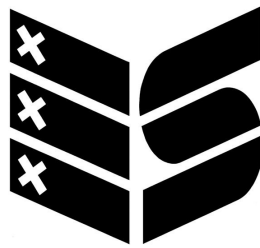


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Medieval Peoples Imagined

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Medieval Peoples Imagined

Peter Hoppenbrouwers

When medieval people imagined peoples, they were thinking of big families, that at one time in history had moved from some place of origin to settle some place else, usually after years of wandering. The new place of settlement was seen as a homeland, a *Heimat* to cherish,¹ where one would stay and fulfill a common destiny until the end of time, led by good kings – or princes of comparable standing – and protected by favoured saints against hawkish neighbours, shady enemies of the faith, and even terrifying monstrous creatures lurking in dark corners of the outside world. This basic pattern emerges time and again in countless histories, biographies, romances, poems, learned treatises or other types of sources at our disposal, written from the early Middle Ages on. These patterned narratives have contributed largely to the development and/or reinforcement of proto-national images and feelings in the multi-ethnic barbarian kingdoms of the early Middle Ages and their successors: the early states (of various types) of later medieval and early modern Europe.

The elements of the ethnic-national origo-to-destiny narrative just outlined were essential to what German historians alternately call the *Selbstverständigungs-*

¹ *Pace* Kugler (1995: 179), who maintains that in medieval protonational imagology “anders als im modernen Denken die Heimaterde nicht zu den Faktoren gehört, die Identität und Selbstverständnis einer Sippe oder einer Herrschaft wesentlich prägen.” I think Kugler overstates the point that the (father)land may have been of secondary importance to early medieval historiographers – although even then there are significant exceptions; witness Isidore of Seville’s *Laus Hispaniae*.

prozess (“the process of self-understanding”) or the *Selbstdeutung* (“self-explanation”) of medieval nations (Garber 1989: 111). They were, in changing mixtures, tapped from four main arteries of received knowledge: the bible; classical, Greco-Roman, ethnography; classical mythology and history; and barbarian mythology and history (cf. Reynolds, 1983).

The medieval image of peoples and their origin was in many ways the very opposite of the early modern (and modern) view, which remains outside the scope of this study. The quintessence of the new ethnogenetic narrative announcing itself in the Renaissance period was that contemporary peoples had inhabited their homeland since time immemorial as the direct and lawful heirs to native ancestors. Moreover, the modern imagining of peoples supported, to a far greater extent than in the Middle Ages, a historiography that served not only as “a statement of national identity” but also, and especially, “as a quarry for examples of right moral and political behaviour” (Royan 2002: abstract).

Origo: numbers of peoples, their names, their languages

Origo stories always consist of two more or less parallel narrative lines: one genealogical – or even genetical – the story of a bloodline that persists through time; the other spatial: the story of departure-wandering-arrival.

One of the main functions of origo stories was to bring barbarian peoples “onto the stage of Greco-Roman history as early as possible”, and at the same time to replace “the long-treasured distinction between Roman and barbarian” (Geary 2002: 61) by the new opposition Christian/non-Christian. Origin stories may also have had an interior value: they explain a people’s name, and legitimize its arrival and settlement in a land that originally did not belong to it – as was the case of the Norsemen/Normans in Normandy (Carozzi 1996: 7). At the same time this process of integration into classical history and ethnography ousted earlier, native-barbarian myths of origin, traces of which may be found in Gregory of Tours’ references to the origins of the Merovingian dynasty, and in Bede’s story about the

Brittones stemming from Brittany (meaning French Bretagne), while the Magyars claimed to descend from a mythical bird, Turul (Borst 1957-63: 581).

Obviously, the biblical books of Genesis and Exodus, and Virgil's Aeneid, have been outstanding sources of origo & wandering stories. Unlike Graeco-Roman ethnography – or paradoxography, as the correct technical term is (Friedman 1981: 6 sqq) – the Bible leaves little doubt about the number of peoples on earth. Genesis 10 lists the progeny of the three sons of Noah who peopled the earth after the Deluge – 72 peoples in all (with slight variations dependent on the counting).² The Roman antipope Hippolytos, who died in 235, had been the first to link Genesis to late-classical Graeco-Roman ethnography. This led to a gradual increase in the number of peoples in early-medieval ethnographic descriptions, as well as to an 'actualization' of their names. For example, Augustine's friend Paul Orosius, in his influential *Historia adversus paganos*, already distinguished hundreds of *gentes*, and had the biblical names of the Noachite tribes replaced by the names of *ethnoi* of late antique ethnography. Their contemporary, Hieronymus, while sticking to the number of 72, estimated that in heaven there would be room for 72,000 peoples, but this number was not taken very seriously and found little following – one of the exceptions was Goscelin, a monk of the (then) Flemish abbey at Saint-Omer, who by 1066 had already moved to Canterbury. The Chester monk Ranulph Higden, in his more famous world history, *Polychronicon* (c. 1350), thought that there were 1000 countries spread over the three continents, but still no more than 72 languages (Borst 1957-63: 411-13, 390, 550-1, 911).

Apart from the disagreement of numbers and names of contemporary peoples, when compared to the biblical evidence, Genesis 10, whose literal truth was not called into question by any Christian scholar of the early Middle Ages, raised two other problems: how had Noah's offspring been dispersed over the empty earth after the Deluge? And how did the number of peoples, all members of the same family, relate to the evident linguistic variety in the world? The first

² Andrew of Saint-Victor (†1175) was one of the few who shrewdly remarked that Genesis mentions peoples before the Deluge, an exegetical problem which had not bothered early medieval commentators (Borst 1957-63: 720).

question was settled by Isidore of Seville. In the *Etymologiae* he matched the offspring of the three sons of Noah to the inhabitants of the three known continents: those of Japhet to Europe, those of Sem to Asia, those of Ham to Africa (this went back to pre-Christian Jewish tradition: Müller 1972-80, 2: 270-272). This division-by-continent tallied, quite in accordance with Greco-Roman geography, with crude ideas of racial superiority in favour of the European ‘Japhetites’ – even if it would take some time before these fully took shape (cf. Akbari 2000).

The second question was closely linked to the exegesis of Genesis 11 (the story of the *confusio linguarum* at Babel) and of Acts of Apostles 2: 4-5 (the story of the Pentecost miracle: the *effusio Sancti Spiritus*). As in so many other important issues, Augustine’s opinion, also echoed in Isidore of Seville’s *Etymologiae*, would prevail. This held that various peoples could speak the same language, and, therefore, that there was little sense in trying to infer the number of languages even from the original number of offspring of Noah. Besides, by omitting to link linguistic variety to the Pentecost miracle, Isidore implicitly subscribed to the idea that this variety was inherent to human nature and, therefore, a permanent feature of human history. Consequently, Isidore distanced himself from the old conviction that linguistic variety in the world was a certain sign of divine wrath and a flaw in humankind (cf. Borst 1957-63: 455).

Even if medieval linguistics did not yet remotely reach modern levels, many medieval authors already distinguished between what we would call language families. There had even been an attempt – the first one ever, according to Arno Borst, who has studied this important theme in European history most exhaustively – to compile a complete inventory of European language families. Its author was Roderick Jimenez de Rada (ca. 1180-1247), bishop of Toledo and councillor to the Castilian king Ferdinand III.³

³ Borst 1957-63: 762-764. For example, Jimenez de Rada classified German, English, and Flemish as one language. Not everything made sense, e.g. the fifteenth-century idea that Lithuanian, a Baltic language, derived from Latin, “which lent convenient support to theories of the Roman origins of the Lithuanians” (Rowell 1994: 32). On additions to Jimenez de Rada’s list in the *General Estoria*, completed under Sancho IV of Castile (1284-1295), see Borst 1957-63: 879-80.

By this time – the late thirteenth century – rising ethnic and national consciousness gave rise to a concerted promotion of national vernaculars, as opposed to Latin and other foreign languages. The use of English and Czech in England and Bohemia respectively, two linguistically divided nations, are the obvious cases in point. About the progression of English in England there is little agreement. On the one hand there are those who are convinced that by the fourteenth century, especially for the rising urban middle class, the choice of English had become a choice in favor of national, insular-English exclusivity.⁴ Others stress that it would take much longer before the English social and intellectual elite – who still were the foremost bearers of protonational feelings – would follow, and “accept the vernacular as able to transmit ‘sacred’ truths”. As late as 1600 only 60 out of 60,000 books in the university library at Oxford were in English (Knapp 2004: 142-143; Anderson 1983: 40). Only the Lollards, a relatively small, dissident minority, have been pointed to as a highly motivated religious group who long before Herder closely linked language to national identity: for them ‘English’, before anything else, meant speaking English as a native tongue. People living in England but speaking some other language, could never be English (Havens 2004: 109-110). In any case, it is remarkable that by the fourteenth century the continuing language divide between elite, and middle and lower classes was not any longer able to disturb the process of national identification.

This was completely different in Bohemia, where the steady immigration of substantial numbers of German colonists enhanced the Czech language as an identity marker for the native Czech community. Because the Luxemburg dynasty that ruled Bohemia from 1310 on had no Slavic roots, and was related to both German and Czech noble families, neither king nor kingdom could function as rallying point for national identification. According to Graus (1975: 226-229), this function was taken over by the Czech community itself (*obec*) that was united by

⁴ Heng 2003: 105-6, who in addition quotes Turville-Petre 1996: 11: “the very act of writing in English was a statement about belonging”. The earliest government document in English was Henry III’s confirmation of the Oxford Provisions in 1258. Heng subscribes to Salter’s argument that “the secular middle-class citizen” has been the driving force behind the growing use of written English (Heng 2003: 356 n73).

language (*jazyk*). Soon this led to a positive discrimination of Czechs. More in general, the Czech part of the population gradually developed its own traditions and historiography which would remain distinct from the German minority culture until into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Not only did Genesis 10 and 11 provide the ultimate genealogical base of all medieval origo stories – in the end all peoples descended from Noah – it also indicated the geographical area where all people came from: somewhere in Asia where Noah's ark had touched on dry land.⁵ However, precisely their function as historical terminus made both story-lines problematic as well, because many concrete origo stories, as we shall see, had a different, most often even non-biblical point of departure. Such apparent inconsistencies asked for creative narrative expedients, that linked up biblical basics and mythical history. Just one – fairly late – example is the inventive fabrication by which the Dominican friar Martin von Troppau in his late-thirteenth world chronicle succeeded in bridging the gap between the Noachite-Japhetite occupation of the European continent and early Roman history (Borst 1957-63: 815).

The very productive Trojan origo, so central to classical Roman history and so widely imitated by the nations of medieval Europe, posed just one problem by locating the shores of Asia Minor as an important cradle of people. Because there were several more. A second core area was the quasi-legendary 'isle of Scanza', the vague indication of Scandinavia in classical ethnography, and a veritable 'hive of races and a womb of peoples' according to Jordanes' Gothic History. Not only the Goths were considered to have originated there, but also the Dacians/Danes, the Lombards, and the Burgundians – claims that are still subject to debate.⁶

⁵ The first time that Mount Ararat in Armenia was mentioned as the Ark's exact landing place was in Marco Polo's famous *Li divisament du monde* of 1298-1299 (Borst 1957-63: 855). Long before Armenia had already pointed to as the region where the Ark had touched dry land, e.g. in the Annolied of ca. 1080-1085 (Borst 1957-63: 592-93; Kugler 1995: 190).

⁶ Cf. Goffart 2005. Keeping intact for centuries the memory of an erstwhile 'homeland' is not completely unimaginable: the Magyars/Hungarians are a case in point. After their invasion and eventual settlement in the Carpathian Basin the memory of their place of origin somewhere near Bashkiria on the Volga was somehow kept alive. We know this from the mission from a

Ultimately, Carolingian scholars such as Freculph of Lisieux, Hraban Maurus, and Ermoldus Nigellus all thought that the Frankish people's cradle had stood in Scanza as well (Innes 2000: 233). The Huns and other nomadic barbarians from the Central Asian steppes, but also non-nomadic Vandals, and the Daci, as forebears of the Normans, are mentioned in this connection as well (Borst 1957-63: 691): they all were believed to have come from beyond the suggestively-named 'Maeotic swamps'. These are commonly identified with the Krasnodarskij Kraj, the eastern coastal area of the Sea of Azov (called the Maeotis in Greek sources) (Pohl 2002: 71-72, 100). Inevitably, in some stories even Trojan refugees had got stuck there (cf. Borst 1957-63: 884). Later on, Armenia was pointed out as the cradle of the Bavarians⁷ – and by one author also of the Saxons (Graus 1975: 132) – whereas the Czechs were traced back to Pannonia and the Suabians would have reached Suabia from overseas as well. One of the Icelandic myths of descent invoked a Turkish primogenitor! (Borst 1957-63: 592-593, 669-671, 697.)

Exodus

Though less productive than Genesis 10 as source of collective-genealogical or geographical knowledge, the book of Exodus was also a template for the narrative of ethnic migration. The Jewish exodus from Egypt figures prominently on several of the well-known mappaemundi of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, but in the actual production of origo stories it did not play a significant part, certainly not when compared with the Trojan exodus motif. As to the reason

small group of Dominicans who around 1235 were sent into Russia by the Hungarian king Béla IV to go and find the 'Hungarians' who had remained behind "in the homeland of the ancestors". Linguistic evidence indicates that the proto-Hungarians in this *Magna Hungaria* on the Volga must in their turn have sometime crossed the Urals from Western Siberia, which is the cradle of the Finno-Ugric languages; cf. Molnár 2001: 8-9.

⁷ The background of this may have been that a people originating directly from Armenia, the region where Noah's Ark had landed and the repopulation of the earth had started afresh, was as important as any other in the world (cf. Kugler 1995: 189-91). The Armenians in their turn were thought by Isidore to be descendants of Jason's companions on his journey to Kolchis (Müller 1972-80 2: 300).

for this, one can only guess. Possibly medieval theologians were uncomfortable with the constitutive act of providing the Jewish people with a new, written law and of repositioning the Jews as God's (only) chosen people by the bilateral contract implicit in the Mosaic tables; possibly, medieval audiences were uncomfortable with certain essential elements of the Jewish Exodus story, such as the departure from a situation of slavery, or the journey to a land promised beforehand.

The various barbarian peoples were highly susceptible to the illusion of Trojan descent, directly implying kinship to the highly admired Romans themselves. Evidence to this effect goes at least back to the first century BC – Caesar makes mention of it with respect to several tribes in Gaul (Albu 2001: 13; Pohl 2002: 183-184; Anton 2000, Ewig 1998). However, the Trojan connection took a fresh turn when the Ostrogothic royal dynasty of the Amals was credited with Trojan roots.⁸ It was the starting point of a whole range of ever more elaborate stories which, successively, turned the Franks/French, the English, the Welsh, the Scots, and the Normans into sons of Troy and brothers to the Romans, until at the very end of the medieval period humanist scholars with an urban background ended up claiming Trojan roots for many Italian and Dutch towns, including Venice, Padua, Verona, as well as Dordrecht, Vlaardingen and Zierikzee (Borst 1957-63: 975; Tilmans 1993: 124-125).

The function of the Trojan myth complex is clear: by proving its Trojan roots, a political community, whether at local or national level, can claim recognition as a worthy member of a post-Trojan (West-)European commonwealth.⁹ The myth was also invoked to justify Western involvement in the affairs

⁸ The Amals were linked to the Roman-imperial family of the Flavii as well. According to Borst 1957-63: 452, the Spanish Galicians were the first contemporary European people to be connected, in the *Etymologiae*, with the ancient Greeks (not Trojans!). “Hier legt eine bisher unerkannte Anregung für alle spätere Trojanerfabeln”, especially the one by Fredegar: (Borst 1957-63 460-61).

⁹ In some stories the Turcs are also presented as sons of Troy (Beaune 1985: 348). By distancing oneself from the Trojans or even opting for Greek descent, one could create a cold distance, as the Saxons (Alexander's men) did with respect to their original arch-enemies, the ‘Trojan’ Franks (Kugler 1995: 188).

of Byzantium and Asia Minor; in particular the capture of Constantinople during the fourth crusade was immediately represented as revenge for the Greek sack of Troy (Beaune 1985: 346-47).

Not surprisingly, during the gradual construction of national myths the Trojan connection was perverted at will.¹⁰ East-Frankish historians from the eighth century started to change the entire storyline by loosening the genealogical ties between Aeneas and the eponymous Franc[i]o. In that way the Franks could, as it were, express their heightened self-confidence and feeling of parity to the Romans, who demoted to the status of vague relatives (Borst 1957-63: 463-464). Next, authors of romances on the matter of Troy joined in, starting with Benoît de Saint-Maure around 1165 and his Latin translator, Guido de Columnis of Messina. And as late as the end of the thirteenth century, the issue of Trojan ancestry was transferred to the new national oppositions that had taken the place of the old rivalry between the West-Franks and East-Franks. This was done by the Cologne canon Alexander of Roes in an attempt to demonstrate historically that the Germans of his own days were superior to the French. The Germans, so he reasoned, were the true descendants of the Franks, originally called ‘Germans’, who owed their new name, meaning ‘the Free’, to a privilege of ten-year tax freedom, granted to them by the Roman Senate out of gratitude for their loyal support in fighting off the Alans. The Romans considered the Germans as brothers because both descended from the Trojans – one band of whom had reached the Rhine after the fall of Troy, and had merged there with the local Teutons. The French, on the other hand, although named after the Franks, were no ‘Ur’ Franks at all, but a mixture of Frankish emigrants to Gaul and the indigenous Gauls who lived there.¹¹ This latter imputation was a malicious reversal of the French historian

¹⁰ Garber 1989: 123-25 points out that the popularity of the Trojan descent myth in the Middle Ages is at odds with Saint Augustine’s negative judgement on Rome’s Trojan origins; Aeneas was to have introduced false gods into Italy! It proves, according to Garber, that in medieval historiography world chronicles such as that of Eusebius were more widely read and used than *De civitate Dei*.

¹¹ In fact, Alexander further amplified the already fantastical version of the Trojan roots of the Franks in the *Liber Historiae Francorum* of ca. 730. Kirn 1943: 107-08; Borst 1957-63: 824-

Rigord's suggestion of around 1200 that the Gauls and the Franks represented two successive waves of Trojan emigrés – separated by thirteen centuries in time! Rigord's compatriots retaliated by bending the Trojan myth to the point at which the French equality and independency of Rome could be stressed. Only at the very end of the fifteenth century, with the work of Jean Lemaire des Belges, the appreciation of the Gauls as veritable, native and non-Trojan ancestors of the French people started to make headway (Beaune 1985: 334, 339-341; Garber 1989: 144). Meanwhile, the story of Troy was used not only to provide France with honourable roots, but also as a prefigurative model of contemporary French history, with all its vicissitudes of fortune. From that perspective, Isabel of Bavaria, king Charles VI' dashing wife, could be staged as a new Helen and Joan of Arc as Hector, the fall of Paris in 1418 was compared to Troy's ruin, while the English were identified with Homer's treacherous Greeks.¹²

The Trojan myth was equally contorted when tensions between Anglo-Norman England and France started to build up by the end of the twelfth century. Since both parties claimed Trojan ancestry, they twisted their respective claims so as to underline the one's superiority over the other. For instance, the Norman monk Stephen of Rouen propounded that the French descended from those Trojan cowards who had cravenly fled their burning city without putting up a proper fight. A complementary tactic was to skip the Trojan connection altogether, and have the English descend directly from Noah's son Sem – not Japhet (Borst 1957-63: 692).

Understandably, both the Welsh and the Scots had reasons to object to the version of the Trojan connection with the British Isles, which (though its narrative can be textually traced back to around 700) found its definite, canonical form in Geoffrey of Monmouth's celebrated *Historia regum Britanniae* of 1138. There, the three brothers who after their Trojan father Brutus had divided Britanny, were arranged hierarchically, with the elder brother Locrinus getting not only England,

25; Graus 1989; Garber 1989: 138-40; Kugler 1995: 182

¹² Beaune 1985: 337-38; already in Philip II Augustus' time the city of Paris was compared to ancient Troy (ibid., 351). For Joan of Arc also: Royan 2002.

but also a claim of sovereignty over the other two parts, Wales and Scotland. This was unacceptable to the Welsh and Scots, and while the former during their final struggle against the English aggression boldly claimed a direct descent from Aeneas (Richter 1978: 482-485), the latter fabricated their own origo myth, in which not Brutus' son Albanact, but the Egyptian princess Scota, a pharaoh's daughter even, and married to a certain Greek Gathelos, had given the Scots their name and identity. In Scotland (and Ireland) this story – that goes back to the ninth century, and from the start included Egyptian migration via Spain to Ireland – proved stronger than the Monmouthian tradition. It was taken up, for instance, by Robert Bruce, who, after Bannockburn, liked to present himself as 'king Arthur redivivant' (Cowan 1998: 56-57; Rambo 1994: 27-29; Borst 1957-63: 551-552 and 609-614).

The Spanish, finally, rather than demanding their place among the descendants of Troy, tried to outdo them. According to an anonymous Mozarabian world chronicle, the Spanish people sprang directly from one of Japhet's sons, Tubal, whose younger brother would have been the progenitor of the Trojans, so in fact the Spanish people was of older origin than the Trojan!¹³ Far-fetched as this argument may seem, in a curious way it anticipated the efforts of fifteenth-century humanists, such as the Dominican fra Giovanni Nanni (also known as Annius of Viterbo) who was perhaps the last scholar to cultivate the art of establishing ethno-genealogical links between the Trojans and the Bible.¹⁴

The mythical aftermath of the fall of Troy was not the only tale of wandering used for deriving a medieval people's origin from pagan-classical history. Second in line was the Asian campaign of that greatest hero of classical and medieval

¹³ Borst 1957-63: 553-54. The unbeatable claim of the sort was made by the so-called *Oberrheinische Revolutionär* (ca. 1505), who plainly argued that the first man, Adam, was German ("Adam ist ein tusch man gewesen"); Borst 1957-63: 1051. Cf. Garber, 1989: 159, and Borst 1957-63: 659 for the possibly twelfth-century, but still German, roots of this thought.

¹⁴ Grafton 1991: 33. In the same period there was also a tendency to 'paganize' one's genealogical roots. For example, the German emperor Maximilian of Habsburg boasted to have Osiris and Hector among his ancestors: Garber 1989: 155-56.

imagination, Alexander the Great, who with his army had traveled towards the edge of the civilized world, and who had locked away behind some medieval Mordor in the East the devilish peoples, mentioned in the Bible, of Gog and Magog.¹⁵ These were seen as the proverbial accomplices of Satan and/or Antichrist; they were usually identified with predominantly steppe-nomadic groups such as the Skyths, Huns, Goths - and their ethnic descendants, such as the Normans and the Swedes - Alans, and Magyars, and later the Saracens, Turks and Mongols.¹⁶ These ‘theophanic interpretations’ of the bible provided the pagan hero Alexander with an essential role in Christian ‘cosmic history’ (Kline 2001: ch. 6, esp. 184-188). The first medieval people claiming descent from ‘the good guys’ in this story, Alexander’s wandering army, were the Saxons. The earliest hint is in the Frankish Gospel book by the Fuldan monk Otfried of Weissenburg (ca. 865),¹⁷ but a fully elaborated version appears one century later, in the Saxon chronicle of Widukind of Corvey.¹⁸ Much later, at the beginning of the thirteenth century, the bishop of Cracow, Vincent Kadlubek, boasted that the early Poles had won a unique victory over the great Alexander, and made the victorious general their first king. But this story did not gain much credit; nor did the Bohemian claim that Alexander had given their Slav ancestors a ‘privilege’ (Graus 1975: 216-217; Borst 1957-63: 767-768).

The recovery of Tacitus’ *Germania* around 1450 inaugurated a new trend: a search for more creditable roots of contemporary nations. Names and actual presence had to be based in reliable classical history, or better still, be praised by

¹⁵ The relevant biblical passages are Gen. 10:2; Ezech. 38-39; Rev. 20: 7-10. For the interconnection between the Trojan myth and the medieval Alexander legend: Garber 1989: 130.

¹⁶ Borst 1957-63: 598, 607, 609, 614; Jackson 2001: 102. For the *Gaels* (Irish) as descendants of Magog (by way of the Scyths), cf. Borst 1957-63: 609.

¹⁷ His claim that the Franks themselves had descended from Alexander was intended to justify Carolingian rule (Borst 1957-63: 536).

¹⁸ According to Graus the connection between the Saxons and Alexander was originally only meant to apply to the Saxon nobility, who had entered the land as superior conquerors; the ‘Saxons’ of the story only turn into the entire Saxon people in Johan Hartlieb’s Alexander romance of ca. 1450 (Graus 1975: 120 sqq; Kugler 1995: 188-89).

their authors: e.g., the Batavi, who, for that reason, became creditable ancestors of the Dutch. The same text was also cited in defense against those Italian-humanist writings that accused the Germans of having annihilated the Roman Empire (Tilmans 1993; Garber 1989: 151-152). There are many more examples of updating Trojan origin myths so as to back up the new urban-chauvinist pride that went along with the spread of humanist ideas in bourgeois culture (Pleij 1998: 14-15), or of replacing the medieval 'national' origin stories around Genesis, Troy, and the great Alexander by new myths rooted in classical history (even if this involved an outright positive re-evaluation of pagan, pre-Christian times). In many respects, this was not a neutral operation but part of a conscious attempt to trade in the universal idea of the Roman-Christian empire for 'national' values, personified by such anti-Roman, barbarian, even pagan, heroes as Arminius or Claudius Civilis (cf. Garber 1989: 160-161). In due time, the tribal pre-Christian past of a modern nation tended to be invoked for the nation's original (primitive, natural, unspoiled) virtues.

Family, brotherhood

In medieval ethnography, peoples were imagined as hugely enlarged families. At the simplest level this appears from the persistent reference to (close) kin relations when indicating ethnic/national units of belonging: fatherland, motherland, mother tongue, sons of the nation, brothers in arms etc. At a more sophisticated level families were presented as the organic building blocks as well as moral corner stones of nations. Already in the Middle Ages we see 'national' kingdoms propagate family values as essential to the national community's welfare.¹⁹

¹⁹ Heng 2003: 208-209 speaks of "tapping the symbolizing potential of family roles, relationships and identities", with the additional remark that the medieval Church did exactly the same – as in other respects; for Heng the medieval Church "functions, as it were, like a nation; or, put it another way, Church and nation are much alike in fostering particular cultures of ideology and motivation."

The same family imagery made it possible to distinguish ‘brotherhoods of nations’, i.e. nations that according to national mythologies descended from the same (physical) forefather. This explains why so many origo stories are embellished with tales of brothers who became the, often eponymous, founding fathers of nations that were considered as ethnically closely related. If the basic case may just have been the three sons of Noah, the earliest known example from the Middle Ages is to be found in Gildas’ *De excidio Britanniae*, which is from the first half of the sixth century. It mentions the mythical arrival in England of two brothers, Hengist and Horsa, who had landed in three ships – an evident condensation of what had happened over centuries during the Migration period.²⁰ There are intertextual echoes: we find the three ships also in Jordanes’ *Getica*, and the two brothers (instead of Noah’s three sons) in the *origo* of the Langobards,²¹ but the meaning is clear: Hengist and Horsa stood symbol for the kin-like brotherhood between the two main ethnic formations that can be distinguished among the continental immigrants into early medieval England: the Angles and the Saxons.

In later centuries the same model has been used time and again. Ireland derived its intra-Gaelic tribal subdivisions from a primordial brother-pair, Eber and Eremon (Leerssen 1994); in the so-called ‘Frankish list of peoples’ of around 700, which probably originated from the Alemannic area, three brothers (Erminus, Inguo and Istio) are presented as the founding fathers of all Germanic peoples (Borst 1957-63: 461). Later versions of the Frankish myth of Trojan descent recognized two brothers, Franc[i]o and Vasso – who were the progenitors of social classes (freemen and vassals) rather than related peoples.²² The model of purely

²⁰ Most royal dynasties of the Anglo-Saxon age traced their genealogies via Hengist and Horsa back to Wodan, “de quo omnium pene barbarum gentium regium genus lineam trahit”, in the words of William of Malmesbury (Borst 1957-63: 684).

²¹ Pohl 2002: 89-90. But Gildas’ text is older than Jordanes and Paul the Deacon.

²² E.g. Garber 1989: 131. Honorius of Autun was the first who had Noah’s sons corresponding to the origins of the three basic ‘estates’ in the world, one of which were the knights. They were Japhet’s offspring, while Sem’s were the (common) freemen, and Ham’s the unfree (Borst 1957-63: 655). Around 1265, the Parisian Dominican Nicolas of Gorran turned the tables by calling the knights “sons of Cham” (Borst 1957-63: 792-793).

‘ethnic brotherhood’ was, as we saw, used by Geoffrey of Monmouth to describe the ‘kinship’ between the three nations of the British Isles, and it was used among the Slavs, who figured themselves to be the mythical descendants of three brothers (Lech, Rus and Czech), each of one was the founding father of one of the three main Slav empires of the central Middle Ages (Poland, [Kiev] Russia, and Bohemia).²³ A final example are the brothers Dan and Angul, presented by Saxo Grammaticus in the *Gesta Danorum* (early thirteenth century), a way of stressing the close relationship between Danes and Anglo-Saxons, also in an attempt to disassociate the Danes from the Trojans “in order to demonstrate the equality of the Danes’ lineage with the Roman one” (Berend 2001: 89, after Boje Mortensen 1987; cf. Borst 1957-63: 698).

Chosen peoples

Already in the early medieval period [hi]stories about the origins of peoples were further refined with several new motifs derived from both the Bible and classical mythology. One idea that was obviously important for newly converted barbarian kingdoms was the conviction, based on 1 Peter 2: 9-10, that Christian peoples were God’s chosen race – without them having to be or become Jewish (Garrison 2000: 115-116). This idea was taken up as early as the sixth century, both in Visigothic Spain – on the occasion of the conversion of king Reccared to Christianity in 589 – and in Frankish Gaul – witness the typological structure of Gregory of Tours’ *Decem libri historiarum*, in which, according to Martin Heinzelmann, the Israel of the books of Kings is transposed, as it were, to Gallia.²⁴ Under the Carolingians the same theme was further elaborated, in Alcuin’s letters and in a new prologue for the *Lex Salica*. Now, the Franks not only were a blessed people

²³ Barford 2001 28. The *Chronicon Poloniae* of about 1235 also offered alternatives and additions, which surprisingly enough included the Germans and the Hungarians, a gesture of international conciliation that, according to Borst, may have been prompted by the Mongol threat (Borst 1957-63: 768-769 and 915-16).

²⁴ Heinzelmann 1994. Already in 1983 J. McClure proposed a similar reading of Bede’s *Historia ecclesiastica*. Cf. Janes 2000: 103.

(*beata gens*), but also God's picked instrument to "vanquish the impious Romans, who had persecuted the early Christians" (Innes 2000: 235; also de Jong 2005: 113; Garrison 2000). At about the same time the Lombard (Langobard) rulers of northern Italy had restyled themselves as kings of "the divinely chosen Catholic nation of the Langobards" (Christie 1995: 187-188), while a century later Rollo's conquest of Normandy was sanctioned by God's providence before Rollo had even shaken off his pagan beliefs (Carozzi 1996: 11).

After the eleventh century, the idea of being God's chosen people was regenerated as part of a proto-national rhetoric then emerging in various European kingdoms. Guibert de Nogent's history of the first crusade was called the *Gesta Dei per Francos*, which strongly suggests that the French, in Guibert's eyes, had become God's chosen instrument. From the twelfth century on the French kings started to embellish their titles with the sobriquet *christianissimus*. Other princes could not trail behind. Frederick Barbarossa declared the German-Roman Empire to be 'Holy'; the kingdom of Bohemia was called *christianissimum* as well, while the Bohemian nation became *sacrosancta*. In England the idea surfaced in the thirteenth century, in close connection with the expulsion of the Jews (Heng 2003: 90, 354 n62); a century later the Lollards promoted their (English) bible in order "to convince the English, not only that God was an Englishman, but also that England was itself the inheritance, the *haereditas Dei*, the promised land and a new Jerusalem of which the scriptures had spoken" (Wilks 1987, quoted by Havens 2004: 120). The very same point of contact between emerging nationalism and a spirit of religious reformation would make the idea of being a modern tribe of Israelites figure largely in Reformation and Counter-Reformation rhetorics. Lining up after the Scots, "the queue claiming to be God's authentic people included English Protestants, Irish Catholics, French, Poles and Spaniards" (Lynch 1998: 97).

Leadership and embodiment: kings

From the migration period on the blueprint of a medieval political

community was a monarchy; kings were the obvious figures for the symbolic embodiment of nations. This is because medieval kingdoms were not just territories, but “comprised and corresponded to a ‘people’” (Reynolds 1997: 250). This essential link between king(dom) and people generated two sets of images that were linked to two basic ideas already discussed: one of election, the other of origo. The former developed into the idea that, if a nation were God’s chosen people, it had to be led by a king who had been chosen both by God and his people (e.g. Nelson 1996, for the Carolingian age). In origo gentium texts, on the other hand, a gens or natio was, as it were, condensed into a royal dynasty, its history reduced to a genealogy of kings. Consequently, ethnic feelings could get a boost whenever someone of an accepted royal dynasty laid claim to the throne, as happened, for instance when, after Otto III’s death in 1002, Margrave Arduin of Ivrea (of old Lombard royal blood) challenged the Salian successor Henry II for the possession of the kingdom of Italy (the old Regnum Langobardorum) (Pohl, 2000: 22). The case involved, on both sides, considerable “royal, dynastic propaganda” (Innes, 2000, 240-241).

The strong link between king and people ensured that individual royal virtues reflected on the people in several ways. The people could appropriate the king’s virtues: e.g. Charlemagne’s imperial *constantia* (‘constancy, steadiness, unswerving determination’) was sometimes presented as a collective virtue of all Franks, ‘an imperial people’ (Nelson 2005: 34-35). Kings embodied the law; already Suger was sure of that (Reynolds 1997: 280). But kings could also heal their people or act as saintly intermediary between people and God. Conversely, kings who for some reason were seen as ‘bad’, were portrayed as making common cause with non-native population groups. The Hungarian king László IV, nicknamed ‘the Cuman’, is a case in point. Already during his government he was accused of associating too closely with the Cuman or Kipchak Turk minority in his kingdom. Gradually the stories that circulated became more horrifying. They started with the gossip that László had repudiated his (French) queen in favour of his Cuman mistress, who in later reports multiplied into a harem of Cuman harlots, and they ended with rumours that the king had relapsed into paganism and

considered allying himself with the Mongols. Even if László may indeed have relied more than his predecessors on the Cumans – after all his mother was a Cuman – the growth of an overwhelmingly negative reputation should be seen in the light of his continuous power struggles both with the Hungarian nobility, the Roman pope and the archbishop of Esztergom (Berend 2001a: 171-183). However, denigrating László (and several other Hungarian kings) tarnished the reputation of the realm as a whole; from the late Middle Ages onwards, Hungary and Hungarians were as often depicted as barbarian and semi-pagan marginals as they were hailed as the ‘shield’ of Christendom against the Turkish menace (Berend 2001a: 201-204, 170-171).

In a complex, long-term process, the King, as abstract embodiment of the political community of the realm, was gradually separated from the physical person of the king. The first steps had already been taken in the early-medieval period, when the physical attendance of the king was no longer needed to let the king’s presence be felt. For instance, when Charlemagne in 789 re-introduced the general oath of fidelity for all his (free, male) subjects, this clearly was seen as a “means of projecting the persona of the king into places where contact with the king had previously been indirect and mediated through local elites” (Innes, 2005: 81).

National saints, representatives

Occasionally, God’s role as the chosen people’s leader was mediated by a ‘national saint’. The Bohemians liked to style themselves ‘St Venceslas’ family’ (Graus 1975: 225). But in the Middle Ages this role of saints was still quite rare;²⁵ possibly, attempts at nationalizing saints may have been arrested due to competition or lack of nationwide support. This was the case in Germany with St Maurice, whose cult was appropriated by the Ottonian kings as an honourable way to connect German kingship to early Christian heroic martyrdom. But instead of

²⁵ Much earlier, at the latest in the ninth-tenth century, the citizens of larger towns already so strongly identified with their city’s patron saint that they were named after him, e.g. *ambrosiani* for the Milanese. Picard 1981.

developing into a symbol of all Germans, St Maurice soon became the exclusive patron of the social class he and his brave soldiers of the Theban legion had apparently foreshadowed: the knights.²⁶ The veneration of St Denis in France, who during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries had experienced a steady rise towards the status of national symbol, underwent a sensitive setback when the French kings promoted their own sacral status as national bonding symbol (Graus 1975: 154-155). Ironically, that very claim created new tensions after one Capetian king – Louis IX – had been canonized. From that moment on, the veneration of Saint Louis at times took on the function of ‘sanctified opposition to the [ruling] king’, in the words of Elizabeth Hallam, who in particular referred to contemporary criticism of Saint Louis’ exacting grandson, Philip the Fair. Despite Philip’s attempts to project himself as a worthy grandson of a holy man, he never really succeeded in ‘exploiting Saint Louis for his own ends’. In England very much the same had happened with “the cults of St Thomas Becket and other opponents of the crown” (Hallam 1982: 211-213), who successfully superseded the holy kings from the House of Alfred, Edward the Martyr and Edward the Confessor. Even so, the Confessor would remain ‘a tragic figure’. In Robert of Gloucester’s late-thirteenth-century Chronicle (which in this respect closely follows Ælred’s vita of Edward) Edward’s pious chastity had prevented him from getting heirs; this childlessness had in turn delivered his English kingdom to a foreigner, the duke of Normandy. To Robert this was proof enough that, once again, the people of Britain were dispossessed by God’s will because they had turned to sin. The most remarkable aspect of this entire argument may be Gloucester’s persisting belief that the Norman conquest had led to a subjugation of the English people by the Norman elite – something which according to Robert had lasted until his own days (Thurville-Petre 1996: 92-94).

If kings and saints became the embodiment of nations, who then came to be seen as their collective representatives? The idea of a nation as a political community in which all (male, wealthy) members counted was beginning to make itself felt by the end of the Middle Ages. The emergence of representative meetings

²⁶ See note 18 for a similar tendency in the Saxon version of the Alexander story.

or assemblies of estates, such as the English Parliament, is the clearest sign. Much more radical, from a political-theoretical point of view, were certain works of political philosophy, foremost among them Marsiglio of Padova's *Defensor Pacis*, in which a form of popular sovereignty was postulated. How such ideas pervaded political practice can be illustrated from a formal letter, addressed by King Richard II of England to Pope Boniface IX, asking him to resign. According to a French source it was issued by 'rex Anglorum et sui subjecti', which placed the people alongside the king as a fountain of law and authority (Harvey 1982: 237 n39).

But initially the idea of representation of the nation was almost uniquely attached to the nobility, and in particular to the nobility in its chivalric aspect. This is most evident in nations that had to wage war constantly, such as the Scots. There, chivalric values greatly contributed to the shaping of a country's "historical, and indeed national, identity" (Edington 1998: 69). However, this was neither a smooth nor a straightforward process. One thing that worked against it was the 'cosmopolitan' character of aristocratic culture, according to which Scottish knights would always in a sense feel solidarity with knights from other nations, even hostile ones such as England. Another was the most important social duty of any knight in the Latin Christian world, and this duty, rather than any 'pro patria mori', was the defence of the Christian faith, preferably on a crusade against the infidel (Edington 1998: 70). But once on its way, the process of 'nationalizing' knighthood was reinforced by the medieval habit of contemporizing the past, by which not only legendary key figures from a hazy national past, but also such global heroes as king Arthur or Alexander the Great, could grow into paragons of knighthood, if not into their founding fathers.²⁷ In late medieval Scotland the recent heroic past made going far back in time completely superfluous. John Barbour styled his "great account of the Wars of Independence" as a "romans", involving an overt heroization of its leaders. Robert Bruce alternately became Arthur redivivus, the new Joshua or Judas Maccabeus (Edington 1998: 72-75; Cowan 1998: 56-57). In the end, in a short ballad on the Neuf Preux, Robert Bruce got an

²⁷ Edington 1998: 70-71. In Scotland the origins of knighthood were also connected to Noah's 'European' son Japhet.

additional couplet raising him to the status of Tenth Worthy.²⁸ Bruce's elevation did certainly encourage "the conflation of nationalist and chivalric ideologies". The famous Declaration of Arbroath of 1320, for all its pathos, proves that, while Bruce was alive, this new model answered to some sort of reality. It can be accepted as the prototypical document in which a nobility, provided with chivalric ideals, acted on behalf of an entire nation (Cowan 1998).

Alterity

The exclusionist idea of election, of being God's chosen people was strangely at odds with one of the basic tenets of medieval-Christian alterity: in the end all people, even the strangest races and blackest pagans, were children of the same God, capable of Salvation (cf. Kinoshita 2001: 79-80). In many medieval romances "an unproblematized Christian presence of some kind everywhere" in the world is taken for granted, while other types of sources have no difficulty with accepting "that pockets of Christian communities were to be found in distant lands", such as those of the Nestorians in the Far East, discovered by missionary friars in the thirteenth century.²⁹

Such inconsistencies are inherent in the complexities of alterity concepts. On closer scrutiny, medieval-Christian images of the Other are fraught with ambiguities. In order to discuss these matters more in detail, we need to make two essential distinctions: one between internal strangers and external foreigners, the other between Christians and non-Christians. This leads to the following tripartition of 'Others' in the medieval world, seen from the perspective of a native population:

²⁸ Edington 1998: 75. The English would soon follow. John Lydgate (ca. 1435) declared Henry V "able to stond among the worthy nine". Rambo 1994: 70.

²⁹ Heng 2003: 271, and more in general chapter 5, built around *Mandeville's Travels*. In connection with this particular point Heng discusses the Prester John myth, with its "idealized Christianity, shorn of any Nestorian coloring" (285).

- Internal strangers: temporary visitors (all kinds of foreign travelers), immigrants and/or non-native ethnic minority groups (Christian and non-Christian, respectively);
- Other Christian peoples and/or nations (neighbouring and non-neighbouring, respectively);
- Non-Christian peoples living outside (Latin) Christendom (either those that were known from existing contacts, be these political, military, commercial or otherwise; or those that only were known from hearsay or from a long classical tradition of xenology, i.e. knowledge of ‘monstrous races’).

Obviously, images of all these three categories and subcategories could move on a sliding scale from friendliness to extremely hostility and loathing, and could, or could not, be expressed in ethnic and/or national terms. What kind of feelings would surface at a given moment very much depended on particular circumstances. Then, like now, war between neighbouring peoples could suddenly turn appreciative attitudes, at best flavoured with mutual stereotypical jokes, into icy hostility and hatred. This was what happened on and off between France and England, or between many Northern and Central-Italian city-states from the end of the twelfth century onwards. In other cases, relations between neighbours could deteriorate, not so much as a consequence of power competition as in the wake of an increasing technological, military or economic discrepancy (as in the case of twelfth-century England versus Ireland, Wales, and Scotland). In yet other cases there was almost insurmountable hostility from the start; this was in particular the case in the militarized frontier societies on the borders of Christendom (Spain and Portugal; Germany East of the Elbe and in the Baltic).

Strangers inside: Jews

Jewish minorities – be they so marked in ethnic or in religious terms³⁰ – were

³⁰ Cf. Hastings 1997: 186: “The huge paradox of Jewish history that the people who gave the world the model of nationhood, and even nation-statehood, lost it for itself for nearly two millennia and yet survived. [...] Whatever their spoken language, Jews were held together by

certainly ‘alienated’ (Kenneth Stow), ‘aliens within’ (Robert Bonfil), marked as outsiders one should not converse with and only tolerated on religious grounds. There has been much debate on where to pinpoint the historical turn when an always-present hateful anti-Judaism (fundamental objections against the Jewish religion) definitely turned into violent anti-Semitism (racial repudiation of Jewish people), when from enemies of the faith Jews became enemies of Christian society. This transition has been situated by some as early as the turn of millennium, by others as late as the fourteenth century, while a third group (e.g. David Nirenberg) refuses to speak of any specific turning point at all. Central to this discussion remains the Moore thesis, which argues that (religious) conformism which led to the persecution of non-conformist dissidents was the logical outcome of the increasing centralization, juridization, and bureaucratization of both Roman Church and secular states from the 12th-13th century onwards (Moore 1987). Processes of national integration, one may add, also led to the exclusion of Jews and other ethnic minorities on ethnic-national grounds.

Several images emerged that would become the vehicle of ever more vehement anti-Semitic propaganda. The first was closely related to a reinvigorated organic theory of society, in which kingdoms and other types of statelike political communities not only were seen as ‘bodies’ but, from the thirteenth century onwards, as *corpora mystica*, a qualification that until then was reserved for the Church (Kantorowicz 1957: 207-232). Within this organic imagery Jews (and other minorities) became like cancers that made the body ill and for that reason had to be cut out.³¹ A second image akin to the first is that of pollution, which we find among several leaders of the Church reform movement of the eleventh century, including Hildebrand of Soana – the later pope Gregory VII – himself: the Jews were among those that polluted Christian society and, therefore, had to be

the Hebrew Bible and related texts. Furthermore, they were in consequence held together as a nation rather than an ethnicity. Indeed, different ethnicities, such as Ashkenazim and Sephardim, emerged within it.”

³¹ In fact, the first instance of this type of discourse dates from seventh-century Spain. González-Salineró 1999: 128, n37. But the image remained rare until the thirteenth century.

‘purged’.³² A third, even more detrimental image was that of a trans-national Jewish conspiracy against Christendom, involving such heinous acts as consorting with the devil, allying with the Muslims (on whom more below), the ritual slaughtering (also by way of crucifixion) and eating of Christian children, and the staining of consecrated hosts.

Together, these images came to constitute a basic repertoire that was invoked whenever the circumstances called for it, even if these in themselves had nothing to do with Jews – e.g. the introduction of a new tax (e.g. Nirenberg 1996: 50-51). Popular discontent could then find an acceptable outlet in physical attacks on Jews. Further fed by the preaching activities of the mendicant orders, this resulted in a general pattern of systematic discrimination, dehumanization (by comparing Jews to animals, in particular pigs; see below), social exclusion, and expulsion.

Other minorities

Important though the history of religious minorities (Jews everywhere, Mozarabs and Mudéjars in Reconquista Spain, Turkic Cumans in Hungary) may be to our deeper understanding of medieval society, the confrontation with alterity runs deeper and wider. Two recent volumes on strangers and on migrations in medieval society (*L'Étranger* 2000; Balard & Ducellier 2002), contain a weird and wonderful catalogue of fascinating topics that cry out for closer examination. It touches on such phenomena as diasporas, merchant communities, refugees, hostages, deportations, repatriations, military colonies, foreign courtiers, labour migration, slavery, and, obviously, missionaries and pilgrimage. Most contributions are less concerned with how the wide variety of strangers, foreigners

³² Stow 1996: 106-107; for the same sentiment in Chaucer: Tomasch, 2000: 248-249. Pollution often has a sexual context, but in that case a double-double standard obtains: first those who are seen as ‘polluted’ or ‘contaminated’ are always women who have been raped by ‘others’ (infidels, barbarians, enemies), while the violators themselves are never described as ‘pollutors’; second, whereas violated women of the own group are seen as polluted, violated women of the other side never are. Cf. Nirenberg 1996 ch.5; Berend 2001a: 196-97. Sénac 1983: 79 points to this theme in the chansons *La chevalerie d’Ogier* and *Floovant*.

and migrants they describe were imagined in contemporary sources than with other aspects reflecting their ‘real’ position, such as their legal or economic status. However, the exceptional cases they survey leave no doubt about the prejudice and distrust strangers increasingly met in the political imagery of the kingdoms and principalities of the second half of the Middle Ages. The ideal of a multi-ethnic society – realized to a large extent in the early medieval world – was traded in for the ideal of a mono-ethnic nation.

Multi-ethnicity was maintained longest in Hungary, which was constituted as a Christian kingdom only at the turn of the millennium, after the Magyar invasion in the century and a half before had been absorbed. The ideal of multi-ethnicity clearly resounds in both historical and epic-literary descriptions of medieval Hungary; its most renowned expression is in the anonymous *De morum institutione ad Emericum ducem* of about 1030. It speaks of the pouring-in of *hospites* (‘guests’) from various countries, who all brought with them their own language and customs and weapons, to the benefit of the Hungarian kingdom, and to the distress of its enemies: *nam unius linguae uniusque moris regnum imbecille et fragile est.*³³ The same ideal is also ascribed to the Hungarians in the *Nibelungenlied*, in which the epic Huns are clearly reminiscent of the Magyars on the threshold of their conversion to Christianity. According to a recent reading, Etzel/Attila “strongly resembles not only representations of Géza, the last pagan ruler of Hungary, but also the image of the Christian Hungarian king in contemporaneous [i.e. early thirteenth-century] German historical texts” (Sager 2002: 33-34). This interpretation enables us to view the German ‘guests’ at Etzel’s court as reflecting “the presence of Germanic aristocrats – the so-called *hospites teutonici* – among the vassals of the Hungarian king [...] especially important at the turn of the thirteenth century.” In sum, unlike the Burgundian world, Etzel’s kingdom does not betray any ‘otherworldly’ qualities in the *Nibelungenlied*; its

³³ Kubinyi 1998: 187-192. Classen 2002: xlvii, more in general, thinks that in East- and Central-Europe, more than in the West, selfhood and nationhood were to a large extent negotiable, “leaving surprisingly extensive room for integration, mutual acceptance, and respect such as in the case of Hungarians.” For a warning against an oversimplistic acceptance of Hungarian tolerance in Berend 2001b: 83-84.

strangeness is no more “than the local color of the Austro-Hungarian border in the early thirteenth century.” And part of its strangeness (*vremdheit*) is exactly its multi-ethnicity, which amazes the Burgundian heroes and heroines, and other exiles (*ellenden*) from the north who arrive there, because it markedly opposes their own, tribal-‘German’ unity.³⁴ Some Hungarian kings went too far even to the taste of their Hungarian subjects: we have encountered the case of László IV (1272-1290); not only was he nicknamed ‘the Cuman’, he was also forced, in the course of his reign, to disassociate himself from them, after which they assassinated him (Berend 2001b: 81-84).

Hatred against recent foreign immigrants, who were still easy to recognize and isolate, more often led to sudden outbreaks of xenophobic violence. A well-known example is the large numbers of Flemish who were invited to England in the years after the invasion of 1066. Even the new Norman masters were soon fed up with them. According to the English chronicler William of Malmesbury, the Conqueror’s son and successor, William Rufus, had them assembled ‘as in a sewer (*sentina*)’, because they were garbage of which he wanted to clean his kingdom; he had them transported to the border area of Wales where they could fight the wild Welsh.³⁵ There are also many instances of a different kind of xenophobia, involving those strangers who accompanied high-ranking women, betrothed to a

³⁴ Sager 2002: 32, points out that the early medieval core of the narrative fabric of old-German epics such as the *Hildebrandslied*, the *Dietrich von Bern*-cycle, and the *Nibelungenlied* all go back to “the flight of Germanic heroes to Hunnic Eastern Europe and their exile at the Hunnic court.” In stressing the opposition to German[ic] unity Sager subscribes to interpretations in older, nationalistic German historical literature. Following a more recent analysis by Jan-Dirk Müller (1998), Sager subsequently elaborated this opposition by viewing the East also as the fringe of the courtly world, where exiles enjoy “freedom from the limitations and constraints of the ordered political and social world”, but because of that relapse into “violence and brutality”, which is also “pure heroism” (Sager 2002: 35-38). In all these respects, so Sager thinks, “German heroic epics developed an imagology of the Huns and Hungarians that diverged sharply from the Latin ecclesiastical tradition” and which never became absorbed in either Arthurian romance or crusader epics (p. 30; cf. Berend 2001b: 88-89, and Borst 1957-1963: 677, according to whom the poet of the *Nibelungenlied* painted a “courtly world in which language barriers were absent” and the women liked to dress in exotic garments from Arabia, Libya, and Morocco.

³⁵ Kirn 1943, 35; Malmesbury took the reference to the *sentina* from Sallustius, *Coniuratio Catilinae* 37, 5.

foreign king, prince or noble lord, to their new homelands, and whose influence could be disproportionately large. It easily invited scathing comments with a ‘nationalist’ undertone, such as the one made by Rudolf the Bald (Glaber) on the Provençal wife of king Robert the Pious of France (996-1031). This Provençal princess, so Glaber tells us, took with her to Paris a large retinue of southerners, who not only were shamefully dressed, but also shaved “as *ioculatores*”, and their horses were all spruced. In similar wording abbot Siegfried of Gorze, in a letter to his colleague Poppo of Stavelot of 1043 about the approaching wedding of the German king Henry III with the French princess Agnes of Poitou, complained about, and warned against, the spoiled customs of the French, with their weird beards and shamefully short dresses. (Kirn 1943: 34.)

In spite of such narrow-minded reactions, one can imagine that intermarriage between different ethnic groups, nations, and/or religions opened an important avenue to integration. Even in the Middle Ages interreligious marriages were not totally excluded. We know of several Christian Spanish kings who had married Muslim women, as well as, vice versa, of Andalucian Muslim princes having Christian wives (Roth 1994: 58-59). But these must have been exceptions, and love relations between Christians and Muslims mainly belonged to the realm of romance fantasies, where Saracen or black beauties, with names like Fatima, Bramimonde or Floripas, are presented as “desiring, sexually aggressive agents, whose religious conversion is part of their bold enactment of their erotic attraction to particular Christian men”.³⁶ In Wolfram von Eschenbach’s *Parzival* the protagonist’s father falls in love with such a black queen; out of this union a child was born, Parzival’s halfbreed half-brother Feirfiz. The story is later continued in the Middle Dutch romance *Moriaen*.³⁷ Conversely, there is the fantasy of the

³⁶ Heng 2003: 187. Sénac 1983: 91 goes even further by arguing that Muslim women in medieval romances are “superior to their husbands” in every respect, including the military.

³⁷ Hahn 2001: 16-17; cf. Kinoshita 2001, for the “mediation of racial relations through sexual exchange” (Hahn, 18) in the Song of Roland, where most Muslims are presented as black and ugly. For the rape and pollution aspects, see note 32 above and Nirenberg 1996: 149-50, on the barriers which many cultures raise against sex with outsiders. According to Sénac 1983: 71-73, Muslims on wall paintings in the south of France did not have any colour until the second

virtuous Christian princess who wanders for a while in an un-Christian (Muslim) world, who marries a Muslim king, and then succeeds in effecting conversion as well.³⁸ Such liaisons are never represented as having offspring – provided they are set in the Orient; which underlines “the impossibility of re-beginning” (i.e. the potential rise of an Ismamic nation; Heng 2003: 227). There is at least one exception: according to the romance *Voyage d’Outremer du comte de Pontieu* the much admired sultan Saladin would have had a Christian mother (Sénac 1983: 118) – how else could he have possessed all those great virtues?

Foreign fellow-Christians: ethnic and national stereotypes

In an essay on ‘xenological phenomenology’ – the study of strangers – of the Middle Ages Albrecht Classen (2002: xlii) has suggested that “the encounter with foreigners functions like a catalyst, forcing people to reconsider their own culture and to examine its ideological premises. [...] all conflicts and encounters with the foreign are ambivalent and ambiguous: they can engender violent and vitriolic forms of hostility, rejection, and fear, and they can also trigger a quest for self-analysis, possibly producing tolerant attitudes.” Generally, however, collective

half of the thirteenth century. From then on they are painted black most of the time, while in texts ‘Moors’ appears more often next to the usual ‘Saracens’. However, a crude distinction was made between Muslims from the (Middle) East, who remained more often white, and Muslims from Spain, who became more often (black) Moors – originally the name for Berber Muslims from North-Africa. (Roth 1994: 48, mentions the *Crónica mozarabe* of 754 as the earliest source). Sénac suggests that there may have been a connection with the massive influx of people from the Maghreb from the twelfth century onwards, but more important was the symbolic value of the colour black, which associates with “sin, death and danger” (after Jean Devisse). This is confirmed by Boissellier 2000: 183 n9, 186-87, who points out that in Portugal ‘black Moors’ were distinguished from ‘white Moors’, especially after 1441, when black people from Guinea started to be imported on some scale. After that ‘Moors’ as a general term is more or less equivalent with ‘Muslims’; in older Portuguese sources ‘Moors’ is more or less equivalent to ‘slaves’. According to Sénac, in the late Middle Ages the distinction white vs. black Muslims was exchanged for one between (white) Turks vs. (black) Moors.

³⁸ Heng 2003: ch. 4 interprets such stories as “the enactment of a successful crusade” (p. 189) in a period when crusades were becoming increasingly unsuccessful. Other famous examples of interracial marriage are provided by the romances *Floire et Blancheflor* and *Aucassin et Nicolette*.

self-criticism is not a virtue of nations. If negative views of one's own people can be traced at all, they most often involve authors who have seen a bit more of the world, and from that position look down scornfully to the narrow-mindedness of their compatriots. Not surprisingly, the proverbial hairsplitter Pierre Abélard spoke of Brittany, where he had been born and raised, as a *terra barbara*, where people spoke a patois *mihi incognita* (Borst 1957-63: 634).

Certainly, all sorts of negative feelings towards Others abound, both innocent and offensive. Mockery, ridicule and abuse figure largely in ethnic or national stereotyping (a term which rightly emphasizes the repetitiveness and lack of originality in ethnic joking). Recurring elements are: the association of members of ethnic groups with specific animals, references to eating and drinking habits, and to physical oddities and/or strange psychic qualities. Hans Walther, in his compilation and surveys (1959), remarks that collective properties ascribed to certain ethnic groups or nations often were interchangeable, like butter-eating, purportedly a favourite indulgence of the Bretons, the Saxons, the Frisians and the Suabians (291). He also established that in ascriptions of collective characteristics to other people praiseworthy properties were far outnumbered by negative qualities, and that light-hearted mockery was less frequent than hateful satire. Walther infers that positive properties were probably generated as self-images, whereas negative properties would have been ascriptions from outside, especially neighbouring groups. It should be pointed out, however, that negative attributes could be adopted as a boastful nickname by those who were meant to feel insulted; *anglici caudati* is the first example that springs to mind (Heng 2003: 101).

A more subtle theory of (negative) 'national prejudice' was advanced by Ludwig Schmugge (1982: 443-444). Before the eleventh century the view of foreigners and foreign peoples was entirely based on literary topoi, mainly derived from classical and patristic examples. During the eleventh and twelfth centuries, national characteristics and the stereotyping of 'other' peoples became markedly more elaborate as a consequence of more direct contacts. Finally, the development of such 'national stereotypes', according to Schmugge, became an essential condition for the development of a 'pre-national' collective awareness. Schmugge

tested his theory on the basis of three themes: the crusades, (international) pilgrimage, and the rise of universities. Precisely those things that were to have united Europeans also turned out to divide them!

As a result of large-scale military conflict (the growing pains of early modern states), friendly or neutral relations with neighbouring nations could suddenly turn into bitter hostility. The classical example is the conflict between Capetian France and Angevin England, which already by the end of the twelfth century was imagined as a life-or-death battle between giants.³⁹ Of course, wars and battles are always occasions to vilify the enemy, no matter how closely related or situated. Long after the days of Richard the Lionhearted, the Hundred Years War remained a focus of national identification and national effort both in England and France. This also implied vilifying the enemy with allegations of savage cruelty (what we now call crimes against humanity): a rhetorical strategy that had already been amply deployed on both sides during the Anglo-Scottish wars. Accusations of extreme violence and cruelty had been leveled against the enemy in both Edward I's letter to pope Boniface VIII in the spring of 1301 and in the Scottish declaration of Arbroath of 1320 (cf. Edington 1998: 72-73). Battles, above all, served to raise national fervour. According to Andrew Galloway, Thomas of Walsingham's renowned description of the battle of Agincourt takes its interest not only from its detailed description of tactics – there are more detailed accounts by authors better informed – but from “how it exceeds any other account in supercharging the event with a combination of emphatic hierarchy yet perfect social representation, and a sense of historical redemption”. Exactly that made Walsingham's report a harbinger of a new “secular nationalism” (Galloway 2004: 82-84).

³⁹ Cf. Hoppenbrouwers 2002, where English and Norman accounts of Third Crusade are presented not so much as narratives of a Christian war against the Muslim infidels but as a ‘hidden’ history of emerging war between the crusading nations England and France, with a party-ridden German Empire as taking both sides. On the appropriation of king Arthur for the English cause: *ibid.*, and Borst 1957-63: 689.

Christian vs. pagan: difference into dichotomy

The distinction between ‘us’ and ‘them’ can easily magnify ethnic or national differences into crude dichotomies. The three basic ones were:

- peoples inhabiting three known continents (Asia, Africa and Europe) vs. the marginal monstrous races and the (possible) inhabitants of unknown continents, especially the *terra antipodum*;
- civilized peoples versus barbarians;
- Christian peoples versus non-Christian heretics and pagans.

A peculiar mixture of all three elements lay at the basis of the quasi-racist ethnological theory that is unfolded in the Byzantine emperor Constantin VII’s tract on public administration *De administrando imperii*, from the middle of the tenth century. People of the same race and speaking the same sort of language (*homogenoi, homophyloi, homophonoi*) should intermix and intermarry, but people of different race and language (*allogenoi, allophyloi, alloglossoi*) should definitely not, because incompatibility of culture would inevitably lead to enmity and hatred. However, subsequent Byzantine ideology had to distinguish between non-Christian steppe nomads on its northern borders and the Roman-Christian nations of the West, with recently-converted Slav peoples in between. With respect to the former, the most crucial cultural determinant was religion: in the end, being Christian or not made the difference between regarded as an inferior barbarian and a civilized man. The Byzantine opinion of Westerners clearly deteriorated in the course of the eleventh century: from co-Romans they were downgraded to barbarians, not because they were not Christians, but because as a group they displayed the same stereotypical negative qualities that were also ascribed to nomads, such as power-madness, pride, and a propensity to tyranny (Malamut 2000). For their part, the Franks themselves, despised as barbarians by the Byzantines, made use of exactly the same negative stereotypes to denigrate their own non-Christian neighbours: these were uncivilized barbarians, unreliable, proud, cruel, etcetera (Depreux 2000: 135-137). Finally, as to recent converts, even after being baptized they often remained under suspicion: not only because of the chance of relapse, but also

because of the conservative medieval mind-set: one just could not imagine people throwing away their old habits and customs from one day to another.⁴⁰

More generally, the obvious binary opposition between Christians and non-Christians served to highlight strangeness. In the *Song of Roland* Armenians, Bulgarians, and Hungarians, all good Christian peoples by the time in which the poem originated (around 1100), are represented as ‘pagans’. This suggests that the domestic sphere of the author and his audience was restricted to Western Europe wrapped around ‘la dulce France’ (Borst 1957-63: 601; cf. Bomba 1987). The message was clear: the nations of Latin Christianity (though sometimes the Byzantine Empire was included in this argument) should stand united against an ever more threatening pagan enemy; in fact this was one of the many variants image of the ‘Europe under siege’ idea. In reality, of course, Latin-Christian Europe was politically deeply divided.

In such dichotomic imagery pagan nations were stereotypically bad in a Star Wars way. Their inhabitants, apart from being infidels, were without exception dark, arrogant, perfidious and treacherous, violent, cruel, rude, obstinate, and sometimes even cannibals.⁴¹ Some *chansons de geste*, evidently harking back to narrative material antedating the final submission and conversion of the Saxons by Charlemagne, describe the Saxons – *la pute gent devee* – as plotting with Saracens and Turks (note the anachronism), while they venerate three main gods, called Mahom, Tervagant, and Apolin, the same three gods mentioned in the *Chanson de Roland* as the three main idols of the Muslims.⁴² Only in later *chansons* does the

⁴⁰ There are plenty of indications that acculturation after conversion to Christianity went slow. Some examples from the Frankish world: Depreux 2000: 150 and 153-54. On cases of relapse among the Slavs: Bühner-Thierry 2000: 266-70.

⁴¹ Heng 2003, ch. 1; Cordery 2002. The trope that Muslims were cannibals is in fact a variant of a much older anti-barbarian cliché (cf. Müller 1980: 255 n96). For the imputation of Mongol cannibalism: Jackson 2001: 100-102.

⁴² Sénac 1983: 75. Note the common impression among Muslims that Christians were polytheists because they worshipped three gods (the standard Muslim interpretation of the Trinity). That notion is, as it were, countered by this accusation that, instead, the Muslims had three gods. Cf. Schwinges 1998: 109-111 for various theological views on Islam in the medieval West.

Saxons' role improve slightly, in that they are promoted from the status of infidels to that of rebels (Zimmermann 1911: 258, 260-267). Generally, 'Saracens' developed into a container term to indicate all enemies of Christendom (Remppis 1911). The imagery associated with this term was the end product of a long-term accumulation of negative stereotypes stamped on Muslims, of which the earliest traces go back to the eighth century: Muslims were heretics (pseudo-Arians) or sacrilegious infidels, sexual perverts and debauchees (because they allowed polygamy), cruel, barbarian, and diabolical (they were apocalyptic accomplices of the Devil) or the punishing instruments of God's wrath. From the turn of the millennium onwards, with apocalyptic expectations rising, Muslim-spotting in the biblical Book of Revelations was on the increase. Muslim capitals such as Bagdad and Cairo were persistently identified with whorish Babylon (cf. Rev. 14:8), Mohammed with the Antichrist. In addition, there were many images (textual and iconographic) hinting at anti-Christian alliances or dark plots between the two most loathed enemies of the Christian faith: Muslims and Jews (Cutler & Cutler 1986). Just one among countless examples: in Mandeville it is told that next to the tree where Judas hanged himself "was the synagoge where the bysschoppes of Iewes & the sarrazins camen togidere and helden here conseil." ⁴³ And according to the so-called *Sentencia-Estatuto* of Pero Sarmiento of June 1449, the rebellious inhabitants of Toledo were convinced, on the basis of their reading of "old chronicles", that the Jews had sold their city to the saracens right after the first Muslim invasion of 711 (Baloup et al. 2003: 190). Conversely, Muslims were often depicted as doing the same misdeeds as Jews (Heng 2000: 143-144).

Remarkably, from the moment they emerge in Christian sources, Muslims were not exclusively seen as the followers of a religion but as a people (*gens*), more precisely, as a biblical descent group, going back to either Sarah (hence

⁴³ Leshock 2002: 218-220. In Leshock's view, Mandeville is remarkably mild and tolerant towards Muslims – although, 'for all their positive features, they still are the enemy' – while on the other hand outrageously anti-Semitic. For a summary of recent views on Mandeville also Classen 2002: xxxviii-xxxix; Heng 2003: ch. 5. Jews were associated, not only with Muslims, but also with the Mongols, via the myth of the 'ten lost tribes of Israel'; Jackson 2001: 100; also Borst 1957-63: 766-767; cf. Cutler & Cutler 1986: 132-135 for the (Jewish) origins of this myth.

Saracens), Hagar (hence Hagarenes) or Ismael (hence Ismaelites) (cf. Sénac 1983: 14, 24-25). Possibly, this also had to do with the close association of Muslims with Jews, whose status in this respect – besides being followers of a religion the Jews were also seen, and saw themselves, as a people – remains ambiguous until today.

Ambiguity reigned in yet other respects. First, known literary descriptions of conflicts between Christians and Muslims from the twelfth century on, are usually couched in West-European-style feudal terms; apparently, Christian authors could not – or were reluctant to – imagine a society which was structurally different from their own. Hence Muslims, even if they are seen as wicked, are not alien. Still, the idea of an exotic outer-world, viewed with a mixture of wonder and disgust, was there, and Muslims were given their part in it. This led to a second ambiguity. On the one hand, there was awe and admiration for the bravery, grace, and refined culture of Muslims, touching on all those ‘wonders’ (*mirabilia*) of the East, in which they clearly participated.⁴⁴ On the other hand, that very position rendered them potentially marginal to the status of true humanity, already impugned by their abhorred paganism. Infidels and pagans were often denigrated and dehumanized. ‘Dogs’ was the fixed term of abuse for pagans and Muslims alike; the image of the Jewish pig (*Judensau*), the hideous ‘conflation of Jews with swine, tabooed animals in Judaism as much as in Islam’, does have firm medieval roots (Heng 2000: 142; 2003: 80-81). To what extremes this type of denigration could go is revealed by a fascinating story of Johannes Victoriensis about a Christian aristocrat called Ingo, who invited Slav slaves to his table because they were Christian, while their lords, still pagan, had to remain outside and were fed “as if they were dogs” (Bührer-Thierry 2000: 262). To the image of ‘dog[like]’ and ‘dog-headed’ were added impressions of ugliness and dirt. St Boniface, in a letter to king Æthelbald of Kent, called the pagan Slavs (Wends) *foedissimum et deterrimum genus hominum*, while one of his successors as abbot of Fulda, Sturm[i], while en route on his donkey, was suddenly stopped and appalled by an

⁴⁴ This kind of admiration would even have given rise to a veritable ‘Saracen look’ in Western architecture and dress in the thirteenth century. In Paris, for instance, there was an entire guild of artisans, specialized in ‘Saracen look’; cf. Sénac 1983: 121-22.

awful stench, caused by some Slav people who were taking a bath [sic] (Kirn 1943: 16). Long after their conversion, the Hungarians were considered to be extremely ugly, thus according to Otto of Freising (Kirn 1943: 25-26), while the Welsh remarkably often bred monstrous, half-human creatures, mongrels, interspecies hybrids (Cohen 2000: 92-95).

Just like the monstrous races, infidels and pagans were marginalized in space. Once again one could point to the Hereford mappamundi, in which there is no place for Muslims/Arabs in any of the three inhabited continents of the earth.⁴⁵

Exotic strangeness; physical monstrosity

Beyond the known world of non-Christian heretics and pagans, on the fringes of the the inhabited continents, were the dwelling places of the Black and then the so-called Plinian or monstrous races.⁴⁶ Admittedly, Augustine had already aired his doubts on the absurdity of ideas concerning these strange creatures, barely human, if human at all. He did not believe in the existence of the Antipodes, first described by his contemporary Martianus Capella. Augustine simply could not accept that there were inhabited parts on the earth where the Gospel had not been preached, or could never possibly be, and he was followed by many later learned authors, including Nicholas Oresme (Friedman 1981: 47-48). In addition, Augustine would not accept that the monstrous races were not really human, as the Greeks and Romans thought they were (Friedman 1981: 34). Although monstrous races were repeatedly described in so-called bestiaries, or set apart in encyclopedic tracts, and although the learned Albertus Magnus never accepted as truly human one of the oldest of the monstrous races – the Pygmies – Augustine’s point of view was generally accepted in the Christian Middle Ages (Friedman 1981: 191-193). Sometimes this loyalty to Augustine’s view required some contortionist flexibility.

⁴⁵ Astutely observed by Leshock 2002: 212.

⁴⁶ For their names and geographical positions on the Hereford mappamundi, see Kline 2001: ch. 5, esp. 142-145.

The Franciscan theologian Alexander of Hales put up a Jekyll-and-Hyde-style argument by stating that the monstrous races were human because humans – and they alone – were capable of becoming monstrous themselves. To make things worse: the monstrous races were gradually placed out of space as well as out of time. Friedman (1981: 132) speaks of “the separation of the monstrous races from true geographic and naturalistic space” – certainly from civilized urban space (Kline 2001: 205). In late medieval imagery, whereas black Africans were more often realistically pictured, the fabulous ‘monsters’ developed into ornamental caricatures, into extra’s, hovering naked like animals in the background of stories and/or pictures of European travelers.⁴⁷ The other way round Sepúlveda, in his notorious debate with Bartolomé de las Casas, modeled American Indians after the monstrous races, in order to dehumanize (or decivilize) them as much as possible.

Conscious attempts to detemporalize other cultures, i.e. to place them outside historical time, have been discussed, first by Johannes Fabian (1983), and subsequently by Kathleen Biddick (1998: 269), who has argued – not very convincingly in my opinion – that on the Hereford mappamundi Jews were “persistently [...] placed in a time other than the present of Christendom”. Given the map’s evident association between Jews and Muslims, Leshock allows for the same mechanism of ‘detemporalization’ affecting Muslims; by their location out of time they are turned into “generic heretics or idolaters” (2001: 210-211).

Medieval racism

Can we conclude from the material surveyed here that medieval images of alterity were up to a point racist? There are many indications, both in scholarly texts and in daily life, that would suggest an affirmative answer. According to Greco-Roman scientific lore vented by authors such as Pliny the Elder, his abbreviator Solinus, and Ptolemy, and digested by Isidore of Seville, each people

⁴⁷ Cf. Friedman 1981: 206; Kline 2001: 204-205. For their appearance in *chansons de geste*: Subrenat 1996, 174-177.

lived on a different latitude (*clima*) as well as under a different ‘heaven’ – and, therefore, astral constellation. For that reason peoples differed from each other in the form of their faces, their skin colours, and their height, but also in their mental disposition (Isidore, Etym. IX: 105). After Isidore’s death his standard mixture of biblical and Greco-Roman ethnography gradually became encrusted with apocryphical tales about, among other, the antediluvial degeneration of half of Adam’s offspring; this would eventually give rise to crude racial theories of such eminent scholastic theologians as Albert the Great or ‘popularizing’ monastic historiographers, such as Benoît de Sainte-Maure (cf. Friedman 1981: 53-54, 93-96, 99-101). They all saw Latin-Christian Europeans as racially superior to neighbouring schismatics, heretics and barbarian infidels, who in turn formed a buffer zone between Christendom and the monstrous races at the earth’s periphery. These were disgusting, morally depraved, hardly human but human nonetheless, and therefore, according to Augustine, not beyond the hope of salvation (City of God 16:8, Friedman 1981: 183). Accordingly, even here true faith could work miracles (in this case the miracle of getting freed from the hideous physical marks of racial inferiority). In medieval romances, baptism could whiten the skin colour of a black person, and “the spiritual essence conferred by [the Christian] religion” could “work on the genetic essence conferred by the biologism of [skin] color”.⁴⁸

The “medieval propensity for drawing spiritual instruction from all aspects of the natural world” (Friedman 1981: 122) intensified a tendency to connect the physical-exterior characteristics of people with inner-mental, and especially moral features. In the case of monstrous races the word *monstrum* had the original meaning of ‘demonstrative sign’ (i.e. of divine will): monsters were seen, not just as freaks of nature or as “an upside-down map of the moral universe” (Campbell 1988: 53), but also as pointers to God’s almightiness. This moralizing tendency is noticeably replaced in the later Middle Ages gradually by the gradual emergence

⁴⁸ Heng 2003: 340, n21; also: 229, where she speaks of the “odd medieval hypothesis of the essentialist power of Christianity to bestow bodily configurations”. Heng admits, however, that racial discourse was more complicated. She points to the incessant suspicion that converted Jews had to face. Evidently, it was widely believed that a core essence of their Judaism had remained even after baptism.

of some sort of “ethnocentric nationalism” (Friedman 1981: 162). Thenceforth, there is no moral point of view any longer, just Western curiosity, but still firmly based on a racial feeling of superiority. While an undercurrent persisted that went back to the Alexander lore of late Antiquity, from the thirteenth century on this was reinforced by the anthropological observations of Christian travelers to the Far East. In this view, certain Eastern people, such as the black king Balthazar of the Three Magi, or peoples, such as the mysterious Brahmans, counted as noble savages and sages. In a sense, this incipient cultural relativism (also visible in, for instance, Jacques de Vitry’s prologue to the list of Eastern races in the *Historia Orientalis*) “prefigured [...] the romantic primitivism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries” (Friedman 1981: 163-164).

Quality of observation and empathy

The image of peoples outside Latin Christendom was clearly influenced by the quality of empirical observation. Ignorance and misapprehension, understandable in a society that was overwhelmingly locally oriented and where relatively few people had the opportunity to travel, exacerbated ethnocentric distortion. Thus, many German intellectuals in the central Middle Ages wrongfully thought that there was only one Slavic language, incomprehensible and ‘barbarian’, which according to some authors was also spoken in Hungary.⁴⁹ Such misapprehensions provoked distrust and even fear because of their implicit suggestion of political and military unity.

From the thirteenth century, the quality of ethnographic observation considerably improved, due to enhanced political stability within Europe, as well as to increased traveling in the outer-European space (cf. Schwinges 1998: 103-

⁴⁹ Borst 1957-63: 699-700; but also Barford 2001: 15-19, who notes that differences between Slavic languages are probably less salient than between Germanic languages. This is already noted in contemporary histories such as the already-mentioned *Chronicon Poloniae* of ca. 1235: “sunt autem Slavorum multimoda genera linguarum se mutuo intelligentia” (Borst 1957-63: 768; Barford 2001: 28-29).

104, esp. n6 and n9, and 119-122, for the connection with the concept of tolerance). Occasionally, this produced accounts of unprecedented accuracy and originality – the foremost example is William of Rubroek’s travel report of his journey to the court of the Mongol great khan at Karakorum. It almost comes up to the standards of modern social-anthropological empirical research.⁵⁰ Even so, it would still take a long time before new observations had been ‘processed’ in maps, or could oust the western appetite for eastern *mirabilia*. Until well into the sixteenth century John Mandeville’s *Travels*, a xenological “mélange of fact and fantasy” (Heng 2003: 298) that brought together all possible clichés about the outer-European world, would remain the most widely read source of ethnographic information (Heng 2003: ch. 5; Jackson 2001: 104-105). But a turn had been taken. The *mirabilia* and the monsters were gradually replaced by (attempts at) truthful observations, whether these were about a giraffe seen by three Florentine pilgrims in Cairo in 1384 (Esch 1991) or incorporated into realistic pictures of black Africans from the middle of the fourteenth century.⁵¹ Another century later, this better-informed, new tolerance could even lead to a call by the Spanish Franciscan, Juan de Segóvia, for a drastically improved translation of the worst enemy’s holiest book, the Koran, with no other purpose than to enter into a serious dialogue with the Muslims (Sénac 1983: 157-159).

⁵⁰ Cf. Lomperis 2001: 148-149. Heng 2003: 295 is even prepared to accept that, generally, “in some medieval travelogues [...] the role and position of the observer-narrator is configured in ways startlingly predictive of the role and position of the ‘scientific ethnographer’ today.” Heng largely refers, to be sure, to the method of observation, not to the quality of what was observed.

⁵¹ ‘Mandeville’ came close to prefiguring the slogan ‘black is beautiful’. In fact the oldest trace is in the Song of Songs, with its phrase *nigra sum sed formo[n]sa*: ‘I am black but beautiful’. In one of Bernard of Clairvaux’ sermons on the Song the ‘black but beautiful’ is converted into ‘black *and* beautiful’. (Of course his reading was not about the literal sense.) Peter Abelard’s reading of the same verse to Heloise – clearly meant to be a literal reading – made the desirable (Ethiopian) woman black, and for that reason disfigured from the outside, but lovely within (Cf. Hahn 2001: 18-23). Hahn adds (4-5) that in the same period “through a series of cultural transformations” at least two early Christian saints who were supposed to have been African, SS Christopher and Maurice, “became palpably black”; and of course, there was Balthasar, the black Wise Man from the East. For pictorial evidence see the survey by Devisse 1979.

In the relationship between self and other, and in particular in the quality of ethnographic observations in particular, an open question (indeed a hotly debated question among medievalists) remains as to the hypothesis of increasing individualism in the later Middle Ages. A useful starting point may be Classen's sensible assumption that "the more medieval people discovered the individual, the more they realized the need to set boundaries and to distinguish themselves from the others as a means of self-definition" (2002: xlvi). This may have engendered the beginnings of empathy for the Other as well. Geraldine Heng has observed with perspicacity that Mandeville's *Travels*, owing to its set-up with a personified narrator who likes to present his exotic subjects in sharp one-of-theirs/one-of-ours contrasts, invited readers into "a modulated admission of otherness, and a participation in otherness" (Heng 2003: 255-256). The same awareness also surfaces in political tracts with an unmistakable 'national' undertone, such as Christine de Pizan's *Le Livre du Corps de Policie*, which tempted one of her modern analysts to suggest that "the presence of both the idea of the individual and the idea of nationalism can prepare an environment conducive to the growth of tolerance" (Forhan 1996: 69). It is important to see that this suggestion of growing toleration within a context of national state formation is at loggerheads with Moore's aforementioned model of increasingly rigid conformism and intolerance. There is no easy answer to this contradiction; we should reconcile ourselves to the idea that not all the signs of a time necessarily point in the same direction.

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