both locations, and some traditions position Thomas simultaneously in Edessa and India. The topographical confusion over the resting place of St. Thomas and the location of Prester John appears to intersect at specific and intriguing places, which suggests a relationship between the two figures that extends beyond their shared faith.

The competition between Edessa and India over the heritage of St. Thomas had implications of spiritual superiority and protection. Not only did Edessa hold the tomb of St. Thomas; it was also the stage of a recent Muslim takeover. Edessa had also been historically considered a valuable bed of Nestorianism ever since the School of Edessa’s professed support of Nestorius in the fifth century. Edessa supplies a strange parallel to the kingdom of Prester John—a traditionally Nestorian locale with a special relationship to St. Thomas that also had a more recent history as an important, yet recently conquered, Christian stronghold. As Edessa falls to the Muslims, Prester John’s kingdom remains the only Christian space that guarantees its borders to be impenetrable to Muslim forces.

Slessarev fails to detect the curious relationship among the Letter’s crusading rhetoric, St. Thomas’s alternate resting place in the crusader state Edessa, and the fall of crusader Edessa to the Muslims in 1144 (where the Christians lost an estimated 120,000 men). By an extraordinary coincidence, Eusebius’s “Presbyter John” hailed from Edessa, St. Thomas was killed and buried in India and then brought to Edessa, and the Letter of Prester John materialized only a year after the crusaders’ loss of Edessa. Regarded as one of the chief Christian cities at the time, Edessa was important not only for its Christian population but also for its strategic location as a Christian gateway to the East. Jerusalem might be the center of the Christian world, but Edessa, as the first crusader territory to be established and also the first to be lost, figures as the first success in the expansion of the limits of a Latin Christian empire.

If the legend of Prester John indeed represented (at least in part) the Latin West’s hopeful reimagining of a lost Edessa, it is appropriate for St. Thomas to be fitted with an elaborate tomb whose miracles could rival those of Islam’s most revered figure. Despite the lack of an obvious intertextual link between the two figures, Michael Uebel has noted that Western authors of the twelfth century invented a tradition without precedent, constructing separate legends that the tombs of Muhammad and St. Thomas floated in midair. Embrico of Mainz’s twelfth-century Vita
“Mahumeti, considered to be one of the earliest coherent Latin Christian responses to Islam, inaugurated the tradition that Muḥammad’s tomb was suspended in midair by magnets.\(^\text{62}\) Other twelfth-century portraits of Muḥammad—including the *Chanson d’Antioche* and Gautier de Compiègne’s *De oitia Machometi*—offer similar descriptions of Muḥammad’s tomb, envisioned in order to showcase the way in which Muḥammad feigned piety and miracles in order to assure adherents of his sanctity.\(^\text{63}\) Muslims were, of course, unlikely to be cognizant of either tomb’s tradition, given that these stories were entirely Latin Christian inventions. Rather, Western Christians seem implicitly to recognize a connection between the Eastern Christians’ adoration of the Apostle Thomas and the Muslims’ adulation of their Prophet Muḥammad.

As the association between Muslims and paganism began to fade in the eleventh century, Islam became increasingly correlated with Latin Christendom’s newfound preoccupation with heresy and reform. By the twelfth century, there was a well-established literary precedent for specifically linking Muslims with Nestorians as two of Latin Christendom’s more problematic groups of heretics. As Tolan notes, Aldelphus’s *Vita machometi* describes Muḥammad as “the Nestorius of the Agarenes” and has him marrying the Queen of Babylon.\(^\text{64}\) Tolan remarks that “all four authors [of twelfth-century Latin biographies of Muḥammad] insist on the spiritual heritage of Muḥammad: while the prophet himself claims affinity to Moses and Christ, the authors instead profess Muḥammad’s solidarity with the great heresiarchs of old, in particular Arius and Nestorius.”\(^\text{65}\) Additionally, along with “Tartars” (Mongols), Nestorians and Muslims were the two most widely mentioned groups in the travel narratives of the East authored by Latin Christians. In Odoric of Pordenone’s *Relatio*, an Eastern travel account that later influenced Mandeville, the Franciscan narrator even conflates the faiths of Nestorians and Muslims during a disputation in the well-known episode of the martyrdom of four Franciscan friars.\(^\text{66}\)

Thus, over time, Latin Europe’s preoccupation with these two “heresies” converged in the Latin Christian imaginary, which reinforces the separate but intimate relationship developing between a Nestorian Prester John and Islam. Although Uebel does note the shared tradition of the floating tomb in stories of St. Thomas and Muḥammad, he reads this overlap as indicative of a desire for stability against a fetishized Other.\(^\text{67}\) I instead would like to emphasize that the long historical precedent of pairing Nestorian and Muslim indicates that the particular qualities of Prester John were perhaps less of an accidental or even arbitrary production than often considered. It is my contention that Prester John embodies the deliberately uncanny specter of a powerful distant patriarch imbued
with all of the historical qualities of religious alterity, who, because always nonetheless coded as ally to the West, is charged with the elimination of those elements existing outside the doctrinal parameters of a unified *societas Christiana*. There is nothing new in pitting the Nestorian against the Muslim, as the hugely popular *Risâlat al-Kindî*, one of the texts of the Toledan Collection, attests. What does seem to be original is the Letter’s assumption that one heretical sect can be counted on to vanquish the other and subsequently to reunite with its Latin Christian brethren—a fantastic projection, to be sure.

The Prester John legend works to project as external the inassimilable excesses inherent but disavowed in such an attempt at a wholly Christian subjectivity. Prester John exists simultaneously as a repository for Christian alterity and as a guaranteed defense against the threat of Islamic alterity. The idea of an “Other of the Other” lent to a Christian West stability in a time of crisis: “Muslims are unlike us Latin Christians, and what you lack, we have—your identity is dependent on ours, we are the fixed entity—it is Prester John who shares those strange customs with you, and he will destroy you and renounce his difference in order to assimilate to our fully-constructed identity.” By externalizing their reactions to and anxieties about Islam, Western Christians renounce their own connection to Islam: Prester John and the mythic East are in competition with Islam, not Western Christians. In this way, Prester John guarantees an enclosure of an Islamic threat kept under constant surveillance and becomes the Other of the Other, flattening the spaces of future possibility that are otherwise left open-ended in the unknown spaces of alterity. The Other of the Other is, of course, a fiction, given its fantastic implication of a totalized subject, but it remains a powerful imaginary tool nonetheless. By its logic, Prester John represents a way to speak about difference, an anchoring point, without having to acknowledge the inherent alterity in Latin Christian identity. For Lacan, the Other of the Other represents the fiction of metalanguage (as a way to guarantee meaning) and exists largely as a defensive projection for those who refuse to grant that language systems are perpetually and irredeemably open. In other words, there is no sustainable epistemological framework for creating and managing meaning—identity is no less arbitrary than the linguistic categories that formulate it. To the extent that Prester John never actually appears, the legend perpetuates the postmodern dictum that there can be no Other of the Other despite a fervent desire to move beyond the space of signification.

Peter and the Cluniacs, along with much of Latin Christendom, tried to understand the new faith by translating its holy book into Latin; they tried to map their understanding of Islam onto the structural plane of
Catholicism; and then they tried to disavow the legitimacy of Islam by painting its tenets as diabolical perversions of the Christianity onto which its belief system is grafted. The divergent theories regarding the rise and significance of Islam in twelfth-century texts indicate either an inability or an unwillingness to map the ideological impact of the new faith onto a still-nascent societas Christiana. Islam stood to disrupt the traditional position Christianity held as the West’s “new faith” and threatened to reshape the temporal landscape of the larger eschatological narrative. The attempted construction of a properly Christian subject through its retroactive relation to a domesticated alterity extends the implications of the dialectical paradigm that undergirds the concept of extimacy—here, mutual recognition between the Christian subject and the Muslim Other forges an extimacy that is not only spatial but also retransmitted through time.

The relationship among language, space, and alterity is a common preoccupation, not only for thinkers of the postmodern but for the pre-modern as well. When outlining the elements that did not belong within societas Christiana failed to assuage the anxieties of Western Christian identity, Latin Christians turned to a fantasy of enclosure under which Islam could be absorbed into Christianity. All of these practices, which rely on the spatialization of religious conflict, produce sites of topographic enclosure within which Christianity haunts the margins of Muslim possibility. It is only through these constructions of a metalanguage or meta-alterity that we can comprehend, however retroactively, that spatial boundaries are consonant with ideological systems under which they are produced. Not only can we then affirm the assertion that “where Prester John goes, Europe is not far behind”; for the Fifth Crusade specifically, in the manner of Freud’s aphoristic Wo Es war, soll Ich werden, we might say “where Prester John was (supposed to go), there the West will be.”

Notes

1. Peter, anticipating Bernard’s objections to the Latin translation of the Qur’an, writes, “I, for my part, am not ignorant, [that] since this scripture, which could not profit them in their own language, since they had been lost, would, turned into Latin, profit them the less. But perhaps somebody of the Latins shall it profit, who can be instructed in the unknown, and having it damned as heresy, extended to their ears, by opposing and destroying it, make [things] clear.” This long letter becomes an important source for knowledge about Peter’s journey to Spain. See The Letters of Peter the Venerable, vol. 1, ed. Giles Constable (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), 295.
2. The specific goals of this journey are unclear and still debated. For the most specific outline of Peter’s itinerary, see Charles Biskho, *Spanish and Portuguese Monastic History, 600–1300* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1984), 344–50.


5. Peter’s letters to Bernard reveal the former’s relative disapproval for crusading and his preference instead for instruction and conversion. See especially Letter 111 from Peter to Bernard in *Letters of Peter the Venerable*, 274–99. For the whole of Peter’s interaction with the Muslim faith, see James Kritzeck, *Peter the Venerable and Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1964).

6. My reading of these enclosures is influenced by Cary Howie’s theorizations of intimate, closed spaces; see *Claustrophilia: The Erotics of Enclosure in Medieval Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

7. Ibid., 17.

8. Kritzeck discusses the formulation of Peter the Venerable’s research team, as recorded in Letter 111; *Peter the Venerable and Islam*, 30–36.

9. The other two complete translations are Mark of Toledo’s *Liber Alchorani* (ca. 1210) and Iohannes Gabriel Terrolensis’s bilingual version (1518), patronized by Egidio da Viterbo. On the history and analysis of the Latin translations of the Qur’an in the Middle Ages, including the most sustained analysis of Robert of Ketton and his *Lex Mahumet*, see Thomas Burman, *Reading the Qur’an in Latin Christendom, 1140–1560* (Philadelphia: University of Pennslyvania Press, 2007).


11. The textual move of situating Islam as a false Christianity is also reflected in the escalation of twelfth-century anti-hagiographies of Muhammad that depict the prophet as a heresiarch, a supreme anti-saint who inverts and perverts the traditional motifs of the genre of saint’s lives. See Tolan, *Saracens*, 135–70.

12. Traditionally, analyses of Robert’s translation tend to view its execution unfavorably. Here I am following Burman’s revisionist stance, which emphasizes Robert’s thorough (if not overzealous) translation efforts. See Burman, *Reading the Qur’an*, 60–121.

13. Ibid., 13, 40. Geoffrey of Vinsauf’s popular rhetorical manual, the *Poetria Nova* (ca. 1210), written some fifty years after Robert’s *Qur’an*, champions
the epistemological model of creating meaning by rendering the foreign in familiar terms and highlights the pleasure in doing so: “Quando tuum proprium transsumis, plus sapit istud / Quod venit ex proprio. Talis transsumptio verbi / Est tibi pro speculo: qui ate specularis in illo / Et proprias cognoscis oves in rure alieno” (796–800) (When you transpose a word whose literal meaning is proper to man, it affords greater pleasure, since it comes from what is your own. Such a metaphor serves you as a mirror, for you see yourself in it and recognize your own sheep in another’s field).


15. Ibid., 16.
16. Ibid., 84.
17. Ibid., 40.
20. Ibid., 125.
21. Ibid., 63.
23. Writing of the extimate Other, Lacan explains that the Other is “something strange to me, although it is at the heart of me.” See *Seminar VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Dennis Porter (New York: Norton, 1986), 71 and 139.
25. The persistence of the legend of Prester John has lasted (at the least) through the twentieth century. For medievalists, Umberto Eco’s *Baudolino*
(2000) is likely the most recognizable popular representation of Prester John. The novel is a reimagining of the opaque circumstances under which the legend first proliferated. See Eco, *Baudolino*, trans. William Weaver (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2000). John Buchan’s procolonial adventure novel *Prester John* (1910), still in print, tells a story of cultural clash when a Scotsman in South Africa must deal with a Zulu uprising strangely connected to the medieval legend of Prester John. See Buchan, *Prester John* (New York: George Doran Company, 1910). See also fantasy novelist Catherynne Valente’s recent reimagining of the legend, *The Habitation of the Blessed* (San Francisco: Night Shade, 2010). Stranger still, and perhaps as a result of the popularity of Buchan’s novel, Prester John began to appear in pulp novels and comics, most famously in the Marvel Comics *Fantastic Four* and *Thor*. In these highly popular comics, Prester John, enemy of Muslim warriors and also called “The Wanderer,” was kept alive by wizards after a plague decimated his kingdom (an island called Avalon). He appears in over twenty comics of the Marvel Universe (mostly in the 1960s).

26. Along with a necessary mention in late-medieval travel writing, Prester John shows up in the writings of early modern world travelers such as Prince Henry, the Infante Dom Henrique, Christopher Columbus, and Duarte Lopes. There also exists a history of Prester John’s kingdom as existing in Ethiopia that held attention during the European exploration of Africa. For a comprehensive analysis of Prester John’s influence in the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries, see Michael Brooks’s dissertation chapters “The Influence of the Prester John Legend in the Sixteenth Century” and “Prester John in the Seventeenth Century and Beyond,” in “Prester John: A Reexamination and Compendium of the Mythical Figure Who Helped Spark European Expansion” (PhD diss., University of Toledo, Ohio, 2010). Brooks argues that the importance of the Prester John legend in world history has been “written out” in order to forge a more modern view of the late-medieval European dispossessed of the mystical and superstitious beliefs associated with the Middle Ages.

28. Nearly all of the widely read travel narratives of the East written between the inception of the legend and the time of Mandeville—including John of Plano Carpini (1246), William of Rubruck (1253), Marco Polo (ca. 1299), John of Monte Corvino (1305), and Odoric of Podernone (1330)—mention Prester John, and many of these authors even claim to have met the legendary figure. In reading Mandeville’s Prester John, Geraldine Heng finds a narratological link between the Prester John myth (as surrogate to the West) and Franciscan cosmopolitanism. See Empire of Magic, 239–305.

29. Presumably, Hugh was in Rome for the specific purpose of reporting to Pope Eugenius that Edessa had fallen to Muslim control. Raymond, Prince of Antioch, had sent Hugh to Rome in 1144 to deliver the news. The pope issued a bull inaugurating the Second Crusade less than a year later. As shall be seen, the fall of Edessa becomes inextricably linked to the Prester John legend, indicated especially in the Latin Letter of Prester John.


31. Indeed, the mythical King David, Prester John’s supposed grandson, on whom the armies of the Fifth Crusade at Damietta so eagerly waited, turned out to be a glamorized, Christianized misidentification of the historical Genghis Khan. See Hamilton, “Continental Drift,” 240–48.

32. The Letter’s condescending tone toward Manuel contrasts ironically with John’s self-expressed humility and avowal of the Greek emperor’s arrogance: “Cum enim hominem nos esse cognoscanmus, te Graeculi tui Deum ess existimant (While we know ourselves to be mortal, the little Greeks regard you as a god)” (Zarncke, “Der Priester Johannes,” 910; Uebel, Ecstatic Transformation, 154).

33. Slessarev discusses the critical tradition of identifying the language of the original letter; Prester John, 41. The only scholar who confidently claims that the original must have been Greek is Alexander Vasiliev; see his Prester John: Legend and History (Unpublished manuscript available at the Byzantine Library of Dumbarton Oaks, Washington, DC), 90.

34. Uebel, Ecstatic Transformation, 155; “dominus sum dominatium et praecello in omnibus divitis” (Zarncke, “Der Priester Johannes,” 910).

35. In the Letter, John claims to surpass, in “virtute et potentia omnes reges universae terrae” [virtue and power, all the kings of the wide world]” (Zarncke, “Der Priester Johannes,” 910; Uebel, Ecstatic Transformation, 155).

36. Uebel, Ecstatic Transformation, 156; “In tribus Indiis dominatur mangitcentia nostra, et transit terra nostra ab ulteriore India, in qua corpus sancti Thomae apostili requiescit” (Zarncke, “Der Priester Johannes,” 910).

37. “Si potes dinumerare stellas caeli et harenam maris, dinumera et dominium nostrum et potestatem nostram” (Ibid., 924).

38. Zarncke notes the passages in the Letter lifted from the Alexander legend and a medieval lapidary. For a thorough exploration of the sources

39. According to Isidore of Seville, the world was composed of seventy-two tribes of people. The fact that John rules over seventy-two kings suggests that John is clearly a universal ruler. See *Etymologies*, vol. 1, trans. Priscilla Throop (Charlotte, VT: Medieval MS, 2005), IX.2.2.

40. Much has been made recently about the medieval monster and what it signals for especially English identity. See especially the influential work of Jeffrey Jerome Cohen: *Of Giants: Sex, Monsters, and the Middle Ages* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999) and the edited collection *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).


43. Ibid., 14 and 19.

44. See, for example, Exodus 3:7–9 describing the fertility of Israel and sura 47:15, describing that paradisiacal Islamic garden.

45. “Venenata animalia non possunt habitare in eo loco nec aliquos laedere. Inter paganos per quandam provinciam nostram transit fluvius, qui vocatur Ydonus. Fluvius iste de paradiso progresdiens expansit sinus suos per universam provinciam illam diversis meatus, et ibi invenientur naturales lapides, smaragdi, saphiri, carbunculi, topazzii, crisoliti, onichini, berilli, ametisti, sardii, et plures preciosi lapides (Venomous animals are not able to live in that place nor harm anyone. Amid the pagans and through one of our provinces flows a river which is called Ydonus. This river, flowing out of Paradise, extends its windings by various courses throughout the entire province, and in it are found natural gems, emeralds, sapphires, carbuncles, topazes, chrysolites, onyx, beryls, amethysts, sardonyxes, and many other precious gems)” (Zarncke, “Der Priester Johannes,” 912; Uebel, *Ecstatic Transformation*, 156). For a description of the most important features of the landscape of Islamic paradise, see Nerina Rustomji, “Otherworldly Landscapes and Earthly Realities,” in *The Garden and the Fire: Heaven and Hell in Islamic Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 63–76. Additionally, although the presence of gemstones also popularly figures into the New Jerusalem as foretold in the *Book of Revelation*, the way in which they occur naturally in the general landscape accords better with Islamic conceptions of paradise, rather than the Christian. According to Revelation, the gems are built into the foundation of the city walls (21:18–21). John’s land conspicuously lacks the borders that New Jerusalem so intently foregrounds. The realm of the *Letter* also lacks the traditional Christian paradisiacal
mainstays briefly outlined in Revelation 21 and 22 such as the tree of life, gates, lack of sun/moon, and in general the presence of a Jesus/Lord/Lamb figure. In fact, the Letter is explicit in its admission that John’s land, though near the “Paradise from which Adam was driven out,” is not in fact that locale. The realm does, however, include elements seemingly unique to Islamic paradise, as popular conceived in Assassin legend, including beautiful women, strange creatures, abundant food, silk, a military presence, and a clear sense of hierarchy.


49. Rustomji relates that in the 1120s the Fatimid caliph al-Amir invented for these followers the name hashishiyya (or “those who take hashish”), which became known to Europe, once Westernized, as “Assassins” (xiii).


51. See Ibn Ishaq, *Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ishaq’s Birat Rasul Allah*, trans. A. Guillaume (London: Oxford University Press, 1955), 184. The number 12,000 also has significance in Christian numerology, most significantly as the number of stadia of the Holy City (length, width, and height) of New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:16). The number also signifies the number of people who will be saved from each of the twelve tribes of Israel (Rev. 7:3–8). Although this number has clear significance in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic tradition, the description of 12,000 bodies situated at a great height recalls the Islamic use of the number more directly than it does either Christian or Jewish uses of the number.

52. Slessarev attributes the magic mirror to Arabic tales of sorcery and traces it as a well-known trope in Persian literature; *Prester John*, 49–50. Thus we have a Muslim origin at the heart of this panoptical surveillance.


54. On the medieval legends of St. Thomas, Michael Uebel writes that these texts “record an instance of ritualized fetishism, whose basic elements provided source material for the descriptions of the saint’s festival in at least one Latin version of the [Prester John] Letter (the Hildesheim manuscript), several French versions, and the narrative of Elyseus (1185)” (55). For Uebel’s theoretical analysis on the connection between Prester John, St. Thomas, and the fetish, see “The Pathogenesis of Medieval History,” *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 44 (2002): 47–65.
56. There were, of course, reputed Christian communities in India in the twelfth century, and as Marco Polo later observes, there existed an Indian Christian community in Mailapur devoted to St. Thomas. See Henry Yule and Henri Cordier, *The Book of Ser Marco Polo*, vol. 2, 3rd ed. (London: John Murray, 1926), 353–59.
58. Through the figure “Patriarch John” in an anonymous *De adventu patriarchae Indorum ad Urbem sub Calixto papa secundo* (On the arrival of the Patriarch of the Indians to Rome under Pope Calixtus II), Slessarev finds an analogue and predecessor of the Prester. The text of *De adventu* is edited in Zarncke, “Der Priester Johannes,” 837–46.
59. In late 1144, Imad-ad-Din Zengi, the governor of Mosul and Aleppo, led an army against an unsuspecting Edessa and thoroughly sacked and conquered the city within a month, leaving Western Christians without its most northeastern defense. Uebel reads the link between Prester John and Edessa as testifying to the “deeply intertwined impulses” of mourning and utopia. See “Pathogenesis of Medieval History,” 55.
64. Ibid., 138. Although the passage that Tolan cites relates the two figures as heresiarchs, the text also indicates a possible doctrinal relation between Nestorians and Muslims: “Rituris Agarenis, quam hactenus servant, Nestorius et Machometa in commune scriptitarunt” (Nestorius and Muhammad have often written in common after the manner of the rites of the Agarenes). For the original Latin text, see Bernhard Bischoff’s edition, “Ein Leben Mohammeds (Adelphus?) (Zwölftes Jahrhundert),” in *Anecdota Novissima: Texte des vierten bis sechszenten Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart: A. Hiersemann, 1984), 106–22 (Tolan refers to p. 122, while I emphasize p. 120). “Agarenes” refers to Hagar, mother of Ishmael, and, along with Saracens (those not from Sarah) and Ishmaelites (those descending from Ishmael), forms the primary descriptive triad (from the perspective of the Latin West) for Muslims in the Middle Ages.
The friars speak to the divinity of Christ and the perfidy of Muḥammad, addressing both the dyophysitism of Nestorians and the false belief in Muḥammad in one fell swoop. In referring to this episode in the introduction to the text, Paolo Chiesa maintains that “[Odoric’s] condemnation appears to have fallen on the historical enemies of Catholicism: the Muslims (or ‘Saracens’) and the Nestorian Christians” (15).

68. The Risālat al-Kindī, written in Arabic by an unknown Christian author, records a fictional exchange of letters, a disputatio between a Nestorian Christian and Muslim, both members of the Abassid court. Originally composed in the ninth or tenth century, the later Latin translation of this polemical text became the most popularly read tract against Muslims in all of Latin Christendom. Strangely, the Christian apologist argues that Muḥammad composed the Qur’an with the help of the Christian heretic Sergius (also called Nestorius), which forges an intimacy between the two belief systems that seemingly undermines the fact that the pro-Christian arguments in the debate are voiced by a Nestorian Christian.

69. Heng, Empire of Magic, 287.
CHAPTER 4

MAPPING THE MUSLIMS: IMAGES OF ISLAM IN MIDDLE HIGH GERMAN LITERATURE OF THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY

David F. Tinsley

Despite the efforts of cultural historians and scholars of mentalities, the Middle Ages continue to be a reflection of what we are not, what we have transcended, the Other by which we define our postmodern selves.¹ The Middle Ages remain, in the words of Gabrielle Spiegel, “a millennium of middleness, a space of empty waiting and virtual death until the reawakening of the West to its proper nature and purpose.”² Such hierarchical assumptions also shape our expectations regarding the attitudes of German-speaking peoples toward religion and race. Surely one may expect that the epic and didactic literature written in Middle High German in the thirteenth century will reflect the views of medieval Christians, and one may be equally confident, along with Ulrike Wiethaus, that any work read will be rife with “undeniably misogynist, anti-Judaic, militaristic, homophobic and xenophobic elements.”³

The image of the Muslim is frequently conflated in Middle High German literature with the image of the Moor.⁴ And here spiritual and physical associations are literally damning: “The Devil was imagined as being black and, in consequence, black people as diabolical figures”; “black was the color of the Devil and of death,” and “other characteristic features associated with Africans—flat, broad nose, thick lips, and frizzy hair—were regarded as the external marks of human and moral inferiority.”⁵ Alfred Ebenbauer argues that a gendered pattern emerges in the depiction of black-skinned peoples in medieval German literature,
such that black women are depicted as inherently seductive and black men as sexually aggressive. And in citing the racist response of a father to the arrival of African American GIs in a twentieth-century short story by Alois Brandstetter, Ebenbauer encourages the conclusion that racist attitudes of Western Europeans represent a continuum stretching from the twelfth century unto the present day.

When the focus moves from the Moor to the Muslim as a figure in medieval German crusader epics, mentalities seem to harden even further. The twelfth-century Middle High German adaptation of the Chanson de Roland, the Rolandslied, provides the most malevolent caricature of Muslims, easily as virulent as the portraits of the other two most hated groups of nonbelievers within the German literary tradition, the Jews and the Beguines. In the prologue, an angel commands Charlemagne to invade Hispania and to convert the sexually depraved, idol-worshipping heathens who live there.

\begin{verbatim}
Di dir | abir wider sint,
die heizent des tuvelis kint
unt | sint allesamt uirlorin;
die slehet der gotes zorn |
an libe unt an sele:
die helle puwint sie imermere.| (Rolandslied 58–63)
\end{verbatim}

(Those that oppose you are called children of the Devil and all of them are damned; the wrath of God will smite them in body and soul: they will reside in hell forever.)

The narrator’s opening paean to Charlemagne asserts that the noble king is in heaven because he conquered many heathen territories and brought God’s truth to so many unbelievers. The conclusion seems clear. The godlessness of the Saracens is reason alone for Charlemagne to unleash an invading army whose purpose is to kill and to force the survivors to convert. And any Christian knight who dies in the attempt is guaranteed a spot among the martyrs, “die luchtet sam der morgen sterne” (twinkling like morning stars) (205).

How do heathens treat Christians? Charlemagne’s speech to his assembled nobles could have been taken from the exhortations of Urban II at Clermont:

\begin{verbatim}
Nu will ich iu clagin:
die heiden | tuont uns grozin scadin;
si ritent in diu lant, |
si stiftint ruob unde brant.
di gotes hús si storent, |
\end{verbatim}
(Here I must lament to you. The heathens are doing us great damage. They ride into our lands, pillaging and burning, destroying the houses of God, taking people captive and sacrificing them to idols. This is the Devil making sport of us. They set them up as targets, and shoot at them as well.)

If any reason is needed beyond the presence of all heathen souls in Hell, then such depredations certainly qualify. How do Saracens fight? When Charlemagne’s armies invade Spain— despite overwhelming numbers in armies summoned from the vast expanse of Asia, despite their unimaginable wealth, despite bizarre rituals and dances that they use to build up their courage—the mere sound of Roland’s horn is enough to send them fleeing. Some heathens fall over dead from fear. Others put up perfunctory resistance. One heathen is easily persuaded to betray his own people and tells Charlemagne’s army of a secret way that it uses to get behind heathen lines and eventually to destroy every city and castle in Spain that refuses to convert.

Because they lack constancy and courage, as Konrad tells it, Saracens must rely on treachery. Saragossa under the rule of the heathen king Marsilie is the last remaining Saracen stronghold, and the desperate councils that Marsilie calls can find no solution other than subterfuge. They cannot succeed without the betrayal of Charlemagne by Ganelun, the Lucifer/Judas figure, whose jealousy of Roland and the twelve heroes leads him to convince Charlemagne to withdraw and to arrange for Roland and Oliver to take on the task of rear guard, thus ensuring their destruction. The narrator reserves his worst vitriol for Ganelun the traitor, but the portrait of the heathens remains consistent: they are uncountable hordes with unimaginable wealth; they are treacherous cowards who worship Muḥammad and Apollo with bizarre rites and rituals; they are lost souls worthy only of slaughter or conversion.

The following analysis seeks to ascertain the degree to which this image of the Muslim Other as physically malformed, sexually depraved, and spiritually lost pervades medieval German mentalities. The first section examines the Ebstorf *mappa mundi* as reflective of the worldview of its makers, concluding with an analysis of its problematical depiction of Muslims. Because of the associations that Christians made among
Muslims, Africa, and dark-skinned peoples, the second part of the chapter compares the depiction of Africa and Africans in the Ebstorf mappa with that contained in the narrative map of the world that Rudolf von Ems provides in his Weltchronik. The virtuous knight’s or king’s encounter with the Muslim Other is a central theme in the epics and romances of perhaps the greatest poet writing in Middle High German in the thirteenth century, Wolfram von Eschenbach, and even attracted the interest of that most unconventional master of shorter forms, the Stricker. The third and fourth parts of this chapter compare and contrast their literary portraits of Muslims.

Composed in the second decade of the thirteenth century, Rudolf von Ems’s Weltchronik, although a fragment, narrates the first five ages of world history and includes more than 1,600 lines of world geography, adapted from the Imago mundi Liber I of Honorius Augustodunensis. It complements the Ebstorf mappa beautifully for several reasons. As Kugler notes, the mappaemundi were all seen by their makers as products of the book, as visualization of manuscript sources. So the Ebstorf mapmakers used many of the same written sources that Rudolf refers to. They have similar goals of comprehensiveness in the depiction of time and space and thus give us the division of the world in both text and image from approximately the same time period. Finally, the epic Karl der Große by the thirteenth-century master of short literary forms, the Stricker, is transmitted as part of the Weltchronik manuscript. In the eyes of medieval collectors, they belonged together. The Stricker used the Pfaffe Konrad’s Rolandslied, my model for negative depiction of Muslims, as his principal source. Furthermore, one of the two literary sources in which the Stricker is documented turns out to be Wolfram von Eschenbach’s Willehalm, another crusader epic in which the Muslim Other plays a central role. So Rudolf’s Weltchronik, the Ebstorf mappa, Wolfram, and the Stricker not only all depict the presence of and confrontation with the Other; there is evidence that they were linked together in the minds of compilers and authors.

Space, Time, and the Muslim Other in the Ebstorf Mappa Mundi

There is no clearer indicator of a people’s view of the world than the maps it draws of the world. Studies by Arentzen, Simek, Harvey, and Kline have shifted the focus of mappaemundi scholarship from cartographers’ critiques of their inaccuracy to the meaning of the world that medieval mapmakers chose to depict. The mappaemundi include geopolitical elements, but their overriding concern is to chart salient points
of topography, ethnography, natural history, literary history, and, especially, salvation history such that they form, as Hartmut Kugler argues, a normative depiction of ideas in the form of a conceptual worldview: “Die Karte präsentiert die Welt nicht so, wie sie war, sondern wie man sie sich vorstellte. Sie bildet Wittanschauung ab, ist ein Weltbild auch und gerade im übertragenen Sinne des Wortes” (the map presents the world not as it was, but rather as it was imagined. It represents a worldview and is also a view of the world, precisely in the figurative sense of the word).  

The most memorable modern equivalent is the cartoonist Saul Steinberg’s famous New Yorker cover, in essence a Manhattanite’s mappa mundi. Two city blocks, from Ninth Avenue to the Hudson River, occupy two thirds of the canvas. Beyond the Hudson, a thin brown strip is labeled “Jersey.” The rest of the United States consists of isolated mountains rising out of a beige rectangle framed by straight-edged borders of Canada and Mexico. Only a few cities and states are noted, among them Kansas City, Nebraska, Las Vegas, and Los Angeles. The Pacific Ocean is barely twice as wide as the Hudson River, and China and Japan appear faintly at the farthest boundaries of the image. The goal of Steinberg’s satirical cartoon is not to depict geographical realities but to define the perceptions of someone who can scarcely imagine a world beyond New York City. Likewise, the goal of the Ebstorf monks’ mappa mundi is not to depict geographical realities but to define the perceptions of someone imagining the diversity of divine creation in the context of salvation history. Steinberg’s cartoon not only helps readers to recognize the essentially subjective function of a mappa mundi; it also illustrates a common scholarly misperception regarding medieval European mentalities. When medievalists such as Wiethaus and Ebenbauer apply Eurocentric models to the German-speaking peoples of central Europe, they are projecting onto these peoples the mentality of Steinberg’s Manhattanite. The assumption is that medieval Germans viewed the world and defined the Other from a unified identity resting on universally shared prejudices.

Although the creators of mappaemundi differ in the details they depict, they all agree that the world was round, that its land masses were divided into three continents and that the cultural and spiritual significance of the continents was hierarchical. The Ebstorf mapmakers describe the relationship between the continents in this way:

Orbis a rotunditate circuli dictus, quia est ut rota. Undique enim occeanus circumflens in circulo est triphariam divisus, id est in Asyam, Europam, Africam. Sola Asya medietatem orbis, due tenent alteram partem Europa et Africa, quas intersecat velut subterraneum Mediterraneum mare.
(The designation “orb” [that is, circle, wheel] comes from that fact that the earth is round like a wheel. Completely surrounded by the ocean, the land is divided into three parts, namely into Asia, Europe, and Africa. Asia alone makes up one half of the earth, Europe and Africa together make up the other half and are separated by the Mediterranean.)  

The origin of human races and the division of the earth were understood biblically: to lie in God’s division and gift of the world to the three sons of Noah after the Flood; significantly, in the Ebstorf *mappa*, it is explained genealogically, such that no distinction is made between Europe and Africa, the lesser continents.

By far, the most significant of the three continents is Asia, not Europe. This is not only due to Asia’s size, which according to these mapmakers occupies half of the earth, but also because all of the important landmarks of salvation history were located in Asia—the Holy Land, the earthly paradise, and the fortress from which the apocalyptic monsters Gog and Magog would break forth to wreak havoc in anticipation of the Apocalypse. This is why Christ embraces the world from the supreme position of the East. The center of the world lies in Asia; it is Jerusalem and the Holy Land, the place of Christ’s death and resurrection, with the tomb of the Holy Sepulchre. The domains of geography, natural history, and saga, as represented in the Ebstorf *mappa*, place many of their most exotic and magical sites in Asia, from the four rivers flowing from
paradise to the wondrous beasts of the bestiaries to literary and historical depictions of Alexander the Great’s itinerary.

For Steinberg’s New Yorker, the city *is* the center that shapes the universe. In the perception of the Ebstorf mapmakers, Western Europe is *not* the center; it occupies the position of Steinberg’s Los Angeles (see figure 4.1). The confidence, even arrogance, essential to Eurocentrism (which one also finds in Roman chroniclers of barbarity like Tacitus) is almost completely absent. The mentalities of poets and patrons at the provincial courts of the Holy Roman Empire where Middle High German literature first flowered are shaped by a feeling of removal, of distance from the center, indeed, of marginality. Such feelings had their basis not only in salvation history but also in economic realities. Asia reigned supreme as the source of the accoutrements of luxury and wealth: spices, oils, dyes, fruits, and textiles such as cotton and silk.

Geopolitical realities only provided further evidence for anxiety. The initial triumphant recovery of the Holy Land by the First Crusaders would, by the end of the thirteenth century, dissolve into defeat and the

![Figure 4.1 Ebstorf mappa mundi (ca. 1300). Annotations by David F. Tinsley.](image)
loss of the Kingdom of Jerusalem. Subsequent crusades ended in stalemate, defeat, or wars with other Christian kingdoms. An implacable enemy had emerged in Islam whose inexorable advance, although stopped in the West, would continue in the East for the next three centuries.

A second factor complicating the application of a Eurocentric model is the lack of linguistic evidence for European identity. Terms for Europe are absent from the vernacular word fields associated with the homeland; they are applied exclusively in Latin to the biblical division of the world. In Middle High German, the word *Europa* is only documented once in all of Benecke and Lexer; it occurs one time in the works of Wolfram von Eschenbach. What will become nations within Europe are equally indistinct. Abbreviated notations of “Teutonia” and “Francia” do appear on the Ebstorf *mappa*, but the geopolitical landscape is defined according to peoples and cities. Even the notion of a land called “Germany” remains linguistically problematic. In Middle High German, the term for Germany, “Dütsklant,” is attested only a single time, in the *Kaiserchronik*. The etymology and usage surrounding notions of the foreign in Middle High German were regionally, not nationally, centered. This is not to say that Germanness had no meaning for the Middle Ages. The adjectives “diutisch” and “diutsch” and the noun “diutsch” are amply attested in Middle High German sources, the former modifying “lant,” “liute,” “rich,” “ritterschaft,” and “künne.” Yet the semantic limits of “diutsch” are determined by custom and language; and references to peoples reflect dialect boundaries rather than the geopolitical boundaries of today. German-speaking people thought of themselves first and foremost as Saxons, Franconians, Swabians, and Bavarians, not as Germans; and foreign meant primarily “not of my people” or “not of my *Heimat*.” One cannot define the two words connoting foreignness in Middle High German—*vremede* or *ellende*—against Germany, much less against Europe, in our modern sense.

But surely Christian sensibility would have provided the basis for a unified identity resting on universally shared prejudices, with Christian Western Europe becoming the equivalent of Steinberg’s Manhattan. This seems to find confirmation in the *Rolandslied*, in which the antithesis of the virtuous Christian is the vicious and treacherous *heiden*, the Middle High German cognate of the modern German *Heide* or the English word “heathen.” In Middle High German, the designation *heiden* was applied to all non-Christians but, as Benecke notes, most frequently to Muslims. Its Latin equivalent was *saracenus*, “Saracen.” Complicating the application of a Eurocentric model based on religion is a universal awareness that not all Western Europeans were Christians. The internal Other included Muslims, Jews, heretics, and non-Muslim
pagans, each of whom is assigned particular characteristics in literary and historical accounts. Back in the homeland, conflicts with non-Islamic heiden were no less meaningful and in some cases much more intense from the Christian perspective. The most extensive research on such groups has been conducted on attitudes toward and practices within Jewish communities. But the internal enemy also included Muslims, most exhaustively documented in the quasi-multiculturalism of medieval Spain. And one should not forget that interaction between Muslims and Christians was also not unknown in the Holy Roman Empire, most notably in Frederick II’s company of Muslim archers, based in Lucera within marching distance of Rome. Nor should one forget the ever-present heretics. One of the original tasks of the Dominican Order was to root out heresy, first epitomized by the Cathars and the Waldensians; poets writing in Middle High German in the Holy Roman Empire assign the corresponding role to the Beguines. When efforts to retake the Holy Land seemed doomed to fail, the Teutonic Knights launched crusades against the non-Muslim, non-Christian peoples of the Baltic. So homeland communities were as much concerned with the threat from within as they were with the emerging Mongol threat and the seemingly unstoppable Muslim hegemony in the East.

The depiction of Islam and the Muslims on the Ebstorf map raises additional questions. Although the Reconquista was nearly accomplished in the West by 1300, Christian armies had just lost a series of battles and all of their strongholds in the East, with Acre falling in 1291. The Berber Almohads still dominated North Africa, and the Ottomans were just beginning the expansion that would take Constantinople and eventually reach to the gates of Vienna. The Holy Land was firmly in Muslim control. And yet, looking at the Ebstorf map, one sees something astounding: it shows none of this. From southern Spain to northern Africa to Egypt to the Holy Land, no Muslim kingdoms and no references to Muslims whatsoever are found. They are not just abject; they are totally absent. Just as Steinberg’s Manhattanite sees almost nothing between New Jersey and the Pacific, the Ebstorf mapmakers’ focus expunges Christianity’s most threatening foe from its worldview. Medievalists in search of the Islamic Other are left with traces, fragments, and the barest of allusions. The mappa’s gloss on Arabia, for example, mentions it only in the context of natural history, quoting Eudaimon on its blessedness, describing it as the source of myrrh and wonderful smells and as the home of the Phoenix, whose legend is recounted. The only other direct mention comes in the description of Thebes on the upper Nile, where, it is said, Arab tradesman come to transact business. The allusions remain resolutely ethnic and economic.
A principal aim of the Ebstorf designers was apparently not to record the geopolitical aspects of the Muslim menace but rather to document all of the stations visited by the virtuous pagan Emperor Alexander the Great in his journey to India. Here it is helpful to remember that the exemplary status of Alexander in medieval salvation history as recounted in German, principally the *Alexanderlied* by Pfaffe Lamprecht, is mixed. Alexander epitomizes hubris and the transitory nature of power but also performs a number of virtuous deeds, such as destroying the heathen Persian Empire and overcoming the cannibalistic Gog and Magog peoples and imprisoning them. The mapmakers probably included these travel stations in response to the growing interest in the travels of Alexander and his encounters with the “wonders of the East” as well as to show God’s ability to do good works during the “pre-historic” ages of the world.

Amid many allusions to salvation history is found another very subtle Islamic connection. The world itself is physically embraced by the body of Christ with Jerusalem as its/his heart. The mapmakers describe the wall of flame surrounding the earthly paradise before concluding with the following didactic lesson:

> Est ibi lignum dinoṣcentie boni et mali. Prorsus hoc lignum visibile et corporale / est sicut cetere arbores. Arbor illa non erat, sed dicta est scientia boni et mali dinoṣcenti. Quia si post prohi-bitionem ex illa homo non ederet, nulla erat precepti / futura transgressio, in qua homo experi-menti / pene dinoσceret, quod inter obedientie bonum et inobedi-entie malum. Proinde ex hoc non figurete sed vere / dictum, et quoddam lignum accipiendum est, cui non de fructu qui inde nasceretur, sed ipsa re impositum nomen, / que contraventum illi facto fuerat secutura.

(There stands the tree of discernment between good and evil. This tree is completely visible and natural, like other trees. It was not originally, but rather later became the Tree of Knowledge [of the difference between Good and Evil]. For if humans had not eaten of it after God’s ban, there would have been no further violation of a commandment. Humans could have realized completely that good lies in obedience and evil in disobedience. Therefore it is not meant metaphorically but rather literally, and the tree is to be understood not as a plant that got its name from the fruit that grew on it but rather from the consequences of complete disobedience.)

The conclusion reminds readers of humanity’s fallen state and underscores the essential role of obedience in securing salvation. This, combined with the portrait of the fortress in which Alexander imprisoned Gog and Magog (the future servants of the Antichrist), maintains the connection among the Creation, the Fall, God’s ability to use virtuous pagans as part of his plan to bring about the end of evil empires, and the
approaching Apocalypse. It is important to note here that the rapid rise of Islam was most frequently interpreted by Christian commentators as a sign that the end was imminent. For example, Joachim of Fiore identified the Muslims as the seventh kingdom named in Revelation. His readers would have understood Islam to be the last of the great empires of unbelievers under which Christians were destined, justly, to suffer. Important here is that evil is not imputed only to Muslims. An unholy alliance between Muslims and internal enemies like the Cathars, asserts Joachim, will set the final, catastrophic events into motion.  

One way of reading the Muslim absence is that Ebstorf mapmakers removed the geopolitical presence of Islam in favor of its apocalyptic potential. The *Rolandslied* portrays Islam as a threat; the Ebstorf mapmakers as a sign.

### A Rhenish View of Africans and Africa in the Thirteenth Century

As Konrad’s *Rolandslied* moves to its denouement, the Muslim ruler Marsilie assembles his armies before the decisive battle with Charlemagne’s rear guard. The captain of each company, each one a king in his own right, presents himself before Marsilie and vows to bring about Roland’s demise. The audience experiences once again bizarre rituals, prideful idol worship, and astounding wealth displayed by the “bestial hordes” assembled in the name of Muḥammad. One sees a parade of rulers who have lost their lands and seen their people slaughtered, an aggrieved son-in-law who would like nothing more than to defend his father-in-law’s honor, and even a captain who has triumphed in battles with Christians. All are welcomed by Marsilie and given Muḥammad’s blessing. The stage is set for the arrival of Cernubiles, who is unique in origin and appearance. He is described at length (3759–72): he is “swartz unt übil getan” (black and ill-formed) and infamous for his strength; with one hand he can lift a load that would make seven mules stagger. His land, not named, is *fraissam* (terrifying, terrible), his people *grimm* (violent/wild). The sun never shines there, and devils feel at home. His lands are forever cursed by God. Cernubiles vows to do something beyond anything the other kings have offered: he will capture Roland alive and bring him in irons before Marsilie for execution.

Especially interesting here is the narrator’s focus on Cernubiles’s black skin, which could have had several possible meanings for a medieval audience. The references to the Devil, to the absence of sunlight, and to eternal damnation shift the focus decisively to the demonic. Cernubiles would thereby illustrate the traditional connection between Muslims and demons already discussed in my introduction. But the monstrous also
plays a role in the descriptions of Cernubiles’s black skin and superhu-
man strength. And an audience would have pondered the exotic, per-
haps thinking of different African lands whose climates have profound
effects on appearance. No matter which interpretation one accepts, a
more basic fact emerges. Cernubiles appears as just one of a series of
Saracen kings, inviting the inference that his black skin is exceptional. So
even in the most vitriolic portrait of the Saracen hordes that survives in
Middle High German, Konrad differentiates between religion and race.
Not all Muslims are dark-skinned, and not all dark-skinned peoples are
Muslims. There can be no doubt that Konrad uses monstrous, demonic,
and exotic characteristics in order to reinforce prevailing clichés sur-
rounding Christianity’s greatest foe. Yet I show how variations in the use
of these same attributes allowed the Ebstorf mapmakers and a chronicler
such as Rudolf von Ems to paint quite different portraits of Africans and
Africa.

On the Ebstorf map, Africa occupies a position parallel to that of
Europe vis-à-vis the center of the world, both continents inferior to Asia
in size and significance, both continents extending into the climatically
uninhabitable lands of the south and north. In an interesting parallel to
the paleological research of modern science, the mapmakers remind their
viewers that Africa’s origins are actually older than those of Europe:

Europa Agenoris regis Lybie filia fuit, quam Jupiter ab Affrica raptam
Cretam advenit et pertem tertiam orbis ex eius nomine appellavit. Iste
autem Agenor Lybie fuit filius, ex qua Lybia Affrica fertur appellata, unde
apparet prius Lybiam accepisse vocabulum postea Europam.

(Europa was the daughter of Agenor, the King of Libya. Jupiter abducted
her from Africa to Crete and gave the third part of the earth’s surface her
name. This Agenor was, however, the son of Libya, from whom Africa
supposedly got its name, which allows the conclusion that Libya got its
name earlier than Europe.)

A cursory view of Europe and Africa on the Ebstorf map does give the
impression that the mapmakers anchored civilization and its history
around the Mediterranean rim, reserving southern Africa as the principal
home of wondrous creatures, savage tribes, and monstrous races. There
one can meet exotic peoples such as the Ophiophagi, who eat snakes,
and the Psylli, who are immune to poisonous snakebites and use them
to identify adulterers. There also reside Pliny’s monstrous races, among
them the Troglodytes and the Cenocephali.

A close examination of the northern lands reveals a parallel geography
of homelands for the abject Other. The exotic peoples of far northern
Europe include Sirens living on the Gardarontae Islands south of the
Orkneys. Within the lands lying between Europe and Asia, map viewers can trace the location of Alexander the Great’s great sea voyages of discovery, where he plumbed the ocean depths, lying just east of Riga. In perhaps the most bizarre relocation of the monstrously exotic, the mapmakers locate the “slimy, barbarian” Turks (future allies of Gog and Magog), who eat the flesh of children and stillborn babies, just slightly farther east, on the island of Taracontae. The borderlands of southern Scythia teem with vicious and monstrous peoples, including more Troglodytes, Scythians, and Geats. As Kugler argues, the mapmakers portray the borders of the northern reaches such that the Christian northeastern Europe of Ebstorf and Lüneburg is opposed to the Asian northwestern Scythia. The borderlands between Riga and the water boundary of Asia appear as a liminal zone where the forces of good engage the forces of evil directly.  

Within the extensive salvation history presented on the map, which begins with creation and portrays events up through the time of the mapmakers in Ebstorf and Lüneburg, the Ebstorf mapmakers do not associate evil with dark-skinned peoples, nor is there any connection to Africa. The true center of evil in the fallen world is not Africa but Asia beyond the Caspian Sea. Here behind the walls erected by Alexander live the cannibal peoples of Gog and Magog, whose breakout will trigger the Apocalypse. Here live the most dangerous and warlike peoples, including the Grifae, called scorpions among men, and the Albanians, who breed dogs with tigers and then send their giant progeny forth to lay waste to the earth. Here medieval travelers could imagine the homelands of Amazons, Pygmies, and the giant-eared Panoti. But the far north and the far south represent the poles of the monstrous and the exotic, with northwest Asia portrayed as the Heimat of evil.

In his Weltchronik, Rudolf of Ems explains the division of the continents through the traditional biblical account of the Tower of Babel, rather than the quasiclassical genealogy of the Ebstorf mapmakers. Rudolf begins with the most important continent, Asia. As with Ebstorf, Asia contains almost all locations of significance to salvation history, including the earthly paradise, surrounded by the wall of flames, and the fortress in which the peoples of Gog and Magog were imprisoned by Alexander. Within Asia, most of Rudolf’s attention is directed to India and its exotic peoples, animals, and monstrous races. These are presented very much in the spirit of the “Wonders of the East,” with subsequent catalogs of exotic peoples, monstrous races, and bizarre creatures such as the manticore and unicorns.

Whereas the Ebstorf mapmakers push Muslims to the margins—one finds only obscure references to Arab traders and Turkic peoples
as allies of Gog and Magog—Rudolf names them and places them in Mesopotamia. He briefly describes the Mesopotamian kingdoms of Nineveh, Babylonia, Chaldea, and Sheba. A catalog of Mesopotamian peoples follows, including Moabites, Ammonites, and Saracens. After a rapid tour of locations in Palestine, including the holy city of Jerusalem, Rudolf informs his audience that the ruins of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah also are to be found nearby. On the Ebstorf map, there is a similar reference, locating the Saracen peoples of the Agarini and Nabataeans near the two cities of infamy. Rudolf and the Ebstorf map-makers thus present the ruins of Sodom and Gomorrah as reminders of God’s willingness to rain destruction on those peoples whose sinful lives were an abomination.

It is certainly no accident that he now turns to the Muslims.

Da sitzt bi ein grozes her,
die Ismaeliten,
die an dén jüngsten ziten
der welte fuogint groze not.
das ist ein diet die Nabaioth
sit, Ismahelis sun, gebar.
des sint zwelf geslehte schar,
die mit kreftn sit für war
gewahsen sint vil manig jar.
der was do bi dén zitin niht
do sih fuogte dú geschiht
das sih zirteiltert dú kint
dú von Noe geborn sint. (Weltchronik 1965–67)

(Here a great army resides, the Ishmaelites, who in recent times have brought great suffering to the world. This is a people that Nabaioth, Ishmael’s son, begat later, made up of twelve tribes who since then truly have grown greater in power for many a year. He was not present in the times when history developed such that the children born of Noah became divided.)

The description itself presents the Muslims as a horde rather than as a people and reminds the audience of how much suffering Muslims have brought to the world. The conclusion stresses genealogy, referring back to the division of the continents with which Rudolf’s world geography began. The contemporary reference to the Muslim threat precedes a genealogy that explains their presence within God’s plan for all of creation. The audience hears of the empires whose rise and fall marked the division of time into ages of the world; then they get a catalog of peoples living in the Holy Land who were conquered by the people of Israel with
God’s help; then they are reminded of God’s ability to destroy those whose lives are not pleasing in his sight. There are no oblique references to the Apocalypse, but the audience is reminded that the Muslims are just the most recent manifestation of a fallen world that is moving toward the cataclysmic resolution set in motion through Christ’s first coming. More importantly, Rudolf makes no reference to the exotic, the demonic, or the monstrous.

Rudolf’s spiritual geography of Europe features three interesting parallels to the Ebstorf version. Although he does speak of Germania—citing the borders as the Rhine, the Elbe, Scandinavia, and the Alps—he presents it, as do the Ebstorf mapmakers, in terms of peoples, cities, and lands. The center is for Rudolf the cities of the Rhine, and in the case of Basil and Cologne, he makes explicit reference to relics, drops of Christ’s blood, and the relics of the Three Wise Men. The emphasis is on wealth, security, and power but equally upon the sacrifices of Christ. Between Rudolf’s praise of Italy and Greece falls a brief section on Hungary, noteworthy because it mentions pagans.

Dien Ungairn sint gesezzin
inwendig ir klûse tor
und ir lantmarchin davor
windeschir lande vil:
inrehalp ir kluse zil
Kotziler und Kolzil sind
und manege unkristenlichú kint
in vromdin sundir sprachin,
Valwen und wilde Vlachin
jensit des sneberges hant
sint lant dú si begant.37 (Weltchronik 2553–63)

(The [peoples] who live in Hungary, both within its dominions and its marches are many Slavic lands: within its dominions are Kotziler and Kolzil and many pagan peoples with different unknown languages, Valwen and wild Vlachin are the lands that they settled beyond the snow-capped mountains.)

Rudolf’s descriptive tour of Africa weaves together the same religious, historical, natural historical, and literary traditions with which readers are familiar from Ebstorf. The catalog of cities and kingdoms stretches from Libya to Sheba. Places that rate special mention include Morocco, depicted as the seat of the king of African kings (2798–805); Tripoli, as the land with three capitals (2782–87), including the great fortress of Leptis; and Carthage, identified as being founded by Dido (2794–97).
(Ebstorf does not mention Dido but names Carthage as the world’s greatest city next to Rome.) For Rudolf, Africa is the site of some of the greatest cities of the world; Africa is the place where wise King Atlas invented astronomy (2850–53); Pentapolis is, Rudolf claims, equal to the best lands in the world in regard to greatness, wealth, and fame (2772–74). One concludes that Rudolf and the Ebstorf mapmakers saw no distinction in significance among the kingdoms of the Mediterranean rim, whether they lay on the European or the African coasts.

The defining characteristic of Africa both for Rudolf and for the Ebstorf mapmakers is the heat of its climate and not the color of its natives’ skin. Rudolf’s precise catalog of lands and cities in Africa makes no mention of race until he comes to Mauritania.

Da bi lit Getulia,
Ipone und Numidia
und Mauritania das lant:
das ist von swerze also genant,
wand drinne bater, muotir, kint
von hizze in swarer varwe sint
vil nah in einis moeren wis. (Weltchronik 2806–12)

(Getulia lies nearby, Ipone and Numidia and Mauritania the land: which gets its name from blackness, for there fathers, mothers, children are black-colored on account of the heat looking much the same as the Moors.)

Tinguitania, Caesarea, Ethiopia, and Sheba are the other lands that Rudolf names where dark-skinned peoples live. But his depiction of southern Africa is multicultural. Between Ethiopia and Sheba lies the land of the Garamanten, who must be lighter-skinned peoples, one infers. Garamand is the land of wondrous springs that are cold by day and hot by night. The furthest southern regions are uninhabitable, Rudolf claims, because of the intense heat. The Ebstorf mapmakers locate the monstrous races and many exotic peoples and animals on the upper Nile, but they also depict on the banks of the Red Sea the Nubians of Mossylon, who are “semper nuda… aum modum veridica, christianissima, auro dives est; negotio vivit; tres habet reges et totidem episcopos. Ierusalem cum multa turma et cum multa pecunia frequenter venit et sepulchrum Domini multa pecunia honorat et ditat” (always naked, they are a decent people, devoutly Christian and rich in gold. They live from trade. They have three kings and three bishops. They travel often to Jerusalem in great numbers and with much gold and leave rich offerings at the tomb of the Lord).
In summary, in Rudolf’s description and on the Ebstorf *mappa*, Africa is depicted as the equal of Europe in civilization, wealth, and history. Both continents begin at the margins and stretch to habitable limits of the northern and southern worlds. The African peoples appear in modern terms as multiracial and multicultural, in no way synonymous with Muslims. The dark skins of the Mauritanians, Ethiopians, and Shebans are described in neutral terms as a natural phenomenon, with no references to subjugation based on Genesis or to bizarre or demonic behaviors. Rudolf places the Muslims near the center of the world in Asia, in Mesopotamia, in a context that stresses their place as instigators of tribulation among the transitory empires of the fallen world of salvation history. The Ebstorf mapmakers do not mention Muslims directly and locate shadowy images of Islam as far to the margins of the world as they can. The emphasis for Ebstorf is on the exploits of the good, virtuous Alexander within the general context of salvation history and the coming apocalypse. For Rudolf, as for the Ebstorf cartographers, Africa remains a continent of lesser status than Asia but equal to Europe, with both continents housing great kingdoms, Christians and pagans, and exotic and monstrous races on their farthest habitable borders as determined by extreme cold and extreme heat.

**Encounters with the Muslim Other in the Epics of Wolfram von Eschenbach**

In Book IX of *Willehalm*, Wolfram’s narrator has just described the Christians’ victory in the final battle and attributed it to Christ’s intervention. One would expect, then, a celebration of Christian supremacy to match Wolfram’s paean to the Holy Spirit in the prologue. But the narrator chooses instead to pose a provocative question:

Die nie toufes künde enpfiiengen, ist daz sünde,
daz man die sluoc alsam ein vihe?
grörzer sünde ich drumbe gihe:
ez ist gar gotes hantgetät,
zwuo und sibenzec sprâche,
die er hât. (*Willehalm* 450, 15–20).

(Is it a sin that those who had never received the insight infused by baptism were slaughtered like an animal? Yes, I reckon it to be one of the more grievous sins. The seventy-two languages all belong to the world that God created.)
In place of exultation, the narrator reminds us that Saracen lives have a place and value in God’s creation, a surprising claim to be found in a thirteenth-century crusader epic.

In her speech to the Frankish nobility before the second battle, the female protagonist Gyburg, Willehalm’s wife (whose flight from her heathen husband and conversion to Christianity caused the war in the first place), reminds the assembled Christians that all human beings are born heathen, thereby invoking a universal human family above which the baptized are elevated.

Wir han vür war bekennet,  
swaz müeter her sit Even zit  
kint gebaren, ane strit  
gar heidenschaft was ir geburt:  
etslichez der touf het umgeburt.  
getouft wip den heiden treit,  
swie daz kint der touf hab umbeleit. (Willehalm 307, 16–24)

(We have indeed recognized that any mother bearing children since the time of Eve, without question their birth was into heathen status. Every baptized woman, yes, even those whom baptism has transformed, bears a heathen, even if baptism has surrounded the child.)

She goes on, depending on how one understands her words, to assert that Christians should lament the loss of the souls of the unbaptized and even hints that God in His omnipotence could show heathens His ultimate mercy.

Wir waren doch alle heidnisch e.  
dem saeldehaften tuot vil we,  
ob von dem vater siniu kint  
hin zer vlust benennet sint:  
er mach sich erbarmen über sie,  
der rehte erbarmekeit truoc ie. (Willehalm 307, 25–30)

(We were all heathens at the beginning. He who has been saved feels pain whenever His children are condemned by God to perdition. Yet He can have mercy upon them, He who has always embodied mercy in its purest form.)

Based on these two passages alone, it would be safe to assume that, when he sat down to adapt the Old French epic La Bataille d’Aliscans, Wolfram was occupied by the question of “how the Christian world while engaged
in the Crusades should treat its heathen enemies.” Yet a careful reading of Willehalm leaves this hopeful message mired in contradiction. Scores of other passages support the view prevalent since Augustine that conversion trumps all other circumstances; that there are no rights and no status outside of Christian doctrine; and that in a war between Christians and Saracens, the Saracens alone are guilty and therefore not worthy of mercy, deserving nearly as awful a fate on earth as they will later suffer for eternity. I offer as but one example the narrator’s description of the dead and dying in the first, catastrophic battle:

Der sele riuwe hordes
vil uf ein ander legten,
himels done sie wegten,
daz vil der engel sungen,
swenne in diu swert erklungen.
Ouch vrumte der getouften wic
daz gein der helle manec stic
wart en straze wis begant.
diu heiden schaft wart des ermant,
da von diu helle wart gevreut:
ir lac manec tusent da gestreut. (Willehalm 38, 20–30)

(Huge heaps of treasure in the form of penitent souls lay piled on top of one another. They brought forth the sounds of heaven in the form of angels’ song whenever swords clanged on their behalf. The struggle of the blessed also made it so that many a small path towards hell was trod as if it were an avenue. It was the heathens who were shown this route, by which all hell rejoiced. Many thousands of them lay scattered there.)

Scholars remain completely divided regarding the question of tolerance in Wolfram’s Willehalm. Although rejecting Mergell’s original argument in favor of Wolfram’s protohumanism, a formidable group, including Lofmark and Ruh, maintains that Gyburg cannot have meant God’s children by “siniu kint,” thereby preserving a distinction in Wolfram between Christians as children of God and heathens as God’s creation. The opposing view of Bertau and Walter Schröder claims that Wolfram presents in Willehalm a broader worldview, which includes the role of heathens in God’s plan. The latter perspective has found additional support from Knapp, Haug, and Classen, whereas Rushing sees little evidence for tolerance. The possibility that Wolfram intended to include both views in Willehalm, whereby the narrator represents the traditional view and the words of tolerance are given to Gyburg, was explored first by Heinzle and then more convincingly by Wachinger.
In general, the consensus on how the High Middle Ages defined Christian tolerance has shifted significantly. Bertau highlights the argument advanced by the twelfth-century polymath William of Tyre that Muslims worshipped the same God as Christians and therefore had the possibility of achieving salvation through God-fearing and pious lives. Bertau also analyzes the letter Pope Gregory VII sent to King Al-Nasir in 1213, in which Gregory acknowledges amid epistolary rhetoric suitable for communication between equals that Christians and Muslims were created by the same God. More recently, Rüdiger Schnell and John D. Martin document voices in both Latin and vernacular sources contemporary with Wolfram that affirm the place of heathens in creation and even the possibility of heathen salvation through divine grace. So now it is known that Gyburg’s views reflect just one side of what was actually a lively debate about the nature of creation. Despite this new evidence, it is fair to say that the scholarly consensus on *Willehalm* continues to uphold Wolfram’s division of creation into two unequal spheres, with the Christians enjoying the assurance of salvation even as Saracens are allowed only a faint hope of the same.

In this section, I argue that Wolfram’s world, as embodied in the fates of four heathens—Belacane and Feirefiz in *Parzival* and Gyburg and Rennewart in *Willehalm*—reveals itself to be governed less by rigid divisions and hierarchies than by fluidity and transformation. The bridging factor may be found in the transcendent power of chivalry and courtly love, as seen in the Gahmuret episodes of *Parzival*, about which I have written elsewhere. Gahmuret, the father of Parzival, takes service with a heathen emperor, the Baruch of Baldac, and earns particular fame before the gates of Alexandria, where he is responsible for defending the Baruch’s army against the Babylonian onslaught. Striking here is the implication that religious conviction is irrelevant to courtly service. Gahmuret moves easily between realms ruled by Christians and kingdoms proudly governed by the servants of Muḥammad. Knighthood and courtly service can apparently be performed anywhere, so long as there exist noble and beautiful ladies and the possibility of serving them in individual combat between assembled armies.

In Book I of Wolfram’s *Parzival*, Parzival’s father, Gahmuret, journeys to Zazamanc (a North African kingdom across the sea from Spain) and takes service with the queen, Belacane. Gahmuret’s errantry “into foreign lands” makes no distinction between Zazamanc and Spain. Scottish and Moorish princes attack the African queen Belacane; an Angevin defends her. Wolfram’s courtly (and spiritual) virtue of fidelity (trivé) serves to transcend the gulf separating heathens and Christians. As a black woman, a heathen, and an African queen, Belacane is a foreigner...
in the physical, religious, and geopolitical terms of Wolfram’s text. But her beauty, virtue, tears, and triwe transcend these categories and not only grant her status as a proper lady for Gahmuret to love and serve but also hint at a higher spirituality, which will eventually be realized through their son, Parzival’s half brother Feirefiz. Feirefiz, born with “mottled” black and white skin like a magpie, wins inestimable wealth and worldwide fame before encountering Parzival in Book XV, battling him to a draw, converting, joining the Grail Society, and marrying the lady of the Grail, Repanse de Schoye. According to Wolfram’s narrator, their son journeys to India, where he founds the perfect Christian kingdom in exile and comes to be known as Prester John.

Ebenbauer argues that Gahmuret never overcomes the disaffection provoked by the sight of the black-skinned peoples of Zazamanc, that his physical union with Belacane is motivated solely by Belacane’s erotic promise as a sexual object, and that Gahmuret means precisely what he says when he cites her heathen status as the reason he deserts her. 47 As Ebenbauer reads Parzival, Gahmuret’s racist ressentiment is contrasted with Gahmuret’s love for Herzeloyde (Parzival’s mother in Book II) as well as with the idealization of sexual renunciation that characterizes Parzival’s encounter with his future wife, Condwiramurs, whose starving body Parzival rescues from the siege of a rapacious nobleman in Book IV. When Ebenbauer broadens the scope of his analysis to the Herzog-Ernst stories and to late-medieval adaptations of the Parzival and Gawain material, he concludes that the Middle High German literary tradition offers a largely racist depiction of dark-skinned peoples, a depiction that is gendered such that black women are depicted as exotic objects of sexual desire, whereas black men tend to take on monstrously sexual characteristics.

My counterarguments to Ebenbauer go as follows: 1) Gahmuret’s disaffection is undeniable but transforms itself into love at the sight of Belacane’s transcendent sorrow as she mourns her lost lover, Isenhart; the narrator describes her tears as a baptism. 2) Wolfram counters any possibility of abjection by shifting the third-person narrative point of view back and forth from Gahmuret to Belacane, making it possible for the audience to experience her thoughts and feelings regarding the foreign knight who has come to her kingdom. 3) Gahmuret’s real reason for leaving her is his desire for fame (prîs), not her religion, which is a pretext. 4) And, most decisively, the narrator compares Belacane, who dies of sorrow after giving birth to their son Feirefiz, to the turtledove, a Marian symbol of triwe, which happens to be Wolfram’s most cherished virtue. Clearly, Belacane is much more than a dark-skinned sex object. Even as Herzeloyde’s son Parzival redeems the Grail Society by asking the proper question and becomes Grail King, Belacane’s son Feirefiz
symbolically unites the Christian and heathen worlds and sires Prester John. The Christian and heathen sons of Gahmuret both prove essential to Wolfram’s vision.

Whereas knightly prowess (prîs) motivates Gahmuret in Parzival, courtly love (minne) underlies the higher forms of devotion in Willehalm. When Gyburg describes what motivated her to abandon her husband Tybalt (whose virtues she affirms), betray a close relative in freeing Willehalm from captivity, flee with Willehalm into Christian lands, convert to Christianity, marry a man of much lower station, and, finally, relinquish her sovereignty over a mighty kingdom, it all begins with acquaintance forged in courtly love (Willehalm 220, 1–30). She hears of and perhaps even witnesses Willehalm’s prowess in battle, and he makes secret overtures to her while in captivity. What draws her to him is not his pious nature but rather his knightly virtues.

Der ie werden wiben
vor uz ir rehtes also verjach,
daz man in dienestlichen sach
under schiltlichem dache
bi sülhem ungemache
da man den lip durh wirde zert
und dem laster von dem prise wert. (Willehalm 220, 4–20)

(Who ever was the advocate of the rights of worthy women, in that, one saw him act in their service under the security of the shield in such unpleasant conditions that the body could be scored in the name of honor and vice kept far away from prowess.)

In Wolfram’s world, courtliness is neither denigrated nor relegated to a lower sphere of significance, as it is in more conventional conversion narratives such as Konrad von Würzburg’s Der welt lon or Hartmann’s Der arme Heinrich. Gyburg’s devotion to the Christian God, the transcendental pleasures of the marriage bed, and a love born in betrayal and intrigue are all legitimate dimensions of the couple’s nascent sainthood.

Admittedly, chivalry does assume a more ambivalent role in Willehalm than in Parzival because of the salvation guaranteed to fallen crusaders. Wolfram’s prayer to Saint Willehalm in the prologue stresses most strongly the superiority of those who fight on God’s behalf over those who fight for honor and glory alone (Willehalm 3, 16–30). In his exhortation to his knights before the first battle, Willehalm sets chivalry on earth parallel to the tones of the angels in heaven, where he declares that they fight “durch der zweir slahte minne” (for the sake of their two kinds of love) (16, 30). When Bertram rebukes the fleeing Franks, he warns them...
of the punishment that awaits on Judgment Day (303, 8–15). Willehalm calls his knights into the second battle with tales of heathen atrocities against Christian women and children (297, 13–19). And the passage already quoted concerning the heathen dead speaks with total assurances of Christian salvation and heathen damnation.

Yet knightly virtues are found as often on the heathen as on the Christian side in Willehalm. Pinel, the heathen son of Cator, is praised as “ein werder heiden” (a worthy heathen) (21, 10); as the heathens gather for the first battle, the narrator calls them “manec heiden vil gehiure” (many quite congenial heathens) (26, 12); Rubiun and King Sinagun fight “des die heidenschaft het ere” (such that heathenry has honor) (27, 14); the heathen kings are praised for keeping their oaths to Terramer, even though the oaths were sworn to pagan gods (34, 20–25); the armies of King Margot are said to have fought well, both in order to obtain the proper salutations of women and to achieve pris, which is Gahmuret’s goal in Parzival. Arofel is singled out for his willingness to brave any danger in service to ladies (78, 3–18); Gyburg is said to have inherited her milte (goodness, modesty, magnanimity) from him. In contrast to such bravery and sacrifice, treachery occurs solely among the Franks, who attempt to desert Willehalm’s banner in his time of greatest need. Chivalry and courtly service, from which triwe (trustworthiness, loyalty) emerges in Wolfram’s Parzival, flourish equally among the baptized and unbaptized in Willehalm.

One might still argue that two worlds are preserved in Willehalm, with chivalry being accessible to heathens and crusading (and salvation) only being open to the baptized as true children of God. But then one must account for the role of the monstrous Muslim Rennewart. Rennewart is the lethal arm of Christian triumph. Not only does he turn the tide of battle at each key moment, but he also corrals and drives the fleeing Franks back into Willehalm’s camp so that the Christian army has the numbers to confront the heathen hordes. Significant here is how Rennewart’s role is transformed in Wolfram’s account. In Alischanz, Reonard’s eventual conversion finds mention in his very first scene, thus tempering somewhat the audience’s response to his violent reprisals against the other kitchen boys. Reonard fervently wishes for baptism but is denied the privilege by the king. In Willehalm, although he is treated in exemplary fashion by both Willehalm and Gyburg, Rennewart refuses baptism because he does not find it suitable to his patrimony (he is Terramer’s son). His fervent wish to battle the heathens is justified by Wolfram not on religious grounds but rather on the grounds of kinship because he was so ill-treated by his family. Lofmark has argued that Wolfram would have included Rennewart’s conversion in the epic’s missing conclusion, to be
motivated by the audacious oaf’s love of the emperor’s daughter Alyze, much as Feirefiz’s conversion was driven by lust for Repanse de Schoye in *Parzival*. But one cannot assume anything, given how many changes Wolfram undertook in his Old French source. Wolfram also means for his audience to view Rennewart outside the unifying context of courtliness, as the comical references to his well-meaning but boorish behavior demonstrate. The colossus Rennewart stands astride the two worlds, performing Christian deeds with a heathen hand. God has given him the strength of ten, but only hatred motivates him, and he fights with equal ferocity against both recalcitrant Franks and fanatical heathens. So what is left is a fragment in which the Christian triumph is made totally dependent on the prowess of a heathen driven by revenge and hatred, not by the fate of his soul.

Gyburg does willingly convert, which would seem to make her an exemplary counterpart to Rennewart, but she continues to see herself between both worlds. She is acutely aware that her love and conversion have brought not only war but also estrangement from her father and the deaths of many noble knights. Her conversion has made her a Christian and her marriage to Willehalm makes her a member of the nobility, but her kinship ties keep one of her feet among the heathens. Furthermore, her resemblance to Rennewart is stressed again and again. On the level of plot, it confirms Rennewart’s heathen kinship, but at the same time, it reminds the audience of their similar position vis-à-vis the warring factions that surround them.

Kinship ties also help motivate Gyburg’s powerful advocacy of compassion and mercy. Much has been written concerning the hope she expresses for the salvation of the heathens through grace, but few scholars have focused on her entire message, which in fact is more subtle and complex than a mere catalog of noble and virtuous heathens who found places in heaven. After making the case for her contention that “die heiden hin zer vlust sint alle niht benennet” (the heathens condemned to perdition have not all been named) (*Willehalm* 307, 14–15), she goes much further, citing the fate of the fallen angels in order to remind her audience that the place of the spiritually privileged in God’s creation can be tenuous, no matter how holy its occupants (308). Medieval theologians had taught that humans were created as part of God’s plan to take the place of the angels who had been expelled from heaven. Yet humans also fell, Gyburg says, just as had Lucifer and his followers. And today the demonic fallen angels torment humans in hopes of usurping their place. Thus Gyburg’s message is that the Christian claim on salvation is not irrevocable, that it still might founder on human frailty. The third part of her message focuses on God’s benevolence and
omnipotence. All things are possible for one so powerful, she asserts, and she reads the message of the cross as a commandment to humankind to have compassion with and mercy upon their enemies. Gyburg concludes her address with a demonstration of exemplary compassion. After a brief reference to what her conversion has cost her personally, she focuses on the knights who have lost their lives in Willehalm’s wars and is moved to tears: “si weinde vil: des twanc si not” (she cried a lot; suffering moved her to that) (Willehalm 310, 30). Given the continual comparisons drawn between the sacrifices of Christ and those of warriors fighting on His behalf, Gyburg’s tears transcend sorrow. The exemplar here is the pietà, and the power of tears unmistakable.50

All of these examples evoke a world in which hierarchies can be reversed and absolute dichotomies overcome—and not just in a temporary plot-motivated fashion common to Arthurian romance. Whether such fluidity is motivated by the unsuccessful integration of diverse epic sources and contradictory motifs, as Wachinger argues, or whether there is true method in Wolfram’s madness remains speculation’s captive. But I hope to have demonstrated that the consistent application of transformation and bridging motives is a model that can to be applied legitimately to Wolfram’s epic responses in regard to the question of how Christians should treat their heathen enemies. Wolfram’s message, voiced through Gyburg and the deeds of Rennewart, is not the humanist mantra of “we are all brothers” but rather a stern warning that compassion is essential in a fallen world where human frailty can bring damnation to all.

Border Crossings: Muslim Women in the Stricker’s “Die Königin von Mohrenland”

Whoever believes medieval literature to be bound by convention and enslaved to stereotypes should be sentenced to spend five years in a manuscript library with the collected works of the Stricker.51 Whether he is applying the motive of trial by fire to a marriage or telling of a king who demands that his missing eye be replaced by one taken from a cat, there is never a dull moment and rarely a convention not subject to some unexpected twist. Because I plan to undertake an extended analysis elsewhere of the Stricker’s adaptation of the Pfaffe Konrad’s Rolandslied, I will focus here on the short verse narrative “Die Königin von Mohrenland,” in which a Muslim invasion figures prominently.52

As always, the Stricker starts in medias res, and as usual, the reader is left to ponder whether the Stricker’s diction is an inept response to the constraints of rhymed couplets or the residue of a truly original mind.
Es was hie vor ein chunigin,
diu moht wol ein vrouwe sin:
si het geburt und gewalt,
in richeit was manichvalt.
sie het vrownen tugende gar,
rosen var und li<gen var
was ir vil minneclicher lip:
si was ein wol gemacht wip. (“Die Königin von Mohrenland” 1–8)

(There once was a queen who probably even was a lady: she had breeding and power, was greatly diversified in wealth. She even had the virtues of a lady, her very lovely body was the color of roses and the color of lilies; she was a well-made female indeed.)

Two incongruities catch one’s eye immediately. The Stricker’s assertion that the queen probably was a lady leaves open the possibility that she might not have been, and the association of virtue with the superficial clichés of courtly appearance encourages the inference that all is not as it should be. This “introduction” concludes with the narrator’s pronouncement of coming doom: that messengers of the Devil will rob the queen of her joy and, here again a strange combination, of her sense (sin), that is, of her sanity (15–17).

Only now does the audience hear of the precarious geopolitical situation in which the queen finds herself. The neighboring kingdom is ruled by a pagan queen whose subjects share the same wondrous characteristic: “swaz man drinne [in ir lande] vant, / es waere man ode wip, / die heten alle swarzen lip” (20–22) (whoever was found there, / whether man or woman, / all had black bodies). Readers recognize the conventional association of black skin with the Devil that Ebenbauer evokes, and they expect the queen’s kingdom to be invaded and desecrated by “Muslim hordes” in the manner of King Cernubiles in the Rolandslied. Instead, the Muslim queen settles on a far more insidious strategy:

Da sante diu heideninne dar
vil wibe—die warn mor var—
in der frowen chuninchrich,
das si da tougenlich
den ungelouben lerten
und die riter da vercherten.
das geschach in churcen stunden.
swen si uber wunden,
daz er ir leben ane gie,
der wart swarz als sie
und wart in gar gehorsam. (“Die Königin von Mohrenland” 23–33)
(Then the pagan queen sent many women—they were the color of Moors—into the kingdom of the queen, so that they secretly taught heresy and converted the knights living there. This did not take long. Whomever they won over became as black as they were and totally obedient to them.)

Here Ebenbauer’s argument (cited earlier) concerning black women portrayed exclusively as sex objects breaks down. If that were the case in the Stricker’s story, this would be the perfect place to tell in luscious detail how the knights were physically seduced—do not forget that the invaders here are all pagan women with the skin color of Moors! But instead the audience hears how the knights were secretly converted by the women’s teaching. Still, the demonic associations are undeniable. If one is to believe the narrator, these women are black-skinned messengers of the Devil who are converting God’s servants to darkness, whether their transformation is to be understood literally or spiritually.

At this point, the narrator’s introductory reference to the queen’s loss of sanity finally begins to make sense.

Do zurnt diu Chuniginne
so sere, daz sie ir sinne
von dem zorne verlos
und alle ir weisheit verchos. (“Die Königin von Mohrenland” 35–38)

(Then the queen was in such a rage that she lost her sanity out of anger and her wisdom in the process.)

In her rage, the queen tells her knights that they are free to choose whom to serve. The knights accuse her of ingratitude, of shirking her responsibility to honor their service to her and to God (45–49). The Stricker makes it plain here that the Muslims are not entirely responsible. It is the intemperance of the queen that brings about the final destruction of the system of fealty:

Durch den vil ungefuogen zorn
wurden da gnuge heiden
und begunden sich scheidens
mit ir glouben von gote
und von der kuniginne gebote.
daz hite maniger verlan,
wolt sis im gedanchet han.
don wolt sis in night danchen.
des begundens alle wanchen.
sus wart der kuniginne chraft 
vercheret mit der heidenschaft. ("Die Königin von Mohrenland"
53–62)

(Quite a number became pagans on account of this uncontrolled anger and began to separate themselves from God in faith and from the queen in fealty. Many would not have done it, if she had thanked them. After this all began to waver. Soon the queen's power was usurped by the pagans.)

Soon the entire kingdom falls into "blackness." The knights no longer serve the queen or their ladies for high purposes: "Daz swartze heiden-iche leben hat sich manigem riter geben, der hohe mine hat verchorn" (93–95) (the black pagan life had given itself to many a knight who abandoned hohe minne). The lesson to be drawn from this, the narrator tells us, is that a woman, be she queen or domina, should never forget her obligation to thank and honor properly those knights who serve her. One might conclude here that the Muslim victory should be read to highlight the Stricker's misogyny rather than his racism, thus vindicating Wiethaus instead of Ebenbauer. But I think a medieval audience would have understood that the Stricker was using the rhetoric of courtly service to remind them that the Muslim triumphs of his time could be attributed to Christian failures in a fallen world.

Conclusion

In order to appreciate the remarkable diversity with which the monks of Ebstorf, Rudolf von Ems, Wolfram von Eschenbach, and the Stricker depict the Muslim Other, I have argued that it is necessary to recognize how much the mentalities of these poets and mapmakers were shaped by the realization that they themselves were living on the margins of a fallen world. For these mapmakers and wordsmiths of medieval German, there was no Manhattan in Steinberg's sense, no identity shaped by hegemony à la Tacitus. If there is a center, it lies in far-off Asia, where the spiritual, economic, and geopolitical power is in the hands of "unbelievers." I have shown how Africa and Europe occupied parallel positions in Rudolf's world, both continents inferior to Asia in the potential for good and for evil, both housing exotic peoples and monstrous races on their fringes. There is scant linguistic evidence for the existence of European identity. The Old French literary sources that poets like Wolfram were adapting and popularizing were transmitted from the Court of Champagne up the Rhine via the Low Countries; when Hartmann von Aue's "Poor Henry" seeks the most advanced medical treatment, he journeys to Salerno; and
spiritual authority was scattered among the Papal States and a multitude of shrines the location of which had been determined by saints’ lives. Even a consistent notion of German identity remains problematic. German-speaking people thought of themselves first and foremost as Saxons, Franconians, and Swabians, not as Germans; and foreign meant primarily “not of my people” or “not of my Heimat.” There is no text more expressive of this decentering of medieval German mentalities than the so-called national epic, the Nibelungenlied, composed roughly at the same time as Wolfram’s Parzival and almost certainly performed at some of the same provincial courts. Deeds are described in light of conflicting values drawn from two literary traditions, the heroic and the courtly. The German national hero, Dietrich, is a rootless, wandering exile (embbodying the concept ellende), Etzel (Attila) the Hun is a virtuous if ineffectual ruler, and the cowardly and treacherous “hordes” who ambush the Christian Burgundians turn out to be Bavarians.

If the Ebstorf mappa is any guide to how the German-speaking peoples viewed the world, one cannot seek to understand images of the Muslim Other without recognizing how their position was defined in time as well as in space. The grand narrative of salvation history, retold by Rudolf von Ems in fragmentary form and depicted with astounding detail by the Ebstorf mapmakers, provided context and meaning for poets who wanted to describe encounters with Muslims for their audiences at provincial courts. The rise of Islam, the flourishing of heresy, and the failure and disintegration of the Christian consensus were all viewed as signs of the imminent Apocalypse. In this context, Islam is not an isolated historical phenomenon whose triumph one might cite as evidence against the existence of God but rather just the seventh of the Great Empires that have subjugated believers as a consequence of the Fall and in anticipation of the Second Coming. Likewise, the phenomenal rise of the Beguines, among other heretics in the Rhenish cities, was viewed as a sign of the inner dissension and conflict predicted in Revelation and in the apocalyptic teachings of Christ. One must therefore take into account that Muslim deprecations, whether historic or fabricated for anti-Muslim polemics, were viewed as just punishments sent by God for Christian failings. On the one hand, this led to the demonization of Muslims that Ebenbauer so powerfully describes and decries; on the other hand, it created a place in God’s plan not only for virtuous pagans like Alexander and but also for “heathens,” and it led, beginning in the twelfth century, to a lively debate concerning the possibility of non-Christians’ redemption through grace.

Religion remained the principal criterion for defining the Other in literature describing intercultural encounters in the thirteenth century.
And it is certainly accurate to say that the Pfaffe Konrad’s images of Muslims as physically malformed, sexually depraved, and spiritually damned represented an important set of tropes that all poets writing in Middle High German knew and made use of. But it is also essential to recognize the diversity and the interconnectedness of the images with which “unbelievers” are portrayed. Each group has its identifying characteristics, but even more important are the characteristics not imparted to each group. Jews do not worship Apollo; Hungarians do not desecrate the host. Much analysis remains to be done, but one might tentatively conclude that the Rolandslied presents one extreme of depiction in Middle High German, with Wolfram’s exploration of the possibility of Muslim salvation through divine grace representing the other extreme. This brief survey has uncovered a number of possibilities in between: Rudolf describes Muslims as a historic phenomenon that brought much suffering to the world; the Ebstorf monks see them as a sign of the Apocalypse. In Wolfram’s Parzival, they can embody Wolfram’s most cherished virtue; in Willehalm, they can exhibit all of the chivalric qualities attributed to noble knights. The Stricker can employ poisonous caricatures of religion and race to describe the inhabitants of Mohrenland, while abjuring the usual clichés involving sex and gender and then in his epilogue attributing the Muslim conquest to the failures of Christians.

Scholars of mentalité have long recognized that to study how social collectives see outsiders is to understand how they see themselves. So in analyzing images of the Muslim Other, contributors to this volume are, in essence, fashioning their own mappa mundi of medieval mentalities. To argue for diversity in the depiction of Muslims in mappaemundi and Middle High German sources in no way denies the existence of dehumanizing caricatures that were meant to inspire or justify brutality against non-Christians inside and outside of Christian-ruled kingdoms. Yet to do so is also to acknowledge the disappointment and disgust with which Christians frequently described themselves. Examples just analyzed include Wolfram’s descriptions of Frankish cowardice in Willehalm and the Stricker’s tale of the erring queen whose conduct brings about the fall of her kingdom, but they extend elsewhere even to such unlikely sources as Pope Urban II’s call to the First Crusade:

O what a disgrace if such a despised and base race, which worships demons, should conquer a people which has the faith of omnipotent God and is made glorious with the name of Christ! With what reproaches will the Lord overwhelm us if you do not aid those who, with us, profess the Christian religion! Let those who have been accustomed unjustly to wage private warfare against the faithful now go against the infidels and end
with victory this war which should have been begun long ago. Let those
who for a long time, have been robbers, now become knights. Let those
who have been fighting against their brothers and relatives now fight in
a proper way against the barbarians. Let those who have been serving as
mercenaries for small pay now obtain the eternal reward.\textsuperscript{54}

Urban’s exhortation to holy war against the “despised and base race” of
Muslims is directed at Christians who have been waging unjust warfare
against other Christians, waylaying and robbing travelers, killing their
own brothers, brutalizing their relatives, and selling their fealty for a
pittance. His call for external action against the Other is thus a call to
internal transformation and evokes a world of uncertainty, ambiguity,
and constant transition, a world that demanded discernment based on
fine distinctions, a fallen world in which the threat of the Muslim Other
could only be overcome once one had triumphed over the depravity of
the Christian self.

Notes

1. Lee Patterson, “On the Margin: Postmodernism, Ironic History and
medieval studies include this Notre Dame anthology, John H. Van Engen,
ed., \textit{The Past and Future of Medieval Studies}, Notre Dame Conferences in
Medieval Studies 4 (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press,
1994); Norman F. Cantor, \textit{Inventing the Middle Ages: The Lives, Works,
and Ideas of the Great Medievalists of the Twentieth Century} (Cambridge:
Lutterworth, 1992); and, most recently, Stephen J. Harris and Bryon Lee
Grigsby, eds., \textit{Misconceptions about the Middle Ages}, Routledge Studies in
Medieval Religion and Culture 7 (New York: Routledge, 2008).

2. Gabrielle M. Spiegel, \textit{The Past as Text: The Theory and Practice of Medieval
Historiography} (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 59.

3. Ulrike Wiethaus, “Thieves and Carnivals: Gender in German Dominican
Literature of the Fourteenth Century,” in \textit{The Vernacular Spirit: Essays on
Medieval Religious Literature}, ed. Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, Duncan
Robertson, and Nancy Bradley Warren (New York: Palgrave Macmillan,
2002), 211–212 [209–238].

4. Andreas Mielke has collected all of the references he could find to Africans
in medieval German literature in \textit{Nigra sum et formosa: Afrikanerinnen in der
deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters: Texte und Kontexte zum Bild des Afrikaners

5. Gude Suckale-Redlefsen and Robert Suckale, \textit{Mauritius: Der heilige Mohr}
(Houston and Munich: Schnell und Steiner, 1987), 21.

6. Alfred Ebenbauer, “Es gibe ain mörrynne vil dick susse mynne; Belakanes
Landsleute in der deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters,” \textit{Zeitschrift für
deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur} 113 (1984): 41 [16–42].
7. Ibid., 41–42.
8. Compare the standard image of the Muslim Other found in Gerd H. M. Claassens, “Jacob van Maelant on Muhammad and Islam,” in Medieval Christian Perceptions of Islam: A Book of Essays, ed. John Victor Tolan (New York: Garland, 1996), 211–212 [211–242]. Stressed again and again are the descent from Ishmael, their violent nature, and that they were sent by God as divine punishment for the sinfulness of Christians.
9. All quotations from the Rolandslied are from Carl Wesle and Peter Wapnewski, eds., Das Rolandslied des Pfaffen Konrad, 3rd ed., Altdeutsche Textbibliothek 69 (Tübingen, Germany: Niemeyer, 1985), and refer to the line numbers in the critical edition, here ll. 33–34. All translations are my own.
10. Figure 1. The Ebstorf mappa mundi (3.57 meters x 3.57 meters) was produced ca. 1300, most likely in the Benedictine monastery of Ebstorf where it was found in 1830. The original map was destroyed during a bombardment in 1943.
13. Theil, Rudolf von Ems, 16.
15. Kugler, “Ebstorfer Weltkarte,” 3; my analysis of the Ebstorf map draws heavily from Kugler’s conclusions, 16.
16. Steinberg’s cartoon may be viewed at the website of the Saul Steinberg Foundation: http://www.saulsteinbergfoundation.org/life_work.html.
18. All quotations from the Ebstorf mappa are from the interactive website maintained by the University of Lüneburg at http://weblab.uni-lueneburg.de/kulturinformatik/projekte/ebskart/content/start.html. I presented some of these arguments on November 13, 2008, as part of
the Thirty-Sixth John D. Regester Lecture at the University of Puget Sound, Washington.


28. Richard Fletcher reminds us that *Arabia* usually referred not to what we now know as Saudi Arabia but to a small land lying east of the Jordan valley. See Fletcher, *Cross and the Crescent*, 8–9.


31. For the popularity of these accounts, see Friedman, *Monstrous Races*, 5–25.


34. Kugler speculates that the allies of Gog and Magog are located in the borderlands east of Riga as an allusion to the Crusades that the Teutonic Knights were conducting in the Baltic countries in the second half of the thirteenth century. “Ebstorfer Weltkarte,” 21.

35. Ibid., 20–22.

36. Recent studies of medieval monsters are careful to differentiate among monsters, demons, and exotic peoples. Augustine himself argues that monsters are part of God’s creation and are to be considered human because they serve a unique purpose in creation. See the introduction to Bettina Bildhauer and Robert Mills, eds., *The Monstrous Middle Ages* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), 9 [1–27]. See also Friedman,
Monstrous Races; and Alixe Bovey, *Monsters and Grotesques in Medieval Manuscripts* (London: British Library, 2002).

37. For the image of Hungarians in the literature of the German-speaking lands of the Middle Ages, see Alexander Sager, “Hungarians as Vremde in Medieval Germany,” in Classen, *Meeting the Foreign*, 27–44.

38. I presented a preliminary version of this section in the session “Gar untiuscz: Encounters with Non-Germans in the German Middle Ages” at the annual meeting of the German Studies Association in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, September 28–30, 2006.


49. For studies of the role of Rennewart, see Fritz Peter Knapp, Rennewart: Studien zu Gehalt und Gestalt des ‘Willehalm’ Wolframs von Eschenbach (Vienna: Notring, 1970); and Carl Lofmark, Rennewart in Wolfram’s


53. I commend to your attention a forthcoming book on images of the Muslim Other by the editor of the present volume, who will strongly contest most of the arguments advanced in this article: Jerold C. Frakes, *Vernacular and Latin Discourses of the Muslim Other in Medieval Germany* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan). I am indebted to Professor Frakes for access to a manuscript version of the book and appreciate his willingness to publish views so contrary to his own.

54. The texts of all five versions of Urban’s call are available via the Medieval Internet Sourcebook at http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/urban2-5vers.html#Fulcher. I am quoting from Fulcher of Chartres’s account.
CHAPTER 5

CONFLICTED COEXISTENCE: CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM INTERACTION AND ITS REPRESENTATION IN MEDIEVAL ARMENIA

Sergio La Porta

During the course of the eleventh century, the Armenian kingdoms of the Bagratuni and Arcruni dynasties were annexed by the Byzantine Empire. The invasions of the Seljuk Turks precipitated the collapse of the Armenian kingdoms and then swiftly removed the Byzantines from their newly acquired territory. Although Armenians had a long relationship with Islam, Islamic peoples, and Islamic rule, Seljuk dominance in Anatolia inaugurated a new social reality resulting from the demographic shift of emigrating Armenians and new influxes of Islamic groups of Turkish, Kurdish, and Persian ethnicity. The new political and cultural topography consequently engendered a renewed Armenian narrative about Islam and Muslims that refashioned elements of the earlier discourse as well as introduced new interpretative strategies to contextualize and determine the radical transformation of contemporary Armenian life. In this chapter, I first present evidence concerning both creative and conflictual Armenian and Muslim interactions in the period approximately between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries and then turn to cotemporal Armenian literary depictions of Muslims and of the Seljuk Turks in particular.

The combination of the Byzantine annexation of Armenia and the Seljuk invasions had a deleterious effect on Armenian political and social life. In addition to the loss of the monarchies, the traditional dynastic structure of Armenian society had been severely weakened by the
emigration and/or extinction of many of the noble houses. This system embodied an extremely conservative force in Armenian society that had constituted the organizing principle of political, social, and ecclesiastical life for centuries. Its near disappearance left a large political and socio-economic vacuum.

The map of Armenia in the twelfth century clearly indicates the contemporary complexity and disunity of political affairs at the time. The Seljuk victory over imperial forces at the battle of Manazkert (Manzikert) in 1071 introduced a new wave of Islamic, mainly Kurdish and Turkic, elements that often became the ruling power in the territory of the former Armenian kingdoms. Many of these Islamic polities survived for much of the twelfth century. Among them were the Sökmanids—known as the Šāh-i Arman—of Xlat’ (Akhlāt); the Šaddādīds of Ani; the Mengüčekids of Erznka; the Saltuḳids of Erzerum; the Artuḳids of Diyarbekir; and the Eldigüzīdzids of Arran.

Seljuk rule in the Caucasus, however, was challenged successfully by the Kingdom of Georgia, ruled since the ninth century by the junior branch of the royal Armenian Bagratuni family known as the Bagrat’ioni. The success of the Georgian monarchs enticed many Armenians to migrate north, where they rather quickly emerged as a powerful military and administrative element in the kingdom. Throughout the twelfth century, the Georgian kingdom attempted to conquer the lands of the former Armenian kingdoms of the Bagratuni and the Arcruni. By 1200 the Armenian commander-in-chief of the Georgian military (amir-spasalar), Zak’arē Mxargrdzeli (Zak’arian), and his brother, the commander of the cavalry (spasalar), Iwanē, were ultimately successful in a series of campaigns that resulted in the conquest of most of the former Bagratuni kingdom with its capital, the city of Ani. They then attempted to restore a semblance of the traditional dynastic social structure that had defined Armenia for so long.

Despite the undoubtedly negative developments ushered in by the destruction of the Armenian kingdoms, the period of Seljuk domination in Armenia was a dynamic one. Particularly during the latter half of the twelfth century, new paradigms were required to replace the social and ecclesiastical norms that had weakened or disappeared amid the chaos of the previous century. Many of these paradigms reflect a conversation with the new or newly empowered Islamic elements within Armenian societies. One may mention, for example, the emergence of futuwwa–like brotherhoods of urban youth during this period. Similarly, a distinct merchant class that thrived under Islamic rule makes its appearance at this moment. The development of cities such as Ani under the Šaddādīd emirs evinces a correspondence with the layout and organization of
contemporary Islamic cities, consisting of a principal street, secondary streets, and side streets, further classified according to trade professions that were highly specialized. This manner of organization, unknown from the epigraphical evidence of the Bagratuni period, appears to have evolved during Šaddādid rule in Ani and was subsequently maintained.\footnote{Over a decade and a half after Šaddādid rule in the city ended, a wealthy member of the Armenian merchant class, Tigran Honenc‘, commissioned an inscription that refers to a side street occupied by grain merchants by the Turkish word \textit{zukak} (modern Turkish \textit{sokak}, or street).}  

Another example of the Armenian incorporation of Islamic socio-economic terminology is the earliest attestation of the term \textit{waqf} in Armenian.\footnote{Found in an inscription of 1173, it denotes a permanent land grant to a monastic institution. The use of the term \textit{waqf} seems to indicate not a change in the actual nature of monastic grants from earlier epochs but rather a perception that such a grant required clarification. The Islamic term may have borne the advantage of specifically identifying an endowment that included land in perpetuity. Attempts to employ the Armenian term \textit{hayrenik‘} (patrimony) in contemporary inscriptions to identify such land grants in certain instances may point to a parallel development in native terminology.}  

It is further possible that the Georgian kingdom and the Armenian conquerors of the former Bagratuni lands developed a system of land tenure analogous to the administrative \textit{iqṭā‘} of the Seljuks. C. Cahen has noted the Seljuks’ unprecedented widespread use of the \textit{iqṭā‘}.\footnote{As their empire declined, the conditional nature of the original \textit{iqṭā‘} model evolved into a hereditary holding that granted its possessor not only rights of revenue but also the right to govern. One may notice a similar development within the Georgian administration. The monarchy originally allotted conditional land grants that accompanied particular offices within the administration. However, under Queen T‘amar (1184–1214), both the offices and the holdings tended to become hereditary, as in the case of the Seljuks. The impression of Islamic Seljuk paradigms of administration on Armeno-Georgian consciousness is underscored by the deliberate adoption of the Seljuk title of \textit{atabeg} (guardian of the crown prince) by Iwanē Mqargrdzeli (Zak‘arian).}  

Well-documented examples of Muslim-Christian intermarriage and of the adoption of Islamic names by Armenian Christians suggest a substantial degree of social integration between the Christian and Muslim populations,\footnote{Well-documented examples of Muslim-Christian intermarriage and of the adoption of Islamic names by Armenian Christians suggest a substantial degree of social integration between the Christian and Muslim populations, and the available numismatic evidence of the period further indicates that a state of economic accommodation existed between the kingdom of Georgia and her Muslim neighbors to the benefit of the mixed Muslim-Christian populations of the regional urban centers.} and the available numismatic evidence of the period further indicates that a state of economic accommodation existed between the kingdom of Georgia and her Muslim neighbors to the benefit of the mixed Muslim-Christian populations of the regional urban centers.\footnote{The}
Georgian copper issue that was minted during the period was bilingual—Georgian and Arabic—and sometimes included the name of the reigning caliph, which one scholar has interpreted as a gesture of conciliation toward the kingdom’s Muslim subjects. A similar approach may be detected from the opposite side. The vast majority of copper coins issued by the Ildigüzids that were found in Armenia (especially Duin) and in the border areas along the Araxes are thin, are of regular shape, and bear the name of the Seljuk sultan but omit that of the caliph.

Such sociopolitical interactions are echoed in contemporary artistic trends. Peter Cowe has elucidated how Islamic poetry encouraged the emergence of a new cultural aesthetic in Armenian literature that valued poetic expression over prose. Islamic poetic forms and motifs were rapidly indigenized within an Armenian literary context. The land conquered by the forces of the Georgian kingdom included the homes of the famous poets Falakī-i Šīrvānī, Xāqānī, and Nizāmī. The Georgian Chronicle (Kartlis Cxovreba) and Rustaveli’s romance, Man in the Panther Skin (Vepxist’q’asani), display ample evidence of knowledge of Persian epic and romance, including Ferdowsi’s Šāh-nāme and Gorgānī’s Vis o Rāmīn.

Although there was no Armenian court in Greater Armenia to support such literary engagements, Armenian translations and adaptations of Islamic romances attest to the dynamic artistic conversation between Armenian authors and Islamic texts. “The Tale of the Bronze City” was likely translated from Arabic at the request of the cupropalate of Tayk’/Tao, David (d. 1000). Into this translation, as into other prose narratives translated from Arabic, mono-rhymed quatrains—known as kafas (from Arabic qafiya)—were inserted to bring the tragic and didactic elements of the story into relief. The extremely learned Armenian scholar and nobleman Grigor Magistros (d. 1058) introduced the consistent use of end rhyme into Armenian poetry, inspired by the qasida poetic form, possibly by al-Mutanabbi in particular. He also composed a rhymed metrical version of the Bible in three days after a Muslim named Manus’ē boasted of the Qur’ān’s superiority over Christian scripture on the grounds that it was poetry. Grigor may also have been the first Armenian to engage in an epistolary exchange with Muslims on the topic of religion. The Armenian poet Frik (d. ca. 1300) rendered Persian quatrains into Armenian. His somewhat later contemporary Kostandin Erznkac’i (1250/1260–ca. 1330) was asked by his brethren—although it is unclear whether they were monastic or not—to compose a poem in the same manner as the Šāh-nāme after listening to a recitation from it. Persian and Arabic influences have been detected in the Armenian romance Patmut’iwn Farman Mankann (The History of the Youth Farman).
Similarly, new loanwords borrowed from Persian and Arabic, often via Turkish, as well as Turkish words themselves entered the Armenian literary vocabulary.\textsuperscript{32} Within the visual arts, Armenian stonemasons were instrumental in developing an Anatolian style of architecture that transformed the Persian brick-and-stucco models fancied by Seljuk rulers into stone. The ornate cross-stones (Armenian \textit{xæč'kar-s}) that multiply during this period bear further witness to the artistic dialogue between Armenian and Muslim artists.\textsuperscript{33} These trends highlight the cosmopolitan nature of intellectual and artistic life, particularly in urban centers and at the Georgian royal court but also in more remote monastic institutions and rural communities. Nevertheless, the near-total collapse and disappearance of traditional Armenian social structures and the ensuing chaos ushered in by the Seljuk invasions invited dramatic and hostile reactions by Armenian authors and, at least initially, by the historiographical tradition in particular.

In the work of the two most significant representatives of Armenian historical narratives of the late eleventh and twelfth centuries, Aristakēs Lastivertc'i and Matt'ēos Uṙhayec'i,\textsuperscript{34} the dehumanizing invectives against the Seljuk Turks and Islamic emirs may be divided into the following four categories.\textsuperscript{35} The first category consists of comparisons to wild animals. The Armenian narrators liken the Seljuks to “savage beasts” (\textit{qawqawir}),\textsuperscript{36} “lions” (\textit{umhûdnûr}),\textsuperscript{37} “eagles” (\textit{wpnûhp}),\textsuperscript{38} “dogs” (\textit{qnîûp}),\textsuperscript{39} “wolves” (\textit{qawlp}),\textsuperscript{40} “birds” (\textit{pnsnûp}),\textsuperscript{41} “serpents” (\textit{odîp}),\textsuperscript{42} “a dragon” (\textit{\textgreek{q}h\textgreek{w}w}),\textsuperscript{43} “grasshoppers and grubs” (\textit{qntkwâl ti qnm\textgreek{h}d}).\textsuperscript{44} The second category of invective accentuates the Muslims’ lack of control over their emotions; they are “hungry” (\textit{wpnq}),\textsuperscript{45} “man-eating” (\textit{\textgreek{q}w\textgreek{h}wawûp}),\textsuperscript{46} “insatiable” (\textit{wlmwq}),\textsuperscript{47} “bloodthirsty” (\textit{wpnhw\textgreek{h}w}),\textsuperscript{48} “dregs of bitterness full of rage” (\textit{\textgreek{q}rn\textgreek{h} wnh\textgreek{h}w\textgreek{p} u \textgreek{h}w\textgreek{h}w\textgreek{h}w\textgreek{p}}),\textsuperscript{49} “merciless” (\textit{\textgreek{q}nw\textgreek{h}w\textgreek{h}w}),\textsuperscript{50} “ferocious” (\textit{\textgreek{q}zn\textgreek{h}w}).\textsuperscript{51} The third category, somewhat in contradiction to the previous, illuminates their less than noble character; they are “sly” (\textit{\textgreek{k}n\textgreek{n}n\textgreek{w}w}),\textsuperscript{52} fearful,\textsuperscript{53} stealthy,\textsuperscript{54} attacking at night,\textsuperscript{55} perfidious.\textsuperscript{56} The fourth category of invective attacks their religion directly, labeling it as demonically possessed and Muslims as “infidels” (\textit{w\textgreek{h}w\textgreek{p}\textgreek{h}w\textgreek{p}}),\textsuperscript{57} “servants of the evil one” (\textit{wpnhw\textgreek{h}w\textgreek{p}w\textgreek{h}w\textgreek{h}w\textgreek{p}}),\textsuperscript{58} and unclean.\textsuperscript{59} Matt'ēos Uṙhayec'i also refers to Turkish incursions in terms of natural, particularly meteorological, phenomena: they come like a black cloud (\textit{\textgreek{k}w\textgreek{w}w\textgreek{h}w\textgreek{w}w}),\textsuperscript{60} like a bitter and fatal wind (\textit{\textgreek{q}w\textgreek{h}w\textgreek{h}w\textgreek{h}w}),\textsuperscript{61} like a rising river (\textit{\textgreek{q}\textgreek{w}\textgreek{h}w\textgreek{h}w\textgreek{h}w\textgreek{h}w}),\textsuperscript{62} a tempest (\textit{\textgreek{q}\textgreek{p}\textgreek{h}w}),\textsuperscript{63} and whirling winds (\textit{\textgreek{h}w\textgreek{h}w\textgreek{h}w\textgreek{h}w}).\textsuperscript{64}

In addition to biblical allusions, many of these descriptions are recognizable from earlier Armenian characterizations of Islamic rule and of the even older Armenian archetypal enemy, Zoroastrian Iran. In his famous
account of the Armenian rebellion in defense of their Christianity against the Persian Zoroastrian Empire in 450–451, Elišē utilized much of this imagery to describe the Persian Shah Yazkert II and his minions. At the beginning of the tenth century, T’ovma Arcruni reapplied Elišē’s characterizations against the caliphate and Muslim emirs of the eleventh to twelfth centuries provided a familiar hermeneutical framework within which contemporary Armenians could interpret the new, chaotic political climate: that of the paradigm of a small people fighting against a much larger foe in defense of their faith.65 It is evident that the continued use, and even expansion, of the storehouse of encoded images for the Seljuk invaders and Muslim emirs of the eleventh to twelfth centuries provided a familiar hermeneutical framework within which contemporary Armenians could interpret the new, chaotic political climate: that of the paradigm of a small people fighting against a much larger foe in defense of their faith.66

Closely related to this marked terminology, however, is the incorporation of the Seljuk invasions and the new political topography within an eschatological perspective.67 Prophetic and apocalyptic visions of the end of days appear in the earliest strata of Armenian literature,68 but the Seljuk period witnesses a proliferation of eschatological speculation in Armenian texts.69 The earlier prophetic visions, particularly the one attributed to St. Nersēs, were reinterpreted to have come to fruition at the destruction of Armenian society in the wake of the Seljuk invasions. The vision of St. Nersēs inserted into the saint’s vita was transformed from a brief prediction of the end of the Aršakuni dynasty into a lengthy discourse on the coming of the Antichrist, the persecution of the righteous, the ultimate victory of the cross over the infidels, the renovation of the world, and the final crowning of the righteous.70

An eschatological perspective is detectable in the historical accounts of the Seljuk invasions as well. For example, Aristakēs Lastivertc‘i remarks that in 1033 a solar eclipse led “many of the learned” (պատրազուցակ ի համակարգ), to believe “that day to be the birth of the Antichrist, or a sign of very great evils” (քաղը ծնունդն Անտիկրիստի, ու քաղը նրանցից գոլտակաչ զանգված). Aristakēs then reveals that he perceived the Seljuk invasions to be the fulfillment of that sign and a manifestation of divine wrath against the Armenians, or Christians generally, on account of their sinfulness:71 “Indeed such things happened in our day. . . . With our own eyes we saw the chastising blows of God and the newly-indicated72 punishment directed against Armenia because of our sins.”73

Writing some sixty-five years after Lastivertc‘i, the chronicler Matt’ēos Urhayec‘i (Matthew of Edessa) devotes a significant amount of his narrative to eschatological signs, apocalyptic visions, and their interpretation.74 He notes that in the Armenian year 452 (1003–1004), a star in the form of fire appeared in the sky, which was “a sign of [God’s] anger towards [His] creations and the end of the world” (երբծառ արծիվագրական աշխարհության համար ու աշխարհի ավարտ).75 Simultaneously, there was an earthquake
that was so severe that “many thought that the last day and the end of the world had arrived” (կարծեալ բազմաց թէ եհասօրն վերջին և կատարածի աշխարհի). He further remarks that at the beginning of the Islamic—for Matt’ēos, Seljuk—raids in 1018, King Senek’erim of Vaspurakan was troubled and consulted books by which he was informed of the impending destruction and end of the whole world. According to Urhayec’i, the king then decided to surrender his lands to the Byzantine Empire.

The most famous visions Matt’ēos records are the two he ascribes to the learned doctor of the church (Armenian vardapet), Yovhannēs Kozeṅ. A celestial omen in 1029 caused the Bagratuni king Yovhannēs to summon all the princes and noblemen of his reign before Yovhannēs Kozeṅ in order to ascertain its meaning. Kozeṅ, a scholar of great renown and, according to Matt’ēos, respected by the Byzantine emperor, Basil II, prophesied that Satan’s thousand-year imprisonment beginning at Christ’s baptism would end in 1030. Seven years later, a solar eclipse once again spurred the king and the nobles—among whom was the famous intellectual Grigor Magistros—to return to Yovhannēs, who repeated a variant form of the same prophecy. This second “prophecy” is a later revision of the first that takes account of the arrival of the Crusades and reveals the influence of the apocalyptic motif of the last Roman emperor, possibly familiar to Kozeṅ through the *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodius.

Like Aristakēs, Matt’ēos himself apparently shared these views on the imminent eschaton as is clear from his reference to the synoptic apocalypse in the interpretation of another celestial sign that appeared before the Byzantine loss to the Seljuks at Manazkert in 1071. And echoing Lastivertc’i, Matt’ēos ascribes many of the misfortunes that befall Christians—and Armenians, in particular—at this time to their straying from the precepts of Christianity. In remarks about the eve of the battle of Manazkert, Urhayec’i laments that “this was the beginning of the end and of the second destruction of the world by the infidel forces of the Turks on account of the multiplication and inundation of our sins.”

The characterization of Muslim Turks in dehumanizing terms familiar from earlier contexts and as depersonalized instruments of divine wrath represents more than just an interpretative framework for the sociopolitical transformations occurring in Armenia. The marked metaphors created a sense of distance and alienation from the increased number of Muslims newly interspersed among—and often above—the Armenian Christian population. Within that space, the vivid accounts composed in the twelfth century attempted to delineate a renewed sense of unity and identity for Christian Armenians. It is interesting to note that in Matt’ēos’s account, though Byzantines and Latins may be criticized and denigrated, only
the Armenian Chalcedonian (i.e., an internal heretic), Philaretos, is the object of similarly marked terminology as the Seljuks. Likewise, Aristakēs Lastivertc'i reserves similar invective for the Armenian T'ondrakec'i heresy. The near equivalency between internal “Others” and Muslims in these authors’ perceptions suggests that the Islamic newcomers may have been considered a greater threat to Armenian identity and community than the external Christian “Others.” Indeed, conversion to Islam and a resultant loss of Armenian identity was a more common phenomenon than the historiographical tradition would care to explicitly admit.

The eschatological contextualization of the Seljuk invasions and Islamic rule undoubtedly amplified the resonance of this marked typology by means of its temporal urgency. More significantly, however, it allowed the authors of these texts to employ these types to construct mythic narratives that could contour the boundaries of Armenian self-identification and modify the community’s behavior in accordance with their conception of Armenian Christian norms and beliefs.


Finally, he refers to Zengi as the evil one (passim), servant of evil (գարշութեան արբանեակ, 74:459 [վիշապ], 74:460 [ներանծիք]), hungering for blood (արեանսով, 58:155), man-eating (գիշախանձ, 74:466), ferocious (կատաղի, 82:611), execrable (գարշ, 82:621), as well as perfidious (նենգավոր, 65:298), devious (լիրբ, 74:469), treacherous (խաբող, 79:555), and lying in ambush (գարշութեան արբանեակ, 65:298).

The Muslims form an army of the ungodly (զօրքաբազկիք, 65:298) and inhuman (զօրքաբազկիք, 65:298) that Muḥammad had taught
them (83:633)—such as ritual ablution, which Nersēs describes as filthy (պղծալի: 84:646). Nersēs characterizes the sultan as frivolous and heretical; the caliph, blind and leader of the blind; and Muḥammad, a false and deceitful prophet, legislator of the blinded, the teacher of evil sins who perpetrates impurity (83:641–45).

Snorhali’s perspective is furthermore clearly eschatological. He proclaims that the day of reckoning has come and that the world will quickly come to an end as all the signs in scripture predicting the eschaton have appeared in his day (95:851–54). The text abounds in comparisons of Zengi and Muḥammad to the Antichrist. According to Nersēs, the reason for Edessa’s destruction at the hands of the Muslims was her descent into sin (64:278–79, 84:664). Nersēs expects, vainly in the end, that the Second Crusade will punish and destroy the Muslims “like a lion destroys a hare” (100:970). Thus, as in the histories of Aristakēs Lastivertc’i and Matt’ēos Urhayec’i, Muslims perform the role of divine chastisers—although in the immediate employ of Satan and the Antichrist—punishing the city and her inhabitants for their sin, within the unfolding drama of the eschaton. As Theo van Lint has cogently argued, the categorization of Nersēs’s Lament as a historico-political work is incomplete and inadequate; rather, Snorhali’s poem attempts to provide comfort through the hope of salvation in repentance. Similar to the historians examined earlier, Nersēs coalesces an eschatological perspective with the dehumanization of Muslims to enhance and clarify the boundaries of Armenian Christian identity.

One may observe that the intensity of both the figuration of Muslims and the eschatological framework recedes within the historiographical tradition of the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Samuēl of Ani (late twelfth century) is much more muted in his Chronicle than his predecessors. The thirteenth-century Chronicles of the Armenian historians Mxit’ar of Ani and Vardan Arewelc’i only rarely displays any such dehumanizing figuration in their account of the Seljuk invasions and of the subsequent period of Muslim domination. Furthermore, the eschatological perspective so distinct in Aristakēs and Matt’ēos is nearly completely absent. This is not to argue that either element disappeared altogether. Both factors reemerge in the History of the Armenians by Kirakos Ganjakec’i (d. 1271), but they occur more often in reference to the as yet shamanist Mongols rather than to the Muslim Turks. Outside of the historiographical tradition, dehumanizing characterizations are prominent in a poem entitled “Grumble” (“Gangat”), questionably attributed to Frik (d. ca. 1300). The poet complains to God that

Ωδὴ ὑπείρα μὴ Ὑποκῦτην,
/tinyosὴ ἔτη ἴμηρηλι’ ὑπανάσιμην
(You have given the earth to Muḥammad
and half of the earth to Satan.
At night we are the deceivers of Satan;
During the day, servants of Muḥammad.
We do not have a field to which to flee,
No cave of shelter,
For murderous and savage beasts
Have hemmed us all around
...
How many churches will they destroy?
How many filthy mosques will they build?
How many women will they leave widowed
And how many Christian orphans?
How much blood will they shed on the earth?
How many insults will they contrive?)

In addition, during the latter half of the twelfth century, the focus of
the eschatological perspective shifts from the punishing destruction of
the Seljuk invasions and Islamic conquest to hope in assistance from the
West97 and, ultimately, to hope in the resurrection of the Armenian
monarchy in Cilicia. Nersēs Šnorhali’s expectation of a Second Crusade
in his Lament on the Fall of Edessa was already mentioned.98 Nersēs’s
nephew, Grigor Tłay, mimicked his uncle after the fall of Jerusalem to
Salāh al-Dīn in 1187 and likewise composed a Lament for the captured
city, repeating many of the same themes. His eyes, however, turn not so
much to the crusaders as to the ascendant principality of Cilicia and to its
new dynamic ruler, Prince Levon II (as prince, 1187–1198; as king Levon
I, 1198–1219), for ultimate victory over the infidel.99 The court of Levon,
both before and after his coronation, developed a royal ideology that
emphasized Levon’s role as defender of Christianity in the East and his parity with his Western counterparts. After the fall of Constantinople in 1204 to the Fourth Crusade, Levon appears to have enlarged the scope of this ideology and assumed the characteristics of the eschatological figure of the Last Roman Emperor. In a “Counsel” written in 1212 to a junior member of the royal family, Levon is portrayed not only as a victorious king who protects all Christians and defeats every surrounding Muslim power but as one who will also finally defeat Islam altogether and recapture Jerusalem. 100

Despite the perceptible reduction in extreme negative figuration of Muslims and the diminished impact of an eschatological outlook in the historiographical tradition, an anxiety of cultural hybridity and miscegenation remains apparent in the perceptions and depictions of Muslims in other genres of Armenian literature, as noticeable in the poem attributed to Frik. The drive to erect physical and fictional boundaries between Armenian Christians and their Muslim neighbors is most readily visible in the number of legal and/or paraenetic texts that circulated during this period. The Penitential of David of Ganjak (d. 1140) includes numerous proscriptions and legislative strategies to control Muslim-Christian interrelations. 101 In his famous law code begun in 1184, Mxit’ar Goš not only attempts similarly to define intercommunal relationships legally but also contends that it was the very fact that Armenians lived in Muslim-controlled lands that prompted the necessity for the Armenians to have a law code. 102 According to Mxit’ar, Armenians ruled by Islamic emirs were subject to šarī’a because they could not appeal to their own written law.

Similarly, the monastic priest and scholar Yovhannēs Erznkac’i encouraged the closing of Armenian shops on Sunday and counseled against intimate family relations between Armenians and non-Christians. 103 Yovhannēs wrestles with the tension between the ideal of denominational seclusion and the aesthetic attraction of Islamic culture and of Muslims themselves in his poem “Yovhannēs and Aša.” 104 Written in Armenian, the poem conforms to a characteristic rhyme pattern of Turkish folk poetry. 105 The poem records the love aroused between a young monk and a mullah’s daughter. In order for him to marry her, he is required to convert to Islam. At the last moment, he wakes up and realizes that he cannot abandon his faith. He still emerges victorious, however, as the beautiful girl consents to be married in a Christian church. Although Cowe may be correct when he remarks that “one facet of the poem’s moral purview appears to be the avoidance of syncretism and community attrition through exogamous marriage,” 106 one
may observe that the marriage would still be exogamous given that Aša is not Armenian. Yovhannēs seems more at pains to resolve the problem of resisting the seduction of the Other without losing her beauty. He is able to overcome the sexual attraction of the Muslim girl but, just as importantly, still receives his prize—much as he is able to keep the beauty of the Turkish poetic rhyme scheme after its marriage with the Armenian language.

In conclusion, during the eleventh to thirteenth centuries, the intensified dialogue that transpired between Armenian Christian culture and Islamic (Turco-Persian) culture resulted in the creation of a dynamic and vibrant artistic milieu. However, many Armenian authors and artists—bereft of the security of significant elements of traditional Armenian sociopolitical structures that were destroyed during the Byzantine annexation and Turkish invasions of Armenia—simultaneously harbored a deep anxiety toward cultural hybridity out of fear of losing their cultural identity. In the late eleventh and early twelfth century, Armenian historians and ecclesiastical poets alike attempted to reinforce an Armenian Christian identity by alienating the Muslim Other through the use of historically marked typologies placed under the magnifying lens of an eschatological perspective. Paraenetic and legal texts tried either to limit or, more often, outright forbid the racial, legal, and economic integration of the two communities. Finally, some artists, such as Yovhannēs Erznkac’i, struggled and succeeded to keep an Armenian voice within the polyphony of their work.

Notes


4. This essay will not discuss how Armenian authors of the period depicted Islam as a religion generally or its origins, on which see Robert Thomson, “Muhammad and the Origin of Islam in Armenian Literary Tradition,” in Études arméniennes: In memoriam Haïg Berbérian, ed. Dickran Kouymjian (Lisbon: Calouste Gulbenkian, 1986), 829–58.


6. Along with the elimination of the nobility, Armenian society was further attenuated by the lack of a centralized ecclesiastical authority; for a succinct treatment of the period, see Krikor Maksoudian, Chosen of God: The Election of the Catholicos of All Armenians from the Fourth Century to the Present (New York: St. Vardan’s Press, 1995), 40–46.

7. On the interpretation of this battle in Islamic historiography, see Carole Hillenbrand, Turkish Myth and Muslim Symbol: The Battle of Manzikert (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007).


11. On the military expansion of Zak’arē and Iwanē, see Minorsky, Studies in Caucasian History, 100–101.


21. Dickran Kouymjian, “A Numismatic History of Southeastern Caucasia and Adharbayjan Based on the Islamic Coinage of the 5th/11th to the 7th/13th Centuries” (Diss., Columbia University, 1969), 129.


25. Ibid., 384.
26. The epic romance of Gorgānī, *Vis o Rāmīn*, was rendered into Georgian prose (*Visramianī*) in the twelfth century. On the extensive relations between Georgian and Persian literature from the eleventh to thirteenth centuries, see Aleksandre Gvakharia, “Georgia IV: Literary Contacts with Persia,” *Encyclopaedia Iranica* online (http://www.iranica.com).
34. The account of Aristakēs ends at 1071, that of Mattēos at 1136, and that of his continuator, Grigor the Priest, at 1162. Henceforth, the following abbreviations will be used: AL=the critical edition of the Armenian text: Patmut'r'wn Aristakisi Lastivertc'woy [history of Aristakēs Lastivertce'i], ed. K. Yuzbaşyan (Erevan, Armenia: Haykakan SSR Gitut'yunneri Akademia, 1963). An English translation of this text by Robert Bedrosian may be found online, http://rbedrosian.com/alint.htm. ME=Armenian and the Crusades, Tenth to Twelfth Centuries: The Chronicle of Matthew of Edessa, trans. A. Dostourian (Lanham, MD; New York; and London: University Press of America, 1993). I cite the text according to the book and paragraph numbers assigned in this translation. “Cont” refers to the continuation of Mattēos’s text by Grigor the Priest. Dostourian’s translation was based on the edition of the Chronicle published in Ėǰmiacin in 1898. I have used that text as published by Hrach’ Bartik’yan in his bilingual edition, Mattēos Uṙhayec'i: Žamanakagrut'iwn [Mattēos Uṙhayec'i: Chronicle] (Erevan, Armenia: Erevan State University, 1991) [=MU].

35. The following list is not intended to be exhaustive. It should also be noted that, with respect to the Chronicle of Mattēos Uṙhayec'i, the author does praise individual Islamic rulers—for example, Malik-šāh, who is lauded for his benevolence—but I am more concerned here with paradigmatic depictions of Muslims.

36. Cf. Isa. 56:9; AL 68.21, 70.23, 70.25, 86.21, 94.20, 101.19, 118.12; ME I:47 [=MU 52]; ME II:12 [=MU 146]; ME II:13 [=MU 148]; ME II:16 [=MU 152]; ME II:20 [=MU 156]; ME II:28 [=MU 170]; ME II:48 [=MU 200]; ME II:49 [=MU 202]; ME II:56 [=MU 212, 214]; ME II:73 [=MU 234]; ME III:54 [=MU 350]; ME III:63 [=MU 358].

37. AL 65.8; cf. 1 Pet. 5:8.

38. AL 68.23.

39. AL 81.20, AL 81.21 (here, “Arabic wolves” [կայլք արաբացիք]), ME I:52 [=MU 62], ME II:15 [=MU 150].

40. AL 65.4, AL 105.21, ME II:15 [=MU 150].

41. AL 86.21.

42. ME I:47 [=MU 52, described as “winged” (թեւաւորք)], ME II:3 [=MU 130], ME II:15 [=MU 150, described as venomous (թունավորք)]; cf. AL 145.11 (viper, հճ).

43. ME I:47 [=MU 52, qualified as “breathing death” (մահաշունչ)], ME II:21 [=MU 158], ME II:56 [=MU 212].

44. AL 68.16 (cf. Joel 1:4).

45. AL 65.4, 101.19, 106.1.

46. AL 81.20, AL 105.21; the term is used in the Armenian translation of Cyril of Jerusalem’s tenth Catechetical Lecture (10.3) in reference to Satan (rendering Greek ἀνθρωποβόρος).

47. AL 65.4–5, 81.21, 86.23, 105.23–24.

48. AL 94.20–21, 107.7, 118.11–12; ME I:47 [=MU 52]; ME II:12 [=MU 146]; ME II:13 [=MU 148]; ME II:15 [=MU 150]; ME II:16 [=MU 152]; ME II:20 [=MU 156]; ME II:28 [=MU 170]; ME II:56 [=MU 212];
ME II:73 [=MU 234]; ME III:54 [=MU 350]; ME III:83 [=MU 380, here “blood-shedding” (արկահեղ]); ME Cont:6 [=MU 412, again “blood-shedding” (արկահեղ)]; ME Cont:32 [=MU 456].

49. AL 67.17; cf. ME I:71 [=MU 92].
50. AL 65.9, 86.21, 108.2; ME I:47 [=MU 57]; ME II:22 [=MU 162]; ME II:49 [=MU 202].
51. ME I:52 [=MU 62], ME II:15 [=MU 150].
52. AL 138.22.
53. Ibid.
54. ME II:126 [=MU 288].
55. AL 102.4.
56. AL 145.13–14 (եղղիքվուուլու).
57. This is a common designation of Muslims in Armenian narratives.
59. AL 77.11–12 (աղբաալ, filthy), ME I:52 [=MU 62], ME I:64 [=MU 80], ME II:1 [=MU 124], ME II:3 [=MU 134], ME III:86 [=MU 384, here describing a mosque].
60. ME II:3 [=MU 130, here described as “flaming” (հրացայտ)], ME II:21 [=MU 158], ME II:56 [=MU 210, here “a cloud swollen with the fog of lawlessness” (գառուե մեուսան հաղրուի վարքեամիան)]
61. ME II:3 [=MU 130].
62. ME II:20 [=MU 156], ME II:56 [=MU 210].
63. ME II:55 [=MU 210].
64. Ibid.
66. The prototype of this image was found in the Book of Maccabees; see Robert Thomson, Elīšē: History of Vardan and the Armenian War (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 11–16.


72. “Newly-indicated” (նորանշան). The compound term usually means “astonishing,” “incredible,” even “unheard of,” but I have translated it here according to its constituents: “new” (նոր) and “sign” (նշան). I think Aristakēs is suggesting not just that the punishments were incredible or previously unseen but that God had newly marked the Armenians for these punishments because of their recent sins.

73. Որ եւ եղեւ իսկ յաւուրս մեր, . . . , զոր տեսաք աչօք մերովք զաստուասաստ հարուածսն, եւ զնորանշան պատուհասն որ եհաս ի վերայ տանս Հայոց վասն մեղաց մերոց, AL 49.11–16.


75. ME II:45 [=MU 52].

76. Ibid.

77. ME II:48 [=MU 54]. Thomson, “Aristakes of Lastivert,” p. 84 and n. 46, suggests that the prophecy Matt’ēos then cites possibly derives from the Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius.


the Ps.-Methodian origin of this theme in Matt’ēos, as does MacEvitt, “Chronicle of Matthew of Edessa,” 158. I hesitate to identify the Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius as a “source” for Kozeřn’s prophecy.

80. ME II:55 [=MU 208]. Likewise, he interprets the troubles of the Armenian patriarchy in the wake of the Seljuk invasions in an eschatological manner. He comments that the confusion of the multiplicity of patriarchates sowed discord among the flock and that “all these things are forerunners of the Antichrist, and the beginning of the end of the world” (այն ստեղծել է անհրաժեշտություն լս եկեղեցու և Երրորդ Առաքել աշխարհիս), ME II:83 [=MU 246]; see also Andrews, “Prolegomena,” 207–11.


82. այս էղեուս սկիզբն կատարածի և կրկին աւերման աշխարհի յանօրէն զօրաց Թուրքաց, ME II:55 [=MU 208]. I thus perceive less of a difference between Aristakes and Matt’ēos than does Thomson, “Aristakes of Lastivert,” 83–85, who emphasizes that Uṙhayec’i does not see any further significance in the invasions other than the fulfillment of prophecy, whereas Aristakes perceived them as an opportunity for repentance; so also, MacEvitt, “Chronicle of Matthew of Edessa,” 163. In my opinion, the previous passages suggest a greater continuity in perspective.

83. AL 119–25.

84. Cf. also James Russell’s discussion of “internal outsiders,” “The Credal Poem Hawatov Xostovanim [‘I confess in faith’] of St. Nersēs the Graceful,” in Van Ginkel, Murre–van den Berg, and van Lint, Redefining Christian Identity, 193–95; repr. in Russell, Armenian and Iranian Studies, 999–1030. My interpretation is at variance, therefore, with Andrews’s assertion that the Muslims invaders—and the crusaders—posed less of a threat to Armenian identity for Matt’ēos than the Byzantines because of a lack of a shared culture (“Prolegomena,” 166). She interprets Matt’ēos’s use of traditional dehumanizing depictions of the Muslims as a technique to mask the modus vivendi that evolved between the Armenians and the Islamic powers (“Prolegomena,” 182, 197, 223).


86. In this sense, the function of the eschatological perspective in conjunction with the “supernatural” characterization of Muslims as both instruments of divine wrath and demonic beings is comparable to that found in definitions of apocalyptic literature; see the contributions of Adela Yarbro Collins (“Introduction,” 1–12), David Hellholm (13–64), and David Aune (65–96) in Early Christian Apocalypticism: Genre and Social Setting, ed. Adela Yarbro Collins, Semeia 36 (Decatur, GA: Scholars Press, 1986).
87. The narrator of the poem is the city of Edessa herself.


89. Antiochus Epiphanes was considered to be a forerunner of the Antichrist.


91. Samuēl Anec’i, Hawak’munk’ i groc’ patmagrac’ [Collection from the histories], ed. Arshak Tēr-Mikaēlean (Valarasap, Armenia: Holy Ejmiacin, 1893). The Chronicle of Smbat Sparapet (late thirteenth century) was based heavily on Mattē’os’s and his continuator’s account for the years up until 1162, so it repeats the language used there. Such language does not carry over into Smbat’s account of the period from 1163 to 1272, Gérard Dédéyan, La chronique attribuée au Connétable Smbat (Paris: P. Geuthner, 1980).


93. Vardan does report earlier eschatological predictions (cf. paragraphs 25, 39, 45), but there is no evidence that he himself partook of any such outlook, in clear contrast to his predecessors.


97. The theme of Armenian salvation from the Muslim rule became a recurring one in Armenian literature even after the failure of the Crusades, see Garsoïan, “Reality and Myth,” 135–45.

98. Andrews, “Prolegomena,” 223, concludes that Matt’ēos Uṙhayec’i exhibits a disappointed expectation in salvation from the West and a simultaneous resignation to the presence and power of the crusader states.


104. The poem has also been attributed to Yovhannēs T’lkuranc’i (fourteenth century), Russell, Yovhannēs T’lkuranc’i, 105–6. Russell’s English translation of the poem may be found on pp. 112–15; Cowe, “Politics of Poetics,” also provides an English translation, 400–403.


106. Ibid.
CHAPTER 6

DON QUIJOTE ATTACKS HIS MUSLIM OTHER: THE MAESE PEDRO EPISODE OF DON QUIJOTE

Baltasar Fra-Molinero

The Second Part of Don Quijote de La Mancha was published in 1615, barely one year after the final expulsion of the Morisco minority from Spain. It is well known among scholars that Cervantes was writing his Second Part as the traumatic events of the Morisco diaspora were taking place with inexorable cadence. One region of Spain after another saw entire areas depopulated, and neighborhoods in small Castilian towns emptied. Initiated in September 1609 and finished in 1614, the expulsion is connected to one of the most important fictional events in the novel, namely, the episodes of Ricote and his daughter Ana Félix in chapters fifty-four and sixty-three of the Second Part. The expulsion of the Moriscos was the response of the modern state of Spain in crisis. Cervantes’s decision to include present history in his book coincides with the definitive decline of the hero. Don Quijote is a passive witness to the story of the fictional Moriscos that cross his pilgrimage route to Barcelona, in marked contrast with Sancho Panza, who debates with his neighbor, the Morisco character Ricote, on the merits of the decree of expulsion and in the end decides not to denounce him. This act, if discovered, would have cost Sancho Panza dearly.

A much more active role is given by Cervantes to Don Quijote in an earlier episode of the Second Part, that of his assault on Maese Pedro’s puppet show in chapter twenty-six. This chapter addresses the inner, yet
less evident, connection between this episode and the 1609 expulsion of the Morisco population from Spain and argues that the violent attack Don Quijote inflicts on the puppets—representing the story of Melisendra’s rescue from the Moors by her husband—enacts the tension in Cervantes’s time between the old Christian majority and the Muslim minority of the Moriscos. Cervantes constructs both parts of Don Quijote de La Mancha as ironic revisions of the literary and historical past of Spain, in what constitutes a crisis in the medieval representation of Islam occurring in Spain during the early seventeenth century.

Spain’s violent confrontation with Islam is the mark of its modernity. The final demise of the Kingdom of Granada in January 1492 was a conquest in two phases. The first one corresponded to the medieval custom of a capitulation. In exchange for his surrender of the kingdom to Isabella and Ferdinand, Mohammed XII (Boabdil) was given a fiefdom in the mountains of Guadix, and he and his subjects received the formal promise not to suffer persecution in the practice of their Islamic faith. This was the war in which Don Quijote’s grandfather was supposed to have fought. His weapons—espada and adarga, sword and shield—were as outdated in his time as they were in his grandfather’s, when firearms and artillery had already become the main instruments of offense in wars of conquest. It is by the time of Don Quijote’s grandparents, the 1480s and 1490s and the early decades of the sixteenth century, when the printing press—a new sign of modernity—brings about the collection of books of chivalry that will populate his private library. These same books fed the ambition of the Spanish conquistadores of Tenochtitlán, who saw a city that defied the most fantastic dreams they had read in the books of Amadís de Gaula. 2

The second phase of the conquest of Granada was significantly more tragic. The policy of religious unity that Ferdinand and Isabella would launch with the decree of expulsion of the Jews, a few months after they signed the capitulations with the last Muslim king of Granada, had the effect of putting pressure on the Muslim population to convert. The forced conversion of all Granadan Muslims in 1499 provoked the first flare-ups of popular rebellion. The conquest of Granada and the expulsion of the Jews marked a point of no return in the formation of a modern national state founded on notions of centralization of power and political unity. The society in which Don Quijote lives has expelled Islam as a religion and as a form of social organization. Like no other country in Western Europe, Spain was at war with Islam at the onset of its modernity. This is the drama that the puppet show in chapter twenty-six of the Second Part comes to represent through the narrative of a romance—traditional ballad—taken from the Charlemagne cycle. As a popular
figure, Charlemagne became an ideological weapon to unify the Spanish population against Islam. In the uninterrupted recitation of the romances of his cycle, he came to represent a militaristic, anti-Muslim form of Christianity that was appropriated by the proponents of the concept of reconquista as a teleological view of Spanish history.

The figure of Charlemagne as the origin of the Spanish reconquista resulted in a contradiction. Barbara Fuchs calls our attention to the formation of a national discourse in Spain in early modernity that needs to use a foreign source—Carolingian epic—to justify the expulsion of the Muslim Other from the national soil of the Iberian Peninsula. That Spanish Muslims defeated Charlemagne in Roncesvalles, as it was told in the Chanson de Roland and other French epic poems, had become an intolerable historical hurdle in sixteenth-century Spain. Fuchs points out the existence of mythical Spanish national heroes—such as Bernardo de Carpio—who are portrayed as the victors over Charlemagne in Roncesvalles. The religious confrontation between Christians and Muslims that dominates the French chansons de geste is replaced by something different in the Spanish romancero. The romance of Bernardo de Carpio, in which this mythical Spanish hero is the one who defeats Roland and the rest of the French troops, Christianizes the defeat of Charlemagne and makes it a victory for Spanish national integrity. Avoiding references to the Christian-Muslim religious struggle that would (as in the chanson) make the Spaniards all Muslim, Spanish romances downgrade Charlemagne from a Christian hero to a foreign invader. However, by doing so, the narrative of the origins of the Spanish nation disavows its belonging to the source of Christian legitimacy: “Cervantes often reveals the contradictions inherent in imagining a heroic past—one couched in Christian and chivalric terms—for a nation that often served as Christendom’s other.”

From the beginning, Don Quijote has a fractured relation to medieval literary representations of Islam. In chapter one of the First Part, he interrupts his reading of chivalric romances to play at being a knight-errant using the old, rusty weapons his forebears used in the “wars against the Moors,” presumably the conquest of Granada in 1492 if the reader wishes to interpret the narrator’s words in a historical frame. More ominously, these old weapons could refer, in a negative fashion, to the war of Granada of 1568, also known as the War of the Alpujarras, when the Morisco population of the old Muslim kingdom rose against Philip II and the Christian population that had occupied the land. Don Quijote is a rural hidalgo whose “idleness” is bracketed by the glorious deeds of his ancestors against the enemy of the land and the religion (Granada 1492) and the more discomfiting absence of action of his own time. Why did Alonso Quijano not participate in the events of Granada in 1568–1570?
For Spain, the War of the Alpujarras in 1568 was a moment of narrative crisis in the national interpretation of the Muslim Other. This conflict was a civil war that necessitated a barrage of propaganda and a continued use of the printing press to defend the destructive manner in which Philip II’s chief military leaders put down the Morisco uprising. Among these military commanders was Don Juan de Austria, a hero of Cervantes’s. This war resulted in a series of cruel episodes characterized by pillage on the part of the royal troops, mass executions, the sale of Morisco captives as slaves, and the massive expulsion of the Moriscos ordered by Don Juan de Austria in 1570. The use of artillery, the confrontation of the two enemy populations on ethnic and religious grounds, and the targeting of noncombatants as military objectives made this war a less than chivalrous episode. Miguel de Cervantes was in Italy at the time and soon would participate with Don Juan de Austria in the battle of Lepanto in October 1571 against the Ottoman Empire, in which he allegedly lost the use of his left arm. As a fictional character, Don Quijote could have participated in either campaign, but obviously he did not. Instead, he spent his time and his money reading books. In this, he was acting like Gaiferos, the protagonist of a popular romance of the Charlemagne cycle, who spent his time in Paris while his wife, Melisendra, waited in captivity in Muslim Zaragoza, in Spain:

Jugando está a las tablas don Gaiferos
Que ya de Melisendra está olvidado. (Don Quijote II, 846)
(Don Gaiferos is playing at backgammon
His lady Melisendra is forgotten.)

Cervantes’s ironic presentation of the idleness of the hidalgo from La Mancha at the beginning of the novel is in marked contrast with the attempts by the knight Don Quijote to dispel any notions of an easy life. Thus, when in chapter twenty-six of the Second Part he hears the first lines of the popular ballad, he feels the recrimination, a motif still popular in the versions of the Romance de Don Gaiferos that have survived in the twentieth century. They all show a contrast between the inaction of Charlemagne’s knight and the need to confront the Muslim captor:

Para eso sodes, Gaiferez, para los dados jugar
No sois pa buscar a Melisendra, que en poder de moros está.
(That’s what you are good for, Gaiferos, to play the dice,
you are not good to rescue Melisendra, who is a captive of the Moors)⁶

Different versions of the romance present Gaiferos as either having forgotten his wife or having been unsuccessful in his attempts to find her. In
the version from Peranzales (near Ponferrada, Spain), Gaiferos has spent an emblematically long period of time (seven years) looking for his wife in both Christian and Moorish lands. The older version of the story—a Sephardic one—relates how Gaiferos had won Melisendra (together with some cities) from Charlemagne while playing dice. Thus, Cervantes’s choice of the opening verses of one of the versions echoes a narrative in which love, rather than anti-Muslim conquest, was at the center of the poem. Victor Millet has pointed out the oral origins of the story of Gaiferos, one that only later became associated with the Carolingian cycle and its anti-Muslim edge. The text of Gaiferos becomes even more unstable if one considers its European origins in a German epic in which the enemies are the Huns and not the Muslims. Thus, the juego de tablas (backgammon, dice) played by Gaiferos evokes the peaceful activity of a lover, rather than the act of an idle soldier in a militaristic society such as Spain’s. In fact, the romance of Gaiferos resembles the contradiction between the military impulse and the erotic adventure that is present in Don Quijote’s adventures.

In the episode of the puppet show, one witnesses a stage in the development of the medieval chivalric tradition from orality to writing. Although Victor Millet has observed that the committing of an oral heroic poem to writing involves the destruction of its “orality” through its fixation, this was not exactly the case with the Romance de Don Gaiferos. The length of the printed version allows for the accumulation of elements from different sources. It also allowed for the creation of new truncated oral versions from the seventeenth-century onward. One of those versions appears to be the one sung in Maese Pedro’s puppet show. Whereas the boy narrator extemporizes and decorates his narrative, Don Quijote, the inveterate reader of printed books, demands commitment to a stable narrative text. Writing the oral tradition is an act of critical transformation. But so is every oral rendering that takes a written text as its source, as the hendecasyllabic verses chanted by the boy narrator clearly indicate. The lines with which the boy introduces Gaiferos are a very readerly performance. The episode of the “Freedom of Melisendra” presented before Don Quijote and the fellow inn-dwellers reveals for the lower classes what originally was a tale for the entertainment and aggrandizing of the upper classes. If the upper classes devised the discourse of the reconquista in terms of anti-Muslim, pro-French narratives, the printed romanceros of early modern Spain leave the reader, or the listener, a space to comment and critique.

Cervantes re-creates the romance of Don Gaiferos through parody, setting the Christian-Muslim confrontation of his time in a mock-heroic frame. The romance touches on the theme of Gaiferos’s wife, Melisendra, who has spent seven years as a captive of the Muslims.
The place of captivity is Sansueña, which Cervantes's contemporaries identified with the Spanish city of Zaragoza. Charlemagne shames Gaiferos for his idleness, to which the knight responds with an irate exit, promising to bring his wife back. However, Gaiferos is poor and needs to borrow a horse and weapons from Roland. He makes his way to Spain alone. When he helps his wife escape from the Muslims, a pursuit scene ensues. Once the Muslim enemies get close to the couple, battle is inevitable. This is the point in the story (as represented in the puppet show) at which Don Quijote interrupts the narrative. This is also the point of a misreading. The story in the popular romance goes on to witness the victory of Gaiferos over his enemies and the couple's triumphant arrival in Paris. Don Quijote, however, does not allow the story to continue. When he hears the boy narrator describe the Muslim army,

Miren cuánta y cuán lucida caballería sale de la Ciudad en seguimiento de los dos católicos amantes, cuántas trompetas que suenan, cuántas dulzainas que tocan y cuántos atabales y atambores que retumban. Témome que los han de alcanzar y los han de volver atados a la cola de su mismo caballo, que sería un horrendo espectáculo.

Viendo y oyendo, pues, tanta morisma y tanto estruendo Don Quijote parecióle ser bien dar ayuda a los que huían, y levantándose en pie, en voz alta dijo:

No consentiré yo que en mis días y en mi presencia se le haga superchería a tan famoso caballero y tan atrevido enamorado como Don Gaiferos. (Don Quijote II, 850).

(“Look at the number of brilliant horsemen riding out of the city in pursuit of the two Catholic lovers; look at how many trumpets blare, how many flutes play, how many drums and tabors sound. I am afraid they will overtake them and bring them back tied to the tail of their own horse, which would be an awful sight.”

And Don Quixote, seeing and hearing so many Moors and so much clamor, thought it would be a good idea to assist those who were fleeing; and rising to his feet, in a loud voice he said:

“I shall not consent, in my lifetime and in my presence, to any such offense against an enamored knight so famous and bold as Don Gaiferos.”)

The puppet show was a hybrid spectacle in which the well-known story told in the romances took the form of a narrative together with the presence
of a divinatory monkey and other elements of spectacle.\textsuperscript{15} Traditionally narratives preceded the singing of a \textit{romance}.\textsuperscript{16}

The narrative of the flight of Gaiferos and Melisendra from Marsilio and his Muslim troops is famously interrupted by Don Quijote, a fact Roberto González Echevarría has interpreted as a reflection of Don Quijote’s problems accepting the happy ending of the story. Don Quijote, like the audience at the inn, already knew that the couple was going to succeed. Don Gaiferos would defeat his enemies alone, and then he and Melisendra would enter Paris amid general joy. González Echevarría interprets Don Quijote’s violent onslaught against the puppets as a pun on the Spanish term for “vanishing point,” which is \textit{punto de fuga},\textsuperscript{17} the word \textit{fuga} meaning both “vanish” and “flight.” As the lovers flee, they also disappear, and Don Quijote fears that he will not be able to help them should the Muslim pursuers get too close. Don Quijote’s delusion at attacking the puppet stage contravenes the well-known story told in the ballad, as the narrator had recognized at the beginning of the play. This puppet show is more like an opera than a \textit{comedia nueva}. The story of Christian–Muslim confrontation that underlies Melisendra’s liberation is part of the medieval lore that the \textit{romances} and the printing press continued to update and extend geographically, including the New World across the Atlantic Ocean. Don Quijote ends up breaking down the illusion of a shared ideological discourse against a Muslim Other by insisting on becoming part of the story.

The tearing apart of the string puppets is lamented by Maese Pedro with a wistful recitation of the \textit{Romance del Rey Rodrigo}, which corresponds to another medieval anti-Muslim theme, that of the loss of Spain to the invading troops from North Africa. Rodrigo contemplates the destruction of his kingdom by the invading Muslim armies with the famous verses that Maese Pedro repeats:

\begin{quote}
Ayer fui señor de España
Y hoy no tengo una almena
Que pueda decir que es mía. (\textit{Don Quijote} II, 851)\textsuperscript{18}
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
(Yesterday the lord of all Spain…
Today not even a tower
that I can call my own.)
\end{quote}

The inverse equivalence between the loss of Spain and the loss of the puppet theater is not lost on the Spanish reader of Cervantes. The contradiction in roles is glaring. While Don Quijote is trying to defend the Christian couple from the Muslim pursuers, the puppet master uses a famous anti-Muslim piece from the oral tradition to equate his
material loss to that of Spain’s, thus making Don Quijote a force of the Muslim enemy. This inversion of roles in Don Quijote’s character, from Christian knight to Muslim invader, is the centerpiece of Cervantian irony on the Spanish political stance toward the southern (Muslim) Mediterranean. Don Quijote’s actions result in an anachronistic reversal. The politics of the Christian/Muslim confrontation in early modern Spain can no longer be conducted through the traditional ballad topoi of the Middle Ages, now made popular through the printing press. Don Quijote’s interruption corresponds to his misreading of the present as a result of his ideological investment in a worldview that no longer held true. 19

As a would-be Spanish knight, Don Quijote suffers from the contradictory reading Barbara Fuchs sees in Spain’s imperial discourse. The boy narrator not only identifies Sansueña with the Spanish city of Zaragoza, but he also “historicizes” the palace or alcázar in the story by identifying it with the real urban landscape of this Spanish city, the Aljafería, the actual alcázar of Muslim times. The historical past lives in front of the eyes of Cervantes and his society. The existence of Muslim architecture makes erasing the medieval past impossible and reveals the complex mudéjar20 present. That Muslim culture is present in Don Quijote’s imagination is made clear as he chides the boy narrator at the mention of bell-ringing: “porque entre moros no se usan campanas sino atabales y un género de dulzainas que parecen nuestras chirimías; y esto de sonar campanas en Sansueña sin duda es un gran disparate” (for the Moors do not use bells but drums and a kind of flute that resembles our flageolet, and there is no doubt that ringing bells in Sansueña is a great piece of nonsense) (Don Quijote II, 850).

The Christian-Muslim discourse of the Middle Ages does not work in Cervantes’s time because its story line has suffered as many interruptions as Maese Pedro’s puppet show of the Romance de Don Gaiferos. 21 Samuel Armistead explains the beginning scene of this romance in light of formulaic themes that traditional audiences were experienced in interpreting as cues. 22 Throwing the game board down is a sign that the hero has been dishonored by the king’s words and he needs to rescue his social standing, in Gaiferos’s case by rescuing his wife from the Moors in Spain.

The verses sung by the boy narrator, which describe Gaiferos idleness signified by his playing the board game, point to Don Quijote’s own idleness at Dulcinea’s plight. She is under the spell of the enchanters and awaits rescue. Despite the fact that this is left unsaid, it is in the minds of the audience members. Don Quijote, as part of the audience, also knows it. Unlike the others present, however, he thinks that the story staged before him is a personal indictment of his inability to rescue
DON QUIJOTE ATTACKS HIS MUSLIM OTHER

Dulcinea. In his insanity, he finds himself publicly dishonored; and like the chivalric hero whom he believes himself to be, he needs to act appropriately. His violent reaction and destruction of the tableau puppets is the parodic equivalent of other heroes’ throwing the game board at the opponent. The question as to why Don Quijote attacks the Moorish King Marsilio and his armies instead of allowing the story to progress toward the well-known (happy) stage ending turns out to be more complicated than it looks. Don Quijote is acting out his own perceived unfitness as a chivalric lover. He is not going to allow Melisendra–Dulcinea to be saved by a knight other than himself—and certainly not a French one such as Gaiferos. Don Quijote fights the Moors of Marsilio because he needs to prove himself as a knight who helps those in need—Melisendra and Gaiferos. As a Spanish knight, he must fight the Moors to prove his Christianity–Spanishness. Yet the fight is futile overkill, given that the romance includes the killing of the Muslim enemy.

Rescuing Spain from the Muslim peril is how propagandists of the time presented the expulsion of the Moriscos, decreed in 1609 by King Philip III and carried out during the time in which Cervantes wrote the Second Part of Don Quijote. Having signed a truce with the United Provinces of the Netherlands that same year, the Spanish Monarchy turned its attention to the Mediterranean theater. The discourse of the reconquista was invoked. Separate political events of the past forty years were strung together in 1609 to transform the Morisco minority into the menacing Moor of romances and even theater plays. The Morisco expulsion had as much to do with the inability of the Spanish crown to impose its will and preserve its honor in the Netherlands as it did with any perceived danger from the Ottoman Empire. The Netherlands were important to the king and the aristocracy that had commercial interests in northern Europe. Conversely, a perceived Muslim threat was part of the popular imaginary and could be invoked for political gain, which is what the Duke of Lerma, the king’s principal minister, did. The identification of the Morisco minority with the medieval Muslim Other was an act of political propaganda that led to their violent expulsion. The opposition of Christian and Morisco was in fact a dyad of the two elements.²³ The Moriscos threatened the Christian–Muslim dichotomy that founded the national discourse of Spain. Their continued presence in Spain and their increasing integration into its culture were changing the culture itself. Spanish culture was in fact a combination of Christian and Muslim practices and ideas, and European travelers to Spain noted how “Moorish” Spanish customs were. The episode of Ana Félix (Don Quijote II, 63–64) shows that a strict distinction between the Christian and the Morisco in religious terms is impossible. The Morisca Ana Félix is a true Christian
who finds life in Muslim Algiers—populated by renegade Christians who had become Muslim—intolerable.

The books of chivalry that Don Quijote read were not anti-Muslim for the most part. Their stories dealt with a mythical time prior to the fateful year 711 and the “loss of Spain.” Furthermore, Spanish Christian kingdoms did not participate in the Crusades—with the exception of the Aragonese campaigns of the Almogavars that ended with the occupation of Constantinople in 1305. The pope had accepted the fight against the Muslims in the southern part of the Iberian Peninsula as a local version of the general crusading spirit. Thus the story of Gaiferos’s exploits rescuing his wife in Sansueña constitutes a non-Spanish, non-Castilian political program. Don Quijote attacks many things but none less than the northern European version of history that condemns Spain to the margins. He will not let the two lovers reach Paris without first having a say.

Don Quijote is not ignorant of the fictional end of the romance of Don Gaiferos’s liberation of Melisendra. His knightly program, however, includes intervening in the course of history. He wants to change history by changing the past because the adventures he reads about in the books of chivalry are for him a matter of the present. What he sees in the puppet show is purely present because he cannot accept a past that does not speak of him. If he is present in the scene of the Moors’ persecution of the couple, how could he merely stand by as a spectator? His defense of Melisendra cancels the past, the victory of a French knight who ignores his existence, and the existence of Christian Spain. If he defeats the Moors of Marsilio, he creates a new future, one that he writes anew. From that point on, the romances might well sing that Don Quijote was the liberator of the French lady and that Don Quijote, the Spaniard, was the victor against the Moors, which is more in tune with historical truth. And yet, after all, Don Quijote is a lunatic, as the reader and the audience at the inn know well.

The emphasis on defeating the Muslim Other in Don Quijote’s attack on the tableau is at odds with many of the oral versions of the Romance de Don Gaiferos that circulated then and still survive. With what version of the Gaiferos romance was Cervantes familiar? The boy narrator clearly refers to a plot taken from one of the printed versions that circulated in the Spanish-speaking world during the sixteenth century, but the oral tradition of the Gaiferos romance was a much more complicated story in which the confrontation with the Moors is only the first of a series of trials for the hero. In fact, twentieth-century oral versions in different parts of the Iberian Peninsula and, most importantly, from the Sephardic diaspora, make Gaiferos’s final enemies non-Muslim.
The reformulation of the old romance in the Renaissance obeys the historical circumstance of the times. The printed versions of the romance contain a short passage in which Gaiferos encounters a Christian captive upon his arrival in Sansueña, who will be his guide to the palace where Melisendra is held against her will. The similarity between the fictive Sansueña and the historical Algiers should not be disregarded. Algiers was the referent of a painful element of the Spanish imaginary, with its community of people who had been captured by pirates and languished in its prisons awaiting their ransom. This was an experience that Cervantes knew only too well, as he spent five years (1575–1580) in captivity there, an episode of his life that he re-created in the First Part (chapters 37 to 42) and later in the Second Part in the previously mentioned episode of Ana Félix, whose fiancé—the old Christian Don Gaspar Gregorio—remains a captive in Algiers, although disguised in women’s clothes (Don Quijote II, 64). Don Quijote now insists on becoming Don Gaiferos in order to rescue this boy–Melisendra from the Muslims, turning cross-dressing into a parodic comparison:

Dijo don Quijote a don Antonio que el parecer que habían tomado en la libertad de don Gregorio no era bueno, porque tenía más de peligroso que de conveniente, y que sería mayor que le pusieran a él en Berbería con sus armas y caballo, que él le sacaría a pesar de toda la morisma, como había hecho don Gaiferos a su esposa Melisendra.

—Advierta vuestra merced— dijo Sancho, oyendo esto— que el señor don Gaiferos sacó a su esposa de tierra firme y la llevó a Francia por tierra firme; pero aquí, si acaso sacamos a don Gregorio, no tenemos por dónde traerle a España, pues está la mar en medio. (Don Quijote II, 1157)

(Don Quijote told Don Antonio that the plan they had devised to free Don Gaspar Gregorio was not a good one because it was more dangerous than feasible, and it would be better to put him ashore in Barbary with his arms and his horse, and he would set the young man free despite the entire host of Moors, just as Don Gaiferos had done to his wife, Melisendra.

“Your grace should remember,” said Sancho when he heard this, “that Señor Don Gaiferos rescued his wife on dry land and took her to France on dry land, but here, if we do release Don Gregorio, we have no way to bring him to Spain because there is an ocean in the middle.”)

The historical reality of the Moriscos has turned the world of Don Quijote upside down: Ana Félix is a Morisco girl dressed as a man, her old Christian boyfriend is secretly in Algiers dressed as a girl, and both have disobeyed the king’s order of expulsion. Sancho Panza, ever the real master puppeteer of the story by this point, reminds Don Quijote of true
geopolitics. This failed attempt to become Don Gaiferos will also mark
the end of Don Quijote’s chivalric adventures. His rescue mission will
never take place, for a few hours later he will meet final defeat on the
beach of Barcelona at the hands of his own neighbor Sansón Carrasco,
dressed as the knight of the White Moon. Rescue missions only hap-
pened in the traditional romances.

Don Quijote, in his own demented way, throws the game board down
by attacking the puppet show in his wish to make the story do for him
what he wants to do for society, namely, to retain or restore the medieval
terms of anti-Muslim ideological confrontation. He fails and destroys the
game board, so to speak. Samuel Armistead has pointed out also that some
medieval heroes who interrupt their game in a fit of anger do so because
they have been called bastards and thus need to go out in search for their
fathers. As a knight-errant in the fashion of the books of chivalry, Don
Quijote does not know if he is a member of Charlemagne’s retinue or a
Spanish hero, always suspected of being of Muslim or Jewish descent and
not a legitimate part of Christendom, much as Renaissance Europe saw
Spain. Don Quijote, the canonical figure of Spanish literature, tears down
the puppet show because, perhaps, he does not know who his father is.

Notes

1. Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, *Don Quijote de La Mancha*, Edición del
   Instituto Cervantes dirigida por Francisco Rico (Barcelona: Crítica,
   1998); Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, *Don Quixote*, trans. Edith Grossman
   (New York: Harper Collins, 2003); citations of the original and transla-
   tion, respectively, are from these editions.

2. Bernal Díaz del Castillo, *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España*,
   critical edition of Miguel León-Portilla (Madrid: Historia 16, 1984),
   vol. 1, chap. 87, 310–11.

3. Barbara Fuchs, “Don Quijote I and the Forging of National History,”

4. Ibid., 396.

5. Bartolomé Bennassar, *Don Juan de Austria, un héroe para un Imperio*
   (Barcelona: Biblioteca Historia de España, 2006), 88–90.

6. Version sung in 1977 by David Ramón in the village of Trascastro,
   near Ponferrada, Spain—see Diego Catalán and Mariano de la Campa,
   *Romancero General de León I: Antología 1899–1989* (Madrid: Seminario
   Menéndez Pidal and Diputación Provincial de León, 1991), 82—and also
   in the Pan-Hispanic Ballad Project: http://depts.washington.edu/hisprom/
   /ballads/balladaction.php.

7. The longest version of the romance of Gaiferos in print is the “Romance
de don Gaiferos que trata de cómo sacó a su esposa que estaba en tierra de
moros” (Cancionero de romances, 1550). It is 306 lines long, five times the length of the longest oral version recorded in modern times, which never extends beyond 60 lines.


16. In the twentieth century, this narrative frame was still prevalent among the population of African descent in the Chocó region of Colombia and the province of Esmeraldas in Ecuador during the singing of traditional romances. See Gisela Beutler, Estudios sobre el Romancero Español en Colombia (Bogotá: Instituto Caro y Cuervo, 1972), 352–54.


18. The gloss Cervantes creates in this passage, in which he omits a few lines, corresponds to the famous verses of the Romance del Rey Rodrigo, in which the last Visigothic king of Spain laments the loss of his kingdom after the battle of Guadalete in 711 against the Muslims led by General Tarik: “Ayer era rey de España, / Hoy no lo soy de una villa; / Ayer villas y castillos, / Hoy ninguno poseía; / Ayer tenía criados; / y gente que me servía, / Hoy no tengo una almena / Que pueda decir que es mía” (Yesterday I was lord of all Spain, / today I cannot call one single town mine / Yesterday, I owned towns and castles, / Today none. / Yesterday I had servants / And people in my service, / Today I do not have a tower/I

19. A similar situation—and possibly a parodic reading of Cervantes’s episode—occurs in Roberto Rossellini’s film *Paisà* (1946), when a drunk African American soldier (Dots Johnson) in war-torn Naples attacks the white knight to defend the Moorish one in an act of racial solidarity. Italian Fascist propaganda had presented the American invaders as black savages threatening the purity of white (Christian?) women. The African American soldier was interpreting the fight as a reflection of his own struggle against racism, a version of which was the Fascists and Nazis he opposed as a member of the Allied armies.

20. Mudéjares were Muslims who remained in the territories of the Christian kingdoms from the twelfth century onward. By extension, mudéjar is a term used in reference to Muslim aesthetic and structural elements in Spanish architecture and other arts.


The past is never dead; it is not even past.

—William Faulkner

Two events have left their indelible mark on the collective consciousness of the Balkan peoples: the fall of Constantinople to the Ottomans in 1453 and the Battle of Kosovo in 1389. The former has been seen as an unmitigated catastrophe by all Orthodox believers and in particular the Greeks; the latter has been regarded as their greatest tragedy but also the source and foundation of their modern history by the Serbs and Montenegrins. This chapter deals with how the battle that took place on the Field of the Blackbirds (Kosovo) in 1389 assumed the form of a powerful myth, which includes “the Turks” as the Other and which became the most important reason and/or justification for the Balkan Christians’ peculiarly intense hatred for those South Slavs (Bosnian Muslims in particular) whose ancestors converted to Islam and, to use the local widespread expression, “become like the Turks” (poturice).\(^1\) The myth took its final shape in the epic work by Peter II Petrović Njegoš (1813–1851), prince-bishop (vladika) of Montenegro—Crna Gora, or “black mountain”—(1830–1851) and one of the greatest epic poets of the South Slavs.\(^2\)

To Njegoš, the Battle of Kosovo was not just a turning point in Serbian history; it was a turning point in world history. It enabled the Ottomans to conquer the Balkans; to destroy three empires (Byzantine, Bulgarian, and Serbian) and many other kingdoms, such as Bosnia; and on their
ruins to set their own empire with its capital in Constantinople. The 
conquest of the Balkans thus meant the transformation of the “empire of 
the gazis” (frontier warriors) to a “world empire.” Njegoš was following 
in the footsteps of the oral epic tradition, which saw the Battle of Kosovo 
as the one in which the earthly empire (i.e., the Serbian Empire) was lost 
and/or exchanged for a heavenly one when Prince Lazar made a fateful 
choice. By Njegoš’s time, four and a half centuries later, the tradition had 
developed after obliterating the traces of earlier reports and uncertainties. 
Contemporaries and early reports were nonetheless thoroughly confused 
as to what happened on the Field of the Blackbirds. Various explanations 
were given over the course of several centuries. It was only after two or 
more centuries that a version emerged that spoke of betrayal. Before that, 
the sources are quite contradictory as to what happened, who was victo-
rious, and who was to blame.

The first reports were extremely fragmentary and included few details. 
The earliest reference to the Battle of Kosovo is found in a Russian monk’s 
report dated between 1392 and 1397. He was traveling to Constantinople 
and wrote, “Murad had attacked the Serbian Prince Lazar. . . . Both Murad 
and Lazar had been killed in the encounter.” Tvrtko, king of Bosnia and 
Serbia (as he styled himself), sent letters to the town of Trogir, whose 
suzerain he was, and to the city of Florence. In his letter to the commune 
of Trogir, Tvrtko boasted that “we held the field in triumph. We fought 
them, defeated them, and stretched them dead on the ground so that only 
a few of these infidels remained alive. And this, thank God, without a 
great number of losses on our own side.” Tvrtko’s letter to Florence has 
not been preserved, but the commune’s answer is extant. In it his claim 
is repeated: “Amurat, who forced his way violently across the borders of 
our kingdoms to a place called the Field of Blackbirds, was killed in great 
bloodshed along with countless thousands of his army and two sons.” The 
commune then went on to eulogize him:

Fortunate is that field where such a defeat occurred, for it will preserve the 
bones of those who died as an eternal monument of victory throughout 
the centuries. Fortunate is the Bosnian Kingdom to which it was given to 
fight such a glorious battle and, with Christ’s right hand, to score such a 
victory. Fortunate too is that day of the blessed, most holy Vitus, glorious 
martyr and of venerated memory, on which date it was given to defeat that 
most bitter enemy.

From this letter, it is clear Tvrtko claimed that Florence accepted the out-
come of the Battle of Kosovo as a Christian victory and that the battle
indeed took place on the very day of St. Vitus—June 28 (New Style; June 15 Old Style). But the letter also gives additional details as to what happened to the Ottoman sultan, who, while in his tent, was stabbed through the throat and belly by a voivoda.  

Although the Florentine letter makes no mention of Prince Lazar, the Venetian Senate’s instructions to their envoy to the new sultan specifically mention him, as does a near-contemporary account by Beltram Minianelli, a trader in Damascus born in 1370. He says,

> [W]hen the late Murad and Lazar were engaged in battle, Lazar, seeing that he could not overcome, decided to die and rushed to Murad’s tent with a detachment of loyal men just when Murad did not expect it. Because of the multitude of enemy troops, however, it happened that Lazar and his lords were captured, brought before Murad, and presented as booty. When Murad sought an oath of obedience and loyalty from Lazar, all of them preferred to die rather than take such an oath. Then one of them—some say it was Lazar—stabbed Murad in the chest with a sword which came out through his back and took his life. Murad, already aged and seeing that he would not escape death, ordered the decapitation of Lazar and the others. And then he himself immediately breathed his last.  

Thus, according to Minianelli’s report, it was Prince Lazar who led the daring raid into Murad’s tent and killed the sultan, a view repeated by a Castilian, Ruy Gonzales de Clavijo (a member of an embassy sent to Timurlane in 1403), in the account of his travels. He explains that Murad “was killed by a Christian count, known as Count Lazar, with a sword in battle on a field. [The sword] entered his chest and came out through his back.” Clavijo goes on to say that Baiazith “avenged his dead father and killed Count Lazar in battle with his own hand.”

Of the four historians—Chalcocondyles, Dukas, Critovoulos, and Sphrantzes—who wrote on the fall of Constantinople to the Turks in 1453, only the first two include information about the Battle of Kosovo. Laonikos Chalcocondyles wrote a history of the rise of the Ottoman Empire (*De rebus turricis*) in which he compared the Turkish and Greek sources. According to the Turkish sources, Murad was pursuing a Serbian soldier during the rout and was stabbed by a spear. But his Greek sources put it differently: Murad was assassinated before the battle. A nobleman by the name of Miloin (Miloš Obilić) decided to sacrifice himself for the good of his countrymen and, with Prince Lazar’s agreement, went to Murad’s tent ostensibly as a traitor. He then killed Murad with a spear.
Dukas, whose *History of the Byzantines* covers the period 1341–1462, narrates how in the melee of battle,

a young Serbian nobleman, who was more daring than any other man of his time, separated himself from the Christian phalanx, as though he were deserting, and fell into the midst of the Turkish ranks. When the Turks immediately laid hands on him, he called out the ruler’s name, saying, “I wish to see him and tell him something secretly so that he can win this battle; this is the reason I have deserted.” They presented him to the ruler. As Murad motioned with his hand for the youth to approach, he rushed forward, and, when near enough, mortally wounded Murad by plunging a sword into his heart; he then was hacked to pieces by Murad’s axe-bearers and bodyguards.\(^{11}\)

Dukas then adds significantly that “neither the right wing nor the left was aware of what was happening since these actions took place in the rear.”\(^ {12}\)

More important than Dukas’s own account is an anonymous Italian translation of it. The author was probably a Slav from Dalmatia living at the end of the fifteenth century, when Venice ruled most of the province.\(^ {13}\) His account has nothing to do with Dukas’s when it comes to the Battle of Kosovo, but it goes on to narrate how, during the battle, Dragossavo Probiscio (Dragosav Probiščić), one of Lazar’s captains, turned traitor and turned his troops against his master. Faced with this sudden development, another of Lazar’s captains, Vlatko Vlađenić—who commanded Bosnian troops that King Tvrtko had sent to boost Lazar’s forces—left the battlefield with his contingent. The anonymous translator’s introduction of the element of treachery was novel and would ultimately prevail.\(^ {14}\) That this new explanation was not known before this time can be attested by a Ragusan chronicle written in Dubrovnik at the end of the fifteenth century—precisely at the time when the anonymous writer was translating Dukas into Italian. Under June 15, 1389, one finds an entry that simply reports the battle on Vidovdan between the “Grand Turk” and the Bosnians—led by Lazar, along with Vuk Branković and Vojvoda Vlatko Vuković—in which both Murad and Lazar were killed and both sides suffered heavy losses.\(^ {15}\)

No Serbian historical accounts exist until the fifteenth century, leaving only homiletic texts, especially those dedicated to the memory of Prince Lazar, which all share the same view: namely, that Prince Lazar fell as a martyr in the defense of the Serbian land, its freedom, its religion, and its culture and that this loss was a fateful legacy left to the Serbian people under Ottoman rule. These sources have very little to say about the battle itself and almost nothing as to who was the aggressor. But they almost unanimously attribute the Serbian defeat to the sins of its rulers,
above all those who came after Dušan the Mighty, but they do not hint at treachery. In short, the Turks were constructed as the divine instrument of punishment for the Serbs (high and low alike) for their numerous sins, a thoroughly biblical view shared by many, both in Byzantium and in the West.

This view also introduces the kenotic (passion-suffering) element that George Fedotov has so masterfully explained. Medieval Slavic saints were often princes, as in the case of Kievan Rus, and if they chose to “suffer passion” (i.e., sacrifice themselves), they were then acclaimed as saintly princes and venerated as such, as in the case of Boris and Gleb. This is the view put forward by Jefimija, the widow of Uglješa Mrnjavčević, one of the three Mrnjavčević brothers, all local potentates like Prince Lazar himself. All three brothers met their doom at the battle on the Marica River in 1371, the battle that opened the Balkans to the Turks (and in many ways a more important battle than Kosovo). Jefimija was placed under Lazar’s protection and wove a beautiful shroud for his coffin after he was beheaded. In 1405 she embroidered an “epitaphion,” on which she developed this kenotic theme:

As a new martyr, Prince Lazar, the strong hand of the Lord showed you as strong and famous among all rulers on the earth. You ruled your fatherland; and, in all good things, you cheered the Christians under your protection. With a manly heart, and with a desire for piousness, you faced the serpent and the enemy of God’s churches, having judged that it would have been unbearable for your heart to see the Christians of your fatherland overwhelmed by the Moslems; if you could not accomplish this, you would leave the glory of your kingdom on earth to perish, and having become purple with your own blood, you would join the soldiers of the heavenly kingdom. In this way, your two wishes were fulfilled. You killed the serpent, and you received from God the wreath of martyrdom.

Jefimija here introduces two themes that will dominate early Serbian accounts of Prince Lazar’s death: first, that he was a martyr for the Serbian cause; and second, that he chose the “heavenly kingdom over the earthly one,” as the ensuing oral epics would put it. But it was Danilo III who introduced what became the staple of subsequent epic tradition: Lazar’s speech to his assembled troops before the battle. Though he starts with a view of Lazar as a martyr, Danilo makes it clear that Lazar saw his sacrifice not as a solitary stand but as one with his people: “Lazar modeled himself after Christ and became a new martyr in his last days. He then brought the big gathering of martyrs to Christ the Lord.”

This was also the view proclaimed by a column that stood on the site where the Turks captured Prince Lazar. Among other honorable
remarks concerning Lazar’s generosity, it also mentions this notion of self-sacrifice:

What Christ wanted, he loved; and to that cause, by his own will, he sacrificed himself and all of his men under his command…. Like a good shepherd and leader of the most noble and glorious, he wisely led his lambs… to die in Christ and to accept the crown of suffering and participate in heavenly glory…. The courageous fighters were seized by criminal Agaren [Turks’] hands, and he accepted well the end of his suffering, thus becoming Christ’s martyr, the great Prince Lazar. 19

The finest expression of this self-sacrifice in Christ is found in Danilo III’s account where Lazar gives a speech in which he harangues the troops along these lines:

But if the sword, if wounds, or if the darkness of death comes to us, we accept it sweetly for Christ and for the godliness of our homeland. It is better to die in battle than to live in shame. Better it is for us to accept death from the sword in battle than to offer our shoulders to the enemy. We have lived a long time for the world; in the end we seek to accept the martyr’s struggle and to live forever in heaven. We call ourselves Christian soldiers, martyrs for godliness to be recorded in the book of life. We do not spare our bodies in fighting in order that we may accept the holy wreathes from that One who judges all accomplishments. Sufferings beget glory and labors lead to peace. 20

It is at this point that Danilo III introduces the soldiers’ response as a sort of a chorus to echo Lazar’s own choice:

We do not spare ourselves because we know that after all this we must depart and become one with the dust. We die so that we may live forever. We bring ourselves before God as a living sacrifice… in the good fight with our blood. We give our lives freely so that after this we will be a vivid example to others. 21

The same idea is succinctly expressed in Slovo o knezu Lazaru: “The pious one [Lazar] said to his men: ‘Brothers and children, it is better for us to accept the single grave together than to see our parents and children led away to a foreign land. . . . I offer my soul for my friends as the Lord commanded.’ And they answered: ‘We are ready to obey your commands.’” 22

Here the idea that they died for their Christian faith reached its apogee.

Thus far I have examined written sources, historical and poetic, that clearly express both that Lazar chose martyrdom or self-sacrifice (kenosis)
and that the outcome of the battle was not definitively either a victory or a defeat. It was sometime after 1460 that the first hints of dissension on the eve of the battle appeared.

In 1456 Stephen Vukčić Kosača employed a German cannon maker by the name of Jerg (who came from Nuremberg) to strengthen his defenses against the encroaching Turks. Though captured by the Turks in 1460, Jerg escaped and made his way to Italy, where he wrote a chronicle for Pope Sixtus IV, the humanist known as Enea Silvio (Aeneas Sylvius) Piccolomini. In it he briefly noted that Lazar’s two sons-in-law who constantly quarreled again argued on the eve of battle about who was best in battle, one of them then sending word to the Turk that he would defect with his troops the following morning; this greatly pleased the Turk, and in the morning when he [the son-in-law] arrived and had to kiss the [Turk’s] foot, he drew out his sword and stabbed the Turk. Then they all fought one another. The Turk was the victor and the despot Lazar fled, but they captured him and killed him. 23

Thus, shortly after 1460, the view was expressed that it was Prince Lazar’s own sons-in-law who were responsible for dissension on the eve of battle. The motif of treason, however, did not appear until suggested by Konstantin Mihailović of Ostrovica (Konstanty Michalowicz), the author of Janjičarove uspomene ili Turska hronika (Memoirs of a Janissary or the Turkish Chronicle) (ca. 1497). Born near Novo Brdo (Serbia) in 1435, he was taken as a part of a child levy before the fall of Constantinople in 1453, participated in Mehmed the Conqueror’s campaign in Bosnia in 1463, and was captured by the Hungarians shortly thereafter. He then turned against his former masters and wrote his chronicle to persuade the kings of Poland and Hungary to fight the Turks until they could be expelled from Europe. Mihailović wrote his account in a sort of Polish, but it was he who first named “Miloš Kobila” as the assassin of Sultan Murad and hinted at the “disloyalty of evil people”:

And then on Wednesday, St. Vitus’s day, there began a violent battle, and it lasted until Friday. Lords who supported Prince Lazar fought bravely, loyally, and honorably at his side; others, however, observed the battle looking through their fingers. Because of this disloyalty and dissension and the jealousies of evil and wicked people, the battle was lost on Friday at noon…. And after those who were disloyal had watched the battle, they remained as traitors. 24

By 1500, therefore, a view had emerged that the battle was lost because some of those whose forces were on the side of Prince Lazar chose not
to fight—that is, turned traitor. The account thus speaks of betrayal, but no blame had yet been specifically assigned to anyone. In 1601, however, Mauro Orbini tells of the feud between Prince Lazar’s daughters, Mara (wife of Vuk Branković) and Vukosava (wife of Miloš Kobilić [= Obilić]); this feud was then taken up by their husbands, who fought a duel and were subsequently superficially reconciled by Lazar (in his *Il Regno degli Slavi, hoggi corrottamente detti Schiavoni . . . Dalmatia, Croatia, Bosnia, Servia, Rossia, & Bulgaria*). Although Miloš was maligned by Vuk as a future traitor, in the end it was he who went to the Turkish camp as a supposed fugitive and was taken into Murad’s camp, where he succeeded in stabbing the sultan in the belly with a concealed dagger, after which he was killed by the sultan’s guards. Orbini concluded his account by pointing out the traitor: “Lazar’s son-in-law Vuk Branković got away with almost all his men, having had (as some say) a secret arrangement with Murad to betray his father-in-law (which he did) in order to seize his estate.”

Thus, by 1601 the legend of Kosovo had finally emerged full-blown: it names the culprit, Vuk Branković, and it provides a very powerful explanation of his actions. It is also a fitting conclusion to Orbini’s own account of medieval Serbia, which forms a very important part of his *Il regno degli Slavi*. In its final section, Orbini repeatedly emphasizes that treachery was the primary cause for the Slavic demise in the Balkans. Thus, Vuk Branković’s treachery of his father-in-law, his comrades-in-arms, and his own Serbian people was part and parcel of the tradition of betrayal rampant among the high (and not so high) feudal lords who sought their own advantage at the expense of the public.

Orbini knew the emotional power of storytelling, never failing to mention those early portents of the impending tragedy that would grip his readers’ attention. Thus, he made it clear that the seeds of the Serbian Empire’s destruction were planted by the greatest of all Slavic rulers in the medieval Balkans, Stephen Dušan himself (1330–1355). He tells how young Dušan fell under the spell of evil counselors who warned him that his father, Uroš, wanted to bypass him for his stepbrother Siniša, Uroš’s son from his second marriage. Finding his father defenseless, Dušan had him imprisoned in a fortress of Zvečan and, following those same evil counselors, in 1331 put the old king to death. Then Orbini introduced the reason why the Serbian Empire was ultimately doomed: “Some say that after the arrival of the henchmen the king cursed his son and his offspring, and even though this curse did not fall on his son, it did fall on his grandson Uroš who lost the kingdom.”

After recounting Stephen Dušan’s glorious reign, Orbini gave an account of his son Uroš’s political naïveté, which cost him his kingdom and his life. Orbini blamed the high magnates around young Tsar Uroš
for the division of his father’s empire while Uroš was still nominally a 
tsar. In Orbini’s memorable phrase, “in less than ten years” (since Stephen 
Dušan’s death in 1356), the entire Rašan kingdom was divided among 
the four noblemen—i quattro baroni—who were obeyed and recognized 
as masters by everyone even during the tsar’s life. The rest of Orbini’s 
treatment of medieval Serbian history is devoted to these four “barons,” 
namely King Vukašin, Nikola Altomanović, Balša (after whom Balšići 
were named), and Prince (knez) Lazar. He blames Prince Lazar together 
with the other barons for what happened to Uroš’s empire, and he makes 
clear that in the end they all got what they deserved. The Serbian Empire 
fell because it lacked unity, in the same way that all the South Slavs were 
conquered and enslaved by the Turks because they lacked unity. According 
to Orbini, the absence of unity stemmed from a deeper cause: their loss 
of memory as to their primordial union with all the Slavs as members of 
the same Slavic “race.” This putative loss of “Slavdom” allowed them to 
treat each other as enemies.

Orbini’s powerful explanation of Vuk Branković’s treachery, which 
came at the end of the long feudal struggle during and following the 
reign of the last Serbian emperor, Stephen Uroš (1356–1371), is a fitting 
finale to a tale of feudal betrayal of prince and people by these quattro 
baroni di Servia. Yet, it should be pointed out, Orbini knows of no other 
treachery than that of Vuk Branković. There is no hint that either he or 
his followers defected to Islam, nor is there any mention of conversion to 
the “faith of the Turks.” Vuk Branković’s is a betrayal in feudal style (i.e., 
the exchange of one lord for another)—in this case Murad for Lazar, his 
men simply following his decision. They did not convert, nor would they 
have understood the meaning of the phrase “the Serbian nation” beyond 
or apart from themselves.

This construction of the Battle of Kosovo became not just a prevalent 
one but indeed the canonical one. It is repeated in oral epic songs, and it 
is deeply engraved in popular memory. It ruled the popular tradition for 
almost two and a half centuries, until it was modified by Njegoš in the 
1830s. Fully accepting that construction, Njegoš went even further: he 
charged those who either did not fight at Kosovo or sided with the Turks 
militarily with being traitors not just to Serbdom but to their religion 
as well—that is, to Serbian Orthodoxy—by gradually embracing Islam, 
the religion of the conquerors. These converts or poturice (“those who 
became Turks”) thus not only betrayed their country and religion and 
let down their prince and their people at Kosovo but by converting to 
Islam “became like Turks” (i.e., became an alien element in their own 
population) and by serving Islam were used by the Porte to entice oth-
ers to do the same. They became both the Trojan horse among the still
predominantly Christian population of the Balkans and the most trusted and notoriously brutal servants of their Turkish masters. That is why the popular saying has it that poturice su gore od Turaka (the converts are worse than the Turks). This construction of the Kosovo tragedy was precisely Njegoš’s invention.

According to Michel Aubin, the first mention of this new version of the consequences of the Serbian defeat at Kosovo are found in Njegoš’s youthful epic composition, Svobodiđada (The song of liberty), written 1834–1835 but not published during Njegoš’s lifetime. It consists of ten poems narrating the various battles that the Montenegrins fought against the Turks in the eighteenth century. In the first poem, Njegoš gives a short epitome of Serbian history up to the eighteenth century and offers a new interpretation of what happened after the Battle of Kosovo, in which the most relevant lines are the following:

After the pitiful Battle of Kosovo
The sons of Turkistan
In the fallen Serbian state
Dispersed and multiplied,

... The Serbian name fell into oblivion,
And the radiant candle of Serbdom
The stormy Asian wind
Snuffed out in the world.
The heroes wandered afar,
All the lords became Turks
The brave people started to wear
The heavy yoke of loathsome slavery.

It is clear here that Njegoš accuses the Serbian lords of “becoming Turks” (i.e., converting to Islam) after the Battle of Kosovo, whereas the ordinary people remained Christian. It is inconceivable that Njegoš was ignorant of the fact that hardly any Serbian magnates and noblemen converted to Islam; the only sizable group of nobility to do so was in conquered Bosnia. Thus, Njegoš accuses the Bosnian nobility through their conversion of being the progenitors of all the poturice. No one before Njegoš had made such a claim. This coupling of what happened in the field of Kosovo with what happened after the Turkish conquest of Bosnia (in 1463, more than half a century after the Battle of Kosovo) enabled Njegoš to explain the existence of a very large number of poturice in both Bosnia and nearby Herzegovina, though not in his own Montenegro. Njegoš then proceeds to explain how “this led all the rest to flee / ... / To a nest made by blood / Where Freedom’s spark glowed (13, ll. 150–53). It was
in this oasis of freedom, this Black Mountain (Montenegro), that those who refused to accept Ottoman rule revolted against Turkish tyranny. In Svobodijada, Njegoš provided a bridge between what happened at Kosovo and the existence of both the poturice and their antithesis and nemesis, Montenegro, peopled by those who refused to accept both Ottoman lordship and their religion, Islam.

Njegoš’s greatest epic composition, Gorski vijenac (The Mountain Wreath), provides the explanation of why some South Slavs in general, and the aristocrats in particular, converted to Islam, whereas the ordinary people among the Christian populace did not do so and took refuge in Montenegro in order to avoid both Ottoman tyranny and conversion to Islam. The first kolo of Gorski vijenac, as the guardian of people’s memory and voice of popular tradition, puts it squarely thus:

Everywhere the Serbian name has perished.
Mighty lions have become meek peasants.
Rash and greedy converted to Islam
—may their Serb milk be tainted with the plague!
Those who escaped before the Turkish sword,
those who did not blaspheme at the True Faith,
those who refused to be thrown into chains,
took refuge here in these lofty mountains
to shed their blood together and to die,
heroically to keep the sacred oath,
their lovely name, and their holy freedom.31

Bosnia and Herzegovina were the two provinces in the Ottoman Balkans where a substantial part of the population had converted to Islam at the time of the Ottoman conquest in 1463. This was especially true of the Bosnian nobility, which, according to the still-prevalent theory, converted to Islam en masse. The reasons for this massive conversion have intrigued historians ever since critical historiography was established among the Croats and the Serbs in the mid-nineteenth century. The prevalent theory was established by Dr. Franjo Rački (1828–1894), who argued that the Bosnian nobility had belonged to the so-called Bosnian Church, which he identified with the Bogomils and labeled as Manichaean (i.e., dualist). For the preceding several centuries, Bosnia had been the heretical stronghold in the Balkans, well known to papal inquisitors and foreign princes; and rather than submit totally to Rome, the Bosnian Bogomils converted to Islam. Islamization has thus been seen in the context of the great contest between orthodoxy and heresy, as well as Orthodoxy versus Catholicism in the pre-Ottoman Balkans. Though challenged ever since, and particularly after the recent dissolution of Yugoslavia, this theory
rests on certain well-known Western (Latin), native (Orthodox Slavic), and Byzantine sources.

Be that as it may, the Islamization of Bosnia and to a lesser extent of Herzegovina led to a substantial portion of the native Slavic population embracing the faith and culture of the conquerors—“the Turks,” as the Ottomans were popularly called throughout the Balkans (cf. the Greek use of the term *turkokratia*, i.e., the period of the Turkish rule). Of even greater importance was the fact that because the Bosnian nobility (no matter its previous religious denomination) chose willingly to convert to Islam, Mehmet II (“the Conqueror,” 1451–1481) made the all-important exception of allowing Muslim boys in Bosnia to be eligible for the so-called *devşirme*. This was a levy of boys between the ages of eight and fifteen who were periodically taken from the villages in the Balkans and trained to become the administrators and the elite troops (the Janissaries) or the top administrative officials and commanding officers of the Ottoman Empire. Ordinarily, only Christian boys were levied, and this “tribute in blood” made up of novices (*acemi oglanı*) was one of the taxes, so to speak, imposed upon the Christian population. By being included in this source pool of imperial officialdom, the Bosnian ruling class was able to establish its presence within the Ottoman central government to such an extent that many leading officials, including grand viziers, as well as provincial governors came from their ranks through the *devşirme*. This meant that the entire provincial government and the ruling social group in Bosnia and Herzegovina came from the South Slavs whose ancestors had converted to Islam rather willingly and whose successors continued to dominate politically, as well as socially and economically, the area surrounding Montenegro on its (poorly defined) northern borders. The same was true, though to a lesser extent, of the Albanian areas to the east of Montenegro, where the population was divided among Muslims, Catholics, and Orthodox but where again the provincial governors and local Ottoman officials happened to come from those (Albanians or South Slavs) who had converted to Islam. Thus, on three sides, Montenegro was bordered by areas governed and often dominated by people whose ancestors (or in some cases who themselves) had accepted the faith and culture of the Ottoman conquerors.

It should be pointed out that up to 1878, Montenegro was a very small land area: including the four *nahije* (Ottoman administrative districts) of Katuni, Rijeka, Crmnica, and Lješani—only about a third of the present-day Republic of Montenegro—and lacking the region of Brda, the Podgorica plain, the littoral, and all the mountainous areas in the north. This relatively tiny area could not be effectively subdued by the Ottomans (though they tried repeatedly throughout the eighteenth
and early nineteenth centuries) because of its rough terrain and the constant fighting both among the Montenegrin tribes and with the nearby Ottoman authorities (the governor [vizier] of Skadar [Scutari] and of Herzegovina [usually centered in Mostar]). This handful of tribes—high up on the mountain plateaus, constantly feuding among themselves (a similar, though not quite the same, situation prevailed among the mountain tribes of “high” Albania)—periodically faced Ottoman expeditions from Skadar or Herzegovina designed to pacify (i.e., to conquer) them and frequently raided nearby Ottoman territories, motivated by vengeance for the Ottoman killing of their fellow Montenegrins or by a simple desire for plunder. Such a tiny oasis was constantly threatened physically with cultural extinction. Even more dangerous and insidious, from the Montenegrin point of view, was the lure that the Ottoman Empire (its faith and its civilization) had for many poor Montenegrins.

Though precise data is lacking on the extent of Islamization in some areas of “old” Montenegro (i.e., those areas that never were effectively integrated into the Ottoman provincial structure and after the extinction of the Crnojević dynasty gradually came to look up to their vladika as not only their bishop but their prince as well), there were quite a few Montenegrins who had accepted Islam in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and who continued to live side by side with their Orthodox kinsmen for generations. As already noted, they were known popularly in Montenegro (as elsewhere in the Slavic-speaking areas of the Balkans) as poturica (those who became Turks). Because in popular imagination and culture the Ottomans were identified with “the Turks,” to “become a Turk” (poturčiti se) meant to renounce Christianity and convert to Islam. Yet it must be stressed that both in popular culture (in particular in oral poetry) and in popular attitudes, such poturica were regarded as (South) Slavs who by accepting the conquerors’ faith had apostatized (i.e., betrayed their “true” religion, Christianity) without ceasing to be regarded ethnically as members of these (South) Slavic tribes. Both the Slavic peoples and their cultural leaders and thinkers, such as Njegoš, regarded the poturica as renegade Slavs, not as foreigners. Thus the Christian attitude toward these poturica was determined not by ethnicity but by religion. Andrej Simić is therefore quite correct when he states that “religious identification had, at least for several centuries, been the single most defining marker of national identity among the Serbs, Croats, and Slav Muslims.”

Njegoš chose as the theme of The Mountain Wreath the supposed extermination of these poturica as a single event at the beginning of the eighteenth century under Vladika Danilo. The latter was the real protagonist of Njegoš’s epic play: Danilo’s dilemma about whether it is humanly
justified to kill one’s kinsmen is the very core of the play. Until it is resolved, the extermination cannot proceed.

Njegoš had a peculiar view of his own people: for him, what made the Montenegrins special was that they modeled themselves on the noblest heroes of the Serbian people, above all Miloš Obilić, who used force to fight force. Thus, despite the fact that much of the fighting was over material goods, the purpose of fighting itself was to prevent the establishment of full Ottoman hegemony over the entire Serbian people, to deny to the Turks the luxury of taking Montenegro for granted, as they did other Balkan countries. Njegoš was not familiar with the official Muslim (and thus Ottoman) classification of the world, namely, into the dār al-ḥarb (abode of war) and the dār al-islām (abode of peace). Of course, the “abode of peace” was the “abode of Islam” and thus coincided with those territories and peoples who had either been conquered by sword or voluntarily submitted to Islam, in this case to the Ottoman sultan as its khalifah. The Montenegrins in general, and Vladika Danilo in particular, were determined not to be a part of the “abode of peace” but to remain outside of it in the perpetual state of fighting. Thus, they rejected Ottoman suzerainty as such by refusing to pay the various taxes and imposts, such as haraç. The Montenegrins thus denied the Ottoman claim to be universal rulers, indeed regarding the sultan and his government as the agents of the Devil.

It should be pointed out and emphasized that in The Mountain Wreath, Njegoš identified fully with his predecessor as the ruler of Montenegro, Danilo Petrović Njegoš (1696–1735). Vladika Danilo’s (and by implication Njegoš’s own) principled rejection of everything Islamic, and in particular of the Ottoman claim to rule the Balkan peoples by right of conquest, was modeled on God’s opposition to Satan in the heavenly kingdom. This is why one cannot understand the deeper meaning of The Mountain Wreath without taking into account Njegoš’s description and explanation of Satan’s revolt in Heaven in his other great work, Luča mikrokozma (The ray of the microcosm). To Njegoš and his Montenegrins, Miloš Obilić is a kind of a supreme hero because he sacrificed his own life to strike at the very center of the “unholy” empire of Sultan Murad I (1359–1389). As Njegoš succinctly expresses it, “His powerful arm with a single blow / Toppled a throne and shook all Tartarus” (MW, 12, ll. 235–36). Thus, there was a sacred obligation to fight those who had trampled every right underfoot (MW, 23, ll.618–20).

In his study of Njegoš’s Luča mikrokozma, Slobodan Tomović quite rightly claims that for Njegoš, “what Satan’s militaristic organization is in Heaven, the Turks are on Earth. The identification is understandable since the poet’s countrymen had for centuries been obsessed with the
idea that the cause of all Evil in the world comes from the Turks.”

This is because they attribute Ottoman tyranny to the lack of law in the Ottoman state. Perhaps no other verses in Njegoš’s *The Mountain Wreath* are better known than those that expresses precisely this idea: “Kome zakon leži u topuzu / Tragovi mu smrde nečovjekovom” (He whose law is written by his cudgel / leaves behind the stench of inhumanity) (MW, 41, ll. 1155–56).

In *The Mountain Wreath*, Njegoš is adamant that

> awesome symbols, the Crescent and the Cross; their kingdoms are the realms of graveyards. Following them down the bloody river, sailing in the small boat of great sorrows, we must honor the one or the other. (MW, 24, ll. 631–35)

Despite its indubitable qualities, Vasa D. Mihailovich’s translation is a somewhat “flat” rendering of Njegoš’s very resolute verse: “to je biti jedno ili drugo,” which literally means “it is to be one or the other.” In other words, there is an absolute dichotomy between the Muslims and Christians. Njegoš cannot allow any compromise or even truce between the two forces. That is why he has *Vladika* Danilo utter this famous line as a part of his monologue: “Let the struggle go on without respite” (MW, 24, l. 658). *The Mountain Wreath*’s first *kolo* traced the origins of the demise of the Serbian medieval state to what happened before the Battle of Kosovo in 1389—that is, to God’s anger at Serbs for their sins, their leaders’ trampling of the law and splitting of loyalties and territories, their internal feuds, neglect of government, and the disloyalty of the people to their leaders and vice versa (MW, 11, ll. 198–214).

It was thus Prince Lazar’s choice of martyrdom, his self-sacrifice, that redeemed the Battle of Kosovo. For though himself a saintly prince, Lazar belonged to that group which had prepared the ground for the fall of the Serbian Empire: the magnates who by their internecine quarrels and wars had sapped the vital strength of Dušan’s empire. In *Vladika* Danilo’s first monologue, this sacrifice is an attempt to redeem the Serbian Empire from a curse (*kletva*) that fell on its rulers (and thus on its people) by shifting the blame from the magnates (who redeemed themselves at Kosovo through their own sacrifice) to those who betrayed Prince Lazar: Vuk Branković and, for the first time, the *poturice*. “May God strike you, loathsome degenerates, / why do we need the Turk’s faith among us? / What will you do with your ancestors’ curse?” (MW, 7, ll. 73–75). How is this curse that fell upon the *poturice* to be explained? There is a fragment of an oral poem on the Battle of Kosovo that cannot be dated but
was included in the second volume of Karadžić’s edition of Serbian folk songs (which was in Njegoš’s library). It mentions Prince Lazar’s curse on the eve of the battle:

If any does not come to Kosovo,
let his whole line be barren,
let the wheat in the field wane,
let the grapevine on the hill wither!\(^{36}\)

Njegoš then accuses the *poturice* of inheriting Prince Lazar’s curse as descendants of those who did not answer the call but instead “became Turks.” Njegoš has thus integrated his vision of the past into three curses: 1) Stefan Dečanski’s curse, which fell on his grandson Uroš and which led to the fragmentation of the Serbian Empire after Stephan Dušan’s death in 1356; 2) Prince Lazar’s curse of those who did not come to Kosovo (Vuk Branković in particular, in popular tradition), which, according to Njegoš, fell on their descendants—that is, the *poturice*; and 3) Mara’s curse of her son Siniša Crnojević for converting to Islam. All three curses are the result of betrayal: 1) of the king by the magnates who stood behind Dušan’s revolt against his father; 2) of Prince Lazar by his son-in-law, Vuk Branković; and 3) of Ivan Crnojević (1465–1490) by his youngest son, Staniša, who converted to Islam and ruled Montenegro (1514–1528) as an Ottoman governor.

Njegoš’s view of Serbian history in general and the Battle of Kosovo in particular was formed during a period of romantic Serbian nationalism. Following the failure of the First Serbian Revolt (1804–1813) under Karageorge Petrović and the success of the Second Serbian Revolt (1815) under Miloš Obrenović, there was a growing interest in the Serbian past, in particular how and why the medieval Serbian state had risen and fallen. The Battle of Kosovo thus became the central point of the cult of Serbdom, of what it meant to be a Serb (and Njegoš considered himself to be a Serb from Montenegro). This cult of medieval glory and its fall under the onslaught of the Turks became the quintessential element of modern Serbian nationalism—retained to the present. At issue is how Njegoš’s personal view of Serbian history and Kosovo in particular could become a *popular* (i.e., widely shared) myth comparable to what Gallipoli is to Australians and Massada is to Israelis.

The process of the formation of shared (national) myth of group identity has been fruitfully examined by Howard F. Stein, who has argued that “if culture is a state of shared group-fantasy, then ethnicity can be said to be the phenomenon of the breakdown of one group-fantasy and the search for and consolidation of a replacement shared fantasy.”\(^{37}\) Stein
argues that the cyclical view of history must be understood in psychoanalytic terms:

The cyclical theorists of history are technically correct, though for the wrong reasons. History repeats itself for the identical reasons that impel individual neurotics to repeat compulsively their bizarre symbolization and ritualization: the vicious cycle of anxiety and symptom-defense. In the individual we call this cumulative pattern “character”; in the group, “culture”; and in the individual or group over time, “history.”

The inability to understand and exorcise one’s own history leads to the invention of a new identity as a result of a new repression. An identity is forged by splitting it into a necessary dichotomy of *us* (positive identity) and *them* (negative identity): adversaries need each other existentially.

Stein’s notion that every identity is in fact the sum of two complementary but opposite identities results in the projection upon the “enemy” of those features that one hates in oneself. The autonomy a particular culture claims is based on the coexistence of a corresponding enemy culture.

If togetherness or communion is what ensures group identity, then any outsider is seen automatically as a threat to this identity merely because he or she exists. As Stein notes, “those human groups we call cultures become experienced as emotionally symbiotic force fields, ‘extended families’ in which all members who claim to be related and descended from the same putative ancestors share a group-fantasy of kinship: oneness.”

In fact, any group harbors an opposition within itself, for its members are ambivalent about themselves and must be held together by a projection of their inner conflict upon an outside enemy. This projection results in a triangle made up not of a binary opposition between “us” and “them” but of “us,” “rejected us,” and “them” as “projected rejected us.” This triangle is thus based on a willful delusion about the unity of the group and its newly acquired identity. The struggle with an outside enemy takes the place of a struggle within one’s group. In order to define itself as what it is, the group must rather obviously define what it is not. Positive identity is predicated upon the existence of negative identity: “Out-groups come to be ‘extensions’ that represent by dissociation those rejected aspects of oneself and one’s group self.” Thus group identity and the symbiotic triangle start with the violent rejection of one’s own previous identity—or rather those aspects of one’s former identity that one has come to hate and reject.

In the case of Montenegro, it was myth (i.e., its constructed history) that gave it its new identity. In its former guise as Duklja (Dioclea) and Zeta (or Zenta), it was one of the areas of the Serbian state after Stevan
Nemanja’s conquest and became one of the offshoots of the disintegrating Serbian Empire following Stephen Dušan’s death in 1356. As a breakaway part of the former Serbian Empire, it shared with other areas the fate of and the responsibility for the decline and fall of the Serbian Empire. Regional magnates—for example, the Balšići and Crnojevići that ruled consecutively the area that became known in the later Middle Ages as “the Black Mountain” (Crna Gora = Monte Negro)—were accused by both oral epic poetry and the chroniclers, such as Mauro Orbini, of destroying the Serbian Empire by opposing Emperor Uroš (1356–1371) and taking away his power in regional areas such as Montenegro. Their squabbles, disunity, and disloyalty were identified as the primary causes for the Serbian failure to present a common front against and defeat the Turks, a tradition that was fully formed by the time Njegoš came to rule Montenegro in 1830. Serbia fell because of the disunity of its leaders, and Montenegro was one of the results of this disunity, brought on by Orbini’s *quattro baroni di Servia* (Serbia’s four barons).

Njegoš understood this better than anybody else. He devoted much of his life to a protracted meditation on the consequences of that decline: the Battle of Kosovo, the fall of medieval Serbia, and the emergence of Montenegro as the only area not (fully) integrated into the Ottoman Empire. As noted earlier, Njegoš did not reject the standard explanation of why the Battle of Kosovo was lost: in the very beginning of *The Mountain Wreath*, he hurls curses on Serbian potentates who ruined their state and people:

> Our own leaders, God’s curse be on their souls,  
> carved the empire into little pieces  
> and sapped the strength of the Serbs wantonly.  
> Our own leaders, may all their trace vanish,  
> sowed the bitter seed of disharmony  
> and thus poisoned the entire Serbian tribe.  
> Our own leaders, miserable cowards,  
> thus became the traitors of our nation. (MW, 11, ll. 207–14)

Njegoš emphasizes the enormity of their crime by repeating the key word *velikaši* (literally “magnates”—Vasa Mihailovich’s translation is rather free on this point) three times. It was thus the most powerful among the Serbs who betrayed the group identity of medieval, feudal Serbia and thus ultimately betrayed themselves as the beneficiaries of feudalism.

Njegoš understood his country not only as a direct consequence of what happened at Kosovo but as a new beginning radically different from the kind of state and society that medieval Serbia had been. In his letter to Osman-paša Skopljak of October 5, 1847, at the time of the publication
of *The Mountain Wreath*, Njegoš gave the history of Montenegro in a nutshell: “When Baiazid (the so-called Ilderim) conquered Bosnia and when the savage Asiatic hordes destroyed our little but heroic empire, then my ancestors and some other select families which did not perish from the Turks left their homeland and found refuge in these mountains. I am indigenous, I am one of the few in numbers.” 44 Njegoš thus numbered himself among those who, though sharing in the collective guilt of their ancestors for the demise of their medieval kingdom, found refuge in the mountains of Montenegro and, by refusing to submit to Ottoman domination, kept a spirit of Serbian independence alive.

In terms of Stein’s model, Njegoš and his fellow Montenegrins were struggling with aspects of their own history, which formed the constituent aspects of their previous identity: the reciprocal socioeconomic and political bonds of lord and vassal, which were rent asunder by the “four barons of Serbia” and other feudal lords. Montenegro’s new group identity lay in its tribal structure, which, egalitarian in the extreme, was the direct opposite of its former feudal regime. Yet that new group identity could be formed only in opposition to the Turks, without which Montenegro was simply a group of tribes made up of innumerable brotherhoods (*bratstva*) fighting among themselves in a series of interminable blood feuds. Whatever unity and identity Montenegro could achieve beyond a geographical expression (it was often pitifully inadequate) was derived from its mutual struggle against the common enemy, the Turks.

Njegoš perfectly understood this cardinal fact. And yet he also knew that his Montenegro was not always united against the Turks, who used bribery in addition to invasion to entice poor Montenegrins to give up the fight. Just when he was preparing *The Mountain Wreath* for publication in 1846, Njegoš faced such Turkish intrigues when hunger stalked Montenegro, and many Montenegrins accepted the Pasha of Scutari’s offers of wheat and money in exchange for opposition to their prince-bishop. This internal disloyalty and sedition rankled most of all with Njegoš. It reminded him of the machinations of the Turks on the eve of the Battle of Kosovo and of the betrayal of the Serbian magnates.

But to accept that the newly forged group identity of the Montenegrins was flawed was ultimately too much for Njegoš. As Stein points out, in order to cover the cracks in a new group identity, it is necessary to project internal opposition, which Njegoš saw within each Montenegrin as well as among all Montenegrins, onto an outside enemy. 45 Nothing seems simpler than to project onto “the Turks” everything wrong with the Montenegrins. Yet that involved coming to terms with oneself and one’s own fears, ambivalences, and phobias, for which it will not do to blame everything on strangers, such as ethnic Anatolian Turks. For Njegoš, the
centuries-long problems in the Ottoman Balkans derived primarily from the actions of some South Slavs toward their ethnic brethren.

As noted before, Njegoš regarded the so-called poturice (the South Slavs who had converted to Islam) as descendants of those feudal lords and their retainers who had not aided “Tsar” Lazar on the eve of the Battle of Kosovo and thus betrayed their own feudal empire, facilitating the Ottoman conquest of Serbia and other Balkan lands. As already discussed, there is not a shred of evidence to support this notion. Njegoš, an Orthodox bishop himself, regarded Islam as Christianity’s and Christendom’s mortal and implacable enemy—just as did Vladika Danilo in The Mountain Wreath. Onto this external enemy, all the internal imperfections of Montenegrin society were projected. It is clear that Njegoš, in the person of Vladika Danilo, is concerned mainly with those Montenegrins who had converted to Islam rather than with the Serbs who accepted Islam after the Battle of Kosovo. But the exchange between Vuk Mićunović (one of the foremost Montenegrin warriors) and Hamza the Captain (commander of the Ottoman town of Nikšić) indicates that he regards all the poturice as descendants of those who betrayed “Tsar” Lazar at Kosovo:  

Then Hamza said to Vuk Mićunović:
“I am better than you. Do you hear, Vlach?”

... This fired up our Vuk Mićunović
and he came up closer to the Captain:
“You call me ‘Vlach,’ you swinish renegade?
How can a traitor be better than a knight?
What is this talk of ‘sword’ and Kosovo?
Weren’t we both on the field of Kosovo?
I fought then and I am still fighting now,
have you have been a traitor then and now.
You’ve dishonored yourself before the world,
blasphemed the faith of your own ancestors,
You have enslaved yourself to foreigners!” (MW, 16,ll. 365–66, 374–84)

The key word “renegade” is here, of course, poturica. In Njegoš’s view, those who serve the Turkish masters are slaves. Already in the sixteenth century, the Venetians emphasized this aspect of the Ottoman state. Morosini states that Turkey is a “republic of slaves” and the “renegades” are proud to boast that they are slaves of the sultan. Njegoš shares this view of slavery: in The Mountain Wreath, he recounts how Vladika Danilo and the Montenegrins greet the envoys of the governor (with the rank of
vizier) of Podgorica, who had sent them a letter. The governor calls himself “Selim vezir, rob roba svečeva” (Selim Vizier, slave of the Prophet’s slave) (MW, 39, l. 1077)—meaning that Selim is a personal slave of the sultan, who in turn is seen as (metaphorically) the slave of Prophet Muhammad.

If, as posited earlier in this chapter, the relationship between the Montenegrins and the Turks is symbiotic, and if Njegoš is aware of this relationship, then the concept of the Other becomes crucial. In The Mountain Wreath, the encounter is reduced to a demand—(re)convert to Orthodoxy, or else!—with an implied threat of extermination. Although the encounter is based on an exchange of views, there is no attempt on the part of either Vladika Danilo or other Montenegrin leaders to come to terms with the Other, which is simply to be (re)absorbed into the home identity. The same is true of the Turkish side: the vizier demands in his letter that the Montenegrins acknowledge Ottoman sovereignty. Thus the gifts offered by the vizier to the Montenegrins confirm the subjection of the Montenegrins to the sultan’s authority, providing them with a new group identity that detaches them from their kinship and tribal foundations.

Paradoxically, as prince–bishop (vladika) of Montenegro (1830–1851), Njegoš set himself the task of creating a rudimentary modern state out of a tangle of tribal and kinship relationships, which required that he come to terms with his own ego before attempting to refashion Montenegrin identity. Njegoš projected backward onto the founder of his dynasty of prince-bishops, Danilo I Petrović Njegoš (1696–1735), his own desire to create a unified Montenegrin state and identified with Danilo’s extermination of Montenegro’s internal enemy, the poturice. Njegoš and his contemporaries believed this event to have taken place between 1702 and 1707.

The notion of struggle, agon in classical Greek, as the essence of ego identity is central to Njegoš’s worldview and (by transference) to Danilo’s dilemma in The Mountain Wreath. The Hamlet-like indecision of Danilo’s monologues demonstrates his difficulty in making up his mind to exterminate the poturice, which for him was tantamount to cutting off one’s own arm, gangrenous (in his view) as it might be. In order to construct a new identity for himself and the Montenegrin nation, Njegoš must transcend/sublate (Hegel’s aufheben) his own former self. This transcending or “going beyond” is central to Lacan’s development of his concept of desire, which grew out of the lectures by Alexandre Kojève on Hegel’s Phänomenologie des Geistes given at the École des Hautes Études (1933–1939). Kojève’s commentary centers on the master–slave dialectic; this is the dialectic of the desire for recognition and is fundamental
to the understanding of the struggle between the (future) master and the (future) slave, which stops short of death: for one side to give up the struggle means to acknowledge the Other as master and oneself as slave. In Njegoš’s *The Mountain Wreath*, the struggle is to the death: there is no recognition of the Other as master and the Self as slave on the part of the Montenegrins, and by refusing to (re)convert, the *poturice* are condemned to be exterminated.

Lacan has dealt with the relationship between the Self and the Other most famously in his “Schema L,” where he posits two axes—one Imaginary (o’–o), the other Symbolic (S–O). When the self tries to engage with the Other, it encounters the wall of opposition from the axis o’–o.⁴⁹ According to Anthony Wilden, Lacan points out that reconciliation (return to “One”) is psychologically impossible either for the individual in relation to himself or in relation to the group to which he is linked both by identificatory ties and by the interaggressivity of the master-slave relationship itself. The subject-object relationship of the Imaginary order precludes anything but a phantasmatic “return to unity.”⁵⁰

This is the position of Njegoš at the end of *The Mountain Wreath*: his attempt to define the Montenegrin Self in terms of a new group consciousness cannot transcend the dual relationship between the undifferentiated Self and the Other. The Montenegrins can exterminate the *poturice* among themselves, but they cannot thereby go beyond (aufheben) their tribal and clan divisions. No true “return to unity”—to the “One”—is possible on the basis of the Imaginary order axis. Dylan Evans explains the difference between the Imaginary and Symbolic orders:

> The dual relation is always characterized by illusions of similarity, symmetry and reciprocity. In contrast to the duality of the imaginary order, the symbolic order is characterized by triads. In the symbolic order all relations involve not two but three terms; the third term is the big Other, which mediates all imaginary dual relations. The illusion of reciprocity in the imaginary dual relationship contrasts with the symbolic, which is the realm of “absolute non-reciprocity.”⁵¹

In “Schema L,” the so-called object (petit) a—object small-letter a—is given the following term by Lacan in his 1960–1961 seminar: *agalma*. According to Evans, this is an ancient Greek term meaning “glory, an ornament, an offering to the gods,” and it “is the object of desire which we seek in the other.”⁵² Evans explains that “desire is thus the surplus produced by the articulation of need in demand”⁵³ and then quotes
Lacan: “Desire begins to take shape in the margin in which demand becomes separated from need.” According to Lacan, desire can never be satisfied because its realization consists in the reproduction of desire as such. He makes clear that in “Schema L” there is only one object of desire, and that is agalma, that is, “object little-letter a.” Evans explains that “the object petit a is not the object towards which desire tends, but the cause of desire. Desire is not a relation to an object, but a relation to a lack.”

This lack or manque first appeared in Lacan’s work in 1955 when he defined it as a lack of being: “Desire is a relation of being to lack. The lack is the lack of being properly speaking. It isn’t the lack of this or that, but lack of being whereby the being exists.” In his Écrits, Lacan situates lack of being in “the very field in which the neurotic’s passion is deployed.” He specifies that being belongs to the symbolic order, as it is “the relation to the Other in which being finds its status.” It thus follows that desire is essentially a desire for being.

Readers are now in a position to return to Njegoš and his quest for a new group identity for his Montenegrins. In the person of his alter ego, Vladika Danilo I Petrović Njegoš, Njegoš attempts a solution to Montenegro’s existential crisis by a radical denial of alterity, of the Other: the extermination of all those who are radically different from the self, from “the One.” This is the supposed extermination of the poturice, although it never actually took place. Njegoš, like all his Montenegrin contemporaries, believed it did, and it thus must be taken as his “reality.” In The Mountain Wreath, to quote Anna Akhmatova, Njegoš “was with my people then, / There, where my people, unfortunately, were.”

According to Aubin, the origin of the incessant fights between the Turks and the Montenegrins from the time of the Battle of Kosovo to Njegoš’s own day was the Montenegrin desire to take vengeance for the events at Kosovo and erase the stigma of Serbian defeat at Kosovo. That is why Njegoš looked for Montenegro’s roots not in the historically attested states of medieval Zeta or Dioclea but in the defeat at Kosovo. According to Aubin, at Kosovo, Montenegro’s history began: “Montenegro is nothing else but the consequence of a heroically lost battle.” The concept of revenge is absolutely crucial for understanding the ethos of the South Slavs; as Simić points out, there is a “strong traditional ethos of vengeance among the South Slavs,” for whom “feuding and warfare traditionally took on not only an obligatory nature but also a quasi-sacred one.” Central to the practice of blood feud was, of course, vengeance. Milovan Đilas, himself a Montenegrin as well as the author of a classic biography of Njegoš, emphasized this aspect of his people’s culture. Đilas projected a code of vengeance onto Montenegrins that derived, he suggests,
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from their “basically un-Christian” faith; he enigmatically contends that they “are the only Christians who not only act out of revenge, but also believe in revenge as if it were the most consummate joy and the highest justice,” concluding by affirming that “the Montenegrin God is a God of vengeance—not just that, but that above all else.”

Njegoš’s *The Mountain Wreath*, as an apogee of this tradition of revenge, had an enormous popularity among and thus influence on the common folk—both Montenegrin and Serbian, as Đilas emphasized—who knew the text as some devout people know a sacred text, reciting and explicating it and finding in it a confirmation of their values.

Njegoš’s work has not only captivated the imagination of the common Serbian and Montenegrin folk but has held a powerful hold over the minds of educated people as well: by 2004 over 200 editions had been published, 176 of them appearing before the wars in Yugoslavia started in 1991. The text was required reading, either in its entirety or in selections, in all schools in Yugoslavia (not just in Serbia and Montenegro). No other work written by a South Slav could match its publication record. Njegoš’s work—far more than any other epic poem, oral or written, or any other myth—shaped the popular and scholarly views of the historical relationship between the South Slavs, the Serbs and Montenegrins in particular, and the so-called Turks (i.e., the Slavic Muslims), as noted by Milorad Ekmečić, a Bosnian Serb and historian, who justified the Serbian military actions in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the 1990s. He claimed that Njegoš’s *The Mountain Wreath* has “become the most widely known literary work among the Serbs. It was *The Mountain Wreath* together with the myth of Kosovo that provided the Serbian national movement with its ethic in the following century.”

The widespread popularity of Njegoš’s *The Mountain Wreath* in both semiliterate and literate circles meant that his attitude toward those who had accepted Islam in Montenegro and were popularly known as the poturice could be projected onto other Muslim Slavs outside of Montenegro. As Njegoš himself modeled his attitude toward “the Turk” as Other on the supposed “extermination” of the poturice by his predecessor, vladika Danilo, in the early eighteenth century, so was Njegoš’s own view appropriated by apostles of modern Serbian nationalism in their attitude toward “the Turks.” As can be easily shown, some five generations have been exposed to and indoctrinated by Njegoš’s mythopoeic view of the Turk. In a region where everything bad was attributed to “five centuries of Turkish rule,” such an attitude was perfectly understandable and acceptable to most people. Although to many people the subject of Njegoš’s poem might have seemed legendary if not mythological, Lacan points out that a subject is initiated into an order through language and that this
order is passed down from parent to child, from father to son (Écrits, 68). According to Stein, “the ideological side of culture, in which the origins and decisive events of ‘history’ are religiously stored,” is made available to “one for whom the group-fantasy is reality to revere and repeat.”

The members of a given culture are “extended families,” “in which all members who claim to be related and descended from the same putative ancestors share a group-fantasy of kinship: oneness.” In Lacanian terms, this is expressed as the demand or desire to go back to the origins, to the Real. But the Real is impossible, and thus “unity is a retroactively established fantasy manifested as a desire to return to the Real, but the Real never existed.”

Njegoš’s quest for Serbian “unity” manifested in his The Mountain Wreath and other works is based on his reading of what happened at Kosovo, which thus acts as the place of origin of Njegoš’s view (and that of all those who followed him) of Serbian and Balkan history. Fryer suggests about Lacan’s problematization of the “origin” that it is only in the realm of fantasy the “origin” exists: “In a very real sense, then, for Lacan, the past only ‘happens’ because the present retroactively establishes it as having happened.” We are here in the realm of a special kind of fantasy: myth. As W. H. McNeill points out, “In the absence of believable myths, coherent public action becomes very difficult to improvise or sustain.”

“By separating the fictitious from the real, Lacan is, in effect, showing how our unconscious fantasies are fictions, but fictions that act as if they are truths. For Lacan, the fictions of the Symbolic may not be ‘true’ in the sense of being ‘real,’ but this does not mean they are illusory, for they operate in our Unconscious as if they were true. Thus Lacan argues that ‘every truth has the structure of fiction.’” In terms of how this works itself out in time, Lacan in effect explains that the path into the future is through the return to the past, that is, “back to the future.” The discourse is thus not only of a past and a present but also a future to which the past and present always point: “What is realized in my history is not the past definite of what was, since it is no more, or even the present perfect of what has been in what I am, but the future anterior of what I shall have been for what I am in the process of becoming.”

Being captive to a myth, such as the one of Kosovo, means (according to La Barre) “that the past imprisons the present only because we have not mastered our own history.” And he warns that “history that cannot be understood and neutralized is the neurosis of the society.” The widespread expressions of hostility on the part of many (if not most) Serbs and Montenegrins toward the Bosnian Muslims were, as Stein points out, “a consequence of events in reality that reawaken unconscious conflict by virtue of their correspondence with them,” that is, by transposition
of the supposed extermination of “the Turks” (in effect, the *poturice*) in *The Mountain Wreath* to the war zones of Bosnia. This explains why the Bosnian Muslims were targeted, but it also explains the horrific violence amounting to rage that this form of violence took:

In its typical forms there is utter disregard for reasonable limitations and a boundless wish to redress an injury and to obtain revenge. The irrationality of the vengeful attitude becomes even more frightening in view of the fact that . . . the reasoning capacity, while totally under the domination and in the service of the overriding emotion, is often not only intact but even sharpened.  

Retrospectively seen as responsible for the lack of unity that enabled “the Turks” (the Ottomans) to conquer and “enslave” Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia, and the rest of the Balkans; stigmatized as the descendants of those whose ancestors preferred the faith of the conquerors (Islam) to that of their own people (Orthodoxy); and held responsible for oppressing the rest of their own people who had stayed loyal to Orthodoxy and the Byzantine tradition, the Muslims in general and the Bosnian Muslims in particular were seen as the primary obstacle to the recovery of this supposed Serbian unity. Regarded as renegade Serbs who had accepted Islam out of base rather than honorable motives (for how, in the eyes of the Serbs and Montenegrins, can Islam be regarded as a religion superior to Orthodoxy?), the Bosnian Muslims were scapegoated again in 1992 by analogy with Njegoš’s view of those who had converted to Islam—the *poturice* in *The Mountain Wreath*. H. T. Norris quotes Miroljub Jevtić of Belgrade University, who in an interview in *Duga* on December 22, 1989, (i.e., before the hostilities started in Yugoslavia) had this to say “authoritatively” about Bosnian Muslims:

Bosnia has sunk to the lowest depths through the name of Islam. Those who embraced Islam betrayed Bosnia. The Ottomans came to the Balkans in the name of Islam, and in the name of Islam they slaughtered and exterminated the inhabitants. Those who embraced Islam in fact acknowledged the occupiers as their own brothers, just as they took on their shoulders the deeds which were committed by their “brothers.” Because of this, the hands of the Muslims who are with us are stained and polluted with the blood of their ancestors from among the inhabitants of Bosnia at that time, namely those who did not embrace Islam. They [the converts] were the traitors in regard to the Bans, Kulin and King Tvrtko [of Bosnia, claimant to the throne of Serbia, who offered his help at the Battle of Kosovo].
Stein points out that “it is the low degree of differentiation that has made for such pernicious consequences over human history. Indeed, it is the very vicissitudes of group symbioses that has made history recurrently repeat itself.”\textsuperscript{82} That brings me to conclude by quoting V. S. Naipaul: “The past has to be seen to be dead; or the past will kill.”\textsuperscript{83} No amount of scholarly debate can alter that fact.

**Notes**

1. Edit Petrović, “Ethnonationalism and the Dissolution of Yugoslavia,” in *Neighbors at War: Anthropological Perspectives on Yugoslav Ethnicity, Culture and History*, ed. Joel M. Halpern and David A. Kideckel (University Park: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 174. “The powerful effect of the Kosovo epic and others in the revival of Serbian ethnic identity, and in the process of national imagining, is key to understanding the conflicts in which the Serbs have been engaged.” This chapter argues that it is the key.

2. For additional information on Montenegro and Njegoš, the interested reader should consult Zdenko Zlatar, *Njegoš’s Montenegro* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005) and *The Poetics of Slavdom*, 2 vols. (New York: Peter Lang, 2007); the second volume focuses on Njegoš.


Samarkand v 1403–1406 gg.,” Sbornik oteđeleniia russkogo iaz’ika i slovesnosti imperatorskoi akademii nauk 28, no. 1 (1881): 147–48. Clavijo’s work was published as Vida y hazanas del Gran Tamorlan con la description de las Tierras de su Imperio y senorio escripa por Ruy Gonzales de Clavijo (Seville, 1582); English translation by Clements R. Markham, Narrative of the Embassy of Ruy Gonzales de Clavijo to the Court of Timour at Samarkand, A.D. 1403–6 (London: Hakluyt Society, 1859).

10. Laonicus Chalcocondyles, De rebus turcicis, ed. Immanuel Bekkerus (Bonn, 1843), 53–54.
12. Chalcocondyles, De rebus turcicis, 94.
18. Ibid., 124–25.
19. Ibid., 132–33.
20. Emmert, Serbian Golgotha, 64.
22. Emmert, Serbian Golgotha, 64.
26. Ibid., 102.
27. Ibid., 325.
28. Ibid., 336.


40. Stein, “Culture and Ethnicity,” 129.

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid., 146.

43. Ibid., 151.


45. Stein, “Culture and Ethnicity,” 146.

46. This is also the view of Nikola Banašević in his commentary on *The Mountain Wreath: Gorski vijenac: kritičko izdanje s komentarom* (Belgrade: Srpska književna zadruga, 1973), 249–50 ad 879–80, and 175 ad 75.


52. Ibid., 125.

53. Ibid., 37.


58. Elizabeth Roberts, *Realm of the Black Mountain: A History of Montenegro* (London: Hurst and Company, 2007), 133: “But however great its literary impact in the Slav world, Njegoš’s *magnum opus*, written almost a century and a half after the events it purports to describe, can scarcely be said to constitute decisive proof of the massacre’s historicity. Nor indeed do the various ballads and songs on which *The Mountain Wreath* was based.” She points out correctly that “no contemporary record of such a massacre survives and historians differ over what happened and even whether it actually took place” (132). She mentions the two schools, the believers and the skeptics, and in p. 133n4 cites Ilarion Ruvarac’s *Montenegrina*, 2nd ed. (Zemun, Serbia: Jev. Puljo, 1899), in which he not only rejected the authenticity of a document purporting to describe such a massacre but rejected the *articulus stantis and cadentis* of Montenegro’s history, namely, that it never formed a part of the Ottoman Empire.


60. Oben, *Njegoš i istorija*, 111: “Izvor sukoba, stalnog tokom celoga XVIII veka, između Turaka i Crnogoraca, u *Svobodijadi* jeste žed’ za osvetom srpskog poraza na Kosovu.”

61. Ibid., 113: “Njegoš ne traži poreklo svojoj zemlji u srednjovekovnoj Zeti ili Duklji, nego u porazu na Kosovu. Na Kosovu počinje istorija Crne Gore.”
62. Ibid.: “Crna Gora nije ništa drugo do posledica jedne junački izgubljene bitke.”
63. Simić, “Nationalism as a Folk Ideology,” 113, citing Christopher Boehm, 
Blood Revenge: The Anthropology of Feuding in Montenegro and Other Feudal 
Societies (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1984), 60. See also 
Zdenko Zlatar, Njegoš’s Montenegro: Epic Poetry, Blood Feud and Warfare 
in a Tribal Zone 1830–1851 (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 
2005).
64. See especially Milovan Đilas, Land Without Justice, trans. William 
65. Milovan Đilas, Parts of a Lifetime, ed. Michael and Deborah Milenkovitch 
(New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975), 33, quoting from 
Milovan Đilas, Njegoš: Poet, Prince, Bishop, trans. Michael B. Petrovich 
of Yugoslavia (Peter Lang, New York, 2007), 2:845–51; Petar II Petrović 
Njegoš, Sabrana djela—kritičko izdanje, vol. 2, Gorski vijenac, priredio 
Aleksandar Mladenović (Podgorica, Serbia: Crnogorska akademija 
nauka i umjetnosti, 2005), “Prilog bibliografiji izdanja Gorskog vijenca,” 
325–50.
68. Ekmečić, main advisor to Radovan Karadžić and professor of history at 
the University of Sarajevo, is the author of a well-known study, Ratni 
čiljevi Srbije 1914. g. (Belgrade: Srpska književna zadruga, 1973).
69. Milorad Ekmečić, “Profiles of Societies in the Second Half of the 
Nineteenth Century,” in History of Yugoslavia, M. Ekmečić et al. (New 
York: McGraw–Hill, 1974), 372. Note that Ekmečić made that state- 
ment during Tito’s Yugoslavia, almost twenty years before the conflict in 
Bosnia started.
70. Stein and Apprey, From Metaphor to Meaning, 144.
71. Ibid., 145.
72. David Ross Fryer, The Intervention of the Other: Ethical Subjectivity in 
73. Ibid., 223–24 (italics added).
74. William Hardy McNeill, “The Care and Repair of Public Myth,” in 
Mythistory and Other Essays (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 
23–24.
The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, trans. Dennis Porter (New York: Norton, 
77. Stein and Apprey, From Metaphor to Meaning, 124, quoting Weston La 
xv.
78. Stein and Apprey, From Metaphor to Meaning, 22.
79. Ibid., 127.
AFTERWORD

John Tolan

How are scholars of the twenty-first century to interrogate medieval texts in hopes of discerning the attitudes of their authors toward those who are “Other”? To what extent are our own categories (religious, racial, or other) useful, and to what extent do they prevent us from seeing clearly? Since Edward Said published *Orientalism* in 1978, his ideas have colored much of the research on medieval attitudes toward Islam and toward the East more generally. Although Said’s conceptual framework has often been put to good use, at other times it has been used clumsily. Said saw Orientalism as a discourse that justified European colonial conquest and domination of large swaths of the “Orient.” While some medieval authors (chroniclers of the First Crusade, for example) indeed use the negative image of the “Saracens” and their religion to justify war against them, much premodern Christian European discourse on Islam came on the contrary from those who lived under Muslim rule or who feared being conquered by Muslims. Said’s Orientalist model cannot be transferred unreflexively to explain discourse coming from very different social realities. Indeed, if we are to use Said’s categories to understand, say, the virulent anti-Muslim polemics of Eulogius and Paulus Alvarus in ninth-century Córdoba, we should rather see them as manifestations of what Said calls a “resistance culture,” a subversive discourse directed against the dominant “colonial” culture of Islam.

Various other basic elements of our conceptual world can only be used problematically, if at all, in discussing the Middle Ages: “tolerance” and “race” are two key examples. The term *tolerantia* indeed exists in classical and Medieval Latin: it designates the capacity to bear a load either literally or, more often, figuratively: to “put up with” someone or
something. Tolerance is at best a necessary evil, at worst a sign of weakness or laziness. Indeed, for Catholic writers up to Bossuet in the late sixteenth century, tolerance is more a vice than a virtue. It is the writers of the Enlightenment, in particular Voltaire, who elevated tolerance to the level of one of the key virtues that the citizen, and even more so the prince, must display. 3

This has not stopped scholars from looking for tolerance, in the positive Voltairian sense of the word, in the Middle Ages. Indeed, in the twentieth century, many medievalists were motivated, consciously or not, by the desire to vindicate their chosen period in order to discredit the widespread image of the “Dark Ages.” One way to do this was to find individuals (often characterized as “ahead of their time”) who embodied the supposed values of nascent modern Europe—including tolerance. James Kritzeck, for example, saw Peter the Venerable’s commissioning of a Latin translation of the Qur’an as a sign of his tolerant nature; Rainer Christoph Schwinges made similar claims for William of Tyre, as David Tinsley notes. A contemporary riff on this theme is the characterization of a particular group or culture as embodying tolerance. The claim is sometimes made, for example, for medieval Baghdad, Cairo, or Córdoba, where indeed members of myriad religious communities lived cheek by jowl, but this did not imply “tolerance” in a modern positive sense. Matthieu Boyd, in this volume, shows that some scholars of Celtic literature have tried to portray Celtic authors as inherently more tolerant of the religious or cultural Other, a tolerance that supposedly came from their own experience as victims of the colonial conquests of the Anglo-Normans. Yet, as Boyd shows, such fantasy does not stand up to close scrutiny: Celtic authors follow the lead of their European contemporaries and give a range of images of the Saracen, which is for all intents and purposes identical to that found in Latin, French, and English texts.

Race is another problematic category that needs to be used with caution. Clearly, the idea of race based on genetics—with the theory of a fixed number of “races,” some inferior to others—is a product of the nineteenth century and cannot simply be employed as such for earlier periods. The word “race” is of uncertain etymological origin: it emerges in various European vernaculars at the end of the Middle Ages to designate a group of people with a common origin. Using it to describe Latin Christians’ attitudes toward, say, Africans or Muslims perhaps only muddies the waters. Yet the idea of descent from a common ancestor as a key element of group identity is of course anything but new: it is part of the foundation myths of many cultures. This can lead to legal distinctions based along perceived cleavages of descent or ethnicity, be it between Arabs and non-Arabs in the early Muslim world, between “Franks” and
Romans in sixth-century Gaul, and so forth. Yet it would be rash to iden-
tify negative attitudes about black skin, for example, as “racism.” As Lynn
Ramey shows, Medieval European literary texts display a great diversity
of ideas on the consequences of sexual mixing of different religions and of
different skin colors. Although some authors equated blacks and Saracens
and gave largely negative images of both, this is not invariably the case:
as David Tinsley notes, both the Ebstorf world map and Rudolf of Ems’s
chronicle present Africa as “the equal of Europe in civilization, wealth,
and history.”

A number of the chapters in this volume examine European depictions
of “Saracens.” This is the word commonly used by medieval Europeans
to designate Muslims, yet the term is used to refer to many other non-
Christians. As Matthieu Boyd indicates, some Middle English authors
refer to pagan Vikings, Irish, and Scots as Sarazin. The term, in Latin
(Saracenus) and in particular in the vernacular (Sarrasin, Sarazin, Heiden,
Moro), is often used to designate ancient pagans, notably in passion narra-
tives, hagiographical texts, and liturgical dramas. Christ is persecuted by
both Jews and Saracens; Alexander the Great, in many medieval versions
of his legend, comes to recognize the true God though those around him
are Saracens.

If “Saracen” does not mean “Muslim,” does it mean “Arab”? Indeed,
when it is first used by Greek and Latin authors of late antiquity, it is used
principally to designate nomadic Arab tribes living along the southern
and eastern borders of the Roman Empire. The term was not, origin-
ally, used to refer to the settled Arabs living within the empire. Yet
over the centuries, the term came to designate Muslims (including non-
Arab Muslims), though it never completely lost its ethnic overtones. Arab
Christians are never called Saracens. After all, according to Jerome, the
Saracens were the descendants of Ishmael, son of Abraham and his slave
Hagar: if they call themselves “Saracens,” it is because they try to usurp
the heritage of Sarah, Abraham’s legitimate wife. This pejorative etymol-
ogy was echoed by countless medieval authors, though of course it ignored
the fact that the “Saracens” in fact did not call themselves “Saracens.” So
when we find medieval authors writing about Saracens as contemporaries
of Alexander the Great or Jesus, it is not that these authors and artists
thought “anachronistically” that people of ancient times professed Islam;
they are simply using the name of a gens about whom, after all, Jerome
had written well before the dawn of Islam.

This in part explains the strange mix, in portrayals of the Saracens,
of what Norman Daniel called the “fanciful” and “realistic” modes of
European discourse on Islam. For Daniel, the chansons de geste offered a
whimsical caricature of a wholly fictional enemy: the Saracen, portrayed
as an idolater who worshipped a ridiculous pantheon, was an object of fun, and the poets (and their audiences) knew better than to confuse the literary Saracen with real-life Muslims. In contrast, there was the serious (if nasty) theological discourse, dubbed “realistic,” which painted Muhammad as a trickster, false prophet, and heresiarch and hence saw Islam as a debased, heretical deviation from the true faith of Christianity. Yet on closer examination, this distinction blurs. Some of the most serious or “realistic” Christian writers about Islam (e.g., John of Damascus in the eighth century and Petrus Alfonsi in the twelfth), though recognizing the fundamental monotheistic nature of Islam, affirm that it is sullied by the remnants of paganism, which still influences its practice: the kissing of the Ka’ba and the choice of the day of Venus (Friday) as a holy day are in keeping with their penchant for debauchery. Indeed, many of the later medieval texts mix depictions of Saracen idolatry with more “learned” discourse on Muhammad and Muslims.

In fact, the polemicist, seeking to denigrate and disparage, freely mixes diverse and at times contradictory images. The Saracen “pagan” idolater is scarcely different from the Christian idolater ridiculed by the sixteenth-century Jewish writer Elijah Capsali. Jewish, Christian, and Muslim polemicists are apt to describe their enemies as barbarians and even to relegate them beneath the level of humanity: Armenian chroniclers described the Seljuks as mice and snakes (as Sergio La Porta shows). Although much earlier research has focused on images of the Other in texts from France, Spain, and the British Isles, the chapters in this volume amply show the similar treatment given in other traditions, from Armenia (La Porta) to the Celtic lands (Boyd).

Yet polemics tell only a small part of the story. To better contextualize these images, one must take into account the complexity and richness of contacts among medieval Jews, Christians, and Muslims. Muslims lived cheek by jowl with Latin Christians as subjected minorities in Spain, Sicily, and the Latin states of the holy land. European traders, principally Italians and Catalans, frequented the ports of North Africa and the Middle East. Indeed, trade with the East nurtured a sense that the Saracen ruled over lands of fabulous riches. Other people were objects of trade: corsairs and slave traders sold European Christians to Muslims, while many Muslims ended up as slaves in the cities of Spain and Italy—to such an extent that moro comes to be a synonym for slave (and that the legal texts have to specify moro de paz when they mean a free Muslim). Matthieu Boyd has found evidence of Muslim Andalusian captives living as slaves in Viking Ireland. At the same time, Latin European scholars learned Arabic; traveled to Toledo, Palermo, and other cities where they could come into contact with Arabic books and Arab-speaking scholars;
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and studied and translated key works in philosophy and the sciences. In the Latin East, creation of the Crusades, Europeans interacted with a bewildering array of Eastern Christians and Muslims. It is in the context of this diverse and intense interaction, which often led Latin Christians to sense the inferiority or fragility of their own culture, that the polemics must be understood.

Christopher Taylor explores the notion of alterity in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Latinitas through an examination of the corpus of translations of Islamic texts (in particular the Qur’an) commissioned by Peter of Cluny and through the various traditions about Prester John, in particular the widely read and copied twelfth-century Latin Letter of Prester John. Much previous work had emphasized that Prester John was an imagined powerful Christian ally of Latin Christendom, who (it was hoped) would help Western crusading forces in bringing about the ultimate defeat of Islam. Yet this imagined ally, Taylor shows, is also intriguingly (disturbingly?) Other: Prester John is portrayed not as a Catholic but as a Nestorian heretic; in his kingdom, one finds polygamy, monstrous figures, even the floating coffin of the revered Apostle Thomas (just as Muslims were thought to worship the floating coffin of Muḥammad). This fantastic kingdom contains a strange mix of Christian and Muslim characteristics; it is, for Taylor, “a fantasy of enclosure under which Islam could be absorbed into Christianity.”

This brings me back around to the question posed at the beginning of this epilogue: can medieval portrayals of Saracen “others” be better understood if examined through the lens of Said’s Orientalism? Should they be seen as precursors to colonial ideologies of later centuries? To modern racism? Here we should bear in mind what David Tinsley refers to as the inappropriateness of the Eurocentric model when dealing with medieval perceptions of the East. After all, Northern Europeans were quite conscious of living at the edges of the world: world maps made Asia half the world’s land mass and often positioned Jerusalem at the center of the inhabited world. Should we attribute their worldview to a subaltern consciousness rather than to a colonialist one? Perhaps such terms only muddy the waters.

What comes across clearly in these essays is that medieval authors, like authors of other periods, are continually reinventing themselves by rewriting their history. Armenian chroniclers portrayed Seljuk invaders in the same terms that their forebears had portrayed the Persians and the Arabs: as rods of chastisement sent by God to humble sinners in preparation for an ultimate victory of His religion.

If many medieval authors saw Christian–Muslim confrontation in apocalyptic terms, their nineteenth-century and twentieth-century
descendants often read the same conflicts through nationalistic lenses. Patrick Geary, among others, has shown how nationalist writers from Paris to Belgrade based their ideologies on constructed “national” histories, based on fictive continuities between ancestral peoples (Huns, Franks, Slavs, etc.) and modern nation-states. Zdenko Zlatar traces one infamous example of such nationalistic rewriting of history: the Battle of Kosovo in 1389. In the earliest sources describing this confrontation between the Ottoman Sultan Murad II and the Serbian Prince Lazar, it is unclear what the outcome of the battle was: victory for the Ottomans, victory for the Serbs, a standoff? In the fifteenth century, homiletic texts begin to present Lazar as a martyr for the Christian religion and for the Serbian people. In subsequent centuries, the battle took on central importance in nationalistic Serbian and Montenegrin visions of history, most notably in Peter II Petrović Njegoš’s epic, The Mountain Wreath, which glorified the extermination of Montenegro’s Muslims; this epic, long taught in Serbian and Montenegrin schools, was infamously used to justify anti-Muslim violence in the 1990s.

Historians are always trapped, perhaps, in the tension between our plausible constructions of the past—fueled (more than we care to admit) by our own desires, fears, and hopes—and the complex and lacunar written vestiges that we must use for evidence of the past. Don Quijote is trapped, in the episodes analyzed by Baltasar Fra-Molinero, between a heroic vision of history based on the romanceros, where lines between good and bad are clearly drawn and a valiant knight can succeed against overwhelming odds, and the more prosaic realities of a world in which Quixote’s heroic quest to rescue don Gregorio in Algiers ends on a beach in Barcelona. As Fra-Molinero suggests, these episodes denote Cervantes’s profound ambivalence toward the history of Spain’s Mudejars and Moriscos and toward the Spanish monarchy’s expulsion of the Moriscos in 1609. Where Njegoš constructed a simplistic nationalistic vision of the Battle of Kosovo, Cervantes offers ironic revisions of Spain’s recent history.

Notes


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