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Images of Ethnic Others in Western Medieval Art

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Review article

Images of Ethnic Others in Western Medieval Art¹

This paper seeks to provide an overview of the characteristic traits of the images of the ethnic Others, the connection of these images to the fundamental ethic and aesthetic categories, as well as the political events of the medieval epoch. Medieval art depicted various ethnic groups like Jews, Saracens, Mongols, Blacks, and eventually, people from the New World. Their representations share both common and distinct characteristics. Common traits encompass distinct appearances, clothing details, associated attributes, and their correlation with political events. They also exhibit imprecision, conventionality, and fluidity in defining the boundaries between these different groups. Moreover, they reflect cultural and political influences and blend real and fantastical elements, often intertwined with religious and ethical categories, which were fundamental in the medieval worldview. Herewith, the images of the Others also had some specific traits.

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KEYWORDS:

the Others, Blacks, Saracens, Mongols, Jews, the Crusades

¹ This is a revised version of a paper originally presented on May 27, 2022, at the fifth biennial conference in the series "Past, Present, Future" "The Other: Stereotype and Prejudice in History, 27-28 May 2022, Pula, Croatia.

There are two distinct periods when it comes to the images of the other peoples (henceforth the Others) in medieval art. In the earlier period (cca 10th-11th centuries), when there wasn't much contact with the Other. Visual arts lacked interest in representing the real world and depictions of the Other were few and generalized. Representation became more visible around the 11th and 12th centuries. This happened because people became more interested in the world around them, connecting with others more often. It was also influenced by political happenings like the Crusades and geographical discoveries.

During medieval times, art depicted Jews, Saracens, Mongols, and Blacks, and by the end of the Middle Ages, portrayals of people from the New World emerged. These artistic representations shared both common and distinctive characteristics across all these groups.

Common traits included:

- Distinctive appearance (e.g. clothing details and symbols);
- Influence of political events and cultural changes of the time;
- Depictions were often imprecise, sometimes blending the appearance of different groups or presenting vague details, particularly noticeable with Mongols and Saracens;
- Fluctuality: The boundaries between these groups were fluid and vague, especially in depictions of Blacks and Saracens;
- Art blended real and imaginative elements, intertwining images of these groups with religious and ethical concepts. These depictions often reflected moral attributes like sin, hostility to Christianity, or falsehood.

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The way these groups were portrayed highlighted contrasts between Christianity and other religions (Judaism, Islam, paganism). Efforts were made to integrate these groups into the Christian worldview, even representing them in religious-themed artworks.

This paper aims to outline the typical features seen in the depictions of various groups labeled as "Others" during medieval times. It explores how these images relate to fundamental ethical and aesthetic concepts and their ties to the political events of that era.

Images of the Jews

The images of Jews in medieval times were often depicted with specific physical traits like large, hooked noses, dark skin, curled hair, and distinctive clothing such as the cone-shaped pointed cap known as "horned skullcaps." These details carried symbolic meanings with complex histories. Wearing these "horned skullcaps" and long dresses became mandatory after the 1215 Fourth Council of the Lateran. Many myths surrounded this headwear, portraying negative ideas about Jews, and linking them to the devil. For example, there were beliefs that Jews had horns under these caps. The portrayal of a large, hooked nose might have been connected to negative moral traits such as cunningness, deceit, and malice.² A beard was

² Svetlana I. Lutschizkaja, *Obraz Drugogo: musul'mane v hronikah krestovoykh pohodov* [The Image of the Other: Muslims in the Chronicles of the Crusades] (Saint Petersburg: Aleteija,

sometimes used in depictions of Jews to highlight the contrast in appearance between them and Europeans. In portrayals of Old Testament characters, the beard might symbolize their antiquity and the distinction between the Old and New Testaments. However, in some instances, a beard was associated with negative qualities like cowardice or danger.³

The most common representations of Jews were in biblical scenes, emphasizing the contrast between the Old and New Testaments. This contrast was often depicted by portraying Jews with distinct features alongside New Testament characters who had more European-like appearances, showcasing delicate facial traits and lighter hair. This contrast aimed to symbolize the difference between the two periods more subtly and neutrally.⁴ In other cases, Jews were represented as enemies of Christ and Christianity: as executors⁵ or witnesses of the torturing of Christ.⁶ Apart from their typical features, these figures often had faces portrayed in an ugly manner: larger and more hooked noses, sometimes with a grotesque appearance, along with thicker lips. Their faces were distorted with grimaces, contrasting the serene and composed expressions of Christ and Christians. In medieval art, these irregular facial features, grimaces, and aggressive gestures symbolized negative traits like sin, malice, and hostility toward Christendom. In contrast, beauty, regular facial traits, calm expressions, and restrained gestures were associated with opposing positive traits.⁷ Additionally, Christ and other figures associated with Christianity were often depicted *en-face* (head-on) or in light foreshortening, highlighting qualities like serenity, sacredness, and transcendence. In contrast, Jews were portrayed in profile or three-quarters view. This contrast in presentation might symbolize attributes such as calmness, sacredness, and transcendence (in *en-face* representations), as opposed to activity or lower social status (in profile or three-quarters views).⁸ In medieval aesthetics, a profile view could signify a sense of defectiveness or inferiority, sometimes associated with a one-eyed appearance. Consequently, negative characters in religious scenes were often depicted in profile, while the main saints were portrayed *en face*. Furthermore, figures connected to Christ and Christianity were positioned on the right side of the image (from the viewer's perspective), while their adversaries were placed on the left. This positioning was linked to the negative symbolism associated with the left side and the positive associations attributed to the right side in medieval contexts.

The rejection of Christ is depicted in images of Ecclesia (Church) and Synagogue, which symbolize one of the contrasts between the Old and the New Testaments.⁹ Most of these images followed a standardized pattern:

2001), 330; Debra Higgs Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews: Making Monsters in Medieval Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 157-208.

³ Strickland, Debra Higgs, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews*, 78.

⁴ Pietro Lorenzetti. Entry of Christ into Jerusalem, ca. 1320. Fresco Lower Church, San Francesco, Assisi.

⁵ Crucifix. Big Lombard Psalter, 1166.

⁶ Portable altar (Nord-Rhein Westfalen). Ca. 1170. Louvre, Paris.

⁷ Lutschizkaja, *Obraz Drugogo*, 337-38; Strickland, Debra Higgs, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews*.

⁸ Lutschizkaja, *Obraz Drugogo*, 326; Strickland, Debra Higgs, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews*.

⁹ Herbert Jochum, *Ecclesia und Synagoga: Das Judentum in der christlichen Kunst:*

typically, two female figures were depicted, and the figure representing the Synagogue was often shown wearing a blindfold over her eyes.¹⁰ The negative perception of Jews, seen as adversaries of Christ, was reflected in their depictions within scenes associated with the devil, hell, the Antichrist, and similar contexts.¹¹

In medieval art, Jews were seldom depicted in scenes portraying their history, cultural customs, everyday life,¹² professional occupations, or religious practices. One of the most prevalent religious practices depicted in medieval art was various types of sacrifices, particularly the worship of the Golden Calf.¹³ The depictions of these practices stemmed from the Old Testament text, particularly Exodus 32:8: "They have been quick to turn away from what I commanded them and have made themselves an idol cast in the shape of a calf. They have bowed down to it and sacrificed to it." These illustrations aimed to portray the Christian perception of Judaism as a false, pagan religion that worshiped idols and false gods.

Judensau

The negative attitudes towards Jews were depicted in sculptures known as *Judensau* (German for "Jewish sow"). These sculptures were crafted in German-speaking regions and nearby territories during the 13th to 16th centuries, adorning the margins of cathedrals—found on misericords, gargoyles, column capitals, and larger sculptures' bases. These sculptures depicted a pig alongside figures wearing distinctive pointed caps, portraying derogatory imagery associated with Jews.

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The origin of this motif likely links to the Roman conquest of Judea in the 1st century BC to the 2nd century AD, coupled with the Jewish prohibition against consuming pork. The Second Book of Maccabees recounts how the Romans, aware of this prohibition, compelled Jews to eat pork. Legend has it that a pig was depicted on the gate of the Roman colony Aelia Capitolina. During the Middle Ages, beliefs persisted about a close association between Jews and pigs, evident in cases where Jews forced to convert to Christianity were given names like "Marrano" (Spanish) or "Marrão" (Portuguese), meaning "pigs."¹⁴ The depictions of *Judensau* likely reflected a collection of negative beliefs about Jews, encompassing their perceived false religion, association with sin, transgressions of rules and norms (including their own), among other negative connotations.

Images of the Blacks

When depicting Black individuals, there were two distinct approaches.

Ausstellungskatalog, Alte Synagoge Essen, Regionalgeschichtliches Museum Saarbrücken (Essen: Alte Synagoge, 1993).

¹⁰ Synagogue. Detail, south transept portal, Strasbourg cathedral, 1230ies.

¹¹ Herrad of Landsberg. The *Hortus deliciarum*, ca. 1176-96. Also see Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews*, 157 and below.

¹² Henry (VII) of Germany receiving a Torah scroll from Jews (Trier codex, 1341).

¹³ Adoration of the Lamb. Stained glass of St. Laurentius church, Nuernberg, c. 1479.

¹⁴ Isaiah Shachar, *The Judensau. A Medieval Anti-Jewish Motif and its History* (London: Warburg Institute, 1974).

Negative representations

The initial approach portrayed individuals with darker skin, often considered Black or bordering on it, within negative contexts. This stemmed largely from the negative associations of the color black in medieval aesthetics. According to J. Devisses, the connection between four concepts—blackness, Otherness, sinfulness, and danger—permeated various expressions of Medieval Christian ideology.¹⁵ Medieval scholars frequently discussed this; for instance, Zacharias Scholasticus (circa 465–536) equated blackness with sin.¹⁶ Indeed, many medieval thinkers linked Africans, identified with Ethiopia, to sin and the devil due to their darker skin. For instance, Flodoard (894–966) referred to them as “the people of the Ethiopians, black in sin and body.”¹⁷

The representation of negative characters, such as those opposing the Christian faith, often mirrored these negative associations with darker colors and shadows. Some of these depictions lacked specific traits associated with nationality or continent, while others portrayed them with characteristics linked to Africans¹⁸ or Saracens,¹⁹ displaying the fluctuating nature of medieval images of Others.

The distinction between Saracens and characters with darker skin, like Blacks, was similarly vague. Thus, Boccaccio narrated about “Ethiopians who are otherwise called Moors;”²⁰ contemporary scholars write (discussing literature, but this can also apply to the visual arts) “giant, black, Saracen: all combinations were possible, intermingling and overlapping.”²¹ Certainly, Saracens were often depicted with darker skin due to their negative portrayal, especially during the Crusades when they were seen as adversaries of the Christian faith.²²

¹⁵ Jean Devisse, “Christians and Blacks,” in *The Image of the Black in Western Art*, ed. David Bindman and Henry Louis Gates Jr., vol. 2, *From the Early Christian era to the “Age of Discovery,” part 1, From the Demonic Threat to the Incarnation of Sainthood* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010), 54.

¹⁶ Devisse, “Christians and Blacks”, 54; see more discussion, authors and quotations 52–54.

¹⁷ Devisse, “Christians and Blacks”, 52; see more discussion, authors and quotations 52–54; Jean Marie Courtès, “The Theme of ‘Ethiopia’ and ‘Ethiopians in Patristic Literature,” in *The Image of the Black in Western Art*, ed. David Bindman and Henry Louis Gates Jr., vol. 2, *From the Early Christian era to the “Age of Discovery,” part 1, From the Demonic Threat to the Incarnation of Sainthood* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010), 199–214; Strickland, Debra Higgs, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews*.

¹⁸ Giotto. *Trial by Fire*, 1325–28; Bardi Chapel, Florence.

¹⁹ *Martyrdom of Saint Vincent. Madame Marie’s Book of Images*. Hainaut, ca. 1300. Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, MS nouv. acq. 16251, fol. 78.

²⁰ Cited in Jean Devisse and Michel Mollat, “The Frontiers in 1460,” in *The Image of the Black in Western Art*, ed. David Bindman and Henry Louis Gates Jr., vol. 2, *From the Early Christian era to the “Age of Discovery,” part 2, Africans in the Christian Ordinance of the World* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010), 167.

²¹ Jean Devisse and Michel Mollat, “The Appeal to the Ethiopian,” in *The Image of the Black in Western Art*, ed. David Bindman and Henry Louis Gates Jr., vol. 2, *From the Early Christian era to the “Age of Discovery,” part 2, Africans in the Christian Ordinance of the World* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010), 92.

²² Strickland, Debra Higgs, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews*, 157–208.

Neutral images of the Blacks

The second perspective represents Blacks without negative connotations in religious depictions, portraying Christian saints or figures as Black, such as St. Mauritius or one of the Magi Kings in scenes like the Adoration of the Magi. These depictions gained prominence during the rule of Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II (1220–1250). The images of Black individuals within the context of the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II Hohenstaufen's biography and politics gained significance during his reign from 1220 to 1250.

The reign of Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II Hohenstaufen marked a crucial phase in the development of representations of Blacks and Saracens. This was attributed to various elements in his life and governance. Frederick II was born in Sicily and served as its king from 1212 to 1250. Sicily had a diverse population, including Muslims (Saracens) and potentially Africans. His close ties with the Near East and Byzantium also influenced his perspectives. He established a settlement in Southern Italy (Lucera, Puglia), relocating around 20 thousand Saracens-Muslims there. He formed a unit with some of them, and they became a key support in his conflicts with the Popes and feudal lords, unafraid of Papal interdicts. Saracens (or individuals with darker skin, not definitively identified) were present among his closest associates. As these power struggles in Western Europe were pivotal during his rule, Frederick II emphasized the importance of visual arts for propaganda. Numerous sculptural depictions of Saracens and Blacks emerged during his reign.²³ Under Frederick II's reign, Black imagery became linked with the Holy Roman Emperors. Following Frederick II's demise, the Hohenstaufen dynasty and the Holy Roman Empire entered a period of decline. Power was restored during Charles IV of Luxembourg's rule (1346–1378), who, like Frederick II, utilized visual arts as a political tool. Charles IV intentionally echoed imagery from the era of Frederick II for political purposes.

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During Frederick II's rule, the initial depiction of St. Mauritius as a Black figure was crafted—a sculpture adorning the Magdeburg cathedral.²⁴ St. Mauritius, the patron of warriors revered in the Magdeburg Diocese, was traditionally depicted as white until the first half of the 13th century. The emergence of the African representation was linked to the loyalty of Magdeburg archbishops to Frederick II during his conflicts with the Roman Popes and German feudal lords. This representation possibly referenced Frederick II, his Saracen or Black associates, and his troops.²⁵

The following images of St. Mauritius as an African emerged during Charles IV of Luxembourg's reign (1346–78). They were linked to his Baltic expansion, imperial ambitions, and strategic use of art as a political tool, inspired by Frederick II's visual style. Unlike the initial realistic sculpture

²³ Oleg S. Voskobojnikov, "Ars instrumentum regni. Repräsentaciya vlasti Fridriha II i iskusstvo Yuzhnoj Italii pervoj poloviny XIII v. [Ars instrumentum regni. Representation of the Power of Frederick II and the Art of Southern Italy]," in *Odissej. Chelovek v istorii*. M., 2002: 169–99; Paul H.D. Kaplan, "Black Africans in Hohenstaufen Iconography," in *Gesta. International Center of Medieval Art*, XXVI, no. 1 (1987): 29–36.

²⁴ Gude Suckale-Redlefsen, *Mauritius, der heilige Mohr* (München: Schnell & Steiner, 1987), 15–53.

²⁵ Paul H.D. Kaplan, "Black Africans," 29–36.

(which likely had real-life African influences), these later renditions, created in a mannerist or rocaille style, seem less accurate, possibly due to the artists' lack of direct exposure to actual Africans.²⁶ Over time, Halle emerged as a significant hub for creating these images, being a part of the Diocese of Magdeburg, and prospering due to its salt mining industry. St. Mauritius became the city's patron in 1184. Sculptures portraying him as Black began appearing there between the 14th and 15th centuries. During the city's peak from the latter half of the 15th to the mid-16th century, numerous sculptures of varying degrees of realism depicting St. Mauritius were crafted in Halle.²⁷ Under the likely influence of the Diocese of Magdeburg, similar sculptures were crafted in various other German cities.

The representations of the Black Magi

The images of the Black Magi were commonly seen between the late 15th and early 16th centuries.

The legend of the Magi dates back about 1,500 years and has evolved with different interpretations over time. It's first mentioned in the Gospel of Matthew: "After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea..., Magi from the east came to Jerusalem... and they bowed down and worshiped him" (Matthew 2:1-11). The essence of this story is that while locals didn't recognize Christ, those from distant lands did. From this text, medieval authors concluded there were three Magi and, connecting Matthew's quote with Psalm 72 from David, where kings bring gifts, they identified these Mages as secular rulers.²⁸ Over centuries, additional details and interpretations were added, later compiled in works like the Golden Legend by Jacobus de Voragine (1260) and the History of the Three Kings by John of Hildesheim (1364).

In these texts, the Magi are depicted as rulers from various Eastern (fictional) lands. Frederick II Hohenstaufen initiated the association of Magi with rulers and high-ranking nobility. Abbot Nicholas from Bari, one of his ideologists, likened Frederick II, his father Henry VI, and grandfather Frederick I to the Magi, stating that just as the Magi brought gifts to Christ, these monarchs expanded their territories. Frederick II's birthday (December 26) fell between Christmas (December 25) and Epiphany (January 6), the day of the Adoration of the Magi. Many rulers later claimed a connection with the Magi to solidify their status. For instance, Charles IV of Luxembourg was crowned on Epiphany Day, and the figures of the three Magi symbolized the unity of his realm, encompassing the Holy Roman Empire, Bohemia, and Italy.²⁹ Rulers and the highest aristocracy were often depicted as Magi: Lorenzo Medici, Duke of Tuscany,³⁰ Ernst II of Saxony, Archbishop of Magdeburg and his father Ernest³¹ and many others.

²⁶ Suckale-Redlefsen, *Mauritius, der heilige Mohr*, 57-81.

²⁷ Suckale-Redlefsen, *Mauritius, der heilige Mohr*, 70-11.

²⁸ Devisse, Mollat, "The Appeal to the Ethiopian," 124.

²⁹ Paul H. D. Kaplan, *The Rise of Black Magus in Western Art* (Ann Arbor: New Research Press, 1985), 72-82.

³⁰ Benozzo Gozzoli. *Journey of the Magi*, ca.1459-1461. Magi Chapel of Palazzo Medici-Riccardi, Florence. Besides, Lorenzo Medici many rulers and representatives of the top authorities of that time (John VIII Palaiologos, emperor of Byzantium et. al.) are represented there.

³¹ Hans Baldung Grien. *Dreikönigsaltar*, ca. 1506/07. Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin.

The depiction of the Black Magi evolved. Early images hinted at their association with the East by portraying them wearing high-pointed hats.³² As Europeans became familiar with the Mongols in the 12th century, ideas arose linking them to the Magi. These notions stemmed from knowledge that there were Christians among the Mongols, the Popes' attempts to convert them to Christianity, and European rulers' efforts to ally with them against the Saracens. This was mirrored in Christian art of the 13th and 14th centuries in the Near East, where artworks depicted one of the Magi as a Mongol.³³

Between the 13th and 15th centuries, artworks emerged portraying a Black individual as part of the Magi's procession.³⁴ During Charles IV of Luxembourg's reign (1355-1378), the publication of the *History of the Three Kings* by John of Hildesheim referenced one of the Magi as Jaspas, an Ethiopian depicted with a dark face. Consequently, a series of book miniatures depicted one of the Magi with dark skin.

The representation of the Black Magus in visual arts took shape in the 1480s and gained immense popularity between the 1480s and 1530s. Scholars have identified thousands of these depictions during that period.³⁵ They particularly thrived in Northern Italy, Southern Germany, and Antwerp, on the territories connected with the Holy Roman Empire during that time.³⁶ The regional significance likely influenced these depictions, especially in a city like Antwerp, known for its trade and navigation. Certain works might also carry specific contextual meanings.

The 300th anniversary of the transit of the relics of the Magi from Milan to Cologne in 1464 likely sparked a resurgence in the popularity of the Black Magus's image. The pictures of the Blacks could have spread widely because of the Holy Roman Empire's power in Europe. Since Frederick II's time, these images were linked with emperors. Many of these images spread a lot when Maximilian I was in charge (1486-1519 in Germany, 1508-19 as Holy Roman Emperor). He, like others, used art to influence politics. During this time, many things happened with other continents: there were more clashes between Western Europe and the Ottoman Empire in the Mediterranean and Near East. People found new lands and discovered the Americas. People explored Africa and met Africans for the first time. The pictures of the Blacks

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³² Mosaic of Basilica Sant' Apollinare Nuovo, 6th century.

³³ Iconostasis beam with the scenes of Nativity and Adoration from the monastery of St. Catherine on Sinai (middle of the 13th - early 14th centuries). See Jaroslav Folda, "Crusader Artistic Interactions with the Mongols in the Thirteenth Century: Figural Imagery, Weapons, and the Çintamani Design," in *Index of Christian Art, Occasional Papers*, ed. Colum P. Hourihane, vol. 9, *Interactions. Artistic Interchange between the Eastern and Western Worlds in the Medieval Period* (Princeton: Penn State University Press, 2007), 147-66; Angus Stewart, "If the Cap Fits: Going Mongol in Thirteenth Century Syria," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 26, nr. 1-2 (2016): 137-46.

³⁴ Nicolo Pisano. Relief of the Siena Cathedral pulpit, ca. 1259; Lorenzo Monaco. Adoration of the Magi, ca. 1420s. Uffizi, Florence, et. al.

³⁵ Joseph Leo Koerner, "The Epiphany of the Black Magus Circa 1500," in *The Image of the Black in Western Art*, ed. David Bindman and Henry Louis Gates Jr., vol. 3, *From the Age of Discovery to the Age of Abolition, part 1, Artists of the Renaissance and Baroque*, (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010), 35.

³⁶ About a half of retablos mentioned in the book by M. Friedlander represents the Adoration (Koerner, "The Epiphany of the Black Magus Circa 1500," 47).

might also show Christians living in Africa. This was a time when artists got really interested in showing different types of people in their art, especially after the Great Discovery. So, in Western art back then, you saw many more pictures of different kinds of people.

The pictures showing the Adoration of the Magi had a mix of meanings, but they also shared some key elements. They focused on the scene where baby Christ was visited by the Virgin Mary and three richly dressed Magi carrying presents. These pictures might have been inspired by plays about stories from the Bible and grand parades where people acted out the Magi's visit, often done in European towns during Christmas or Epiphany.³⁷ These pictures could differ in the number of people shown, sometimes featuring only five figures or showcasing larger or smaller processions. The Black Magus could be depicted in different ways too. Sometimes, his African features were detailed, but other times, he only had darker skin without any distinct characteristics.

The decrease in Black Magi representation likely stemmed from various historical events. The Reformation and Protestant iconoclasm, along with the Counter-Reformation and the Council of Trent's decision against art not directly linked to the Holy Testament, played a significant role. Moreover, conflicts like the Italian Wars (1494-1559), religious strife in Germany, the fight for the Netherlands' independence, and the decline of Italian influence contributed to this decline, especially in regions where these images were widespread.

Images of the Saracens

The word "Saracens" has its roots in the Arabic term "shark" (meaning "east") and was initially linked to nomadic tribes in the Near East. Over time, particularly in the Middle Ages, it became a broader term encompassing Muslim communities in Arab regions, the Near East, and Spain. "Moors" was another term used as a synonym for Saracens, but it was even less specific, referring to people from Northwest Africa, the Arab population in the Iberian Peninsula, and even some Black communities.

The Images of the Saracens in the Context of the Crusades

Of particular importance for European mentality was the perception of the Saracens in connection with the Crusades (1095-1291): their ideologists declared Saracens the enemies of faith and the Crusades themselves were declared as the struggle between Good and Evil, the true faith and paganism. In addition, the Crusades broadened the notions of the Europeans of the surrounding world and of "the other peoples," and contributed to the growth in interest in the visual arts representing them.

Before the 14th century, portrayals of the Crusades were symbolic and abstract. Depictions of these battles often featured two opposing groups of warriors, clad in European attire and wielding European weaponry, or scenes depicting St. George slaying the Dragon. These events, along

³⁷ Richard C. Trexler, *The Journey of the Magi. Meanings in History of a Christian Story* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 58, 90-91.

with the legend of St. George, unfolded in the same region—the Eastern Mediterranean. St. George was believed to have aided in the triumph at the Battle of Antioch on June 28, 1098. Crusade battles were sometimes depicted in a generalized manner, resembling scenes from the old French epic, which primarily revolved around conflicts—mostly with the Moors (Arabs) in Spain—initiated by the Carolingian rulers, notably Charlemagne (748-814). As a result, these representations drew a parallel between these wars and the Crusades, prevalent in South West France and Northern Spain during the 12th century.³⁸ This occurred for a few reasons, primarily because this region marked the boundary of the Spanish Moors' territories. The most detailed depictions of the Crusades were found in illuminated manuscripts. These illustrations, much like the general style of book miniatures, were schematic and simplified. They portrayed a limited range of subjects and characters in a rather conventional manner, with standardized poses and corresponding gestures. Such representations were likely because the miniatures were meant to complement texts that detailed the events extensively. Yet, despite their simplicity, these images carried a rich semantic load. As S. Lutschikaja describes, "by condensing the content, the illustration takes on the appearance of a symbol teeming with various connotations."³⁹ They weren't merely illustrations; they embodied ideograms. These images encapsulated a whole range of meanings, embodying not just the event itself but its symbolic subtext. When depicting historical battles, these miniatures symbolized the triumph of Christianity over paganism, representing the victory of Good over Evil.⁴⁰

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In the Crusade illustrations, the Saracens shared characteristics similar to negative portrayals of Jews: irregular facial features like large hooked noses and thick lips, along with thick beards, grimaces, and aggressive gestures. They were often depicted in profile or three-quarters, and sometimes portrayed with dark skin (with negative connotations) and occasionally with African features.⁴¹ The depictions of Saracens contrasted with those of European Christians, showcasing opposite characteristics. Both groups' traits carried similar moral and ethical meanings, conveying a common subtext: the battle between the right and wrong religions, representing Good and Evil.⁴²

The depictions of Crusades often focused on specific scenes, mainly battles between Saracens and Europeans. These scenes typically followed a traditional medieval format. The composition split into two sections, with two groups of warriors engaged in combat: typically mounted fighters

³⁸ Rita Lejeune, Jeanne Stiennon, *La légende de Roland dans l'art du moyen âge* (Brussels: Arcade, 1966); Gaetano Curzi, "L'immagine del nemico. Arabi, turchi e mongoli nella propaganda crociata," in *Europa e Islam tra i secoli XIV e XVI. Europe and Islam between 14th and 16th Centuries*, vol. 1, ed. Michele Bernardini et. al. (Naples: I.U.O., 2002), 274.

³⁹ Lutschikaja, *Obraz Drugogo*, 326.

⁴⁰ Lutschikaja, *Obraz Drugogo*, 326 et. al.

⁴¹ This connection is discussed on page 6 of the present paper; see also Strickland, Debra Higgs, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews*, 157-209.

⁴² Strickland, Debra Higgs, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews: Making Monsters in Medieval Art*; Nirit Ben-Aryeh Debby, "Visual Rhetoric: Images of Saracens in Florentine Churches," *Anuario de Estudios Medievales* 42, no. 1(2012): 7-28.

wielding swords or lances, Europeans depicted on the left, and Saracens on the right side (from the viewer's perspective). This division aligned with the cultural significance of the right side being positive and the left side having a negative connotation. Additionally, it followed the Western cultural reading pattern from left to right.

In medieval art, gestures held significant meaning, encapsulating emotions, actions, and ideas. In battle scenes, the most prevalent gesture was the hands lifted while holding swords diagonally, signifying the conflict itself. Additionally, a character (usually European) might be depicted with the sword held in defense or poised towards their opponent, symbolizing the culmination or outcome of the battle – the victory over the enemy.

In addition to battle scenes, there were also depictions of the capture of fortresses or cities during the Crusades.⁴³ Here, the artwork is divided into two groups, much like the battle scenes: one defending the fortress (on the right), and the other attacking (on the left). The breaking of the door or lock symbolizes the seizure or victory of the fortress. These images carry a symbolic meaning, focusing less on the battle between good and evil and more on the historical and cultural significance, which was the central idea behind the Crusades.

In these scenes, gestures take on a crucial role: Europeans are shown with folded palms, signifying obedience, while the Saracens display aggressive, commanding gestures, grabbing the Christians and threatening them. These depictions often resemble scenes of Christ and saints being tortured, emphasizing the religious and ethical conflict between good and evil, right and false beliefs.⁴⁴

Frederick II personally led the 6th Crusade from 1228 to 1229. He brokered a peace treaty with the Sultan of Egypt, Al-Kamil, in 1229 and was granted the title of King of Jerusalem. This treaty's signing is depicted in the miniature found in Giovanni Villani's "Nuova Cronica."⁴⁵ The depiction shows two rulers very similarly, sharing similar clothes, facial features, and even identical crowns. What sets the Sultan of Egypt apart from the European ruler is a longer, thicker beard and a turban positioned under the crown. This similarity between Oriental and European rulers was common in medieval art, especially in book illustrations that had limited details and focused on portraying only the most significant characteristics, often indicating their status. However, in depictions of the Sultan's surroundings, more distinct traits typical of the Saracens are present, such as irregular facial features, curved swords, and bows.

Compared to the many images depicting Saracens with dark skin in battle scenes, the miniatures in "Liber Secretorum Fidelium Crucis" by Mario Sanudo look notably different.⁴⁶ Here, the imagery is more intricate and points to the diverse population of that region, depicting a complex

⁴³ *The History of Outremer*. Medicean-Laurentian Library, Florence, ca. 1287; MS. Plu.L.XI.10, fol. 33r, Bk. 3. Ch. I.

⁴⁴ Strickland, Debra Higgs, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews*; Ben-Aryeh Debby, "Visual Rhetoric," 7-28.

⁴⁵ 1340s. The Vatican Apostolic Library, ms. Chigiano L VIII 296, f. 75r.

⁴⁶ 1321. The Vatican Apostolic Library, Il-113 fols., fol. 11 sup v.; fol. 14, fol. 15v.

interplay of contradictions among them. Some figures are shown with a lion (symbolizing the Tatars), a wolf (representing the Turks), and a leopard (symbolizing the Sultan of Egypt). Among them are individuals wearing turbans and holding shields with crosses, likely representing dark-skinned Christians living in that region. They are depicted engaged in conflict with light-skinned characters, identified as turbaned Saracens.

Certainly, Saracens with dark skin (not exclusively dark) were portrayed not solely as adversaries of Christ but also as witnesses to Christian miracles. Their inclusion in these depictions added a layer of credibility and authenticity to the portrayal of these events.⁴⁷

The connection between the negative connotations of the color black and its association with Africa and Africans might have emerged partly due to the depictions of Black heads, often adorned with a white tie, appearing on the background of crosses that adorned the crests of certain noble families in Western Europe. These representations emerged in the late 13th century, especially in Northern and Central Italy. These heads symbolized Saracens more than Africans, highlighting their distinctiveness and signifying evil as adversaries of the faith. These heads represented the strength of the crest owners, much like other symbols like bears or lions, positioning them as defenders of the faith against enemies. It's worth noting that the names of certain Italian noble families, such as Saracini in Siena, Morandi in Genoa, Negri in Vicenza, and others, were associated with these crests.⁴⁸

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Images of Mongols

The introduction of Mongol imagery into Western art during the 13th century came through various interactions: travelers, missionaries, merchants, the influx of Mongolian slaves, and Mongol embassies in Europe. Identifying individuals in these depictions – whether they were Mongols, Chinese, or general representations of Asians – can be challenging. The terms “Mongols” or “Tatars” often encompassed diverse peoples from Central Asia, the Far East, India, and Hungarian Cumans, and sometimes served as general descriptors. As a result, the term “Mongol” had relative and broad applications during this period.

The depictions of Mongols often featured specific elements in their appearance, attire, and weaponry. Their clothing could incorporate aspects from various cultures mentioned, like khalats, caftans, or high caps like felt kalpaks. Hairstyles might showcase pigtailed hair or beards divided into two tresses. In terms of weaponry, they were often depicted wielding bows or curved swords. However, thorough investigation into these specific clothing elements is still lacking.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Giotto. St. Francis before the Sultan (Trial by Fire), ca. 1325-28. Bardi chapel, Florence.

⁴⁸ Jean Devisse and Michel Mollat, “The Shield and the Crown,” in *The Image of the Black in Western Art*, ed. David Bindman and Henry Louis Gates Jr., vol. 2, *From the Early Christian era to the “Age of Discovery,” Part 2, Africans in the Christian Ordinance of the World* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010), 31-36.

⁴⁹ Mikhail V. Gorelik, “Pamyatniki ital'yanskoj zhivopisi XIV v. kak svidetel'stvo italo-zolotoordynskih svyazej” [Italian Painting of the 14th Century as the Evidence of Italian-Horde Contacts], in *Sredizemnomorskij mir v antichnyu i srednevekovuyu epohi: krosskul'turnye kommunikacii v istoricheskom prostranstve i vremeni. XIII Chteniya pamyati professora*

The European understanding of the Mongols encompassed both real knowledge and fantastical ideas, especially during the initial stages of their interaction. Thus, one of the miniatures of the *Chronica Majora* by Matthew Paris represents them as the cannibals illustrating the text.⁵⁰ In that miniature, Mongols were depicted with ugly, angry faces and twisted bodies, emphasizing a sense of bloodlust. Despite the fantastical elements, the details were carefully observed: they wore high pointed caps, the desert backdrop reflected their steppe habitat, and the horse represented their cultural significance.

The Mongols were represented in religious subjects: scenes of crucifixion, torturing of Christian saints, and others.⁵¹ These images also have political connotations. The semeiotics in Ambrogio Lorenzetti's fresco 'Martyrdom of the Franciscans' (early 1330s (?)) referenced the Franciscans' missions in the Orient and their interactions with the Mongols and Cumans.⁵² Meanwhile, Oriental depictions in works like Altichiero da Zevio and Jacopo Avanzo's scenes of St. George, St. Catherine of Alexandria, and St. Lucia at the Oratory of San Giorgio in Padua (late 1370s - early 1380s) were linked to the Paduan House of Carrara's associations with the Hungarian Cumans. Andrea da Firenze's frescoes depicting the Christological cycle in the Spanish chapel at Santa Maria Novella in Florence (1365-1367) carried semeiotics tied to Dominican missions and trade between Florentine merchants and the Orient.

Confrontations with the Mongols were mostly represented in battle scenes of the illuminated manuscripts. Among these were those of the Hedwig codex representing the Battle of Legnica (1241) where the Mongols defeated the combined Polish-German troops. One of the miniatures is divided into two almost equal parts.⁵³ However, there's an inversion in the depiction: the Mongolian troops, portrayed as the aggressors, occupy the left side while the Christians are positioned on the right to the viewer. This contrast is highlighted by specific details commonly used in depictions of 'the Other': the raised hands indicating an attack and the prevalence of curved lines, distinct from the dominant straight lines in European depictions. These elements accentuate the perceived aggressiveness and danger attributed to the Mongols.

The Tatar invasion is depicted on a different miniature.⁵⁴ The image is organized horizontally. The accurate monoliths of the groups of the Mongols, consisting of uniform parallel figures with parallel lances, alternate

Nikolaya Petrovicha Sokolova. *Materialy Mezhdunarodnoj nauchnoj konferencii (Nizhnij Novgorod, 25-27 sentyabrya 2012 g.)*, ed. Alexander V. Mahlayuk (Nizhnij Novgorod: Izd-vo Nizhegorodskogo gos. un-ta, 2012), 124-26; Prinz Wolfram, "I tatarì nella pittura italiana del Trecento," in *Studi di storia dell'arte sul Medioevo e il Rinascimento nel centenario della nascita di Mario Salma. Atti del Convegno Internazionale Arezzo-Firenze*. Vol. 1, (Florence: Polistampa, 1989), 413-29.

⁵⁰ 1236-1259, Parker library, Corpus Christi College, Cambridge; Ms 16, fol 166r.

⁵¹ Prinz, "I tatarì nella pittura italiana del Trecento," 413-29.

⁵² Gorelik, "Pamyatniki ital'yanskoj zhivopisi XIV v. kak svidetel'stvo italo-zolotoordynskih svyazej," 126; Prinz, "I tatarì nella pittura italiana del Trecento," 413-29.

⁵³ The Hedwig codex, 1353, Getty Museum, Los Angeles; Ms. Ludwig XI 7, fol. 11v (83.MN.126, 11v).

⁵⁴ *Book of the Marvels of the World, 1413*. Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris: Ms fr. 2810, fol 180.

with the images of the mountains which expresses the idea of the similarity between the Mongols and the monolith, and the solidity of the mountains, the cohesion and organization of the Mongols. Also, here the Europeans' notions of the place of living of the Mongols are reflected: as a contemporary wrote, "I asked them, where their land was, they responded: behind the mountain, near the people called Gog."⁵⁵ Furthermore, this depiction might echo a medieval myth known as the 'enclosed peoples.' According to this legend, Alexander the Great constructed gates within the Caucasus Mountains to safeguard the Christian world from northern populations by confining them within the mountainous barriers.⁵⁶

In the depictions of the battles between the Mongols and the Saracens, the expansion of the Mongols in the Near East in the 13th century was reflected. These battles represent the miniatures in *La Flor des estoires de la terre d'Orient* by *Hayton of Corycus*. One of them represents the battle of Köse Dağ (1243), and the other one depicts that of Homs (1281).⁵⁷ The miniatures have the same composition with two groups: that of the Mongols (left) and of the Saracens (right). Here, the Mongols are represented with the details associated with the Saracens (turbans, darker skin), i.e., the Mongols are represented as more "Other". The first miniature shows the Saracens escaping the battlefield, while the second shows the Mongols escaping, which represents the actual finality of the battles. Such representations were connected to the notions of the Mongols as potential allies of the Christians against the Saracens which were widespread at that time; the attempts of the Popes to convert the Mongols to Catholicism; and the evidence, that Christians existed among them.⁵⁸

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Moreover, in the book *Illumination* (those of the books of Marco Polo and John Mandeville) there was a significant number of those illustrating characteristic traits of Mongolian culture. Among them, there were many of those representing the Mongols as idol worshippers. An important place among them also played images of the Mongol rulers, the life of the court et. al.⁵⁹ It is evident that the illustrators never saw the real Mongols and created the illustrations using the verbal descriptions of the clothes, haircuts, appearance of the Mongols or maybe the Oriental illustrations. They are thought essentially true, but quite schematic.

Conclusion

From today's standpoint, the depictions of the Others might seem prejudiced, yet the values, knowledge, and understanding of the Middle Ages differed from our modern perspective. It might be more accurate to label

⁵⁵ Cited in Alexander G. Yurchenko, *Imperiya i kosmos: Real'naya i fantasticheskaya istoriya pohodov Chingis-hana po materialam franciskanskoj missii 1245 g.* [Empire and Cosmos: The Real and the Fantastic Story of the Genghis Khan Campaigns] (Saint Petersburg: Evraziya, 2002).

⁵⁶ Lutschizkaja, *Obraz Drugogo: musul'mane v hronikah krestovyh pohodov*, 8.

⁵⁷ Early 14th century. Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris; NAF 886, fol.18 and NAF 886, fol. 27.

⁵⁸ Stewart, "If the Cap Fits: Going Mongol in Thirteenth Century Syria," 137-46.

⁵⁹ Brothers Polo before Kublai Khan. *Tractatus de septem vitiis*, late 14th century. Ashmolean museum, Oxford; MS 27695, fol. 13r.

the attitude toward the Other (other peoples) as ethno-, Euro-, and primarily as religiocentrism. Religion held the utmost importance in the medieval worldview. Consequently, aspects of the surrounding world, including other cultures, were either integrated into the religious framework or, if they conflicted with Christian doctrine, were often condemned and portrayed negatively.

While bearing the common traits of being linked with the religious worldview and a degree of vagueness, representations of Otherness also carried distinct features. Depictions of Jews were not necessarily tied to political events but were exclusively connected to religion, particularly to the Old and New Testaments—both depicted neutrally and negatively. In portrayals of Saracens, they were often cast as adversaries of the Christian faith, sharing similarities in details and symbolism with the depictions of Jews. However, representations of Saracens were largely associated with political occurrences. Negative interpretations of depictions of Blacks and Mongols were less widespread. They were more intertwined with political figures (such as Frederick II, Charles IV of Luxembourg, and the archbishops of Magdeburg), historical processes (such as the dominance of the Holy Roman Empire in Europe), geographical discoveries, and geographical conceptions. The interpretation of these depictions could vary depending on their relation to these political events.

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Figure 1. Adoration of the Magi and Black St. Mauritius. Hans Baldung Grien. Dreikönigsaltar, ca. 1506/07. Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin

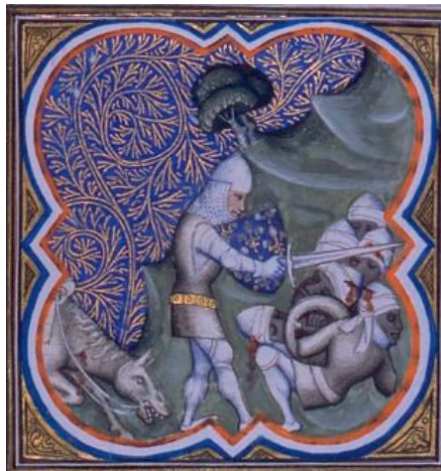


Figure 2. Grandes Chroniques de France. 1375-80, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris; Ms. Fr. 2813, 114v



Figure 3. Adoration of the Magi. Altichiero da Zevio and Jacopo Avanzo, second half of 1370s-first half of 1380s. Fresco in the Oratorio of San Giorgio, Padua



Figure 4. The Hedwig codex, 1353, Getty Museum, Los Angeles; Ms. Ludwig XI 7, fol. 11v (83.MN.126, 11v)