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Exotic Allies: Mongol Alterity And Racial Formation In The Global Middle Ages, 1220-1400

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Abstract

This dissertation investigates the long and diverse lineages of medieval European engagement with the Mongol Empire from the Fifth Crusade (1217-1221) to the end of the fourteenth-century. It examines the literature this cross-cultural encounter produced, including historiography, travel narratives, and romances, in order to reveal the discursive practices by which racial ideologies were formed during the period under study. Existing scholarship on medieval ideologies of race has concentrated on representations of religious difference or descriptive analyses of physiognomic differences. At the same time, this work has been heavily scrutinized with charges of anachronism grounded in the idea that race is a modern phenomenon, a social construct engendered by the institutions of colonialism and transatlantic slavery. This project draws on the theories of race advanced by Geraldine Heng, taking the literary representation of Mongols as a case study to show how racial ideologies of the period were not limited to religion or the body. It argues that geopolitical circumstances led to the construction of Mongols as exotic allies, a term this project coins to define a racial formation characterized by the consolidation of fear, desire, and control. In using the conceptual framework of the exotic ally to analyze the racial function of Mongols, this project reveals the ontological features of medieval European racial ideologies and the role that global relations played in their formation.

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MONGOL ALTERITY AND RACIAL FORMATION IN THE GLOBAL MIDDLE
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Christina Sierra Lomuto

Dedication

For Ella, and our beloved Vonnie

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ABSTRACT

EXOTIC ALLIES: MONGOL ALTERITY AND RACIAL FORMATION IN THE

GLOBAL MIDDLE AGES, 1220-1400

Sierra Lomuto

Emily Steiner

This dissertation investigates the long and diverse lineages of medieval European

engagement with the Mongol Empire from the Fifth Crusade (1217-1221) to the end of

the fourteenth-century. It examines the literature this cross-cultural encounter produced,

including historiography, travel narratives, and romances, in order to reveal the discursive

practices by which racial ideologies were formed during the period under study. Existing

scholarship on medieval ideologies of race has concentrated on representations of

religious difference or descriptive analyses of physiognomic differences. At the same

time, this work has been heavily scrutinized with charges of anachronism grounded in the

idea that race is a modern phenomenon, a social construct engendered by the institutions

of colonialism and transatlantic slavery. This project draws on the theories of race

advanced by Geraldine Heng, taking the literary representation of Mongols as a case

study to show how racial ideologies of the period were not limited to religion or the body.

It argues that geopolitical circumstances led to the construction of Mongols as *exotic*

allies, a term this project coins to define a racial formation characterized by the

consolidation of fear, desire, and control. In using the conceptual framework of the *exotic*

ally to analyze the racial function of Mongols, this project reveals the ontological features

of medieval European racial ideologies and the role that global relations played in their

formation.

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INTRODUCTION

MEDIEVAL RACE AND THE MAKING OF THE *EXOTIC ALLY*

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The early contact history between Latin Christendom and the expanding Mongol Empire in the thirteenth century engendered two competing discourses of the Mongol figure—the Christian savior and the ferocious monster. These discursive representations developed in response to geopolitical changes from the 1220s to the end of the century, yet one never entirely supplanted the other and they continued to inform the conception of Mongols well into the early modern period. As chapter one demonstrates, the discourse of the Fifth Crusade (1217-1221) identified the Mongols as descendants of Prester John, an orientalized Christian priest-king of crusader legend, and constructed them as Christian allies in the crusade against the Ayyubid Caliphate in Egypt. This case of wishful identification points to a desire for a powerful east that is in service of Latin Christendom. Although the decade after the crusade brought news of Mongol incursions into Russia, Hungary, and Poland, and the myth of the Mongol as Christian ally dissipated, it did not entirely disappear.

The travel writing of Franciscan and Dominican missionaries to Mongol territory in Central Asia and the Steppe in the 1240s (the subject of chapter two) provided more information about the Mongols, making it impossible to continue believing they were Prester John's descendants. However, their convertibility becomes a focal point in some of these writings, such as that of William of Rubruck (c. 1257), as well as in some chronicle histories, such as those used as source material for the fourteenth-century

Middle English romance *King of Tars* (discussed in chapter three). Writings after the

Fifth Crusade continued to rely on the discourse of the Mongol Christian in various ways.

At the same time, many travel accounts and chronicles, such as those of John of Plano

Carpini (c. 1247) and Matthew of Paris (c. 1250), characterize the Mongols as barbarous

and cannibalistic, and their potential alliance as Christians is less visible; however, these

conflicting discourses remained within the same overarching epistemological frame of

Latin Christian supremacy. Even as Matthew's *Chronica Majora* presents a venomous

portrait of Mongols, their monstrosity nonetheless emerges as a harnessable source

against Islam. By the fourteenth century, when Mongols began to feature in the romance

literature, and real contact between them and Europeans dwindled, the discourses of the

Christian savior and the ferocious monster had folded into one another, becoming

inextricable and intertwined concepts within the representation of Mongols. Chapters

three and four explore how a racialized construct of the Mongol figure functioned in the

romances of fourteenth-century England, particularly *The King of Tars* (c. 1330) and *The

Book of John Mandeville* (c. 1356).

      The perception of Mongols as potential Christian allies has long been recognized

in the work of medieval scholars, but this understanding often remains unreconciled with

the concomitant recognition of their representation as monstrous barbarians and

cannibals. "Exotic Allies: Mongol Alterity and Racial Formation in the Global Middle

Ages, 1220-1400" considers these discursive representations alongside and in relation to

one another. It argues that while they might appear to be in conflict with one another,

they were in fact constitutive of an ideological narrative that constructed Mongols as

what I am terming *exotic allies*. Even though the Mongols were powerful world

conquerors who also subjugated the various societies and communities they dominated, their ferocity was contained within Latin Christian discourse where it was harnessed for Latin Christendom. I use the term *exotic allies* to describe the racial function of Mongols within this discursive system that is invested in establishing Latin Christian supremacy over Islam. The "exotic" houses both negative and positive connotations that do not compete for space, but rather coincide and reinforce one another, capturing the ambivalence and contradictions that cohere within racial constructs. Debra Higgs Strickland (2008) has noted that the medieval exotic is "a *quality* rather than […] a limited set of real or imaginary 'outside' groups,'" and characterizes this quality as "one that just as often carried positive connotations as negative ones. In later medieval art and literature, exotic persons or creatures are now fearful and repulsive, now intriguing and desirable. As a particularized brand of alterity, the exotic exuded ambivalence." The barbaric conception of Mongols that rendered them terrifying, inducing European vulnerability, is precisely what facilitated their construction into allies who would help Latin Christendom destroy their primary foe, the "Saracen," and thus made them desirable figures of admiration.[1]

While there are several examples of noble Saracens in Latin Christian texts, such as the depiction of Saladin in historiography or Ferumbras in romance, they are exceptional figures among a race that is consistently depicted as inferior, debased, and primed for eradication. Noble Mongols, however, such as we see in the *Book of John*

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[1] "Saracen" is a racialized term used in the medieval period to identify Muslims. This dissertation distinguishes between "Muslim" and "Saracen," using the former to signify historical adherents to Islam and the latter that of their misrepresentation and racialization within Latin Christian discourse. This is particularly important within the romance literature, where the Saracen religion bears little to no resemblance to the reality of Islam, although that is the intention. The misrepresentation of Muslims in medieval romance is well studied. See Dorothee Metlitzki (1977). For a specific discussion on the racialization of Muslims through the construct of the "Saracen," see Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (2001).

Mandeville or Chaucer's *Squire's Tale*, are not exceptional; rather, they are representative of the exotic ally, an admirable figure of alterity characterized by the consolidation of fear, desire, and control. This emergence of the exotic ally through a discursive nexus of Mongol representation reveals the ideological process whereby racial constructions are formed. The tension between, and simultaneity of, competing discourses reflects the fundamental *modus operandi* of ideology. Ideology absorbs instances of discordance and finesses them into a familiar frame of reference, so that even as this process, by its very necessity, reveals ruptures in the narrative it produces, it also resists being completely supplanted, although shifts do occur. Thinking about the Mongols as a race is useful precisely because of their prominent position within early global histories.[2] It helps us to understand how ideologies of race developed within a global medieval world, which deepens our understanding of the complexity of Latin Europe's relations with the peoples and cultures beyond its immediate geographic landscape.

"Exotic Allies: Mongol Alterity and Racial Formation in the Global Middle Ages, 1220-1400" demonstrates how ideologies of racial alterity emerged within a global context in which Europe was a peripheral player aware of its own vulnerability. By examining the longue durée of medieval Europe's discursive representation of the Mongol Empire, across various genres of writing and an array of geopolitical affairs, it shows precisely how we may understand epistemologies of supremacy as specifically racial in a period that is often considered pre-racial. It is the first study to trace the representation of Mongols across the period, from thirteenth-century Latin travel

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[2] For an overview of the Mongol Empire's influence on the medieval world economy, see Abu-Lughod (1989).

narratives and historiographies to fourteenth-century romances of England. It is also the only extended study of medieval race to shift the focus from physiognomy to epistemological structures.[3] In doing so, it aims to contribute to a growing interest in global relations in Medieval Studies by offering ways of theorizing the power dynamics of cross-cultural encounters in which Europe was not the imperial, global center it would later become. At the same time, it demonstrates the capacity of literature to not merely reflect, but bring into being modes of knowing and seeing that in themselves produce power.

Medieval Race

Fatima el Tayeb (2011) has argued that Europe has been constructed as a white space that interpellates people of color as perpetual and permanent outsiders. At the same time, she demonstrates how a lack of language for analyzing the racial politics of this construction of Europe, what she calls a "political racelessness," makes it nearly impossible to disrupt. The dynamics of this "political racelessness" resonates with the construction of the Middle Ages as pre-racial and the problems that such a characterization poses within the field of Medieval Studies. "Medieval" is a term that denotes a constructed historical period within European history, not global history. Its synonymity with "Europe" has led to its signification as a white space in popular consciousness, which in turn has impacted the constitutive body of scholars working within Medieval Studies. Expanding a critical discourse of race for the Middle Ages

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[3] A very recent exception is the March 2018 publication of Geraldine Heng's book-length *Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages*, which expands upon her earlier articles on the topic in *Literature Compass* in 2011.

necessarily helps resolve the problem of "political racelessness" in the field, which in turn contributes to its aims of professional inclusion. The study of race within Medieval Studies, often perceived as beyond the purview of the field for its anachronism and irrelevance, can reveal as much about the medieval past as the present.

Since race entered the critical discourse of Medieval Studies, its inclusion has been the subject of contentious debate. In fact, the very premise of its entrance in the field was the question of whether it could be included at all. Thomas Hahn's 2001 special issue of the *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* posited whether race could be a useful category of analysis for the study of the Middle Ages. In his introductory essay, he asks, "What, if anything, does medieval studies have to do with racial discourses?" (2) His article and the six that follow present various ways of approaching race in the Middle Ages, as well as query the merits of doing so. The majority of the contributors – Hahn, Verkerk, Cohen, Kinoshita, and Lomperis – all seem to agree to that it is a useful category of analysis, but one that needs serious theorizing and historicizing so that its applicability to a premodern period (and one that is itself so expansive it requires more than a singular definition) can produce accurate knowledge of how biological, cultural, and religious identities were conceived and codified.

Hahn's discussion is primarily concerned with how skin color signifies in constructions of identity precisely because he recognizes how central color is in modern conceptions of race; thus, he reads modern race back onto the medieval. As he states, he is interested in focusing "specifically upon the power of color to signify difference and to consider the ways in which such difference participates in medieval categories of race" (10). He ultimately makes a strong case for how climatic explanations of color

(everywhere in medieval writing from encyclopedias to romances) are always imbued with a hierarchical scheme, and become, he notes, "a lynchpin of difference" (15). He also explores how blackness functions as a metaphor within ideologies of religious conversion ideologies, specifically in the commentaries on the Song of Songs; this notion of metaphorical color is taken up more extensively in Verkerk's article, in which she examines the presence of black figures in the Ashburnham Pentateuch. She shows how the black skin of real people becomes a mark of sin because of how religious discourse employs the color symbolism of blackness as the state of the soul prior to conversion. Verkerk thus shows how theological color symbolism informs the racialization of real people.

Bartlett's article examines the distinction between "race" and "ethnicity," arguing that race in the Middle Ages is much more akin to modern conceptions of ethnicity, which he defines as a neutral description of human difference. For Bartlett, race is biologically inflected and intractable, whereas ethnicity captures more cultural plasticity; this distinction leads him to conclude that "ethnicity" is the more accurate term for medieval classifications of difference. Yet he suggests the two terms are practically interchangeable and decides to use the term "race" for the remainder of his article, demonstrating an ambivalence toward terminology even as he offers a clear definition for medieval race. In his formulation, medieval race is determined by descent, language, law, and customs: it is a malleable identity that is not fixed on the body, but rather marked by one's cultural and geographic environment.

Cohen glosses this formulation, elucidating the relation between race and the body in Bartlett's article: "Dermal and physiological difference, the most familiar

markers of embodied race, play no role in Bartlett's formulation because he overlooks

race's humoral-climatological (that is, medical and scientific) construction; race for

Bartlett ultimately has little to do with bodies" (115). In contrast, Cohen insists on the

physical intractability of race even in medieval contexts, asserting that race is always

"written on and produced through the body." Jordan, who closes the issue with an article

titled, "Why Race?" answers Hahn's initial question with a great deal of skepticism as to

the term's significance in the Middle Ages, as he queries the usefulness of reaching back

into the medieval period for the history of race. The ambiguity of the issue's answer to

Hahn's opening question has remained with us, prompting Cord Whitaker's 2015 special

issue of *postmedieval* to provide a definitive answer in the affirmative. [4] Yet, as many of

the essays contained within Whitaker's issue reveal, the field still warrants a justification,

and it is still in need of the heavy theorizing Hahn's issue called for.

      The primary resistance to an analysis of race in the medieval period comes from

the perception that the concept is anachronistic because racial ideologies did not exist in

the Middle Ages; and the idea that when such ideologies are visible, it is only as a

nascent version of later racial ideologies, and thereby of little significance. Yet,

eschewing teleological conceptions of history brings medieval time into focus for

analyses of race. As Geraldine Heng (2011) has argued, the anachronism of medieval

race arises from the construction of modernity as both origin and telos, both the result of

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[4] Other recent scholarship on the topic has pushed for the study for medieval race. See, for example: Kofi
Omoniyi Sylvanus Campbell (2006); Geraldine Heng (2011), "The Invention of Race in the European
Middle Ages I and II." *Literature Compass* 8.5 (2011): 315-331, 332-350; Lisa Lampert-Weissig (2010);
and Lynn Ramey (2014), where Ramey makes the important point, in direct response to Jordan, that "by
locating racial or even racist ideas in the very origins of the western Europe, it becomes clear that the
scientific racism that developed from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century in Europe was not an
unfortunate, chance development in the history of European civilization. Scientific racism was the
inevitable outcome of the centuries of thought that preceded it" (37).

great ruptures that cut it off from medieval histories and a locale in which the medieval past consistently arrives. Reminding us that the history of race is "both protracted and erratic," Loomba and Burton's *Race in Early Modern Europe: A Documentary Companion* (2007) challenges the idea that race is a strictly "post-Enlightenment ideology forged on the twin anvils of colonialism and Atlantic slavery and hinging upon pseudo-biological notions of human differentiation, especially color" (8). They posit, "racial ideologies and practices are not just engendered as a simple consequence of modern colonialism. Rather, many premodern ideologies and practices shape the particular forms taken by modern European colonialism and slavery" (8). They point to the "circular logic" at play within arguments against the presence of race prior to the modern era, raising the rhetorical question: "is it particular disciplines that give rise to racial thought, or are various disciplinary formations, and ways of ordering knowledge, themselves shaped by the histories of cross-cultural and colonial encounters?" With an obvious affirmative for the latter option, they enjoin their readers to "query the analytical separation of culture and biology and the consequence of such a distinction for histories and theories of race" (22). Heng (2018) also emphasizes this imperative: "Nature/biology and the sociocultural should not thus be seen as bifurcated spheres in medieval race-formation: They often crisscrossed in the practices, institutions, fictions, and laws of a political—and a *bio*political—theology operationalized on the bodies and lives of individuals and groups" (3). For example, religion was the "master category of difference" (to use Omi and Winant's phrase) of the Middle Ages, which was leveraged in essentializing practices of persecution and exclusion that functioned in ways we would recognize as racial today.

An early and lasting argument for the anachronism of medieval race has been etymological; the term itself is highly contested. Many scholars have argued that, in the medieval period, the term did not hold its modern meaning regarding the codification of physical and inherited differences across human groups. For example, Asa Mittman (2015) has recently argued that the term in the fifteenth century was used to distinguish one kind of dog from another, or one class of people from another regardless of their shared skin color or European ancestry, a point he poses may hinder the terming of the "monstrous races" as such. Yet terms and the concepts they denote are not always born together at the same time. Concepts may arise and circulate long before a term is either created or adapted to signify it. Although Lynn Ramey, in her recent study *Black Legacies: Race and the European Middle Ages* (2014), limits her definition of race to "shared socially selected physical traits" and her analyses focus on skin color, she reminds us that "meaning is also produced outside etymology" and the fact that "race" did not mean the same thing in the medieval period as it did after the fifteenth century should hold no bearing on our ability to use it when speaking of the medieval.[5] As Heng (2011) puts it, "a gap can exist between a practice and the linguistic utterance that names it" (324).

Pointing to the etymology of race also presumes that the term itself became stable after the Enlightenment.[6] Concepts can and often necessarily do circulate in various and contradictory forms before they are captured by the terms that afford them with the

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[5] Loomba and Burton make this point as well, as does Campbell (2006), Heng (2011), and other medieval race scholars.

[6] From Loomba and Burton: "It is important to remember that even when racial ideologies and racist practices became more entrenched and pernicious, there was no singular approach to or agreement about human difference, something that is often forgotten by those who emphasize only the gap between 'fluid' or unformed early modern ideologies and the more rigid modern ones" (7).

appearance of neat signification, but even then they continue to adapt and change, drop old meanings, and acquire new ones. Geraldine Heng reminds us that "race has no singular or stable referent […]. [It is] is a structural relationship for the articulation and management of human differences, rather than substantive content" (Heng 2011, 332). Race is never a fixed or stable category of strictly biological or physiognomic signification, but an organizational structure through which difference is controlled and contained for particular purposes. It appears to be a stable concept because of its inscription on features that are also constructed to appear fixed, such as the body or the environment.

Racial difference also appears to be stable because it is shaped by power structures that sustain themselves through the reconciliation of dissonant information and simultaneous presentation of a coherent narrative. Even when faced with a counter narrative, racial stereotypes resist disruption. Contemporary Islamophobia and the construction of the terrorist as synonymous with the Muslim presents a poignant example of ideology's persistence. The Muslim neighbor, friend, or co-worker who is not seen as posing a threat is perceived as the exception, not the rule, within the epistemological frame of Islamophobia. Their unknown family members remain suspicious, as do Muslim refugees fleeing extremist persecution in their home countries. Islamophobic fear surpasses both humanitarian justice and factual or anecdotal evidence that would otherwise challenge the stereotype of the Muslim terrorist.

Another racial stereotype, often rendered with the moniker "positive," that persists in the U.S. is that of the Asian "model minority." Within this frame of reference, for example, Asian students are understood to be inherently smarter than non-Asians.

When they earn high grades, they are perceived to have expended less effort than their white peers with the same grades; and the Asian student with low grades becomes an anomaly.[7] The "model minority" is produced and only exists within a dominant system of whiteness; it is a constructed stereotype that defines the racial ideology undergirding the figure of the Asian-American. At the same time that the success of the "model minority" threatens the supremacy of the white dominant group, it is supports the power structure that upholds the supremacy of whiteness. This is not only harmful to Asians, but in turn perpetuates racist stereotypes of other minority groups—for example, blaming impoverished black communities for their own socio-political disadvantages rather than a racist system that relies on their subjugation—and therefore further entrenches racial ideologies. Positive representations are part of racialized systems. This is important to remember when thinking about the Mongols as lionized figures of admiration in many of the fourteenth-century romances, and even to some extent in the early travel accounts, particularly that of William of Rubruck. Both negative and positive attributes constitute the construction of racial ideologies: the presence of the latter does not signal the absence of racial formations, but rather their complexities.[8]

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[7] It is also important to remember that racial groups, as social constructions, are more diverse than categories of race allow for. This stereotype given here of the smart and successful Asian doesn't take into account the diversity of Asians, and that Southeast Asians are among some of the most at-risk in terms of educational success, with some of the highest rates of high school dropout in the U.S.

[8] Loomba and Burton make this same case for the early modern period: "The recent critical tendency to claim that racism could not be said to exist in the early modern period because various non-Europeans were also praised and admired at that time is reductive and unhelpful in tracing histories of race. Putatively "positive" as well as clearly "negative" traits feed into racialized discourse—the primordial innocence of Native Americans is as important as the supposed bestiality of Africans; the devotion of 'Oriental wives' is the flip side of the patriarchy of Eastern societies as well as of the deviance of Eastern women; the Ottomans' political and military organization feed the notion of Oriental despotism as much as they do stereotypes of excessive Oriental luxury and carnality" (7).

I offer the term *exotic ally* to capture the particular racial function of Mongols within Latin Christian discourse, with all of the machinations of ideology attached to it. It signifies a racial ideology that the following chapters will contextualize within the particular historical, social, and cultural circumstances that produced and reproduced it from the 1220s to the end of the fourteenth century. My use of the conceptual frame of the "exotic ally" to analyze the racial function of Mongols in Latin European discourse reveals the ontological features and constituent parts of racial ideology, as well as the invisible incoherence of its logic and simultaneous appearance of epistemological stability.

We can understand the Mongol exotic ally as being produced within a "racial project," as Omi and Winant define this concept. They write:

> Race can never be merely a concept or idea, a representation or signification alone. Indeed race cannot be discussed, cannot even be *noticed,* without reference—however explicit or implicit—to social structure. […] We conceive of racial formation processes as occurring through a linkage between structure and signification. Racial projects do both the ideological and the practical 'work' of making these links and articulating the connection between them. A racial project is simultaneously an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial identities and meanings, and an effort to organize and distribute resources (economic, political, cultural) along particular racial lines. (125)

These resources can be epistemological, not just material; and it is my argument that medieval discourse represented Mongol difference with the strategic aim of producing an

epistemology of Latin Christian supremacy. As Omi and Winant also articulate, "race is strategic; race does ideological and political work" (111). Race is not a descriptive category, but a functional one that operates within a hierarchal system to produce and support the supremacy of a dominant subject. The very construction of race occurs through a discursive practice whose point is to render difference legible within an ideological purview that is shaped by dynamics of power.

Medieval race scholarship has focused primarily on the body, examining how skin color, genealogy, and other elements that can be tracked with biological meaning have featured in the practice of differentiating humans. [9] This tendency in the scholarship has developed in part because of the general understanding that race is a category that codifies human groups according to physical characteristics that are essentialized and inscribed with moral value. While early discussions of medieval race foregrounded the body in analyzing the merits of pursuing race as a viable and useful topic for the field, many scholars have demonstrated that when we historicize race and consider its epistemological and structural functions, we understand that its link to physiognomy is unstable and not as fixed as it seems.[10] Racial groups may often *not* share the same physical characteristics, including skin color, even as they take on the appearance and function of essential sameness. As Heng has argued, in the long history of race, difference is essentialized in a variety of ways, "perhaps battening on bodies,

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[9] As Geraldine Heng articulates, major studies of classical and medieval race have "understood race as a body-centered phenomenon: defined by skin color, physiognomy, blood, genealogy, inheritance, etc." (2011, 324). Such studies include the essays included in Thomas Hahn's 2001 JMEMS special issue. Most recently, see Ramey (2014). For a detailed account of other studies, see Heng (2011). While this earlier scholarship on medieval race was body-centered, the field is moving away from this not only because of developments in race theory, but because a body-centered approach obstructs our ability to analyze the complexity of discourses of race, a point emphasized in Loomba and Burton (2007)

[10] This is a prevailing understanding in race theory, which has been pointed out by several medievalists and early modernists, most notably Geraldine Heng and Ania Loomba.

physiognomy, and somatic attributes in one location; perhaps on social practices, religion, and culture in another; and perhaps a multiplicity of interlocking discourses elsewhere" (325). Thus, race must be analyzed not only at the level at which it becomes visible, but at the level at which its conditions of production are made.

"Exotic Allies: Mongol Alterity and Racial Formation in the Global Middle Ages, 1220-1400" decenters physiognomy and skin color in its analysis of race, not to suggest that the body is insignificant for medieval racial constructions, but to show that somatic difference isn't the only marker of race, nor the most central in the medieval period. In doing so, it moves medieval race studies away from more descriptive analyses of race and directly builds on the work of Geraldine Heng by examining the ideologies and epistemologies that form racial differences, whether they are defined through the body, language, cultural practices, governance, and/or religion.

Heng's *Empire of Magic,* several of the essays in Whitaker's *postmedieval* issue, and Ramey's *Black Legacies*, among others, all show how the body matters even when we acknowledge race as a cultural phenomenon; after all, nature and culture do not constitute the binary opposition they have traditionally signified, but rather emerge through each other. Steven Kruger's *The Spectral Jew*, for example, demonstrates the significance of the Jewish body in the racialization of Jewish religious identity. Christian ideologies of blackness and whiteness, specifically their connection to the mapping of moral degradation and spiritual enlightenment onto human bodies, should not be underemphasized. [11] But even in the absence of color signification or the overt

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[11] Whiteness in the Middle Ages was afforded significant space in Whitaker (2015), which marks an important turn in the field of medieval race, as it introduces the emergence of two important claims: 1) even when bodies of color are absent, racial discourse can still be operative, and 2) our focus needs to include whiteness in analyses of race. These have been established as premises through the work of Claudia

codification of human bodies, racial discourse can be operative. Although skin color does not usually factor into the depiction of Mongols' racial difference, the discourse highlights other physiognomic features, as well as religion, gender, governance, and legal practices, as markers of otherness: Mongols become essentialized within a discourse that both pulls them into the Latin Christian epistemic community and suspends them at a distance—as inferior and threatening, yet malleable and manageable.

On the Global Middle Ages and Contemporary Racism

The Global Middle Ages, as a field of study, has the potential to change the very way we think about the Middle Ages, how we study the past, and how we query the impact of medieval histories on our own modern world. Even when our disciplinary investments and academic pedigrees are in the study of Europe, taking a global perspective pushes us to examine Europe as one part of an interconnected world; to try to collapse our own critical paradigms of Eurocentrism. The aim has seemed to be to uncenter the world in a field that has traditionally focused on Europe, to facilitate a way of seeing the world as pluralistic and free of centers and peripheries. Attempting this, however, poses great risks to the very aims: to present the world as a series of interconnected places in equitable relation to each other, when the vantage point remains, inescapably, Europe, is to pull the world into the European purview with no legibility ouside of that Eurocentric frame.

Rankine and, in Early Modern studies, through the work of Kim Hall; however, they have only just begun to garner acceptance in Medieval Studies.

The subfield of the Global Middle Ages has revealed to us the limitations of Medieval Studies itself, but in doing so it has also presented avenues for changing the paradigms of the larger field. As we think more about the global world beyond Europe, we must rethink the relations of contact and exchange *within* Europe. Our growing body of scholarship on Anglo-Norman, Welsh, and Scottish literary cultures, for example, will both reframe our conception of medieval British literature and offer us critical vocabularies and theoretical frameworks for reading cross-cultural relations beyond Britain.

Thinking globally necessarily upends our conception of time and space. When we take a global perspective in our study of the temporal and geographic designation of the European Middle Ages, we necessarily aim to decenter Europe in its relation to the rest of the world – to the Middle East, Asia, Africa, the Americas. As the Global Middle Ages asks us to decenter particular geographies, it also shifts the relationship of the medieval to modernity. As Geraldine Heng and Lynn Ramey have pointed out, Song China was burning coal in the eleventh century, 700 years before the Industrial Revolution in Great Britain (Heng and Ramey 2014). Thinking globally is to circulate across and through disparate geographies, bringing various places into conversation with one another, as much as it is to travel across and through time, disrupting teleologies and the hard and crude borders between the medieval and the modern.

This border of time has posed persistent barriers to the study of race in the Middle Ages, and it seems perhaps no coincidence that a growing interest in medieval race – and its gradual acceptance in the field – has coincided with the development of a Global Medieval Studies. If the global engenders a critical lens of temporal circuity, where the

linear time of medieval to modern no longer holds stable, then any case made for the

anachronism of medieval race must also no longer hold. But while medieval race

criticism and the global as a methodology of study for early contact histories have arisen

contemporaneously, they have not always been placed within the same critical discourse.

The contentious debates that plagued early discussions of medieval race criticism

influenced the formation of the Global Middle Ages and continues to hover over the

possibilities of its future direction.

The Global Middle Ages developed out of an earlier subfield of Postcolonial

Medieval Studies and has now become the primary site for the study of cross-cultural

relations in the period.[12] Postcolonial Medieval Studies offered us critical tools for

analyzing early contact histories before its successor arrived as the biggest new subfield.

This earlier criticism drew from theories of postcolonialism to shape its methodologies

and perspectives, but it never quite escaped its tenuous applicability to what is considered

a precolonial medieval world unmarked by the legacies and impacts of colonialism.

Many medievalists posited that the theoretical underpinnings of Postcolonial Studies

were inextricable from twentieth-century politics and could not be adapted for the Middle

Ages. Despite the fact that theory has the capacity to travel and adapt to new

environments, and despite many persuasive counterpoints– such as in the work of Patricia

Clare Ingham, Michelle Warren, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, Geraldine Heng, Nadia Altschul,

and many other medievalists who contributed significantly to this field –postcolonial

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[12] For a thorough overview of Postcolonial Medieval Studies, see Lisa Lampert-Weissig (2010). See Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (2000) for the first extended study of the pairing of postcolonial theory with medieval texts.

medieval studies seemed always vulnerable to objections of anachronism. But the global

has proven incredibly popular to medievalists.

This move from the postcolonial to the global follows a disciplinary turn that

emerged outside of its medieval adoption, from debates within Postcolonial Studies itself

where its scholars have queried the limitations of its analytical frame. One point of

contention has focused on the term: that "postcolonial" may be too suggestive of a new

era where colonialism persists as vestiges of the past and not as contemporary, recurring

experiences of emotional, physical, intellectual, and cultural traumas; it may

inadvertently mask new forms of colonialism, or erase the many places in the world that

did not, and still have not, gained a postcolonial independence. As Postcolonial Studies

faced its own limitations, the global offered a designation not for a multicultural world

engaged in equitable exchange and relations, but a methodological perspective that could

capture the deep extent to which colonialism has impacted governance, education,

language, religion, culture, and institutions across time and disparate geographic spaces.

Even if the global is about uncentering the world, we must remember that it is also

wrapped up in structures of power.

Perhaps it seems puzzling how readily Medieval Studies has embraced the global

when its predecessor was so heavily resisted. They share the same roots and foundational

questions, the same attachments to twentieth-century geopolitics. If one seems unfit for

the study of the medieval period, the other should as well. But that it doesn't pose an

issue for medievalists makes perfect sense because its adoption into the field has not been

dependent on an evolutionary relationship to medieval postcolonialism in the same way

that Global studies in the humanities has emerged from twentieth-century Postcolonial

Studies. Rather, it has offered a disciplinary space for studying the rich medieval histories of cross-cultural networks of economic, intellectual, and artistic exchange while at the same time side-stepping queries of racial politics that the signifier of the postcolonial necessitates.

For Medieval Studies, the concept of the "global" has often operated as a gesture toward multiculturalism without adequate attention to the racial politics that are inherently inflected in the concept's meaning and its implications. It has become a methodology for rebuilding the framework of medieval studies as inclusive of non-European histories and cultures, but its lack of political engagement has in fact merely reoriented the scope of the field's Eurocentrism from one that ignores the rest of the world to one that incorporates that world under the Western gaze, risking a neo-orientalist framework for Medieval Studies. The concept of the global has come to signify the multicultural in Medieval studies for two reasons. First, if the racial ideologies that inhere within global modernity are contingent on the legacies of European colonialism, then they are not to be found within global premodernity, thereby unmooring the term from those ideologies. The second reason, which follows from the first, is the impetus to provide a counter narrative to white supremacist notions of the Middle Ages: if we can present a Middle Ages that is diverse and multicultural, where whiteness does not reign supreme over the rest of the world, then we can disrupt the idea that the Middle Ages is a heritage site for whiteness.

While it is certainly true that the Middle Ages was diverse and interconnected in ways that white supremacists would be loath to acknowledge, and while it is certainly crucial that we reveal this medieval past to fight back against those who have

appropriated medieval histories for hateful means, we must also attend to the racial

hierarchies and discourses of race that did circulate in the Middle Ages. The racial

politics of the "global" in the Global Middle Ages merits scholarly attention. As the field

gains a position of prominence in Medieval Studies, it is important that we remember its

indebtedness to postcolonialism and consider what the global has the capacity to leave

behind if we are *not* mindful of this critical genealogy. Race was integral to the

theoretical framework of postcolonial medieval studies, and it should remain so as we

continue to study early histories of cross-cultural contact and exchange, even as we aim

to uncenter the world with the expanded methodologies that the global offers us for these

studies.

A large body of medieval scholarship explores otherness and "others" in the

middle ages, yet does not use the term "race" to describe the alterity under examination.

"Other" is not a neutral term that exists without reference to the inferiority and exclusion

of that which it names. Yet, this term is often employed as a neutral signifier for non-

Europeans, non-Christians, in the Middle Ages – even when the centering of those non-

European and non-Christian groups is the stated aim.[13] As Heng has urged, using the term

"race" itself is important, for it

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[13] The controversy around the 2017 Leeds conference is a good example of the relation between intellectual
and professional discourse. The theme of "Otherness" tried to foster rising the field's rising interest in
medieval global relations and perspectives, but the CFP omitted "race" from its description, none of the
panels featured the topic of race, and nearly none of the paper titles used the term either. This omission
suggests a lingering resistance to medieval race even if arguments about its anachronism are being
sidelined. But it should go without saying that we can't study "otherness" without attending to the power
structures that construct otherness in the first place. It is precisely "race" that affords us a term for the
dynamics of power that arise through global contact with peoples and places different from what is
considered the norm (that is, Christian and European, in Medieval Studies). The guise of neutrality that
often falls on the term "otherness" in our intellectual discourse effectively normalizes a racial hierarchy --
who is considered an insider and who is a perpetual outsider. From whose perspective are we viewing the
world and its inhabitants? This intellectual discourse carries into our professional discourse, manifested
most clearly in the controversial joke made at the highly publicized Leeds plenary session. It showed us
how a lack of racial discourse within global medieval studies could extend to a lack of racial sensitivity

bear[s] witness to important strategic, epistemological, and political

commitments not adequately served by the invocations of categories of

greater generality (such as 'otherness' or 'difference') […]. Not to use the

term race would be to sustain the reproduction of a certain kind of past,

while keeping the door shut to tools, analyses, and resources that can name

the past differently. […] the refusal of race de-stigmatizes the impacts and

consequences of certain laws, acts, practices, and institutions in the

medieval period, so that we cannot name them for what they are, nor can

we bear adequate witness to the full meaning of the manifestations and

phenomena they install. (322)

By refusing the term race, we restrict the scope of our interpretative lens. While the

particular phenomena that have produced theories of race have indeed largely been

modern, such theories help us understand phenomena well beyond the range of their

original production. Racial differentiation in the medieval period was not primarily

articulated through skin color or other physiognomic features, but we must remember that

even in our contemporary period racil ideologies do not always focus on the body:

language, custom, religion—non-physical markers of difference—also articulate race.

Studying race across time is a comparative method that, as Loomba (2009) has eloquently

shown, reveals deeper complexities of race in our own time, which may otherwise remain

hidden. The study of racial histories helps us to understand how power is made and

sustained through the uneven organization of human beings. When we cordon the Middle

Ages off from histories of race and racism, we push it into a realm outside of history,

among colleagues.

marking it as a fantasy space that can become anything to anyone, potentially opening up to modern and contemporary ideologies invested in narratives of white heritage and supremacy. [14]

Etienne Balibar's 1991 article, "Is There a 'Neo-Racism'?" asks, as the title suggests, whether racism has become something new in a "colorblind" society. He focuses on France, but his observations and argument are relevant beyond just modern-day France. Neo-racism, according to Balibar, is not predicated on biological heredity, but is instead based on "the insurmountability of cultural differences"; it appears on the surface to not make claims of hierarchies among those differences, but at the same time it makes clear that those differences are incompatible for mixture. While specifically interested in modern race (in a postcolonial context), Balibar's discussion brings much to bear on our understanding of race in the Middle Ages, as he shows just how important it is to think about race as a network of intersecting classifications of difference that reside in cultural, not merely biological, constructions.

When we speak of "others" in the Middle Ages, we are already speaking of race, for "others" only become "others" when a discursive power structure processes difference into otherness and thus makes it function in relation to a dominant subject. But if we speak of others *without* speaking of race, then we normalize an inferior position for the non-European world – whether we intend to or not. Ultimately, if we present a diverse world as multicultural without a concomitant reflection on the construction of

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[14] From Heng (2011): "fictionalized as a politically unintelligible time, because it lacks the signifying apparatus expressive of, and witnessing, modernity, medieval time is then absolved of the errors and atrocities of the modern, while its own errors and atrocities are shunted aside as essentially non-significative, without modern meaning, because occuring outside the conditions structuring intelligible discourse on, and participation in, modernity and its cultures" (320). See Bruce Holsinger (2007) and Helen Young (2013, 2015) on the appropriation of the medieval period in the contemporary period.

racialized power structures, we may inadvertently overlook the insidious ways in which racism can persist in the shadows. We risk presenting the diversity of the world as only legible within the purview of Europe, thus reinforcing its centrality. Global perspectives can in fact engender a kind of colonialism that is epistemological. In doing global medieval scholarship, there is an imperative to not replace a heritage site for white supremacists with a paradigm that carves out supremacy within a global world. This dissertation conceives of a Global Middle Ages that is not "colorblind," the kind of racism that thrives under the guise of multiculturalism (Bonilla-Silva 2013). It takes the global as both a lens for seeing racial inequities and a way toward, but not in itself indicative of, an interconnected world of mutual and multicultural equality.

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CHAPTER 1

"IN EXTREMO ORIENTE":

CHINGGIS KHAN AND THE LEGEND OF PRESTER JOHN

* * *

At the turn of the thirteenth century, the Mongol warrior Temujin, or Chinggis Khan,[15]

united the nomadic tribes of the Steppe region in Central Asia, including the Mongol,

Tatar, Merkid, Naiman, Kereyid, and Oyirad tribes. Together they formed an allied army

that over a few decades would build the largest contiguous land empire in history. At the

time of Chinggis's death in 1227, the Mongol Empire spanned from the Pacific Ocean in

the East to the Caspian Sea in the West; it reached from the Yellow River up to the

Siberian forest and Lake Baikal across Central Asia and down to the banks of the Indus

River. By 1241, Chinggis Khan's grandson Batu expanded the westernmost part of the

empire past the Caspian Sea into the Northern regions of the Black Sea and then into

Poland and Hungary, founding what is known as the Golden Horde, or the Kipchak

Khanate. In 1258, his other grandson Hulegu established the Il Khanate of Persia after

killing the Caliph of Bagdad. And by 1271 Kubilai Khan, another grandson of Chinggis,

had ousted the Jin Dynasty in Cathay (Northern China) and established the Mongol Yuan

Dynasty, which, by 1279 reigned over all of China when Kubilai's forces also conquered

the Song Dynasty in the South; Khanbaliq (modern-day Beijing) became the imperial

capital, which Marco Polo famously visited and wrote about in 1298. By the end of the

thirteenth century, the unified empire that Chinggis Khan had forged and expanded

across an entire continent had dissolved into individual khanates separated by geographic

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[15] Also known as Genghis Khan

distance, political policies, and religion. But the extent of their power for nearly a century effected lasting global influence.

Studies of medieval Europe often exclude Mongols from consideration, perhaps because the western-most borders of their empire only reached Hungary and Poland, and eastern Europe is itself often peripheral in the scholarship of the European Middle Ages.[16] As more interest emerges in early global contact histories, however, so too should interest in the Mongol empire increase. The extensive reach of the Mongols, and the way in which they integrated with the societies that fell under their dominion, effected lasting cultural influences in China, Central Asia, the Middle East, India, and Europe. Mongols facilitated intercultural exchange among Muslim, Christian, and Chinese artistic traditions. Phags-pa script, the written language commissioned by Kubilai Khan that incorporated Tibetan and Chinese scripts, is depicted in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Latin European art (Mack 2002). Within the world of the European Middle Ages, religion was often the primary marker of difference. Jewish, Christian, and Muslim religious differences were central to its socio-political structures and formation of communities. But religion did not constitute a main vector of difference between the Mongols and other medieval societies because they themselves were religiously diverse and indifferent to the conversion of those whom they conquered.[17] Originating as a

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[16] For a thorough discussion of the conventional mapping of medieval Europe in Medieval Studies, as well as an exemplum for its restructuring, see Wallace (2016). This work opens up the borders of Europe in the Middle Ages and rethinks the relations between what we think of as Europe and geographies that have occupied more marginal spaces in the scholarship. Of note is the limits of the volumes' scope; Wallace notes in his general introduction: "If there were to be an 83rd locale in this project, it would be, by way of recognizing the Mongol culture that so galvanized the European imaginary, Samarkand. But then there would be no reason not to consider those cultures of the greater Eurasian landmass reaching the Mongols from the east. Rather than despair at such infinite extension we might simply acknowledge, again, that the limits of Europe, endlessly negotiated, never can be securely known" (xxix).
[17] See Jackson (2005)

consolidation of several tribes, the Mongol Empire was diverse in language, religion, and cultural practices. Shamanism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam were all at one time or another practiced among them; Karakorum, the central capital, held various religious houses from temples to churches and mosques. Forced conversion was not part of Mongol policy, and peoples who came under their rule were left to openly practice as they wished. Conversion wasn't a prerequisite in cross-faith marriages either, and Mongol rulers often had wives of several different faiths. Among their top ranks were Nestorian Christians, Muslims, and Buddhists. Khans would sometimes use religious affiliation and conversion as strategies of political diplomacy because they understood how significant religion was to other medieval societies; however, theirs was a multi-religious one.[18]

The author of one of their most important world histories, Rashid al-din, was a Muslim Persian who had converted from Judaism (Thackston 1998-99).[19] He began writing his history before the Ilkhanid Mongols of Persia had completed their mass conversion to Islam, but he transformed the Mongols into a monofaith people in an attempt to more closely align them with Persian Muslims. In effect, his historiography sets them up for Islamic conversion. This example illustrates how, despite the Mongols' own attitudes towards religion, religion played a large role in how other medieval societies engaged with them and understood their relationship to one another. When Latin Christendom first encountered the Mongols, Christianity was a primary factor in how they were positioned within its epistemic community.[20] Drawing on familiar narratives to

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[18] For an overview of the history of the Mongols, see Jackson (2005)

[19]See also Akasoy (2013).

[20] For more on the term "epistemic community" and the stranger within it, see Ahmed (2000).

place the Mongols, they turned to the legend of Prester John, who reflects crusade

ideology's most romantic manifestation.[21] Prester John, a fictional priest-king from an

imagined far eastern and luxurious kingdom, symbolized eastern grandeur and mystery,

as well as crusader heroism and global Christian dominance. When Latin Christians first

encountered reports of Chinggis Khan sweeping through Central Asia in the early 1220s,

during the Fifth Crusade (1217-1221), they transformed him into a Prester John figure

who would save them from their Muslim enemies in Egypt.

The link between Prester John and the Mongols persisted from this historical

moment throughout the Middle Ages, even as new geopolitical events engendered new

narratives that were folded into the construction of the Mongol race. I begin with the

Prester John legend, rather than where chapter two will take us (to the first moments of

encounter) because doing so allows us to see both the place of the literary imaginary

within racial formations and the ideological processes of those formations. That is,

locating the Fifth Crusade, rather than the missionary encounters of the 1240s, as the

origin point for the representation of Mongols in medieval Europe reveals the imbricated

relations of literary invention, geopolitical ideologies, and racial formation.

It is also important to unravel the significance of Prester John within the

production of the Mongols as a racial group in order to elucidate the connection to

medieval England. As chapter four will explore in depth, Prester John was an important

figure in the conception of England as a global power, and the racialized historicity of the

Mongols becomes an important engine within the epistemology that draws them together.

This link is perhaps best articulated in the early years of the fifteenth century at the

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[21] For more an overview of the legend of Prester John, see Slessarev (1959) and Silverberg (1972).

Council of Constance. The Council of Constance (1414-1418) brought together the

nations of Latin Christendom to resolve the schism that had divided Europe between

Avignon and Rome from 1378. Each nation would vote for a pope who could unite the

Latin church once again. In a dispute over whether England could rightfully claim the

status of a nation, spurred by the French cardinal Peter d'Ailly, the Council records reveal

a puzzling claim of English control over extensive global territory, including mention of

the two Indias governed by Prester John and nine kingdoms of the great empire of the

Mongols.[22] As David Wallace has eloquently observed, "English claims to territorial

jurisdiction are fantastical" (672). Not only do the territories being claimed include those

that are fantastical, but as Wallace says here, it is also fantastical that England could have

held such global power. Wallace notes that the territories assigned to England, as

recorded by the German chronicler of the Council Ulrich Richental, "read like a litany of

mockery. […] Perhaps an attempt by Richental, and his informants, to capture the enigma

of England, a nation of marginal and delimited territory that somehow extends its

influence." Chapter four will show, just as Wallace suggests here, that it is precisely

England's marginality and association with Prester John and the Mongols that enables

The Book of John Mandeville to envision a nation of global power. Worth noting here is

that it was in 1356, the same year as the composition of *Mandeville*, that England

captured and imprisoned the king of France, at which, Wallace notes, Petrarch expressed

amazement. *Mandeville* and the Council of Constance both reveal an investment in or

attitude toward, respectfully, the production of England's global significance by way of

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[22] Wallace (2014); see page 671-3

fantasies of a harnessable east, particularly articulated through the interlocution between Prester John and the Mongols.

In Thomas Polton's formal response on behalf of England, he contravenes the fantastical claims about England, yet they remain of interest here. He argues that the English nation is constituted by eight kingdoms and many languages that are not understood by each other: "the Gallic nation speaks in the main one language...the renowned nation of England or Britain includes within and under itself five languages or nations, no one of which is understood by the rest, namely English, which the English and Scottish share alike, Welsh, Irish Gascon, and Cornish" (Wallace 2016, 673). The English claim to nationhood—and enfranchisement within the international administration of the Council—rests on multilingualism and its attendant diversity of culture. What constitutes England's nationhood is not homogeneity, or similarity, but rather difference. The link to Prester John and the Mongols gives us some insight, and perhaps a heuristic, for understanding the particular machinations by which difference and heterogeneity may work within the self-constitution of English nationhood.

Certainly, the material culture of medieval England suggests a circulating connection between the Mongols and Prester John, particularly in relation to fantasies of a global England. British Library, Royal MS 13 A XIV (c. 1300), includes the *Letter of Prester John* and John of Plano Carpini's *Historia Mongalorum* (discussed in chapter two), as well as Gerald of Wales's *Topographia Hiberniae* and *Expugnatio Hibernica,* and verses on the martyrdom of Thomas Beckett. The compilation reveals links between Mongols, fantasies of global Christendom, ethnographic knowledge, English conquest, and the relation between history and romance. As such, this codex serves as a material

witness to the overarching claims woven throughout this dissertation, and points as well to the early modern afterlife of the Mongol exotic ally within English literary culture: BL Royal MS 13 A XIV became part of Lord Lumley's Library, in which Richard Hakluyt found it and whereby it became the source text for his edition of the *Historia Mongalorum* in *Principal Navigations* (1598), a colonialist project that was influential in England's colonization of North America.

<div align="center">***</div>

Prester John was a central figure within crusade ideology as early as the mid-twelfth century. The earliest extant record of Prester John is Otto of Freising's *Historia de Duabus Civitatibus* (*The History of Two Cities*), in which Otto recounts the November 1145 meeting between Bishop Hugh of Jabala and Pope Eugenius III in Viterbo. Hugh had traveled to Viterbo as an emissary from the crusader state of Antioch to enlist military aid from the pope because their control in the Levant was faltering after the crusader stronghold of Edessa had been taken by General Imad ad-din Zengi's Muslim forces in 1144. According to Otto, Hugh told the pope about a priest-king named John, a Nestorian Christian who lived beyond Persia and Armenia in the furthest regions of the east:

> Iohannes quidam, qui ultra Persidem et Armeniam in extremo oriente
> habitans rex et sacerdos cum gente sua Christianus est, sed Nestorianus.
> (Brewer 2015, 43)

[A certain John, king and priest, who lives beyond Persia and Armenia in the farthest east is, along with his people, a Christian, but Nestorian.][23] Prester John lives in a mythical space far removed from, and yet still in contact with, the Latin Christian world. While *ultra* can be translated as *beyond*, *past*, or *across*, it can also hold the connotation of being "neither on that side nor on this," a meaning that invites readers to locate Prester John in a *beyond* space that is both determinable and undeterminable at once.[24] Further, the use of *ultra* as well as the adjective *extremus* [or farthest] effects a double displacement of Prester John into this liminal land *beyond*. He is not only beyond Persia and Armenia, regions constituting the eastern borders of Latin Christendom's global purview; he is also in the outermost, final possible place in that eastern, beyond space. Yet despite this extreme geographic distance, he aims to engage in Latin Christian affairs and help the crusaders fight the Muslims for control over Jerusalem.

As related by Otto, Hugh told the pope how Prester John had tried to cross the Tigris in order to help the Christian crusaders in Jerusalem. Not able to cross the river, he led his army north, where he waited several years for the water to ice over, but when that never happened, he finally returned home. Hugh's story about Prester John was likely a strategy to dispel rumors that the priest-king would help the distressed crusaders (Silverberg 1972). He perhaps wanted to emphasize to the pope that if such help was on its way before, it was no longer the case since Prester John had returned home: help needed to come from Europe. Hugh received the help he sought in what became the

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[23] All Latin quotations are taken from Brewer's 2015 edition, which is based largely on Zarncke (1879). All translations are mine except when noted otherwise.
[24] See Perseus online Latin dictionary for "ultra"

Second Crusade (1145-49), but it was ultimately a failure. Hugh's use of Prester John as a stratagem for inspiring crusade fervor suggests that rumors about the priest-king were already in circulation even if it were something of which Hugh was skeptical.

Prester John became one of the most famous legends of the Middle Ages after a mysterious letter began to circulate in 1165. This letter, known as the *Letter of Prester John* was purportedly authored by the priest-king and sent to the Byzantine Emperor, Manuel Comnenus (1143-1180) in Constantinople.[25] While we now know that this letter was a masterful piece of literary fantasy, it was believed to be real at the time and was used as evidence for the priest-king's existence. It was copied, translated, and embellished so many times that there are over 250 manuscripts still extant.[26] In the letter, Prester John characterizes himself as a fierce Christian ruler who could rescue the beleaguered Levantine crusader states from the Muslim infidels. He references himself as "lord of lords," as "surpassing everything under the heavens in virtue and power."[27] He

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[25] See Slessarev (1959). Chronicler Alberic de Trois Fontaines, who wrote between 1232-1252, recorded its arrival in Europe under the year 1165. Slessarev quotes Alberic as saying that the letter was sent "to various Christian kings and especially to the Emperor Manuel of Constantinople and the Roman Emperor Frederick" (33). Some introductory notes in early manuscripts of the letter note that Manuel forwarded the letter to Frederick I Barbarossa (1152-1190). There is also a reply letter written by Pope Alexander III (1159-1181) to the "King of India," dated September 27, 1177. According to Zsuzsanna Papp (2005): "In his copy of Wendover's *Flores Historiarum*, a colourful crown is drawn in the margin of an 1181 letter from Pope Alexander III to the "King of India" and the rubric Nota de Johanne presbytero rege Indiae scribbled in Matthew Paris's hand next to it" (234). Alexander's letter is usually used to date the Prester John letter.

[26] There are over 250 extant manuscripts of the letter in various languages, including Latin, Anglo-Norman, Hebrew, German, Welsh, Irish, Scottish, Italian, and French. First known vernacular was in Anglo-Norman around 1192 (this English connection is worth noting: at the Council of Constance 1414-18, England is given the realm of Prester John). No extant manuscripts before the 13th century, but we know that it was sent in the latter half of the 12th century. Usually dated to 1165. It grew longer and embellished more as it passed through the hands of hundreds of scribes and translators. For example, techniques of pepper production were added to some later versions. Friedrich Zarncke's critical edition from 1879 is still the most authoritative of the Latin letters. He studied all of the nearly 100 mss of the letter in Latin, which all subsequent work on the letter (including that of Brewer) still draws upon. One of the most significant contributions that Zarncke's study made was identifying five interpolations that were made to the original Latin letter. See also Uebel (2005), pages 155-60.

[27] See *Epistola Presbiteri Iohannis* [*Letter of Prester John*] in Keagan (2015), pages 46-66.

remarks that he is so powerful that seventy-two kings serve him as tributaries and, under him, defend Christians in need. The point in the letter that offers the most hope to crusaders is Prester John's vow to visit the "Sepulchre of the Lord with a very great army in order to humble and defeat the enemies of the cross of Christ and exalt his blessed name." He speaks of having ten thousand mounted soldiers and one hundred thousand foot soldiers, a huge army that could defeat any enemy.

The letter expresses an interest in Christian unity that is ultimately effected by the absorption of all Christians into Latin Christendom.[28] While it is addressed to the Byzantine emperor in Constantinople and Prester John does not describe himself as either Latin or Byzantine Christian, nor is there mention of the Trinity, it is written in Latin and speaks of aiding Latin crusaders.[29] Further, the Nestorian identity of Prester John reflected in Otto's account, is removed in the *Letter*. Otto had qualified the particular Christian identity of Prester John with the conjunction *sed* [but]: "Christianus […] *sed* Nestorianus. [Christian, […] but Nestorian]." He is Christian, but not Latin Christian. Nestorianism was considered a heresy in the Latin Church: it was Christian, but a Christian heresy. In Otto's account, even though Latin Christians and Prester John were religious kin, they were fundamentally different. In the *Letter*, this difference no longer exists. Instead, it is replaced by an unmarked Christian identity that invisibly associates itself with a Latin one. The *Letter* demonstrates how Prester John could function as an agent of consolidation for Latin Christendom: that is, he represented a unification of

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[28] It is worth mentioning that a Christian unity from the perspective of a Latin Christian author would likely mean that Byzantines are just incorporated into Latin Christendom. For evidence of this conjecture, we may look to the politics that informed the Siege of Constantinople in 1204.

[29] Scholars have debated whether it originated in Greek and then was translated into Latin, but the consensus is that it originated in Latin, as there is no evidence of a Greek version; no mss in Greek. There are at least 100 mss in Latin.

Christendom's global diversity under the supremacy of Latin Christianity. He can

produce a global Christendom.

This conception of an orientalized Christendom as an agent for the expansion and

dominance of the Latin Christian domain is also reflected in Roger of Wendover's

abbreviated version of Pope Alexander's response to Prester John. In the *Flores*

Historiarum, under the year 1181, Roger of Wendover (d. 1236) distills the letter to a

central message about how Pope Alexander is eager to help Prester John achieve his

desire to learn the true doctrine of the Latin faith and be brought into their fold.[30] He

expresses delight in learning that Prester John wants to build a church in Jerusalem where

his people will remain and continue to learn more about the Latin doctrine. Wendover's

distillation of what is a much longer letter captures how crusade ideology relied on the

image of the far east—"ultra," "in extremo oriente"—that was desirous of entering the

fold of Latin Christendom and eager to play an important role in crusader success.

Prester John's prominence within crusade ideology led to his presence in the

discourse of the Fifth Crusade (1217-1221), a position that would ultimately enroll the

Mongols into the Latin Christian epistemic community as Christian allies against Islam.[31]

The Mongols were still unknown to Latin Christendom during this crusade, so when

news of their hostile moves against Muslims in the region reached Damietta, crusade

leaders contextualized these reports through a prevailing perception of the non-Muslim

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[30] See pages 316-317 in Luard (1874). Roger of Wendover's *Flores Historiarum* constitutes the first part of Matthew Paris's *Chronica Majora*, both composed at St. Albans.

[31] The fifth crusade, located in the Nile Delta and Damietta, is the backdrop of Chinggis Khan's introduction into European consciousness. The crusade targeted Egypt rather than Jerusalem because its leaders believed the only way to recover Jerusalem was to diminish Islamic power in Egypt. This was the tactic in the fourth crusade of 1202-4 and the seventh crusade of 1248-54, which is right before Hulegu takes over Persia and loses Syria to the Mamluks, as discussed in Chapter three.

east as housing potential allies for their holy war. Chinggis Khan was represented as Prester John (or his descendent) on his way to aid the crusaders. The letters of Jacques de Vitry, and other prominent leaders of the crusade, demonstrate how the Mongols became absorbed into a narrative of crusade ideology before anyone even knew who they were or what the motivations were behind their military advancements.

On the eve of the crusade's launch, in March 1217, Jacques sent a letter to several ecclesiastics in which he expresses a longing for the approaching crusade. [32] Forlorn that the "pilgrims [*peregrinorum*]" had not yet arrived, he imagines a great army of four thousand men that would be impossible for the Muslims to defeat (Brewer 2015, 98).[33] In Jacques's fantasy, this army consists of not only the crusaders coming across the sea from Europe, but also of Christians living within and nearby Muslim lands, and even some Muslims themselves. He comments on the discord and divisions among the Muslims because of their many and various sects, as well as what he deems an awareness, among some, of their own heathenism. This lack of unity and constancy of faith that Jacques ascribes to the Muslims diminishes their strength as military opponents, but it also suggests that there are allies to be found among them; this is particularly apparent when he remarks that those who know "their error for certain" would readily convert to Christianity with the right amount of courage and help from Christians.

Jacques identifies a similar interest in both conversion and alliance among the Christians living in these eastern regions. He describes these non-Latin Christians as the

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[32] Pope Innocent III began preparations for the Fifth Crusade in April 1213, in his papal bull *Quia Maior*. After his death in 1216, Pope Honorius III continued with the crusade, which focused its efforts in Egypt. For background on the fifth crusade, see Mylod, Perry, Smith (2017).

[33] Jacques de Vitry, *Epistola II*, in Brewer (2015). *Prester John: The Legend and its Sources*. Surrey: Ashgate, 2015. For manuscript history of Jacques's letters, see Huygens (2000).

Syrians, whom he says resemble the Greeks and whose priests have been known to convert Muslims; the Nestorians; the Jacobites; and the Maronites. These Christians, he notes, are deemed to be so in name only: "christiano nomine censentur." They have greatly erred in Latin doctrine, but they, like the Muslims, would convert once they heard the "sanam doctrinam [sensible doctrine]." Despite sharing the Christian faith in name, they are definitively different, and placed closer to the convertible Muslims than to the Latin Christians. Their significance in Jacques's letter, and what sets them apart from the non-converting Muslims, is their role as military allies: he writes that they, upon "hearing of the arrival of the crusaders [*crucesignatorum*], would come to their help and go to war with the Saracens."

Jacques's powerful coalition of heretical Christians and non-faithful Muslims is specifically formed through the ideological power of the Prester John legend. Jacques describes the heretical Christians as "living in the eastern regions up to [*usque*] the land of Prester John." Brewer's translation here of *usque* as "up to" seems to suggest that Jacques only means to include the Christians in the lands bordering, but not including, that of Prester John as potential allies for their crusade. But *usque* also has the sense of continuity and thus Jacques invites his readers to imagine the Christians "living in regions of the east [habitantes in partibus Orientis]" as conjoined with the famous Prester John.[34] He affirms this inclusion of John when he later gives more details about the particular Christian heresies practiced in these lands and describes Prester John's people alongside them: "all those who live in the land of Prester John had recently become

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[34] "Multi autem reges christiani habitantes in partibus Orientis usque in terram presbyteri Iohannis, audientes adventum crucesignatorum, ut eis veniant in auxilium movent guerram cum Sarracenis" (Brewer 2015, 98).

Jacobites, who only say there is one nature in Christ and one will as though he was one person" (98). The cartographic continuity between the heretical Christians of the east and the land of Prester John confers them all with the crusading zeal, military might, and religious piety that characterized the priest-king. Within Jacques's crusade ideology, they become valuable allies for the soon to arrive *crucesignati*. The imagined east's conversion and alliance are two intertwining concepts in Jacques's fantasy of a successful crusade. He ends his letter with a prayer that the Lord "condescend to illuminate the darkness of that east [istis Orientales tenebras illuminare dignetur]," a final note that is as much about conversion as it is about the military defeat of those who refuse to convert. Jacques prays for the illumination of the east so that its potent ferocity may be mobilized for Latin Christendom's holy war. His letter's closing prayer captures crusade ideology's integration of spiritual salvation and brutal destruction, and it points to the function of the east within that ideology.

Later in 1217, the crusaders launched their attack on Egypt and eventually took control of Damietta in November 1219. Soon thereafter, in 1220, they heard news about a Christian king from the east who was on his way to support their campaign. They believed this warrior-king to be a descendent of Prester John, and in some accounts he is said to have been called Prester John by his people.[35] In reality, the leader from the east to whom these reports referred was Chinggis Khan, whose incursions into Central Asia and Iran had nothing to do with the crusaders in Egypt, nor did he intend to offer them aid. In 1218, Chinggis Khan and his armies took over the territories of the Khara Khitai and became the direct neighbors of the Muslim empire of Khwarezm, ruled by Ali ad-

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[35] In Oliver of Paderborn's chronicle, *Historia Damiatina*, King David is the son of Prester John; and in Pope Honorius III's March 13, 1221 letter to Theodoric, David is known as Prester John by his people.

Din, Muhammad II. Khwarezm controlled Samarkand and Bukhara, the most important

trade routes for the global mercantile economy.[36] Samarkand was the Khwarezm capital

and has a long history as an important trade city. It was the center for the major land

routes north of India, east of the Black Sea, and west of China.[37] Bukhara was its sister

city. As Abu-Lughod writes, they were "connected by a 'royal road' that allowed

travelers to bridge the distance between them in 6-7 days (Barthold, 1928: 96)" (180).[38]

Chinggis intended to capitalize on his new territory's proximity to Samarkand and

Bukhara through peaceful relations with his neighboring ruler. He sent ambassadors to

Ali ad-Din and the two leaders signed a commercial trade treaty. This ambition for peace

quickly changed, however, when a Khwarezmian governor betrayed the treaty. He

suspected Mongol merchants of acting as spies in service of the Caliph of Baghdad, an

enemy of Khwarezm, so he ordered an attack against the first Mongol caravan in which

all the Mongol merchants were murdered. Perhaps Chinggis would have pardoned the

affront had Ali ad-Din condemned the actions of his governor; however, when two

Mongol soldiers and an ambassador arrived in Samarkand to demand punishment against

the governor, Ali ad-Din had them all executed. His demonstration of support for the

governor and slaughter of the Mongol trade caravan compelled Chinggis to retaliate.

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[36] Abu-Lughod (1989) writes, "Although most points along the caravan route were modest burgs – oases or agricultural settlements for which the periodic arrival of a string of camels was an exciting festival but not their staff of life – a few of the cities located at the crossroads of heavily traveled routes grew to large size, particularly if they occupied fertile sites and also served political or religious functions. Then, permanent trade and industry were likely to appear, stimulated by local demand and supplemented heavily by long-distance trade. Tabriz, along the southerly route, was one such place, as were Balkh, Merv, and other towns along the northerly one. But when one thinks about a trade oasis city par excellence, Samarkand (and to a lesser extent, Bukhara) comes to mind" (178).

[37] See Abu-Lughod (1989), pages 178-9 for more on Samarkand, and specifically for a summary on page 179 of its long history of importance as a global trade center and how control over it passed through many hands over the centuries. Alexander the Great captured it in 329 B.C. The Khara Khitans controlled it in the 12th c. And of course it was Tamerlane's capital in the 14th/15th c. Mongols ruled Samarkand for 145 years – it was a provincial capital and trade center.

[38] See Abu-Lughod (1989), page 180 for more on Bukhara, which Tamerlane made his capital in 1370.

Along with his two highest ranked commanders, Jebe Noyan and Subedei Bahadur, he raised the Mongol army against Ali ad-Din and for nearly two years waged war until they eventually took control of his territories. Chinggis Khan rode triumphantly into Samarkand on March 12, 1220.[39] He also took Bukhara that same year.

Despite the Mongols' disconnection from Latin Christian affairs, their military prowess and success against Muslims in the region thrust them into a prevailing ideology in which the east functioned as a progenitor of allied ferocity and Latin Christian conversion. Chinggis Khan was named "King David" in the crusader reports and, as such, promised to fulfill the fantasy of Jacques's 1217 letter.[40] Although the crusaders waited fruitlessly for him to arrive and their crusade ended in failure, they used him to justify their aims of destroying Islam as divinely ordained as well as foster hope amidst a dwindling campaign. This rhetorical handling of David cemented an epistemological framework for casting Mongols as exotic allies from the east who would usher in a global empire for Latin Christendom through the destruction of Islam.

In a letter dated March 13, 1221 that was sent to Theodoric, Archbishop of Trier (1212-1242), Pope Honorius III outlines a strategy for seizing Egypt that relies upon the aid of King David.[41] According to Honorius, Pelagius (Bishop of Albano, papal legate, and crusade leader) had asked the Georgians to "war against the Saracens from their side" in order to disperse their power away from Egypt. Honorius commands Theodoric to orchestrate a similar tactic in Trier; meanwhile, David would arrive in Damietta to aid the

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[39] For an overview of the history of these Mongol invasions, see Jackson (2005).
[40] The name "King David" is significant, too, because of its biblical allusion to the king of Israel as well as his incorporation into Christian history and theology as one of the nine worthies and significance as a typological prefiguration of Christ.
[41] Pope Honorius III, *Epistola* in Brewer (2015), page 123.

crusaders there and take over all of Egypt. He says that there is a "King David who is commonly called Prester John," and claims him and his military successes for Latin Christendom:

> Vir catholicus et timens deum, in manu potenti Persidem est ingressus et, soldano Persidis bello campestri devicto, terram ejus per XXIIII dietas invadens et occupans, in ea tenet quamplures munitas civitates et castra; tantumque ab illa parte processit, ut non nisi per X dietas distet ejus exercitus a Baldach, maxima et famosissima civitate, que Kalisti, ejus videlicet, quem Sarraceni suum summum sacerdotem vel pontificem appellant, sedes esse dicitur specialis. (Brewer 2015, 123)
>
> [a Catholic and God-fearing man has entered Persia with a mighty force and, having defeated the Sultan of Persia on the battlefield, is invading and occupying 24 days' worth of his land, in which there are a great many fortified cities and castles, and he has proceeded so far from that region that his army is not even ten days distant from Baghdad, that greatest and most famous city which is said to be the special seat of the Caliph, the one whom the Saracens call their highest priest or pontiff.][42]

Honorius relates the impressive strength of David himself, not merely of his army, who in direct combat had defeated the Sultan. His invasion of Persia was so successful that it not only acquired him a great deal of land, cities, and castles; it also enabled him to position himself to conquer the seat of the Caliphate, the seat of Islamic power in the Levant. And, as Honorius notes, David has done all of this as "a Catholic and God-fearing man."

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[42] Translation is Brewer's, page 124.

The conquests and motivations of Chinggis-as-David are recorded in the *Relatio de Davide*, a Latin translation of an Arabic tract thought to have been written by a Christian in Baghdad in 1220 or early 1221.[43] There were several versions of the text, two of which made their way into the hands of Jacques, who copied them both in his letter of April 18, 1221 to Pope Honorius III.[44] The first version closes with a description that characterizes David as a crusader king from the east, as one "who liberates believers from the hands of unbelievers, who is king of kings, who destroys the law of the Saracens, who protects the holy church, [and] who is king of the Orient [qui liberat credentes de minibus incredulorum, qui est rex regum, qui destruit legem Sarracenorum, qui tuetur sanctam ecclesiam, qui est rex Orientis]" (106).[45] In Jacques's introductory comments to the *Relatio* in his April 18, 1221 letter, he emphasizes this characterization, drawing out the ideological purpose of interpreting David—in reality, Chinggis—as the long awaited Prester John. He writes,

> Hic […] rex David, vir potentissimus et in armis miles strenuus, callidus ingenio et victoriosissimus in prelio, quem dominus in diebus nostris suscitavit ut esset malleus paganorum et perfidi Machometi pestifere traditionis et execrabilis legis exterminator, est ille quem vulgus presbyterum Iohannem appellant. […] Quam mirabiliter […] dominus ipsum his diebus promoverit et eius opera magnificaverit, gressus illius dirigens et populous innumeros, gentes, tribus et linguas eius ditioni subiciens, ex transcripto carte subsequentis patebit. (Brewer 2015, 126)

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[43] For more on the relationship between the Mongols and the *Relatio*, see Jean Richard (1996) and David Morgan (1996)

[44] Jacques de Vitry, *Epistola VII* in Brewer (2015), pages 126-129. Brewer's Latin comes from Zarncke.

[45] *Relatio de Davide (Prima Carta)* in Brewer (2015), pages 101-106.

[This King David, a most powerful man and a vigorous knight in arms, skillful by nature, and most victorious in battle, whom the Lord raised in our day to be the hammer of pagans and the exterminator of the pernicious tradition and detestable law of the treacherous Muhammad; he is the man whom the common people call Prester John. […] How marvelously […] the Lord has pushed him forward these days and amplified his acts, directing his steps and subjecting to his dominion countless peoples, races, tribes, and languages, as will be known from the transcript of the following tract.]

Jacques's framing of the *Relatio* underscores David's motives and military successes as being driven by God's will and direction. His power, sourced from both God and his army, is his ability to bring a diverse, non-Christian world under the rule of Latin Christendom. Jacques discusses not merely a defeat of the Ayyubid Muslims in Egypt and Jerusalem, but a subjection of "countless peoples, races, tribes, and languages [populous innumeros, gentes, tribus et linguas]." He imagines that an entire world consisting of various differences along racial and linguistic lines will succumb to the potency of King David, an earthly force propelled by the divine. Like Prester John, *as* Prester John, David has the power to mobilize all the disparate and diverse heretical Christians to form a coalition and ultimately defeat the Muslim enemy.

This mobilizing of a powerful Christian east for the propagation of Latin crusade ideology is reflected in another letter written in 1220 or early 1221 by two German clergymen in Damietta.[46] Their names are abbreviated as W. and R. in the letter and their

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[46] W. and R. *Epistola* in Brewer (2015), pages 118-120.

identities remain unknown, but they address their epistle to their fellow ecclesiastics in

Munster. They relate details about the conquests of King David having occurred "by

means of God's help" and "in the name of our lord Jesus Christ."[47] They also offer visual

evidence of David's crusader allegiance:

> rex David habet secum CC.LV milia, qui non sunt de lege sua, et
>
> C.XXXII milia militum de lege sua probatissimorum. Et deferunt ante se
>
> XL cruces pro vexillis, et post unamquamlibet crucem C milia equites.
>
> (Brewer 2015, 119)
>
> [king David has 255,000 with him, who are not of his law, and 132,000 of
>
> the most highly esteemed knights of his law. And he carries before him
>
> forty crosses in place of banners, and behind each cross 100,000
>
> horsemen.]

This passage goes on to explain that he captured the two greatest kingdoms of Persia as

well as "subdued the Georgians because they held meetings with the Saracens and,

having killed many of them, he made them his subject." As the Mongols moved farther

north and attacked Christian territories such as Georgia, the crusaders made justifications

that enabled them to hold onto the myth that they were Prester John-like saviors. King

David bears the cross instead of a banner, providing visual evidence of his crusader

identity and allegiance to Christianity over all else. This image recalls how crusaders

were understood as militarized pilgrims; indeed, they wore pilgrimage badges with the

cross, garnering them the moniker *crucesignati* when the more general *peregrinati* wasn't

used. David rides in here laden with imagery and a formation that renders his racial

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[47] The former is from version b and the latter is from version c, see Brewer page 118.

difference legible within a specific context of Christian crusader-ness: his difference is pulled into Latin Christendom's domain of control. This passage also emphasizes, within the precise moment of a visual proclamation of David's crusader-ness, his ability to act as an agent himself of this maneuver of consolidating difference into a single domain of control. The great number of servants who are not of his law and that are of his law highlight his power to bring others into the fold with him.

As the exploits of the Mongols buttressed this fantasy of a Christendom-building king from the "orient," they also enabled the crusaders to discursively construct their supremacy over their Muslim enemies. The rumors about David simultaneously inspired confidence in the crusaders and disparaged the Muslim leaders and their armies. In his letter to Theodoric, Honorius uses David to mitigate the vulnerability of the crusaders in Damietta and emphasize the depletion of the Muslim armies. He explains how the Sultan of Aleppo turned his army against King David out of fear:

> cujus timore soldanus Halapie, frater soldanorum Damasci et Babilonie, vires suas, quas preparaverat contra christianum exercitum, qui Damiate consistit, compulsus est contra regum convertere memoratum. (Brewer 2015, 123).
>
> [In fear of [King David], the Sultan of Aleppo, brother of the Sultans of Damascus and Babylon, was compelled to turn his forces, which he had prepared against the Christian army in Damietta, against the aforementioned king.]

Honorius identifies fear as a motivating factor in the Sultan's military movements. Here, the Sultan moves against King David not because of reasoned, thoughtful strategizing,

but because of emotional terror. Any sense of fear that the Latin crusaders may have had

for the Sultan (and indeed, for the historical Chinggis Khan) are quelled and displaced

onto the Sultan toward King David. Honorius's description also emphasizes the Sultan's

weakness when he reminds his reader that he is the brother of two other Sultans: even

with their presumed support, the Sultan of Aleppo is terrified enough of a single king to

alter his war strategy. He takes his army that he had prepared for Damietta and turns it

instead against David. Honorius's letter reveals the rhetorical use of the Prester John

legend to displace Latin Christian fear onto their Muslim enemies in order to assert their

supremacy.

Jacques de Vitry employs this same rhetorical strategy. In his letter from April 18,

1221, he describes the King of Damascus, Coradin, as "withdrawing with great

confusion, many of his men having been killed [cum magna confusione, multis ex suis

interemptis, recessisset]" (126). Both weak in army and in mind, he is no longer a threat

to the crusaders. Jacques later characterizes the Sultan of Egypt similarly, saying that he

became "confounded in soul and confused in mind [consternatus animo et mente

confuses]" after hearing word of King David's "invincible power and marvelous

triumphs [insuperabilem potentiam et mirabiles triumphos]" (127). According to Jacques,

in the Sultan's state of overwhelming terror, he tried frantically to make a truce with the

crusaders, but news about David so strengthened their confidence that they were ready to

go to war. [48] The Sultan's psychic and emotional state, combined with his desperation for

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[48] Leaders of the Fifth Crusade discovered a book of prophecies in Egypt that said two kings, one of the
west and one of the east, would meet in Damietta and destroy Islam forever. This led the crusaders to
believe that Prester John was coming to their aid. The late 1220s chronicle, *Historia Damiatina* by Oliver
of Paderborn talks about the prophecy, the Book of Clement. He and Jacques were both present at the
reading of the prophecies. He says that Pelagius ordered it be read aloud for a large group of crusaders. See

a truce, foster a sense of supremacy among Jacques's readers who are invited to

anticipate the defeat of their enemies.

Jacques's letters also reveal an investment in transforming the rumor into a

corroborated truth, which captures the process by which narratives produce and

perpetuate ideologies. Jacques says that he and his companions have translated the two

tracts of the *Relatio* from the Arabic to the Latin with the help of "trustworthy translators

[fideles interpretes]" so that its content may be known to his recipients (127). He goes on

to detail an extensive source list for the rumor in order to secure its credibility for his

readers. He writes:

> He [King David] is only 15 days' journey away from Antioch, hurrying to
>
> come to the promised land to visit the sepulchre of the Lord and rebuild
>
> the holy city. Earlier, however, he proposed, with the Lord allowing it, to
>
> subjugate to the Christian name the land of the Sultan of Iconium, Aleppo,
>
> and Damascus, and all the regions lying in between, so that not even one
>
> adversary would remain behind him. His men coming from those parts
>
> brought copies of the preceding letters [the two versions of the Relatio] to
>
> the Count of Tripoli; also merchants from the eastern parts carrying
>
> various spices and   precious stones brought similar letters; moreover, all
>
> the people coming from these parts say the same thing. (131-2)[49]

Jacques demonstrates an interest in substantiating the veracity of the rumor and ensuring

that it is not seen as mere conjecture, but as truth. He provides an array of direct sources

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Hamilton (2017). For more on how an undercurrent belief in apocalyptic prophecy fueled the Fifth Crusade
and ultimately led to its demise see Brett Whalen (2009).
[49] Translation is Brewer's.

from David's own soldiers, merchants, and everyone who has travelled through those regions. Corroboration also came from the crusaders themselves, whom Jacques goes on to say brought back to Antioch the same information after being captured and released by the Muslim armies. With so many sources, Jacques was able to convince himself of the veracity of the reports that King David was near Antioch and on his way to Jerusalem, and when he conveyed this information to the rest of the crusaders, they were compelled to trust them as well.

These letters and documents of the Fifth Crusade reveal the mechanisms of ideology, whereby the unfamiliar becomes familiar through a prevailing discourse and are presented as truth: Chinggis Khan became King David because the legend of Prester John enabled the crusaders to graft the Mongol incursions onto their existing conceptions of the east: a space of alterity that also housed powerful Christian allies. Chinggis-as-David transported Prester John from the rumors of history into the tangible present of the crusaders. But just as Prester John himself never materialized for earlier generations of crusaders, neither did David show up for Jacques and his brethren in Egypt. Chinggis returned to Karakorum in 1223 and Latin Christendom didn't think much about Mongol affairs until the invasions of Hungary and Poland at the end of the next decade. Once they felt a threat to their own territory, Latin Christians began to revise their conception of the Mongols. Beginning in the late 1230s, Chinggis began to be seen as the usurper of Prester John while retaining a familial connection to him: Chinggis's father's *anda*, or blood brother, was understood to be the real Prester John whom Chinggis killed as he rose to power among the tribes of the Steppe. This new narrative opened the way for a new discourse in which the Mongols became constructed as blood-thirsty barbarians. The

travel writing and chronicle narratives of the next decade were to paint them as

Apocalyptic figures like Gog and Magog: monstrous, inhuman, and cannibalistic. But, as

we will see in the next chapter, the conception of the Mongol-as-Christian ally continued

to persist alongside this new construction of Mongol alterity.

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CHAPTER 2

EUROPEAN VULNERABILITY AND MONGOL MONSTROSITY IN THIRTEENTH-

CENTURY TRAVEL AND HISTORY WRITING

* * *

Romance is often the genre scholars turn to for explorations of race in the medieval

period. Its capacity for the imaginative lends itself to the kind of discursive space

necessary for the making of social constructions. And turning to more historically based

genres, such as historiography or travel writing, often triggers the field's enduring

questions about extending histories of race into the pre-Enlightenment and (what is

thought of as) pre-colonial world of the Middle Ages. As race has been marginalized as

an operative discourse in the period through arguments of historical anachronism,

romance has emerged as the dominant genre for its exploration. Yet, medieval romances

developed out of and in conversation with history writing. For example, the most famous

romance cycle in England is the Arthurian cycle, which begins in Geoffrey of

Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* (History of the Kings of Britain). The

representations and constructions of race that we find in romance arose through and with

historiography. It is often within history writing itself that racial ideologies become

entrenched so that they can be picked up and employed, explored, and played with in

romance. The racial representation of Mongols— the *exotic allies*—that consistently

features in Middle English romances (discussed in the next two chapters) came from how

they were depicted in historically-based writings such as travel narratives and chronicles.

The earliest Latin Christians to write about the Mongols with an awareness that they were not, in fact, the people of a Prester John-like king named David were Franciscan and Dominican missionaries who travelled into Mongol territory in the 1240s and 50s.[50] After the Mongol conquest of Kiev in December 1240, Archbishop Peter of Russia wrote a letter, believed to have been composed between 1241 and 1244, which alerted Latin Christendom to an encroaching Mongol threat.[51] From 1236 to 1241, Batu Khan, Chinggis Khan's grandson, and his famed general Subetei expanded the Mongol empire into northwestern Russia, Poland, and Hungary.[52] They conquered Kiev on December 6, 1240, marched through the Verecke pass into Hungary in March of 1241, and burned Krakow on Palm Sunday that same year. Their momentum diminished, however, after the death of Ogodei Khan in December 1241 when Batu returned to Karakorum, the empire's capital at the time, to elect a new great khan. Although the Mongols retreated from advancing farther west, the leaders of Latin Europe were on high alert, and the Mongol threat became a priority at the Council of Lyons in 1245. At the Council, Pope Innocent IV called upon Peter to read the letter, which prompted his dispatch of several missionaries into Mongol territory to acquire information and learn how best to defend themselves against their armies. From this vantage point of

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[50] Franciscans and Dominicans became trusted messengers of the papacy and of secular rulers. From 1234, they were employed to preach for the crusades against Muslims. And they were afforded the same absolution of sin as the crusaders themselves. Louis IX chose Friars to be the ones to investigate royal corruption.

[51] The letter is in: 1) *Annales Burtinenses* (Pauli 1885, 27:474-5), (also *Annales de Burton* (Luard 1864, 1:271-75)); and 2) Matthew Paris, (Luard 1877, 4:386-89). Matthew assigns the letter to 1244, the *Annales* to 1245. The letter is only extant in these chronicles, not independently. See Papp (2005), page 12. See also Jackson (2016).

[52] The *Chronica Majora* is the primary English source for these events, but there are also accounts of the invasions in other contemporary English chronicles such as the Waverley Annals, the Tewkesbury Annals, and the Burton Annals; see Papp (2005). For more on Latin Europe's early encounters with the Mongols, see Denis Sinor (1999); Jacques Paviot (2000); and Peter Jackson (2005).

vulnerability and fear—and with a motive of acquiring ethnographic knowledge—these travelers' writings produced an epistemology of power precisely by constructing a discourse of race in which the Mongols function to both assert and sustain Latin Christian supremacy.

The account of John of Plano Carpini, a Franciscan friar, was the most widely known of these early missionary reports largely because it was used as a source for Vincent of Beauvais's *Speculum Historiale* (c. 1260), a universal history of incredible influence in the late medieval period.[53] Carpini was one of the leaders of Innocent IV's papal missions, for which he departed from Lyons in April of 1245. By way of Kiev, he travelled first to the camp of Khan Batu, which he reached the following April. With Batu's permission, he proceeded on to Syra Orda, the imperial camp right outside the Mongol capital of Karakorum, where he witnessed the election of the Great Khan Guyuk in July of 1246. He composed a report outlining the information he had acquired about the Mongols during his travels, known as the *Historia Mongalorum*, in 1247 or 1248; and as he made his return journey, he and his companions lectured at various monasteries about their experience.[54] Notes from one of these lectures is thought to constitute *The Tartar Relation*, attributed to C. de Bridia. [55] Dominican Friar Simon of St. Quentin was

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[53] The *Speculum Historiale* was a source of *The Book of John Mandeville*, which echoes parts of Carpini's account, notably when he discusses the depravity of Tartary's geological terrain and the eating habits of the Grand Khan. This textual genealogy is a good example of how historical writing shaped imaginative literature a hundred years later: this is especially noteworthy in a text like *Mandeville* which presented itself as and was read as historical writing and influenced historical travelers of later centuries, such as Christopher Columbus. It was included in the first edition of Hakluyt's *Principal Navigations*, but then taken out of the second edition.

[54] See Beazley (1903) for a discussion of *Historia* manuscripts. See also BL Royal MS 13 A XIV ff. 198-213, where it is called the *Librum Tartarorum*: "Incipit prologus in librum tartarorum." (see figure 1)

[55] (Yale, Beinecke Library MS 350A); see R.A. Skelton, Thomas E. Marston, and George D. Painter (1965). *The Tartar Relation* is the title given to these notes in 1965 by the editors of the *Vinland map and the Tartar Relation*. Two manuscript copies known: editors of the tartar relation say their copy is the only extant copy, but Guzman (1991) says he knows of another one and is in the process of editing and

part of Friar Ascelin's embassy, also dispatched by Pope Innocent IV at Lyons. He wrote the *Historia Tartarorum* in 1248, of which no complete manuscript is extant, but it was also incorporated into Vincent of Beauvais's *Speculum Historiale*, where it survives in the last three books. This inclusion, as with Carpini's, increased the dissemination and influence of these early travel accounts across Latin Christendom.[56]

These mid-thirteenth-century writers represented the Mongols as cannibalistic barbarians who delighted in terrorizing their enemies. Carpini, de Bridia, and Simon all remark that Mongols eat human flesh in times of great necessity, and the latter three explain that when they would run out of food during long battles, they would choose one out of every ten men to eat. [57] In Simon's account, they drink the blood of their enemies. In his quantitative study of Mongol cannibalism in six Latin texts from the mid-thirteenth century, Gregory Guzman (1991) examines why these Latin sources consistently represent Mongols as eating human flesh when the "Chinese, Tibetan, and Muslim sources never do so, even though they had more direct and longer-lasting contact with the Mongols than the Europeans did" (32). His inquiry attempts to reveal why such false information would circulate repeatedly and so consistently in the Latin sources. His ultimate conclusion is that it arose because of the influence that literary and biblical traditions had on the Latin authors. These authors came to represent Mongols as cannibalistic because when thinking about and identifying the unknown peoples of the east beyond the Muslim middle east they turned to and fused together the Alexander

comparing them (check if he did this). Mathew Paris may have also received his information from these lectures, not first-hand but from others who had attended (see Evelyn Edson 2007).

[56] Even though Vincent used both Carpini and Simon's accounts for his encyclopedia, by his own admission, Carpini provided him with more thorough source material.

[57] For more on thirteenth-century chronicle depictions of Mongols as cannibals and monsters, see James Ross Sweeney (1982).

romances, apocalyptic biblical traditions, and Greek and Roman myths. According to

Guzman, the Plinian monsters and Gog and Magog legends inadvertently shaped how the

Latin authors understood the Mongols, and thus they grafted the cannibalism and

monstrosity of those figures onto their conception of the Mongols despite the reality. This

process of discursive production in these travel writings mirrors that which occurred in

the literature of the Fifth Crusade: while the latter turned to Prester John because of the

need for a Christian savior within that geopolitical context, the former turned to

monstrosity because of this new geopolitical context.

Guzman asserts that it was "the literary tradition of medieval Western civilization,

and not the six individual authors, [that] was at fault for seeing the rest of the world

through the framework of the classical and biblical legends, myths, and literary accounts.

The six reporters merely saw and wrote what they were expected to see, hear, and report"

(53).[58] Guzman's argument points to how racial ideology works, although he doesn't

make this claim and was likely unaware of the connection. His analysis shows how

fantasies about the monsters of the world can shape the racial constructions of real

people—and how individuals, even though they are the conduits for the survival of those

ideologies, can evade culpability. His reading suggests that, in these Latin sources,

authorial engagement with these literary traditions was a passive, and perhaps neutral,

act. As Noreen Giffney (2012) has pointed out, Guzman here "assume[s] that their aim

was to record a series of contemporary happenings accurately and without bias" (230).

She posits a series of questions that intervenes in Guzman's set of assumptions: "what if

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[58] See Menache (1996) for another case for why mythology would have factored into these depictions of
the Mongols. Her argument focuses on how myth offered a psychic escape from confronting the
inadequacy of Christian leaders.

that was not their objective? What might it mean to read reports of monstrous Mongols not as ignorant attempts to explain an apparently inexplicable event, but as irruptions of emotion in response to a deeply traumatic experience on the one hand and as part of a propagandistic exercise to induce people out of inaction and toward resistance on the other hand?" (230). Giffney's main point is that these medieval authors very well may have constructed these particular representations of Mongols to elicit an affective response in their audiences that would stir defensive action among them. While neither Guzman's nor Giffney's speculations around the authorial intentions of thirteenth-century representations of the Mongol figure can ever be fully determined, we can examine the discursive effects of these representations for insight into how authorial engagement with various literary traditions produced a racialized depiction of Mongols within Latin Christian discourse. And since race is never neutral or decontextualized from a hierarchy of power, I posit that these authors' reliance on tradition is—far from neutral—precisely what enables the construction of Mongol alterity and perpetuation of Latin Christian dominance within its discursive structures.

Kim Phillips's work (2013) on European travel writing on Asian peoples and cultures in the medieval period has fostered important critical attention for these early writings and has contributed to opening the field of the European Middle Ages to more global contexts. The aim of her project is to highlight the various perspectives expressed in these early travel narratives and demonstrate how they did not reflect the kind of orientalist and colonialist attitudes of later travel narratives beginning in the sixteenth century. She argues that there was "a distinctive European perspective on Asia during the era c. 1245-c.1510" wherein "attitudes [...] were little touched by the colonialist

mentalities that would emerge through the early modern era and dominate the modern"

(2). Rather than espousing a colonialist agenda, she argues, these texts were motivated

by a "desire for information and for pleasure." While conceding that orientalist attitudes

were present in writings about "closer peoples," such as Muslims and Jews, where

religious conflict dominated the encounter, Phillips contends that "late medieval

Europeans' reactions to the peoples of India, Mongolia, and *l'extreme orient* were more

often determined by pleasure, pragmatic fears, and curiosity" (3).[59] She argues that while

the "powerful desire to denote Self as separate from Other" is central to modern travel

narratives, this impulse is not found in medieval travel narratives (54). She writes,

> alongside medieval travel writers' efforts to paint eastern peoples and
>
> cultures as 'Other,' we will find plenty of occasions when they noted
>
> sameness or at least similarities between East and West. Admiration and
>
> the willingness to learn are found, too, and where authors denigrated
>
> particular Asian cultures their attitude can be explained by the motives of
>
> authors and expectations of their audiences. […] most medieval writing on
>
> China was full of admiration and appealed to audiences' desire to revel in
>
> descriptions of natural bounty and civilized pleasures. (6-7)

Phillips's critical perspective here, which undergirds her entire study and its analytical

frame, presumes that admiration for another culture opposes denigration of that culture,

and fails to recognize how these attitudes are often concomitant symptoms of a

perspective of superiority within global contexts.

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[59] See Akbari (2009) on orientalism in Christian-Muslim contexts.

Phillips denies the presence of orientalism in the travel writing she analyzes, and instead reads these texts as reflective of a European perspective that is curious yet free from racial ideologies. Phillips's analysis defines curiosity, desire, and admiration as inherently constitutive of an allophilic multiculturalist perspective, and indicative of a neutral, non-racializing discourse. Yet, narratives that produce ethnographic knowledge can do so through an orientalist perspective—through racializing discourse—and still (and necessarily do) express attitudes of pleasure and curiosity, while even representing the variety and splendor of an unknown world.[60] Phillips's analysis of the relation between the Self and the Other, which leads to her rejection of its presence in medieval travel writing, is flawed. She assumes too much distance and opposition between dominant bodies and the "others" they construct, eclipsing the complex ways in which the Self /Other paradigm is in fact one of imbrication, with much more intimacy and iterations of sameness (rather than merely difference) than Phillips accounts for.[61]

Phillips argues that an autorial perspective that expresses a desire for sameness effectively avoids a Self/Other binary because she defines this binary as strictly oppositional and staunchly about differences being pitted against one another. I argue, however, that the author's very desire for sameness when looking at difference is constructed through a hierarchy shaped by a perspective of self-superiority. Phillips

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[60] See introduction and also specifically bottom of page 59 where she takes on Said. See Sara Ahmed (2000) on the process of the unknown becoming known and the production of the stranger. See also Cohen and Steel's book review (2015).

[61] See her chapter "On Orientalism" which argues that because these narratives did not express an oppositional Self-Other binary, but were rather interested in sameness, they did not hold orientalist attitudes. She also contends that because travel writers who actually went to the places they wrote about did not lump all Asian peoples into the same group, that is, because they accounted for the differences between different Asian groups, their texts were not orientalist. But of course one can have an orientalist perspective of one particular Asian group, in this case the Mongols. As my discussion of Carpini's narrative will show, Mongols were in fact essentialized and rendered inferior even if Carpini understood that their essentialized racial features were different than, say, that of the Tibetans.

argues that Mary Campbell's claim, in her influential book *Witness and the Other World*, that medieval travel writings explicitly reference future conquest of the lands and peoples they describe is never substantiated (56). She further critiques Syed Manzurul Islam's claim that Marco Polo's narrative is a precursor to modern imperial racist writings, or what he calls, "a machine for othering" (56). It is fair to say that Islam's argument is informed by what is becoming an outdated perspective of teleological histories, but it is also unproductive to dismiss it wholesale. Rather than these medieval travel narratives functioning as machines for othering, there is often a quest for sameness that does not, in fact, escape paradigms of power. That is, the alternative to a "machine for othering" is not a narrative of multicultural curiosity, for alterity and unequal constructions of human difference can be found, and often are, within expressions of curiosity. A desire for sameness does not indicate ideological neutrality or the absence of hierarchical perspectives; in fact, transforming cultural difference into a sameness is an act of epistemological colonialism, and not one that necessitates the "numerous provisos" Phillips contends it does.

While Phillips acknowledges that we may read the missionary aims of many of the Franciscans and Dominicans as "informal colonial enterprises" with a "culturally colonialist *motive* in these efforts at evangelization," she emphasizes that "nothing close to actual dominance of the Christian faith was ever achieved" (5). Indeed, Latin Christianity was a peripheral religion in the thirteenth century and medieval missionaries never succeeded in their aims of global conversion; however, their success or failure matters less than how they understood and wrote about their attempts, as well as the long-term effects they had on later periods. If the aim of studying these texts, as Phillips makes

explicit, is to enrich our understanding of European cultural history, then our focus

should be on what role these texts, and the racial discourses they produced, played in the

long durée of European history—not whether their authors themselves succeeded in

converting their missionary objects. These authors express a desire to dominate, both

epistemologically and culturally, peoples different from themselves: their curiosity within

this context racialized those differences, transforming them into an otherness that is not

oppositional to the dominant subject, but constituted by differences and similarities that

are all held in a discursive system that buttresses that subject's supremacy. These

thirteenth-century texts produced a cultural discourse that spread into the imaginative

literature and shaped ideologies that would eventually influence colonialist endeavors

that *were* successful. Although medieval travel writing was indeed distinct from that of

later periods, for geopolitical contexts shift over time and thus so too does the way in

which travel occurs and informs ethnographic knowledge, these early writings

nonetheless racialized their subjects and consistently expressed orientalist attitudes within

a context of *medieval*, not modern geopolitics.[62]

Travel Writing and Ethnographic Knowledge

Even if, as Guzman has proposed, travel writers did not intend to "other" the

subjects of their ethnographies, but rather wished to record their observations without

bias (discussed above), Sara Ahmed reminds us that such an endeavor is impossible.

Ahmed argues that ethnography is never objective even in the best cases when efforts are

explicitly employed to remove authorial biases. It is always inflected by the subjectivity

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[62] For more on Phillips' study, see Cohen and Steel (2015), and Kinoshita (2015). For more on orientalism in Carpini, as well as his traveling companion Benedict the Pole, see Czarnowus (2014).

of the author even if they try to hide behind a veil of objectivity or sublimate an ethnocentric perspective and replace it with one of cultural relativism.[63] However, if we accept Ahmed's point that biases are inescapable (and I do), it does not inevitably follow that travel writing thus inherently produces racialized bodies—that is, bodies whose differences are used to denigrate or elevate them, relationally—because the author's subjectivity itself may not reflect such a perspective. In other words, a lack of objectivity in the narrative does not inherently produce a discourse of alterity. Omi and Winant's concept of a "racial project" may be helpful in parsing this nuance of authorial subjectivity and medieval travel writing, albeit with a few caveats to account for the temporal discordance of the theory.

Their racial formation theory contends that race is produced through "a linkage between structure and signification" and that racial projects "do both the ideological and the practical 'work' of making these links and articulating the connection between them" (125). Both institutions and individuals participate in racial projects so that even as we can understand race as a systemic, socially constructed concept, it is also individual actions and significations that operate within the making of race. For example, they cite restrictive voting rights laws and community organizing for immigrant rights as racial projects, just as they do the individual cop who accosts a person of color or the student who joins a protest march against police violence. Racial projects, in sum, are efforts

>*to organize and distribute resources (economic, political, cultural) along*
>
>*particular racial lines.* Racial projects connect what race *means* in a
>
>particular discursive or ideological practice and the ways in which both

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[63] Ahmed (2000); see chapter 3, "Knowing Strangers."

social structures and everyday experiences are racially *organized*, based upon that meaning.

Omi and Winant's context for this theory of race and its formation through racial projects is definitively modern (and U.S.-based), but not restrictively so. For them, race is a "master category of difference" that is inescapable and thus to diminish its relevance within modern society leads not to its erasure but to colorblind racial ideologies (the racial ideology that structures the contemporary United States).[64] Within a society pervaded by these ideologies, the representation or articulation of any difference is always operative within a racialized social structure, and thus a racial project. It can work to uphold and further entrench inequities, continuing or finding new ways to direct resources towards a dominant human group; or it can work to redistribute those resources towards disenfranchised groups. Racial ideologies pervade modern society and thus representations of racial difference must always be read in relation to the racialized social structures in which they are articulated.

Authorial subjectivity in travel writing has the potential not only to represent difference as otherness, but also to disrupt cultural stereotypes; and, as a racial project, the narrative can reorient the reader's position to hegemonic ideologies. However, it is crucial to remember that in medieval Europe, race had yet to become codified in the legal and economic structures to the extent that it would qualify as a "master category of difference," in Omi and Winant's terms, and so encountering representations of Mongols within medieval discourse is not to necessarily encounter racial projects, per se. Although medieval travel narratives, like those of post-medieval worlds, are not objective texts and

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[64] See also Bonilla-Silva (2013)

they certainly reflect the biases of their authors, those biases don't necessarily constitute a racial project with legal and economic implications. However, we may still recognize these texts as racial projects in different form. The construction of a racial epistemology *is* present in these texts along with and in relation to cultural significations. That is, the representation of racial differences cements a hierarchical organization of human groups into the social epistemologies these texts produce. Narratives such as those of John of Plano Carpini, Simon of St. Quentin, or Guzman's other case studies for cannibal representation are clear examples of racial projects that promulgate Latin Christian supremacy. Not only are they not objective (as they never could have been), but the authorial subjectivity that is present denigrates Mongol difference in order to promote Latin Christendom. However, it is possible for a travel writer's perspective to emerge within their narrative not as a progenitor of racial ideologies, but as a mode through which differences are laid side by side without organization into a hierarchal structure. This dynamic can be found in Rubruck's travel narrative, as Shirin Khanmohamadi (2013) has persuasively demonstrated.

A Franciscan friar like Carpini, William Rubruck also travelled through the Mongol empire, but almost a decade later and with much different intentions. Rubruck was there explicitly to preach and convert the Mongols to Latin Christianity.[65] He left from Constantinople in 1253 and travelled through the Kipchak Khanate to Karakorum where he met with Mongke Khan. He began his return journey in July 1254, arriving in

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[65] In Peter Jackson's introduction to the *Itinerarium* (1990), he notes that it was part of the *modus operandi* of the Franciscan order, since St. Francis, to travel to the non-Christian world and promote the faith. Guzman notes that Rubruck was not an envoy, but rather traveled in order to convert as part of his role as a Franciscan. However, Carpini was also a Franciscan who played an important role in developing the order, but his travel was not about conversion.

Tripoli in August 1255. His *Itinerarium*, a letter he composed to King Louis IX of

France, details his journey and encounters with the peoples of the Mongol empire. The

Itinerarium has been preferred by modern scholars for its more reliable portrayal of the

Mongols than the writings of Carpini and others in the preceding decade, as well as its

more eloquent descriptions; however, it had relatively low circulation during the

medieval period.[66] It is extant in six manuscripts, the earliest of which is bound with

Carpini's.[67]

Rubruck nonetheless offers a useful comparison to Carpini because of the two

different motivations and perspectives of their travels and reports. The accounts of Simon

of St. Quentin and Carpini are very similar (such as in their depictions of Mongol

cannibalism, mentioned above), so similar that they could be incorporated and integrated

with one another in Vincent of Beauvais's *Speculum Historiale*. The only mention of

cannibalism in Rubruck's report is not of the Mongols, but of the Tibetans, which

significantly distinguishes his representation of Mongols from those of Carpini and

Simon. Further, Carpini and Simon were also both papal missionaries dispatched

simultaneously by Innocent IV with the specific aim of acquiring information as a

strategy of defense; by contrast, Rubruck was an unofficial missionary, not sent by the

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[66] It may not have circulated at all if it weren't for Roger Bacon, who included parts of it in his *Opus Maius*. See Jackson (1990).

[67] Corpus Christi Cambridge MS 181 contains Carpini's *Historia* and the earliest of the surviving copies of both the *Historia* and Rubruck's *Itinerarium* (dated to last quarter of 13th c.). It originally belonged to St. Mary's Abbey at York, and this is the manuscript that was used for Fr. Van den Wyngaert's printed text. (Sinica Franciscana, Vol. I: Itinera et Relationes Fratrum Minorum saec. XIII et XIV, published by the Franciscan Press, Quaracchi, 1929, pages 27-130). Three more of the surviving manuscripts have English provenance: CCC MS 66A, CCC MS 407, BL Royal MS 14 C. XIII (this is the source text for Hakluyt's 1598 edition). The fifth is Leiden, Vossius Lat. F. 77, likely a copy of Cambridge, CCC 181. See Beazley (1903), pages xviii-xx for details on the Rubruck manuscripts. The sixth has only recently been identified, in David (2009): Yale, Beinecke Library MS 406. In addition to Hakluyt, Samuel Purchas also published (in its full form) a copy in 1625, and the five manuscripts were published by the Société de Géographie of Paris in 1839.

papacy nor a monarchy. Even though he addressed his narrative to Louis IX, the king did not commission or officially sanction the journey. And whereas the former travelers are peripherally interested in Mongol conversion, conversion was precisely the impetus behind Rubruck's journey and it is a focal point of his report.

In Khanmohamadi's study of the poetics of medieval ethnography, she argues that Rubruck's authorial subjectivity is one that expresses a destabilization of the self, which thereby opens a space through which Mongol subjectivity can emerge in tandem with Latin subjectivity. Khanmohamadi suggests that as Rubruck others himself, he disorients his own subject position, which allows him to create an intersubjective ethnography that does not employ a perspective of superiority or produce an epistemology of power. Through Khanmohamadi's analysis, Rubruck's narrative demonstrates how medieval travel writing can reflect a particular poetics of intersubjectivity by which it may be read outside the frame of a colonialist discourse or racial project; however, as I will suggest, it nonetheless reveals some links between cultural representation and socio-political structure, articulated specifically through the narrative's focus on conversion, that are difficult to overlook.

According to Khanmohamadi, "the cosmopolitan practice of stepping outside of one's own shoes into those of racial, cultural, or religious others comes at considerable risks—of humiliation, of self-objectification—to the self" (111). For example, as Khanmohamadi notes, when Rubruck appeared before the court of Khan Batu in 1253, he did so "with bare feet [nudis pedibus]"—as was customary for Franciscans—and in his

report he remarks that he and his retinue "were a great spectacle in their eyes [eramus spectaculum magnum in oculis eorum]"; that is, in the eyes of the Mongols. [68]

In this self-reflective moment, Rubruck steps away from his own perspective to explain how he and his fellow Franciscans appeared to the Mongols. He describes a similar submission to the gaze of the Mongol court when he is received by the Great Khan Mongke in Karakorum in 1254. Appearing barefoot there as well, he writes: "People gathered round us, gazing at us as if we were freaks [tamquam monstra], especially in view of our bare feet, and asked whether we had no use for our feet, since they imagined that in no time we should lose them." [69] William expresses a self-conscious awareness of the alterity of the Franciscans in the Mongol court, of the nearness of their own dehumanized perception. As Khanmohamadi persuasively argues, William's travel account reveals the deep discomfort that comes with a cosmopolitan ethos of travel, where the traveler experiences an estrangement from his own worldview. [70]

Geraldine Heng (2018) makes a similar argument about the destabilization of the gaze in Rubruck. She argues that his "ablity to visualize himself through Mongol eyes increases as his understanding of his own powerlessness also increases" (308). Heng's analysis here reveals an inverse relation between Rubruck's self-othering and his vulnerability. His descriptions of his encounters with Mongols reflect a loss of power rather than its production, which the discourse does not attempt to recover, making the *Itinerarium* different than the travel writing of his contemporaries. In fact, the recovery never comes in Rubruck's narrative because it is only Mongol conversion to Christianity

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[68] *Itinerarium*, ed. Anastasius Van den Wyngaert. *Sinica Franciscana*, vol 1 (1929): 164-332. Chapter 19.5.
[69] *Itinerarium*, 28.4. Peter Jackson, trans. *Mission of Friar William of Rubruck*, Hakluyt Society (1990).
[70] See Gilroy (2004) for self-estrangement in cosmopolitanism, which Khanmohamadi uses in her formulation of cosmopolitanism here.

that offers a route toward re-stabilization of the self. Rubruck says they only converted six people over two years and thus recommends to Louis that they not send further missionaries to the Mongols, as the effort is hardly worth it. When he is frustrated, he even goes so far as to suggest a crusade so that they may destroy the Mongols.

This undercurrent of conversion or destruction is the feature of Rubruck's narrative that contravenes the text's authorial intersubjectivity. Certainly, Mongol difference is represented without recourse to stereotypes or dehumanization, yet at the same time Rubruck's representation of these cultural differences seem only to warrant such affirmation and regard in so far as he may foresee Christian conversion. Precisely because Rubruck's primary aim is to convert the Mongols, his encounters reflect strategies for reaching that goal. Rubruck's narrative raises the question of whether a medieval ethnography can be read outside of a lens of colonial control when conversion is the scaffold of its descriptions, however affirming they are.

Whether and when we may read Mongol difference as alterity in Rubruck's text depends on the extent to which it functions towards the production of Latin Christian power. We will see in the next chapter how conversion can operate as a mode of cultural colonialism, which I argue it does in *The King of Tars*. However, in the *Itinerarium*, while conversion appears as the motivation for not only the journey, but also Rubruck's ethnographic practices of intersubjectivity, it also remains suspended within the narrative as an unattainable goal, wherein the desire for conversion ironically (and perhaps paradoxically) keeps the production of Mongol alterity at bay.

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John of Plano Carpini's *Historia Mongalorum* offers quite a different discourse of representation, in which apprehension shapes the narrative and produces Mongol alterity. The fear and anxiety felt by the Europeans at the 1245 Council of Lyons drove them to seek knowledge about the Mongols, to arm themselves with information about this unknown enemy. The pursuit to intellectually grasp who the Mongols were effected their epistemological capture within the discourse engendered by Innovent IV's papal missions.

The *Historia Mongalorum* is not merely the history of the Mongols as told by a European traveler (as it was told to him by both Mongols and non-Mongols living within their territories); it is a meticulously organized ethnographic account of everything Carpini could collect about the Mongols. The account is structured and orderly with a clear blueprint of each chapter's subject neatly laid out. Carpini explains that there will be nine chapters, the first seven each detailing a different category of knowledge: the country, the people, their religion, their customs, their empire, their wars, and the countries under their dominion. The eighth, toward which all the preceding chapters build, is about how to wage war against them, a narrative progression that reveals Carpini's investment in linking an apprehension of knowledge with military strategies. The ninth and final chapter is devoted to a description of Carpini and his retinue's journey, including eyewitness accounts, a conclusion that serves to assure readers of the veracity of the report.

Each chapter is similarly organized with the provision of a structural blueprint. In the first chapter, for example, he notes that he will discuss, under the main topic of the country: its position, its physical features, and its climate. The narrative is thus structured

not as a sequential relation of Carpini's journey from Lyon to Syra Orda, but rather

around particular areas of research with a rhetorical program in mind. The ethnographic

knowledge he presents is contextualized and framed by an introduction, or prologue, that

precedes it. The *Historia* apprehends the history and culture of the Mongols for a Latin

Christian audience who are presented with a totalizing perspective of who the Mongols

are, one that will circulate in one of the most copied and widely consulted encyclopedias

of the late Middle Ages, the *Speculum Historiale*, as well as in the widely redacted

Chronica Majora by Matthew Paris. It will have great influence on Carpini's intended

audience and even in the early modern period when Richard Hakluyt publishes it (along

with Beauvais's version) in the first volume of his 1598 *Principal Navigations.*[71]

In the prologue, European fear and vulnerability emerge as the driving forces that

compelled Carpini's journey, his research, and its collection in the ensuing report. He

remarks that Christendom itself is under threat of attack by the advancing Mongols and

that he is prepared to serve as a martyr for its defense. Explaining that he has been

ordered by the Pope to "go to the Tartars and other nations of the orient [iremus ad

Tartaros et ad nationes alias orientis]," Carpini links his mission's expedition with a

defense of the Church. He writes, "we decided to go to the Tartars first, for we feared that

if we did not pass through their territory, the Church of God would be threatened by

danger [elegimus prius ad Tartaros proficisci; timebamus enim ne per eos in proximo

Ecclesie Dei periculum immineret]."[72] According to Carpini, it is imminent that they

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[71] Hakluyt was a fierce and effective proponent of England's colonization of North America and his work played no small role in the founding of Jamestown in 1607. Hakluyt was an advisor for the East India Company, he was listed on the original charter of the Virginia Company of London and an investor for the second charter. His *Principal Navigations* was a colonial project that curated medieval and contemporary texts for the aim of demonstrating the greatness of English travel and conquest. See Beazley (1903) for Hakluyt's edition of Carpini, as well as Rubruck.

[72] From *Historia Mongalorum*, in Fr. A. Van den Wyngaert's *Sinica Franciscana*, Vol. I: Itinera et

travel into Mongol territory and equip themselves with as much information as possible

in order to defend Christendom from a Mongol invasion:

> Et quamvis a Tartaris vel ab aliis nationibus timeremus occidi vel perpetuo
>
> captivari, vel fame, siti, algore, estu, contumeliis et laboribus nimiis quasi
>
> ultra vires affligi [...] non tamen pepercimus nobis ipsis, ut voluntatem Dei
>
> secundum domini Pape mandatum adimplere possemus, et ut proficeremus
>
> in aliquo christianis, vel saltem scita veraciter voluntate et intentione
>
> ipsorum, possemus illam patefacere christianis, ne forte subito irruentes
>
> invenirent eos impreparatos [...] et facerent magnam stragem in populo
>
> christiano.
>
> [Although we feared we would be killed by the Tartars or other people, or
>
> imprisoned forever, or afflicted with hunger, thirst, cold, heat, abuses, and
>
> forcefully cast down almost beyond our ability to resist [...], nonetheless
>
> we did not spare ourselves, so that we could carry out the will of God as it
>
> followed in the Lord Pope's mandate, and to some extent help Christians:
>
> at the very least, indeed, knowing the truth about the desire and intention
>
> of the Tartars, would enable us to reveal it to the Christians; then if by
>
> chance they made a sudden attack, they would not find the Christian
>
> people unprepared [...] and would not inflict a great slaughter on them.]

Carpini presents a long and specific list of all of the terrors he and his missionaries are

prepared to face: everything from harsh weather conditions and hunger to life

imprisonment and death; he thus conveys their deep vulnerability and the validity of their

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Relationes Fratrum Minorum saec. XIII et XIV, published by the Franciscan Press, Quaracchi, 1929, pages 27-130. Translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

fear, as well as the risks they are willing to take in order to defend Christians and Christendom against the Mongols.

This expression of fear and the assertion of martyrdom activates Carpini's *auctoritas*, or authorial legitimacy. He invites readers to be cautious as well ("vobis scribimus ad cautelam"); that is, to share his perspective of fear and vulnerability. As he does so, he asserts the credibility of his narrative by citing both his motivations and eye-witness sources (his own and that of other Christians) while employing a rhetorical maneuver that further appeals to Christian vulnerability and Mongol terror:

> Unde quecumque pro vestra utilitate vobis scribimus ad cautelam, tanto securius credere debetis, quanto nos cuncta vel ipsi vidimus oculis nostris, quia per annum et quattuor menses et amplius ambulavimus per ipsos pariter et cum ipsis, ac fuimus inter eos, vel audivimus a christianis, qui sunt inter eos captivi, et ut credimus fide dignis.
>
> [Therefore whatever, with your welfare in mind, we shall write to you to put you on your guard, you ought to believe all the more confidently inasmuch as we have either seen everything with our own eyes, for during a year and four months and more we travelled about both through the midst of them and in company with them and we were among them, or we have heard it from Christians who are with them as captives and are, so we believe, to be relied upon.][73]

While assuring his readers that his narrative is a reliable source of information, he reminds them that Christians are held as prisoners in Mongol territory, which

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[73] Translation from Dawson (1955)

immediately signals that they are not safe there, again emphasizing his vulnerability—and his readers' if the Mongols reach them—as well as his bravery.

The point of Carpini's expedition and narrative was not to discover and learn about an unknown people so that his own people could conquer them and their lands, as would be the impetus behind later European travel in the fifteenth century. Carpini's mission was to learn about the Mongols as a method of defense for a peripheral and vulnerable Europe against an increasingly powerful Mongol Empire. This difference in context is one reason that has led some scholars, such as Kim Phillips (2013) and Shirin Khanmohamadi (2013) to claim that orientalism and colonizing desires were not present in thirteenth-century travel narratives such as Carpini's. However, this perspective implies that only an already powerful Europe has the ability to colonize already disempowered societies, as though power is not produced by the very process of its acquisition. This perspective thus essentially ascribes Europe with a global dominance before they claimed it, and divests of power the global societies over which they made this claim *before* it was made. It also narrowly defines the various ways in which colonial projects occur and manifest. While Carpini's narrative may not be an overt project of imperialism, or a strategic "machine for othering," as Syed Manzurul Islam terms it (see above); it demonstrates precisely how fear and vulnerability operate as mechanisms for producing ideologies of racial alterity, which, in this case, created an epistemological framework upon which early modern explorers could rest their claims of colonialist entitlement over and against indigenous peoples in North America. The *Historia Mongalorum* produces ethnographic knowledge about Mongols wherein they are constructed as inferior to Latin Christians with essentialized physiognomic, cultural, and

religious features. The production of their alterity emerges consistently through Christian

fear, which buttresses the *Historia's* orientalism and racial discourse, rather than

evacuates it from them.

While the inferiority of the Mongols is drawn throughout the *Historia* in a number

of ways, including in regard to their eating habits, marriage customs, and legal practices,

Carpini's discussion of their religion entrenches their degraded status more deeply than at

any other moment in his ethnography, and it does so specifically by constructing a

narrative of despotic monstrosity. The religion section is structured into four parts: 1)

worship of God, 2) what they believe is sinful, 3) divinations and purifications of sin, 4)

funeral rites. The significance of this religion section is that it says very little about their

religion and focuses almost entirely on how threatening the Mongols are. Indeed, it reads

as though Carpini is using this section to make an active case for why the Mongols are so

threatening. He gives an anecdote about the horrific treatment of Michael of Chernigov, a

pious Christian duke from Russia, who, when he refused to bow in the direction of

Chinggis Khan's burial in the south saying that it was against Christian law, was beaten

and then beheaded. He moves through the anecdote quickly and without much critique or

comment, but it has deep rhetorical impact on the construction of the Mongols as brutal

anti-Christians at the precise moment of their religious description. He says they don't

persecute based on religion, but gives a very poignant example of when they did, which

drives home the point that they are nonetheless a threat. He writes, "we understand that

they forced no one to deny his faith or law, except Michael, of whom we have just

spoken [neminem adhuc quod intelleximus coegerunt suam fidem vel legem negare,

excepto Michaele, de quo dictum est supra]"; however, he then immediately says that if

they were the sole rulers of the world, they would impose their religion on everyone (notably, an historically inaccurate claim given the Mongol practice of integration rather than forced conversion).

He then proceeds to give another anecdote about the cruel punishment of another Russian duke, Andrew of Chernigov, who is put to death after being accused of stealing horses even though his guilt was not proven. The Mongols' ruthless brutality is conveyed not just through Andrew's unjust death sentence, but also through the story about his brother who was forced to marry the widow and consummate their relationship despite her "crying and weeping [clamantem et plorantem]." Their brutality is here expressed through women's suffering and the abuse of women's bodies. Highlighting these examples of brutality in a section marked as about religion does epistemological work. Their brutality is related to their religious difference, which suggests that the Mongol threat could be mitigated by religious conversion. Constructing them as monotheistic opens up this possibility in the same way that it did for Rashid al-din's audience who wanted to see the Mongol ancestors as on the trajectory toward Islam even if they were still pre-conversion. Just like Rashid al din, Carpini represents the Mongols as monotheistic, but here their monotheism is twisted because they worship idols (like the Saracens). So while they are primed for conversion through their monotheism, they are at the same time degenerate in their current religious practices. Carpini is condescending about what the Mongols think are sins and is very pointed about the fact that while they consider absurd things to be sinful, they don't see terrible things as sinful. At no point does Carpini convey a neutral perspective of Mongol religion – it is both inferior to Christianity *and* a threat to Christians.

Mongol despotism and inferiority throughout Carpini's narrative provide the framework in which his description of their physical features appears. He says that their body distinguishes them from all other men ("forma personarum ab omnibus hominibus aliis est remota"), because they have more space between their eyes and cheeks than other people, and their cheeks are quite prominent above the jaw ("Inter oculos enim et inter genas sunt plus quam alii homines lati. Gene etiam satis prominent a maxillis)." They have flat, small noses; little eyes; eyelids raised up to the eyebrows; slender waists; small feet; they are of medium height; and hardly any of them have beards except a little hair on their upper lip and chin, which they don't trim. He also gives a very elaborate description of their hair style and how they shave it, saying that they do so like the clerics with a tonsure, providing a cultural reference point for his readers. In fact, he has a very keen self-awareness of wanting to describe them in very minute detail so that his audience understands who they are: there's an explicit strategy here that through capturing their physical bodies with description, they can be known to this very distant, European Latin Christian audience. Further, gender constructs aid the racialized essentialism here. He says it's difficult to tell young women from men because they dress the same and that the men keep their hair long like women. The need to offer a cultural reference point has the effect of effeminizing the men and de-feminizing the women. The men and women are indistinguishable from one another in dress and appearance.

What makes this description racial is not that he details their physical features, but that it is part of a larger discourse about Mongol barbarity and inferiority in which this description is a strategy for knowing who they are and that—above all—through their epistemological capture, Carpini and his audience can acquire power over them. Race is

always about a production of power; it is never a neutral category for organizing difference. It is always functional with the aim of leveraging differences for the supremacy of a dominant subject, and transforming vulnerability into power. Racial ideologies are not merely the product of systematized institutions, such as colonialism or slavery, but rather a mechanism of these institutions' production. They help systems of power come into being and sustain themselves. Carpini's medieval world was not one of Mongol subjugation to European institutions of power, and certainly his travel account, and those of his contemporaries, did not in itself lead to later projects of colonialism. Yet, precisely through a perspective of vulnerability, it produces a racial discourse that pulls Mongols into an epistemology that would shape a way of seeing and constructing European power on a global scale.

Matthew Paris's *Chronica Majora (c. 1250)* and the Historiographical Construction of Race

The Benedictine monk of St. Albans Matthew of Paris, whose *Chronica Majora* is one of the most famous histories produced in medieval England, offers a prime point of departure for exploring the connection between race and historiography. [74] His writings are marked by a distinct narrative voice and rhetorical style that have earned them recognition within literary histories, garnering wide scholarly attention to his dehumanizing depictions of medieval Jews, Muslims, and Mongols.[75] If no history is

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[74] Matthew Paris was the first European cartographer to include Mongols on a map, in 1253; see David Connolly (2009). The *Chronica* is the continuation of Wendover's *Flores Historiarum*. See also Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 16II.

[75] For more on Matthew Paris, see Suzanne Lewis (1987), Richard Vaughn (1958), and Richard Vaughn (1993)

neutral and can neither be extricated from the historian's perspective nor their individual biases, however they may try, then historiographies invite analyses not only of what they purport to record but also the ideologies they both reflect and construct through their discursive practices. Matthew's *Chronica Majora* presents an illustrative example of racial discourse at work through its essentialist, repetitive, and functional representation of Mongols (as well as other non-Christian peoples). By its very conceit as a history of the world, laden with all the attendant structures of power and perspective that such a project inherently carries, the *Chronica Majora* discursively constructs and asserts a codification of the world it describes. Within this space, race is formulated as a relational structure of otherness, as a necessarily mutable system through which the historical narrative coheres and upholds its author's perspective.

Like the missionary travel accounts, the *Chronica Majora* was composed within the context not of the Fifth Crusade, but of the destruction of Latin Christendom's eastern borders in Hungary and Poland. Thus, underlying Matthew's narrative is also fear and vulnerability in the face of a Mongol threat. While Matthew did not travel into the Mongol empire and likely never met a Mongol person, he was very in touch with current geopolitics from his position at St. Albans. He may have attended one of the lectures that Carpini and his travelling companions gave, or he may have acquired his information from someone who had (Edson 2007, 94). It is not surprising, then, that his chronicle echoes the tenor of Carpini's travel account, particularly in respect to how fear and othering coincide in their authorial perspectives. Reflecting Carpini's disdain in his own description of the Mongols, Matthew Paris exclaims that they are "without human laws [humanis legibus carentes]" and "ignorant of mercy [nescii mansuetudinis]" (Luard 1877,

77). He depicts them not as humans, but as monsters: "The men are inhuman and bestial, rather to be called monsters than human men [Viri enim sunt inhumani et bestiales, potius monstra dicendi quam homines]." He mentions their thirst for and habit of drinking blood three times in a short passage, which further emphasizes their monstrous ferocity. Matthew conveys an affect of fear, circulating within Latin Christendom, that activates the process by which Mongol difference becomes barbaric alterity. In his chronicle, as in Carpini's travel account, they are barbarous monsters who threaten a civilized, Christian world.

The Mongols enter Matthew's narrative account of the year 1240 as a disruption. Before recounting the Mongol invasions of 1240, he describes the famous transfer of the Crown of Thorns as a mutually beneficial transaction between the French king and the Byzantine emperor.[76] Baldwin II, the ruler of Latin Byzantium, was in desperate need of financial support after various wars had caused economic depletion; he thus reached out to Louis IX of France for a large sum of money in exchange for the Crown of Thorns, who agreed to the deal. Matthew's narration includes reference to a history of diplomacy between France and Byzantium, and he notes the presence of counsel as the French king considers his decision: "the French King, by the advice of his natural councilors, joyfully accepts [rex Francorum, fretus consilio naturali, gratanter accepit]" (75). These moments point to practices of civility. The section ends with a comment on how the Crown was received in a procession of solemn devotion and placed "with respect [veneranter]" in the king's chapel in Paris.

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[76] As a result of the Fourth Crusade, Constantinople was under Latin control during this time, from 1204-1261.

This copacetic representation of history is abruptly shattered by Mongol barbarity
and the fear it incites. The narrative moves from the civil and spiritual diplomacy of
French-Byzantine affairs to a relation of the Mongol invasions into Hungary, Poland, and
Russia. The rubricated heading introduces them as an irruption that terrorizes Christians:

> Quomodo Tartari resumptis viribus de montibus suis
>
> prorumpentes, Orientalium multis finibus vastatis, etiam
>
> Christianos jam perterruerunt. (76)
>
> [How the Tartars burst forth from their mountains with
>
> resumed force, laid to waste many territories of the east,
>
> and forthwith terrified the Christians.]

Cast as anti-Christ figures, they are understood to have been enclosed in the Caucasus
mountains by Alexander. Their escape occurs as an irruption, a bursting forth of a
ferocity long fueled by its containment, and eager for its release onto a
vulnerable Christendom. The section thus begins with their description as "an inferior,
cursed people of Satan [plebs Sathanae detestanda]" who interrupt the progression of
civilized, Christian history:

> Ne mortalium gaudia continuentur, ne
>
> sine lamentis mundana laetitia diu celebretur, eodem anno
>
> plebs Sathanae detestanda, Tartarorum scilicet exercitus inf
>
> initus, a regione sua montibus circumvallata prorupit. (76)
>
> [So that human joys would not run on continuously, and so
>
> that earthly pleasure would not be enjoyed without sorrow,
>
> that same year, an inferior, cursed people of Satan, whom

we know as that large army of the Tartars, broke forth from

their enclosure in the mountains.]

The civility recounted in the previous section is glossed here as an example of human

joys and earthly pleasure. Matthew thus frames the Mongols as a disruption that

precludes one instance of joy from continuously uniting with another. They destroy the

peaceful narration of history in the same way that, as recounted by Matthew, they swept

through like locusts and devastated the eastern regions of Europe: "completely covering

the earth like locusts, they ravaged the eastern borders with wretched destruction,

desolating it with fire and carnage [quasi locustae terrae superficiem cooperientes,

Orientalium fines exterminio miserabili vastaverunt, incendio vacantes et stragibus]."

As they are pulled into Latin Christian history as a barbaric disruption, they are

included specifically as outsiders whose difference is leveraged. At the same time that

they are monstrous cannibals, they are also constructed as a powerful force against Islam.

Under the year 1238, Matthew Paris records that "Saracen" messengers were sent to the

French and English kings seeking aid against advancing Mongol armies (Luard 1876,

488-9). At the English court, the Muslim envoy warned that if they could not ward off the

Mongol attacks, the west would soon be devastated as well. Although he tried to appeal

to their relationship as neighbors, citing a quote from Horace: "For it concerns you too

when your neighbor's wall is burning [nam tua res agitur, paries cum proximus ardet]";

he is quickly dismissed by Peter de Roches, Bishop of Winchester.[77] Matthew records the

words of Peter to Henry III: "Let us leave these dogs to devour one another so that they

all perish [Sinamus canes hos illos devorare ad invicem, ut consumpti pereant]." He

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[77] Horace, Chapter I, Epistles 18.84.

believed their fighting amongst themselves would weaken the Muslim occupation in the

Levant and open the region to Christian control. Peter collapses both Mongol and Muslim

into the same debased category of inhuman bestiality. While they share a racialization of

monstrosity and barbarity here, the enmity between them distinguishes their particular

relation of alterity to Christendom. Mongol and Muslim otherness, while marked by a

similar racialization of the east, work against each other to the benefit of Christendom's

epistemological dominance. Peter imagines Christian triumph against the Muslims

precisely because he is able to position Mongols within, and then harness them against,

the Muslim east. Once the Mongols and Muslims destroy each other, Peter advises, the

Christians can slay all those who remain so that they may subject the world to one

Catholic church, with one shepherd and one fold: "ut universus mundus uni catholicae

ecclesiae subdatur, et *fiat unus pastor et unum ovile*."

In an historical narrative about Latin Christian history, the Mongols are pulled

into a discursive structure where they are inferior and marked by otherness. The

racialization of the east inheres within their relation of alterity to Latin Christendom. The

east is inscribed with essentialized characteristics that are not necessarily fixed and

coherent, but arise systematically through crusade ideology. It is barbaric and also home

to paradise: these don't necessarily contradict one another because it is the barbarism of

the east that will facilitate the management of eastern alterity so that it can be opened up

to Latin Christians and their arrival in paradise. This eastern barbarity has to be harnessed

against itself, eliminating and converting heretics and heathens. Through this work of

eastern barbarity, paradise will then be offered to Latin Christendom. Thus, the

racialization of the east is not monolithic or singular, but rather depends on different

relations of alterity to Latin Christendom because it is not east vs. west, but east vs. east for the benefit of the west (explored more fully in the next chapter). As the east is racialized, it's also important to remember that so too is the west. Latin Christianity emerges as a racial category, however unmarked, within the same discursive system that racializes Muslims, Mongols, Jews, and non-Latin Christians.

A continuous thread of Matthew's historical narrative from 1237 to 1241 tells the story of papal legate Otto who comes to England and imparts his influence on King Henry III. Matthew's disdain for the cardinal is apparent throughout the thread. He resents that the king has turned away from the counsel of his "natural subjects" ["hominum naturalium"] in favor of "foreigners" ["alienigenis"] from Rome, and his rhetoric expresses a clear demarcation of foreignness along the lines of English and non-English belonging. In his account of Otto's arrival, he records the collective words of the nobles who are angered that their king has summoned the cardinal, proclaiming that he "perverts all laws, breaks his faith and promises, and transgresses in everything he does. ["pervertit, jura, fidem, promissa, in omnibus transgreditur]" (Luard 1876, 395). He later writes that Henry has decided to trust a "corrupt council [perverso consilio]" and has thereby "estranged himself from the counsels of his natural subjects [suorum naturalium hominum consiliis factus est extraneus]" (Luard 1876, 410). Henry imposes a new tax without consulting the English nobles, for which Matthew paints him in a negative light: "without taking the advice of any one of the natural subjects of his kingdom, he gave it [the taxes] to foreigners to be carried abroad, and he became like a man deceived, as if he had no sense [sine alicujus naturalis hominis terrae consilio alienigenis exposuit asportandam. Et factus est quasi seductus, non habens cor]" (411). Matthew blames an

attitude of anti-nativism for the rebellion that happens in 1238 and he depicts the king's brother Richard, earl of Cornwall, in a much kinder light precisely because of his allegiance to the English nobility.

Matthew's use of *alienigeni* to describe the legate and non-Englishmen reveals an interesting relationship between how belonging operates within Latin Christendom and how it is defined against figures like the Mongols, who are *inhumana monstra.* Underscoring his narrative is a perspective of English prioritization over non-English Christians even within a larger community of Latin Christendom. And his history details the many wars and political discord between different Christian kingdoms. However, the foreignness of the legate and other non-English subjects are still bound together by Latin Christendom against the monstrosity of Jews, Muslims, and Mongols. Without the inclusion of these outsider figures—who are beyond the pale that would define them as even *alienigeni,* or foreign—there wouldn't be a sense of unity for Latin Christendom. Thus, while the discussion of the foreign legate, internal discord, and nativist ideologies are woven throughout Matthew's narrative, they come together under the umbrella of a greater insider against real outsiders, those for whom human civility, which encompasses even disagreement over taxation, is completely absent. The inclusion of the Mongols during this thread from 1237 to 1241 reminds readers that the Roman legate, the French foreigners, the Milanese, even the Greeks, are all part of a civilized world of Christians – and that these are the real outsiders, monstrous barbarians, that threaten humanity itself. Their alterity functions rhetorically within the discourse to forge a Latin Christian community that can have all its diversity and discord while remaining coherent. Mongol

alterity both epistemologically defines Latin Christendom and rhetorically delimits the historical narrative.

<div align="center">***</div>

Matthew's chronicle history is continued by various authors at St. Albans and, later, Westminster. Its continuation, known also as the *Flores Historiarum*, records an event about the Mongols that epitomizes their construction as both racial, exotified others and Christian allies within Latin Christian discourse and the romance literature it inspired. Under the year 1299, the *Flores* chronicler recounts the slaughter of more than two hundred and forty thousand Muslims by the hand of the King of the Tartars and his allies, the Kings of Georgia and Armenia. The narrative suggests that it was the conversion of the Mongols to Christianity that prompted this war, and their conversion is credited with a miracle having to do with a baby of mixed heritage. The "heathen" brother of the Mongol King Cassanus had been smitten with the Christian King of Armenia's daughter, but the Armenian king refused to give her to him in marriage unless he converted to Christianity. The Mongols threatened war, however, so the king ultimately assented to the marriage. When the couple had a male child, he was born monstrous in appearance with a body that was "hairy and shaggy [hispidum et pilosum]" (Luard 1890, 107-8). His mother had him baptized despite her husband's orders to have the child burned, and upon his third anointment in the holy water, all the hair fell from his body. Having witnessed this miracle of his son's transformation, the Mongol husband and his people convert.
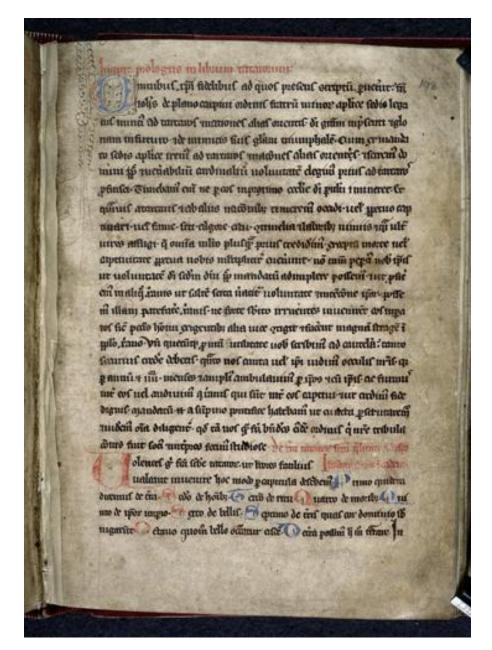
The king who is named Cassanus in the Flores is a fictionalized representation of Ghazan, the Mongol ruler of the Ilkhanate of Persia (1295-1304). In December of 1299,

with the help of the Christian forces of Georgia and Armenia, Ilkhan Ghazan successfully conquered Aleppo and Damascus, pushing the Mamluks out of Syria. In reality, Ghazan had converted to Islam in 1295 and this war was not the anti-Muslim crusade it is imagined to be in the *Flores*. The Mongols of the Ilkhanate had been at war with the Mamluks in Syria since the 1250s. During that time, they appealed to European leaders numerous times for military alliance, even undertaking a joint crusade with Edward I in 1271. Their diplomatic strategy to acquire European allegiance against the Mamluks often entailed an assertion of their convertibility and Christian sympathies. Ilkhan Abaqa, Ghazan's grandfather, sent an embassy to the 1274 Council of Lyons, which delivered a report outlining nearly two decades of friendship between the Mongols and Europeans as well as their shared interests against the Mamluks. The report names two influential Mongol women, Doquz Khatun and Sorqaqtani Beki, as daughters of Prester John; in so doing, the report calls upon an enduring association between the Mongols and Prester John, and thus activates an auto-ethnographic maneuver of diplomacy. [78]

That Ghazan was himself a Muslim is thus overlooked in the historiographical record, which rather transforms his military defeat of the Mamluks in 1299 into a victory for Latin Christendom. Latin Christians constructed Ghazan into a warrior who had conquered Jerusalem on their behalf. While the Mongol occupation of Syria was short-lived, lasting only until the following year, it fueled a prevailing narrative of Mongol-Christian alliance that would long persist. The romances of the fourteenth century would consistently depict Mongols as *exotic allies*, a racial construct that had developed over the course of decades in the previous century.

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[78] See Jackson (2005, 175). See also Lupprian (1981, 229, no. 44). See also Jean Richard (1977).

Figure 1:
Liber Tartarorum in British Library, Royal MS 13 A XIV, fol. 198r

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CHAPTER 3

THE MONGOL CHRISTIANS OF TARS:

LOCATING THE ILKHANATE OF PERSIA IN THE MIDDLE ENGLISH *THE KING OF*

TARS (C. 1330)

* * *

On September 22, 1331, a royal procession in the middle of Cheapside commenced

Edward III's first tournament in London. Lasting three days, it was one of the earliest to

be cast as a royal pageant.[79] Its location in London's mercantile center brought the

aristocracy and the wealthy urban elites together in a shared event, increasing the

visibility of the crown and asserting royal power through the theatricality of chivalry.

This genre of tournament that combined combat with the spectacle of the pageant became

an integral part of England's social culture under Edward's reign, specifically after his

execution of Roger Mortimer in November of 1330.[80] Between 1331 and 1343, Edward

hosted at least thirty tournaments (Ormond 2011). William Montagu, the captain of the

Cheapside tournament and the king's most intimate friend, had been the leader of the

coup against Mortimer, which successfully stabilized Edward's kingship. A sentiment of

royal triumph thus contextualizes the procession through Cheapside, and it does so with

the performative accoutrements of Mongol terror.

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[79] For a discussion on the association between tournaments and disguisings, and how the tournament became framed as a chivalric pageant beginning in the thirteenth century, see chapter two in Barber (2013) and chapter five in Twycross and Carpenter (2002); and on tournaments in England becoming spectacles, see Barker (1986, 98).

[80] For more on Edward's enthusiasm for tournaments, particularly after Mortimer's execution, see Barber (2013).

Pageantry enabled the knights to bolster their chivalric prowess by way of a

prevailing racialized identity of the Mongol figure. In the chronicle record of the event,

the compiler describes the spectacular procession headed by William Montagu:

> Willelmus, qui erat capitaneus illius sollempnitatis, una cum rege et aliis
>
> militibus electis, omnes splendido apparatu vestiti et ad similitudinem
>
> Tartarorum larvati; venerunt etiam cum eis et tot dominae de nobilioribus
>
> et pulcrioribus regni, quae omnes indutae fuerunt tunicis de rubeo velveto
>
> et capis de camelino albo; et habebat unusquisque miles a dextris unam
>
> dominam cum cathena argentea eam ducendo.[81] (Stubbs 1882, 354)
>
> [William, who was the captain of this solemn occasion, together
>
> with the king and other chosen knights, were all clothed in
>
> splendid attire and masked in the likeness of Tartars; and further,
>
> there came with them as many noble and beautiful ladies, all of
>
> whom were dressed in tunics of red velvet and capes of white
>
> cameline; and on his right side, each knight had a lady, leading her
>
> with a chain made of silver.]

The masked impersonation here conveys Mongol monstrosity into an assertion of the

knights' martial indomitability, a source of royal power. *Larvati* were not merely masks

of neutral aspect, but of something frightening, terrible, and ferocious. As the knights and

the king parade through the streets of London "ad similitudinem Tartarorum larvati

[masked in the likeness of Tartars]" while leading noblewomen by chains made of silver,

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[81] This event is recorded in the *Annales Paulini*, a chronicle compiled at St. Paul's Cathedral in London. I use Stubbs's Latin edition here; it is extant in a codex of fourteenth-century chronicles: Lambeth Palace MS 1106, ff. 93-110. See Gransden (1996, 25-29) for more on its London context and authorship. For Gransden's discussion of the 1331 Cheapside tournament, see page 63.

they embody the hideous ferocity of the constructed Mongol race and its power to
dominate. The spectacularized domination of the noblewomen, whose restrained and
controlled bodies become captive property for all of London to witness, leverages the
sexual overtones of barbarity in order to assert the chivalric prowess of the knights and
their king. Edward's pageant-tournament activates royal power in the center of civic and
mercantile life in England by drawing on the Mongol figure as an "exotic ally," a racial
construction produced by thirteenth-century Latin discourse, wherein the representation
of Mongols functioned to buttress the supremacy of Latin Christendom (as discussed in
previous chapters).

Around the same time as the Cheapside tournament, a Middle English romance
featuring the mass conversion and genocide of Saracens by Christian Mongols is
transcribed in the Auchinleck manuscript (c. 1330).[82] The inclusion of *The King of Tars* in
the Auchinleck suggests its significance within a literary culture that was formulating
what it meant to be English in the early fourteenth century. Indeed, all three of the
manuscripts in which *Tars* is extant have been noted by scholars as being particularly
interested in creating a textual compilation that could contribute to a growing sense of
English identity.[83] Scholars have shown that although the modern nation-state is an

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[82] The earliest extant version is contained in the Auchinleck (c. 1330), NLS Advocates MS 19.2.1. For a facsimile of the Auchinleck, see Pearsall and Cunningham (1977). It is extant in two later manuscripts: Vernon (c. 1390), Bodleian Library, MS Eng. poet. A. 1; and Simeon (c. 1400), British Library Additional MS 22283. Simeon is considered a copy of the Vernon because they are nearly identical. For a facsimile of the Vernon, see Doyle (1987). For an analysis of the transmission of *The King of Tars* from the Auchinleck to the Vernon/Simeon, see Reichl (1990). For a study on the relationship between the Vernon and Simeon, see Doyle (1990).

[83] Turville-Petre (1996, 108-141) calls the manuscript "a handbook of the nation" and demonstrates its particular interest in Englishness because the majority of the texts have to do with England, its history and legends, and the entire manuscript is written in the English language except for a few lines of French. Calkin (2005b) also views the manuscript as having an investment in formulating English identity, and she explores specifically how it does so through its representations of Saracens. For a discussion on the Englishness of the Vernon, see Blake (1990) and Calkin (2005a). Blake's analysis emphasizes the vernacularity of the manuscript. Calkin notes that the Vernon "envisions England as a realm whose

inadequate concept for parsing the consolidation of community and power in the Middle Ages, medieval England was nonetheless invested in formulating a sense of itself as a coherent community bound together by shared political, cultural, and geographic affiliations.[84] As Andrew Galloway (2004) has argued, "the time is long past when we can make a flat declaration that a pan-European Christian ideology and the preeminence of Latin rendered medieval culture incapable of nationalism" (41). However, precisely what constituted a cohesive English identity was still being worked out in the early fourteenth-century; indeed, Kathy Lavezzo (2004) notes that while there existed "a discourse of English identity […] in the medieval period, […] what constituted 'England' during the Middle Ages was hardly fixed. The Middle Ages did not see the birth of a unified English community, but instead witnessed the construction of multiple, contingent, and conflicting 'Englands,' each geared toward the respective needs of different social groups (monarchic, Lollard, monastic, etc.) engaged in national discourses" (xix).

The compiler of the Auchinleck turned to the Mongol figure in a similar maneuver as the knights at Cheapside: to harness a construction of eastern alterity for the activation of royal power, in the latter case, and a consolidation of a stable England in the former. *The King of Tars* offers the Auchinleck and its English readers a romance that resolves

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inhabitants are concerned about understanding and practicing their Christian faith in their own language" (233). The work of several scholars has shown that English vernacularity alone cannot serve as a marker of national interest: notably Pearsall (2001) and Galloway (2004). Galloway makes a strong case for the inclusion of monastic Latin texts in conversations about the English nation and defining Englishness. But language aside, the texts in these manuscripts are overwhelmingly concerned with England, its past, present, and future, and explore themes relevant to an English audience.

[84] Lavezzo (2004) offers a thorough overview of the exclusion of the Middle Ages from scholarship on the nation and nationalism, notably in Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, and the strides taken within medievalist scholarship to dispel the myth that medieval communities were not engaged in nationalistic discourse; see p. vii-xix.

instability and uncertainty with conquest. It demonstrates the capacity of romance to grapple with and advance a philosophical viewpoint on the intersecting categories of race and religion, and their role in consolidating identity.[85] The religious battle between Christianity and Islam in *The King of Tars* plays out through an interfaith marriage and the anxieties it raises about the progeny such a union might produce. The child that is born a lump, the product of a Christian mother and Saracen father, intuitively represents the unintelligibility of miscegenation and the necessity of immediate correction for the future of Christendom. It is precisely the racial construct of the exotic ally that enables the narrative's resolution of physiognomic stability when the Princess of Tars facilitates the child's baptism, his father's conversion, and both the mass conversion and genocide of the rest of the Saracens. Just as the noblewomen in the processional at Cheapside became instruments for the assertion of male chivalric power, so too is a woman in *The King of Tars* the central agent by which Mongol racial alterity is articulated and activated for not only the longevity of Latin Christian identity, but also its supremacy. Religious conversion functions in the romance as a form of racialized colonialism that folds the entirety of the imagined east into the domain of Latin Christendom.

The Invisible History of Romance

The King of Tars is a retelling and highly embellished version of an event that was recorded in the annals of 1280 or 1299 in six chronicles across Latin Europe (Pertz et al

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[85] *Tars* is not grouped with the romances in the Auchinleck, but instead is included among the religious texts; it follows the *Legend of Pope Gregory* and precedes the *Life of Adam and Eve*. This placement as well as its inclusion in the Vernon and the Simeon, two religious manuscripts intended for pious readers, have led some scholars to critique its generic classification as a romance. However, its narrative structure and themes are unmistakably of the medieval romance genre.

1851, 806; Seemüller 1890, 253-6; Luard 1890, 107-8; Riley 1865, 189-90; Massai 1802;

Finke 1908, 747).[86] These historiographical sources recount the birth of a monstrous

baby, born to an Armenian Christian Princess and a pagan Mongol ruler (or his brother),

during the reigns of Ilkhan Abaqa (1265-1282) and Ilkhan Ghazan (1295-1304). While

the versions vary slightly, consistent among them is that the baby miraculously

transforms upon his baptism, which promptly inspires his father to become Christian,

fight the Saracens, and reconquer Jerusalem for Latin Christendom. These accounts

feature a theme of conversion, an ideological investment in Latin Christian supremacy,

and the racial construction of Mongols, all of which, my analysis will show, are picked up

and expanded in the romance.

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[86] While there are many analogues, only six can be considered sources of *The King of Tars,* all identified
below, because of the dates of the chronicle mss and the date of the Auchinleck MS (the earliest extant
version of *Tars*).
1. *Annales S. Rudberti Salisburgenses* (German-Latin)*;* see Pertz et al (1851, 806). Event recorded
   under 1280; the husband is the king of the Tartars and the wife is the daughter of Prester John; no
   names are given.
2. Ottokar of Styria's *Österreichische Reimchronik* (German); see verses 19097-19351 in Seemüller
   (1890, 253-6). Recorded in events of 1280. This version is a long embellishment of the version in
   the *Annales S. Rudberti Salisburgenses.* The husband is the king of the Tartars, but the wife
   becomes the daughter of an Armenian king; no names are given. When the Armenian king relents
   to give his daughter in marriage, he does so thinking it possible that the daughter will convert the
   Tartars. This is notably not the case in the *Tars* version.
3. *Flores Historiarum* (Anglo-Latin); see Luard (1890, 107-8). Recorded with events for 1299. The
   husband is the pagan brother of the Tartar king Cassanus and the wife is the daughter of the
   Christian king of Armenia: "Cassani magni regis frater paganus fliiam regis Armeniae Christianam
   adamavit."
4. Rishanger's *Chronica* (Anglo-Latin); see Riley (1865, 189-90) and MS Cotton Faustina B.ix.
   Recorded for 1299. The husband is the brother of the king of the Tartars, just as he is in the *Flores
   Historiarum*, but no names are given: "Frater hujus Regis Tartarorum, ex filia Regis Armeniae,
   gennit filium hispidum et pilosum." Worth noting is that the only two sources of English
   provenance have the husband cast as the brother, not the king, of the Tartars.
5. Villani's *Istorie Fiorentine* (Italian); see Massai (1802). Recorded under December 1299. The
   husband and wife are the emperor of the Tartars, named Cassanus, and the daughter of the
   Armenian king.
6. Hispano-Latin letter written to Jayme II of Aragon; see Finke (1908, 747, no. 464). The husband
   and wife are the king of the tartars and the daughter of the king of Armenia. Finke dates the letter
   to 1307, but Hornstein argues that it could also have been 1300 or 1301-2. See Hornstein (1941b,
   438).

Although Mongols are not explicitly named in *The King of Tars*, the geographic locale of Christendom in the romance secures their continued presence in its narrative landscape and, specifically, the Christian-Muslim conflict it stages. "Tars" is generally understood to be shorthand for Tartary, European nomenclature for Mongol territory.[87] Judith Perryman (1980), in her authoritative edition of the romance, has argued that while the term "Tars" may signify Tarsus (Tabriz) or Tharsia, rather than Tartary, both of these "geographical areas were under Mongol domination at the time of the poem's conception. So from a historical viewpoint 'king of Tartars' is a fair gloss for *king of Tars*" (48). [88] Perryman's assertion follows from the earlier work of Lillian Herlands Hornstein (1941a, 405-6), who persuasively demonstrated a Tars-Tartar connection, and reflects the scholarly consensus on the meaning of "Tars" in the romance. Yet, scholarship on *Tars* has largely skimmed over the Mongols and has not, to any great extent, examined how their presence might function in the text's exploration of racial and religious difference, nor its assertions of Latin Christian dominance over the Levantine east.

Hornstein's work in the first half of the 20th century provides a strong basis of knowledge on the historical context of *Tars*, including a survey of the text's analogues in European chronicles of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries (1941b) and a study of Ilkhan Ghazan, one of the historical referents for the king of Tars (1941a). Recent scholarship has also included an historical analysis that accounts for the Mongol and Armenian contexts of the romances (Friedman 2015; Boyadjian 2011); however, most of

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[87] For a detailed discussion of the medieval use of Tartar to designate the Mongols, see C.W. Connell (1973).

[88] Tabriz was an important Mongol city in Persia and commercial and cultural center in the region. Tharsia, according to the MED, was a kingdom bordering the west of China. See Perryman (1980), pages 42-8 for an extended discussion of all the possible locales indicated by the name "Tars."

the scholarship on the romance has tended to de-emphasize *Tars*'s historical backdrop in favor of its symbolic representations (Gilbert 2004; Ellzey 1992; Heng 2003; Lampert-Weissig 2004; Elias 2012; Calkin 2005a, b; Whitaker 2013).[89] For example, Lisa Lampert-Weissig (2004) uses *The King of Tars* to theorize medieval race, identifying how religious difference could operate as racial difference; yet she purposely limits her reading to representations at the narrative's surface rather than connecting its symbolic implications to historical frameworks. She acknowledges the text's analogues within historiography, but argues that because this history is sublimated within the romance, it no longer informs the revitalized story. Following from the earlier work of Judith Perryman (1980), Lampert-Weissig (2004) argues that in the romance's translation of the historiographical sources, the characters "lost their moorings to historical figures and took on symbolic roles" because Ilkhans Abaqa and Ghazan, the real Mongol rulers on which the historiographical figure was based, were Buddhist and Muslim, respectively (406). She goes on to argue, "*The King of Tars* moves away from historical complications to work on a symbolic level, in which an unequivocally Christian king is threatened by a

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[89] Friedman's symbolic reading of whiteness in the text rests upon the historical connection to the Mongols. Boyadjian makes a case for the continued presence of Armenia in the text because of its connection to the Mongols. But the majority of scholarship on the text marginalizes the significance of the Mongols. Gilbert's Lacanian reading of the father-figure in *Tars* only mentions the text's historical connection to Mongols in a footnote identifying Tars as Mongol territory and in a peripheral comment on an analogue, both citing Hornstein. Ellzey focuses on the religious difference between the Sultan and the Princess, but ignores other factors of cultural sameness and difference between them that the Princess's Mongol identity would suggest. Heng, Lampert-Weissig, and Elias's readings all rely on a Christian-Muslim binary that does not consider the Mongol heritage/eastern identity of the Christians of Tars. Calkin's work on *Tars* also skims over the Mongol identity of the Christians of Tars, reading them instead as Latin Europeans. Whitaker's comprehensive analysis of *Tars* complicates prevailing conceptions of the romance's presentation of an oppositional black Muslim/white Christian dyad, and his formulation of how difference and similitude commingle in the Sultan challenges the somatic and religious binaries on which much of the earlier *Tars* scholarship rests. However, as his reading traces the metaphor of blackness in the text, focusing on its symbolic implications within the romance's construction of race, it too does not explore the Mongol identity of the Christians of Tars.

Muslim sultan."[90] Without the complications posed by the historiographical material, which confuses the religious identity of the Mongol ruler, Lampert-Weissig argues that the romance stages "a clear-cut battle between Christianity and Islam [that] is sharpened through its deployment of white and black to mark the two opposing faiths." This idea that the romance maps a black-white binary of racialized physiognomic difference onto a paradigm of religious difference reflects an elision of race and religion in much of the criticism of the text.

I argue that the Christian-Muslim opposition at the core of the narrative relies on an imbricated system, not a synonymous mapping, of racial alterity for its efficacy. Rather than collapse into one another, race and religion in *The King of Tars* operate in distinct and complementary ways within a network of alterity that activates the ideological work of the romance. The geopolitical relations between Latin Europe, the Islamic Mamluk Sultanate in Syria, and the Mongol Ilkhanate of Persia from the 1260s to 1290s—along with their representation within Latin Christian historiography—provides a rich historical backdrop to a symbolically complex Middle English romance. [91] Rejoining the romance with its history reveals how Mongol racial alterity functions within the romance's oppositional paradigm of religion as a potent strategy of discursive colonial dominance.

This period in the history of the Ilkhanate of Persia was marked by conflict with the Mamluk Sultanate as well as diplomacy with Latin Europe.[92] Hülegü, Chinggis

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[90] For Perryman's argument that Lampert draws from here, see Perryman (1980), pages 44-49.

[91] The Ilkhanate, or sub-khanate, was the Mongol suzerainty in the Persian region that remained loyal to the Great Khan.

[92] Ironically, the success of the Mongol invasions of the 1220s inadvertently led to the rise of the Mamluk Sultanate and thus the end of Mongol expansion. The Mamluks descended from the Kipchak Turks, who had been displaced into slavery after their lands were devastated by the Mongols. Many of them were sold into slavery in Cairo, where the Ayyubid sultan al-Salih Ayyub put them to work in his army; these

Khan's grandson, took control of northern Persia from the Assassins in 1256 in order to found the Ilkhanate of Persia for the Mongol Empire. In 1258, he seized Baghdad from the Abbasid Caliph, and then continued on into Syria, where he also took control of Aleppo and Damascus from the Ayyubids in 1260. He intended to expand the Ilkhanate's borders all the way across Syria and into Egypt, and his early success in Syria seemed promising for these plans. However, at the Battle of Ayn Jalut in 1260, the Muslim Mamluks of Egypt not only succeeded in defeating Hülegü's advance into their territory, but also in pushing his forces from Syria and establishing Mamluk power there instead. So while Hülegü was unsuccessful in taking over Syria, his invasion nonetheless changed the political landscape of the region because it opened a space for the Mamluks to expand their Sultanate into Syria: it effected a transfer of power from the Ayyubids to the Mamluks, rather than to the Mongols. And the Mongols' defeat at Ayn Jalut halted the western expansion of their Empire.

Regaining control over Syria became a priority for Hülegü and his successors, including Abaqa and Ghazan; and the war between the Ilkhanid Mongols and the Mamluks persisted until 1323, when they brokered a peace agreement under Ilkhan Abu Sa'id. During this period, beginning in 1262, the Ilkhans opened and maintained fairly consistent diplomatic contact with the Latin popes, English and French kings, and to a lesser extent the kings of Aragon and Sicily, in their campaigns against the Mamluks.[93]

Mamluks eventually took control from the Ayyubids and founded the Mamluk Sultanate. See Cobb (2014, 220).

[93] There is a good amount of scholarship on the Mongol-Mamluk conflict in Syria and the diplomacy it inspired between the Ilkhanid Mongols and Europe. For an overview, see Jackson (2005), pages 118-119 and 165-195. For a detailed account of Mongol-European correspondence and the evidence of diplomacy contained therein from the period of Hulegu's reign (1256-1265) until that of Oljeitu (1304-16), see Boyle (1976). See Meyvaert (1980) for a discussion of a specific letter sent from Hulegu to Louis IX in 1262 requesting his naval support in his next campaign against their "common enemy." Between the reign of Abaqa and that of Ghazan, diplomacy between Europe and the Ilkhanate dwindled, although it was not

By the early 1260s, the Mongol Empire had already begun to break down and Hülegü's

Mongol neighbors were far from allies; in fact, the Kipchak Khanate to the north had

forged an alliance with the Mamluks.[94] With these broken ties as well as the instability of

the Franco-crusader presence nearby, the Ilkhanid Mongols turned to Latin Europe as the

most likely ally in this enterprise. And Latin Europe, desirous of reconquering the Levant,

reciprocated this diplomacy.

At the center of the diplomacy between Latin Europe and the Ilkhanate was a

promise of Mongol conversion to Christianity. At the Second Council of Lyon,

summoned by Pope Gregory X and held on May 7, 1274, members of a Mongol

delegation publicly converted and were baptized, which the compiler of the *Flores*

Historiarum notes was motivated not by faith but by diplomatic political aims. The

compiler writes:

> Vener[u]nt […] sexdecim Tartari, qui Moalli, cum littera regis sui, in
>
> concilio publicantes verbis pomposis potentiam Moallorum. Hi non pro
>
> fide, sed ut confoederationem haberent cum Christianis, venerunt. Hos
>
> Papa benigne suscipiens, donis et honoribus ampliavit, et ad petitionem
>
> ipsorum, non baptizatos fecit honorifice baptizari.[95] (Luard 1890, 43)
>
> [Sixteen Tartars, who are Mongols, arrived with letters from their king,
>
> announcing with grand language, before the council, the power of the

entirely abandoned, especially under the reign of Arghun (1284-91), who sent four missions to Europe,
including to Edward I; see Paviot (2000).

[94] See Jackson (2005, 124-128) for an overview of the dis-unification of the Mongol empire in the 1260s.
"Hulegu's campaigns of 1259-60 in Syria, and perhaps too the almost simultaneous invasion of Poland by
Berke's forces, were therefore the last military operations to be mounted by armies gathered on the qaghan's
orders and representing the united empire" (126).

[95] This event is recorded in the *Flores Historiarum* that was an extension of Matthew of Paris's *Chronica*
Majora both at St. Albans and then later at Westminster, where Robert of Reading was its compiler from
1307 to 1325. For a discussion of this event, see Paviot (2000, 310).

Mongols. These men came not for faith, but so that they might make an agreement with the Christians. Honoring them well, the Pope ennobled them with gifts and honors, and by their own request made those who were not baptized to be honorably baptized.]

It is unclear what religion the Mongols were converted from, but it's important not to assume that the Mongols were Muslim, as this event predates, by two decades, the official conversion of the Ilkhanate to Islam in 1295. The delegation may have consisted of Mongols of diverse faiths; and indeed, the description in the *Flores* suggests that at least some of them were already Christian, as only those who were not baptized are said to have been baptized by Pope Gregory.

Ilkhan Abaqa, who had sent this embassy to the Council, was himself Buddhist and had Nestorian and Byzantine Christian wives, including Maria Palaiologina, the illegitimate daughter of Emperor Michael VIII Palaeologus (Ryan 1998, 416; Runciman 1987, 320, 331-2; Richard 1977, 102). [96] Mongols were religiously diverse, and conversion was often used as a political tool for forging alliances. It is worth noting that this episode immediately follows the account of the Byzantine conversions at the Council and Byzantine Emperor Michael VIII's promise to unite with the Latin Church, suggesting that the compiler at least somewhat understood the Mongols' conversion as related to that of the Byzantines; that is, conversion here is a method of diplomacy. At the Council, Mongol conversion served as a symbol of political allegiance, which Abaqa hoped to leverage for his campaign against the Mamluks in Syria. His Latin secretary Richardus

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[96] Maria was betrothed to Hulegu, but when she arrived in Tabriz, he had already died so she married Abaqa, his son and successor. Maria succeeded Doquz Khatun as the spiritual leader of the Ilkhanid Mongols and was known as Despina Khatun. Ryan (1998) notes that "Maria Palaeologina even brought a Greek bishop with her to Tabriz" (416, n. 32).

delivered a report outlining the Ilkhan's victories, and those of his father Hülegü before

him, as well as their favorable relations with Europe and continued intentions of war

against the Mamluks (Jackson 2005, 168; Lupprian 1981, 229-30). The report specifically

credited Hülegü's diplomatic outreach in Europe to an embassy that arrived at his court

from Jerusalem years earlier, in 1260. This embassy was headed by an Englishman,

Dominican friar David of Ashby, who went on to live at the Mongol court and was also

present at the 1274 Council as one of Abaqa's envoys (Boyle 1976, 28; Meyvaert 1980,

250).[97]

      Friar David traveled to England after the 1274 Council and presented Edward I

with Abaqa's report, which was addressed to Christian kings in addition to the Pope

(Boyle 1976, 30).[98] Mongol diplomacy with England, in particular, is evidenced not only

by Friar David's position and his journey to the English court, but also by an earlier

crusading campaign of 1271. Answering Louis IX's call for crusade prior to his death in

1270, Edward I, then Prince Edward, arrived in Acre on May 9, 1271. Upon his arrival,

he sent an embassy to Ilkhan Abaqa requesting aid, to which Abaqa favorably responded,

providing an army for the crusaders under the leadership of his captain Samaghar. While

Samaghar's military efforts were productive, they failed to take control of the region;

meanwhile, Edward's troops suffered heavily from the harsh climate, many of them

dying before seeing any military successes. His campaign thus ended in quick defeat and

he left Acre on September 24, 1272. But while the campaign was a military failure, it

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[97] Friar David wrote *Les Fais des Tartars* for the council, a treatise on the Mongols, but no surviving manuscript exists. The only known copy was in a manuscript at Turin, and was destroyed by a fire in 1904. A description of the manuscript survives in the library catalogue, published in 1867 with one chapter transcribed along with it, discussing Mongol methods of war; see pages 26-28 in A. Scheler (1867).

[98] Boyle notes that Edward replied to Abaqa in a letter dated January 26, 1274 in which he wishes him success, but regrets that he can't send aid because the Pope has not yet called for a crusade.

serves as a strong example of Mongol-English alliance in the Syrio-Palestine region in the late thirteenth century. The delegation at the 1274 Council demonstrates Abaqa's continued interest in diplomacy with Latin Christendom, and particularly his commitment to re-establish a joint military campaign in Syria after the failure of the 1271 crusade. Friar David's delivery of Abaqa's report to King Edward I also reveals to an English audience the capacity for Mongols to convert to Christianity, and situates that conversion within a context of anti-Muslim sentiment.

After the Ilkhanate officially converted to Islam under Ilkhan Ghazan in 1295, Latin Christendom continued to represent the Mongols as Christians, and even as saviors of the Holy Land. The enduring association of Mongols with Prester John is perhaps best captured in the Latin records of a false report that Ghazan had recovered the Holy Sepulchre and conquered Jerusalem for Latin Christendom, thus fulfilling the promise of Prester John.[99] As Sylvia Schein (1979) has argued, "narrative accounts as well as numerous letters prove that between February 1300 and September 1300, many Christians in the West laboured under the impression that the Holy Land, including Jerusalem with the Holy Sepulchre, were conquered by the Mongol khan Ghazan from the Moslems and handed over to the Christians" (805). Schein demonstrates that this false report was based on Ghazan's brief reconquering of Syria at the end of 1299. The attribution of Christianity to Ghazan reflects an ideological investment in Mongol alliance through a shared religion.

As Horstein (1941a) has demonstrated, Latin Christendom purposefully interpreted factual details in order to support their construction of the Mongol figure in

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[99] See chapter 1 of this dissertation for a detailed discussion of the Prester John legend and how it shaped the first European understanding of the Mongols in the 1220s.

this way. In her discussion of Ghazan, Hornstein explains,

> In the proclamation which he [Ghazan] issued December 30, 1299, after
> the capture of Damascus, he forbade his troops "to molest those of other
> faiths – Jews, Christians, or Sabaeans." In addition, his alliance with two
> notable Christian rulers, the Kings of Armenia and Georgia, led
> Westerners to suppose he had joined with them in baptism. Finally,
> Ghazan's appeals to the European rulers for military aid were
> accompanied, like those of his father [Arghun], by statements of his
> willingness to embrace Christianity, and to turn over to the Christians such
> lands as he conquered in Palestine. His emissaries doubtless stressed
> Ghazan's Christian sympathies. (409-10)

As Hornstein articulates here, Latin Christians navigated around the problem posed by

Ghazan's Muslim conversion by focusing elsewhere: on his "Christian sympathies."

Doing so enabled them to maintain their conception of Mongols as exotic allies *against*

Islam. The desire for a Christian savior in the Holy Land overpowered any contradictory

realities, including the fact that their so-called Christian hero was Muslim. In the *Flores*

Historiarum, the Christian conversion of the Mongols is attributed to a miracle that was

bestowed on Ghazan's pagan brother ["frater paganus"] and his child (Luard 1890,

107).[100] This account circulated in several chronicles, as mentioned above, telling the

story of how the pagan Tartar (sometimes the king himself) converted to Christianity after

witnessing his son's monstrous hairiness fall from his body in the baptismal font.

      This historiographical material is transformed into a romance narrative in *The*

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[100] Ghazan is named, in the form "Cassanus," as the Tartar king in the *Flores Historiarum* and the *Istorie Fiorentine.* The Tartar ruler is not named in the other four sources.

King of Tars, with significant alterations made to its principal characters. The husband whose child is born monstrous is no longer a Mongol ruler, but rather a Saracen Sultan; and the Mongol ruler is the father of the Christian Princess whom he marries and with whom he has the child. Thus, in *The King of Tars*, the Mongols are the existing, not the converting, Christians of the story, and the converted Christian who fights the Saracens begins the narrative as a Saracen himself. The *Tars* author takes the plot and moves it forward one step such that the Mongols have already converted to Christianity by the start of the narrative. Mongol conversion, a central component of the historical relations between the Ilkhanate and Europe, undergirds the ideologies reflected in the chronicles, but it becomes a pivotal premise in the romance.

  The King of Tars operates as a space of cultural fantasy that can enact the kind of colonial dominance that was not possible in fourteenth-century England. In lieu of a crusade, it stages Christian supremacy in the imagined east by leveraging a racial construction of Mongols as exotic allies. Race is not a descriptive category, but a functional one that works within a hierarchal system to produce and support the supremacy of a dominant subject. In this romance, Mongols are constructed as agents that work against Muslims, or Saracens to be precise, in order to assert Latin Christian dominance over the entirety of the imagined east. Conversion operates as a tool of colonial conquest through the Mongol body: first by converting Mongols into Latin Christians and then by using those converted Mongols to facilitate the mass conversion and genocide of the Saracens.

  The King of Tars, the character, stabilizes Mongol conversion within this paradigm through the conventions of the romance narrative. He becomes the Christian

king who, in crusade romances, is the mirror image of the Saracen Sultan. He occupies

the role conventionally held by Charlemagne, the Christian hero who is true to his faith

and set up to be the savior of Christendom. Although the king is "of Tars," readers are

quickly assured of his faith as a Christian. In the opening lines of the narrative, the author

offers an immediate assertion as to the king's loyalty to Christianity. He asks readers to

listen to a story about how a war began

> Bituene a trewe Cristen king
>
> And an hethen heye lording,
>
> Of Dames the soudan.
>
> The king of Tars hadde a wive,
>
> Feirer might non ben olive –
>
> That ani wight telle can.
>
> A douhter thai hadde hem bituen (4-10) [101]

"Trewe" means faithful, loyal, and, in the specific context of religion, spiritually correct

and steadfast.[102] It also signals that the king is a Latin Christian, rather than Nestorian,

Jacobite, or Syrian, all sects one would expect to find in this region; notably, he is also

not Armenian, which was the particular Christian faith represented in the source

material.[103] Removing the Armenian Christians and replacing them with Latin Christian

Mongols activates the prevailing racial ideology of the exotic ally. The Mongol exotic

ally has the power to unite the heathens of the east—Christian and Muslim alike—and

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[101] All *Tars* quotes are taken from Chandler (2015).
[102] MED "treu(e)": 1a. (a) Steadfast in fidelity to friends, kin, country, etc., loyal; also, inseparable. 5(a) Of a person's heart, mind, etc.: faithful to principle, having integrity; rightly motivated, capable or possessed of proper feeling; also, pure in motive. 6(a) Steadfast in devotion to God. 7(a) Religiously orthodox, spiritually correct
[103] As discussed in chapter one, non-Latin Christians were considered heathens despite their shared Christianity.

bring them all into the fold of Latin Christendom. In the literature of the Fifth Crusade

that chapter one examines, the conversion of the east is understood specifically as a

weapon against Islam in the Levant.

Further, there is no doubt here as to the king's loyalty to his faith despite an

invisible history of conversion and a prior "hethen" affiliation of his own. Indeed, in the

sources, he was the "hethen" at the start of the story; yet, here, he occupies a stable

Christian identity. As he is established as a "trewe" Christian, his retention of his eastern

Mongol identity is equally significant. In a story that offers very little by way of

identifying markers – the characters are given no names – his attachment to his locale of

rule stands out as integral to who he is: not just a "trewe Cristen king" but also "of Tars"

(4,7). He draws an allusion to Prester John, just like the historical Ghazan from whom his

character is based; as such, he signals to readers a particular fantasy of a global Latin

Christendom in which Islam is destroyed or converted, and in which Mongol alterity

functions towards that aim (see chapter one).[104]

The Princess of Tars

The Armenian Christian Princess of the source material becomes the Christian Princess of

Tars in the romance. As the narrative conventions of romance characterize her father as a

Christian hero and savior, so too does it construct his daughter through the trope of the

romance heroine. Scholars have long noted the membership of *The King of Tars* within

the cluster of narratives known as the Constance-cycle, which includes Chaucer's *Man of*

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[104] The king's link to Prester John is further supported by the earliest version of the sources, the German-Latin *Annales S. Rudberti Salisburgenses*, in which he is Prester John. This version indicates that the Christian wife/mother is the daughter of Prester John. She becomes the daughter of the Armenian king in all subsequent versions of the sources.

Law's Tale, Book Two in Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, and Nicholas Trivet's account in his Anglo-Norman chronicle.[105] What all these stories have in common is a Christian heroine who travels away from her home to a foreign land, marries a non-Christian king with whom she has a baby son, and facilitates both her husband's conversion and the mass conversion of his people. Geraldine Heng (2003) has shown how in these Constance romances empire is articulated through the cultural conquest that conversion enables. The failure of a military, masculine ambition of territorial dominance in the Latin East is recovered through a cultural mode of colonial dominance. This cultural imperialism is driven by what Heng calls an "erotics of conversion" in which the intimacy of feminine desirability and sexual martyrdom "lubricates […] the modalities of power that bind large communal groups into mutual relationship, especially where the unequal possession of power constitutes the organizing principle of relation" (187).

As the agent of the Sultan's conversion, the Princess plays a central role in the narrative's progression and the fulfilment of its ultimate aim: to expand the borders of Christendom. The Princess's hybridity—that is, the conjoining of a Latin European appearance and a racialized construction of the Mongol within her characterization—facilitates a conversion-as-colonial conquest that the Sultan ushers in. Despite that she is a Mongol woman, she appears, physically, to be a Latin European literary heroine. When the narrator introduces the Princess, there is nothing indicating her Mongol heritage:

> Non feirer woman might ben
>
> As white as fether of swan.
>
> The meiden was schast and blithe of chere

---

[105] She is also part of the Saracen Princess tradition. The Princess of Tars's relation to these romance heroines is a rich avenue for further study.

> With rode red so blosme on brere
>
> And eyghen stepe and gray.
>
> With lowe scholders and white swere
>
> Hir for to sen was gret prier
>
> Of princes proud and play. (11-18)

She is the most beautiful woman, as white as the feather of a swan, chaste, joyful in her demeanor and appearance, possessing a rosy complexion and glistening gray eyes, low shoulders and a white neck. Her appearance is by all accounts that of a stock Latin European heroine. In fact, critics such as Heng (2003) and Lampert-Weissig (2004) have argued that this appearance effectively erases any semblance of an eastern identity that her association with Tars would have otherwise designated. [106] While her physical features certainly transform her into a normative racialized Christian body, I argue that the romance's history sutures onto her a Mongol heritage that is impossible to ignore. The Armenian Princess of the source material is here transplanted not by a strictly

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[106] Heng (2003) argues that the whiteness of the Princess and the transformation of the Sultan work together to cement a normativity of whiteness for Latin Christianity. For Heng, racial identity becomes conflated with that of religion, especially evidenced in the skin color change experienced by the Sultan upon his conversion. See also Lampert (2004), who follows the same line of analysis in regard to racial-religious categories in *Tars*. See Cord Whitaker (2013) for a compelling case against readings that interpret the Sultan's physiognomic change into whiteness as a consolidation of racial and religious identities. Whitaker makes a compelling case against readings that interpret the Sultan's physiognomic change into whiteness as a consolidation of racial and religious identities. Whitaker's contention is that the Sultan actually turns white after, not at the precise moment of, his conversion and thus he exists as both black *and* Christian for a period of time. He argues that neither his blackness – notably, only mentioned when he converts – nor his whiteness are mapped along a Saracen-Christian divide, but are rather symbolic of his Christian sin and path towards redemption. He writes, "the [Sultan's] change is in fact not indicative of a cut-and-dried relationship between Christian identity and the normativity of European whiteness. The connection between color and religious identity in the late Middle Ages is rather more complex, and the *King of Tars* in particular exploits the normativity of physical whiteness in western Christendom when it advocates the necessity of metaphorical, or spiritual, "blackness" in Christians. In the *King of Tars*, the physical reality of skin-color difference gives way to the metaphor of color that facilitates Christendom's necessary "blackness." The *King of Tars* didactically navigates the line between reality and metaphor in order to turn its reader's attention from the Christian mission to convert others, a defining feature of late medieval Crusades ideology, to the project of examining and maintaining his own spiritual well-being" (169).

European heroine, but by a European-Mongol hybridized figure.

Her hybridity becomes the very thing that enables the success of the romance's cultural conquest. Her role as an agent of conversion affirms her connection not only to the European heroine of the romance tradition, but also to the European perception of Ilkhanid Christian wives as holding influence over their husbands and wielding potential power to inspire their conversion. Ilkhanid Mongol women were known to be spiritual leaders. In fact, noblewomen across the Mongol Empire often held influential positions in the political affairs of Mongol courts. John of Plano Carpini, one of the earliest travelers to Mongol territory (discussed in chapter two), reported on how one of the wives of Jochi—son of Chinggis Khan and father of Batu, founder of the Kipchak Khanate (Golden Horde)—ruled his *ordo* (camp) after his death, which he noted was the custom (Dawson 1955, 60). Ibn Battutah also wrote about the relatively high status of Mongol women.[107] As Yoni Brack (2011) has argued, Mamluk sultans and nobles often sought marriages to Ilkhanid princesses because these brides would bring them great prestige. While they did marry Ilkhanid women, they were usually the daughters of military officers, not princesses whose bloodlines traced back to Chinggis Khan (343-4). Some of the most influential women of the Ilkhanate were Christians, beginning with Hülegü's mother, Sorqaqtani Beki, who was also the mother of the Great Khans Mongke and Kubilai.[108] Hülegü's father Tolui also married another Nestorian Christian, Doquz

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[107] Ibn Battutah was a 14th c. Arab-Muslim world traveler and Islamic legal scholar who wrote the *Rihla*, an account of one of the most extensive journeys across northern Africa to Asia from 1325 to 1354. For more on Battutah, see Mackintosh-Smith (2003) and Dunn (2004). In a remarkable comparison to the contemporaneous *Book of John Mandeville* (c. 1356), the subject of chapter four, Ibn Battutah was disbelieved by his contemporaries while *Mandeville* was accepted as factual and had an extensive afterlife in the century after its composition. See, most recently, Bale (2016) on the historical use of *Mandeville* by late medieval English pilgrims.

[108] Sorqaqtani Beki was the daughter of Ong Khan of the Kerait tribe, which converted to Nestorian Christianity around the beginning of the 11th century. She is considered one of the most influential women

Khatun, of the same line as his mother, who later became Hülegü's chief wife upon his

father's death. According to Rashid al-Din (d. 1318), Persian statesmen and chronicler,

Doquz Khatun

> commanded great respect and possessed absolute authority. Since the tribe
>
> of the Kerait adhered to the Christian faith, she strongly supported the
>
> Christians, so that under her protection this 'nation' had great influence. In
>
> order to please her, Hulagu supported and promoted this community, so
>
> that it was able to build new churches everywhere. Near Doquz Khatun's
>
> tent, there was always set up a [portable] chapel, where bells were rung. [109]
>
> (Spuler 1972, 121)

Doquz Khatun and Sorqaqtani Beki were both mentioned in Abaqa's report at the

Council of Lyon in 1274, in which they were said to be daughters of Prester John and

employed as examples of the Ilkhanid Mongols' fellowship with the Latin Christians

(Jackson 2005, 175; Lupprian 1981, 229). To represent these influential Mongol women

as belonging to the filial line of Prester John sent the message that Mongol Christianity

was in league with Latin Christendom in the way that Prester John was imagined to be.

This fantasy of Mongol Christian alliance includes a narrative that casts Mongol women

as Christians with the power to facilitate conversion.

James D. Ryan (1998) has noted that Pope Nicholas IV began addressing letters to

the Christian women at Ilkhan Arghun's court, urging them to spread their faith to their

husbands. In one letter of 1291, for example, the pope addressed two Mongol queens, one

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in the empire for her role in her sons' ascension to power.

[109] All editorial marks and translation choices are from Spuler (1972). See also James D. Ryan (1998, 416) where he changes "this nation" to "they."

of whom was the third wife of Arghun and mother of the future Ilkhan Oljeitu (r. 1304-16). According to Ryan, "the pope complimented both women on having accepted Christianity, and urged them to uphold it and to encourage other princes to embrace the true faith" (418).[110] Ryan describes another letter, dated April 2, 1288 and addressed to one of Abaqa's Christian widows, Nukdan: "the pope (calling her a shining example) congratulated her on her faith, but reminded her that one must also excite others to convert" (417). These letters evidence the way in which Mongol women were included in the European tradition of casting Christian women as agents of their sons and husbands' conversion—such as in the case of Clothild who helped move Clovis and the Franks to conversion in the 5th century (Ryan 1998, 411-2, 417).[111] Thus, when all the baptisms and conversions in the *King of Tars* are orchestrated by the Princess, we witness her not only as a European romance heroine, but also as the Mongol wife and mother that her heritage in the narrative ascribes to her.

In *Tars*, all of the baptisms and conversions into Christianity are orchestrated by the Princess. After her baby is born a formless lump "withouten blod and bon" and with "noither nose no eye" (579, 581), and the Sultan accuses her of believing falsely in his gods, the Princess negotiates a deal with him that if he prays to his gods and they can bring the baby to life, she will believe in his gods; but if they can't then she will not (598-618). He goes to his temple, but despite his prayers, "The flesche lay stille as ston" (636); and when he realizes that his gods won't help, he curses them:

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[110] For a reproduction of the text, see J.B. Chabot (1894, 623-4).

[111] Ryan notes, "The words of St. Paul, 'The unbelieving husband is sanctified by the believing wife' (I Corinthians 7:14), were taken literally as describing women's function in the spread of Christianity: they were to urge their unconverted husbands toward the baptismal font" (411). As examples, he cites Clothild and Clovis; Clotsinda and Alboin; Vladimir I and his mother Olga and Christian wife, the sister of Basil II.

"O Sir Mahoun," he gan to grede,

Wil ye nought helpe me at this nede?

The devel you brenne ichon!" (643-5).

He violently tears down their effigies, breaking them apart – "And brac hem arm and croun" (654) – and continues to curse them before finally telling the Princess, "Mine godes no may help me nought./The devel hem sett afere!" (668-9). The Princess's response positions her as a spiritual leader who will guide the Sultan into Christianity while at the same time facilitate her baby's baptism:

"Leve sir, here mi speche.

The best rede that Y can,

Bi Jhesu Crist that made man,

Now ichil you teche." (672-75)

Instructing the Sultan to listen to her advice, for now she is going to teach him about Jesus Christ, the Princess fulfills the role imagined by Nicholas IV of Ilkhanid wives who would urge the conversion of their husbands. And the Sultan agrees to let the Princess teach him, replying "Now, dame, ichil do bi thi lore" (685). She instructs him to find a priest among the many Christian prisoners he has, and says she will show him what she knows Jesus can do that the Sultan's "maumettes" (idols) could not (714).

After testing the priest that is brought to her, the Princess tells him "We schul make Cristen men of houndes," asserting her role in the conversions to follow (740). In fact, even though the priest performs the baptism, the Princess is behind its orchestration, instructing the priest on what precisely he must do:

Than seyd the soudan' wiif,

> "Thou most do stille withouten striif
>
> A wel gret priveté.
>
> Hali water thou most make,
>
> And this ich flesche thou take,
>
> Al for the love of me,
>
> And cristen it withouten blame
>
> In the worthschipe of the Fader' name
>
> That sitt in Trinité." (742-50)

If not for the Princess, the priest would not have known what to do, for he has been

imprisoned for twenty years and is out of practice. So even though he performs the

ceremony, she emerges here as the powerful spiritual leader with both the foresight and

knowledge to save her baby. Her instructions for the baptism are successfully carried out,

"And when that it cristned was / It hadde liif and lim and fas" (769-70). Upon the baby's

baptism, it is given form and turns into such a beautiful child that all trace of its previous

state is completely erased:

> Feirer child might non be bore —
>
> It no hadde never a lime forlore,
>
> Wele schapen it was, withalle (775-77)

This miracle becomes evidence for Christ's might over the Sultan's gods, and the

Princess uses it to then push the Sultan toward baptism as well, forcefully threatening

him that he will have no part of her or the child if he does not convert:

> "Bot thou were cristned so it is —
>
> Thou no hast no part theron ywis,

Noither of the child ne of me." (808-10)

She goes on to say that he must forsake his gods and make himself a Christian, otherwise

he should be scared that he will be harmed. As a Christian, however, both she and the

baby will be his, and he will go to heaven.

Her words in this entire section, and her instructions to the priest, characterize her

as spiritually powerful; she directs the situation, teaches the Sultan Christian doctrine,

and becomes the agent of the Sultan's conversion. We might expect the priest to serve

this function, but he merely follows her instructions.[112] It is also her idea to convert all

the Saracen people, and she directly influences the strategy for a military campaign that

will enable them to do so. She instructs the Sultan,

 "Mi lord," sche seyd with hert fre,

"Sende now this prest in priveté

To mi fader the king,

And pray him for the love of me

That he com swithe hider to thee

With alle that he may bring

And when mi fader is to thee come,

Do cristen thi lond alle and some,

Bothe eld and ying

And he that wil be cristned nought,

Loke to the deth that he be brought,

Withouten ani duelleing." (943-954)

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[112] The Vernon manuscript omits some of this section where the Princess teaches him about Christian doctrine. See Gilbert (2004) page 122, note 31.

She assumes a position of power here not only as an agent of her child and husband's individual baptisms, but also of the mass conversion of an entire Saracen population. The historical Ilkhanid women buttress her representation here.

The Princess's Mongol alterity is retained as a tool that can be leveraged to conquer the Saracens. Importantly, Chaucer's Constance—who remains a Latin Christian European—fails to successfully convert the Saracens. They are all slaughtered by her almost mother-in-law, a Saracen Queen. The Saracen Queen's insider position affords her a vantage point from which she can wield the kind of influence needed for cultural dominance. While of course the Saracen mother doesn't effect mass conversion (that is precisely the point of her resistance), she does effect a mass slaughter in order to regain control over the religious assignation of Syria. The power of an insider position is deployed in the Princess when she publicly converts to the Saracen religion, something that significantly sets her apart from Constance, who never converts (or even performs it). Prior to her marriage to the Sultan, the Princess partakes in a ceremony of conversion wherein she vocalizes her voluntary adoption of the Saracen religion and willingness to learn how to pray to the Saracen gods (478-89). After this declaration, she then "kist Mahoun and Apolin / Astirot and Sir Jovin" (496-7) and went on to "lerd the hethen lawe" (501). Readers are told that the Princess eventually learns all the Saracen "lawes," or rites and prayers, and openly practices accordingly. By all outward appearances, the Princess has become a Saracen; however, the narrator offers details of her inner life to assure readers that her public and vocal expression of the Saracen religion is only for show, and that she has in fact remained a Christian at heart. Her private prayers to Jesus, when she is "bi herselveon," evidence her true and continued Christian faith (502-513).

As Calkin (2005a) has argued, however, an easy rejection of her public Saracen-ness is not so neatly attained. She writes, "As various medieval texts and scholars make clear […] it is no small matter that the princess takes on the appearance of a Saracen [her dress, but also her behavior as she demonstrates faith to the Muslim gods]. One crusade chronicle, for example, claims that 'appearance is governed by character. Whatever sort of character the ruler has, it is naturally reflected in outer appearance.' For this medieval writer, internal 'character' and external 'appearance' are not as separable as *The King of Tars* might have us believe" (223). [113] Even as the Princess may continue to be Christian, at least some part of her becomes Saracen through her performance of this identity. The Princess's occupation of a public Saracen self and a continued private identification with Christianity are both integral to the narrative's progression, the former being just as inextricable from her characterization as the latter. If not for her public conversion and adoption of Saracen law, she would not be able to marry the Sultan and consummate the relationship, resulting in the birth of the lump-child whose baptism precipitates the narrative's ultimate aim of mass Christian conversion. At the same time, if the Princess had not privately retained her Christianity she would not be able to facilitate that conversion. It is her Mongol identity that enables her to perform Saracen-ness while also maintaining her Christian allegiance.

If we ignore the persistent presence of the Princess's Mongol characterization, we miss her racial significance as an exotic ally and the way in which a Middle English

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[113] Calkin (2005a, 223-4) goes on to use *Roman de Silence* as a literary example of this point. For the chronicle she cites here, see: *Chronicle of the Third Crusade: A Translation of the Itinerarium Peregrinorum et Gesta Regis Ricardi*, trans. Helen Nicholson (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1997): 156: "Porro modus habitudinis formam trahit ex animo praesidentis; talis nimirum erit forma praedicati, qualem permiserit natura subjecti."

romance constructs a racialized east to fulfill a fantasy about the colonial dominance of

Latin Christianity. Belonging to the West while leveraging the controlled potency of

Eastern alterity, the Princess pulls into Latin Christendom the entirety of the imagined

East. The Sultan's conversion represents the symbolic conversion of not only the

Muslims in the Syrio-Palestine region, but also the Ilkhanid Mongols whose Christian

faith had long been desired and fantasized about within the Latin European imaginary.

Because of the Sultan's invisible association with a Mongol king in the source material,

when he converts in the romance he extends and affirms the king of Tars's significance as

a symbol for Mongol Christianity. The Sultan's single body, its transformation from black

to white at the baptismal font, marks a translation of the racialized non-Christian east,

Mamluks and Mongols, into the Latin Christian domain. At the same time, his beautifully

formed child, a result of this process of conversion-as-colonial conquest, inserts Christian

salvation into the inherited lineage of these eastern players. Christian futurity is the

colonial conquest and domination of the east, made possible through the sexual

desirability of the Mongol Princess and her discursive accountability to her racial

function as an exotic ally for Latin Christendom's global expansion.

The Princess's Dream and the Mongol Hound

While the conventions of the romance genre, and specifically those featuring Constance

or a Saracen Princess, might suggest that readers immediately understand the Princess of

Tars as an agent of conversion whose Christianity is unquestionable, I argue that the

narrative invites readers to initially question such an inevitability. Unlike Constance, it is

the Princess and not the Sultan who must offer conversion in order for the marriage to occur.[114] The narrative asks readers to entertain the possibility that she will, indeed, convert to the Saracen religion, and to ponder the implications of such an event. It takes us through the details of her conversion ceremony, her adoption of the cultural ways of life of her new home, and the birth of her child by her Saracen husband before it ultimately confirms for the audience that she is indeed Christian and will ensure the mass conversion of the Saracen land over which she now reigns. Although the narrator tells readers that she has remained a Christian privately, as Calkin (2005a) has argued, anxieties still linger as to the impact of her public adoption of the Saracen faith on her religious identity. It is not until the birth of her child, when she publicly asserts her Christianity, that we are absolutely certain that she will assume the important role of converting her husband and all the Saracens.

Yet, there is one important scene before her child's birth that does point to the inevitability of this conclusion. On the eve of the Princess's conversion ceremony, she has a dream in which readers witness the construction of the Mongol exotic ally, which also foreshadows the Princess's own adoption of this racial identity in the conversions that follow. In this dream, the Princess sees "an hundred houndes blake" (420), all barking at her, one of whom particularly "greved hir sore" (422) for fear that he wanted to take her away. As she is about to flee from the hounds, she sees "develen thre" burning "as a drake" and each holding a "gleive" (428, 429, 431). She then concentrates on Jesus Christ so that "the fendes derd hir nought" (434). But as she escapes the fiends unharmed,

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[114] In Chaucer's MLT and Gower's Tale of Constance, the Sultan of Syria and the Sultan of Persia, respectively, offer to convert in order to marry Constance. Here, the Sultan's conversion is not even an option.

a hound "with browes brod and hore" (438) comes upon her and "almost he hadde hir drawen adoun / ac thurth Jhesus Cristes passioun / Sche was ysaved thore (439-441). At this point, "that blac hounde hir was folweing" (445) transforms from a figure of fear into one of comfort, for he "Thurth might of Jhesu, Heven king / Spac to hir in manhede / In white clothes als a knight" (446-448) and delivers her a divine message:

> And [he] seyd to hir, "Mi swete wight,
>
> No tharf thee nothing drede
>
> Of Ternagaunt no of Mahoun.
>
> Thi Lord that suffred passioun
>
> Schal help thee at thi need." (449-453)

This dream has received relatively little scholarly attention, and has been read as foreshadowing the physiognomic transformation that the Sultan undergoes when his skin turns from black to white upon his baptism (Whitaker 2013, 183-7). While the dream may indeed foreshadow the conversion of the Sultan, I argue that it also works, through its divinatory potential, to bring the Princess into her role as a Mongol exotic ally who will, despite her impending performative conversion into the Saracen religion, become a powerful agent of Christian conversion and the expansion of Latin Christendom in the Levantine east.

The hound is often read as representative of the Sultan because of the association of "hound" as an epithet for Muslims. However, Mongols were also regularly referred to as hounds in Latin discourse. Even when the Mongols were represented as figures of admiration, more sinister referents necessarily persisted. In fact, the potency of the exotic ally is precisely its ability to harness a threat into a controlled force, as we saw at the

Cheapside tournament of 1331. The hound's threat to the Princess is never direct, but is instead ambiguous before it completely disappears and is replaced by his role as a savior. When he first appears, he emerges from a pack of one hundred hounds as the most fearful, but we are not shown his menacing behavior. The narrator tells us that the Princess feared he would want to take her away (422-3), but we do not see him making any strides towards this aim. She is clearly terrified of him, but whether he is actually threatening her remains unclear:

> And sche no durst him nought smite
>
> For drede that he wald hir bite,
>
> Swiche maistri he gan to make.
>
> And as sche wald fram hem fle,
>
> Sche seye ther stond develen thre
>
> And ich brent as a drake. (424-9)

Chandler translates "Swiche maistri he gan to make" as "So threateningly he began to behave" (426), but we do not know to whom he directs this behavior, only that it induces fear in the Princess. That there appear three devils, burning like dragons and brandishing spears, suggests the hound's threatening behavior may not have been directed at the Princess at all. The narrator's use of "maistri" here furthers the ambiguity. While the Princess certainly interprets the hound as a threat, "maistri" also connotes skill or mastery, suggesting that the hound's behavior is conducted with purpose and control. His "maistri" works here not against the Princess, but on her behalf, to protect her from the devils that surround her (both in the dream and at the Sultan's court). In his next appearance, the hound's malevolence is also painted in vague terms. He is described

"with browes brod and hore" (438), which combines a racial feature meant to signal a menacing character (wide eyebrows/forehead) with that which marks old age and the wisdom it brings (gray hair). In the next line, he tries to "drawen adoun" the Princess, but it is at this very moment that he begins to speak to her and transforms into a friendly figure offering comfort. Through his own menacing attributes, he has protected the Princess from the threatening forces that surrounded her and emerges a comforting messenger of Christ.

His occupation in the dream as both a possible yet unclear threat and a savior is akin to how Mongols were imagined in the Latin west (Papp 2005). Not only did the Mongols have an existing association with the Christian savior from the east, Prester John, but so too did the specific Mongol whom the Princess's father and the Sultan are modelled after: Ilkhan Ghazan. As discussed above, Ghazan was imagined as fulfilling the promise of Prester John when he briefly conquered Syria in 1299. The idea of a Christian savior among the Mongols is thus conceivably witnessed in the hound of the Princess's dream. Even if we retain the hound's Saracen association, he can at the same time hold ties to the Ilkhanid Mongols, for he drives away the non-Christian threat just as Ghazan, a Muslim convert, was imagined to have done in Syria and Jerusalem.

The narrative carefully situates the dream at a moment of sleep/wake inbetweenness such that readers are invited to identify her dream as a possible vision:

> That miri maiden litel slepe,
>
> Bot al night wel sore sche wepe
>
> Til the day gan dawe.
>
> And als sche fel on slepe thore

> Her thought ther stode hir bifore
>
> An hundred houndes blake (415-420)

She begins to see the hounds, the opening content of her dream, not after but *as* she falls

to sleep. The narrative thus emphasizes the dream's position within the middle space of

the imagination where it has revelatory potential. Indeed, the Princess's dream delivers a

divine message: Christ will protect her from the Saracen gods even if she must perform

her conversion into their religion.

While there is no definitive dream theory that characterizes the entire Middle

Ages, or even the specific period of the text's composition in the fourteenth century,

Steven Kruger's (1992) exhaustive work on medieval dream theory sheds some light on

possible ways the *Tars* author and his readers may have thought about dreams,

particularly those containing divine messages. In the thirteenth century, the Aristotelian

perspective on dreams, which emphasized the "physics and physiology of dreaming" and

the "confinement of the dream to a mundane realm" (85), began to supplant the earlier

predominance of Macrobius's *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio* and other late-antique

and early Christian writers, whose theories tended to include a spectrum of dream types

that accounted for both the mundane and the divine nature of dreams. Macrobius, for

example, developed a spectrum of five types of dreams: *oraculum, visio, somnium,*

visum, insomnium; each type is characterized by the extent to which the dream interacts

with the earthly and spiritual worlds and is thereby revealed to be false or true. The more

mundane a dream, the more false it is; and the greater its contact with the divine realm,

the more true it is. [115] The Princess's dream is certainly linked to the mundane. Readers

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[115] See Kruger (1992, 21-3) for more on Macrobius's dream spectrum.

are told that she has been up all night weeping before she finally falls asleep in the early morning hours: "Bot al night wel sore sche wepe / Til the day gan dawe" (416-7). Her bodily distress is therefore likely to bear influence upon the dream. The prominence of her fear throughout the dream also points to its links to the mundane. The fear that the hound induces in the Princess pushes the dream into a psychosomatic space. The dream's psychosomatic influences are clear, but they do not occlude its visionary potential.

While earlier dream theory such as that of Macrobius included the psychosomatic dream as but one kind of dream, Aristotelian thought limited all dreams to this type. But, as Kruger has shown, the increased "emphasis on the somatic and psychological causes of dreaming" and "denial of divinely inspired dreams" (89, 111) that Aristotle brought to dream theory did not entirely elide the possibility for divine dreams. In fact, he notes that Vincent of Beauvais's account of dreaming in *Speculum naturale* and Albertus Magnus's *Summa de creaturis*, from which Vincent draws, purposefully distort Aristotelean theory so that they can afford space for Gregory the Great's view that dreams sometimes come from God. Christian dream theory thus informs Aristotelean views even in the later Middle Ages when it was thought to have disappeared (Kruger 1992, 99-115). Kruger comments that thirteenth and fourteenth century encyclopedic treatments of dreams generally followed along the lines of that of Bartholomaeus Anglicus in *De proprietatibus rerum*, where he "emphasizes dreams whose cause is naturally explicable, arising from internal physiological or psychological process and from the action of external physical forces" (90), but also accepts "that dreams may have supernatural origin. […] [H]e recognizes, citing Augustine, the possibility of both divine and demonic dream experience, and follows patristic authorities in expressing a concern with the

problem of distinguishing the demonic from the divine. The dream in the *De proprietatibus rerum* is thus involved both with the body and with higher, spiritual forces" (91). [116]

So even a dream subject to the psychosomatic experience of the dreamer could be divine or revelatory. The problem lies in determining true divination from false. When Margery Kempe visits Julian of Norwich, a meeting between two of medieval England's most famous female mystics that is remarkably captured in Margery's *Book*, this issue of the deceptive vision is the principal point of their discussion. Margery shares her "wondirful revelacyons" with the older and wiser "Dame Jelyan" in order "to wetyn yf ther wer any deceyte in hem, for the ankres was expert in swech thygys and good cownsel cowd gevyn" (Windeatt 2000). In response, Julian tells the younger mystic that she may believe in these visions "yf it wer not ageyn the worshep of God and profyte of hir evyncristen, for, yf it wer, than it wer nowt the mevying of a good spyryte, but rather of an evyl spyrit" (Windeatt 2000). This conversation between Margery and Julian points to the importance of distinguishing between a true vision from God and one with devilish origins intended to deceive. Late medieval culture allowed for the veracity of dreams while recognizing their inherent potential for deception. So even as Julian affirms Margery's faith in her visions, her commentary—and indeed the impetus behind Margery's visit—reminds us of the stakes involved in having such faith; that is, the Word

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[116] See Kruger (1992, 89-92) for more on Bartholomaeus Anglicus's treatment of dreams in *De proprietatibus rerum,* including passages from Trevisa's Middle English translation. Particularly relevant here is when he discusses the difficulty in knowing whether a dream is true or false: "Somtyme sweuenes beþ trewe and somtyme fals, somtyme clere and playne and somtyme troubly. Sweuenes þat beþ trewe buþ somtyme opun and playne and somtyme iwrappid in figurative, mistik, and dim and derke tokenynges and bodinges, as it ferde in Pharaoes sweuene" (Kruger 91; from *On the Properties of Things: John Trevisa's Translation of Bartholomaeus Anglicus De proprietatibus rerum: A Critical Text*, ed. M.C. Seymour. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975. 337)

of God could really be the devil in disguise. Dreams posed a serious threat precisely because of their vulnerability to misinterpretation. But medieval dream theorists maintained the possibility for the revelation of truth in dreams despite this threat; so rather than condemn them as blasphemous, they sought ways to identify real truth from disguised delusion (Kruger 1992, 7-16).

The narrator repeatedly stresses the veracity of the Princess's dream. In the middle of the dream, as the hound transforms from something threatening into something comforting, and immediately preceding his delivery of Christ's message, the narrator interjects to assert the truth of what the Princess sees: "Yete hir thought withouten lesing / Als sche lay in hir swevening" (442-3). And when the Princess wakes, the narrator again stresses the truth of the hound's message:

> As wis as He hir dere bought
>
> Of that swevening in slepe sche thought
>
> Schuld turn to gode ending. (460-2)

As readers witness the Princess convert to and adopt the practices of the Saracen religion in the next scene, they can also simultaneously trust in her retention of her Christian faith because of this dream and its divine message. The hound, allusive of a Mongol exotic ally, eases both the Princess's and the audience's anxiety about her conversion ceremony. The dream not only offers the Princess divine consolation, it also serves as a literary device to foreshadow the role that the Princess herself will soon adopt. She will become the agent that converts all the Saracens, including her husband the Sultan, to Christianity, thereby activating Latin Christendom's colonial dominance over the east.

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The racial identity of the Princess of Tars is integral to her function in the romance. She is not merely a Latin European heroine, like Constance, who brings Christianity to a pagan, but specifically not Saracen, world; nor is she like the Saracen Princess who serves Latin Christendom by betraying her father and Saracen people. Unlike these analogous romance heroines, the Princess of Tars converts the Saracens without betrayal, and offers Latin Christendom a global future through the symbol of her child. The romance enacts its colonialist fantasy of global Christian dominance by leveraging a prevailing racial construction of Mongols and using it to characterize the Princess. Without recognizing her characterization as a Mongol and its racial function within a discursive world of Latin Christian supremacy and Muslim subjugation, we would miss the particular way in which this romance constructs and employs racial difference for an epistemological religious battle. The geopolitical history of the global relations between Latin Europeans, the Mamluks, and the Ilkhanid Mongols of Persia during the last decades of the thirteenth century provide a crucial context for our interpretation of *The King of Tars*. Not only did it directly inform the historiographical source material of the romance, but perhaps more poignantly, it also reveals to us the complexity of race and how it operates beyond a white-black or Christian-Muslim binary. Mongol racial alterity was constructed precisely to harness an eastern ferocity, or monstrosity, for Latin Christian efforts against the perceived threat of Muslims; and it becomes a useful tool for England in the 1330s, when it enters the political and cultural landscape through the modes of fantasy that royal tournaments and romance literature enabled.

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CHAPTER 4

BRINGING ENGLAND INTO THE WORLD:

RACIAL EPISTEMOLOGIES IN *THE BOOK OF JOHN MANDEVILLE* (C. 1356)

* * *

The Book of John Mandeville (c. 1356) purports to be a real account of the

narrator's extensive world travels (and people read it that way for centuries), but it is in

fact a remarkable work of fiction whose author stitched together fantastical legends on

the east and real historical accounts of European travel into Asia. [117] *Mandeville* is less

concerned with mapping a real world to be traversed than with the potential for travel to

produce a racialized world that will secure England's global dominance. Geraldine Heng

has used the term "travel romance" to describe and categorize it; and Josephine Bennett,

in the 1950s, called it a "romance of travel." [118] This classification of "travel romance,"

rather than something like "fictional travel narrative," is particularly fruitful because it

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[117] While manuscripts vary as to the precise composition date, scholars agree that the narrator's self-proclaimed 1356 (sometimes 1357) date of composition often found in the manuscripts is likely correct. The author's known sources were all available by the mid-1350s and we know that the Biblioteque Nationale MS nouv. Acq. Fr. 4515 was an early copy. This is the earliest extant MS, copied in 1371 by Raoulet d'Orléans and commissioned by Charles V of France's physician, Gervais Chrétien. This is a Continental French version, edited by Letts (1953). The author is anonymous, but there is a scholarly history of searching for the real John Mandeville. Michael Bennett (2006) wants to revisit the search for Mandeville's identity, a thread of scholarship that he notes hasn't really made any headway since Josephine Bennett's work, where she identified and researched all the John Mandevilles near St. Albans at the time the text claims to have been written.

[118] Josephine Bennett (1954) uses the term "romance of travel" to categorize *Mandeville*. Geraldine Heng (2003) calls it a "travel romance." According to Heng, as a travel romance, the narrative garners a global reach where other romances "might end at the boundaries of the nation [or] the interests of a particular social class aligned across nations" (241). See page 242 for more on the global reach of travel romance and the play between home and away. I read the romance of travel as affording *Mandeville* a particular worldly quality that informs its ability to play a role in later histories of colonialism and imperial conquest; however, my reading of the domestic home in the text departs from Heng's. Where she sees the romance of *Mandeville* as bringing the world back into the domestic sphere, I see it as bringing the home out into the world.

captures the author's use of travel to leverage the imaginative capacity of the romance genre.[119] Medieval romance offered authors and readers a space of speculation in which they could explore alternate possibilities and grapple with questions of community and belonging, as well as negotiate the lines of exclusion that would bring them into being.

As a "travel romance," *The Book of John Mandeville* imagines the world beyond England and how England, from its globally peripheral position, could fit into that world. Its narrator, Sir John, is an English knight born and raised in St. Albans, the center of map-making in medieval England.[120] He sets off in 1332 to travel the world: to explore many kingdoms, lands, provinces, and isles "whare that dwellith many dyverse of folk of dyverse lawis and schappis" [where there live many diverse people of diverse religions and shapes] (5).[121] Being in and experiencing the diversity of the entire world is the aim

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[119] There is an abundance of scholarship on the marvels, marvelous, exotic, and fabulous in *Mandeville*. See, for example, Jost (2013) and Camargo (2002). See also Zacher (1976) for a discussion of medieval curiosity and pilgrimage.

[120] Matthew Paris (d. 1259) produced an extensive corpus of world maps at St. Albans, especially focusing on the Holy Land. See Connolly (2009). Bale (2012) suggests, "it would be in keeping with the spirit of Mandeville's playful sense of centre and periphery to be setting out from the edge of the world (England) and the centre of cartography (St. Albans) to visit the centre of the world (Jerusalem) and the places evoked on the peripheries of world maps" (xv).

[121] Unless otherwise noted, all quotes are from Seymour (2002), which uses Queen's College, Oxford MS 383 (included in subgroup 1 of the Defective versions) as its base text. I have chosen to use the Defective version (unfortunately named because of the "Egypt Gap," not because it is actually defective) because this was the most popular version in England in the medieval period and early modern period. It is the earliest extant Middle English translation and the first printed edition (Pynson 1496) was based on it; see Kohanski (2001). This printed edition was the most authoritative until the 1725 edition based on the Cotton version was released (anonymous editor) and eclipsed it as the authority text because it was considered the most complete. In reference to the switch from the Defective version to Cotton, Pollard (1900) has noted: "From 1499, when they were first printed by Wynkyn de Worde, the *Travels* had enjoyed great popularity in England, as in the rest of Europe; but the printed editions before 1725 had all followed an inferior translation (with an unperceived gap in the middle of it), which had already gained the upper hand before printing was invented" (v). Pollard's 1900 edition (reprinted in 1964), based on the Cotton ms, is the first since 1725, although G. F. Warner references Cotton in his 1889 edition of the Egerton version (Pollard claims there is no evidence of anyone even looking at Cotton after 1725 other than Warner until he does so for this edition, and claims that the 1725 edition has omissions in Chapters 15 and 16). Seymour's 1967 edition also looks at the Cotton version. There are 33 manuscripts and six fragments of the Defective and only one of the Cotton version (BL MS Cotton Titus C. xvi). The Egerton has also become a standard base text (BL MS Egerton 1982). For a list of all Defective manuscripts and fragments, see Seymour (2002, xiv-xxvi). For more on the merits of the Defective version, see Kohanski (2001); and Heng (2003, 423, n. 2).

of the traveler-narrator, who has authorial privilege. He does not merely relate his experiences to his reader for informational purposes, but rather moves through the world in order to conjure that world—and he does so from his particular vantage point as an Englishman.

Sir John's imaginary cartography erects a paradigm through which England—and English people—can claim global dominance over a diverse world constituted by religious, linguistic, and cultural differences. In my analysis of *Mandeville*, I identify how this fourteenth-century travel romance reveals a relational process that is integral to the ontology of race: namely, how the interlocution between cultural representation and social structure can produce hierarchies of power. I argue that Sir John represents difference in order to transform people into "others" of Latin Christendom and thereby promote the position of Englishmen on the global stage. His manipulation of geography turns the world into a structured space in which value is distributed unevenly across human groups. In *Mandeville*, we can see how race is not merely a category that describes human differences, but an ideological representation of those differences that produces and uphold power structures.

Iain Higgins has noted that the distinction between *Mandeville* and its sources is the "syncretism" of the former: "its tendency to try […] to amalgamate the world's difference, diversity, and divergence, to make its seemingly endless variety fit inside Latin Christian categories, broadly interpreted" (Higgins 2011, xxi).[122] This syncretism

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See Kohanski (2001, xxv) for more on the date of the narrator's departure. While there is variation among the more than 250 extant manuscripts, and 1322 seems to be the most common date given, the Defective version identifies his departure date as 1332. For studies on the readership of Mandeville in England, see Tzanaki (2003) and Moseley (1975).

[122] *Mandeville's* sources are extensive and reflect the author's access to an erudite French library. Most of his sources were French translations of Latin texts, including his two primary sources: German Dominican

has often led critics to read *Mandeville* as a multicultural text, in the sense that it is both

open to and accepting of human difference (with the oft-noted exception of its

antagonistic depiction of the Jews) and espouses an epistemology of global equity.[123] One

moment in the narrative that often becomes evidence for the text's ethos of global equity

is the dialogue Sir John has with the Sultan. Absent in this exchange is the more overt

racialization of Muslims represented in other romances such as the Middle English

Sowdone of Babylone (and *King of Tars*) or Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale*, where they

William of Boldensele's *Liber de quibusdam ultramarinis partibus* (Book of Certain Overseas Regions) (c. 1336) and Venetian Franciscan Odoric of Pordenone's *Relatio* (c. 1330), both copies that had been translated by Jean le Long of Ypres, monk of Saint-Bertin at Saint Omer in 1351 (which helps to date *Mandeville*). Odoric had gone on a mission in the 1320s to India and China and his Relatio is a first-person account he wrote in Padua, upon his return, of his journey. William's *Liber* recounts his pilgrimage to the Holy Land and Egypt. In addition to these two historical travel narratives, the Mandeville-author consulted encyclopedias from medieval authorities such as Orosius, Josephus, Macrobius, and Isidore of Seville. He drew from John of Würzburg's *Descriptio Terrae Sanctae* (c. 1165), Thietmar's *Peregrinatio* (1214), Hayton's *Flor des estoires de la terre d'orient* (1307), Jacques de Vitry's *Historia Orientalis* (early 13th c.), Vincent of Beauvais's *Speculum historiale* and *Speculum naturale* (c. 1256-9), Brunetto Latini's *Li Livres dou Tresor* (c. 1265), Jacobus de Voragine's *Legenda Aurea* (before 1267), William of Tripoli's *Tractatus de statu Saracenorum* (1273), *Littera Presbyteris Johannis* (late 12th c.), *Roman d'Alexandre* (mid 12th c.), and Johannes de Sacrobosco's *De Sphera* (c. 1220). Most of these texts are well regarded and in circulation among the educated: the *Mandeville*-author is not interested in producing a text with original content, but rather in inventing something new (inventio) with knowledge that was already accepted as true. Higgins (1997) notes that scholars such as Mary B. Campbell and Stephen Greenblatt have called the book "plagiarized," but they don't see that its meaning must be understood not in a modern context (post-Victorian), but in a medieval one. Notions of intellectual property and copyright did not exist in the Middle Ages, and in fact plagiarism was typical (making the Book typical in its composition) and compilation was a "basic medieval mode of original research and 'creation'" (12). Higgins cites Mary Carruthers, who has noted that our modern sense of plagiarism only existed if the compiled materials were done so lazily and not made into something of the new author's own "and so would have been considered a failure of invention and memory" (12), not an infringement of property or theft of someone's property.
[123] This perspective can be found across much of the scholarship on *Mandeville*, reflected recently in Jost (2013) and Bale (2012), in which the latter describes the narrator's perspective as one of "tolerant curiosity" (xxiv). It is worth remembering, however, the work of David Nirenberg (1996), who demonstrates how tolerance of diversity can in fact rest upon an undercurrent of violence. And while Bale allows for the exception of the Jews within *Mandeville's* "tolerant curiosity," such an exception begs more thoughtful analysis of the text's representation of difference: if the narrator holds such animosity for one non-Christian group precisely *because* of religious difference, it is likely that he holds a perspective of Christian superiority that informs his larger worldview. Analysis of difference in *Mandeville* tends to overlook hierarchies because the narrator is perhaps not as incendiary as some of his sources. While this scholarship describes the human difference represented in *Mandeville* as "otherness," it often fails to grasp that such "otherness" only comes into being through the violence of inequity and construction of racialized difference. For example, see Sobecki (2002) who uses the term "otherness" even as he argues that the text reflects "cultural openness" towards those "others."

drink snakes' blood or are described as hounds.[124] Saracens in *Mandeville* are nonetheless

represented as an inferior race, however couched in an affect of politeness.

As this dissertation has aimed to show through its analysis of discursive

representations of the Mongol figure, the process by which human differences are

racialized does not always rely on racist epithets or caricatures. It is rather the

hierarchical organization of differences across human groups that marks a process of

racialization. Thus, when Sir John says that "they are easily converted to our faith when

men preach our law to them and share with them the prophecies," or that Saracens

themselves believe that **"**the law of Muhammed will fail just as the Jews' law has failed,

and that the Christian law will endure until the end of the world," he is articulating a

viewpoint that we cannot reasonably describe with concepts like *equity* or *parity* without

willfully overlooking—and thereby endorsing—the naturalization of an epistemology

that racializes religious difference (58).[125] While Sir John may certainly depict the Sultan

as a wise ruler whose education has lead him to understand the Christian faith better than

Christians themselves, this is not a point of admiration for the Sultan but rather a point of

lamentation for Sir John. He offers this dialogue to readers to induce a sense of shame in

their "wickide lyvyng" that has cost Christians control over Jerusalem (61). It is

deplorable, in this viewpoint, that an inferior race has exceeded a more superior one, a

wrong that Sir John aims to redress through the writing of his book. In fact, he explicitly

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[124] See Cohen (2001) on the racialization of Muslims in medieval romance such as the *Sowdone of Babylone.* Although Saracens aren't said to drink snake blood in Mandeville, the traglodytes are. In India, on the island of Tracota, Sir John refers to the people as beast-like, incapable of reason, and living in caves because they don't have the intelligence to build houses. These traglodytes eat snakes and don't even have human language, but rather, he says, they hiss at each other like snakes. This is hardly a description of human differences that we can overlook as not derogatory and, specifically, racial.

[125] Translation mine from the Middle English: "thei beth lightlich convertid to oure fey whanne men preche to hem or oure lawe and openeth to hem the prophecies. […] the lawe of Macomet schal faile as the Iewis lawe is yfayled, and that the cristen lawe schal laste to ende of the world."

says—towards the end of the narrative—that reason can be identified among the diverse peoples of the world only insofar as they reflect Christianity: "alle these men and folk of whom Y have spoke that beth resonable haveth somme articlis of oure treuthe [of all these men and people whom I have discussed, those who have reason also have some articles of our faith]" (134). A concession of equity is offered *not* when recognizing difference, but only similarity, which is not true equity at all.

The narrative's openness to the world is strategic. Sir John racializes the communities he comes into contact with, which constructs a position of global dominance for England. His engagement with the human differences he encounters around the world is not neutral; rather he transforms these differences into otherness, revealing the precise process through which racial ideologies are constructed. As this dissertation has argued, race is a functional category integral to the discursive apparatus of a hierarchal system that produces and supports the supremacy of a dominant group. The discursive practices operative in *Mandeville* render difference legible only through an ideological framework of Latin Christendom's supremacy and the dominance of England within its global expansion; thus, difference becomes, specifically, racialized difference, which cannot exist unmoored from an ontology of alterity. This chapter explores how the text's narrative geography produces racial epistemologies that propel England into a stable position of dominance over the entire world. I argue that the racial function of Mongols as exotic allies plays out in this enterprise as the mechanism by which the *Mandeville*-author is able to push his imaginative constructions of a hierarchical world into the realm of historical possibility.

Sir John envisions a spherical and explorable earth in which England and Prester John's Christian utopia are placed opposite one another with Jerusalem in the middle. This cartographic framework provides cohesion to the two parts of his itinerary: the first, a pilgrimage guide to Jerusalem and, the second, an account of travel farther east into Asia. It structures the narrative and Sir John's journey to Jerusalem, through Asia and the Great Khan's empire, and to his encounter with Prester John. The legend of Prester John figures prominently in his global cartography, as does the priest-king's enduring association with the Mongols. I will demonstrate how the author's complex appropriation and integration of his sources conjures a comprehensive world that is specifically racialized for the benefit of England and the English people; in so doing, I show how the Mongol exotic ally functions within the racial epistemology at the core of *Mandeville*.

Vernacularity in The Book of John Mandeville

The narrator's nation of origin tells us little about where and in what language the text first appeared. While there is no longer any doubt as to its original composition in French, there are still lingering questions regarding specifically which French, as well as where the text was originally released and circulated.[126] The original could have been composed in Anglo-Norman and released on the Continent, or it could have been

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126 Scholars debate whether the Insular or the Continental form of the original French text was written earlier and is, thus, authorial. They agree that the third form of the original French, the Liege (also known as Ogier and the Interpolated Continental), is a redaction of Continental. Insular is extant in 25 manuscripts in both Anglo-Norman (14 mss) and Continental French (11 mss), and Continental is extant in 30 manuscripts. Deluz's standard edition of the French original follows the Insular text; see Deluz (2000). See Higgins (2011), footnote 20 in introduction: Bennett and Deluz favor Insular as authorial and de Poerck and Seymour favor Continental. Higgins himself contends that there can be no authoritative text of *Mandeville*, and that in fact we can't think of it as a single book given the number of times it was altered through each translation or copy.

composed in Continental French and released in England.[127] Simon Gaunt has recently

remarked on the international quality of the French language, which can help elucidate its

use in the *Mandeville* text. Speaking in regard to the original composition of Marco

Polo's *Devisement*, Gaunt writes, "rather than seeing 'French' as something that belongs

to 'France' and 'French' high culture, I prefer to see French as the vernacular of choice

when a writer wishes to address an international audience, and thus as an index of

cultural mobility rather than as a sign of the prestige of one culture in particular" (Gaunt

2013, 36).[128] The prologue of *Mandeville* captures this dynamic of cultural mobility that

Gaunt suggests is housed in the French vernacular.

In the French version, the narrator tells us that he chose to write in the vernacular

so that everyone may understand it even though writing in Latin would have taken less

time:

> Et sachez qe jeo eusse cest escrit mis en latin pur plus brifment deviser,
>
> mes pur ceo qe plusours entendent mieux romancz qe latin jeo l'ai mis en
>
> romancz pur ceo qe chescun l'entende, et luy chivaler et ly seignurs et ly
>
> autre noble hommes qe ne scievent point de latin ou poi et qe ount esté
>
> outre mer sachent et entendent si jeo die voir ou noun. (Deluz 2000, 93)

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127 According to Higgins, the evidence is more favorable to a continental release; nonetheless, by the end of the fourteenth century, it was circulating throughout Europe in multiple languages –French, English, Czech, Dutch, German, Italian, Spanish, Latin – and by 1450 it was also available in Irish and Danish. See Higgins (1997), end of the introduction, for a detailed diagram of the MS translation and transmission history. See page 8 for brief discussion on print history (it was printed in 8 languages before 1515: there were 60 printings by 1600.). There is even one manuscript with no text, but only illustrations: BL Add. MS 24189; see Krása (1983). And of note is that five of Piers Plowman's surviving manuscripts are bound with Mandeville, such as BL Harley MS 3954 and Huntington Library, HM 114, which also includes *Troilus and Criseyde*; for a discussion of Chaucer and *Mandeville*, see Bennett (1953).
128 See pages 62-3 for more discussion about the French vernacular in this sense, where Gaunt also indicates that he is taking this perspective from Bertolucci Pizzorusso, most notably in 'Linge e stili'.

[And know that I should have written this in Latin in order to explain things more briefly, but because there are more [people] who understand the vernacular better than Latin, I have put it in the vernacular so that everyone will understand it, and the knights and the lords and the other noblemen who don't know any Latin, or a little, and who have been beyond the sea know and understand if I speak the truth or not.]

The narrator's decision to compose his narrative in French is deliberate. While he may personally be able to write in Latin—the language that would allow "pur plus brifment deviser"—he acknowledges that it may not be known (or may be only a little known) and he wants *everyone* to understand his text. Whether the original French was Anglo-Norman or Continental matters less than the intended aim of the vernacular having the capacity to reach *everyone*, instead of only those able to read Latin. Particularly noteworthy here is just who "chescun" refers to. Its antecedents are, specifically, "luy chivaler et ly seignurs et ly autre noble hommes": that is, all men of the noble class. He does not specify whether they are English or French; in fact, the suggestion is that they are noblemen of both England *and* France—all those who understand the French vernacular better than Latin.

The English versions may seem more focused on reaching an audience in England. Cotton emphasizes its composition in the vernacular and expresses a desire to limit its audience to England: "And ye shall understand, that I have put this book out of Latin into French, and translated it again out of French into English, that *every man of my nation* may understand it" (Pollard 1900, 6, emphasis mine). However, neither Egerton nor Defective mention the language of the text (Seymour 2002; 2010). Kohanski posits

that their silence on this issue "tacitly suggest[s] their own English as the original form, but express[es] a similar commitment to rendering the book in a form accessible to a popular audience" (viii). Of course, the popular audience of an English vernacular text, unlike a French one, would likely be limited to England. But the absence of an explicit claim to this limited audience suggests a desire to maintain a similar openness expressed in the original French despite the translation.

And, indeed, the *Mandeville*-author brings England and France together elsewhere in the prologue in a way that is more difficult to erase in translation; in fact, each version maintains the notion that both English and French noblemen alike must cease their battles and join together to reclaim the Holy Land. This passage is nearly identical in each version, suggesting that its message was felt as so integral to the prologue that scribes and translators kept it fairly intact. Here, he poses travel as a way of bringing together the warring nobles of France and England, whose domestic discord has detracted from the more important goal of reclaiming Jerusalem for Christians, to whom, he writes, God gave as their "heritage" (4). He cites this as the impetus behind his travel narrative, which he hopes will provide people with a guide to Jerusalem and the sites of the Holy Land. As we know, however, *Mandeville* is much more than a pilgrimage *itinerarium*. In fact, the journey to Jerusalem constitutes only the first half of the narrative; the second half transforms into an account of world travel into Asia where Sir John eventually discovers the elusive kingdom of Prester John. I suggest that the transnational unity between England and France that he desires in the prologue reflects a sense of European stability that he hopes to carry with him not only to Jerusalem, but to the more distant lands beyond.

Mandeville's Privileged Traveler and a Cosmology of Race

Kim Phillips (2014) notes that medieval travel narratives, unlike those that modern readers are more familiar with, don't feature a "distinctive authorial personality" (54). Mary Campbell (1988), from whom Phillips draws here, has also argued that these texs are not "fully inhabited by its narrator" (6). Phillips proposes that this distinction in the relationship between authorial presence and ethnographic description evidences an absence of self-identity formation. While medieval travel narratives certainly employed different rhetorical strategies than later writings of the same genre, we may locate other ways in which medieval authors devised authorial subjectivity within the traveler-narrator. In discussing the narrator of *Mandeville*, in particular, Suzanne Akbari (2004) writes,

> This traveller is at once intimately involved in the foreign lands he passes
> through and starkly outside them, at a vantage point far away. His claim to
> tell the truth is based both on objective, intellectual authority and personal,
> eyewitness experience." (171)

Sir John's distance gives him authority, and his closeness gives him credibility. His authorial presence is far from inconsequential. Indeed, absent are personal commentaries about his emotional responses, anxieties, or excitements as he travels the world; but he nonetheless becomes an important device for the text's literary enterprise.

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Sir John draws on medieval cosmology in order to circumvent the threat of the destabilized traveler that Shirin Khanmohamdi (2013b) has identified in many of the real

thirteenth-century travel narratives; and, once established, the stability of the traveler

conveys a position of global dominance for England. [129] Racial difference enables the

structural maneuvers the narrative needs to achieve its aims. Difference becomes alterity

the moment it serves the functional purpose of creating and buttressing a hierarchal social

structure. Sir John states his aim of traversing borders of difference in order to buttress

his own position and worldview. As he concludes what feels like a tangential description

of Constantinople, before returning "agen to the way" to Jerusalem, he pauses to tell

readers why he has spent so much time digressing. He admits that his lengthy discussion

of Constantinople may seem to "touche not to the way," that is, seem irrelevant to the

itinerarium to Jerusalem. But, he asserts:

> nevertheles they [these digressions] touchith to that that I
>
> have hight to schewe a partye of customes and maners and
>
> dyversetez of countries. And for this is the nexte cuntrey
>
> that varieth and is discordant in faith and lettris fro oure
>
> feith, therfore I have set it here that ye may wite the
>
> dyversite that is bitwene oure feith and heris, for many men
>
> have grete likyng and comfort to hure speke of straunge
>
> thingis. (14)
>
> [nonetheless, they [these digressions] relate to my aim of
>
> showing some of the customs and manners and differences

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[129] I use the term global here not in the empirical sense, but in the sense introduced by Krishnan (2007), where the global is "an instituted perspective" that "brings the world into view" (5, 4). It produces "the frames through which the world is made available for thought and action" (2). It is the process of naturalizing the perspective that the global becomes an empirical description. I argue that the romance of *Mandeville* partakes in this process; its presentation of a global world aspires to affirm England's dominance within it.

> of countries. And since this is the nearest country that
>
> varies and is discordant in faith and doctrine from our faith,
>
> I have set it here so that you may know the diversity that is
>
> between our faith and theirs, for many men take great
>
> pleasure and comfort in hearing talk of strange things.]

The term *comfort* in Middle English means to strengthen, support, or confirm. For Sir John, there is comfort in the strange because the strange has the capacity to confirm one's own beliefs and customs as superior. The traveler aims to construct a knowable world for his readers—one in which their own worldview is confirmed and upheld as superior.

Scholars have argued that such comfort is not readily found in earlier travel narratives.[130] During the thirteenth and early fourteenth century, European travel writing on excursions into Asia often reflect the vulnerability and unease of the traveler (Khanmohamadi 2013a; 2013b; Phillips 2013). Early travelers into Asia were Dominican or Franciscan missionaries with the dual aims of learning about the Mongols and converting them to Christianity. Shirin Khanmohamadi's work has identified an ethos of cosmopolitanism in these medieval ethnographies that specifically does not reflect a multiculturalist celebration, but rather leads to disorientation in the traveler's sense of self (as discussed in chapter two).

She identifies a similar discomfort with an openness to cross-cultural encounter in *The Book of John Mandeville*. While Khanmohamadi argues that there is uneasiness, discomfort, and instability in medieval cosmopolitanism, I suggest that this is precisely

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[130] Although it is not readily found, I have argued in chapter two that these earlier travel narratives nonetheless produce a sense of supremacy for Latin Christendom precisely because of their sense of vulnerability.

what Sir John seeks to correct in his construction of world exploration. In *Mandeville*, a cosmopolitan ethos becomes a strategy of recovery for the destabilized world traveler. Like Khanmohamadi, Linda Lomperis (2001) also identifies an instability in Sir John's position. But she argues that a sense of impermanence for the self is precisely his desire as he encounters foreign alterity. She writes, "His pleasure seems to come not from situations of fixed identity and stable residency, but rather from situations of passing and indeed, from situations of "passing through": from situations, in other words, of never remaining in any one place or in any one racial identity for very long" (158). I agree with Lomperis that there is a kind of passing going on, where the narrator assumes the other and the other assumes the narrator; the line of difference is blurred and traversed time and again. I argue that Sir John's "passing," as Lomperis describes it, is a method not for acquiring an instability of self, but rather for stabilizing the world traveler's experience with alterity. While travel does create instability in Rubruck's *Itinerarium*, and for him it is not pleasurable but a source of anxiety and humiliation, it does not do so in *Mandeville*.

I argue that Sir John foregrounds his worldview rather than estranges himself from it. He establishes himself as a stable traveler with a privileged position in his cross-cultural encounters. When he arrives at the Great Khan's court, for example, he describes his encounter there in a straightforward manner; absent is the kind of self-othering or submission to an external gaze that characterize William's travel account. In fact, Sir John asserts English superiority in terms of eating habits when he says that

> "mete and drinke is more honest in oure cuntre than there, for alle the
>
> communes ete no fleisch as we do but of alle manere of beestis. And

whenne thei have yete thei wipe here hondis on here skirtes and thei ete

but ones on the day. And thei drynken melk of alle maner beestis" (94).

[food and drink is more respectable in our country than in theirs, for the

commoners don't eat meat like we do, but eat any kind of animal. And

when they have eaten they wipe their hands on their skirts and they eat

only once a day. And they drink milk from any kind of animal.]

Sir John compares the food and drink of the Mongols to that of England, placing a value

judgement on the difference between them. While Englishmen are discerning with their

meat choices, Mongols eat the flesh of "alle manere" of animals, a phrase that conveys

the narrator's condescension towards this practice, which he repeats when he remarks on

the source of their milk as well: they, unlike the discerning Englishman, drink milk from

any kind of animal. When he asserts overtly that England's eating habits are more

"honest," a word that signifies respectability and virtue, he suggests that through food

customs one may locate the veracity of a people's moral goodness. [131] In doing so, he

presents readers a clear statement on the moral inferiority of Mongols as he relates his

discovery of their eating habits.

Similar to Carpini, which is the source for the *Mandeville*-author's description of

the Mongols' physiognomy, by way of Vincent of Beauvais, Sir John says that the

Mongols have "smale iyen and litel beerdis [small eyes and little beards]," features that

are also contextualized within a discussion of their moral falseness (105). Just as he

finishes describing the facial characteristics that he uses to mark their difference, he says

[131] MED

that they are "comynliche fals for thei holdeth noght that thei hight [a dishonest people, for they don't hold to that which they promise]."[132]

Sir John is a traveler who can traverse the world, experience it and come into contact with all of its diverse peoples and places, and yet retain a stable sense of self. His subject position of privilege is constructed through racial paradigms of medieval cosmology. Latin Christian thinkers understood the diverse physiognomic features of the earth's inhabitants as being determined by the variations of the earth's seven climates, which were associated with and themselves determined by the placement, movement, and size of the seven planets. [133] Geographic locations were mapped onto a cosmological paradigm, which not only accounted for things like differences in skin color, but also led to claims about demeanor and moral characteristics. This cosmology was primarily circulated by way of Johannes de Sacrobosco's thirteenth-century astronomical treatise *De Sphaera* (c. 1230), an explanation of Ptolemy's adaptation of Aristotle that was hugely influential throughout the medieval and early modern period as a source for the structure of the cosmos as geocentric.

In this cosmological paradigm, the earth is in the center of the universe with several spheres rotating around it. In the inner rungs are the elements (earth, water, air, fire), followed by what were understood as the seven planets (the Moon, Mercury, Venus, the Sun, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn), followed by the fixed stars, and then the Primum Mobile, which set all the other spheres into motion and is itself moved by the Primum

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[132] "comynliche" may be translated as "commonly" in the sense that somethings happens often; however, I have translated "comynliche fals" as "a dishonest people" because doing so retains the valence of the term *commune* connoted here as well: that is, a quality ascribed to the people of a community. Sir John means that the Mongols are *often* dishonest *and* that their dishonesty is characteristic of the entire community.

[133] Such as Bartholomeus Anglicus's *De Proprietatibus Rerum* (c. 1240), Roger Bacon's *Opus Majus* (c. 1267), Ranulph Higden's *Polychronicon* (c. 1342). Note, too, the etymology of climate from the Greek "klima" meaning inclination.

Movens, God in Heaven. [134] The location, size, and movement of each sphere were thought to influence the diverse climates and inhabitants of the earth. The paradigm was not neutral, but rather instantiated value judgements on the earth's places and peoples. Suzanne Akbari (2004) has noted that commentators of Sacrobosco's treatise consistently remark that the skin color of Ethiopians is both related to its cosmological location and degenerate because of it. According to Akbari, one such commentator writes:

> "An example of the blackening of Ethiopians is the cooking of golden honey. First it is golden, then reddish, and finally by long cooking it becomes black and bitter, and that which was at first sweet is now salty. And it is just this way all over Ethiopia" (2004, 158).

The anti-blackness here is clear: Ethiopians' skin color is likened to burned honey, a delicacy that is no longer sweet to taste but rather bitter and salty.

The racial rhetoric of Sacroboso's commentators is echoed in the *Mandeville*-author's own interpretation of the *De Sphaera*, which informs his presentation of the world and its inhabitants. Specifically, Sacroboso's racial cosmology activates the traveler's privilege and stability as he journeys into unfamiliar lands and encounters people who are different than himself. Sir John's description of India is one of the clearest moments where we see how Sacrobosco's cosmology helps the narrator construct English superiority. He draws on this cosmology as well as geography and ecology in order to produce an inferior body (in the Indian subject) whose difference is processed into racial alterity, and thus concomitantly produces a dominant subject in the English traveler. When he explains that India has acquired its name from the Indus river that runs

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[134] For examples of how this diagram was represented with slight variations, see NYPL MA 069 (figure 2) and Penn LJS 26 (figure 3). See also LJS 216; and see LJS 494 for a Hebrew translation.

through the land, he also associates the country with monstrosity, saying that the river is

inhabited by enormous eels, thirty-feet long:

> "In that water men fyndeth eelys of xxx feete long. And men that dwellith
>
> nere that water beth of yvel colour, yolewe and greene. In Ynde beth mo
>
> than fyve thowsand yles that men dwellith ynne, goode and grete. […]
>
> And in everyche of these beth many citez and townes and myche folk, for
>
> men of Ynde beth of o condicoun that thei passith not out of here lond
>
> comunliche. (71-2).
>
> [In that river one finds eels thirty feet long. And the people living near that
>
> river are of an *yvel* yellow-and-green color. In India there are more than
>
> five thousand pleasant and large islands that people live on […]. And in
>
> every one of these [islands] there are many cities and towns and many
>
> people because Indians are of such a disposition that they don't often leave
>
> their country.]

Sir John carries a conception of ecological monstrosity into his depiction of the people

who live in India, whose skin color he says is "yvel." In Middle English, *yvel* is a term

that means wicked, harmful, miserable, and inferior – all characteristics of demeanor and

morality.[135] Further, when used to reference people, it also takes on the meaning of

diseased. Sir John represents the people of India as morally deficient and dangerous,

characteristics that are inscribed on their bodies, but are also pathological—something

that could presumably be changed and that is not clearly constituted by biological

inheritance. But Sir John's understanding of their "yvel colour, yolewe and greene" as

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[135] MED. See entry for "ivel."

either permanent or impermanent is not so important here. The biological fixity of racial

difference would become a crucial argument in Enlightenment-era discourses of race.

Here, what is consequential is how the racial alterity of the Indians functions to buttress a

superior position for the traveler -- and, through him, for that of England.

Sir John also situates India and England within Sacrobosco's cosmology,

assigning them to spatial positions that consequently impact the demeanor of the people

living in those places. He says that Indians

> dwellith undir a planete that me clepith Saturne, and that plantet makith
>
> his torn by the xii signes in xx yere, and the moon passith thurgh the xii
>
> signes in a monthe. And for Saturne is of so late sterying, therfor men that
>
> dwellen undir hym and that climate haveth no goode wille to be myche
>
> steryng aboute. And in oure cuntre is al the contrarie, for we beth in a
>
> clymate that is of the moone and of light steryng, and that is the planete of
>
> way. And therfore it geveth us wille to be myche stering and to go in
>
> dyverse cuntrez of the world, for hit passith aboute the world more
>
> lightlich than another planet. (71-72)
>
> [live under a planet that men call Saturn, and this planet turns through the
>
> 12 signs in 20 years, while the moon passes through the 12 signs in a
>
> month. And because Saturn is so slow in movement, men that live under
>
> him and that climate have no desire to move about much. In our country is
>
> the contrary, for we are in a climate that is of the moon and fast
>
> movement, for this is the planet of travel. And therefore it gives us the

desire to move about a lot and go to diverse countries of the world, for it

passes about the world more quickly than any other planet.]

The sphere of Saturn influences the climate of India, and so the slowness associated with

this planet (determined by its time around the earth) makes the people of India sluggish

and loath to travel. In contrast, the people of England, like himself, love to travel because

they live in the climate under the moon's influence. The moon is nimble, and so therefore

produces world travelers. Sir John uses the authority of the cosmos to make these claims

about Indians and Englishmen, and as he does so he also accords value to these respective

qualities. He remarks that Indians' aversion to travel has led to their overcrowded cities

and towns, and throughout the text, he paints travel as a morally righteous endeavor. In

the prologue, for example, he emphasizes that travel will help the Christians reclaim

Jerusalem from the Muslims. Sir John's use of cosmological and climatological theory

here invites readers to see his own desire for travel into diverse countries as racially

determined, as something that is essential to all Englishmen. This self-referential moment

performs epistemological work for a narrative preoccupied with travel and its capacity to

imaginatively construct a global presence for England. This global position is predicated

on the stability of the traveler, whose privileged position becomes a conduit for achieving

this aim.

In Sir John's worldview, there is no one more privileged than the traveler. We see

this notion reflected clearly when he arrives in Ceylon, or Sri Lanka, and tells his readers

how foreigners are safer than the locals from the land's threatening beasts and thus may

more readily access the wealth of its natural resources.[136] He describes Ceylon as wild

and mostly uninhabited because of the many large snakes and crocodiles that live there:

> In this lond is myche waast, for ther beth so many naddris and dragouns
>
> and cocadrilles that men dar not wel dwelle ther. These cocadrilles beth
>
> naddris yolewe and rayed aboue, and thei have iv feet and schorte
>
> schankis and grete nailes and mervelous. And whenne thei goth by the
>
> way whiche is sondy it semeth as a man hadde drawe buske thurgh the
>
> sond.
>
> [This land is mostly uninhabited, for there are so many snakes and dragons
>
> and crocodiles that men do not dare to live there. These crocodiles are
>
> yellow snakes and have striped backs, and they have four feet and short
>
> legs and large, incredible claws. And when they move over a sandy path it
>
> looks as though someone has pulled a bush through the sand.]

The crocodiles are terrifying, monstrous, and even unnatural. Although one might expect

to find large and terrifying animals in uninhabited wilderness, the crocodiles that Sir John

encounters here are more than that; they are surprisingly unnatural. They have

"marvelous" claws, thus impressing onlookers with a particular kind of fear that arises

through that which is miraculous. Likewise, the imprint these crocodiles leave on the

sand suggests an enormous, monstrous size. Finally, they are described as having the

same skin color as the people of India: *yolewe*. The appearance of the monstrous

crocodiles and the Indians is linked through this shared description of their skin color,

further evidencing the way in which Sir John grafts monstrosity onto the local people.

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[136] Sri Lanka was an important medieval trade location, further evidencing the valence of economic power reflected in this scene.

In this land, there is a great pond in a hill, and "men of that cuntre seith that Adam and Eve wepe upon that hulle an hundrid yere aftir that thei were put out of paradys, and thei seith that watir is here teeris. And in this water beth many cocadrilles and other naddris" [men of that country say that Adam and Eve wept upon that hill a hundred years after they were exiled from paradise, and they say that the water is their tears. And in this water are many crocodiles and other snakes.] (88). The pond's origin story allusively brings Adam and Eve—and biblical history—into what would likely be a terrifying place for a traveler.

However, the fear this place induces in the locals is not extended to foreigners passing through. Sir John notes,

> the kyng of that land every yere o tyme geveth leeve to pore men […] to go in that water and gedre hem precious stones, for ther beth many. And for the vermyn that is withynne the water men anonynte here armes and schankys of an oynement made therfore, and than haveth thei no drede of cocadrilles nether of other naddris. And men seith there that naddris and wilde beestis of that cuntre don never harm to straunge men that cometh thedir but onlich to men of that same cuntre. (88)
>
> [Once every year, the king of that land gives poor men permission […] to go into the pond in order to gather precious stones for themselves, for there are many. But because of the vermin in the water, these men smear their arms and legs with a special ointment, and then they are not scared of the crocodiles nor serpents. And men say that the snakes and wild beasts

of that country never do harm to outsiders who go there, but only to men

of that country.]

For the locals to access the precious stones in the pond, they must first apply their arms

and legs with an ointment that will keep the beasts from harming them. Meanwhile,

outsiders--"straunge men"—need no such protection. "Straunge" in Middle English

means foreign and unfamiliar, and can sometimes mean barbarian; although here it takes

on the connotation of foreign -- men who are outsiders—but not characterized by

barbarianness. Sir John's strangeness does not make him vulnerable in this unknown

land, but rather serves as the precise antidote to the danger that surrounds him. In fact, it

is not the land that is characterized as "unknown," it is him who is unknown. But as a

"straunge man," Sir John can potentially inhabit this land, safe from the threat of the

snake-like crocodiles. He can capitalize on his ability to enter the pond, as he can gather

its precious stones without fear of being attacked or killed – or needing a special ointment

(released only once a year) in order to do so. He holds a privileged position over the

locals so that he is able to assert his superiority even as he becomes a strange man

passing through a world filled with both terrifying beasts and people to whom that

beastliness is often extended, through the traveler's dehumanizing descriptions. That this

pond is in the "myddel" of the mountain is also important because it brings the excellent

middle, which I discuss below, to this place of potential instability and anxiety, and

operates in Sir John's project of privileging and stabilizing the traveler here. Racial

alterity structures this maneuver and enables him to assert his superiority even as he

passes through and embraces the differences of a diverse world.

The Antipodal Prester John

        The privileged subject position of the English traveler mobilizes the global

dominance of England, and it does so specifically through the author's deployment of the

crusader legend of Prester John. [137] Prester John figures prominently in *Mandeville's*

cartographic construction of the world, and enables the narrator to racialize geography to

the benefit of an England that occupied a peripheral place on the global stage. Medieval

England was far removed from the economic and cultural centers of the Mediterranean

and Central Asia, and its remoteness from Jerusalem also meant that it held a minimal

role in the crusades. While it was undoubtedly connected to the world beyond its island

borders, its geographic location at the edge of the known world, separated from the

European Continent by the Channel, became a point of interest for English authors

throughout the Middle Ages. Kathy Lavezzo has shown that English authors often self-

consciously constructed England as what she calls, a "global borderland" – that is, a

cartographically marginal place that could hold global significance precisely because of

that marginality. She writes, "in the case of English culture up to the early decades of the

sixteenth century, not only geographic centers but also geographic margins had a certain

social authority" (2006, 7).

        The late fourteenth-century Ramsey Abbey map visually illustrates this dynamic

(see figure 4).[138] Accompanying Ranulf Higden's *Polychronicon* (c. 1327-60), a universal

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[137] For more overview of the legend of Prester John, see chapter 1

[138] The Ramsey Abbey map opens BL Royal MS 14. CIX as a preface to Ranulf Higden's *Polychronicon*. It was produced by an English mapmaker at the abbey in Huntingdonshire. It has been previously known as the Higden map, as it has been the most associated with Higden even though there are twenty-one maps included in manuscripts of the *Polychronicon*. The map in Higden's autograph manuscript (Huntington Library HM 132 f. 4v) places England outside the perimeters of the world and it is not painted red like in the Ramsey Abbey map. However, Lavezzo (2006) argues that the Ramsey map's close association with Higden accords with the way that it "corresponds to the issues of English identity and marginality that […] are crucial to Higden's work" (71). According the Lavezzo, the *Polychronicon* is "a textual version of what

history of enormous scope, this map emphasizes the privileged position of England within global geography, not despite, but because of its marginality.[139] Lavezzo, who features the Ramsey Abbey map on the cover of her book, offers us a beautiful close reading of how the maker's artistry draws out the prominence of England from the map's lower right-hand corner. She writes:

> "Even as the red-tinged Jerusalem beckons the reader's attention, it finds its rival in the crimson image of Anglia, [or England]. Occupying the northwestern corner of the oval-shaped map, England lies directly across the world from the Red Sea, whose two hydrographic prongs extend diagonally along the map from the southeast, leading the eye beyond Jerusalem to England. Through its proportion, toponymic detail, and color, [the map] makes the English corner of the world its focus." (71).

Within the large, universal scope of the mappamundi, the Ramsey map visualizes how a marginal place may be drawn into the foreground. By linking two opposing corners and a central point—the Red Sea, Anglia, and Jerusalem—with the same striking color, the map-maker encloses the entire represented world within the domain of these places. As Lavezzo argues, the most prominent of the three is Anglia, which is emphasized not only through its enlarged coverage (in relation to other maps of its kind where England is smaller), but also because of the way in which the Red Sea directs viewers to look past Jerusalem and toward the corner it inhabits. At the same time, however, the Red Sea and

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the map visually displays: how an artifact of universal scope nevertheless can imagine a sovereign England." See also Woodward (1987) for more on all the Higden maps.

[139] See Steiner (2015) for more on Higden, specifically on the organization of his universal history into seven parts (the first a geography of the world and the next six a chronicle from the Fall of Man to the reign of Edward III) and how his use of compendiousness reveals a mode of genre thinking.

Jerusalem are integral to this schema, for without the paradigm their integration creates, Anglia would remain disconnected, even if emphasized, from the rest of the world. It is the connection between these three places, visualized through the red coloring, that makes Anglia's prominence *globally* significant.

Mandeville was composed a decade or so before the Ramsey Abbey map was made, and it reflects in its narrative the same perspective the map presents visually. It presents a similar assertion of England's global significance by employing not the Red Sea, but the legend of Prester John. In the middle of the narrative, Sir John presents a comprehensive world geography that takes readers out of the constructed intimacy of his ethnographic descriptions and shows us the larger epistemological framework that houses those descriptions. When he describes the spherical earth and England's position within it, we can see clearly the geographic paradigm that allows him to imagine how a peripheral England may come to claim global dominance over a diverse world. He thereby produces a racial epistemology through his presentation of world geography.

As he explains that the earth is round, with two fixed stars around which the firmament rotates, he describes England and Prester John's kingdom as being directly opposite one another:

> the lond of Prestre Ioon emperour of Ynde is under us, for
>
> yif a man schal go fro Scotland other Engelond toward
>
> Ierusalem, he schal go ever upwarde, for our londe is in the
>
> lowist partye of the west and the lond of Prestre Ioon is in
>
> the lowist partye of the eest, and thei have day when we
>
> have night and night when we have day. And as myche as a

man riseth upward out of oure cuntrez to Ierusalem he schal go dounward toward the land of Prestre Ioon fro Ierusalem, and that is for al the erthe is round. […] Ierusalem is in the myddel of the world. [….] thei that goth out of oure cuntrez of the west toward Ierusalem, as many iourneys as thei make to go thider upward, as many iourneys schal thei make to go into the lond of Prestre Ioon dounward fro Ierusalem.

[the land of Prester John, emperor of India, is under us, for if a man shall go from Scotland or England toward Jerusalem, he shall go ever upward, for our land is in the lowest part of the west and the land of Prester John is in the lowest part of the east, and they have day when we have night and night when we have day. And as much as a man rises upward out of our country to Jerusalem, he shall go downward toward the land of Prester John from Jerusalem, and that is because the earth is round. […] Jerusalem is in the middle of the world. […] those who go out of our country of the west toward Jerusalem, as many journeys as they make to go upward, as many journeys shall they make to go downward from Jerusalem into the land of Prester John.]

Travel is the precise mechanism by which the spherical earth is mapped. He says that it takes the same number of journeys to get to Jerusalem from England as it does to get from Jerusalem to Prester John's land. [140] Prester John, England, and Jerusalem together form a cartography that structures the world into a hierarchy that produces the global and spiritual supremacy of England. It is precisely the marginal location of both England and Prester John's kingdom that affords England with this global power.

As discussed in chapter one, Prester John was a figure of crusader legend that dates back to the twelfth century. He was imagined as a Christian priest king from the far east who would come and save the beleaguered crusaders in the Levant. According to the legend, Prester John would lead his men across the Tigris, defeat the Muslim forces, and take Jerusalem for Latin Christendom. For medieval Latin Christian audiences, Prester John represented a Christian utopia in the lands beyond the Muslim regions of the Levant. He was beyond the known world, yet always in reach. His extreme geographic distance and his Christian identity—that is, both his opposition and similarity—are precisely what fueled his legend and imbued him with the imaginative power of a global Christianity. In *Mandeville*, the relationship between England and Prester John's land is antipodal. The antipodes – meaning "having feet opposite" in Greek – denoted a place directly opposite another place on the globe. Matthew Boyd Goldie (2010) has argued that the antipodes are both oppositional and similar at the same time. Drawing on Eve Sedgwick's notion of "beside" in *Touching Feeling*, he writes, "the antipodes are opposite, but they don't only (and certainly don't necessarily) oppose or always clearly

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[140] Note that England is constantly fighting for control in Scotland, so mentioning Scotland is not to recognize its sovereignty but to define its shared geography over the island; and there seems to be a fantasy of bringing it under English dominion so it's really just an extension of England.

differentiate themselves from Europe [...] they stand opposite yet also beside" (70). The antipodal relationship between England and Prester John's empire is one of simultaneous opposition and correspondence.

As Sir John's travels expand the reaches of the known world, incorporating more diversity and difference into the European purview, he contains the threat of alterity in the antipodal Prester John, rendering the world's extreme difference into something not only familiar, but something all powerful and in service of Latin Christian aims. *Mandeville* uses the simultaneous difference and similarity of Prester John to expand the world on England's terms so that as the Antipodes, his lands (and their significance as a Christian utopia with the promise of global dominance) can be appropriated for England. The geography of opposition here places England on the global stage reflecting the imperial might and far reach of Prester John's imaginative power.

Goldie suggests that correspondence with the antipodes can destabilize, and that such may be the case in narratives like *Mandeville*, where circumnavigation is the aim and an expanded world is the effect. In these narratives, he writes,

> The world and epistemologies about it are [...] extended in unexpected
> ways that move the European corpus beyond itself. [...] the antipodes
> destabilize, indeed, set Europe in motion. In some texts, especially those
> involving circumnavigation, the European traveler's movement, once he
> passes through the antipodes, is potentially endless. (58)

I suggest, however, that in *Mandeville*, this geographic paradigm of antipodean opposition is stabilized by the location of Jerusalem in the middle between them. Jerusalem's middleness, a relational excellence, is here rendered in concrete geographic

terms. Its middle position anchors the opposition between England and Prester John's land with its virtuous excellence, and asserts Christian piety and power for the interchange across their antipodean bridge. As Sir John's travels expand the reaches of the known world, incorporating more diversity and difference into the European purview, he contains the threat of alterity in the antipodal Prester John, rendering the world's extreme difference into something not only familiar, but something all powerful and in service of Latin Christian aims.

The famous anecdote that Sir John tells of the world traveler who circumnavigates the world follows this scene in which he maps his imaginative geography. I suggest that this world traveler, who doesn't recognize home when he returns after circling the entire globe, and so keeps moving, is not the disoriented traveler that we tend to think he is. Rather, I posit that he captures precisely the aims of Sir John and *Mandeville*—namely, to expand the world to the extent that home (that is, England) moves into the world with a stable position. This traveler, upon returning to England, recognizes his language, but not the country, and he quickly leaves, returning the way he had come, back out into the world. The provincial English home is of the past, no longer suitable for an ever-increasing global world of diversity and difference. *Mandeville* uses the simultaneous difference and similarity of Prester John to expand the world on England's terms so that as the Antipodes, his lands (and their significance as a Christian utopia with the promise of global dominance) can be appropriated for England. The geography of opposition here places England on the global stage reflecting the imperial might and far reach of Prester John's imaginative power. And Jerusalem's middleness imbues England with an ever present religious and spiritual excellence.

Jerusalem in the "Myddel"

The spiritual significance of Jerusalem becomes an anchor for the text's vision of an England with a position of global dominance over a diverse world. Sir John stabilizes the experience of encountering difference in order to privilege a peripheral England. In his unwieldy account of a circuitous pilgrimage to Jerusalem and travels farther east into Asia (both real and fantastical), Sir John presents an imaginative geography that offers structure and coherence. He moves from pilgrim-traveler in the first half of the text to curious world-traveler in the second, using Jerusalem as a conceptual middle place to stabilize his journey beyond the Holy Land and his encounters with difference throughout Asia. Jerusalem as a middle place buttresses an antipodean relationship between England and Prester John's powerful Christian empire. I argue that this cartographic paradigm enables England's dominant entrance into a diverse world that, resembling the text's discursive chaos, would otherwise threaten the stability of the traveler.

The first time Sir John identifies Jerusalem as a place in the middle of the world, he does so not in relation to England and Prester John, but in relation to human salvation. This initial mention provides readers with a heuristic for theorizing the middleness of Jerusalem in the geographic paradigm of the Antipodean Prester John, which is the third and final time Jerusalem's middleness is presented in the narrative. In the prologue, as the narrator discusses Jerusalem—"the lond ouer the see, that is to say the holi lond"—as the chosen place for Christ to "take fleisch and blood of the virgyne" and "suffre passioun and deeth," he invites readers to meditate on the Aristotelian ethics of a virtuous middle and its manifestation within geographic space:

And that lond hadde he chose bifore alle othere londis as

for the best and most vertuous and the moost worthi of the

world, for as the philosofir seith, Virtus rerum in medio

consistit, that is to say, the vertu of thynges is in the

myddel. (3)

[And he chose that land above all other lands as the best

and most virtuous and most worthy of the world because,

as the philosopher [Aristotle] says, Virtus rerum in medio

consistit, that is to say, the virtue of things is in the middle.]

The logic here presupposes that Jerusalem is "in the myddel" and thus was chosen for the

excellence of its location as such. At the same time, it is in being chosen that Jerusalem is

accorded its excellence and thereby understood to be in the middle. This imprecision of

geography is overcome by the very concept of the Aristotelian middle that places

Jerusalem at its crux, both determining and being determined by it. Aristotle's principle

of the virtuous middle distinguishes between "the mean in the thing" and "the mean in

relation to us," whereby the former describes a fixed point of equidistance to two

extremes and the latter describes "that which is neither excessive nor deficient" and,

unlike the former, "is not one and the same in every case."[141] This "mean in relation to

us" is the "myddel" in which Sir John locates Jerusalem. The Middle English word

"myddel" has the meaning of being "in the midst" rather than at a fixed point around

which circles revolve. [142] Such a point would have been denoted by the Middle English

"centre," and indeed the author uses this word when referring to the point of a compass in

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[141] Taylor (2006): Book II, chapter 6, lines 30-33.
[142] MED.

his description of the spherical earth: "Y ymage a figure whare ys a grete cumpas, and aboute the poynt of that compass, that is yclepid the centre" (81). It is not a fixed point on a map, but rather a place of virtuous character whose middleness is understood as relational to the excess and deficiency of the world. As Sir John anticipates an expanding world of difference and alterity --and aims to manipulate its cartographic implications— he ensures that Jerusalem's middleness is retained even if its geographic centrality is displaced.

The relationality of *Mandeville's* middle is apparent later in the prologue when the narrator explains where, according to common sense, one would go to make an important announcement:

> And he that was kyng of glorie and of ioiye might best in
>
> that place suffre deeth; for he that wol do ony thing that he
>
> wole be knowen openly by, he wole do crie it openliche in
>
> the myddel place of a cite other of a toun, so that yt may be
>
> wel knowe to alle the parties of the cite. And therfore he
>
> that was kyng of al the world wolde suffer deeth at
>
> Ierusalem for that is in the myddel of the world, so that it
>
> might be knowe to men of alle partyes of the world how
>
> dere he boughte man. (3-4)
>
> [And he who was the king of glory and joy might best in
>
> that place suffer death; for he who wishes to do something
>
> that he will be known by will announce it openly in the
>
> middle place of a city or town, so that it may be well

known to every part of the city. And therefore he who was

king of all the world would suffer death at Jerusalem, for

that is in the middle of the world, so that it might be known

to men in every part of the world how dearly he saved

mankind.]

The "myddel place" in a city or town is determined not by its spatial centrality, but its capacity to transmit information to all the divisions of that city or town. One imagines that this place would move according to shifts in population density so that it is always located where important news may spread outward and reach everyone quickly.

The "myddel" location of Jerusalem here is informed by the genre of *mappaemundi*, maps of the world, which were relational depictions of the world and hierarchical in nature. *Mappaemundi* were diagrams that captured the whole of earthly and biblical history within world geography, that is, within the three known continents of Europe, Asia, and Africa. They were nearly always oriented east because the farthest point of the east was believed to be the location of Earthly Paradise, which is thus depicted at the very top of mappaemundi. Sir John describes it, according to prevailing theology, "at the begynnynge of the erthe" revealing how these maps represented both time and space at once (130). Europe is represented in the lower left corner, with Africa in the lower right. Jerusalem is placed in the center, such as in Ramsey Abbey map (or the more famous examples of the Hereford, Ebstorf, and Psalter maps), visually asserting its significance in both world history and geography. Before the thirteenth century, however, the center of world maps was rarely emphasized and, as some scholars have noted, it wasn't until the loss of Jerusalem in 1244 that map makers began to place it

there, as a maneuver of spiritual recovery.[143] This sentiment is echoed in the prologue

when the narrator enjoins readers to take back Jerusalem with an explanation that it was

lost because of Christians' own spiritual shortcomings.

We can think of mappaemundi as a kind of encyclopedia that combined time and

space, guiding viewers to visually locate their position in relation to the peoples, places,

and events of world history. They were about ascribing space with meaning rather than

plotting out scaled and measured distances between them. They offer a unified and

simultaneous presentation of temporal and spatial diversity in what were inevitably

hierarchical schemata. For example, important pilgrimage sites and biblical events, like

the crucifixion, are given disproportionate coverage; and the "monstrous races" of legend

were depicted on the edges of the world.[144] As travel into Asia increased in the thirteenth

century and knowledge of real places in these regions filtered back to Europe, map-

makers were confronted with the challenge of not only incorporating this new knowledge

into their world maps, but also with the issue of needing more accurately scaled maps that

could be used for travel. Maps constructed along longitudinal and latitudinal lines move

away from the relational world of mappaemundi and depict geography in more neutral

terms. According to Edson (2007), "A grid-based map implies that all points on the

surface of the earth are of equal importance, a concept that did not harmonize with the

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[143] See Edson (2007), who cites Ingrid Baumgartner for this specific idea and notes that it was probably due to the crusades that Jerusalem made its way into the center of maps (21). She explains that this idea came from Ezekial 5:5 and Isidore of Seville. In the former, it is "in medio" and in Isidore it is "umbilicus" (20-21). Higgins (2011) remarks that while the idea dates back to a fourth-century reading of Ezekial, geographical writings prior to the twelfth century infrequently mention it, and only one pre-thirteenth century map places Jerusalem in the center (4 n.6). See also Woodward (1987) for more on the placement of Jerusalem on medieval world maps. He notes that even fourteenth-century English maps rarely placed Jerusalem in the center.

[144] Most of the monstrous races of medieval mappaemundi come from Pliny and Solinus (in fact, the Hereford quotes from the *Naturalis Historia*). The meaning of place is crucial in Pliny and Solinus and in climatological theories of race, which is prevalent in *Mandeville*.

hierarchical world view of the mappaemundi" (18). As maps focused more on scaled distances, Jerusalem was necessarily displaced as the central point.[145]

Sir John's description of Jerusalem's location resists the fixity of its centrality, and instead emphasizes the Aristotelian virtuous middle by which it is located. He translates the relativity of the mappaemundian place into the relativity of an Aristotelian mean. The journey to Jerusalem is circuitous and hardly feels like a travel guide. The first half of the narrative focuses on the way to Jerusalem and describes all the various ways you can take to get there. This *itinerarium* is more circuitous than straightforward and serves to decenter Jerusalem even as it is focalized. This circuity has been well documented in the criticism: Higgins refers to the journey to Jerusalem as a "spiral path" and Karma Lochrie notes that the narrative is not the linear one you might expect in the *itinerarium* genre, but is instead an "excursive structure" (Higgins 1997, 67; Lochrie 2009, 594). The narrative structure itself constructs a Jerusalem that is not in the "centre" even as it remains absolutely in the "myddel"; in fact, it succeeds in geographically rendering the middleness of Jerusalem. Readers are taken to places beyond Jerusalem before heading to the intended destination. The narrative affect is geographical chaos, yet readers are still anchored by a consistent arrival in Jerusalem. It is the place in the midst of things through which one travels to get to all other places and to where one always finds oneself returning.

As readers experience this circuitous journey through, around, and to Jerusalem, they are reminded once again of its middleness when the narrator repeats this idea from

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[145] See Edson (2007) for a study of how the world map changed from the thirteenth century to the fifteenth where the secular cartography of sea charts replaced the theological geography of mappaemundi. The increase in Asian travel in the thirteenth century because of the missionary and mercantile expeditions through the Mongol empire played a large role in the cartographic shifts that occurred.

the prologue for the second time. As he describes the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, he says, "ther as oure lord was don on the cros is writun" in Greek letters that which means in Latin, "Hic deus rex noster ante secula operatus est salutem in medio terre, that is to say, Here God oure kyng bifore worldis hath wrought hele in myddel of the erthe" (29). The spiralness of the journey makes it clear that the middleness of Jerusalem is not a fixed center, but a relational excellence. It becomes a source of stability as Sir John's world journey begins "fanning outward to new horizons," as Suzanne Conklin Akbari (2009) phrases it. Akbari makes a case for competing centers (the Sultan's chamber, Jerusalem, Earthly Paradise, Prester John's Land, England), suggesting that they "serve as alternate centers for organizing a world that was increasingly seen not as ordered about one point, but as fanning outward to new horizons for exploration and conquest" (58-59). Akbari, following Higgins, sees Jerusalem's centrality as being taken out into the world beyond Jerusalem, where it informs the depiction of that world. I suggest that it is *as a myddel* that Jerusalem is taken out into the world in this way; and that, as such, it serves to privilege the two places that determine its cartographic location: England and Prester John's Kingdom.[146]

Karma Lochrie (2009) has also stressed the significance of a distinction between the middle and the center, but in her analysis the middle becomes "a cosmopolitan ethos that cumulatively provincializes both Christian and European perspectives," rendering

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[146] Kathy Lavezzo's *Angels on the Edge of the World* (2006) is an important work for understanding how this imagined geography can privilege two marginalized spaces (England and Prester John's land). She writes, "The English were not simply self-conscious of their marginality during the Middle Ages; English writers and cartographers actively participated in the construction of England as a global borderland" (7). However, "in the case of English culture up to the early decades of the sixteenth century, not only geographic centers but also geographic margins had a certain social authority. […] The power of medieval English marginality paradoxically resembles the might of modern English centrality, as it is generated by the Kerrs in their reading of the Walker-Boutall world map" (7).

Mandeville a "medieval utopian project" (595, 593). Lochrie notes that *Mandeville* also draws on zonal maps elsewhere in the narrative, where Jerusalem is not centrally located, and that his use of both Jerusalem-centered and non-centered maps "open[s] up the spatial middleness of the globe" (594). For Lochrie, Europe is relocated within a relational middle as a means by which the text dismantles the hegemony of Latin Christianity; that is, it is "in the midst" of the world, rather than removed from it. But to locate Europe in the middle, as Sir John imagines it, would not deprivilege Europe; rather, doing so would fortify its privilege, its significance, within a world whose center necessarily shifts as it becomes increasingly global. A conception of Jerusalem in the Aristotelian middle ensures England global dominance because it is, in fact, England (and the antipodal Prester John) that determines this middle in Sir John's imagined cartography. Even as the geographic center of the world may shift, England's determination of the middle, as an essentially mobile place of excellence and virtue, will remain; as such, England is positioned so as to harness and benefit from that excellence.

From the Great Khan to Prester John

Chapter one of this dissertation has shown the early history of the Mongols' association with Prester John, which I argue is integral to *Mandeville's* program. The Great Khan is an important figure in the efficacy of the text's racial geography. In fact, it is the Mongol ruler who enables Sir John to move his vision for England from the confines of romance to historical possibility. While the legend of Prester John was believed to be real, travelers consistently failed to find him in the places he was supposed to be, and many travelers (such as Rubruck) even expressed skepticism about him. On the

other hand, the Mongol khans were well known in Europe. The Great Khan was thus someone, unlike Prester John, who the *Mandeville*-author was not only certain existed, but also someone who could serve as a tangible figure through whom Prester John could be reached – and thus enable him to realize his worldview. Sir John's discursive journey across the world ends in the land of Prester John, but directly prior to reaching that farthest, mythical, beyond space, he travels through the Great Khan's empire. This empire serves as an important evolutionary place on the traveler's journey to discover Prester John's land and thereby realize its role in his aims for bringing England into the world.

      As discussed in chapter one, when the Mongols first became known to Europeans during the Fifth Crusade around 1220, they were mapped onto the Legend of Prester John and were constructed as Christian allies, as descendants of the priest-king who would fulfill his promise of conquering Jerusalem for Latin Christendom. While this narrative was ruptured by later contact with the Mongols and European travel into their territory, as demonstrated in chapter two, the affiliation persisted. Mongols continued to be cast as allies: they became exotic allies where it is precisely their oriental exoticism (constituted by both grandeur and barbarity) that could be harnessed for European aims – primarily to defeat Muslim enemies in the Levant and usher in global Christianity. That is, they served a similar function as Prester John, but they also retained a characterization of barbarity not extended to Prester John.

      Sir John describes the Mongols' barbarous eating habits, despotic governance, and idolatry while at the same time he admires their greatness. He says, "Catay is a grete cuntre, faire and good and riche and ful of goode merchaundiz [Cathay is a large country,

beautiful and good and wealthy and teeming with excellent merchandise]" (91). The Great Khan's court is grand: his palace has walls nearly two miles high containing even more palaces and fecund gardens. His court drips in orientalist opulence: there are twenty-four golden pillars and panther fur adorning the walls that shine like gold so bright that people can't look at them. The dais is adorned in precious gems, pearls, gold and jasper, white and yellow crystals, golden serpents, and fountains (see figure 5). His court is spectacular and marvelous, a place Sir John says he found "more riche and noble than ever herde we say. And we schulde never have trowe hit yf we hadde noght ysey hit [more prosperous and noble than we had ever heard. And we would never have believed it if we had not seen it]" (94). Immediately after this remark, he notes that the Mongols' eating habits are less "honest" than those of Englishmen, as discussed above. This rhetorical move ensures that even as readers are drawn into the impressive wealth of the Mongol court, something by which the English court would presumably fail in comparison, they are assured of their continued superiority. Thus, this depiction of Mongol grandeur is orientalist, not in the Saidian sense that it forms a discourse, but in the sense that its construction here serves a purpose of alterity, specifically one marked by exoticism. English readers are able to indulge in and enjoy the spectacle of Mongol opulence while maintaining a perspective of superiority. These descriptions provide them the "comfort" Sir John promised they would find in this narrative, as discussed above.

Prester John's court is similarly opulent, but the luxury of his court is carefully punctuated with markers of his Christian piety and asceticism. Notably, as Sir John remarks, "his lond is good and riche but not so riche as the lond of the Grete Chan of Catay [his land is excellent and fertile but not as rich as the land of the Great Khan of

Cathay]" (113). His people, who are mostly Christian, are "right devoute and trewe everichon to other and thei makith no fors of catel [truly devout and loyal to one other and they don't give much weight to material possessions]" (115). Their wealth thus escapes the kind of orientalist indulgence readers saw in Cathay. In fact, the particular gems that adorn his palace and bedchamber allow for a display of wealth while expressing an adherence to Christian piety. For example, his gates are made of sardonyx and his bed adorned with sapphires, both stones that promote chastity.[147] Sir John also takes notes of the priest-king's marital practices:

> The fourme of his bed is al of saphires wel ybounde with gold to make
>
> hym to slepe wel and for to destroye leccherie, for he wol noght lye by his
>
> wyf but [thrys] at iii. sesouns in the yere, and that is al oonliche for getyng
>
> of children. (117-18)
>
> [His bed is adorned with sapphires bound tightly with gold to help him
>
> sleep well and destroy lecherous thoughts, for he does not wish to sleep
>
> with his wives except on three occasions in the year, at each season, and
>
> that is only for the purpose of conceiving children.]

Even as Prester John's bed displays the opulence of his rule, it also becomes a site for the expression of his piety. The very gems that demonstrate his wealth work to ward away the potentially immoral temptations that the bedchamber may bring. Further, it is not only the gems that protect him from sin, but also his own "wol."

Prester John also comports himself with Christian humility and ascetism among his personal household, as well as performs ceremonial deference to Christ.

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[147] See *On the properties of things*, 2.873 for sardonyx. 2.871 for sapphire

When he rideth […] with prive maigne, than is ybore bifore hym a cross

of tre noght ypaynted and withoute gold and precious stonus but al playn

in tokne that oure lord suffrid deeth upon a crois of tree. And [also] he

hath ybore byfore hym a plate of gold ful of erthe in tokne that his nobley

and his lordschip [schalle torne to noght] and his fleisch schal turne unto

erthe. (116)

[When he rides […] with his personal household, carried before him is a

wooden cross that is not painted and has no gold or precious stones, but is

completely plain, to represent that our Lord suffered death on a wooden

cross. And also, he has carried before him a golden plate full of earth to

symbolize that his nobility and his lordship shall return to nothing and his

flesh shall return to the earth.]

The bareness of his cross reveals both his recognization of the Crucifixion and his

willingness to forsake material wealth. His particular position as an exemplary Christian

ruler is captured in the symbolism of the dirt he carries on a golden plate, affirming for

Sir John's readers that Prester John's oriental grandeur is but a foil for his role as a savior

of Christendom.

　　While Prester John's Christian piety is emphasized despite the oriental luxury that

surrounds him, the wealth of the Mongols poses an impediment to their Christianity for

Sir John, who is often contradictory when discussing their religion. He demonstrates a

desire to ascribe to them the Christian faith while at the same time laments that he cannot

do so. The faith of the Mongols was perceived to be malleable and open to conversion.

This perception of convertibility informs Sir John's contradictory description of the Great

Khan's religion. He spends time lamenting the Mongols' lack of faith, yet he later asserts,

"and yife alle it be so that thei be noght crystenede yit the emperour and the Tartaryns

trowes in God allemyghty [and even though it is that they are not christened, the emperor

and the Tartars still believe in God almighty]" (98). He says that they speak of God when

they are ready to go into battle, and that the inscription on the Khan's seal, written in

Latin, refers to the Khan as God's strength on earth. He also says that the Khan refers to

himself as "Chan filius dei" in his letters. That his signature and seal are written in Latin

with such clear faith in God suggests the narrator's desire to locate the Christian religion

within what he identifies as the largest kingdom in the world ruled by the strongest

emperor there is. But while the Great Khan represents political ferocity, he remains out of

Sir John's grasp because of his lack of the Christian faith.

He laments time and again that the Great Khan is not Christian, while also

asserting his proximity to it:

> He hath many phisicyans, of whom ii. hundrid beth cristen men and xx.
> Sarasyns, but he tristith moost in cristene men. And ther beth in his [court]
> many barouns and other that beth cristene and yconvertyd to cristene fey
> thurgh preching of cristen men that dwellith there. But ther beth many that
> woleth not lete men wite that thei beth cristened. And yf alle hit be so that
> the emperour and his men be not cristened, yit trowe thei wel in God
> almyghty. (101)
>
> [He has many physicians, of whom two hundred are Christian men and
> two hundred Saracens, but he trusts in Christian men the most. And in his
> court, there are many barons and others who are Christian or converted to

the Christian faith because of the preaching of the Christian men who live

there. But there are many who do not wish to reveal that they have been

christened. And even though it is that the emperor and his men are not

christened, they still truly believe in God almighty.]

Sir John wants desperately to be able to see that the Mongols believe in god, even if they

haven't converted yet. He leaves open the suggestion that the Khan may have converted

secretly and simply hasn't told anyone.

Sir John strives to find the Christian faith among the Mongols because doing so

will bring him closer to Prester John. In fact, he imagines the lineage of the Great Khan

as joining with the priest-king through marriage. He says,

this emperour the Grete Chan hath iii. wyfes, and the principal wyf was

Prestre Ioon his doughter. And his men trowith wel in God that made al

thing, but yit have thei mawmetis made of gold and silver to whom thei

offer the firste melk of here beestis. (104)

[this emperor the Great Khan has three wives, and the principal wife was

Prester John's daughter. And his men truly believe in God who created

everything, but they still have idols, made of gold and silver, to whom

they offer the first milk of their animals.]

Though the Mongols are cast as idolatrous, the promise of their conversion – by way of

the Christian wife (that is, Prester John's daughter) – is crucial to their characterization. It

is precisely through the possibility of Mongol conversion that Prester John's Christian

imperialism can manifest in a tangible, obtainable world – and thus function in

Mandeville's paradigm of racialized geography. The association between the Great Khan

and Prester John, anchored by the sexual union between their kingdoms, resolves the tension expressed in Sir John's experience with the Mongols' religious faith. This union is reciprocated in both directions, as Sir John notes later: "this emperour Prestre Ioon weddith comynliche the doughter of the Grete Chan, and the Grete Chan his doughter [This emperor Prester John, as a matter of custom, marries the daughter of the Great Khan, and the Great Khan marries his daughter]" (115).

This resolution occurs through the narrative's discursive geography as well. As readers leave the Great Khan's empire and enter that of Prester John, they recognize the former in this new place, but here they find unambiguous Christians with direct descent to St. Thomas. When Sir John arrives in the realm of Prester John, he meets a ruler who matches the might of the Great Khan *and* possesses the religious stability the Mongols failed to offer the narrator. Prester John's Christian faith is so entirely wrapped up in his identity that it is unquestionable. It is important that Prester John is *not* a convert. His ancestry links back to one of the first evangelists, St. Thomas of India, which endows him with a deeply rooted Christian identity. Prester John offers Sir John and readers a Christian kingdom where there is no conversion involved, and hence no destabilizing anxiety or suspicion.

Sir John also provides the audience with a physical description of the priest-king's lands, which was notably absent from his otherwise detailed excursus through the cultural characteristics and political practices of the Great Khan and his people. The tangibility of Prester John's land is conveyed specifically through the *Letter of Prester John*, as Sir John, verbatim, includes the *Letter's* description of the Sandy Sea, the stony river that flows from Paradise, and the desert of shrinking shrubs. The *Letter* emerges here to fill

the gap left by the Great Khan—it brings a physical realness to this place at the end of the world in which a great, decidedly Christian empire reigns. For the narrator, it is the final destination on a progressive path towards a world full of difference, diversity, and the strange—all brought together in a mirror for England's projection of global dominance.

While the section about Prester John provides rich, detailed descriptions about the land, it circles around the figure himself. Much in the same way that the Great Khan's cultural prestige and political greatness escapes Sir John's apprehension because of his lack of religious stability, Prester John remains shrouded in an unknowability that keeps him just out of the reader's grasp. Yet the Great Khan re-enters several times, standing in as the tangible figure that Prester John is not. He becomes Prester John here in a more complex way than he did in the Fifth Crusade documents that chapter one examines. Thus, when readers arrive in the antipodal space that will, according to Sir John's imagined cartography, function as a mirror that will appropriate and reflect its global power for England, they find not merely an evasive figure of legend, but a historical ruler transformed into an exotic ally. The Mongols function once again within a racialized epistemology wherein their alterity is harnessed specifically to produce a dominant, superior position for another human group: here, the people of England.

Geography in *Mandeville* is constructed through a racial epistemology such that it produces a global landscape in which England is endowed with global power. The narrative's racializing of human differences is integrated into the process whereby geography becomes racialized. As chaotic as the narrative seems to be, its narrator's movement across space and through the various communities of the world pulls that

chaos into a coherent paradigm that contains the world under the domain of Latin

Christendom and a privileged English traveler.

Figure 2:
Sacrobosco's Ptolemaic cosmology in New York Public Library, MA 069 fol. 81r

Figure 3:
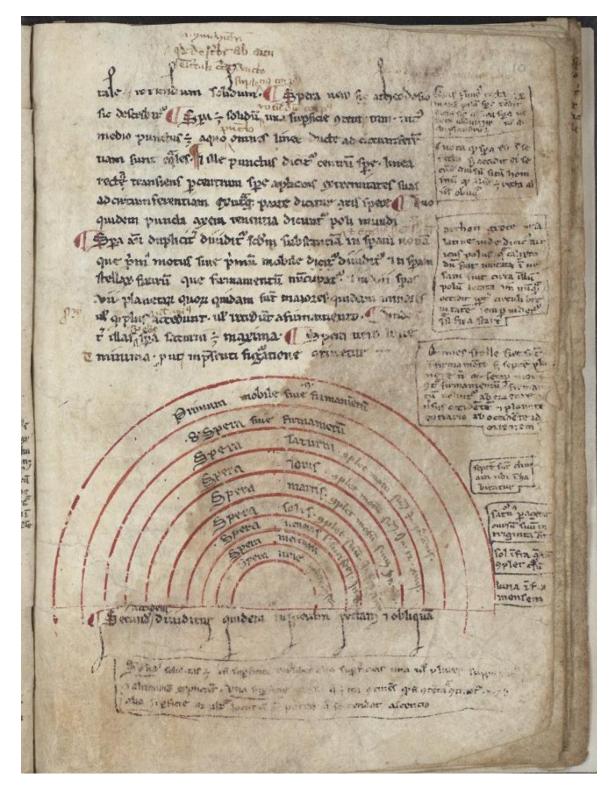Sacrobosco's Ptolemaic cosmology in Penn, LJS 26, fol. 10r

Figure 4: Ramsay Abbey Map in Higden's *Polychronicon*
British Library, Royal MS 14 CIX, fols. 1v-2r

Figure 5: The Palace of the Great Khan in *The Book of John Mandeville*
British Library, Harley 3954, fol. 46r

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CONCLUSION

MONGOLS AND ENGLISH LITERARY CULTURE

* * *

After the loss of Acre to the Mamluks in 1291, several proposals to launch a new

crusade circulated across Europe. Marino Sanudo (c. 1270-1343), a member of a

prosperous Venetian merchant family, was a leading voice among these campaigns and

wrote one of the most practical, economically-oriented books for the cause.[148] In 1307 he

wrote *Conditiones Terrae Sanctae*, which he later expanded into *Liber secretorum*

fidelium crucis super Terrae Sanctae recuperatione et conservatione [Book of secrets for

the faithful crusaders on the recovery and retention of the Holy Land].[149] His writings

presented his ideas on how to reconquer Acre and establish Latin Christian control in the

Levant. He presented *Liber secretorum* to the papal court at Avignon in 1321 and spent

the remainder of his life distributing his book to the religious leaders and monarchs of

Latin Europe, including Edward II of England. The nineteen extant manuscripts of *Liber*

secretorum were all produced in his lifetime.[150]

Given the financial success that Venetian merchants had garnered from the

Levantine economy, Sanudo's motivations were likely largely economic (and indeed his

primary strategy for the crusade is a trade embargo); however, Christian entitlement to

the Holy Land and anti-Muslim fervor clearly drove his project. Edson (2004) notes that

he repeatedly references the theological assertion (also articulated in the *Mandeville*

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[148] See Evelyn Edson (2004) on the deep political and economic ties between Venice and Acre beginning in
the Fourth Crusade. Sanudo lived in Acre as a young man prior to its fall.
[149] His descriptions of the Holy Land relied heavily on Burchard of Mount Sion.
[150] For a list of manuscripts, see Edson (2004, 151-2)

prologue and witnessed in the historiography of *The King of Tars*) that Christians are the rightful heirs to the Holy Land and thus it must be taken back from the Muslims. Edson characterizes his animosity towards Muslims as "fanaticism" because of its incessant expression throughout the book (150). He demonstrates an awareness about Islam, correctly identifying some of its practices, such as prayer five times a day and the prohibition on eating pork. But correct knowledge here doesn't disrupt his animosity toward Islam, and rather points to the maneuver we saw in Carpini's *Historia* wherein ethnographic knowledge fuels the construction of Latin supremacy. In fact, Sanudo also emphasizes the vulnerability of Christians as a rhetorical move to inspire a militaristic endeavor. Edson suggests that Sanudo's inclusion of world maps (nine manuscripts include maps, including the presentation copy produced for the papal court) functioned as a way "to illustrate the point Sanudo makes about the declining strength of Christianity in the world. He begs his reader to consider what a small space of the earth is inhabited by Christians. In Asia there is only Armenia, and it is constantly under siege. Even in Europe Spain is partly under Saracen rule, while eastern Europe is dominated by schismatic Greeks. Looking at the world map one could see this sorry state of affairs more vividly" (139).

For Sanudo, the Mongols offered Latin Christendom an ally against the Muslims in his campaign for the expansion and assertion of Christianity. As he writes about protecting Armenia, he suggests:

> perhaps there should be hope and not mistrust placed in the favour and the
> help of the Tartars, who rule in Persia and Chaldea, although for the most
> part they are mixed with the pestilential Saracen sect. Although it must be

believed that they would prefer to follow their own rather than foreign

ways.[151] (27)

He goes on to warn that if the Mongols join forces with the Mamluks, "it is to be feared

that after this they will pour themselves to areas beyond" (28).[152] In other words, the

Mongols could be great allies for *or* against Christians, and so it would be wise to secure

their diplomacy. The pestilence Sanudo equates with the Muslims is carried into his

characterization of the Mongols, but from the latter it may be sourced against the

Muslims on behalf of Christendom (a familiar perspective we saw earlier in Matthew

Paris's *Chronica*).

In fact, Sanudo repeats the wisdom of approaching the Mongols as allies when he

discusses the fear they induce in the Muslims in Syria, and the favorable consequences

for his crusade proposal. He says that because "a bold lord of Armenia, brother John of

the Franciscans, […] had wisely invited in many Tartars against" the Muslims, the land

that transports valuable resources to Egypt

> has been denuded several times of many people and infinite riches. A
>
> great part of the soldiery of the Sultan has departed and the people of the
>
> Sultan are terrified to such an extent that many have left. At the present
>
> time, that part of the Sultan's lands has not the people and the wealth that
>
> it is accustomed to have. (55)

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[151] Translations from Peter Lock (2011).

[152] In fact, a former Mongol soldier in Hulagu's army, taken prisoner by the Mamluks in 1260, eventually became the Mamluk Sultan from 1294 to 1296.

Mongol ferocity and pestilence becomes an alterity that is desired and sought specifically

for its use against the Muslims. The Mongols can strike the place where Mamluk power

in Egypt sources its economic stability in the region.

Further, the exotic ally protects vulnerable Christians from enslavement. Sanudo

explains that the people who are born in Egypt aren't capable of constituting a strong

military, and so the Sultan buys

> small boys from various nations, wherever they can be obtained for
>
> money, Christian as well as pagan. These they teach and introduce to
>
> military pursuits and […] with these men the Sulan expelled the Christians
>
> from the Holy land of Promise. They also bring girls, both Christian and
>
> pagan, to Egypt and the lands of the Sultan from various peoples, which
>
> they use for their carnal pleasure and which they subject to the law of
>
> Machomet to the damnation of their souls. (56)

The potential of young Christian children to fuel the global world that Sanudo envisions

through his crusade project is cut off by their vulnerability to capture, which twists them

into forces *against* Christendom. Christian boys become soldiers who keep the Holy

Land in Muslim control, and Christian girls are sexually exploited with no promise for

reproducing the faith: their enslavement is a threat to Christendom on earth and Christian

souls in the afterlife. Mongols emerge within this context as saviors.

Two illustrations accompany this passage in the manuscript presented to Pope

John XXII, one showing the apprehension of Christians into a Muslim ship, and the other

showing Muslim soldiers being chased by Mongols (see figure 6).[153] These illustrations are so close together and occupy the same spatial position at the bottom of the folio that they appear to be part of the same image and indeed we may interpret them as a single unit. Together they capture the distinct and relational positions between Christian enslavement, Muslim aggression, and Mongol aid. The Christians are depicted with white skin, huddled together on a Muslim ship, and surrounded by their Muslim captors, whose skin is painted black. In the illustration immediately beside it, two parallel armies of Mongols and Muslims, respectfully, ride toward the boat: the Mongols, whose skin is brown, outnumber the Muslims as they advance upon them and suggest the coming of aid for the helpless and fearful Christians on the boat. The visualization here of this triangulated dynamic articulates a crucial *knotte* (to use the Middle English term) of "Exotic Allies": Latin Christendom's construction and use of eastern alterity was constitutive of distinct processes of racialization that both disrupt the familiar Self-Other binary between east and west and reveal how Mongols became a racial group with a particular function for Latin Christian subjectivity, which also plays out in the English literary imaginary.

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

In Chaucer's late fourteenth-century masterpiece, *The Canterbury Tales*, we find Chinggis Khan transformed into an Arthurian king—and Tartary into Camelot—in the *Squire's Tale*, a disjointed romance told by the Knight's son and apprentice. It is often read as a failure in the art of rhetoric and noble storytelling: a humiliating demonstration

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[153] Edson (2004) notes that it was Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Vat. Lat. 2972 that Sanudo presented to Pope John XXII. See also figure 7, where Christians are depicted in enslavement with ropes around their bodies.

of the Squire's immaturity, deliberately wrought by Chaucer as a counterpoint to the eloquence and *gentilesse* of his father's epic romance. His periphrastic tale has three parts, each with tenuous links to the other, and ends abruptly with an interruption by the Franklin, sparing the pilgrims (and readers) from further enduring the Squire's tangential nonsense. At the same time as the tale develops into an experiment in English rhetoric, it may also be characterized by a poetics of exoticism, produced through its presentation of marvels from Arabia and India, Arthurian aesthetics, anthropomorphic birds, and its setting in "Serray," or Sarai, the Mongol capital of the Kipchak Khanate (the Golden Horde).[154]

In a tale particularly invested in experimental rhetoric and the destabilization of class norms that can stage its performance, Chaucer takes England into the Mongol Empire and Mongol exoticism into English literary history. He thus brings together the exotic ally and English poetics. In the *Squire's Tale*, we see the exotic ally function within a structure of triangulated relations just as we saw in the *King of Tars*; but whereas the latter draws from *chanson de geste* and crusading romances for its literary conventions, the former draws from Arthurian legend. The oriental east (marked by the "strange" knight who arrives from Arabia and India bearing four marvelous gifts), Tartary, and England form a palimpsest in the fictional court of Cambyuskan (Chinggis Khan). This triangulation becomes the site through which the tale's experimental poetics plays out.

Brenda Deen Schildgen's *Pagans, Tartars, Moslems, and Jews in Chaucer's Canterbury Tales* (2001) devotes a chapter to examining the role of Tartary in the tale

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[154] For more on the exoticism represented in the *Squire's Tale*, see Heffernan (2003), Karnes (2015), Lynch (1995), and Minnis (2016).

and how this imagined non-Christian realm intersects with Chaucer's England. Schildgen

argues that in the *Squire's Tale*, Chaucer translates the familiar Arthurian court into

Cambyuskan's foreign court in Tartary, and in the process "erases the history of violence

that was common knowledge about Tartary" to Chaucer's contemporary audiences (40).

From the "strange kynght" who interrupts the court's revelry to the excellence and

exemplarity of the Mongol king, Schildgen argues that the Squire renders what would

otherwise be a mysterious fantastical space into the familiar fantasy of Britain's own

Arthurian landscape. Her main contention is that in erasing the realities of Mongol

violence, the Squire "assimilates Tartar difference within the familiar" so that "his tale

works to minimize rigid spatial and cultural boundaries between the 'East' and Latin

Christendom" (47), proffering a cultural relativist worldview to Chaucer's readers. There

is certainly a likening of the Mongols with the English through the Arthurian trope, as

Schildgen carefully demonstrates in her reading of the tale; however, her reading that the

Mongols are "assimilated" seems to overlook the tale's insistence on Cambyuskan's

violent history in the opening lines, where he is said to have "werreyed Russie" and killed

"many a doghty man" (10, 12). The brass horse also insists on a continued presence of

Mongol culture, while at the same time it conjoins a mysterious Arabia with a known

Tartary.[155] While the tale overlays Camelot and the Mongol court, they are not collapsed

into each other, but rather placed in dialogue, along with Islam.

There is also an explicit insertion of the Arabic language into the Mongol court.

The names of Cambyuskan's wife (Elpheta) and son (Algarsyf) embed Arabia within the

Mongol royal genealogy. And, as Schildgen notes, the presence of Islamic culture is

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[155] See Heng (2018), pages 294-6 for a detailed discussion of the significance of horses in Mongol culture.

foregrounded in the tale through the gifts brought by the knight, an emissary of the King of Arabia and India: the ring, mirror, sword, and brass horse "convey the splendor, science surpassing natural law, and military might of the gift givers, who represent the contemporary Islamic world. . . [and] the steed itself actually corresponds to the brass astrolabe associated with Arabia" (41). Despite this recognition, Schildgen doesn't quite explore the significance of Islam within the Tartary-Arthurian parallel. I would argue that this parallel Schildgen identifies is secured through an Islamic symbol, the ring that Canacee wears; and that Algarsyf, because of his and his mother's name, gestures towards a cross-cultural union between Islam and Tartary that, because of the Arthurian stage, emerges within a context of English nobility and courtly rhetoric.

Alan Ambrisco (2004) deepens Schildgen's discussion of the assimilation of Mongols into Englishness with an exploration of the Mamluk emissary's otherness. He agrees with Schildgen's main point that the threat of Mongol violence is eliminated by "reducing the cultural other to something known" (214), and adds that the inclusion of the Islamic knight and the tale's Arabic references inserts another kind of alterity such that "the Mamluk comes to occupy the space of the other, and the Europeans/Mongols occupy the place of the self" (214). Ambrisco's close attention to the tale's insertion of Islam at the Mongol-turned-European court brings to the fore an important facet of the text's engagement with alterity, but my own reading of the *Squire's Tale* relies on the triangulation of three distinct cultures – all of which, despite any suggestions of ambiguity in their representation, are nonetheless made apparent by clear markers of their identity: the Mongol invasion of Russia, Islamic science and astrology, and the famous Arthurian knight Sir Gawain. However, Ambrisco's main point bolsters my ultimate

reading of the tale; he asserts that even though the Squire may seem to propose a sympathetic perspective of its Mongol and Islamic characters (an interpretation held by Schildgen), his "vacillation between moments of representational control and moments of rhetorical ineptitude […] reminds us of all the ways that overt displays of sympathy can mask antagonism and intolerance" (224). The exoticism of the *Squire's Tale* functions through an imbrication of alterity, rather than an east-west binary that assimilates Mongols into Englishness and positions them against the otherness of Islam. The violence of the Mongol ruler is not eliminated, but rather harnessed to endow the tale teller with the skills through which he may demonstrate his abilities as an apprentice of both war and rhetoric.

The construction of Mongols into a racial group characterized by admiration, fear, desire, and control developed throughout the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries in various forms: the exotic ally was made (and re-made) as geopolitical relations of global contact shifted over time and across space. While the Latin East during the Fifth Crusade desired an eastern ally to defeat the Ayyubid Muslims in Egypt, the Latin West two decades later was more interested in producing a monstrous and despotic race through which European vulnerability could be managed and overcome. In England, these competing discourses coalesced within a literary culture whose fantasy of English global dominance rested on a harnessable source of eastern barbarity and magnificence. While scholarship has tended to collapse the exotic, eastern, oriental, and threatening into the figure of the Saracen, "Exotic Allies" has shown that an investigation of Mongol alterity reveals a more complex process of racialization in medieval Europe's discursive practices. Mongols held a distinct position of otherness to Latin Christendom from that of

Muslims even if they at times became imbricated within a larger category of eastern

alterity.

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Figure 6:
Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Vat. Lat. 2972, fol. 11v

Figure 7:
Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Vat. Lat. 2972, fol. 14r

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