

“Sultans of Babylon:” Racialization and “Crypto-visuality” in Fourteenth- and Fifteenth-
Century European Latin Christian Manuscripts

By

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Abstract

This dissertation analyzes the ways that late medieval illuminated manuscripts from France, Italy, and England visualize the “Sultan of Babylon” as both a historical and fantastical racialized construction. The title encapsulates the vagaries of European Latin Christian racialization, one that describes both the Sultan of Egypt and an imaginary ruler who hails from an ill-defined region under Islamic control. Thematically focusing on the different guises of this constructed enemy as monstrously unconvertable, a wielder of the Nile, and an imposter of Latin Christian authority, the project demonstrates how the “Sultan of Babylon” functioned as a premodern Islamic supervillain in the European Latin Christian imaginary. Despite the diverse provenances, polities, production contexts and displaced temporalities surrounding the primary sources used, their respective elite patrons racialized the Islamic ruler either to better legitimize their own reigns through a crusader past or to serve as propaganda for future incursions. Most importantly, this project attends to the racialization of the “Sultan of Babylon” by developing and employing a “crypto-visual” lens. This methodology deemphasizes the expected markers (such as skin color, costume, accoutrement) in favor of less-expected ones including text-image interaction, topography, masquerade, materiality, and the appropriation/expropriation of iconography.

Introduction

An illumination from the fourteenth century *Luttrell Psalter* depicts a fictional battle between a Plantagenet Prince and the “Sultan of Babylon” (**Figure 1**). The left figure encased in gold armor and displaying three lions on his surcoat defeats his blue faced, hook-nosed, bared-teeth opponent who carries a shield emblazoned with a caricatured “Ethiopian” head. There is little wonder that this image has been frequently used as a quintessential example of Latin Christian racialization of the Islamic Other. So often when discussing race, we fixate upon the usual subjects of somatic and sartorial differences. Yet new methodologies allow us to consider not alien physiognomies but landscapes, not tarbooshes but crosses as racializing in the correct contexts. In further mining the visual program with a *crypto-visual* lens we can interrogate aspects of our own more modern race-seeing and witness the less expected-categories more present in the medieval past. This dissertation will investigate more optically subtle forms of racialization through fourteenth and fifteenth century European Latin Christian illuminations of the “Sultan of Babylon,” the princely avatar of the Islamic Other(ed).

Over the last decade, and particularly since the white nationalist “Unite the Right” riot at Charlottesville in 2017, scholars of medieval European Latin Christian cultures have increasingly realized the necessity of addressing the topic of “Race in the Middle Ages.” As Geraldine Heng writes in her groundbreaking monograph *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages*, “*race is the structural relationship for the management of human differences, rather than a substantive context.*”¹ Heng invites us to think about race beyond the confines of modernity and

¹ Geraldine Heng, *Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 19.

to consider how religion, class, economies and geography helped form medieval notions of “race” alongside their intersections with the more expected categories of epidermal and physiognomic differences.² The Latin Christians not only racialized the Jewish communities living in Europe, but their gaze also turned against the Islamic polities of Iberia, North Africa, Egypt, the Levant in connected but distinct ways. The Crusades, which began as a series of European Latin Christian incursions to “reclaim” the “Holy Land” served as an important movement in shaping the Islamic Other(ed) in the Western imagination.³ The complicated political relationships during these events, sometimes even resulted in temporary alliances between Christians and Muslims, are reflected in European Latin Christian propaganda. The body of the male “Saracen,” a polemical and racializing term for Muslims, constituted an inversion of the Latin Christian body along behavioral, moral and theological lines.

Acknowledging Shokoofeh Rajabzadeh’s excellent work which reinforces the racist implications of the term “Saracen” and encourages us to use Muslim in order to prevent further harm to this real marginalized community, I continue to use it here in order to describe the complex visual technologies deployed to formulate the Sultan of Babylon. When properly contextualized as racist, the term demonstrates these codes racialize an amalgamation of people, even if the character remains Muslim.⁴

² Ibid., 16-17, 27-34.

³ Susanna A. Throop, *The Crusades: An Epitome*. (Kismet Press, 2018), 10. This project follows the “pluralism” school which interprets “crusade” as having occurred in different theaters of war including the Levant, Spain, France, and the Byzantine Empire. See: Housley, *Contesting the Crusades*, 116-119.

⁴ For “Saracen” as a polemical and racist term derived from a false etymology see: Shokoofeh Rajabzadeh, “The Depoliticized Saracen and Muslim Erasure.” *Literature Compass*, 16, no. 9-10 (2019): 1-8. Additionally, she encourages scholars not to employ it (and to rather use Muslim) except in very particular circumstances, such as a direct quotation. My use of it below does not follow Rajabzadeh’s model. As shall be explained in the outline of Chapter 1, part of this project demonstrates that “Saracen” when properly contextualized as racist, can better describe the complexity of the visual program that depicts Islamic characters, instead of eliding the various marginalized groups that make up this iconography under the blanket of “Muslim.” For further discussion of Latin Christian imagination of “Saracen” behavior see: Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, “On Saracen Enjoyment: Some Fantasies of Race in Late Medieval France and England,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31 (2001): 119-124.

Even after the Sack of Acre in 1291, which precipitated the end of the Crusader States, these narratives continued to appear in manuscripts produced in the mainland for Latin Christian rulers as part of their own royal performances of legitimacy as well as a hope of eventual “reconquest.” At the same time, the European Latin Christian narratives glamorized the “chivalric” attitudes of certain Islamic political leaders, a trope which buttressed the desire for the “formerly Muslim Christian convert” in epic and romantic traditions.⁵ These two poles are not binaries, but rather markers for a range of racializing characterizations. Indeed, there can be considerable nuance in attitudes towards race within a given text.

The centrality of the “written text” is critical in understanding the current state of “Race in the Middle Ages” scholarship. The lion's share of excellent research on this topic and the racialization of the “Saracen” more specifically, has largely been in fields of literary studies. Theoretical frameworks from art history, history, philology, music and performance studies have severely lagged behind. This dissertation seeks to re-center the visual aspects as integral to understanding pre-modern formulations of race by addressing one of the most important and enduring “Saracen” figures in the late medieval Latin Christian imagination— “The Sultan of Babylon.”

This epithet combines Arabic and European Latin Christian terminology in order to create an original construction of a racialized enemy. Sultan, coming from the Arabic root [س-ل-ط] meaning power/authority, refers to Islamic rulers who received authority to rule as subordinates under the caliph.⁶ Babylon, in Latin Christian narratives, refers to two different

⁵ Suzanne Conklin Akbari, *Idols in the East: European Representations of Islam and the Orient, 1100-1450* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), 155-157.

⁶ See: sultan س-ل-ط as power, ruler, authorization. Hans Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, ed. J. Milton Cowan (Snowball Publishing, 2011), p. 922. See also: “Sultanate,” In *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*, edited by Esposito, John L: Oxford University Press, 2003. <https://www-oxfordreference-com.ezproxy.library.wisc.edu/view/10.1093/acref/9780195125580.001.0001/acref-9780195125580-e-2276>.

geographical locations: Lesser Babylon (Egypt/North Africa/ and sometimes specifically Cairo) and Greater Babylon (the “Biblical” Babylon and Mesopotamia).⁷ The marriage of a historical office with a non-existent and inconsistent location reflects the complex use of this term writ large by the Latin Christians. On one hand, the term can refer to the historical Sultan of Egypt (and at times the Levant), specifically for Ayyubid and Mamluk rulers from the twelfth to the fifteenth century. On the other hand, the title also refers to an Islamic prince who ruled all of “Islamdom” with his reach extending from the East and into Iberia, especially in more fantastical texts.⁸ In both cases, the Sultan functions as a supposed political successor to Muhammad, as a foil to the “Princes of Christendom,” and the thorn in the side of the Latins impeding their geopolitical goals of claiming the “Holy Land.”

This dissertation presents a series of case studies which analyze how fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Latin Christian manuscripts from France, Italy and England visually imagined the various modulations of the “Sultan of Babylon” as both a historical and fantastical racialized construction. Indeed, this dichotomy of historical-fantastical easily blends together, producing a caricature of contradictions. The Sultan functions as an eschatological, Anti-Christ character, who also serves as a potential convert; a specific yet ubiquitous individual whose monstrous abilities threaten Latin Christian authority in the “Holy Land,” even after they had no real power in the region. Despite the fall of Crusader States, European Latin Christian political actors still validated their authority through and fantasized about eventual victory over the Sultan and Islam. I will explore as case studies visual narratives in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century manuscripts of *Les Grandes Chroniques de France*, the *Mare Historiarum*, the *Legenda Maior*, *Fierabras*, the

⁷ Andrew Scheil, *Babylon Under Western Eyes: A Study of Illusion and Myth* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), 259. See also: John Mandeville, *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville*, trans. C.W.R.D Moseley (New York: Penguin Books Ltd., 1983) 59-61.

⁸ Cohen, “On Saracen Enjoyment,” 129-130. See also: Heng, *Invention of Race*, 112-127.

Chronica Nuova, the *Liber Secretorum Fidelium Crucis* by Marin Sanudo the Elder of Venice, and the *Luttrell Psalter*. Each of my chapters will demonstrate the ways these manuscripts visually racialize the Sultan as: a fantastical monstrosity, a dangerous commander of the Nile, a conflated and abstracted symbol of violence and illegitimacy and as a replacer of Latin Christian royal authority. Despite the various provenances, polities, production contexts and displaced temporalities surrounding these texts, their respective elite patrons weaponized the racialization of the “Sultan of Babylon” either to better legitimize their own reigns through the crusader past or to serve as propaganda for future incursions. These rationals correspond with specific manuscript traditions. For example, on one hand the memorialization “Sack of Acre” scenes in the *Grandes Chroniques* imagine continued royal French ownership of the “Holy Land.” On the other hand, Sanudo’s *Liber Secretorum* justifies plans for a new Venetian-led crusade. This project also incorporates the historical royal articulations of Ayyubid and Mamluk Sultans in order to emphasize that the Sultan is not simply *racialized*. Far from just painted caricatures on European parchment, these rulers served as powerful political actors in their own right who often successfully resisted crusader incursions, and even deployed accounts of these events to buttress their own legitimacy.

Most importantly, in exploring the “Sultan of Babylon,” we find evidence for the importance of “ocularcentric fixations” because medieval formulations of race are incredibly

visual.⁹ Michael Camille contends that images “tyrannize” and dominate the manuscript page.¹⁰ David Freedberg’s scholarship encourages us to consider the power that images have on the viewer to elicit political as well as religious responses.¹¹ Continuing this line of thought, we must consider depictions of racialized people as one of the most crucial forms of evidence for understanding race-building in the Middle Ages. Indeed, the words that we often use to describe racialized constructions such as “stereotype,” (referring to a printing process) “caricature” (from the Italian *caricare*– “loaded image”) and even “imagination” (mental image) all give primacy to the visual.¹² However, the expected markers used to identify racialization, such as particular types of skin color, physiognomy, costume and accoutrement are unstable and inconsistent categories to make these determinations.

Understanding racialization in the visual past requires a probing eye to uncover its embodiment in sometimes unexpected ways. cursory glances which treat images as products or interpretations of written texts frequently lead to pedestrian observations. In order to fully understand the breadth and complexity of this phenomenon, one requires lenses, tools, and

⁹ When critiquing Thomas Hahn’s previous discussion of medieval race, Dorothy Kim notes that Hahn (and others) betray an “ocularcentric fixation on medieval race as epidual and visual.” In her excellent article, Kim rightly points out the limitations of Hahn’s critical engagement with race as well as Robert Bartlett’s superficial methodology coupled with an incipient approach to race as a poorly defined taxonomy of physical differences. Placing this to one side, in this project I champion an “ocularcentric fixation” as paramount for understanding medieval racialization. Indeed, this same perspective which obscures Hahn’s and Bartlett’s readings helps us find new meanings about the epidermal not usually considered or find new pathways for seeing race that are not immediately as obvious. See: Dorothy Kim, “Introduction to literature compass special cluster: Critical race and the Middle Ages.” *Literature Compass* 16 (2019): 4-5. This historiography will be discussed further below.

¹⁰ Michael Camille, *The Gothic Idol: Ideology and Image-Making in Medieval Art* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 351.

¹¹ David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 438.

¹² See: “stereotype, n. and adj.,” OED Online. March 2023. Oxford University Press. <https://www-oed-com.ezproxy.library.wisc.edu/view/Entry/189956?rsk=jiPy4q&result=1&isAdvanced=false> (accessed March 08, 2023). “Caricature, n.,” OED Online. March 2023. Oxford University Press. <https://www-oed-com.ezproxy.library.wisc.edu/view/Entry/27971> (accessed March 08, 2023). “Imagination, n.,” OED Online. March 2023. Oxford University Press. <https://www-oed-com.ezproxy.library.wisc.edu/view/Entry/91643?redirectedFrom=imagination> (accessed March 08, 2023).

tactics beyond simply identifying characters with *tortils*, turbans, brown/black skin, demonic attributes and scimitars. As Jeffrey Jerome Cohen writes “race cannot be reduced to any of its multiple signs. Religion, descent, custom, law, language, monstrosity, geographical origin, and species are essential to the construction of medieval race. Although inextricably corporeal, race is also performative, a phenomenon of the body in motion [...] race is embodied performance.”¹³ Adapting Cohen’s important observations, I apply them to an art historical methodology to create a *crypto-visual* lens of understanding racialization. By *crypto-visual* I mean that epidermal and sartorial approaches which taxonomize “Otherness,” though important, do not accurately capture the complexity of medieval formulations of race. Less-obvious markers and less expected categories such as the deceptive whiteness and masquerade of the Islamic Other(ed), the Monstrosity of “Saracenic” topography, the appropriation of Christian iconography, the expropriation of Islamic iconography, and the visualized accusations regarding Islamic behavioral practices can serve as equally substantive and powerful indexes.¹⁴

¹³ Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, “Race,” in *A Handbook of Middle English Studies*, edited by Marion Turner, 109-122, (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013): 111-112. See also, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, “On Saracen Enjoyment: Some Fantasies of Race in Late Medieval France and England,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31 (2001): 115-116.

¹⁴ In addition to my explanation about my use of “Saracen” in footnote 4, the employment of “Saracenic” here, a term previously used by European art historians to discuss Islamic architecture, conveys Latin Christian ideas about lands belonging to the “Sultan of Babylon.” Potentially, I could use Marshall Hodgson’s popular phrase “Islamicate” to describe phenomena and materials born within a diverse Muslim polity as opposed to those with specifically religious purposes. However, Shahab Ahmed, in seeking to defend the value “Islamic” pushes back on this differentiation as it narrows the term to a religious definition which elides cultural aspects that often reach over confessional divides. He further states “*whether or not an actor is Muslim is irrelevant to the matter of whether or not the act or the product of the act is Islamic*” that is to say something that is to say a “hermeneutical engagement with Con-Text of Revelation to Muhammad.” As the “product of the act” in the case I describe is a Latin Christian fantasy of Egypt, it cannot by Ahmed’s definition be described as “Islamic” either. Nor does the Arabic term Dar al-Islam sufficiently communicate the Latin Christian anxieties and desires over these lands. Thus, I am left with the problematic term “Saracenic.” Bannister Fletcher in the early twentieth century described “Saracenic” architecture as “the product of a religion which had no special country.” I reappropriate this term to describe Latin Christian perceptions of Islamic topography. After all, the term Babylon as discussed above, refers to multiple locations. Such repositioning denies a narrative of “degenerate” architecture but instead imagines an imposing phenomenon that crusaders feared and understood to be a weapon that impeded their success. For “Saracenic” see: Bannister Fletcher, *A History of Architecture on the Comparative Method for the Student, Craftsman, and Amateur* (New York Charles Scribner’s Sons 1901), 473. See: Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*, vol. 1 (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1974). See also: Shahab Ahmed, *What is Islam: The*

I further develop this neologism through Elizabeth Alexander's discussion of "the shock of delayed comprehension." Borrowing this term from poet Adrienne Su, Alexander recounts her experience of discovering a horrifyingly racist aspect in the painting of *Elihu Yale and his Servant* at Yale University. Despite her previous encounters with this image, she describes suddenly noticing that the dark-skinned servant who accompanies the institution's namesake wears a silver collar. This motif not only renders the servant a slave but functions as a visual metaphor for Yale's high status.¹⁵ Alexander's realization parallels the veiled and pernicious implications of medieval racialization, which are often not completely apparent on first encounter. Still, the crypto-visual is not simply about detecting hidden symbols. Seeing racialization in these manuscripts often requires looking at the entire narrative and pictorial composition rather than the sum of its iconographic parts.

Thus, the embodiment of racialization does not only occur in the components specific to a single character but from signs, symbols, clues, and traces which exist around it, from the relationship of multiple figures across connected artistic traditions, interlaced between the semiotic image of text and the textual image. Put another way, racialized embodiment does not start and stop at the image of the "Sultan of Babylon" character in a given scene but includes everything that surrounds him. The other figures, objects and backgrounds also *inform* his embodied racialization. The rendering of his analogues in other manuscripts *reflects* his embodied racialization. The ways he might break out of the confines of the illumination and interact with the textual realm *reveals* his embodied racialization. The materials that used to illuminate him *capture* his embodied racialization. The manner in which the text differentiates

Importance of Being Islamic (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 449 (for quote), 445-452. See also: Rajabzadeh, "Depoliticized Saracen," 4-7.

¹⁵ Elizabeth Alexander, *The Trayvon Generation*, (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2022), 27-30. See also: Adrienne Su, "Personal History," *Poem-a-Day*, December 4th, 2019. <https://poets.org/poem/personal-history>.

from or responds to the visual program *constitutes* embodied race. While the “usual-suspects” remain helpful signposts and clues for “seeing difference,” this project champions exploring new vistas where imagined behavioral qualities are visualized by less-apparent metaphors that racialize the “Saracen” prince.¹⁶

As part of this broader motif of *crypto-visibility*, I offer four sub-themes that late medieval European Latin Christian manuscripts illuminate about premodern racialization through the Sultan of Babylon. First, the depiction of the Sultan demonstrates that medieval racialization is character or agent-driven. His body encompasses the actions of all Muslims under his command and so their collective body, their geographical locations, possessions, and practices all function as an extension of the Sultan’s body politic. While previous scholars have noted how Latin Christian notions of Islamic societies present them as reflective of European Latin Christian courts, less attention has been paid to fabricated “Political Office–Polity” as a category of racialization.¹⁷ Even in moments when the Sultan is not clearly delineated in the visual program, throngs of “Saracen” warriors, landscapes, topographies, statues, banners, heraldry, historiated initials, monsters and animals all contribute to building the racialized body

¹⁶ As Heng importantly states race “can function both socioculturally and biopolitically.” Keeping this framework in mind, I focus on the ways that manuscripts deploy less-expected metaphors as crucial in racializing the Sultan. The site of racialization is not always in dark skin color, turbans, or scimitars but rather the clues that direct the viewer in reading the scene more deeply as to better understand the threat of the Islamic Other(ed) to “Christendom.” The reception of these images is thereby equally important. Indeed, as David Areford writes in discussing medieval manuscripts—“the image needed the viewer as much as the viewer needed the image.” Heng, *Invention of Race*, 27. See also: David S. Areford, “Reception.,” *Studies in Iconography* 33 (2012): 86.

¹⁷ William Wistar Comfort originally outlined the ways that “Saracen” political society is imagined as a parallel to Latin Christian ones. In this framework, the Sultan is the equivalent to the European king. Of course, the Latin Christian and Islamic courts differed in terms of royal power, performance administration (not to mention the changes from polity to polity within this simplified binary). Moreover, this relationship cannot be read as a neutral one but instead as a racialized foil whereby Latin Christians imagined themselves through what they were not what they were not (what Julia Kristeva would call “abjection.” See: William Wistar Comfort, “The Literary Role of the Saracens in the French Epic,” *PMLA* 55 no. 3 (1940): 631. See also: Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 5-13. Michael Uebel first illustrated the connections between Latin Christian perceptions of Saracens. Michael Uebel has drawn a parallel between Kristevan abjection and Latin Christian narratives of “Saracen” alterity. Michael Uebel, “Unthinking the Monster: Twelfth-Century Responses to Saracen Alterity,” in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, (Twin Cities: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 266-267, 280-282.

because he constantly machinates against “Christendom” within the written narrative. Text and image always work together and just because the Sultan does not *appear* in a given image does not indicate the absence of his presence.

Second, Latin Christian trade and cultural encounter did not simply produce a syncretic relationship between various polities but also facilitated European Latin Christian race-building as it moved towards the sixteenth century. Indeed, through economic exchange, Islamic political leaders became unwilling participants in their own racialization as Europeans employed motifs from Islamic polities in shaping their imagination of the “Sultan of Babylon.” To this extent, the project forefronts royal performances and self-articulations of historical Sultans as a point of comparison in examining the ways in which Latin Christians weaponized their understandings of these rulers when “creating” the “Sultan of Babylon.” Such reframings position the process of European Latin Christian racialization as part of a premodern “global” interaction.¹⁸

Furthermore, this lens incorporates the agency of the historical Islamic figures, who, far from being marginalized powers, consistently dominated their Latin Christian equivalents during the Crusading period.

Third is the importance of materiality.¹⁹ Manuscripts do not merely serve as a static collection of independent folios, texts, and images but objects onto themselves which require us to consider their entirety.²⁰ In reading racialization with a crypto-visual lens we must also

¹⁸ As Heng writes: “*the global* in premodernity is not the same thing as *the planetary*, and a premodernist working on the global should not feel a requirement to address every place on the planet, nor feel a corollary obligation to establish the interconnectivity of each corner of the earth with every other corner of the earth.” See: Geraldine Heng, *The Global Middle Ages: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 16-17. For further discussion of the “Global Middle Ages” see: Geraldine Heng and Lynn Ramey, “Early Globalities, Global Literatures: Introducing a Special Issue on the Global Middle Ages.” *Literature Compass* 11, no. 7 (2014): 1-6.

¹⁹ For some of the literature on materiality writ large see: Eric Palazzo, “Art, Liturgy and the Senses in the Middle Ages,” *Viator* 41, no. 1 (2010): 25-56. See also: Bruce Holsinger, *On Parchment: Animals, Archives, and the Making of Culture from Herodotus to the Digital Age* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2023).

²⁰ For examples of materiality as a methodology in understanding manuscripts see: Alexandros Tsakos, “Materiality and Physicality of Medieval Manuscripts from Christian Nubia,” *cahiers d’études africaines*, 236

address their contents and make-up, especially gold illumination. Why did the producers and patrons of these manuscripts spend so much time, energy, and coin to illuminate the enemy? On one hand, the illuminators may have simply been following a convention, whereby gold communicated the enemy polity's own royalty as well as parity. Previous scholars have noted Latin Christian narratives of Islamic obsession with gold serves as a metaphor for their supposed idol-worship.²¹ By depicting the Islamic Other(ed) often associated with gold, the materiality of the manuscript accuses Muslims of a materialistic mentality akin to idolatry and possessing an overabundant amount of wealth. The strategic use of gold, particularly in crusade propaganda manuscripts, invites the viewer to challenge the Islamic enemy, to take back the "Holy Land" and in so doing, remove this wealth from him and reshape the material into "good" Christian gold.²² Moreover, the material object itself within the manuscript serves as a downpayment, an allusion, or a "preordainment" to Christian success, as here the "Saracenic" gold already exists in the hands of the Latin Christian viewer. Thus, materiality functions on multiple levels not only as the object of racialized accusations in need of correction but also as emblems of a pre-supposed imagination of colonial authority.

Finally, as medieval conceptions of race are connected to but independent from modern ones, this project considers the visual reification of what Suzanne Conklin Akbari has termed a "process of racialization" within the medieval as opposed to an established "discourse."²³ Even

(2019): 967-992. See also: Henrike Lähnemann, "The materiality of medieval manuscripts," *Oxford German Studies* 45, no. 2 (2016): 121-141.

²¹ For examples of idol worship and gold connotations see: Tolan, *Saracens: Islam in the European Imagination*, 119-121. See also: Debra Higgs Strickland, "Meanings of Muhammad in Later Medieval Art," in *The Image of the Prophet between Ideal and Ideology: A Scholarly Investigation*, ed. Christiane J. Gruber and Avinoam Shalem, 147-164 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 150-151.

²² Camille, *The Gothic Idol*, 144-146.

²³ Suzanne Conklin Akbari, "Race, Environment, Culture: Medieval Indigeneity, Race and Racialization," in *A Cultural History of Race in the Middle Ages*, ed. Thomas Hahn, *A Cultural History of Race 2* (London 2021), 55-61.

though we can find tendrils of “race-making” or “race-thinking” in the premodern past, it does not constitute the same level of “fixity” or “absoluteness,” (at least in regard to the Sultan) as it gains in early modern Europe from the late fifteenth-century onward through increasingly biological categories such as physiognomy, blood and heritage and pseudo-anthropological understandings of cultural difference.²⁴ This is not to say that “race” ever gains full stability after this period (as it constantly changes) but rather that this latter iteration claims greater stability than the late medieval. Scholars such as Urvashi Chakravarty, Ayanna Thompson and Geraldine Heng warn against a “teleology of race,” or the notion that race has a chronological trajectory.²⁵ Keeping this important observation in mind, I do not make the argument that “racialization” becomes “race” between late medieval and early modern, but rather that the racialization of the Islamic Prince was fundamentally transformed in the mid-fifteenth century due to geopolitical realities. In the fourteenth and early-to-mid fifteenth-century depictions of the Sultan we find a lack of iconographic consistency coupled with characterizations that ever-approach a different racial moment. At this culmination, the Islamic enemy transitions from the “Sultan of Babylon” to “Il Gran Turco” or the Great Turk (in the aftermath of the Ottoman conquest of

²⁴ Hahn has previously written “A robust engagement that takes “medieval race”—as constituted by religion, geopolitics, physiognomy, color—as at once parallel and discontinuous with more recent racial discourses will ensure that the Middle Ages does not become (remain?) an excluded Other.” See: Thomas Hahn, “The difference the Middle Ages makes: color and race before the modern world,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31, no. 1 (2001): 26. For “race-making” see Heng, *Invention of Race*, 33 for “race-thinking” see: Cord Whitaker, *Black Metaphors: How Modern Racism Emerged from Medieval Race-Thinking*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019). For a discussion of blood linked religion see: Brian A. Catlos, *Muslims of Medieval Latin Christendom, c. 1050–1614* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 290-291. Heng also devotes an entire chapter on the “absolute difference” in late medieval England. According to Heng, English Latin Christians delineated themselves from the Jewish population through biological notions of shared blood (explaining my caveat for Muslims above). See: Heng, *Invention of Race*, 55-109. For a larger discussion of early modern costume books of Turks see: Amanda Wunder. “Western Travelers, Eastern Antiquities, and the Image of the Turk in Early Modern Europe,” *Journal of Early Modern History* 7, no. 1-2 (2003): 89-119. Wunder does not frame these images in terms of “race” but rather Orientalized depictions. However, I contend that such images provided more fixed imaginations in the second part of the fifteenth and sixteenth century, in part due to shifts in portraiture and printing building a different level of racial fixity than that of the “Sultan of Babylon” in the late medieval.

²⁵ Urvashi Chakravarty and Ayanna Thompson. “Race and Periodization: Introduction,” *New Literary History* 52, no. 3 (2021): vi-vii.

Constantinople in 1453) demonstrating a shift from late medieval racialized “office-polity” to an early modern raced “princely racialized ethnicity.” These types of distinctions borne out textually and visually allow us to consider the nuances around the conceptualization of race between these periods.

I. Where is Babylon?

“Babylon” holds an imprecise meaning in medieval European Latin Christian narratives, at times referring both to the ancient Mesopotamian city and to medieval Egypt.²⁶ Thus, on one hand, Babylon frequently refers to the lands controlled by Nebuchadnezzar and his various Persian successors.²⁷ On the other hand, the attribution of pre-modern Cairo as “Babylon” comes from the Romans and thus continues into medieval European Latin Christian epistemology.²⁸ In the travels of Sir John Mandeville, the narrator attempts to differentiate the two, distinguishing “Greater Babylon” as the Biblical site while “Lesser Babylon” refers to the lands belonging to the Sultan of Cairo.²⁹ The fourteenth century *mappa mundi* from Hereford Cathedral depicts a parallel distinction labelling the area surrounding Cairo “Infanita Babylonia” (Lesser Babylon) situated in the larger area of *Terra Egypta* (Egypt)---- a different region entirely from *Terra Babylonia*.³⁰ Still, these distinctions are frequently blurred in the Latin Christian imagination. In *Li Livres dou Tresor*, a universal history written by Brunetto Latini in the 13th century,

²⁶ Andrew Scheil, *Babylon Under Western Eyes: A Study of Illusion and Myth* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), 259.

²⁷ We can find one example of the recording of this “knowledge” in Sanudo’s propaganda manuscripts which includes genealogical charts for the “Kings of Babylon” as including these historical figures. See: Marino Sanudo Torsello, *The Book of the Secrets of the Faithful of the Cross Liber Secretorum Fidelium Crucis*, ed. Peter Locke (London: Routledge, 2016), 171.

²⁸ Peter Sheehan, *Babylon of Egypt: the Archaeology of Old Cairo and the Origins of the City*. Vol. 4 (Oxford University Press, 2015) 1-2.

²⁹ Mandeville. *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville*, 59-61.

³⁰ See: Asa Mittman, *Maps and Monsters in Medieval England* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 92.

Babylon's history is conflated with that of the Egyptians. Under the rubric "dou reigne de Babilloine et d'Egypte (the Reign of Babylon and Egypt) the main text begins by stating "the reign of Babylon is recounted by the Egyptians and Assyrians."³¹ The text goes on to relate the reign of Nebuchadnezzar (as a persecutor of Jewish people) and his various successors including Cyrus the Great. In the chapter directly preceding the above mentioned rubric, the text relates who Cyrus' son Cambyses who had conquered Egypt.³² Historically, narratively and spatially (within the context of the manuscript), "Babylon" possesses a double meaning which refers both to the ancient biblical city in Mesopotamia and to its counterpart in Egypt. We can find another example of this associative phenomenon in Marin Sanudo's *Liber Secretorum*. At one point the author draws a parallel between Cyrus the Great and the Sultan of Babylon. Sanudo relates a narrative where the Persian king divided the Euphrates during his conquest of ancient Babylon because he wished to "punish" the river. Sanudo goes on to relate that he does not know whether the Sultan has done the same action to the Nile but that such a reality should not discourage would-be crusaders from trying to take Egypt.³³ By placing Cyrus' relationship with Babylon/Euphrates and the Sultan's with Babylon/Nile, the text typologizes one through the other. In other words, both rhetorically (through the actions in the location) and semiotically (in repetition of a name for two different locations) Babylon becomes a larger geographic entity. Put another way, Babylon on the Nile supersedes Babylon on the Euphrates in the medieval imaginary when the axis of evil is shifted to Egypt and its Sultan as occupiers of the biblical

³¹ Brunetto Latini, *Li Livres dou Tresor: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies*, vol. 257, ed. Spurgeon Baldwin & Paul Barrette (Tempe, Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2003), 21. See also BnF fr. 573, f. 20v.

³² *Ibid.* 20.

³³ Marino Sanudo Torsello, *The Book of the Secrets of the Faithful of the Cross Liber Secretorum Fidelium Crucis*, ed. Peter Locke (London: Routledge, 2016), 100.

“Holy Land.” As Andrew Scheil has observed, for medieval Europeans, this vague land functioned as an “antagonist for a reified West [...] or a metonymic marker for a reified “East.”³⁴

As an essentialized polity, “Babylon” also required an essentialized prince to govern it. On the broadest level “Sultan of Babylon” always refers to a political leader of the “Saracens,” a Latin Christian polemic used to racialize Muslims.³⁵ From the mid-seventh century onward, different Islamic polities controlled the different locations that could be considered “Babylon.” This knowledge is made legible in travel narratives and maps which persistently position Babylon in relationship to Mecca, the most sacred city for Muslims.³⁶ Like the land he governs, this prince is a complex construction. Medieval Europeans deployed this title almost ubiquitously, using it for numerous Islamic figures. For example, in the Middle English romance *Sultan of Babylon*, the eponymous villain Laban eats fried snakes and drinks tiger’s blood, symbolizing the disgusting exoticism of the East.³⁷ Furthermore, the text relates how this prince appears to have political control over multiple locations including Babylon, Ascalon (in the Levant) and Baghdad.³⁸ At times, even more historical chronicle treatment of the Sultan parallels that of the different types of “Babylon.” In *Les Grandes Chroniques de France* the Sultan unleashes the “Saracen” giant Ferragut (who descends from Goliath) to ravage Iberia, thereby

³⁴ Scheil, *Babylon Under Western Eyes*, 274.

³⁵ Shokoofeh Rajabzadeh, “The Depoliticized Saracen and Muslim Erasure,” *Literature Compass*, vol. 16, no. 9-10 (2019): 1-8. “Saracen” refers to a Latin Christian polemic that acquires a false etymology in the Middle Ages which accuses Muslims of claiming descent from Sarah instead of Hagar.

³⁶ Mandeville. *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville*, 62. See also: Evelyn Edson, “Reviving the Crusade: Sanudo’s Schemes and Vesconte’s Maps,” in *Eastward Bound: Travel and Travellers, 1050–1550*, ed. Rosamund Allen (Manchester, 2004), 142-143.

³⁷ Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, “On Saracen Enjoyment: Some Fantasies of Race in Late Medieval France and England,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31 (2001): 129-130. Cohen also notes that such behaviors mark the Saracen as “excessive” as will be discussed later.

³⁸ *Three Middle English Charlemagne Romances New edition*, ed., Alan Lupack (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1991), 7.

muddying the borders of the geopolitical and the legendary.³⁹ Other historical accounts sometimes omit the Sultan's name altogether making it difficult to determine which historical character the text refers to. As the "Sultan of Babylon" is often identified solely through his toponymic marker, the specific identity of this character does not actually matter so long as he functions as a racialized representative of *Dar al-Islam*, and the lands and waters therein.⁴⁰

II. Historiography of "Race in the Middle Ages"

The trajectory of "Race in the Middle Ages" has been developing over the last thirty years. Building on the "Critical Race Theory" that developed out of legal studies by scholars such as Derrick Bell, Jean Stefancic, and Richard Delgado and postcolonial studies such as that of Gaytri Spivak, Homi Bhabha and Edward Said, this sub-discipline has only gained currency in the field in the past half-decade.⁴¹ This historiography traces three phases of "race" in Medieval Studies. The first championed "ethnicity" to describe medieval cultural differences and derided the use of "race" as presentist.⁴² The second phase used language relating to alterity, religious difference, Orientalism, colonialism, "Monster Studies" and race as methodologies for

³⁹ Jules Marie Édouard Viard, *Les Grandes Chroniques de France*, vol. 3 (Paris: Société de l'histoire de France, 1920-1953), 240.

⁴⁰ For a general discussion of medieval shifts from ethnonyms to toponyms See: Claire Weeda, "Ethnic Identification and Stereotypes in Western Europe circa 1100-1300," *History Compass* 12 no. 7 (2014): 587. *Dar al-Islam* is the Arabic word for "Islamic lands" or (literally Abode of Islam) See also: Heng, *Invention of Race*, 112.

⁴¹ Derrick A. Bell Jr. "Brown v. Board of Education and the interest-convergence dilemma." *Harvard law review* (1980): 518-533. Gayathri Chakravorty Spivak, *Can the Subaltern Speak?* in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. C. Nelson and L. Grossberg (Macmillan Education: Basingstoke, 1988), 271-313. Bhabha, Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (Routledge, 1994). Edward W Said. *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978). ed. Richard Delgado, and Jean Stefancic, *Critical race theory: The cutting edge*. Temple University Press, 2000). See also: ed. Richard Delgado, and Jean Stefancic. *Critical race theory: An introduction*. Vol. 87 (New York: New York University Press 2023).

⁴² An important critique of this historiography and specifically the *JMEMS* has been well articulated by Dorothy Kim's critical contribution. See: Kim, "Introduction to literature compass," 1-16.

understanding medieval imaginations of the “Other.”⁴³ Finally, the critical turn for this discipline has been Geraldine Heng’s *Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* published in 2018 which has since inspired a series of scholarship that treat race and racialization as a methodology for studying the Middle Ages. These phases did not occur in a fixed, linear timeline, instead frequently overlapped with one another.

II.A “Ethnicity not Race”

Until rather recently, the term “race” has been viewed as an ahistorical and anachronistic one when applied to the medieval past. Indeed, previous attempts to even consider this terminology have been met with strong resistance from the scholarly establishment. Interestingly enough, early research into medieval depictions of Blackness can be traced back not to an interest in “race” in Medieval Studies but rather to a broader transhistorical study in Jean Devisse and Michael Mollat’s *Image of the Black in Western Art*. Devisse crucially observes that, for the medieval Europeans, internal sinfulness manifests externally especially as it relates to skin color.⁴⁴ Later works such as Philippe Senac’s *L’Image de L’Autre* and Norman Daniel’s *Islam and the West* also serve as early studies into the ways Latin Christians imagined the Islamic Other(ed).⁴⁵ In the late 1990s Benjamin Braude discussed the relationship between the Sons of Noah and notions of geographic ethnicity. However, as Braude explains these geographic

⁴³ While I have structurally separated this group from the “watershed” section, Dorothy Kim notes that a number of the scholars first mentioned here are important for premodern critical race studies (PCRS). See Kim, “Introduction,” 3-4. See also: Cohen, 2013, 115. For a discussion of PCRS see: Margot Hendricks “Coloring the past, rewriting our future: RaceB4Race 2, Folger Library, Washington DC, Paper presented at Race Before Race 2, Folger Library, Washington, DC. A recording and transcript of her talk at the Folger Library is available: <https://www.folger.edu/institute/scholarly-programs/race-periodization/margo-hendricks>.

⁴⁴ Jean Devisse, *The Image of the Black in Western Art: From the Early Christian Era to the “Age of Discovery,”* trans. William G. Ryan Vol 2. Pt. 1: *From the Demonic Threat to the incarnation of Sainthood* (New York: William Morrow, 1979), 59-61.

⁴⁵ Philippe Sénac, *L’Image de l’Autre: l’Occident médiéval face à l’Islam* (Paris: Flammarion, 1983) & Norman Daniel, *Islam, and the West: The Making of an Image* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 1960).

ethnicity has no fixity in the medieval past and the associations of Blackness and Ham become far more concrete in the 19th century.⁴⁶ In doing so he critiques the notion of race in the medieval past as being imported into the field by modernism.⁴⁷ Responding to the 1996 “Race in the Middle Ages” panel at the International Conference for Medieval Studies at Kalamazoo MI, Robert Bartlett, and William Chester Jordan all challenge the idea of race in the medieval in different though intersecting ways. Bartlett writes that the term “ethnicity” better describes social differences in the medieval past because the indexes for those differences were “cultural” ones rather than physiognomic or somatic.⁴⁸ In one example, he provides the King of Poland calling upon language as the vessel which united his nation against the Germans.⁴⁹ In the same Winter 2001 issue of the *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* as Bartlett’s contributions, Jordan asks the important question “why race” is a worthwhile category in considering the medieval past.⁵⁰ Pushing back against Bartlett’s terminological differentiation, Jordan writes that “ethnicity” and “race” function as synonyms.⁵¹ In place of this vocabulary, Jordan directs scholars to think about the ways various medieval religions polemicized their political opponents.⁵² Despite the shift away from the frameworks of “ethnicity-- not race” (to paraphrase Bartlett) in more recent scholarship, some medievalists continue to use this framework. In his recent book on the Byzantine Empire *Romanland: Ethnicity and Empire* Anthony Kaldellis, uses

⁴⁶ Benjamin Braude, “The Sons of Noah and the Construction of Ethnic and Geographical Identities in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods, *The William and Mary Quarterly* 54 no. 1. (1997): 114-123.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 122.

⁴⁸ Robert Bartlett, “Medieval and Modern Concepts of Race and Ethnicity,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31 no. 1. (2001): 45, 48 (for “culture creates ethnicity”).

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁵⁰ While Jordan is sometimes lumped together with these other scholars of the “Old Guard” it should be noted that his objection takes a much broader view. Even though what would be described as thinking about the medieval race from a more global perspective and not simply focusing on Latin Christian formulations of race-making. William Chester Jordan, “Why Race?,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31, no. 1 (2001): 161.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 168.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 171.

this term to describe the political realities of the multi-ethnic “Roman” state.⁵³ As he expresses, “Romanness” within the empire was incredibly malleable and an individual’s ethnicity could change by adopting Roman language, costume, religion and culture.⁵⁴ Yet at the same time he also provides examples of ethnic immutability where polemics regarding an individual’s foreignness could be weaponized even generations after their “Romanization.”⁵⁵ While Kaldellis insists on this terminology of ethnicity, such examples fit well with the contemporary scholarship’s definitions surrounding medieval racialization.

II.B Otherness, Foreignness Religious Alterity, Monstrosity & Orientalism

Yet even while Bartlett, Chester Jordan and others have critiqued the use of “race” other scholars in the same Winter issue of *JMEMS* moved the needle towards thinking critically about this term. The editor of this issue, Thomas Hahn takes something of an intermediate position. He notes the lack of visual fixity in medieval formulations of race vis a vis epidermal color on its implications.⁵⁶ Acknowledging that for some “race-ing the Middle Ages smacks of presentism,” he offers that scholars instead should recognize the dissonance between premodern and modern race-making.⁵⁷ In his article “On Saracen Enjoyment: Some Fantasies of Race in Medieval France and England” Jeffrey Jerome Cohen focuses on the conflated Latin Christian “monstrous” imagination of the “Saracen as a racialized figure of ultimate difference.”⁵⁸ Building on contemporaneous articles by Suzanne Conklin Akbari and Geraldine Heng, he writes “race [is]

⁵³ Anthony Kaldellis, *Romanland: Ethnicity and Empire in Byzantium* (London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2019), 11-24.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 135-136.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 135.

⁵⁶ Hahn, “The difference the Middle Ages makes: color and race,” 18-25.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁵⁸ Cohen, “On Saracen Enjoyment, 115. The threads in this article build on Cohen’s important contribution to the field of “Monster Studies” see: Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, “Monster Culture (Seven Theses), in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Twin Cities: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 7-8.

inextricable from religion, location, class, language, bodily appearance and comportment, anatomy, physiology, and other medical/ scientific discourses of somatic functioning.”⁵⁹ He would later expand on this work in his discussion about race as an embodied category in the medieval.⁶⁰ Paralleling Thomas Hahn, Sharon Kinoshita also addresses the separation between the differences between pre-modern and modern race, though she does so by engaging with postcolonial scholarship. In her discussion of *Chanson de Roland* she notes instability of religious binaries of Christian/Muslim while also recognizing the ways that the Muslim queen functions as a representative of those differences.⁶¹ Responding to Said’s *Orientalism* Kinoshita writes “disengaging *the Roland* from this colonial context [...] brings into focus the fluidity characterizing medieval notions of difference.”⁶² Kinoshita reinforces this type of research in her later book *Medieval Boundaries* which also critiques the scholarly over-emphasis on medieval-polemical narratives on Muslims thereby characterizing a *long durée* from medieval to modern racialization and instead incorporates the complexities of realpolitik interactions between various polities.⁶³ Other literary scholars such as Lynn Tarte Ramey and Siobhain Bly Calkin considered the imaginary representations of Muslims in French and English romantic traditions respectively through postcolonial lenses.⁶⁴ In the case of the latter, Bly outlines the figure of the “Saracen” as

⁵⁹ Ibid., 116. See also: Suzanne Conklin Akbari, “From Due East to True North: Orientalism and Orientation,” in *The Postcolonial Middle Ages*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000), 19–34. Geraldine Heng, “The romance of England: Richard Coeur de Lyon, Saracens, Jews, and the politics of race and nation,” in *The Postcolonial Middle Ages* ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (New York: St. Martin’s Press 2000): 98-174.

⁶⁰ Cohen, “Race,” in *A Handbook of Middle English Studies*, edited by Marion Turner, (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013): 109-112.

⁶¹ Sharon Kinoshita. “‘Pagans are wrong, and Christians are right’: Alterity, Gender, and Nation in the ‘Chanson de Roland’.” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31, no. 1 (2001): 79-80.

⁶² Ibid., 103.

⁶³ Sharon Kinoshita, *Medieval Boundaries: Rethinking Difference in Old French Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006) 4-8.

⁶⁴ Lynn Tarte Ramey, *Christian, Saracen and Genre in Medieval French Literature: Imagination and Cultural Interaction in the French Middle Ages* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 1-7.

a body of difference through which the English identity could address anxieties of “foreignness,” both at home and abroad.⁶⁵

Much in the same vein as Kinoshita, Ramey, and Calkin and culminating years of research, Suzanne Conklin Akbari’s book *Idols of the East* reformulates Said’s work by considering medieval connections between Islam and the “East.” Working beyond simply somatic differences of the Other, Akbari understands this “Medieval Orientalism” through geography, climate and religion in a variety of texts including maps, romances and scientific discourses.⁶⁶

While it is certainly true that the scholarly development around “Race in the Middle Ages” has been dominated by literary studies, it would be unfair to state that historians and art historians had no contribution. Adding to Norman Daniel’s previous work John Victor Tolan’s several monographs consider the reasons for Latin Christian polemics against Muslims and tracks the changes over time. In his more recent work, he traces the historical and hagiographical shifts between the infamous meeting between St. Francis and Ayyubid Sultan al-Kamil from the medieval to the modern, not only through text but images as well.⁶⁷ Perhaps one of the most significant and early scholars on the visualization of Otherness in the medieval era is Debra Strickland. Focusing on iconography as well as climate and geographical notions of physiognomic difference, Strickland traces the methods through which Latin Christians deployed various visual codes to represent Jews, “Saracens,” human and infernal Others as monstrous.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Siobhain Bly Calkin, *Saracens and the making of English identity: The Auchinleck Manuscript* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 3-4.

⁶⁶ Akbari, *Idols in the East*, 155-157.

⁶⁷ John Victor Tolan, *Saracens: Islam in the European Imagination* (New York: University of Columbia Press, 2002), 6-10. John Victor Tolan, *Sons of Ishmael: Muslims through European Eyes in the Middle Ages* (Tallahassee: University of Florida Press, 2008). John Victor Tolan, *Saint Francis, and the Sultan: The Curious History of a Christian-Muslim Encounter* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

⁶⁸ Debra Higgs Strickland, *Saracens, demons, & Jews: making monsters in medieval art*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003). See also: Debra Higgs Strickland, “Monstrosity and Race in the Late Middle Ages,” in *The*

Asa Mittman has previously drawn our attention to the intersection of the categories of “monster” and “race” and how scholarship uses “monstrous races,” warning that to continue deploying such terminology would be to legitimize Latin Christian notions of normative culture and society.⁶⁹ Madeline Caviness localizes the transition from depicting flesh tones in human skin to representing a porcelain white for European Latin Christians in manuscript traditions to the court of Louis IX in the thirteenth century. Such transformations tied together imagined European epidermal appearance to notions of purity.⁷⁰ Finally, investigations of medieval race have not simply been limited to the practices of Western European polities. Pamela Patton’s research demonstrates the ways that Iberian Latin Christian depictions of Jewish people from the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries coincided with and importantly diverged from other stereotypes elsewhere in Northern Europe. Alicia Walker considers the ways the Byzantine Empire legitimized its supremacy through the use of “foreign” motifs.⁷¹ At times her work interestingly approaches more contemporaneous scholarly articulations of medieval race. She demonstrates that imperial patronage often “expropriated” “Eastern” iconography, weaponizing it to polemicize Islamic polities and even accuse their co-religionists and citizens of behaving like Muslims.⁷² Finally, Fairchild Ruggles critically uses “race” rather early in this historiography to describe the statuses of Christian born princesses who married Umayyad princes and gave birth to their successors. Despite this progeny being sufficiently Arab in the eyes of the court, their

Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and The Monstrous, ed. Asa Simon Mittman with Peter J. Dendle (New York: Routledge, 2016), 374-378.

⁶⁹ Asa Simon Mittman, “Are the ‘monstrous races’ races?,” *postmedieval: a journal of medieval cultural studies* 6, no. 1 (2015): 47-48.

⁷⁰ Madeline Caviness, “From the Self-Invention of the Whiteman in the Thirteenth Century to The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly,” *Different Visions: A Journal of New Perspectives in Medieval Art* 1 (2008): 18.

⁷¹ Alicia Walker, *The Emperor and the World: Exotic Elements and the Imaging of Middle Byzantine Imperial Power, Ninth to Thirteenth Centuries C.E.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012) 7.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 127-131. See also: Alicia Walker, “Globalism,” *Medieval Art History Today – Critical Terms Special Issue, Studies in Iconography* 33 (2012): 183-196.

mothers remained relegated to a “foreign” status.⁷³ This sketch of the second phase, while not exhaustive, demonstrates the variety of methodologies, and disciplines that assisted in developing race and racialization as worthy of consideration in Medieval Studies.

II.C Watershed

The title I have provided this third phase, “watershed,” is not completely accurate. Many of the scholars included here have been pushing the development of “Race in the Middle Ages” since the first phase and important figures throughout the second. Moreover, some of the scholars initially mentioned in the second phase continue to be important, figures in the current research. However, I place the scholars who appear here in order to highlight the significance of their contributions to a new moment that presses for anti-racist scholarship.⁷⁴ Cord J. Whitaker’s introduction to the 2015 *postmedieval* issue on medieval race excellently frames the ethos of the “watershed” section. Reflecting on Hahn’s *JMEMS* issue from more than a decade ago he writes “yes, the Middle Ages have been thoroughly raced. The question at hand is, exactly how are they raced? Not whether, but how is medieval race-thinking different from modern racism? How does it contribute to the formation of modern racism?”⁷⁵ Most important to this transition is Geraldine Heng’s *Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages*. Heng had previously articulated her more expansive definition of race in her 2011 article, and threads of which appeared in her

⁷³ Fairchild D. Ruggles. “Mothers of a hybrid dynasty: race, genealogy, and acculturation in Al-Andalus.” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 34, no. 1 (2004): 77-88.

⁷⁴ As Kendi writes it is not enough to simply be non-racist, but to instead actively work against and dismantle racist systems. The medievalist scholars whose work follows, not only treat race as a construct in the medieval past but write scholarship which critiques the white nationalistic weaponization of the Middle Ages but also addresses the racist history of Medieval Studies as a discipline. See: Ibrahim X. Kendi, *How to be an Antiracist*, (New York: One World, 2019), 18-20.

⁷⁵ Cord J. Whitaker, “Race-ing the dragon: the Middle Ages, race and trippin’ into the future,” *postmedieval: a journal of medieval cultural studies* 6 (2015): 7.

earlier work.⁷⁶ Still, the book represents a significant new synthesis of scholarship which critically treats a variety of racialization in medieval Europe including that of Jews, Muslims, Mongols, epidermal difference, and First Nation and Romani people. Moreover, the book serves as a theoretical framework for future scholars to elaborate.⁷⁷ Cord J. Whitaker's book *Black Metaphors* asks us to think of race as a "rhetorical mirage" alongside the multiple meanings of Blackness and whiteness which "shimmer" in the medieval past.⁷⁸ He writes "the racial frameworks so dominant today were not as fully entrenched, though they were extant in formative stages."⁷⁹ Other scholars have created new terminology and phrases to address different types of racialization as well as their effects. Sierra Lomuto uses the term "exotic ally" to describe a Christian (or potential Christian) who hails from an "Eastern" polity and will help Latin Christians correct and convert other non-Christian members. Despite such positivist narratives such figures still remained racialized.⁸⁰ Shayama Rajendran argues that the abrupt disappearance of formerly Muslim knights in literature serves as a metaphor for the destruction of "reproductive futures" which signal lingering anxieties over converts and their subsequent

⁷⁶ Geraldine Heng "The invention of race in the European middle ages I: race studies, modernity, and the middle ages 1." *Literature compass* 8, no. 5 (2011): 315-331. Geraldine Heng, *Empire of Magic: Medieval Romance and Politics of Cultural Fantasy*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 12-15. See also: Heng, "The romance of England," 139. As she writes here "The episteme of the thirteenth century and afterward, I contend, is a *racializing discourse* posited on religion, color and bodily difference."

⁷⁷ Heng is not without her detractors. In a polemical (and problematic review), S. J. Pearce argues that Heng perpetuates the very colonization she claims to be dismantling by engaging in linguistic colonialism, adopting the voice of the Latin Christian oppressor when discussing racialization and not incorporating the agency and voice of the marginalized groups. See: Sarah J. Pearce, "The Inquisitor and the Moseret: The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages and the New English Colonialism in Jewish Historiography," *Medieval Encounters* 26, no. 2 (2020): 145-190. For Heng's response for this and other reviews see: Geraldine Heng, "Before Race, and After Race: A Response to the Forum on The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages," *Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry* 9, no. 1 (2022): 159-172.

⁷⁸ Whitaker, *Black Metaphors: How Modern Racism Emerged*, 4-7.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁸⁰ Sierra Lomuto, "The Mongol Princess of Tars: Global Relations and Racial Formation in *The King of Tars* (c. 1330)," *Exemplaria*, 31 no. 3. (2019): 174-175.

mixing with European Latin Christian populations.⁸¹ Adam Miyashiro theorizes the legacy of “white heritage politics” across time by analyzing various imaginations of settler colonial authority from the crusades to the formulation of “Anglo-Saxon.”⁸² Building on the work of Lynn Tarte Ramey and Heng’s scholarship, Victoria Turner emphasizes the performance of race when considering the “Saracen” in French literature, which are not fixed but frequently undulate based on context.⁸³ Shookfeh Rajabzadeh’s important article demonstrates the ways that earlier (even well-meaning) scholars have used the term “Saracen” uncritically, thereby reinforcing the racist and Islamophobic narratives from source material. Furthermore, she encourages present scholars to use more care, with very few exceptions, to replace “Saracen” with “Muslim.”⁸⁴ Other recent scholarship has sought to trouble the type of dichotomy that Rajabzadeh and others have laid out. Writing on Latin Christian imaginations of Muslims through crusade literature Marcel Elias’ recent work coincides with the temporal and geographical interests of this dissertation. He argues that crusader losses engendered a more complicated Latin Christian perspective on Muslims one which took on the shape of simultaneous admiration/ condemnation rather than just the expected Orientalized trope of the “Other.”⁸⁵ Perhaps some of the most important scholarship has centered on critiquing the problem of normative whiteness within Medieval Studies. This attention is certainly contextualized by contemporary American politics. In the aftermath of “Unite the Right” many medievalists felt compelled to not only challenge white nationalist appropriation of

⁸¹ Shyama Rajendran, “E(race)ing the Future: Imagined Medieval Reproductive Possibilities and the Monstrosity of Power,” in *Monstrosity, Disability, and the Posthuman in the Medieval and Early Modern World*, ed. (Richard H. Godden & Asa Simon Mittman, Palgrave, 2019), 135.

⁸² Adam Miyashiro, “Our deeper past: Race, settler colonialism, and medieval heritage politics,” *Literature Compass* 16, no. 9-10 (2019): 1-11.

⁸³ Victoria Turner, *Theorizing Medieval Race: Saracen Representations in Old French Literature* (Cambridge: Legenda, 2019), 14-20.

⁸⁴ Rajabzadeh, “The Depoliticized Saracen and Muslim Erasure,” 1-8.

⁸⁵ Marcel Elias, “Unsettling Orientalism: Toward a New History of European Representations of Muslims and Islam, c. 1200–1450.” *Speculum* 100, no. 2 (2025): 474-475. See also Marcel Elias, *English Literature and the Crusades: Anxieties of Holy War, 1291–1453*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024), 5.

the medieval past but also address the long racist history of the field.⁸⁶ Dorothy Kim's articles from 2019 and 2021 address the disciplinary failures in earlier discussion of "medieval race" to incorporate CRT and postcolonial studies and an intellectual insistence on premodern "racial innocence," respectively.⁸⁷ In the case of the latter, Kim draws battle lines across fields such as history that remain mired in older (racist) definitions of race and juxtaposes these positions with literary studies for a more broader definition.⁸⁸ Mary Rambran-Olm in her scholarship (both public and academic) has contested the use of "Anglo-Saxon" for the field of Old English.⁸⁹ Moreover, she identifies the legacy of white supremacy that still plagues the field because of its temporal isolation from other sub-specialties.⁹⁰ Finally, art history continues to provide important interventions. Pamela Patton considers the intersection of race and class when analyzing how darker skin color in Iberian depictions indicated slave status across the three confessional divides of Christianity, Islam and Judaism.⁹¹ Asa Mittman has since revised his position on "monstrous races," arguing that "race" is an important framework to use in order to counter the anti-race ("color-blind") narratives within the scholarship.⁹² Focusing on the fourteenth century, Thomas Dale has recently linked race-making in Venetian art to imperial

⁸⁶ For example, see: Sierra Lomuto, "Becoming postmedieval: The stakes of the global middle ages," *postmedieval* 11 (2020): 503-512. I mention American politics; the right-wing appropriation of a "medieval" past is a global phenomenon. We can find one such example in the anti-Muslim rhetoric promoted in Hindutva narratives, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) propaganda and Bollywood cinema. See: Amy S. Kaufman, and Paul B. Sturtevant. *The Devil's Historians: How Modern Extremists Abuse the Medieval Past* (University of Toronto Press, 2020), 140.

⁸⁷ Kim, "Introduction to literature compass, 1-16. Dorothy Kim, "The politics of the medieval preracial i," *Literature Compass* 18, no. 10 (2021): 2.

⁸⁸ Kim, "The politics of the medieval preracial i," 3-6.

⁸⁹ Mary Rambran-Olm, "Misnaming the Medieval: Rejecting 'Anglo-Saxon' Studies," History Workshop Online, November 4, 2019, https://www.historyworkshop.org.uk/misnaming-the-medieval-rejecting-anglo-saxon-studies/?fbclid=IwAR1EndSzaJOhf8mTir qWBx434G-_Ehu9OYOk3eKBUhJOiLBqKCDNifD8p44.

⁹⁰ Mary Rambran-Olm, "A Wrinkle in Medieval Time: Ironing out Issues Regarding Race, Temporality, and the Early English," *New Literary History* 52, no. 3 (2021): 388-389.

⁹¹ Pamela Patton, "What Did Medieval Slavery Look Like?" *Speculum* 97.3 (2022), 680-685.

⁹² Asa Simon Mittman, "Anti-Race: The Need for Colour-Sightedness in Medieval and Renaissance Studies," in *Cultural History of Race in the Renaissance and Early Modern Age*, ed. Kim Coles and Dorothy Kim (London: Bloomsbury, 2021), 170.

expansionism and genealogies of race rooted in biblical commentary and humanist rhetoric.⁹³ Byzantine Studies too has also begun to consider race. Roland Betancourt's monograph *Byzantine Intersectionality* intertwines queer theory with those of premodern race. Through a series of case studies, Betancourt argues that the Byzantine past imagined itself as a "post-racial" society though it failed to live up to this standard.⁹⁴ Still despite these contributions, there remains relatively little art historical theorization of "Race in the Middle Ages" that fully accounts for the visually embodied aspects of racialization in medieval cultures.

The scholarship on "medieval race," though expanding, remains heavily dominated by literary scholars. This dissertation seeks to complement their research by centering and theorizing the evidence of the visual. In part, I seek to respond to the claims of Dorothy Kim and Sierra Lomuto who have recently critiqued the primacy given to race as a visual construct. In her article reflecting on Hahns' *JMEMS* 2001 notes his (and others) "ocularcentric fixations."⁹⁵ Again in her most recent article, Kim, thinking through Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí's theorizations, states Western notions of race are "ocularcentric rather than rethinking difference through any of the other senses." She goes on to write:

I suggest that as more research and discussions of medieval race continue to be produced, that [...] the configurations of race may also move away from centering the visual.⁹⁶

Similarly, Lomuto, drawing on Mark Jerung's scholarship on race writes that:

⁹³ Thomas E.A. Dale, "Cultural Encounter, Race, and a Humanist Ideology of Empire in the Art of Trecento Venice." 1-4, 8-14. See also: Thomas E.A. Dale, "Visualizing Muslims and/as Black Africans in Medieval Venice," in *Art, Power, and Resistance in Medieval Art*, ed. Pamela Patton (Princeton: Index of Medieval Art and University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2024), 57-89.

⁹⁴ Roland Betancourt, *Byzantine Intersectionality: Sight, Touch, and Imagination in Byzantium* (Cambridge University Press, 2020), 201.

⁹⁵ Kim, "Introduction to literature," 4.

⁹⁶ Kim, "The politics of the medieval preracial" i," 7. See also: Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí, "Visualizing the body: Western theories and African subjects," in *African gender studies: A reader*, ed. Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí, (London Palgrave Macmillan: 2005), 1-21.

My analysis of *Tars* focuses on how the less visible, yet still present, racial formation of the Mongol figure drives the colonialist fantasy at the core of the romance.⁹⁷

Of course, on one level Kim and Lomuto are certainly correct. Focusing exclusively on specific and expected markers of racialization (including certain types of skin color, accoutrement and costume) limits our understanding. Yet, if this criticism of “ocularcentric fixations” stands, what contributions do Euro-medievalists in Art History make? Indeed, the issue is not actually the role of visibility in race-making, but rather, what art historians have chosen not to see. Learning from these critiques, I formulate my language of crypto-visibility. Crypto-visibility moves us away from a myopic view wherein we rely upon iconographic signs of race such as the hooked nose, darker skin or exoticizing fashions. Though these remain important clues they are not necessarily the main vehicle of racialization. The crypto-visual focuses on the subtler indexes of racialization such as whiteness and sartorial imposterism, topography, materiality, semiotics, text-image interaction, accusations of appropriation and weaponized expropriation. These categories of racialization are not “less visible” as Lomuto might articulate per se (this is, after all, visual art and so these factors are readily visible for the most part) but rather less-expected and less-obvious. To this extent, I counter the charge of “ocularcentric fixation” by championing “slow-looking” that allows us to see, discover and excavate, that which is not superficially apparent.⁹⁸

III. Methodology

⁹⁷ Lomuto, “The Mongol Princess of Tars,” 172-173. See also: Mark Jerung, *Racial Worldmaking: The Power of Popular Fiction* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018), 7.

⁹⁸ For this methodological and pedagogical practice see: Shari Tishman, *Slow looking: The art and practice of learning through observation* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 1-7.

I conceive of Crypto-visualization as a tool for scholars to use to better discern pre-modern formulations of racialization. As part of this broader theme, I also offer four sub-genres through which we can understand the Crypto-visual.

1. **“Top-Down” Racialization** —Racialization in the medieval works as a top-down system where the Islamic prince or ruler drives the narrative and actions of his followers. Indeed, the treatment of the “Sultan of Babylon” parallels the treatment of the Latin Christian king’s “Two Bodies” as theorized by Ernst Kantorowicz.⁹⁹ Thus, we can read scenes with hordes of Muslims, topographic power, historiated initials, and behavioral tropes as all representative of the Sultan’s body politic because the text insists that the Muslims act out his orders. Indeed, the Sultan is the most important “Saracen” figure because he serves as a contemporaneous and specific opponent, a successor to Muhammad, who commands other Muslims. To this extent, racialization does not necessarily need to be genealogical though it does follow a logic of political genealogy.¹⁰⁰

2. **Race-Making through Cross-Cultural Encounter, Historical Knowledge &**

Topographical Experience-This project rejects the notion of cross -cultural encounter narratives proposed by Debra Howard and Rosamond Mack. While Howard argues that we should not frame Venice’s interaction with the Mamluk Sultanate as “Orientalism” due to trade, Mack states that Mediterranean trade “contributed little over time to the

⁹⁹ Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958)1-23.

¹⁰⁰ Dale, “Cultural Encounter, Race, and a Humanist Ideology,” 24. Thomas Dale discusses the “biblical genealogy,” as well as a humanist theory of Trojan lineage for European whiteness in Venetian formulations of racialization. When discussing the apocalyptic propaganda of the Third Crusade Jay Rubenstein writes that in the minds of the Latin Christians that the Prophet “returns through his new general Saladin.” Similarly, the “Sultan of Babylon” functions as a successor to Muhammad. See: Jay Rubenstein, *Nebuchadnezzar’s Dream: The Crusades, Apocalyptic Prophecy and the End of History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 196.

popular understanding of the appearance & character of Orientals.”¹⁰¹ Both of these frameworks presuppose that cultural encounter decreases (or should decrease) racializing narratives rather than considering the ways this contact generated racialization.¹⁰²

Cultural contact just as easily leads to racializing narratives as distance. Indeed, in some contexts, Islamic signs and symbols, as well as those explicitly *not* Islamic, become part of the “Sultan of Babylon” construction. To this extent this project emphasizes that historical or topographical “knowledge” about Islam(dom) accumulated by the Latin Christians can never wholly function as “informational” or “objective.” Rather, this knowledge must always pass through the veil (is always facilitated through) medieval European Latin Christian relationships with Islamic polities.

3. **Materiality of Racialization and the Importance of Gold-** Taking Sarah Ahmed’s phrase “to think of race as a sedimented history is to think how race matters as matter” literally, this project makes materiality central to the process of medieval racialization.¹⁰³

Gold illumination serves as a vessel through which Latin Christian narratives simultaneously accuse Muslims of greed and imagine themselves as soon in the possession of Islamic wealth. While many medieval manuscripts certainly use illumination, in specific contexts related to the “Sultan of Babylon,” this material serves as a visual device to document evidence of the Islamic leader’s materialistic mentality and the need to take it back through crusade and colonization.

¹⁰¹ Deborah Howard, *Venice & the East: The Impact of the Islamic World on Venetian Architecture 1100-1500* (New Haven [Conn.]: Yale University Press, 2000) Rosamond E. Mack, *Bazaar to Piazza: Islamic Trade and Italian Art, 1300-1600* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 148-149.

¹⁰² The ways I discuss racialization functioning parallels the scholarly debates over the implications and limits of *Convivencia* between Christians, Muslims and Jews in Iberia. For this debate see: Hussein Fancy, *The Mercenary Mediterranean: Sovereignty, Religion, and Violence in the Medieval Crown of Aragon*, (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2016), 142-145. See also: Catlos, *Muslims of Medieval Latin Christendom*, 515-535.

¹⁰³ Sara Ahmed, “Race as Sedimented History,” *postmedieval: a journal of medieval cultural studies* 6 (2015): 95.

4. **Race, Racialization and Visual Flux and Optical Indelibility** – When discussing race, racialization and indigeneity, Suzanne Conklin Akbari has recently stated “in the twelfth century [...] racialization is taking place, but the system – or, in Foucauldian terms, the discourse – is not yet fully operational, as it will become in the thirteenth and fourteenth century.”¹⁰⁴ Moving these timetables slightly, I similarly view the racialization of the “Sultan of Babylon” in the fourteenth and fifteenth century as a “process” which shifts towards greater visual fixity in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century through increasingly biological categories (blood, heritage) and pseudo-anthropological knowledge/understandings of culture (portraiture and costume books) which coincides with the invention of the term “race.”¹⁰⁵ I use Akbari’s terminology to contend with two historical moments that share a temporal border between Latin Christian plans for new incursions against the Sultan of Egypt and the rise of the Ottoman Empire and their potential threat to Latin “Christendom.”¹⁰⁶

Combining Akbari’s language alongside the terminology of beneficiaries that Frank Wilderson uses to describe those benefiting from racializing systems I have developed my own definition as well.¹⁰⁷ *Racialization is the process in which a society excludes individuals (either internal or external) from being fully integrated beneficiaries of the society on the basis of geographic aspects (which encompass geographic origins alongside regional diet, clothing,*

¹⁰⁴ Akbari, “Race, Environment, Culture: Medieval Indigeneity, Race and Racialization,” 61.

¹⁰⁵ Charles de Miramon, “Noble dogs, noble blood: the invention of the concept of race in the late Middle Ages,” in *The Origins of Racism in the West*, ed. Miriam Eliav-Feldon, Benjamin Isaac, and Joseph Ziegler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009): 200-217.

¹⁰⁶ As Heng writes that “race-making thus operates as specific historical occasions.” Parallely, the moments that form the “Sultan of Babylon” and “Il Grano Turco” are different (though connected) events. See: Heng, *The Invention of Race*, 3.

¹⁰⁷ Frank B. Wilderson III, *Afropessimism*, (New York: Liveright Publishing, 2020), 94. I am modifying the intention behind Wilderson’s use of “beneficiary” which for him can never apply to Black people but can apply to other marginalized groups.

customs and practices), class, or religion. Furthermore, racialization is an optical phenomenon, even if sometimes obscured or not immediately evident because the pernicious technology always conjures up a body which does not belong.

The “process of racialization” allows for some degree of fixity that remains malleable though it can ultimately lead to greater fixity with a change in historical context. The visual flux of imagining the “Sultan of Babylon” bears optical evidence to these theoretical principles as this character appears in a variety of versions, iterations and guises, though often mimicking the representation of European Latin Christian princes. In theorizing medieval race, Cord Whitaker uses “polysemy” to describe the chiasmic metaphorical meanings of Blackness and Whiteness which change (or “shimmer”) based on context.¹⁰⁸ Adapting this terminology, the embodied Sultan similarly undulates, visually gaining and shedding facets associated with this construction. Despite the repetition of characters with the moniker, race, as it relates to Islamic princes in the medieval is not, as Ruha Benjamin in her discussion of the technology of modern race notes, “automatic.”¹⁰⁹ There is no carbon-copy, no “stereotype” in its most literal form (as a solid type) but a plurality of “Sultan[s] of Babylon” ever-becoming racialized but achieving no true stasis, fixity and absoluteness in shape. Yet through this constant shifting, the Sultan is simultaneously cast with a degree of “optical indelibility.”¹¹⁰ He is always racialized, though the manner in which this occurs constantly changes.

IV. Chapter Outline

¹⁰⁸ Whitaker, *Black Metaphors: How Modern Racism Emerged*, 4-12.

¹⁰⁹ Ruha Benjamin, *Race After Technology: Abolitionist Tools for the New Jim Crow Code* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019), 44-45, for “automatic” 45.

¹¹⁰ I have previously coined this term in: Tirumular (Drew) Narayanan, “The Indelibly ‘Saracen’ Knight: Heraldry, Monstrosity and Race in Fifteenth-Century Arthurian Romance Manuscripts,” in *The Arthurian World*, ed. Miriam Edlich-Muth, Renée Ward, & Victoria Coldham-Fussell (Oxfordshire: Routledge 2022): 326-347.

I lay out my argument in three chapters, applying my methodology to key case studies. The chapters are ordered conceptually gradually moving from the more fantastical to the historical. **Chapter 1** (“Sultan of Babylon, A Sultan of “Saracens” –Monstrosity, Fantasy & Redesignating “Saladin” in the *Luttrell Psalter*) will focus on the “fantastical” representations of the “Sultan of Babylon” in the medieval imaginary. To be clear, the construction itself is a fantasy as historical Islamic princes of Egypt did not refer to themselves as rulers of “Babylon;” nor did they necessarily use the term “Sultan.”¹¹¹ Still, the fantastical constructions inform the more historical narratives produced about this character. At the heart of the chapter, I revisit arguably the most famous “Sultan of Babylon” --an-Nasir Salah-ad-Din. I explore how the famous illumination in the *Luttrell Psalter*, is often erroneously titled “Saladin battling Richard the Lionheart,” in order to fit a European Latin Christian fantasy well after the Middle Ages. As an alternative interpretation that takes account of the patronage of Geoffrey Luttrell, whose family members had participated in the Ninth Crusade, I offer the broader designation “Sultan of Babylon battling a Plantagenet Prince.”¹¹² However, in doing so, I simultaneously push back against Rajabzadeh’s call for scholars to remove the term “Saracen” and replace it with “Muslim” because of the racist and violent implications of this term. While the *religion* of a given character might be Islam, images frequently combine a variety of racializing attributes (which may/may not be “Islamic”) creating the visual construction “Saracen.” Rather than just eliding a variety of marginalized groups under the assumption of Muslim, “Saracen” when properly contextualized as racist and problematic, better describes the complex optical codes in

¹¹¹ Nasser Rabbat has previously noted that Saladin may not have used the title “Sultan” but rather “Malik.” See: Nasser Rabbat. *The Citadel of Cairo: A New Interpretation of Royal Mamluk Architecture*, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995) 8-9.

¹¹² Rajabzadeh, “The Depoliticized Saracen and Muslim Erasure,” 1-8.

the Latin Christian formulation the Islamic Other(ed). After all, the Sultan of Babylon is understood to be a Sultan of “Saracens.”

Working through a variety of iterations, including Laban from *Fierabras*, Esclabor from *Prose Tristan* and the Sultan (the historical al-Kamil) in the *Legenda Maior*, I track the formulation of this epithet and his monstrous body in the visual program. Additionally, I observe that the “conversion” narratives of these Islamic princes remain relegated to the romance and hagiographic traditions rarely if ever appearing in chronicles and propaganda texts.

Chapter 2 (Sword of the Sultan --The Nile and the Anthropocene) considers how the medieval European Latin Christian visual program cast the Nile as a weapon in the “Sultan of Babylon’s” armory, a tool he could control and manipulate against the crusaders. The river symbolizes all the power of that undrawn blade girdled at the Sultan’s waist. Like a sword, the Nile shimmers, gleams, cuts, divides, determines battles, and shapes who controls the land. If the Muslim foot soldiers of other manuscripts use scimitars or curved bows to halt crusader progress, then the Sultan employs his environmental weapon to do the same.

I argue that in fourteenth- and fifteenth- century French and Italian chronicles and propaganda manuscripts, the Nile embodied the Sultan’s racialized ability to impede and antagonize crusade success. With it in hand, the Islamic ruler could decimate opponents, make his territory insurmountable to assault and even dictate the terms of defeat. To this extent, I theorize this imagined weaponization of the Nile through the entwinement of “premodern critical race studies” and the “Anthropocene.” While medievalists have discussed the geographical index of racialization, especially as it relates to climate, less attention has been paid to topography as an embodiment of racialized behavior. For this reason, I turn to the “Anthropocene” a term

originally coined by chemist Paul Crutzen to describe humans as “geological forces.”¹¹³ Humanities disciplines have since deployed this term to discuss social effects upon ecology including how human endeavors and activities, as well as imagination, work to reshape the environment.¹¹⁴ Likewise, Latin Christian relationships with Islamic polities shape their engagement with the Nile. The river functions as a metaphor for the racialized power, threat and destructive capability of the “Sultan,” one that potentially could lose these implications if the “correct” actors possessed it. Crusade narratives did not merely wish to overcome the river but also employ it to their own advantage. In the desire to reclaim the Levant, Italian manuscripts particularly provide instructions on how to use the Nile while illuminating fantasies about turning the river against the Sultan. Evidently, this fluvial force was a double-edged sword both friend and foe. While often an obstacle wielded by the enemy, if the river could be manipulated, it would become a powerful ally. Finally, this chapter attends to other fluvial conflicts in Egypt which typologize Christian supersession, including examples which cast the Egyptian Pharaoh in the Exodus narrative in the guise of the Sultan, articulating the limitations of his control over his topography, because only God can truly control the elements.

Chapter 3 (“Babylon Comes Over Our Walls:” Visualizing Racialization-as-replacement through the “Sack of Acre” in *Les Grandes Chroniques de France*) serves as a case study for investigating race through the lens of what I will be theorizing as imagined *replacement* using images of the “Sack of Acre” scenes from *Les Grandes Chroniques de France*. Here, I adapt Asa Mittman’s concept of colonial “certitude” which he defines as the “colonial perspective, secure in its superiority over the Other, of the correctness of its own perspective; of the medieval

¹¹³ Paul Crutzen, “The ‘anthropocene,’” *Journal de Physique Archives IV France* 12 no. 10 (2002):1-5.

¹¹⁴ Eva Horn & Hannes Bergthaller, *The Anthropocene: Key Issues for the Humanities* (London: Routledge, 2019), 1-16.

geographical enterprise.”¹¹⁵ I envision replacement as a counterpart, an echo, or a complement of certitude. If certitude functions as the articulation of colonial correctness, then replacement serves as the response to an untenable reality when that correctness shatters. It is a clarion call that denounces the usurper as unjust, disorderly, illegitimate, and, of course, temporary because certitude endures. Even though the French crown did not possess the “Holy Land” in the years immediately preceding the 1291 Sack of Acre, they envisioned themselves as its spiritual guardian. Thus, the textual treatment and pictorial depiction of the “Sack of Acre” sections from *Grandes Chroniques de France* articulate the crown’s perceptions of “Saracenic” illegitimacy, racializing the occupying force for shattering the former’s self-constructed role as “Defenders of Christendom.” In other words, the Sultan and his polity function as *replacers* of royal French authority and its claims to certitude in the Middle East. These illuminations are not always as explicit and so replacement is often communicated visually by illuminating the “Saracens” as destructive-imposters who sometimes appear indistinguishable from the Latin Christians or even masquerade as the “French king.” Despite the lack of a stereotype in rendering Islamic forces, the various permutations nonetheless convey notions of usurpation. The historical context around the production of these manuscripts buttresses this argument of French certitude and accusations of Islamic replacement. Anne D. Hedeman demonstrates that Valois kings often celebrated their connections to their crusading Capetian predecessors in the *GCF* as a sign of their own legitimacy.¹¹⁶ Furthermore, many of the extant examples of “Sack of Acre” scenes come from

¹¹⁵ Asa Simon Mittman, “Mandeville’s Jews, colonialism, certainty, and art history,” in *Post-Colonizing the Medieval Image*, ed. Eva Frojmovic & Catherine E. Karkov (London: Routledge, 2017), 91. This notion of certitude can also be read in line with Fanon’s discussion of the colonizing statue as a symbol of a “world which is sure of itself.” Much like these monuments, the *Grandes Chroniques de France* is sure of its authority over the “Holy Land.” See Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 52.

¹¹⁶ Anne D. Hedeman, *The Royal Image: Illustrations of the Grandes Chroniques de France 1274-1422* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 63-65. See also: Anne D. Hedeman, “Valois Legitimacy: Editorial Changes in Charles V’s *Grandes Chroniques de France*,” *Art Bulletin* 66 no. 1 (1984): 104-106.

manuscripts associated with the court of Charles VI. Given that the French king joined the 1388 Barbary Crusade to conquer Tunisia from the Hafsids, the inclusion of this scene in the *GCF* memorializes a French loss at the hands of the Muslims, one that the contemporaneous ruler seeks to avenge or begins to correct.

V. The Stakes—A Brief Autoethnography

Finally, inspired by the recent scholarship from scholars such as Shookfeh Rajabzadeh and Cord Whitaker, I want to conclude by providing an autoethnographic explanation for the importance of studying visual art which racializes Muslim people.¹¹⁷ As I have written elsewhere, my own foray into this material originates from my social upbringing in the aftermath of 9/11. I grew up in a Hindu-Indian household and my family and I were often accused of being Arabs, Muslims, Islamists, and terrorists. Thus, even though my own heritage is removed from the polity, my body, my culture, my language, my tastes have been racially conflated with that of the Islamic Other(ed).¹¹⁸ Such experiences have engendered an affinity in me with these other groups alongside a desire to understand the racializing technologies that render both of us in the same shape. These experiences also inform my interpretation of Islamic subjects—particularly in thinking about how other groups have been made “Islamic” in the European Latin Christian narrative. Those same narratives, while often independent from the ones weaponized against Muslim people today, do have many connecting tendrils which inform the present. Moreover, those who would vilify Muslims today often invoke the medieval European Latin Christian past in their own justifications. With the start of the Gaza War in 2024, Islamophobic sentiment has

¹¹⁷ Rajabzadeh, “The Depoliticized Saracen and Muslim Erasure,” 1-8. Cord J. Whitaker ‘Race-ing the dragon: the Middle Ages, race and trippin’ into the future,’ *postmedieval: a journal of medieval cultural studies* 6 (2015): 3–11.

¹¹⁸ Tirumular (Drew) Narayanan, “‘Why is he Indian?’: Missed Opportunities for Discussing Race in David Lowery’s *The Green Knight* (2021),” *Arthuriana* 33 no. 3 (2023): 47-49.

risen to brand new heights. Dehumanizing perspectives and monsterizing language that I had come to think of as having gone dormant in the aftermath of the War on Terror and the decline of ISIS have come creeping back into common use. There is certainly no new “Sultan of Babylon” in contemporary polemics against Muslims. However, the impulse in late medieval European Latin Christian manuscript illuminations to view Islamic polities as invading, religiously perverse greedy, geographically terrifying, bloodthirsty and imposturous have enduring afterlives.

Chapter 1: “Sultan of Babylon, A Sultan of “Saracens” –Monstrosity, Fantasy & Redesignating “Saladin” in the *Luttrell Psalter*

The bas de page from f. 82 in the fourteenth century *Luttrell Psalter* has traditionally been identified as a fictional battle between two 12th century rulers: Richard the Lionheart King of England & Saladin, Sultan of Egypt (**Figure 1**). The left figure encased in gold armor and wearing three lions passant on his surcoat jousts against and defeats his monstrous blue faced, hook-nosed, fanged opponent who carries a shield emblazoned with a “Ethiopian head”.¹¹⁹ There is little wonder that this image has been frequently used as a quintessential example of the Latin Christian racialization of the Islamic Other(ed), as it presents both the epidermal and cultural aspects of this process, as well as the “correct” social interaction with this enemy.¹²⁰ This is to say that good Christian princes slay evil Muslim ones. While the two historical leaders never met in battle, previous scholarship has interpreted this scene as a fantastical encounter which serves as a metaphor for a successful crusade.¹²¹

The title “Sultan of Babylon,” much like the depiction of Saladin in **Figure 1** or the term “Saracen,” is a fantasy and a myth. Islamic princes of Egypt did not use this title to refer to themselves as rulers of “Babylon” nor did they necessarily use the term “Sultan.”¹²² Yet

¹¹⁹ Debra Higgs Strickland, *Saracens, demons, & Jews: making monsters in medieval art*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 82.

¹²⁰ Pamela Patton, “Blackness, Whiteness, and the Idea of Race in Medieval European Art,” in *Whose Middle Ages: Teachable moments for an ill-used past*, ed. Andrew Albin, Mary C. Erler, Thomas O’Donnell, Nicholas L. Paul, and Nina Rowe (New York: Fordham University Press, 2020), 159-160. The popularity of this image is further demonstrated by its deployment as a comparison in contexts outside England. For one example see: Yvonne Freidman, “Christian Hatred for the Other: Theological Rhetoric vs. Political Reality,” in *Fear and Loathing in the North: Jews and Muslims in Medieval Scandinavia and the Baltic Region* ed. Cordelia Heß and Jonathan Adams (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2015) 187-202 (196).

¹²¹ See: R.S. Loomis, “Richard Coeur de Lion and the Pas Saladin in Medieval Art,” *Proceedings of the Modern Language Association* 30 (1915): 516-17. See also Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews*. 82,178-79.

¹²² Nasser Rabbat has previously noted that Saladin may not have used the title “Sultan” but rather “Malik.” See: Nasser Rabbat. *The Citadel of Cairo: A New Interpretation of Royal Mamluk Architecture*, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995) 8-9.

iterations of this title (whether it be lord, amiral, king or sultan) appears in reference to Islamic rulers, across various genres including chronicles, propaganda manuscripts, hagiographies and epic and romance traditions. As Latin Christian visualizations of historical Islamic princes are often (if not always) mediated through a fantasy lens, this first chapter focuses on the more fantastical (romance and hagiographic) representations of the Sultan. I argue that the visual program consistently racializes the Sultan of Babylon as: a monstrosity representing the uncontainable “Saracenic” geopolitical malaise, a desired (though ineligible) convert, or a combination of both. Furthermore, the nuances of this characterization hold special importance because the legacy of modern scholarly understandings of medieval fantasy sometimes leads to designating racialized fantasy figures as historical Islamic rulers.

The remainder of this chapter will be divided into three parts, focusing on different iterations of the Sultan of Babylon found in the Anglo-Norman *Destruction of Rome/Fierabras*, *Les Noms, Armes et Blason de Chevaliers de la Table Rond*, *Legenda Maior & the Luttrell Psalter*. I have selected these particular traditions not only to survey English, French & Italian contexts but also to demonstrate the multivalent imaginations about the Islamic Other(ed) among them. The first part addresses the monstrous body of the Sultan. Moving beyond the more obvious politics of disgust, as seen in **Figure 1**, I demonstrate that his allegorized enormity and multiplicity serve as vehicles to communicate the “gigantic” Islamic geopolitical threat.¹²³ The second part contends with the complex role of Latin Christian desire for Muslims, a fantasy “ethnophilic” relationship whereby the Muslim could become, incorporated and integrated into

¹²³ While Martha Nussbaum uses this phrase in the context of American dehumanization of LGBTQ people vis-a-vis pejoratives of behavioral practices, she also notes that disgust is used in the context of race. I contend that this framework is useful for the premodern past as well. Martha C. Nussbaum, *From Disgust to Humanity: Sexual Orientation & Constitutional Law*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010), 2-37.

the Latin Christian fold especially through conversion.¹²⁴ Such narratives largely remain relegated to the romance and hagiographic traditions because this notion of spanning confessional divides is ultimately understood to be fantasy or at the very least, beyond the norm, and thus do not frequently appear in chronicle or propaganda manuscripts. Yet I argue that even in this fantastical context, the visual program does not commemorate “Saracenic” integration, if the textual programs allow for it at all. I conclude by revisiting the Luttrell Psalter image. I propose that the image is often erroneously titled “Saladin battling Richard the Lionheart” in order to fit a European Latin Christian fantasy well after the Middle Ages. As an alternative interpretation that takes account of the patronage of Geoffrey Luttrell, whose family members had participated in the Ninth Crusade, I suggest the broader designation “Sultan of Babylon battling a Plantagenet Prince.” However, in doing so, I simultaneously push back against Shookfeh Rajabzadeh’s call for scholars to remove the term “Saracen” and replace it with “Muslim” because of the racist and violent implications of this term.¹²⁵ While the religion of a given character might be Islam, images frequently combine a variety of racializing attributes (which may/may not be “Islamic”) creating the visual construction “Saracen.” Rather than just eliding a variety of marginalized groups under the assumption of Muslim, “Saracen” when properly contextualized as racist and problematic, better describes the complex optical codes in the Latin Christian formulation the Islamic Other(ed). After all, the Sultan of Babylon is understood to be a Sultan of “Saracens.”

I. Monstrous Body of the Sultan of Babylon

¹²⁴ Geraldine Heng, “Race and Politics, in *A Cultural History of Race in the Middle Ages*, edited by Thomas Hahn (London: Bloomsbury, 2021), 109.

¹²⁵ Shokoofeh Rajabzadeh, “The Depoliticized Saracen and Muslim Erasure.” *Literature Compass*, 16, no. 9-10 (2019): 1-8.

The “Sultan of Babylon” is always a racialized monstrosity. In his now foundational work “Monster Culture (seven theses)” Jeffrey Jerome Cohen offers different (though frequently intersecting) lenses through which we may interpret the teratological. Crucially he writes that “the monster haunts a place that leads to many other places,” an aspect of what he calls elsewhere “category crisis” drawing on Marjorie Garber’s terminology.¹²⁶ The relationship between “place” becoming multiple “places” and the illegibility within that slippage synergizes well with Latin Christian characterization of the Sultan. Indeed, the very appearance of his title “Sultan of Babylon” embodies what Cohen would describe as “refus[ing] easy categorization.”¹²⁷ As I previously discussed in the Introduction subsection titled “Where is Babylon?” Babylon does not possess any true fixity: it constantly shifts, sometimes meaning Cairo and other times referring to the ancient site, and sometimes both meanings occur in a single text. And even when it refers clearly to one and not the other, the palimpsest of its semiotic implications always remains. This is to say that in a medieval European Latin Christian manuscript, a medieval viewer could not see “Babylon” without also recalling its biblical connotations. This highly metaphorical locational monstrosity corresponds to the Sultan’s behaviors and practices especially in the more fantastical narratives. Cohen notes that in the fifteenth-century Middle English *Sowdone of Babylone* that the eponymous villain Laban’s consumption of fried snakes and drinks tiger’s blood symbolizes his excessiveness.¹²⁸ Pseudo-historical chronicle traditions, such as the *Pseudo-Turpin*, feature the Babylonian ruler sending forth literally gigantic generals

¹²⁶ Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, “Monster Culture (Seven Theses),” in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Twin Cities: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 6-7. Cohen builds on Marjorie Garber’s coining of the term see Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 11.

¹²⁷ Cohen, “Monster Culture (Seven Theses),” 6.

¹²⁸ Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, “On Saracen Enjoyment: Some Fantasies of Race in Late Medieval France and England,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31 (2001): 129.

to support Iberian-Islamic firepower.¹²⁹ In the continental *Fierabras* not only is the Sultan's progeny a giant but he commands legions of them as well.¹³⁰ The racialized themes of multiplicity and enormity are not simply relegated to the textual realm but manifest visually even if sometimes in less obvious ways.

Egerton 3028 depicts a scene of Emperor Charlemagne battling Sultan Laban of Spain (**Figure 2**). Produced during the fourteenth century the includes three Anglo-Norman texts: *Roman de Brut*, *La Destruction de Rome* and *Fierabras*, with the last serving as the textual basis of this illumination. The emperor, accompanied by his peers, charges from the right side, wearing a closed helmet surmounted with a crown and topped with a fluttering scarf. Carrying a shield emblazoned with the fleur de lis, he holds a lance tucked beneath his right arm, which he uses to jab towards the Sultan. Despite the host of spears pointed towards his opponent, Laban does not carry a weapon, his left hand raised and his right hanging by his side, so that his lion shield hangs on his chest, signaling his defeat as he is no longer actively fighting or even defending. Upon first glance, the racialization of the Sultan might be understood to occur somatically. Ostensibly his red hair and exaggerated beak-like nose function as signs of monstrous difference, features generally associated with Jewish people.¹³¹ Yet these markers are varyingly consistent throughout this manuscript. Many Christian characters, including Charlemagne himself appear with similar colored hair in other folios. The nose, while a fairly consistent marker of difference throughout the manuscript, sometimes graces the faces of

¹²⁹ Viard, *Les Grandes Chroniques de France*, vol. 3 (1920-1953) 240, 261. See also: Sylvia Huot, *Outsiders: The Humanity and Inhumanity of Giants in Medieval French Prose Romance* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2016), 81.

¹³⁰ Michael A. Newth, *Fierabras and Floripas: A French Epic Allegory First Modern English Translation* (New York) Italica Press, 1-2.

¹³¹ Andrew Colin Gow, *The Red Jews: Antisemitism in an Apocalyptic Age, 1200-1600* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995), 65-92, 386-387

Christian characters as well. Rather than emphasizing the unreliability of physiognomic minutiae, I want to focus on the relationship between illumination and its borders in this illumination to read the crypto-visual codes of racialization. The Sultan wears a tall, pointed hat which exceeds the red border that confines the illumination. The iconography of this accessory recalls Mongol and Byzantine headgear, frequently deployed as an Orientalizing sign. Yet the presence of sartorial difference does not in itself satisfy the requirements of racialization. When analyzing the characterization of giants, Cohen writes that these monsters exhibit an “exorbitance . . . that cannot be held captive in structure.”¹³² Elsewhere he also notes that Latin Christians frequently racialized Muslims via accusations of their overindulging, “excessive” habits.¹³³ Here too, Laban exhibits a similar type of behavior, allegorized through his hat which transgresses the boundaries of the established visual space as determined by the Latin Christian illuminator. This type of optical metaphor is not uncommon in the broader scheme of medieval European Latin Christian depictions of monsters. Asa Mittman has previously observed that the blemmye in the *Wonders of the East* (c. 1000) who grasps the red frames around it, attempts to step out of the page and into the “real” world.¹³⁴ Nor is Laban’s hat an outlier in the manuscript, as this motif appears in every scene in which the Sultan appears, almost always exiting the borders. Another interpretation of what this hat represents may explain the fixity and repeated nature of its appearance. The text preceding the *Fierbras* narrative, *La Destruction de Rome*, serves as a prologue to the story, explaining how Laban’s “Saracen” forces sack Rome, strip the city of its relics and murder the pope. Interestingly enough, a depiction of Pope Eleutherius from the unrelated Arthurian text *Roman de Brut* earlier in the manuscript wears a similar tiered

¹³² Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Of Giants: Sex, Monsters, and the Middle Ages* (University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 183.

¹³³ Cohen, “On Saracen Enjoyment,” 129.

¹³⁴ Asa Simon Mittman, *Medieval Maps and Monsters in Medieval England* (New York: Routledge, 2006) 50.

pointed though more curvilinear crown, whose height similarly extends outside of the frame though here it is dwarfed by the towering cross (**Figure 3**). Instead of a sign of audacity, the border-crossing crown here is understood as the papal tiara which embodies the pope's exalted authority (and even then, always under God as represented in the even taller cross). In reading the manuscript, even across the two sets of unrelated texts (*Roman de Brut* followed by *Destruction & Fierabras*), the iconography implies Laban's usurpation of the pope's position much as he has conquered Rome.¹³⁵ The Hanover manuscript produced during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the only other manuscript containing *Destruction* and *Fierabras*, provides more concrete evidence of this interpretation. Previous scholars such Marianne Ailes and Phillipa Hardmann, have suggested that the similarity between the iconographic programs and styles between the two manuscripts suggests a shared origin, allowing us to better understand one by the other.¹³⁶ Here the papal tiara appears mimetic with that of the Sultan's hat, with the same triangular shape and tiers (**Figure 4 & Figure 5**). Moreover, when Charlemagne ultimately executes Laban and reestablishes French authority, he places the same hat-crown onto the head of the knight Guy de Bourgogne who assumes control of the Islamic ruler's lands (**Figure 6**). By wearing the papal tiara, Laban claims, incorporates, and consumes lands which do not belong to him. The combination of the iconographic implications alongside the object's expansiveness, embodies the Islamic threat, which harries the borders of "Christendom." Not only does Laban's army consist of giants, but his geopolitical reach is gigantic in proportion.¹³⁷

¹³⁵ Indeed, Marianne Ailes suggests that Egerton 3028 should be read as "a complete codex" See: Marianne Ailes, "The deaths of kings and political propaganda in the Brut epitome of British Library MS Egerton 3028," *Reading Medieval Studies* 44 (2018): 54.

¹³⁶ Marianne Ailes "A Comparative Study of the Medieval French and Middle English Verse Texts of the Fierabras Legend" (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Reading, 1989) See also: Phillipa Hardman and Marianne Ailes, *The Legend of Charlemagne in Medieval England: The Matter of France in Middle English and Anglo-Norman Literature* (Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2017), 145.

¹³⁷ For discussion of giants in Laban's army see: Hardman & Ailes, *Legend of Charlemagne*, 319.

Indeed, the textual narrative reifies this interpretation of the Sultan's far-encompassing lands. As I noted in the introduction, I deploy "Sultan of Babylon" not only as a title medieval Europeans used to refer to particular characters but also as a critical term to describe the Latin Christian imagination of an Islamic prince who ruled a vague Eastern empire. Laban falls into this second category as he is never explicitly referred to by this title in the text. As Philippa Hardmann states when contrasting the latter Middle English *Sowdone of Babylone* with the Anglo-Norman version "Spain is not Laban's place of origin, as it is in the Anglo-Norman *Fierbras*, where he is named repeatedly in the text 'Laban d'Espaigne.'" ¹³⁸ Simultaneously, however, the text also does not explicitly refer to him as the "Sultan of Spain," rather just "the Sultan" and only names him "the emperor of Spain" only once. ¹³⁹ The choices of official titles suggests that while his primary domain might be Spain, he rules over other polities as well. Laban certainly controls Babylon as evidenced in the war-council scene where he addresses his commanders as "mes marchaunz de Babiloigne" (my marshals of Babylon). ¹⁴⁰ Furthermore, as Hardmann and Marianne Ailes also observe, Laban's justification for invading Rome at the start is because his cargo ships from Babylon have been attacked by Europeans. ¹⁴¹ According to the narrative, economic losses on one side of the Mediterranean affect political decisions made on the other. Moreover, the longer Hanover manuscript includes a litany of Laban's holdings which include Babylon and Constantinople among other Eastern kingdoms. ¹⁴² Yet the boundaries of

¹³⁸ Philippa Hardman. "Knight, king, emperor, saint: portraying Charlemagne in Middle English romance" *Reading Medieval Studies* 38 (2012): 54.

¹³⁹ For Laban as Emperor of Spain see: Brandin, "La Destruction de Rome et Fierabras," 80.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 32. (Egerton 3028, 66v). This articulation of Babylon also appears just below an illumination of an enthroned Laban raising his hand to a warrior carrying a spear who wears a miniature version of the lion associated with Laban's armies at his hip. Such iconography alongside the invocation of Babylon in the text suggests that anyone associated with this symbol (Laban, Fierebras & the Muslims writ large) are connected to Babylon.

¹⁴¹ Philippa Hardman and Marianne Ailes, *The Legend of Charlemagne in Medieval England: The Matter of France in Middle English and Anglo-Norman Literature*. (Boydell & Brewer, 2017), 336.

¹⁴² *La Destruction de Rome: Chanson de Geste du XIIIe Siecle*, edited by Marc Le Person (Paris Honore Champion Editeur, 2023), 195.

Babylon in this text (as always) are unclear. Early on *Destruction de Rome* tells the reader that Babylon is located “dejouste la Rouge Mer” (beside/alongside the Red Sea).¹⁴³ If we consider this description geographically, this Babylon refers to Egypt. Still, European Latin Christian locational understandings do not necessarily correspond to our contemporaneous ones. For this reason, I turn to the English Hereford Map, dating from 1300 CE thereby contemporary to the Egerton manuscript as a point of reference. According to the cartographic world-building of this image the Red Sea is situated equidistant to both “Greater Babylon” (the Biblical site) and Little Babylon (Cairo) (**Figure 7**). Other evidence also contributes to the difficulty in nailing down the precise location of Babylon. As the Sultan has numerous princes under his command, their lands function as fiefs given to them by the Sultan. As a prince of the realm, Laban’s son Fierabras, hails from Alisandre (Alexandria) which could imply a number of places, but most likely refers to the famous one in Egypt. At the same time, the Sultan’s chief lieutenant, Lucafer comes from Baldas (Baghdad near historical Babylon) but was born in Africa.¹⁴⁴ The textual complexity creates a dizzying effect making unclear exactly where the Sultan’s authority ends. Much like his hat that extends far beyond the illumination’s borders, his lands encompass more than just Spain. This unending multiplicity of places all pointing back to a singular geopolitical entity (the Sultan’s domain) curiously echoes Cohen’s crisis of categorization, making it many places. Though he is not the “Sultan of Babylon” explicitly, nor are Spain and Babylon the same place in the text, Laban does control an empire “Babel-like” in its composition.¹⁴⁵

As Laban’s visual excessiveness corresponds to his textual possessions, so too does his monstrous multiplicity appear in the visual program. Take for example his first appearance in

¹⁴³ Brandin, “La Destruction de Rome et Fierabras,” 30 (65r).

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 32 (66v).

¹⁴⁵ Ana Grinberg, “The Lady, the Giant, and the Land: the Monstrous in” Fierabras,” *Journal of Iberian Studies* 18 (2011): 190

Egerton 3028 surrounded by his underling kings and princes, as they worship Apollo and Terrvangnet (**Figure 8**). Though not exiting the illuminations borders, the Sultan's tall crown-hat soars above their heads, suggesting his importance and authority over them. The illuminator has framed Islamic prayer as a perversion and inversion of Latin Christian practice. As scholars of John Victor Tolan and Suzanne Conklin Akbari have demonstrated, such narratives regarding medieval European Latin Christian polemics about Islam often included accusations of polytheism, heresy and idolatry.¹⁴⁶ Here, the "Saracens" offer birds before a diptych upon an altar, with lighted lamps hanging on the ceiling.¹⁴⁷ But instead of saints or angels, the apertures present hooved, furry and horned demon-like deities with prominent noses—sculptured idols that come alive. As previously stated, exaggerated physiognomy alone does not do racializing work. However, the mutual presence of Laban's beak-like nose, the beaks of the bird offerings, and the noses of the demons tether together the plurality of similar somatic features with "Saracenic" religion. In other words, the worshippers, the objects of worship and the devotional offerings themselves, all exhibit different types of noses: human, demonic & avian, in a scene of Islamic worship. This panoply of pointed proboscises participating in the praxis of purported polytheistic prayer parallels the "pagan" prince's polycultural polity in the proceeding pages. Moreover, the physiognomic marker is not merely a consequence of the text as it does not make any mention of the "Saracens" offering birds to their deities but simply states "to Tervagant and Apollo they gave their offerings." (A Tervagant et a Appolyn lour offerent ont done)¹⁴⁸ Thus, the

¹⁴⁶ Tolan, *Saracens: Islam in the European Imagination*, 87-93, 155. Suzanne Conklin Akbari, "The Rhetoric of Antichrist in Western Lives of Muhammad," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 8 no. 3 (1997): 298-299. Michael Camille, *The Gothic Idol: Ideology and Image-Making in Medieval Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 135-144.

¹⁴⁷ For a brief discussion of this scene and its relationship to the text and other illuminations discussed in this chapter see: Keith Busby, "Texte et image dans le manuscrit de Londres (British Library, Egerton 3028) de la Destruction de Rome et Fierabras," in *Le Souffle épique: L'Esprit de la chanson de geste ; études en l'honneur de Bernard Guidot* (University de Dijon, 2011), 218 (for this illumination), 215-224.

¹⁴⁸ Brandin, "La Destruction de Rome et Fierabras," 30 (64v)

interpretation I have etched out here may not have only been the receptionary experience of the medieval reader but potentially a conscious choice in the production of the manuscript, directing the reader to understand corresponding but diverse somatic features as characterizing racialized Islam.

Furthermore, the composition of Laban and his entourage also visually enhances this motif of multiplicity. The Sultan's large head, surrounded by three smaller ones, renders the court into a single entity, with a main axis orbited by lesser branches. Such formations allegorize the text where Laban's domain consists of various polities, with representatives arriving to attend a war council.¹⁴⁹ Previously, Sherry M. Lindquist and Asa Mittman when analyzing the Morgan Moralized Bible have observed that the throng of Jewish people mimic the poly-cephalus shape of the seven-headed beast as St. Michael casts both of them into hell (**Figure 9**).¹⁵⁰ While Laban's prayer scene does not possess the same doubling of form which appears in the Moralized Bible, the "Saracenic" conglomerate does appear hydra-like, if in an extremely abstracted form. My compositional reading of racialized monstrosity might well be regarded as arbitrary and convenient at first glance. After all, medieval illuminations frequently render the rulers and their court members in close proximity to one another and we would not necessarily always understand such scenes as implying monstrosity. However, comparing this scene with one of Charlemagne engaged in Christian worship later in the manuscript demonstrates a programmatic vilification of Islamic agglomeration (**Figure 10**). The French emperor stands before a Cross that sits on an altar, while a fleur-de-lis banner rises far above the confines of the

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 30-32.

¹⁵⁰ Sherry C. M. Lindquist, Asa Simon Mittman, *Medieval Monsters: Terrors, Aliens, Wonders* (New York: The Morgan Library & Museum, 2018), 93-94.

church, articulating that royal authority springs from a divine one. Whereas the illumination characterizes Islamic worship as multiple worshippers exalting multiple gods, Charlemagne in sharp contrast prays alone before a symbol which emphasizes the singularity of the Triune one. Furthermore, the pair of illuminations position Christians as right and pagans as wrong.¹⁵¹ Despite Laban and his people's numerous flighted offerings to their deities, perhaps in the hope of activating apotropaic magic, the statues remain static, with both holding the same pose.¹⁵² Conversely, the veracity of Charlemagne's worship, enacted with no other offering other than prayer, proves true, testified by the winged-angel who swoops down to converse with him. The visual program capitalizes on compositional singularity (one worshiper, one icon, one messenger from God) and multiplicity (various worshippers, deities, and offerings to the gods) coupled with the effectiveness of their respective worship as vehicles to communicate confessional legitimacy and illegitimacy. The compounded tiers of multiplicity-as-evil, beginning with the accusation of polytheism, cascades to its practitioners who mimic in number and oblations its supposed theological tenants thereby embodying racialized religion.

We also find evidence of the Sultan's expansiveness and multiplicity within the composition of the manuscript itself. As previously mentioned, Egerton 3028 consists of three texts, beginning with the *Roman de Brut*, an Arthurian text whose earliest version dates from the 12th century and is unrelated to the later Charlemagne ones.¹⁵³ Interestingly enough, the main villains of both traditions appear iconographically similar to one another. Emperor Lucius of

¹⁵¹ For a discussion of this infamous line in the *Chanson de Roland* see: Sharon Kinoshita, "Pagans are wrong and Christian are Right: Alterity, Gender and Nation in the *Chanson de Roland*," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31 no.1 (2001): 79-111.

¹⁵² Another illumination shows a similar looking statue on top of the Sultan's boat mast which my similarly express and apotropaic: Due the British Library cyber-attack I am unable to consult this scene.

¹⁵³ Judith Weiss, *Wace's Roman De Brut: A History Of The British (Text and Translation)*, University of Exeter Press, 2002, xi-xxvii.

Rome (who like Laban also hails from Spain) wears the same hat which breaks out of the borders of the illumination as he charges into battle against a Plantagenet shield-bearing King Arthur.¹⁵⁴ While Lucius is not described as Muslim, his invading army can be considered “Saracenic.”¹⁵⁵ This is to say his forces consist of multiple people and polities including “Moors,” Africans, a Spanish prince named “Alifatin” (or Ali Fatima combining the names of the first Caliph and his wife, the Prophet Muhammad’s daughter), and perhaps most importantly, a “king of Babylon.”¹⁵⁶ Text and image across two narratives replicate the model of an antagonistic prince whose territory comprises vast polities and domains (ones which include Babylon). Reading this manuscript from left to right, the medieval reader would have first encountered Arthur’s battle with Lucius and subsequently Charlemagne’s with Laban and thus the shared iconography inflects the Islamic implication back onto Lucius. Beyond physical excessiveness and multiplicity, this visual doubling suggests that the “Sultan,” reaches outside his own immediate space, across the material manuscript and appears as the villain for another Christian ruler in a different time and place. In this way, the “Saracenic” emperor serves as a persistent, transtemporal antagonist, requiring every generation of European prince to resist this enemy.

Perhaps understanding the context of this manuscript can help explain the reasons for the ways it racializes the Islamic Prince. While we know little about the patronage of Egerton 3028, Allison Stones states that the codex belongs to “a special category of densely illustrated secular manuscripts made between c. 1250 and 1350 in England for patrons, mostly anonymous, who were particularly interested in historical, hagiographical and literary works in Latin and

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 312-313.

¹⁵⁵ In her introduction Weiss refers to this conglomerate force as “Saracens.” Ibid., xxiii.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 321. For a discussion of “Alifatin” see Hans-Erich Keller, “Wace et Geoffrey de Monmouth: problème de la chronologie des sources,” *Romania* 98, no. 389 (1 (1977): 1-14.

French.”¹⁵⁷ Vernon Underwood had earlier made the case that the manuscript dates between 1338-1340, as evidenced in the *Brut* section continuing to the reign of Edward III.¹⁵⁸ Still, as Hardmann and Ailes point out, this evidence only proves that the manuscript was produced no later than this date.¹⁵⁹ While Ian Short does not contest the dating, he has offered a Hiberno-English origin or influence, pointing to the manuscript’s use of Gaelic vocabulary.¹⁶⁰ Amy Jeffs pushes for an earlier date than Underwood when she suggests that the manuscript may have been used as an instructional text for a lord’s son, specifically Edmund Fitzalan.¹⁶¹

More crucial to our discussion here, scholars such as Allison Stones, Marianne Ailes and Phillipa Hardman interpret the manuscript against the backdrop of the Hundred Years War.¹⁶² In depicting both Arthur and Charlemagne in the same manuscript, the visual program engenders a narrative which, as Stones writes “ link[s] the history of England and its king and the beginning of the Hundred Years War and France with the Triumph of Right–Christianity over Islam– on the continent under Charlemagne.”¹⁶³ I would push this reading further, given the visual similarities between Laban and Lucius, that Arthur too triumphs over a “Saracenic” (Islamic) opponent. The Spanish provenance of both these villains may provide one explanation for their similar appearance. Ailes and Hardmann note that the emphasis of Spain in *Fierabras* could have been in response to Edward III and Philip VI’s planned crusade into Iberia.¹⁶⁴ Still, they do not

¹⁵⁷ Alison Stones, “The Egerton *Brut* and its Illustrations,” in *Maistre Wace: A Celebration*, ed. Glyn S. Burgess & Judith Weiss (Jersey: Societe Jersiaise, 2006), 167.

¹⁵⁸ Vernon Philip Underwood, “An Anglo-Norman metrical ‘Brut’ of the fourteenth century (British Museum Ms Egerton 3028),” PhD diss., University of London, 1937.

¹⁵⁹ Hardmann & Ailes, *Legend of Charlemagne*, 138.

¹⁶⁰ Ian Short “Anglo-Norman Gaine' Arrow' and a Possible Context for Egerton MS 3028.” *Early Middle English* 4, no. 2 (2022): 39-44.

¹⁶¹ Amy Jeffs, “Picture-books, Politics & Pedagogy: Illustrating Histories for a Young Reader, 1338-40 (British Library, Egerton MS 3028).” PhD diss., University of Cambridge, 2020.

¹⁶² Stones, “Egerton Brut” 169. See also Hardman & Ailes, *Life of Charlemagne*, 138.

¹⁶³ Stones, “Egerton Brut,” 169.

¹⁶⁴ Hardman & Ailes, *Legend of Charlemagne*, 139. See also Timothy Guard, *Chivalry, kingship and crusade: the English experience in the fourteenth century*. (Boydell Press, 2013), 52. See also: Christopher Tyerman, *England*

go as far as to say that Egerton 3028 served as propaganda for this endeavor. Instead, they argue the manuscript casts the king of England as Charlemagne thereby framing him as “the one who will unite all the Christians” against the Muslims.¹⁶⁵

This rationale complements well the vilification of the Sultan as the leader of a multiplicitous, and therefore fractious polity. Arthur and Charlemagne, united in the same manuscript, resist “Saracenic” invading forces under the aegis of good Christian (English) kingship. Yet here too I would nuance Ailes and Hardmann’s reading in order to center the role that racialization plays. We do not need to only read Egerton in terms of English superiority but a tacit acknowledgement regarding a fundamental difference between their immediate political opponents and a more distant foe.

Ailes points to the use of heraldry, such as that found when Arthur defeats the French fleur-de-lis carrying Frolo, as evidence of the English superseding the French in the manuscript’s visual narrative.¹⁶⁶ Yet importantly in this comparison we also observe that while the shields of these rulers reflect their Plantagenet and Valois equivalents, those of Laban and Lucius do not have any such analogues. Their respective arms, the two-headed eagle and rampant lion (both gold in an azure field), perhaps generically referring to imperial authority and ferocity, emphasizes the enemy that both England and France needed to contend with.¹⁶⁷ Norman Housely explains that despite the lack of crusade treatises in the mid-fourteenth century, crusade remained very much on the mind of medieval Europeans, as demonstrated in texts such as *Livre*

and the Crusades, 1095-1588 (University of Chicago Press, 1996), 246. Ailes and Hardmann do not connect Lucius’ provenance to Laban’s in their analysis.

¹⁶⁵ Hardman and Ailes, *The Legend of Charlemagne*, 139.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 139-144. See also: Marianne Ailes & Phillipa Hardman, “Texts in Conversation: Charlemagne Epics and Romances in Insular Plural-text Codices,” in *Insular Books: Vernacular Manuscript Miscellanies in Late Medieval Britain* ed. Margaret Connolly & Raluca Radulescu (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015), 33-34.

¹⁶⁷ Stones notes Fierabras shield is a mystery. See Stones, “Egerton Brut,” 175.

de Chevaliere, Libre Secretorum Eventuum and Mandeville's *Travels*.¹⁶⁸ He goes on to state that "in a world where national differences were becoming more evident, and in which arguably the first "national war" was taking shape in the all-consuming conflict between England and France, all three texts testify to a continuing belief in an overarching Christian unity and identity."¹⁶⁹ Laban and Lucius both threaten that unity. Both audaciously lay claim to European Latin Christian lands and their multicultural, multi-deity principles contrast with those of princely brothers under the Holy Church. Despite moments of English chauvinism or imagined dominion against their French political opponents, the English patrons who owned this manuscript would not see their cousins across the channel as racialized Others in the same way that they did understand Babylon and Islamic princes as a mutual racialized-religious menace.

II. Fantasy Conversion

"Proud was his face, his hair was ringleted/ White as a flow'r in summer was his head/ His vassalage had often been proved/ My God what a Baron if only he was Christian."¹⁷⁰ So the *Song of Roland* describes Baligant, the emir from Babylon who allies himself with Marsile of Saragossa. Suzanne Conklin Akbari has previously argued that these famous lines dream of the assimilation of this Muslim ruler. She goes on to write that his handsome "appearance thus suggests that the spiritual transformation of conversion would simply be a completion of the transformation that is already evident on the level of flesh."¹⁷¹ Far from simply monsterized and

¹⁶⁸ Norman Housley, "Perceptions of Crusading in the Mid-Fourteenth Century: The Evidence of Three Text," *Viator* 38 (2005) 415-417.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 431.

¹⁷⁰ Gerard J. Brault ed. and trans. *The Song of Roland: An Analytical Edition*. 2 vols. (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1978), vol 2 192-193.

¹⁷¹ Suzanne Conklin Akbari, *Idols in the East: European Representations of Islam and the Orient, 1100-1450* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), 156-157.

demonized imaginations, Latin Christian narratives, even since early crusade propaganda texts such as *Roland*, desire the Islamic Other(ed), especially vis-a-vis conversion. This example is hardly an isolated one. Sierra Lomuto has noted the ways that the *King of Tars* text fetishizes “exotic allies,” previously non-Christian converts who would team-up with and support the Latins to take back the “Holy Land.”¹⁷² Arthurian tales contain an unending stream of former pagans who become “Knights of the Round Table.” Such narratives are not relegated to text alone but also appear in the visual program. When analyzing the indistinguishability of Latin and Muslim warriors in some medieval manuscripts Debra Strickland explains that illuminators may have presented these figures as indistinguishable from one another in order to create a sense of “worthy” combat.¹⁷³ Echoing these sentiments, John Victor Tolan attributes the occasional valorization of Islamic characters because “it would not be “valorous to slaughter mere beasts.”¹⁷⁴ These various arguments, while differentiated in context, all function as various modulations of what Heng has more recently described as ethnophilia. She uses this term to describe “a phenomenon demonstrating that the racialization of the heathen in the European Latin Christian Middle Ages, has more than a single face and allows fictional literature to imagine more flexible relations for racial formation.”¹⁷⁵ Fantasy both modern and premodern serves as a space for creating possibilities in order to fill social and cultural imagined pasts or potential futures. When ethnophilia (or specifically Islamophilia) occurs in Latin Christian

¹⁷² Sierra Lomuto, “The Mongol Princess of Tars: Global Relations and Racial Formation in *The King of Tars* (c. 1330),” *Exemplaria*, 31 no. 3. (2019): 174-175.

¹⁷³ Debra Higgs Strickland, *Saracens, demons, & Jews: making monsters in medieval art*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 126.

¹⁷⁴ John Victor Tolan. *Saracen: Islam in the European Imagination* (New York: University of Columbia Press, 2002), 126. Moreover, this type of treatment of Islamic subjects lives beyond just the borders of Latin “Christendom.” Alicia Walker has noted the ways which Byzantine emperors performed visual parity with their Islamic counterparts (and vice versa) in their mutual culture of gift exchange. See: Alicia Walker, *The Emperor and the World: Exotic Elements and the Imaging of Middle Byzantine Imperial Power, Ninth to Thirteenth Centuries C.E.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 81-107.

¹⁷⁵ Heng, “Race and Politics, in *A Cultural History of Race*, 109.

narratives it predominantly does so in romance and hagiographic traditions because these genres best support those goals. This is not to say that Latin Christians did not believe in the lives of Saints, as such arguments would deflate an important reality of medieval lived religion. Rather, the ability of St. Francis or St. Louis to gain converts testified to their religious status beyond the ordinary.¹⁷⁶ Yet even in fantastical contexts, the incorporation of Muslims is still mitigated. Although we find attempts of Islamophilia in Roland's theological discourse with Ferragut and especially the un-monsterized, even humanized version of the "Saracen" giant in the visual iconography, the somatic assimilation remains a flash in the pan, momentary, a possibility perhaps but still incomplete (**Figure 11**).¹⁷⁷ The princes of Babylon, as not merely "Saracens" generally, but representatives of Islamic polities, polities that function as threats (real or imagined), have a difficult time attaining a long lasting incorporation. Indeed, this insufficient incorporation into the Christian fold signals the racialized Islamic political body.

II.A Laban's "Baptism" Scene

So invested are Latin Christian narratives in the Sultan of Babylon's conversion that they include images of this potentiality even when that result is understood as impossible. Returning to Egerton 3028, we find a scene which depicts Laban on the brink of baptism (**Figure 12**).

According to the text, after Charlemagne defeats and captures the Sultan, Fierebras asks for his

¹⁷⁶ For the roles that the converting abilities played in their hagiographic traditions of Saint Louis and Saint Francis See: William Chester Jordan, *The Apple of His Eye: Converts from Islam in the Reign of Louis IX* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 33-34 58-59. See also: M. Cecilia Gaposchkin, "The Place of the Crusades in the Sanctification of Saint Louis," in *Crusades: Medieval Worlds in Conflict*, ed. Thomas F. Madden, James Naus, and Vincent Ryan, 195-209 (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010). John Victor Tolan, *Saint Francis, and the Sultan: The Curious History of a Christian-Muslim Encounter* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 64-100. Adam L. Hoose, "Francis of Assisi's way of peace? His conversion and mission to Egypt," *The Catholic historical review* 96 no. 3 (2010): 449-469. Mahmood Ibrahim, "Francis Preaching to the Sultan: Art and Literature in the Hagiography of the Saint" in *Finding Saint Francis in Literature and Art*, ed. Cynthia Ho, Beth A. Mulvaney, John K. Downey (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009): 47-61.

¹⁷⁷ For a discussion of Ferragut in the *Pseudo-Turpin* see: Huot, *Outsiders: The Humanity and Inhumanity*, 81-83.

father to be allowed to convert and therefore spared. As the reader learns, Laban refuses to become Christian, though the visual program includes the scene leading up to this ultimate rejection. The illumination presents a naked Laban, although he still wears his pointed hat which once again exits the illuminations borders. His blue beard here is probably not original as it has been speckled onto his chest as well, perhaps some damage or bleeding of paint. Standing in front of a tall wooden basin with his arms raised, he faces Bishop Turpin who stands behind, perhaps in, the basin, ready to administer the sacrament. On the far-right side, Charlemagne stands wearing a blue mantle gesticulating as if to say, “convert or die.” Behind Laban stands his son Fierbras, indicated by his proximity to his father as well as the indented and elongated nasal region which serves as a consistent physiognomic marker of non-Christian characters throughout the manuscript. With his right hand the prince reaches down, his fingers tapping his father’s buttocks, providing encouragement, much like one would do to coax a beast into moving.¹⁷⁸ Of course this “encouragement” is one under the aegis of violence as conversion alone can prevent Laban’s destruction. This bottom-touching trades in sexual implications which heighten the Sultan’s permanently unconvertable status. Laban’s nakedness is not the one usually found in baptism scenes. Contrary to the position of an expected converter, the illuminator has placed him outside the baptismal font, in contrast to the regular iconography of conversion. For example, fifteenth century illuminations depicting the baptism of another Muslim character, Palamedes, place him in the font, with the brim covering his lower regions.¹⁷⁹ In this state of freedom, not hidden behind the vessel, Laban’s genitals are revealed to the viewer. The line from the sultan’s curving belly dips downward intersecting with the line which shapes the top of the figures left

¹⁷⁸ Christopher Michael Herde provided me this insight of reading this as similar to “coaxing a beast into moving” on 10/05/2023.

¹⁷⁹ For these images see: BnF 101, f. 394, BnF 336 f. 334, BnF 343 f. 97v, BnF 97, f.550.

thigh, thereby rendering an indication of his penis. Indeed, Laban's depiction contrasts significantly from the only other baptismal scene found in the manuscript, that of Ethelbert at the hands of St. Augustine of Canterbury (**Figure 13**). The crowned king sits in the bowl of the font, his lip covering nearly to his shoulders, hiding his nude form. Thus, Laban's nakedness here does not communicate the baptismal state as much as it reiterates his behavioral "exorbitance" in the form of sexual excessiveness. Previous scholars have observed the link between monstrous figures and nakedness. Sherry M. Lindquist concisely summarizes the medieval Latin Christian position when she writes "the more naked, and the more sexualized, the depiction of a particular race, the more bestial and uncivilized they were understood to be."¹⁸⁰ In the case of Laban, his phallic pointed cap, serving as his last item of costume in an otherwise stripped form, elongates him, drawing the viewer's eye up and down the body and towards his penis. With his hands raised, resisting this conversion Laban does not attempt to cover his shameful display.

The framing of this scene also draws upon biblical narratives as a way to further racialize Laban's religious fixity. Specifically, the elite patron of this manuscript would have been familiar with the "Drunkenness of Noah" and perhaps its pictorial programs. Thomas Dale has recently reconsidered this story alongside sculpture in the Palazzo Ducale as an example of late

¹⁸⁰ Sherry CM Lindquist, "The Meanings of Nudity in Medieval Art: An Introduction," in *The Meanings of Nudity in Medieval Art* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2012), 18. See also: see also: John Bloch Friedman, *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought* (New York: Syracuse University Press), 31–32. Debra Higgs Strickland, *Saracens, demons, & Jews: making monsters in medieval art*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 45, 227. Sarah Salih, "The Medieval Looks Back," in *Troubled Vision: Gender, Sexuality, and Sight in Medieval Text and Image*, ed. Emma Campbell and Robert Mills (New York; Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 223–31. Moreover, we can productively read this scene through Homi K. Bhabha's understanding of the relationship between the colonial subject and the colonizer, even if the medieval example is a proto-colonial and imaginary example. He writes "the exhibitionism of the settler is dependent upon the native's muscular tonicity in order to represent himself." This is to say that the clothed nature of Charlemagne represents the civilized powers instructing the "savage Saracen" towards the correct religion, thereby reifying his own status and superiority. See: Homi K. Bhabha, "A question of survival: Nations and psychic states," *Psychoanalysis and Cultural Theory: Thresholds: Thresholds* (1991): 99. Michael Camille makes a similar comparison with a figure in the Luttrell Psalter, See: Michael Camille, *Mirror in Parchment: The Luttrell Psalter and the Making of Medieval England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 280.

medieval understandings of genealogical racialization in Venice.¹⁸¹ While he employs a different medium from a different polity, the iconographic program of this scene is consistent in the manuscript traditions as well as illustrates the recognizable metaphor I lay out below. In his drunken state, Noah lies with his genitals exposed as Iaphet covers his father, while Ham has already been displaced to the other side of the arch (**Figure 14**). According to the textual tradition, when Noah awakens from his stupor, he curses his son to become progenitor of the various ethnic groups, including the Egyptians.¹⁸² The relationship between Laban and Fierembras in (**Figure 12**) presents a diametric reversal of that between Noah and his sons. Far from mocking his father, the son presses him to join Christianity. Like kind Iaphet, seeking to spare his father's dignity, so too does Fierembras attempt to spare his father's soul by pushing his buttocks. Yet here, the father with his genitals exposed outside the baptismal font, a sign of his own sexual excessiveness as an analogue to Noah's consumptionary one, rejects this invitation, exiling himself religiously. As Ham becomes the predecessor for "Africa," here Laban embodies that genealogical tradition remaining locked within his "Saracenic"/Islamic/and Babylonian identity. Given the multi-valent meanings of Babylon in the Latin Christian imaginary as both Egypt and elsewhere, Laban's geographical polity conveniently corresponds with the implications of Ham's lineage.

Laban's behavioral excessiveness at the site of baptism extends into the textual narrative as well. Though Egerton 3028 presents a heavily redacted iteration of the longer Fierabras narrative, the continental version explains that the Franks expropriate Laban's marble wine vat,

¹⁸¹ Thomas E.A. Dale "Cultural Encounter, Race, and a Humanist Ideology of Empire in the Art of Trecento Venice," *Speculum* 98, no. 1 (2023): 40-44.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 44-47. See also: David Goldenberg, *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Princeton, 2003), 168-177.

emptying it of its contents to serve as his baptismal font.¹⁸³ This transformation suggests the latent possibility and hope for conversion—that Islamic baptism could be facilitated by the transformation of their corrupted items into Christian ones.¹⁸⁴ We find this extended narrative visualized in the earlier Hanover manuscript (**Figure 5**). The image parallels that found in Egerton with Laban’s hat exiting the confines of the illumination, though here depicted as less nude, with a cloth covering his genitals.¹⁸⁵ The basin has been rendered as a sculpted stone basin, corresponding with the description. A black hole at its center instead of the red wine that once filled it suggests that it has already been emptied. The dumping of wine attempts to rid Laban of his earthly, material consumption in preparation for the spiritual one. Despite this assistance, his monstrous personality abounds, again never entering this vessel. This behavior manifests in a very physical way as he attacks the Bishop whilst he is led toward the baptismal font.¹⁸⁶ He punches Turpin in the face, reaching out across the basin to push the priest away from it thereby refusing its expropriation into a Christian item.

While the Egerton manuscript does not depict Laban’s visceral response to baptism as the Hanover does, other visual clues may suggest the impossibility of his conversion.¹⁸⁷ The transformation of the wine vat into Sultan’s font provides a valuable avenue for interpretation

¹⁸³ Michael A. Newth, *Fierabras and Floripas: A French Epic Allegory First Modern English Translation* (New York) Italica Press, 211-212.

¹⁸⁴ This notion that materials could transform from their previous use is not a new one. Michael Camille has previously noted the ways that gold and jewels in Saracen hands could take on new meanings once expropriated by Latins. See: Michael Camille, *The Gothic Idol: Ideology and Image-Making in Medieval Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 144.

¹⁸⁵ For a previous discussion of text-image interaction in this manuscript see: Marc Le Person, *textimage: revue d'étude du dialogue text-image*, 03/06/2024, https://www.revue-textimage.com/12_varia_5/leperson14.html.

¹⁸⁶ For this narrative in the continental version see: Newth, *Fierabras and Floripas*, 212.

¹⁸⁷ Laban in this text also punches Turpin: “Kant Laban vient al founce, n'i vousist entrer; Il enhaue le poine, l'evesqe voit ferir/ En travers les denz, si ke li fist verser.” When Laban came to the font/ he did not want to enter, he raised the fist, the bishop saw the strike, in between his teeth so that he was knocked over.” My translation but transcription from: Louis Brandin, “La Destruction de Rome et Fierabras: MS. Egerton 3028, Musée Britannique, Londres,” *Romania* 64, no. 253 (1938): 97 (f. 116v).

even though the Egerton remains silent on these details not mentioning its origins, its materiality or previous uses.¹⁸⁸ Again, given the mutual Anglo-Norman provenance of these manuscripts and the stylistic similarities between them, they may have been produced by the same artists.¹⁸⁹ Noticeably, however, the baptismal vessel iconography of Egerton departs from the stone basin in Hanover, instead depicted with rivets and wooden planks, more like a barrel or bucket than a basin. Indeed, this depiction contrasts with the baptismal font of Ethelbert found earlier in the manuscript (**Figure 13**), with a wider seemingly stone bowl connected to a narrower base. The construction of Ethelbert's font better reflects that found for Laban's basin in the Hanover manuscript as well as archaeologically extant fonts from the period which often incorporate sculpture.¹⁹⁰ A survey of baptismal scenes in manuscript descriptions demonstrates the presence of both "font" and "barrel" types.¹⁹¹ Indeed, Fierbras' conversion in Hanover uses this wooden-vessel too. Perhaps the deployment of these different types (barrel and basin) stems from the iconography which imagines Christ in a winepress, a metaphor for the link between wine and his blood.¹⁹² One example of this iconography can be found in a fourteenth-century Apocalypse manuscript (**Figure 15**). Given the importance of baptism and the Eucharist in Latin Christianity, the slippage of basin/barrel ties these sacraments together as both mechanisms are crucial to

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Phillipa Hardman and Marianne Ailes, *The Legend of Charlemagne in Medieval England: The Matter of France in Middle English and Anglo-Norman Literature* (Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2017), 145-146.

¹⁹⁰ For one example of this sculptural practice during the fifteenth century see: Nirit Ben-Aryeh Debby, "Nel mio bel San Giovanni, fatti per loco de' battezzatori: Baptismal Fonts in Tuscany," in *The Visual Culture of Baptism in the Middle Ages: Essays on Medieval Fonts, Settings and Beliefs* ed., Harriet M. Sonne de Torrens, Miguel A. Torrens (Burlington: Ashgate, 2013), 11-31 (esp. 23). See also: Baptisteria Sacra Index (BSI), University of Toronto, <https://bsi.dhn.utoronto.ca/>. Accessed 11/13/2023.

¹⁹¹ For some examples see: Stone Font: (Paris, BnF, Français 299 f.190), (Paris, BnF, Français 313 f.97v), Paris, BnF, Français 13502 f.9v) Wood Barrel: (Paris, BnF, Français 313 f.41v) (Paris, BnF, Français 97 f.550). In other places too, the various types of baptismal fonts are used in the same manuscript as seen in BnF fr. 313.

¹⁹² A. Lynn Martin, "The baptism of wine," *Gastronomica* 3, no. 4 (2003): 22. Mack P. Holt, "Wine, Life, and Death in Early Modern Burgundy," *Food and Foodways* viii (1999): 75. See also: Horst Wenzel, "The logos in the press: Christ in the wine-press and the discovery of printing," in *Visual Culture and the German Middle Ages*, ed. Kathryn Starkey & Horst Wenzel (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 225-229.

salvation. Thus, while the “barrel” font does not possess any inherent subtext, when considered alongside the expanded narrative, the choice of this iconography in Egerton gains new meaning. This contrast with baptismal models established elsewhere in the manuscript, alongside Laban’s position outside of the vessel, invites a question, whose answer is made more obvious in the Hanover manuscript. In the shadow of the Sultan, can the winepress/barrel iconography accurately represent a baptismal font, or does it simply remain an emblem of Laban’s excessive imbibing? In other words, if this symbolic transformation is not possible then neither can his status from “Saracen” to Christian” truly succeed.

This interpretation is predicated on viewer’s awareness of the longer version of this text or was informed of it. If not, how then would this **Figure 12** be received with the text which surrounds it? The mention of a “founce” (font) occurs a handful of times in the entire Egerton manuscript, appearing three times between folio 116v and 117v with Laban’s baptismal scene appearing on 117r.¹⁹³ Thus, despite the concentration of this word over the course of a folio and a half, it does not appear at all on the recto which includes the image. Instead, the text on 117r records Laban speaking the word “Mahon” twice: once four lines from the top and again three lines from the bottom, thereby sandwiching the illumination. Previous scholars have argued that “Mahon” functions as a bastardized version of “Muhammad.”¹⁹⁴ The textual narrative, the image as well as the inclusion and displacement of the various semiotic signs all work in consort, to contrast with what appears at first glance a “baptismal” scene” thereby instructing the viewer that conversion is not forthcoming. In taking the experience of both text and image together, the

¹⁹³ Louis Brandin, “La Destruction de Rome et Fierabras: MS. Egerton 3028, Musée Britannique, Londres,” *Romania* 64, no. 253 (1938): 97.

¹⁹⁴ Debra Higgs Strickland, “Edward I, Exodus, and England on the Hereford World Map,” *Speculum*, 93 no. 2 (2018): 431-432. See also: Asa Simon Mittman, *Cartographies of Exclusion Anti-Semitic Mapping in Medieval England* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2024), 103-113. See also: Michael Camille, *The Gothic Idol: Ideology and Image-Making in Medieval Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 135, 142.

reader would have first seen the word “font” first on 116v where Charlemagne demands this item brought to him. Across from this text, the reader would simultaneously encounter the baptismal scene (**Figure 12**), surrounded by the text which catalogs Laban invoking Muhammad’s name twice—signaling the Sultan’s commitment to his religious beliefs and thereby countering the vessel’s intended use. Upon turning to 117v, the reader receives confirmation of this narrative. The first line reads “En despit de Jhesu, en le founce voir esrachier” (and despite Jesus, in the font sees rejection,” going on to relate Laban’s decapitation.¹⁹⁵ Just as “Mahon” frames the baptismal illumination, perverting it, so too has “founce” been displaced to regions outside of it. Laban’s exorbitant speech, with his devotion to Muhammad dominating the folio-side, has effectively pushed the reference to the baptismal font away from its visual depiction. On multiple levels the manuscript’s program reinforces the Sultan’s Islamic fixity, echoing that found in the Hanover, if in a more metaphorical sense.

The Egerton and Hanover manuscripts possess similar yet subtly diverging programs not only in terms of iconography but in the scenes illuminated. While the Hanover manuscript depicts both Fierabras’ conversion and Laban’s execution, the Egerton manuscript does not include either one. Potentially these differences may have resulted from the allotted space for each manuscript, with Egerton’s **118** miniatures presenting scenes from *The Destruction of Rome*, *Fierabras* and *Roman de Brut* as opposed to the Hanover’s **102** miniatures combining just the first two texts. Yet despite these variations, both manuscripts include the scene of Laban’s refusal to join Christianity. The visualization of the Sultan’s immovability is important for two reasons. Firstly, because it marginalizes Fierabras’ baptism. Indeed, in the Egerton manuscript, this earlier conversion is not important at all in that it is not visualized. Regardless of

¹⁹⁵ Brandin, “La Destruction de Rome et Fierabras: MS. Egerton 3028,” 97.

illuminations such as those that heroically present Fierabras framed under the ogee arch in a similar manner of Charlemagne, the once Muslim knight still bears his father's lion-emblazoned coat of arms, a reminder from his past (**Figure 16**).¹⁹⁶ By bookending Islamic presence in these manuscripts with visual embodiments of Laban's inconvertibility instead of the textual baptism of his daughter Floripas, the Egerton visually privileges "Saracenic" fixity rather than religious incorporation. When analyzing the Fierabras narrative in MS 3028, Suzanne Conklin Akbari observes the differentiation between the progenitor and progeny who reject and accept baptism respectively.¹⁹⁷ While she acknowledges that Laban, Fierbras and Floripas all possess an "irascibility," this behavior eventually cools in the latter two when they ultimately convert.¹⁹⁸ Despite this textual differentiation, the visual program does not make this distinction. By focusing on Laban's resistance, the visual program underscores that the *total* conversion of the Babylonian lineage may not be possible, even if it is for some members and inheritors.¹⁹⁹ Shyama Rajendran has previously noted the ways that medieval European Latin Christian texts quickly dispense with recently Christianized Muslims, as a way to deny them "reproductive futures," thereby erasing them from the narrative. Conversely, in the case of Fierabras' and Floripas,' their conversion becomes tainted with their genealogical past, one that is incongruent with those of Charlemagne and his peers. The second significance of the Sultan's indelibility applies more strongly to the Egerton and its backdrop of the Hundred Years War discussed previously. Whatever else the French might be, they were already-Christians, and therefore more

¹⁹⁶ Marianne Ailes, "The deaths of kings and political propaganda in the Brut epitome of British Library MS Egerton 3028," *Reading Medieval Studies* 44 (2018): 50.

¹⁹⁷ Akbari, *Idols of the East*, 158. For Floripas' conversion see: Brandin, "La Destruction de Rome et Fierabras: MS. Egerton 3028," 98.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 165-166.

¹⁹⁹ Again, while Fierabras is described as "king of Babylon" the ending of this narrative sees Charlemagne give the land to Gy de Bourgoïn (who marries Floripas) with Fierabras governing parts of it. Thus "Babylon" as a pseudo-Islamic polity is shattered and reformed into a new Christian land See: Newth, *Fierabras and Floripas*, 214.

readily associated with. In a political moment where these two European Latin Christian polities fought against each other, the depiction of the adamant Sultan at the font, pits the “already-Christian” against those who were not, and would never truly be. The last folios of the Egerton visually manifests this dichotomy through the penultimate miniature (117r) and the final one (118r). When turning the page, the viewer witnesses a juxtaposition between Laban’s rejection of the Christian fold on one side, and Charlemagne sailing home, with his Christian host unified between the fleur de-lis and the soaring cross at the helm (**Figure 17**). Moreover, as Marianne Ailes and Phillipa Hardman argue, Egerton casts the king of England as Charlemagne thereby framing him as “the one who will unite all the Christians.”²⁰⁰ Thus, the Sultan’s refusal and lack of integration threatens the boundaries of “Christendom” which elevates the emperor’s need to rally against him. The English patrons could imagine themselves placing their political differences with the Valois crown aside in order to destroy a threat that baptism may not convince.

II.B– Esclabor le Mesconnu

Despite his status as a minor character in the Arthurian legend, Esclabor le Mesconnu also serves as an excellent example for considering the desire for, but insufficiency of the Sultan of Babylon’s conversion. However, whereas Laban’s trajectory remains villainous from his introduction to his ultimate refusal of baptism, Esclabor’s character arc is heroic throughout, if ultimately tragic. The father of the famous Muslim knight Palamedes, strictly speaking Esclabor is not referred to as the “sultan” but rather the “king of Babylon” in the *Prose Tristan*.²⁰¹ The

²⁰⁰ Hardman and Ailes, *The Legend of Charlemagne*, 139.

²⁰¹ Sylvia Huot, *Outsiders: The Humanity and Inhumanity of Giants in Medieval French Prose Romance* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2016), 214. See also: *Tristan en Prose*, ed. Renee Curtis, vol 1 (Munich: Max Huber, 1963), 164. Ross Odell also notes Esclabor’s various relationships with Babylon in a footnote. See:

Post-Vulgate tradition suggests that this Babylon refers to the Levant, as opposed to Laban's polity in the Middle English *Sowdone de Babyllone* where Babylon refers to Egypt.²⁰² When Knights of the Round Table Sir Galahad and Sir Bors meet Esclabor, he describes himself as "a native of Galilee," (in modern day Lebanon) though does not explicitly mention his status as a lord of Babylon.²⁰³ Similarly, in *Guiron le Courtois*, the text describes him as a knight born in the city of Babylon.²⁰⁴ Finally, Sir Thomas Malory's fifteenth-century *Le Morte D'Arthur* identifies Esclabor (Astlabor) as a king but does not mention his homeland.²⁰⁵ Placing these various degrees of Esclabor's association with "Babylon" to one side, his entrance into the Arthurian narrative remains rather consistent. A pagan ("Saracen") knight, he leaves his Eastern homeland as tribute to Rome where he saves the Emperor from an attacking lion. Gaining his freedom he subsequently travels to Arthur's court who is surprised to learn the knight's religious status and thus names him "Le Mesconnu" or the "Unknown."²⁰⁶ When comparing the Muslim knight's journey in *Meliadus de Leonnoys* to medieval travel narratives, Jennifer Robin Goodwin notes that Esclabor functions as a "mirror image" to those of Marco Polo: a reversal which imagines the perspective of the Easterner coming West.²⁰⁷ Developing this analysis, we can also understand Esclabor's arrival in Camelot as another type of mirror. If texts such as

Ross C. Odell, "Feelings as Heraldic Devices in Late Middle English Chivalric Romance," (Phd Dissertation University of Oregon, 2022), 48.

²⁰² Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, "On Saracen Enjoyment: Some Fantasies of Race in Late Medieval France and England," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31 (2001): 126. For examples of the *Post Vulgate* and *Quest of the Holy Grail* traditions referring to Sarras as the land of Babylon see: *Lancelot-Grail: The Old French Arthurian Vulgate and Post-Vulgate in Translation Volume V*, ed., Norris J. Lacy (Garland Publishing, 1996), 288. See also *Volume IV*, 87.

²⁰³ *Lancelot-Grail: The Old French Arthurian Vulgate and Post-Vulgate in Translation Volume V*, ed., Norris J. Lacy (Garland Publishing, 1996), 146.

²⁰⁴ See also: *Guiron le Courtois*, fifteenth century, BnF fr. 356 f. 2v.

²⁰⁵ Thomas Malory, *Morte D'Arthur: Sir Thomas Malory's Book of King Arthur and of His Noble Knights of the Round Table* (London: Macmillan, 1871), 318, 320.

²⁰⁶ Lathuillère, *Guiron le Courtois*, 189. See also: *Guiron le Courtois*, BnF fr. 356 f. 3r.

²⁰⁷ Jennifer R. Goodman, *Chivalry and Exploration: 1298-1630* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1998), 94.

Marco Polo or *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville* paint and promise the ability for Latin Christian readers to consume the wondrous sites, customs, creatures, and peoples of a medieval Orientalized fantasy, then Esclabor's presence functions in a parallel manner, a textual magnet that draws the desired convert to their shores.²⁰⁸ This wish becomes partially satisfied as Esclabor eventually converts to Christianity.²⁰⁹

I say partially satisfied because the memorialization of the character never completely jettisons his Islamic past. For example, an illumination from a *Noms, Armes et Blasons* manuscript (BnF fr. 1437 71v) depicts Esclabor's heraldry (**Figure 18**). This image participates in an armorial manuscript tradition popular in the fifteenth century, with 74 extant copies, which catalogs the one hundred and seventy-eight Knights of the Round Table present for the Feast of Pentecost at Camelot shortly before the start of the Grail Quest.²¹⁰ As such, the text, while situated in specific (if imaginary) time and place, also gestures towards the knights' ultimate fates in the twilight years of Arthur's reign. Esclabor's crimson and gold device recalls the black-white checkerboard pattern attributed to his more famous son, whose heraldry possesses a recognizable iconography throughout late medieval Arthurian manuscripts. I have argued elsewhere that Palamedes' sigil throughout fifteenth century Arthurian manuscripts, even after the point of his textual conversion, stains him with the "optical indelibility" of his "Saracenic" past. In both romance and armorial texts, the blackness on his shield eternally mars his potential

²⁰⁸ See: Suzanne Conklin Akbari, *Idols in the East: European Representations of Islam and the Orient, 1100-1450* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), 11-24. See also: Suzanne Conklin Akbari, "The diversity of mankind in The Book of John Mandeville," in *Eastward Bound: Travel and Travelers, 1050-1550*, ed. Rosamund Allen, 157-176 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004).

²⁰⁹ The *Post-Vulgate* text explains that Esclabor had a religious experience after a lightning bolt struck a band of his fellow pagan knights dead. See: *Lancelot-Grail Volume V*, 146-147.

²¹⁰ Michel Pastoureau, *Armorial des Chevaliers de la Table Ronde* (Le Léopard d'Or, 1983), 15. For the armorial commemorating this feast see: *Armorial des chevaliers de la Table ronde*, fifteenth century, BnF fr. 1437, f. 2r.

pure white status.²¹¹ Despite the similarity between the devices of father and son, I do not attach the same analysis to the heraldry of Esclabor. After all, crimson and gold do not hold the same metaphorical value as black and white and if anything, these more brilliant colors potentially articulate the character's royal status. Writ large, this particular combination of colors does not possess any particular significance. In his comparison of historical heraldic motifs with those found in this Arthurian armorial tradition, Michael Pastoureau notes that twenty percent of known heraldic emblems dating 1200-1500 utilize "or" and gules" (gold and red), a percentage which reflects the twenty one percent of devices for the Knights of the Round Table.²¹² The repeated use of the chessboard, a device only used for Esclabor and his sons Palamedes and Saphar, is consistent with heraldic attributions throughout this manuscript.²¹³ For example, King Lot of Orkney and his progeny (here documented as Gawain, Mordred and Agravain), all possess the same double-headed golden eagles on purple fields as their coat of arms even if their supporters and mottos distinguish them.²¹⁴ Familial association does have implications and thus, the continued use of the chessboard motif may loosely refer to a generational sinfulness in the case of the Muslim knights. However, the main site Esclabor's racialization does not appear in the coat of arms itself but in the shield's supporters. While the armorial features various fantastic creatures flanking heraldic devices throughout, Esclabor's is one of a handful of entries to depict human beings.²¹⁵ Moreover, only his coat of arms features a pair of Turks, complete with striped

²¹¹ Tirumular (Drew) Narayanan, "Sir Palamedes the Indelibly 'Saracen' Knight: Heraldry, Monstrosity and Race in Fifteenth-Century Arthurian Romance Manuscripts," in *The Arthurian World*, ed. Miriam Edlich-Muth, Renée Ward, & Victoria Coldham-Fussell (Oxfordshire: Routledge 2022): 326-347.

²¹² Pastoureau, *Armorial des Chevaliers*, 21.

²¹³ Gerard J. Brault, *Early Blazon: Heraldic Terminology in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries with Special Reference to Arthurian Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 188-189.

²¹⁴ See BnF 1437: Lot 21v, Gawain 54r, Agravain 73r. See also: Brault: *Early Blazon*, 38-43. See also: Pastoureau, *Armorial des Chevaliers*, 84.

²¹⁵ For some examples of human supporters in BnF fr. 1437 see: Guiron le Courtois 6v, Mordred 74r, Normans le Pelerin, Feé des Dames 131r, Arthur le Petit 80v, l'enfant du Plessis 107v. Amant le bel Josteor 91r, Geoffroi de la tour 135v, Arganon le Riche 123v, Lancelot 52r. Furthermore, the supporters of Guiron (Naked Female Moors),

robes, and foreign hats. The right figure wears a large scimitar on his belt, the largest depiction of a weapon in a book of arms, possibly a sign of Latin Christian polemics of Islamic violence.²¹⁶ According to Michel Pastoureau these Turks could sometimes appear “au naturel,” naked, a metaphor for their imagined uncivilized and barbaric nature.²¹⁷ The association of a previously Muslim character with these figures in a fifteenth-century text carries particular implications given the Ottoman sack of Constantinople in 1453 which threatened Latin Christian epistemological security. Despite his conversion, Esclabor remains associated with members of his former religion.

The text reinforces this interpretation, with the rubric titling him as “Esclabor le Mesconnu” and the first line beneath it reading “Esclabor was of pagandom and was brought to serve the emperor of Rome.”²¹⁸ The endurance of the moniker also provides a semiotic marker of his past. The “Unknown” character can be found *en masse* in the *Arthuriad* and is not necessarily a pejorative. From the inception of this title in *Le Bel Inconnu*, to thematic equivalents as found

Mordred (Female Moors), Normans le Pelerin (Naked Male Moors) Lancelot (Savage Men) are some of the few explicitly racialized figures in this manuscript.

²¹⁶ For a parallel visual example linking scimitars to violence see: Strickland, *Saracens, Demons and Jews*, 184. For a discussion of medieval Latin Christian writings on Islamic violence see: John Victor Tolan, *Saracens: Islam in the Medieval*, 88-94, 250-254.

²¹⁷ Pastoureau, *Armorial des Chevaliers*, 64. This is not uncommon as a number of figures are naked as well in this manuscript as well. For an example of nudity and racialized figures see: Sherry C. M. Linquist, Asa Simon Mittman, *Medieval Monsters: Terrors, Aliens, Wonders* (New York: The Morgan Library & Museum, 2018), 99-100.

²¹⁸ My transcription and translation: “Il estoit de payeme et fut amene serf à lempereur de Romme.” BnF 1437 f. 70v. “Payeme” does not appear in Middle French dictionaries. It is also possible that the term may refer to Esclabor serving as payment or tribute. I choose to translate this word as “pagandom” because the spelling of “paiem” for “pagan” also exists in Middle French. Furthermore, at least one manuscript uses the spelling of “paieme” (BnF 1437 f. 39r), and another sixteenth century uses “payene” (Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, MS-4976 f. 51r). Finally, Middle English uses “Payeme” and “Paieme” to refer to “pagandom.” Even if Esclabor’s biographical entry does not refer to him as “pagan” explicitly this status is clear both from the inclusion of “Lemesconnu” and from the entry for his son Palamedes which refers to the knight as “Palamede le Payen” (Palamedes the Pagan) while also using “Lemesconnu.” See: Dictionnaire du Moyen Français (1330-1550), “payeme,” <http://zeus.atilf.fr/dmf/>. See also: *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “payemy, n.,” July 2023. <<https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/1197445347>>. For Palamedes moniker see: BnF 1437 f. 118r-118v.

in Brunor le Noir and Gareth, many of them are protagonists.²¹⁹ Still, the use of this word alongside Esclabor carries different valences. Here, the term refers to an imperfect status and a deception, an uncomfortable ability that the non-believer could appear Christian. According to the *Meliadus* narrative, Arthur cannot discern the truth about Esclabor and mistakes his Christianness because he *speaks* so well. It is only when the latter informs the ruler of his religion that the king names him as “the Unknown.”²²⁰ Regardless of the knight's understood conversion in the armorial text, this title haunts him in every mention of him and even appears passed on to his sons.²²¹ Such continuity suggests a pseudo-genealogical attribute amongst Muslims, an ability to pass within Latin Christian society. Indeed, Latin Christians had been reckoning with this anxiety since the Fourth Lateran Council which determined that Muslims had to wear distinct clothes from Christians as to distinguish members of different confessional systems and prevent sexual intermingling. Confronted with the potential of indistinguishability, the manuscript resolves Esclabor's textual unknownness through the presence of the Turks. Developing Pastoureau's previous interpretation of similar images, I would argue that the Turks do not merely alert the viewer to Esclabor's “Oriental” origins but also function as signposts of his enduring religious unreliability, as he stands between them.²²²

Unlike his son, however, Esclabor's heraldry does not possess iconographic fixity beyond the armorial texts. Romance manuscripts do not generally depict him with his coat of arms, much less accompanied by Turks. Ostensibly, the reason for the former may be because of his role as a minor character and thus he does not receive a great deal of visual attention. Still, we should also

²¹⁹ For this motif see: Alan Lupack, *The Oxford Guide to Arthurian Literature and Legend* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) 317-20 and 443-44. See also: Robert H. Wilson, “The ‘Fair Unknown’ in Malory.” *PMLA* 58, no. 1 (1943): 1-21.

²²⁰ Lathuillère, *Guiron le Courtois*, 189-190.

²²¹ BnF fr. 1437 118v (Palamedes) and 71v (Saphar) respectively.

²²² Pastoureau, *Armorial des Chevaliers*, 64.

consider the reasons for Esclabor's visual treatment in different contexts contrasted with his presentation in the armorial. Returning to Heng's notion of "ethnophilia," the *Guiron de Courtais* manuscripts readily incorporate Esclabor into King Arthur's court and even that of the patron. In the *Guiron de* BNF 356 f. 1 produced in the fifteenth century, the image presents Esclabor saving the Emperor of Rome from a lion who has escaped the menagerie (**Figure 19**). Dressed in a red hat and green robe, Esclabor valiantly slays the ferocious creature with a straight sword on the left side. The opposite side presents a large city-castle with golden flags tipping its spires. A king dressed in both the English and French royal coat of arms, possibly the King Henry mentioned just below in the red rubric, rides forth from the battlements, wearing a fashionable falchion and meets a knight in a field.²²³ The inclusion of this royal figure thereby blends the realms of patronage and text, and it provides us with a clue as to how the unknown elite patron of this manuscript may have encountered this program. Without reading the text, the reader would be unable to know Esclabor's religion, any more than King Arthur could in the text. Yet similar to Arthur, even upon learning the truth, the "Saracenic" status means little here

²²³ The King Henry memorialized at the start of this manuscript is Henry II, a legacy of the thirteenth century inception of the *Guiron* narrative. Indeed, King Arthur had been associated with the Plantagenet Kings since the twelfth century. See: John Gillingham, "The cultivation of history, legend, and courtesy at the court of Henry II," in *Writers of the reign of Henry II: twelve essays*, 25-52 (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2006) 25-28. See: Emmanuele Baumgarner, "Figures du destinateur: Salomon, Arthur, le roi Henri d'Angleterre," in *Anglo-Norman Anniversary Essays*, ed. Ian Short, Anglo-Norman Text Society Occasional Publications Series 2 (1993): 1-10, 7-10; and Sian Echard, *Arthurian Narrative in the Latin Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 1-2. See also: Lathuillère, *Guiron le Courtois*, 31. However, given the fifteenth century production of this manuscript Henry may have doubly referred to Henry VI of England who claimed the throne of France between 1422-1453, though he would end up losing control over substantial parts of the region during his reign. The combined fleur de lis and lions heraldry potentially suggests this reading. Previous scholars have also noted Henry VI's use of Arthurian ancestry in his own propaganda. See: John W. McKenna "Henry VI of England and the dual monarchy: aspects of royal political propaganda, 1422-1432." *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 28. 1 (1965): 155. For example, of Henry VI heraldry see: BL Royal MS 15 E vi, f. 405r. For a discussion of Henry VI's reign see: Ralph A. Griffiths, *The reign of King Henry VI: The exercise of royal authority, 1422-1461* (University of California Press, 1981). For the distinction between a falchion and scimitar (and the potential slippages between them) see Kelly DeVries, and Robert Douglas Smith, *Medieval military technology* (University of Toronto Press, 2012), 23.

because the character functions as an impressive knight whose prowess in battle and eloquence in speech make him an excellent addition to any court.

A similar image in a *Guiorn* manuscript (BnF fr. 359 f. 1) produced for Louis of Bruges emphasizes this reading of Esclabor as a valuable character in this tradition (**Figure 20**). The illumination depicts a kneeling Louis as he presents the manuscript before the French ruler, whose Fleur de Lis arms are suspended above his head.²²⁴ In the distance, we once again find a scene of Esclabor killing a lion that attacks the emperor who is clad in a golden robe. Considering that the *Guiorn* text begins with Esclabor's introduction, this iconography often appeared in the first few folios of manuscripts dating from the thirteenth century.²²⁵ However, in the case of **Figure 20**, the inclusion of this motif requires more investigation as this manuscript only contains one illumination. As the hero of the *Guiorn le Courtois* text is Guiron and not Esclabor, the privileging of a less important character prompts us to question why. Unlike the eponymous figure, Esclabor's presence embodies both mythical chivalric past in the contemporaneous court and has the added benefit of representing the attraction of a foreign curiosity. The perspective between the court and Esclabor not only conveys the passage of time, but also geographical distance. Esclabor hails from far away, overcoming dangerous and fantastical encounters, until he ultimately arrives at the feet of the French king, in the form of the manuscript (one which begins with his story), which Louis now presents to the ruler. Parallel to the Emperor's acquisition of the Muslim knight and Arthur's acceptance of him, Louis here heralds Esclabor's arrival into France. This cyclical visual program which relies upon the

²²⁴ The provenance of this manuscript is somewhat complex. Originally produced for Louis of Bruges, lord of Gruuthuse between 1480-1490, the manuscript was later inherited by the French King Louis XII. See: Barbara Wahlen, "Adjoindre, disjoindre, conjoindre-Le recyclage d'*Alixandre l'Orphelin* et de *l'Histoire d'Erec* dans *Guiorn le Courtois* (Paris, BnF, français 358-363)." *Rencontres* 49.4 (2013): 235-247.

²²⁵ For other instances of this visual motif introducing this text see: Bibliothèque de Arsenal MS-3325 f. 1v, BnF fr. 338 f.1r, BnF fr. 356 f. 1.

receptionary interlacing of text and image embodies Heng's articulation of ethnophilia. Like a precious commodity, whose value grows via its transportation from distant lands, so too does Esclabor's as he moves from Babylon, to Rome, to Camelot and ultimately into an illuminated manuscript. Potentially as a result of this incorporated status, the illuminator has chosen to strip Esclabor of any overtly racializing qualities, allowing the character to visually pass, leaving the semiotic image of the text to mark him as a "pagan."

Returning to the text surrounding Esclabor's coat of arms in **Figure 18**, we find that the ethnophilic rhetoric of his romance iterations possesses an afterlife in his memorialization. As is common with the knightly biographical entries in the armorial, the Muslim receives a physical description. The text relates "he was of great and beautiful stature and his hair was curly and he had a large beard that does not happen often (incomparable), his arms were long and big and the remainder of his body was well made [...] bold beyond measure he was well spoken."²²⁶ Even in moments where Esclabor does not physically appear, his physical appearance does not consist of somatic differences from normative society but instead he is admired.²²⁷ Indeed, admiration here also possesses a second layer as the text also notes his command of a European language (ostensibly French). The description which accompanies the heraldry strongly contrasts with the invasionary implications indicated by the inclusion of the supporters. If Esclabor passes so completely in body and culture in the text, why does he appear alongside the Turks, a polity which are considered enemies in the contemporaneously produced *Le Morte d'Arthur*?²²⁸ An

²²⁶ My transcription and translation: "Et estoit de moult belle grandeur et les cheveux eust crespes et moult eust grant barbe et ne la foifoit pas souvent. Les bras eust long et gros le demourant du cros eust fi tresbien facit. Hardy a demesure estoit bien emparle." See BnF fr. 1437 f. 70v-71r.

²²⁷ We should not make the mistake of thinking that Esclabor is simply physically admired because of his status as a Knight of the Round Table. Take for example the extremely noncanonical Hideux le Fort Tirant (Hideous the Strong Tyrant) who while loyal to Arthur is described as black and full of wounds/sores. See BNF 1437 f. 140r.

²²⁸ Peter H. Goodrich, "Saracens and Islamic Alterity in Malory's 'Le Morte Darthur.'" *Arthuriana*, vol. 16 no.4, 2006, 12-14.

answer to this question may be found in the conclusion of Esclabor's life, one found in the armorial text, but not in the *Guiron*, where he commits suicide grieving for the death of his son Palamedes. Alexandra Illina has previously analyzed this act stating "he explains his marginality and belonging to a completely different morality, condemnable. Furthermore, he shows himself incapable of controlling his feelings, as a Christian is supposed to do."²²⁹ Similarly I have noted elsewhere that despite his conversion "Esclabor cannot help but ultimately revert to his sinful 'Saracenic' actions, namely suicide" an act associated with Muslims in Latin Christian polemics.²³⁰ Thus in **(Figure 18)** he becomes iconographically reassociated with his former co-religionists.

The text even relates the manner in which "he killed himself with his sword."²³¹ The inclusion of this act and the specificity of this information is another outlier in this manuscript. Most knights receive heavily sanitized versions of their biographies in the armorial. For example, while the text mentions Tristan's relationship with Queen Isolde, it does not say anything about her being the wife of his uncle King Mark.²³² Similarly, Lancelot's affair with Queen Guinevere receives only a passing mention.²³³ The minimization of the knights' illicit actions can be explained as an attempt to valorize the major heroes of the Round Table in a text commemorating their imagined lives. Yet even in comparison with other minor "outsider" characters, Esclabor receives far worse treatment. Let us consider the commemoration of the longtime antagonist in the *Arthuriad*, King Ryons of Wales, who here inexplicably becomes a

²²⁹ "Par son geste transgressif, il explicite sa marginalité et l'appartenance à une toute autre moralité, condamnable." Alexandra Illina, "Un paradoxe littéraire médiéval. Le Sarrasin dans 'Le Roman de Tristan.'" *Revista Cercurilor studențești ale Departamentului de Limba și Literatură Franceză (RCSDLLF)* 4 (2015): 20.

²³⁰ Narayanan, "Sir Palamedes the Indelibly 'Saracen' Knight," 341.

²³¹ My transcription and translation: "Il se tua de son espee." BnF fr. 1437 f. 71r.

²³² BnF fr. 1437 f. 57r-57v. Tristan's motto (which does not appear in the heraldic motto but does so in the text is "c'est pour yseul" (It is for Isolde).

²³³ BnF fr. 1437 f. 51v. The only mention of Queen Guinevere here is "la femme de son maistre le roy Artu." (the wife of his [Lancelot's] master, King Arthur).

Knight of the Round Table via his inclusion. Texts such as the *Suite du Merlin* relate that the evil ruler invades Logres early in Arthur's reign demanding that the young king send him his shaved beard as a sign of tribute.²³⁴ However, the armorial tradition removes any mention of this animosity instead only stating that "[Ryons] loved Arthur since he made peace with him."²³⁵ This differential treatment continues into their visualization. Far from racialized caricatures, Ryons possesses a blazon with a green and gold lion, his motto in French reading "trop mi tarde," leaving no stain of his adversarial relationship with Arthur (**Figure 21**).²³⁶ In contrast, Esclabor's device just repeats his name: a visual echo, a reminder that the knight never received a new name after baptism, calling into question the legitimacy of his original conversion.²³⁷ The possibility of a re-"Saracened" apostate in Camelot is so unwelcome that he does not merit a status of absolute integration as the Welsh villain receives. The odiousness of Esclabor's act cannot disappear like the sins of Lancelot, Tristan or Ryons because the impermanent nature of the Muslim convert threatens the episteme of Camelot-as-Christian. Such disjunctions cannot remain unchallenged, especially when commemorating the eve of the Grail quest, and so his "Saraceness" must be recognized, even if the knight does not die until after this adventure begins.

²³⁴ *Lancelot-Grail: The Old French Arthurian Vulgate and Post-Vulgate in Translation Volume I*, ed., Norris J. Lacy (Garland Publishing, 1996), 392-395.

²³⁵ My transcription and translation: BnF fr. f. 22r: "Moult ayma le roi artus depuis quil eust fait paix avecqs luy.

²³⁶ Brault has previously noted that in the *Suite du Merlin* Ryons possess a mantle of beards and crowns of the kings he had subjected. That this iconography does not make any appearance as part of his heraldic emblem also provides evidence of Ryons' sanitization in this text. After all, the Knights blazons are in many cases informed by text first as can be found in the case of Palamedes' black/white shield. See: Brault, *Early Blazon*, 139 (for Rions) and 189 (for Palamedes).

²³⁷ Similar to the model of Saul/Paul, Christian converts sometimes receive new names as can be seen in the Sultan of Damas in *The King of Tars*. See: Cord Whitaker, *Black Metaphors: How Modern Racism Emerged from Medieval Race-Thinking*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), 172.

While rarely illuminated, an image of Esclabor's death in BnF 112 provides contemporaneous context for the seriousness of the knight's final decision (**Figure 22**). Produced for a collector of the Arthurian texts Jacques d'Armagnac by Micheau Gonnot, the illumination follows that of Palamedes' death who dies as a good Christian at the hands of Gawain and Agravaine.²³⁸ The image presents Esclabor, dressed in a crimson hauberk, as he stabs himself with a sword in his right side, the wound seeped with blood-red. Note that like his depiction in the *Guiron le Courtois* manuscripts, Esclabor's racialization does not manifest epidermally. Still, the manuscript's compartment and ordering provides an instructional on how that character should be visually interpreted. The iconography of this scene parallels the popular image of Christ's crucifixion, where the Roman soldier spears him just below his right breast.²³⁹ By employing an inversion of this motif, with the knight stabbing himself, the illuminator implies Esclabor scrubbing away his Christianity. He perverts this recognizable iconography through his suicide thereby removing Christ's sacrifice for his immortal soul. The scenes which immediately follow narrate the birth of the Questing Beast. The first of these relate how the human mother of the monster had been seduced by the devil (**Figure 23**). Upon first glance, the devil does not appear demonic at all with his handsome face and courtier's costume. However, a closer inspection reveals that he possesses horns and clawed feet. In turning the folios, the medieval reader would have encountered the death of Esclabor on 150r which precedes the rubric

²³⁸ Miriam Edlich-Muth has previously written that this manuscript may have served as a "mirror for noblemen" but may also have had various political implications given the patron's tumultuous relationship with the French King Louis XI. See: Miriam Edlich-Muth, *Malory and his European Contemporaries: Adapting Late Arthurian Romance Collections* (Suffolk: D.S. Brewer, 2014), 48-49. See also: Cedric Pickford, *L'évolution du roman arthurien en prose vers la fin du Moyen-Âge* (Paris, Nizet, 1960), 209.

²³⁹ For the duration and significance of Christ's right-sided wound (and the nuancing of this iconography see: James Hall, *The Sinister Side: How Left-Right Symbolism Shaped Western Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 168-186. See also: Vibeke Olson, "Penetrating the Void: Picturing the Wound in Christ's Side as a Performative Space," in *Wounds and Wound Repair in Medieval Culture* ed. Larissa Tracy & Kelly DeVries, (Leiden: Brill 2015), 313-339.

describing this event. In turning the folio to complete the chapter, the reader would first be confronted with the seduction scene in the bottom right corner of 151r, its foliated decoration drawing their eye. The overall effect directs the viewer to consider these scenes alongside one another even if they appear in separate chapters and involve different characters. The textual and visual program also facilitates this association. After all, the progeny of this demonic union (which appears on 152v) had previously been slain by Esclabor's son Palamedes. Previous scholars have interpreted the Questing Beast as a metaphor for the "Saracen" knight's hybridity.²⁴⁰ Thus its posthumous reappearance following the death of the knight's father suggests a familial inability to erase their Islamic past. The physical presence of the Devil also gestures towards Esclabor's final destination, even if it is not articulated in the text. Like the princess who births the monster, the "pagan" knight has been seduced to commit moral apostasy by the temptation of his grief. Simultaneously, the devil also reflects the status Esclabor inhabits both in the Vulgate text and in the armorial. As Satan's human guise masks his monstrosity, so too does Esclabor straddle the boundaries of the "Unknown," seemingly Christian though engaged in un-Christian acts.

Evidently, the invitation extended to a Babylonian knight by King Arthur's court does not guarantee a permanent residence. Esclabor's consistently alternating status reflects a parallel reality to that of other previously non-Christian knights in Arthuriana.²⁴¹ Following Esclabor's suicide in BNF 1437, the text initially appears conflicted as it laments Esclabor's death stating he

²⁴⁰ Antonio L. Furtado, "The Questing Beast as Emblem of the Ruin of Logres in the Post-Vulgate," *Arthuriana* 9.3, (1999): 44-46.

²⁴¹ For some discussions of this phenomenon see: Sylvia Huot, "Others and Alterity," in *Cambridge Companion to Medieval French Literature*, ed. Simon Gaunt & Sarah Kay (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 249. Dorsey Armstrong, "Postcolonial Palomides: Malory's Saracen Knight and the Unmaking of Arthurian Community," *Exemplaria*, 18. 1 (2006): 175-203. Shyama Rajendran, "E(race)ing the Future: Imagined Medieval Reproductive Possibilities and the Monstrosity of Power," in *Monstrosity, Disability, and the Posthuman in the Medieval and Early Modern World*, ed. (Richard H. Godden & Asa Simon Mittman, Palgrave, 2019), 127-144. Heng, *Invention of Race*, 218.

was a great man to God and to the century. Yet this language quickly recovers, reminding the viewer before they would turn the page to see the heraldry on the following verso: “he is ‘Unknown’ as is seen in his device.”²⁴² When analyzing the meaning of Esclabor’s “Unknown” status in the *Prose Tristan* Alexandra Illina writes “his nickname says a lot about the place of “Saracens” in the romance, unknown, they arouse curiosity and fear.”²⁴³ Nuancing this reading I propose that Esclabor’s characterization does not communicate curiosity as much as a curio, an object of desire. Furthermore, “fear” of him can better be described as an anxiety about his ability to pass. Thus, his Unknown status (and that of other Muslims) results from an uncertainty of whether they could ever truly be Christian at all, despite that hope. Returning to the Esclabor’s shield, the fluctuating colors in this pattern reveals his unstable Christianness. Perhaps this effect may be better understood in a manuscript which utilizes gold leaf instead of gold paint, as may be seen in a sixteenth century armorial (**Figure 24**). The reflective quality of this material against light, alternating with the painted red squares, produces an undulating movement heraldry, an unstatic, even shimmering quality. In theorizing medieval race Cord Whitaker formulates his language of the race as a “rhetorical mirage” which possesses a “shimmer,” a simultaneous “presence and nonpresence.”²⁴⁴ Though completely abstracted, the armorial motif, in concert with the textual narrative, not only encapsulates Whitaker’s metaphor but communicates Esclabor’s wavering and unstable Christian conviction. In other words, the shimmer here, in a very material sense, reflects the Muslim knight’s latent “Saraceness,” one communicated throughout the various manuscript traditions (both narrative and armorial). Indeed, we should not

²⁴² My transcription: quil en eust moult fut preudoms adieu et au siecle. See BnF fr. 1437 f. 71r.

²⁴³ My translation: “Son surnom dit long sur la place des Sarrasins dans le roman: méconnus, ils suscitent la curiosité et la peur.” Alexandra Illina, “Un paradoxe littéraire médiéval. Le Sarrasin dans ‘Le Roman de Tristan.’” *Revista Cercurilor studentești ale Departamentului de Limba și Literatură Franceză (RCSDLLF)* 4 (2015): 20

²⁴⁴ Cord Whitaker, *Black Metaphors: How Modern Racism Emerged from Medieval Race-Thinking*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), 4-10, 11.

treat these different traditions as isolated texts but part of the larger Arthurian narrative. By 1501 a manuscript of *Guiron le Courtois* produced by Antoine Verard cataloged descriptions of the heraldry of Knights of the Round Table, connecting them explicitly.²⁴⁵

Thus, in the end, ethnophilia, despite the desire to convert the non-Christian Other, has its own limits. The knight “born in Babylon” fails to meet the model of a good Christian Prince. As Illiana rightly notes, Esclabor’s body could only be placed in unconsecrated ground, a place reserved for suicides and, the most odious of traitors in the Arthurian tradition.²⁴⁶ This “beyond the grave” expulsion and rejection demonstrates the difficulty that Latin Christian narratives had in completely accepting that former Muslims could be meaningfully Christian even if there were such historical converts living in Europe.²⁴⁷ Certainly, a “Saracenic”(though Christian) prince could never be viewed as an equal to one born into the faith.

II.C Sultan of Babylon and St. Francis: A Fantasy Meeting

So far we have considered the fantastical “Sultans of Babylon,” as characters with no historical analogue or model. Yet equally worthy of consideration are historical characters or events presented in fantastical ways. The ahistorical knighting of Saladin’s son al-Afdal in *Histoire d’Outremer* or the imaginary in-person surrender of Jerusalem by al-Kamil to Frederick

²⁴⁵ A. Verard, *Guiron le Courtois c. 1501*, introduction by C.E. Pickford (London: The Scholar Press, 1977), f. ii. Pastoureau, *Armorial des Chevaliers*, 15.

²⁴⁶ King Mark’s fate serves as an example of this latter case. According to the *Post-Vulgate* the Cornish ruler sacks Camelot after Arthur’s death. After desecrating Lancelot’s tomb and destroying the Round Table, a knight kills Mark near a monastery and the monks place his body outside of the consecrated earth. In BnF 112 the evil king dies at the hands of bears after being bound in the woods, similarly, suggesting the unconsecrated place of his final resting place. *Lancelot-Grail Volume V*, 311-312. See also: BnF fr. 112 (3) 163r.

²⁴⁷ William Chester Jordan has argued that St. Louis brought some 598-1500 converts back from the Holy Land, settling them in areas in Northern France. William Chester Jordan, *The Apple of His Eye: Converts from Islam in the Reign of Louis IX* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 61-99.

II (Figure 25) serve as excellent examples.²⁴⁸ It is not that such textual and visual imaginations have no historical basis. In fact, a young prince al-Afdal did lead a contingent of his father's forces at the Battle of Cresson and al-Kamil did give Jerusalem to the German emperor.²⁴⁹ However, the narratives have been filtered through the lens of Latin Christian ethnophilia; in these cases, to create chivalric equivalents or princely parity at the site of conquest. Indeed, Islamic polities did not have European concepts of "kighthood" and al-Kamil never met Frederick, only giving him Jerusalem (with its walls razed) because he faced problems inside the Sultanate.²⁵⁰ These types of narratives, which straddle the boundaries between the fictional and the historical, form the heart of the case studies in Chapters 2, 3 and 4. Yet here, in discussing fantasy, desire and conversion, I wish to revisit the potentially historical exchange between St. Francis and the Sultan of Babylon (al-Malik al-Kamil). Previous scholarship as well as contemporary interfaith dialogues have lauded and lionized this meeting as an example of cross-confessional tolerance.²⁵¹ While acknowledging these valuable interpretations, I would also

²⁴⁸ Latin Christian crusade chronicles bookmark the battle of Cresson with Raymond the count of Tripoli "not daring to refuse a request of the son of Saladin, which he granted in honor of the latter's recent kighthood. Sébastien Mamerot. *A Chronicle of the Crusades: The Expeditions to Outremer: An Unabridged Annotated Edition with a Commentary*, ed. Thierry Delcourt Danielle Queruel Fabrice Masanès (Köln: TASCHEN, 2016), 545.

²⁴⁹ For al-Afdal's historical participation in the battle of Cresson see: David Nicolle and Helen Nicholson, *God's Warriors: Crusaders, Saracens and the Battle for Jerusalem*, (Oxford: Osprey, 2005), 52-59. For al-Kamil surrendering Jerusalem to Frederick II See also: Suleiman A. Mourad, "Too Big to be Owned: Reflections on Jerusalem in Islamic History." *Review of Middle East Studies* 53, no. 1 (2019): 28-30.

²⁵⁰ Maher Y. Abu-Munshar, "Sultan al-Kamil, Emperor Frederick II and the Submission of Jerusalem." *International Journal of Social Science and Humanity* 3, no. 5 (2013): 443-446. See also: Norman Housley, *Contesting the Crusades* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 70-71.

²⁵¹ The interfaith implications of this meeting possess a strong afterlife in modernity and have been well-inscribed into scholarship and popular history. For some examples see: Farhan Mujahid Chak, "Islam and the myth of the other: The Noble Colloquy between St. Francis of Assisi and Sultan al-Malik al-Kāmil," *The Muslim World* 109, no. 1-2 (2019): 126-143. Dawn M. Nothwehr O.S.F., "A Model for Muslim-Christian Dialogue on Care for the Earth: Vatican II, St. Francis and the Sultan, and Pope Francis," *Catholicism Engaging Other Faiths: Vatican II and its Impact* (2018): 265-284. Fareed Z. Munir, "Sultan al-Malik Muhammad al-Kamil and Saint Francis: interreligious dialogue and the meeting at Damietta." *Journal of Islamic Law and Culture* 10, no. 3 (2008): 307-317. Jason Welle O.F.M., "That's Gonna Leave a Mark: A Saint, a Sultan, and How Friendship Does (or Doesn't) Change the Church," *Changing the Church: Transformations of Christian Belief, Practice, and Life*, eds. Mark D. Chapman, Vladimir Latinovic (Palgrave Macmillan: 2021): 217-223.

Paul Moses, *The saint and the sultan: the Crusades, Islam, and Francis of Assisi's mission of peace*, (New York: Random House, 2009).

consider the inherent racializing narratives of “conversion impossible” which occur in the visualization of these scenes.²⁵² Rather than sifting through the various iterations and illuminations of Francis’ hagiography, I focus on a *Legend maior* manuscript produced in the fifteenth century. This exercise allows us to meditate upon how a contemporaneous Franciscan, in his political context, would visualize the Sultan’s final destination as an infernal one.

The manuscript in the Museo dei Cappuccini in Rome, Codice Inv. nr. 1266, was produced in Brescia Italy around 1457, as demonstrated in a final folio which marks this completion date.²⁵³ The manuscript relates Bonaventure’s *Legenda Maior*, which became the “authoritative text” for the life of the saint in 1266.²⁵⁴ While a colophon does not provide information about its patrons, similar texts were produced for friars of the order, to serve as a meditation and a model for living.²⁵⁵ The folios concerning Francis’ attempt to convert the Sultan may have been particularly worth considering for friars, as here the Saint is accompanied by Illuminatus of Acre. Beginning on folio 54, the image depicts the Sultan of Babylon sitting enthroned and flanked by black skinned attendants. The ruler wears a white turban surmounted by a gold crown, wearing red robes and carrying a scepter of state. Across six illuminations (**Figure 26**) (**Figure 27**) (**Figure 28**) (**Figure 29**) this iconography remains fairly consistent, perhaps because these illuminations in part relied upon earlier visual models as inspiration. Previous scholars such as Jurgen Einhorn and John Victor Tolan have noted the iconographic and compositional similarities to the famous Assisi frescoes or those painted by Giotto in Florence (**Figure 30**).²⁵⁶

²⁵² I am purposely playing here on the subtitle of Paul Moses’ article. See: Paul Moses, “Mission improbable: St. Francis & the Sultan,” *Commonweal* 136, no. 16 (2009): 11-16.

²⁵³ Servus Gieben & Vincenzo Criscuolo, “Introduction,” in Francesco D’Assisi Attraverso L’Immagine, Roma Museo Francese Codice INV. NR. 1266 (Rome: Istituto Storico Dei Cappuccini, 1992), 35.

²⁵⁴ John Victor Tolan, *Saint Francis and the Sultan: The Curious History of a Christian-Muslim Encounter*, (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 112.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 187.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, See also: Jürgen Werinhard Einhorn, “Das große Franziskulseben des Hl. Bonaventura in zewi illuminaten Handschriften in Rom und Madrid,” *Collectanea Franceseana*, 62 (1992) 5-61 (esp. 32-44).

Some parallels include the depiction of the Sultan sitting under a cupola or the flame meditating the space between Francis and the Sultan in the trial by fire scene (**Figure 31, Figure 32**). Yet the manuscript also contains important differences. When discussing Giotto's fresco, Erwin Panofsky has noted the gilded statues and lions decorating the Sultan's architectural space and throne serve as an allusion to his idolatry, remaining "Saracen" even after Francis' preaching.²⁵⁷ Acknowledging this interpretation, Peter Bokody notes the gold figures could serve as a symbol of the Sultan's and therefore the Orient's wealth.²⁵⁸ Yet in the manuscript scenes no such statues exist to serve as a visual manifestation of his racialized-religious fixity or even as a symbol of his "idolatrous" devotion to gold. Sartorial markers of difference, also make for poor evidence in locating the site of racialization. As Tolan has previously stated, the Sultan appears dressed as a European Latin Christian king, with the exception of his turban. Still, other iconographic elements, such as the cudgels wielded by the black skinned attendants who beat the friars bear more fruit (**Figure 33**). Previously Tolan has noted a textual and visual contradiction found in this scene. He asks "why show the friars conversing with the sultan *before* being beaten by his soldiers, in flagrant contradiction of the *Legenda Maior*?"²⁵⁹ An answer to this question may be found in the scepter that the Sultan carries in most of the illuminations, a thin white bar in his right hand, an example of which appears directly above the tortuous scene (**Figure 31**). The cudgels which the black skinned attendants use appear quite similar. By redeploing the scepter iconography as the cudgel, the visual program creates a visual link between the Sultan's authority and his attendants' violence. It is important to note that these black skinned characters

²⁵⁷ Erwin Panofsky, *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art* (New York: Icon, 1972), 148 n3.

²⁵⁸ Péter Bokody, "Idolatry or Power: St. Francis in Front of the Sultan," in *Promoting the Saints: Cults and Their Contexts from Late Antiquity until the Early Modern Period*, ed. Ottó Geeser, József Laszlovszky, Balázs Nagy, Marcell Sebők, Katalin Szende, 69-81 (Budapest: CEU Press, 2010), 79-80.

²⁵⁹ Tolan, *Saint Francis and the Sultan*, 190.

are not new to the visual narrative as they first appear standing behind the Sultan when the friars arrive (**Figure 26**). Rather than following the text, by placing Francis' meeting with the Sultan before his beating, the visual program implies that the ruler *orders* his soldiers to beat the friars. Thus, the epidermally different, dark-skinned servants are not racialized because of their cruel natures manifested externally but instead function as appendages of the Sultan's will, embodying his commands.²⁶⁰ The lambs which appear alongside the Sultan in (**Figure 31**) reinforce this reading. The *Legend Maior* states that Francis and Illuminatus encounter two lambs on their journey to Babylon, declaring them to be a sign from God as a metaphor for themselves. When they arrive in the Sultan's land "the Saracen sentries fell upon them like wolves swiftly overtaking the sheep, savagely seizing the servants of God [and] beating them with whips."²⁶¹ In (**Figure 31**) two lambs, looking up at the friars, sit at the Sultan's feet alluding to this narrative text.²⁶² In conjunction with the beating scene just below, the inclusion of these animals functions as a metaphor for the Sultan himself "savagely seizing" the friars and subsequently ordering their punishment.

Thus, the narrative reorganization places the onus of the friars suffering on the Sultan, making him responsible, indeed even commanding his soldiers actions. In doing so, the imagery undermines positive qualities attributed to the Sultan in the text, who upon meeting Francis admires his spiritual vigor of his speech and religious conviction.²⁶³ This switch racializes the

²⁶⁰ Madeline Caviness has discussed similar, black-skinned figures in a different medium. See: Madeline Caviness, "(Ex)Changing Colors: Queens of Sheba and Black Madonnas," in *Architektur und Monumentalskulptur des 12.–14. Jahrhunderts: Produktion und Rezeption: Festschrift für Peter Kurmann zum 75. Geburtstag*, ed. Stephan Gasser, Christian Freigang, and Bruno Boerner (Bern, 2006), 553–71

²⁶¹ I rely on Tolán's translation of this section of the *Legenda Maior* as well as an Italian translation to check the corresponding Latin. See: Tolán, *St. Francis and the Sultan*, 109. "Come lupi che si lanciano in fretta contro le pecore." See also: Bonaventura da Bagnoregio, *Vita di San Francesco: Legenda maior*, ed. Pietro Messa (Milan: Paoline, 2009), 236. Museo Francese Codice INV. NR. 1266 f. 55r-55v.

²⁶² Tolán, *St. Francis and the Sultan*, 189-190. Museo Francese Codice INV. NR. 1266 f. 55r.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, 110. See also: Bonaventura, *Vita di San Francesco*, 236-237. Museo Francese Codice INV. NR. 1266 f. 56r.

Sultan because it foreshadows his inability to convert, as he orders the beating of Francis *after* the saint has begun to evangelize directly to him as seen in his gestures indicating speech. Such disjunctions between text and image racialize the Sultan because they visually emphasize his inability to receive the Gospel, and therefore salvation.

This theme of the Sultan's religious fixity continues in the Trial by Fire illumination (**Figure 32**). According to the text Francis proposes a contest where if he is able to withstand the flames and the "Saracen" priests are not, the Sultan and his people would convert. However, terrified of this prospect, the priest flees.²⁶⁴ Scholars have given much attention to this narrative as it appears in other visual material, especially the Assisi frescoes and Giotto's fresco in the Bardi Chapel, though less has been given to manuscript renditions.²⁶⁵ The scene depicts Francis and Illuminatus, standing in front of the crimson flame, with the saint even touching it as a demonstration of his ability to remain unburned. On the right side, the Sultan once again appears enthroned, in profile and dressed in a deep red robe with a green trim. While he gestures with his hand either to the saint or to his priests, he dares not touch the fire. Two women wearing turbans and also wearing red (if faded) dresses now flank him instead of the dark-skinned attendants. A pair of priests stand on Francis' left side converse with one another, wearing the same crimson as their ruler, with the far-left figure also possessing the green trim on his robe. While they do not

²⁶⁴ Ibid., 110. See also: Bonaventura, *Vita di San Francesco*, 236. Museo Francese Codice INV. NR. 1266 f. 56v.-57r.

²⁶⁵ Alexandra Dodson, "Trial by Fire: St. Francis and the Sultan in Italian Art," in *The World of St. Francis of Assisi* ed. Bradley Franco & Beth Mulvaney, (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 60-79. See also Gregory W. Ahlquist, "Francis, the Sultan, and reading an image in context," in *The World of St. Francis of Assisi* ed. Bradley Franco & Beth Mulvaney, (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 45-59. Tolan, *St. Francis and the Sultan*, 173-184. One article also briefly mentions this scene in another manuscript Biblioteca Nazionale Vittorio Emanuele II, Rome- MS 411. See: Holly Flora, "Passion, charisma and gender in an illuminated manuscript of Bonaventure's Life of Saint Francis," *Specula: Revista de Humanidades y Espiritualidad* 1 (2021): 135.

look as terrified as found in earlier wall painting versions of this scene at Assisi or in Florence, they do stand away from the fire protected by the friars from the heat.²⁶⁶

While the subject of this illumination depicts Francis' religious supremacy, its composition serves as a metaphor for Muslims as well. The deep crimson color which characterizes the fire serves as a unifying sign of the Sultan's court. Even the cut of the Sultan's robe reflects the undulating shape of the flickering flames. Additionally, this is the only illumination which depicts Muslim women in the entire manuscript. The priest who stands closer to Illuminatus has been depicted in profile, with the face mimicking that of the Sultan. The Sultan of Babylon, his priests', his women, his entire polity are destined for a very different fire because of their refusal to convert to Christianity. Though the textual narrative suggests that the Sultan refuses to convert because he is afraid of sparking a rebellion amongst his people, the visual program presents the sultan as the one in charge.²⁶⁷ The presence of his followers surrounding him (the women and the priests) function as extensions of his princely authority which encompasses different genders and religious life. The priest's profile mirroring the Sultan serves as a symbol of him as another type of appendage in the ruler's body politic. This double articulation indicates that the Islamic prelate symbolizes the Sultan's religious fixity, unwilling to face Francis' challenge (as he faces the opposite direction) and the Christian truth therein. Neither epidermal difference nor Orientalized costumes convey racialized religion. The absence of the African attendants makes this all the more obvious, drawing the viewers eyes toward the

²⁶⁶ For a discussion of this scene in the Giotto paintings see: Mahmood Ibrahim, "Francis Preaching to the Sultan: Art and Literature in the Hagiography of the Saint," in *Finding Saint Francis in Literature and Art* ed. Cynthia Ho, Beth A. Mulvaney, John K. Downey (New York: Palgrave Macmillan) 2009): 54-55. See also: Dodson, "Trial by Fire: St. Francis and the Sultan in Italian Art," 76. See also: Tolan, *Saint Francis and the Sultan*, 179, 190.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 110. See also: Bonaventura, *Vita di San Francesco*, 237. Museo Franceseano Codice INV. NR. 1266 f. 56v.

“Saracenic” polity which is not simply characterized by the hermeneutic implications of dark skin. Rather it is communicated by a similarity with the fire, the fire which will not burn Francis or his companion but whose similitude will burn Muslims in hell.

A semiotic indicator outside of the main text also supports this interpretation. Just below the illumination we find the word “ignes” written on the parchment. It is difficult to say when this word was added. Perhaps it is a palimpsest of the manuscript’s production to indicate where important scenes should be illuminated. However, a survey of other significant moments in Francis’ life, such as the stigmata, include no such markers.²⁶⁸ Alternatively, I argue that this word indicates a friar’s readings and meditations on the life of St. Francis. Note that “ignes” appears not below the fire, but directly below the sultan. When discussing the relationship of text and illumination in medieval manuscripts, Stephen Nichols writes “the transgression practiced by the image is to deregulate the conventions by which we read and understand the narrative message as an authoritative statement about the world.”²⁶⁹ In the case of **(Figure 32)** we find multiple transgressions both in the image itself and in the semiotic sign of ignes which catches the viewer’s eye as outside the main text. Separated and hanging in space, this word-as-image holds open a gap, allowing for multiple interpretations of the illumination above it. Certainly, the inscription of these letters refers to Francis’ spiritual supremacy. Yet simultaneously, the placement implies the future consequences and destinations of those who do not accept the Saint’s (and therefore Christian) authority. Its presence creates a powerful visual nexus which

²⁶⁸ Museo Franceseano Codice INV. NR. 1266 f. 74v.

²⁶⁹ Stephen G. Nichols, “The image as textual unconscious: Medieval manuscripts” *L’esprit créateur* 29, no. 1 (1989): 19.

corresponds with the fiery color of Muslims' costumes. Francis cannot be burned because his faith is "correct" while the Sultan would ultimately descend into the Fire of Hell.

Much with the case of Esclabor, the 1450s production context may explain the reason for this emphasis upon the Sultan's religious fixity. While the Franciscans certainly benefited from the Mamluks Sultans who allowed their presence in the "Holy Land" even after the fall of Acre, their chronicle narratives often obfuscated this fact.²⁷⁰ As Christopher MacEvitt argues, to acknowledge this reality would undermine their suffering in the pursuit of converting the infidel.²⁷¹ Indeed, to some extent the Franciscan order had a vested interest in presenting the Sultan as hostile towards Christianity because such narratives bolstered their own martyrdom narratives.

Moreover, the looming threat of the Ottoman Turks in the late fourteenth and fifteenth century, especially after Nicopolis, may have served as reasons for these types of stories.²⁷² One Franciscan friar from Constantinople in *Tractatus de martyrio sanctourm* justifies seeking martyrdom via the Turks as a form of resisting Islam instead of Crusade. As E. Randolph Daniel interprets this text "just as the martyrs had enabled the early Christians to convert the pagans of their day, so the renewal of martyrdom and not Crusades would overcome Islam."²⁷³ Crucially for our discussion here, the unnamed author of the *Tractatus* refers to a Sultan twice, the first

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²⁷¹ Ibid., 22-23.

²⁷² For the Nicopolis Crusade and its effect on Western Europe see: Kelly DeVries, "The Lack of a Western European Military Response to the Ottoman Invasions of Eastern Europe from Nicopolis (1396) to Mohács (1526) In *Medieval Warfare 1300–1450* (Routledge 2017), 543-544. See also: Aziz Suryal Atiya, *The Crusade of Nicopolis* (London: Methuen and Co., 1934), 94-98, See also: James Magee. *Politics, society and the Crusade in England and France, 1378-1400* (PhD diss, University of Leicester, 1997). Kelly DeVries, "The effect of killing the Christian prisoners at the battle of Nicopolis." In *Crusaders, Condottieri, and Cannon* (Brill, 2003), 158.

²⁷³ E. Randolph Daniel, *The Franciscan Concept of Mission in the High Middle Ages* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1975), 121.

time invoking St. Francis' audience as a model for new potential martyrs.²⁷⁴ The other addresses that the "Sultan of Saracens" had been kidnapping young Christian boys turning them into Muslim soldiers, a reference to Ottoman military practices.²⁷⁵ While the goal of the Franciscan author is certainly to win converts, there remains an underlying reality of the Sultan's unwillingness to change as he has been the one forcibly converting Christians to his own religion. Even a text which proposes "martyrdom to save souls" as the best course of action to prevent the spread of Islam acknowledges the Sultan's own political interests generates an obstruction to the spiritual goal.

These narratives correspond to other European Latin Christian depictions of the Sultan and his polity's inconvertibility. Tolan observes that fifteenth century paintings (such as those in Nicolas Frances Baneza altarpiece or the fresco at Santa Maria della Grazie in Bergamo) emphasize the Sultan's brutality and unreceptive attitude towards Francis, something he claims can be found in "their ugly scowling faces," at least in Baneza's piece.²⁷⁶ He posits that such depictions too could have been a response to rising Turkish power and a need to emphasize their irredeemability.²⁷⁷ Yet in focusing on physiognomic articulations of difference, Tolan observes a shift in the frescos that already exists in the Museo dei Cappuccini manuscript, although in far more subtle ways. The fixity appears in the sheer number of folios devoted to figuring the Sultan and Francis together, each rendering imagining yet another attempt by the Saint to win the Islamic ruler or the hellish implications of the courtly costume. The brutality appears in the re-organization of the torture narrative from text to image placing the Sultan as the driving force

²⁷⁴ Jacob Langeloh, *Der Islam Auf Dem Konzil Von Basel (1431-1449): Eine Studie Mit Editionen Und Übersetzungen Unter Besonderer Berücksichtigung Des Johannes Von Ragusa* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2019), 475.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 451. See also: Daniel, *The Franciscan Concept of Mission*, 120.

²⁷⁶ Tolan, *St. Francis and the Sultan*, 210.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

behind the hostility. Thus, the visual program does not frame Francis' inability to convert the Sultan as his own failure, but rather that of the Sultan's. The ethnophilic fantasy of a Saint incorporating Muslims can only go so far before the blame for the lack of integration falls on the absence of "the root of true piety in the Sultan's soul."²⁷⁸ This lack of faith curiously complements Esclabor's faithlessness in committing suicide. Galatians 3:28 states "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus."²⁷⁹ Thus in the medieval European Latin Christian epistemology, all humans could accept Christ, to be welcomed into the fold of the church. However, if Muslim princes could not become fully Christian ones in romance and hagiographic narratives, then they do not function as truly human.

III. Mortal Combat in the Luttrell Psalter: Between Monstrosity and Desire and Making "Saladin."

Evidently, even taxonomizing the Sultan of Babylon in neat classifications proves difficult as nuances within these sub-categories defy their borders. The monstrous does not always appear immediately apparent and desire for the Other is not always fulfilled. Returning again to the *Luttrell Psalter* scene (**Figure 1**) I would note that this image also engages in the different types of Latin Christian fantasy. As previously discussed, the blue-faced presentation of Saladin reflects the monstrous attributes applied to "Saracens" elsewhere. While he does not exhibit the same "exorbitance" as Laban, he does display a behavioral excess, with his teeth bared, suggesting ferocious anger in contrast to the Christian knight's unreadable face. A detail

²⁷⁸ Ibid., 110. See also: Bonaventura, *Vita di San Francesco*, 237. See also: Museo Francese Codice INV. NR. 1266 f. 56v-57r.

²⁷⁹ Galatians 3:28. For a longer discussion of the intersection of this verse and race see: Denise Kimber Buell, "Race and universalism in early Christianity," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 10, no. 4 (2002): 429-468.

of the “Saracen” figure's face even reveals white painted nostrils, perhaps smoke issuing forth **(Figure 34)**. While monstrosity is certainly obvious though, this image also includes an aspect of desire, if more subtle in tenor. The bizarre symmetry of these figures is striking. Far from just the chiasmic interlocking of their lances, the characters mirror one another in color and composition. The orange heraldry and caparison of “Richard” matches the hauberk of “Saladin.” Conversely, the skin tone of the “Saracen” knight corresponds with the underbelly of the “Christian” steed. The left figure's horse flies forward with all legs extended, while the right pulls to a halt. The purple caparison matches the scarf while they carry shields on opposite sides. Finally, both warriors have been decorated with gold leaf, most visibly on their heads. On one hand the mutual use of this material further inscribes a chivalric parity between the two combatants. Yet, while Richard wears a helmet, with subtle details articulating the visor, Saladin's at first glance, looks more like a crown (or at least an open-faced helmet) with its bauble-topped fin. Yet upon closer inspection, the accoutrement does not actually sit on top of the “Saracen” figure's head but *behind* it. While the gold is damaged, we can still see a slotted visor— this crown is no crown at all. The impact of Richard's lance against Saladin's body has knocked the latter's helmet off, implying that it had previously covered his face in the moments before the viewer encounters this battle.²⁸⁰ This interpretation perhaps explains the curved nose area of the helmet, which would have conformed to the Muslim knight's hooked nose. The illumination does not simply signal Christian victory but depicts a Christian knight shattering a Muslim warrior's chivalric masquerade to reveal his monstrosity. Trading in Latin Christian ideas about internal sin manifesting externally the image also accuses their Islamic counterparts of performing a lie, in

²⁸⁰ For the notion of the “force of the blow struck by the knight's lance and reveals his caricatured blue face, which is echoed by the emblem on the shield.” See Michelle P. Brown, “Commentary” in *The Luttrell Psalter: A Facsimile* (London: British Library), 39.

trying to hide it.²⁸¹ Thus, the optical dynamics between these figures create a tension which frames “Saladin” as a fantasized knightly equivalent, at least before the start of this scene, but one ultimately unveiled as insufficient, recalling the characterization of Esclabor. Yet, the illumination also evokes desire of a very different type, one of possession and acquisition. While the gold embellishes “Richard” as a Christian hero, its use for “Saladin” suggests his ownership of this material, wrought and shaped for his own combat and therefore evil purpose. In defeating his opponent, the Christian knight lays claim to it. The visual narrative promises not only Christian victory over Islam but provides material evidence for the booty to be found in the “Holy Land.” Pamela Patton has previously stated that Psalm 41 which surrounds this illumination does not connect with the illumination.²⁸² On the contrary the Psalm activates the illumination, noting the location as to where a crusader could acquire this “Saracenic” gold. On the top of the folio the text invokes the “land of Jordan and Hermoniim from the little hill.”²⁸³ The text-image interaction invites the reader to meditate upon Biblical sites, thereby engendering the possibilities of crusade both spiritual and material. Moreover, the entire program paints a multi-layered narrative, a presentation which relies upon the undulation between ethnophobia and ethnophilia. To some extent, previous scholarship has fallen into the propagandistic trap of this scene in their own desire to read it as a fantasy battle between Richard and Saladin.

²⁸¹ Strickland, *Saracens, Demons and Jews*, 29.

²⁸² Patton, “Blackness, Whiteness,” 159-160.

²⁸³ “et Deus meus. Ad meipsum anima mea conturbata est; propterea memor ero tui de terra Jordanis, et Hermoniim a monte modico.” See *The Vulgate Bible: Douay-Rheims Translation*, vol 3 ed. Swift Edgar (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2011) 260-261. The sites of Jordan and Mt. Hermon were often invoked in the crusade-era pilgrimage texts. Take for example a narrative written by a cleric Thietmar who traveled to the Levant. He states “I beheld Mount Hermon and the fields of Galilee, in which Sisera and all his army died. From here I passed through the field where the army of the Christians was defeated, and the Holy Cross was captured by enemies.” The proximity here between biblical and contemporaneous events creates a meaningful slippage. After all, Latin Christian crusaders typologized themselves as new Israelites while framing the Muslims as Cannanite (or other biblical enemy) equivalents. Thus, in the context of the *Luttrell Psalter*, the invocation of the biblical “Holy Land” accompanied by Christian/Muslim combat may have engendered a parallel response. See: Denys Pringle, *Pilgrimage to Jerusalem and the Holy Land, 1187–1291* (Oxfordshire: Taylor & Francis Group, 2012) 97. See also: Katherine Smith, *The Bible, and Crusade Narrative in the Twelfth Century* (Boydell Press, 2020) 127-136.

Medievalists, crusade aficionados & apparently school children alike may well be familiar with the *identification* of this image. From scholarly articles, history buff coffee books, K-12 learning materials, museums, and academic lectures on premodern race identify the image as a battle between Richard and Saladin.²⁸⁴ The British Library's identification of this scene takes a somewhat more nuanced approach, writing that the figures "are generally believed to be Richard the Lionheart and Saladin, the famous leader of the Muslims during the Crusades."²⁸⁵ In continuing with Shookfeh Rajabzadeh's caution with how we classify "Muslims" in scholarship, my question with this image is one of identification: how do we know these figures represent these two specific rulers? Indeed, as a collection of psalms, the text provides no indication about who these figures represent, and the visual iconography remains insufficient evidence to name them. By categorizing these figures as "Richard & Saladin," previous scholarship has etched its own fascination of an Orientalist narrative foregoing the broader classification of "a Plantagenet Prince of Christendom" battling the "Sultan of Babylon," here the European Latin Christian fantasized construction of a Prince who rules all of Dar-al Islam. Such a nuance, while seemingly

²⁸⁴ For scholarly works which include this identification see: Richard A Leson, "Chivalry and Alterity: Saladin and the Remembrance of Crusade in a Walters *Histoire d'Outremer*," *The Journal of the Walters Art Museum* 68/69 (2010): 90. Marcus Milwright, "An Ayyubid in Mamluk Guise: The Portrait of Saladin in Paolo Giovio's *Elogia virorum bellica virtute illustrium* (1575)" *Mamluk Studies Review* 18 (2015): 195. Ann Kontor, "The Bold and the Beautiful: A Courtois Saladin?" *Chimères* (2004): 73. Pamela Patton, "Blackness, Whiteness, and the Idea of Race in Medieval European Art," in *Whose Middle Ages: Teachable moments for an ill-used past*, ed. Andrew Albin, Mary C. Erler, Thomas O'Donnell, Nicholas L. Paul, and Nina Rowe (New York: Fordham University Press, 2020), 159-160. Sophia Rose Arjana, *Muslims in the Western imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 29. Kim M. Phillips, "The grins of others: Figuring ethnic difference in medieval facial expressions." *postmedieval: a journal of medieval cultural studies* 8 (2017): 83-101. For lectures see: "Dr. Shokoofeh Rajabzadeh – 'Christian Use, Muslim Misuse: The Racialization of the Premodern Muslim Body.'" EventBrite, accessed 03/11/2024, <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/christian-use-muslim-misuse-racialization-of-the-premodern-muslim-body-tickets-275478522677>. For K-12 Materials see: "Engage, support and develop confident historians from 11 - 19," (Pearson Education Ltd), 9. <https://www.pearson.com/content/dam/one-dot-com/one-dot-com/uk/documents/subjects/humanities/b0382-history-portfolio.pdf>.

²⁸⁵ The British Library has suffered a cyber-attack and thus the link to this information is not currently supported. The language can still be found through social media. See: <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10155258956217139&id=8579062138&set=a.10150482396397139>

arbitrary, offers a corrective to the ways scholars taxonomize racialized figures, especially when those identities cannot reasonably be confirmed through context.

While the two leaders never met directly in battle during the Third Crusade, this conflict has become somewhat mythologized in modernity, and this has certainly contributed to the pervasiveness of this identification. Sir Walter Scott's nineteenth century novel *The Talisman* romanticizes the interaction between these rulers, with the Muslim ruler ultimately serving as Richard's physician, saving him from the dastardly action of the envious Latin Christian Princes. Cecille Demille's *The Crusades* and *King Richard's Crusaders* translate this legacy onto the silver screen.²⁸⁶ Even Youssef Chahine 1966 *Saladin the Victorious*, celebrating Pan-Arab rhetoric, imagines the dueling yet complementary nature of the respective medieval courts.²⁸⁷ Of course this fascination has its roots in the medieval past, and for the West, in the memory of crusade. Amanda Luyster has recently confirmed the Chertsey tiles depiction of Richard battling Saladin in the Chertsey in her reconstruction of their textual programs.²⁸⁸ The commemoration of this fantastical combat extends outside of visual art and into theater as well. Froissart's chronicles describe a pretend tournament in the court of Charles VI where knights masquerading as Richard the Lionheart and Saladin would re-create this fantasy meeting.²⁸⁹ The fourteenth-century Middle English Romance *Richard Coeur de Lyon*, a text contemporaneous with the

²⁸⁶ For a discussion of some of these films see: Daniel O'Brien, *Muslim Heroes on Screen* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 69-170. John Aberth, *A Knight at the Movies: Medieval History on Film* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 69-98. See also: Donald Hayne, ed., *The Autobiography of Cecil B. DeMille* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1959), 344.

²⁸⁷ Paul Sturtevant, "SaladiNasser: Nasser's Political Crusade in *El Naser Salah Ad-Din*," in *Hollywood in the Holy Land: Essays on Film Depictions of the Crusades and Christian-Muslim Clashes*, ed. Nicholas Haydock and E.L. Ridsen (Jefferson NC: McFarland 2009), pp.125-127. Su'ad Shawqi, *Sinimat Youssef Chahine: tatawwur al-ru'ya wa-l-uslub* (Cairo: General Institute of Culture Palaces, 2004), 47. Malek Khouri, *The Arab National Project in Youssef Chahine's Cinema* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2010), 47.

²⁸⁸ Amanda Luyster, "Fragmented Tile, Fragmented Text: Richard the Lionheart on Crusade and the Lost Latin Texts of the Chertsey Combat Tiles (c. 1250)," *Digital Philology: A Journal of Medieval Cultures* 11, no. 1 (2022): 101-102, 109-110.

²⁸⁹ *Froissart's Chronicles*, ed. & trans. by Geoffrey Brereton (London: Penguin Books, 1978), 351.

Luttrell Psalter recounts a fanciful crusade narrative where Richard cannibalizes black-skinned Muslims and battles Saladin in single-combat.²⁹⁰ In fact, Debra Strickland has previously cited the *romance* as evidence that the *psalter* depicts Richard & Saladin, drawing a tenuous tie between secular & religious textual genres. Strickland explains that the illumination depicts the final combat between these characters, where Saladin rides into battle on a horse decorated with bells.²⁹¹

While the manuscript is certainly not somber and contains no shortage of fanciful illuminations of animals and humans, I would note the peculiarity of connecting a Psalter, a text intended for religious meditation, with a very specific passage from a romance text. Indeed, the aforementioned bells function as the lynchpin for Strickland's justification of this reading. This is not to say that the Psalter cannot be interpreted in the context of romantic or popular narratives more broadly.²⁹² However, that the illuminator would privilege one romance, especially when a great number of identifiable figures being religious ones, would be an interpretation inconsistent with the manuscript's visual program. Fantastical depictions would still have been understood as various parts of Creation. As Michael Camille writes about marginal images more broadly, "illuminators were often not inventing monsters but depicting creatures that they might well have assumed existed at the limits of God's creation."²⁹³ Indeed, some of these figures even appear connected with biblical texts explicitly in the *Luttrell Psalter*, such as the blue-skinned, fire-

²⁹⁰ For a discussion of *Richard Coeur de Lion* see: Suzanne Yeager, *Jerusalem in the Medieval Narrative*, (Cambridge University Press, 2008) 53-63. See also: Suzanne M. Yeager. "Racial Imagination and the Theater of War: Captivity and Execution in Richard, Coeur de Lion," in *A Companion to British Literature* (2014): 81-96. Geraldine Heng, "The romance of England: Richard Coer de Lyon, Saracens, Jews, and the politics of race and nation," in *The Postcolonial Middle Ages*, pp. 135-171. New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2000.

²⁹¹ Strickland, *Saracens, Demons and Jews*, 179.

²⁹² Michael Camille, *Mirror in Parchment: The Luttrell Psalter and the Making of Medieval England* (University of Chicago Press, 1998), 170, 271.

²⁹³ Michael Camille, *Image on the Edge: The Margins of Medieval Art*, (Reaktion Books, 1992), 14.

haired “Moorish” executioner of John the Baptist (**Figure 35**).²⁹⁴ This is all to say that the presence of fantastical images in the Luttrell Psalter does not provide sufficient evidence for reading these unlabeled figures as specific characters from a secular (even if heavily religiously propagandized) text.

It should be noted that not all previous works of scholarship have identified this figure as a fantasy narrative between Richard vs. Saladin. Michael Camille argues that the scene is a “representation of a representation,” one which alludes to tournaments where knights sometimes dressed up as “Tartars.”²⁹⁵ This interpretation however, while plausible, raises its own problems. Elsewhere, Camille differentiates the presence of black-faced figures from those of more “mask-like quality.”²⁹⁶ His reading of the tournament scene considers the topos of the blue face as an indication of the latter. Yet in returning to the decapitation of John the Baptist, the illuminator has depicted the blue executioner in a similar manner to the figure usually identified as Saladin. The saint appears in the archway of a multi-colored castle, a bloody streak separating his neck from the rest of his body alerts the viewer that the deed has already been done. John raises his hands in supplication, not towards his executioner but rather to God. Above him stands his killer, brandishing a gilded sword above his head, as he grabs John’s hair with his free hand. This scene is certainly not a reenactment or recreation but a visualization of religious history. When then do blue faces refer to theater and when do they not? The distinction is difficult to make. Instead, I offer that both of these depictions negatively present the fantasized enemies of Latin Christianity, both historical and contemporaneous.

²⁹⁴ Camille, *Mirror in Parchment*, 126.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 60-61.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 282.

The accepted internal logic for the left figure being Richard has been the lion symbols, which would make the right figure his historical military opponent Saladin. However, this identification via semiotics does not withstand contextual analysis. While Richard served as the progenitor of this particular heraldic motif, every Plantagenet king that followed him until 1340 also used this symbol as their coat of arms.²⁹⁷ For example, in the fourteenth-century Egerton manuscript, the mythical King Arthur, who is typically depicted with three crowns upon his shield in armorial texts, appears here instead with three lions (**Figure 36**).²⁹⁸ Evidently, in Plantagenet England, any king, either historical or imaginary, could appear with this motif because the Plantagenet line communicated English royalty.

In this same vein, we can find parallel issues when ascribing the name “Saladin” to the right figure, as it does not take into account the production and historical context of the *Luttrell Psalter*. There were plenty of well-known Muslim enemies of the Latins, who were not the famous Ayyubid leader. One such example may be found in the Mamluk Sultan Baybars who halted the Ninth crusade of the future Edward I in 1271, dating far closer to the production of the psalter than Richard’s crusade in 1189.²⁹⁹ In fact Sir Geoffrey Luttrell’s family had had a direct stake in this expedition, as his great uncle Alexander had joined the crusade and died on it. Moreover, Luttrell himself lived during Edward’s reign and other family members played various roles ranging from crusade planning to joining the Knights Hospitaller.³⁰⁰ Thus the

²⁹⁷ Adrian Ailes, *The Origins of the Royal Arms of England: Their Development to 1199* (Reading, UK: Graduate Center for Medieval Studies, Reading University, 1982), 52-64.

²⁹⁸ Ailes, “The deaths of kings and political propaganda, 52. See also: Amy Jeffs, *Storyland: A New Mythology of Britain* (Kansas City: Andrew McMeel Publishing, 2021) 192.

²⁹⁹ Jonathan-Riley Smith & Susanna Throop, *The Crusades: A History*, 4th ed (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023), 273-275.

³⁰⁰ Camille, *Mirror in Parchment*, 131, 277.

Plantagenet prince defeating the Sultan might just as well function as a different type of fantasy to Richard/Saladin, one where Edward did not fail but defeated his enemy.

In meditating on a broader crusade context, it is crucial to revisit Strickland's arguments that the bells on Sultan's horse serve as an allusion to his identity as Saladin from the Richard romance. This text-image comparison remains unsatisfactory, especially when considering the historical legacy of Islamic removal and expropriation of Christian bells. al-Mansur appropriated the bell from Santiago de Compostela, bringing it back to Cordoba to serve as a candle-holder in the Great Mosque.³⁰¹ Saladin himself removed bells from churches upon his conquest of Jerusalem.³⁰² Furthermore, Islamic polities during the crusade period had well established the precedent of policing Christian religious sounds, not permitting the ringing of church bells. Finally, Latin Christian travel narratives in the "Holy Land" contrasted Christian and Muslim soundscape practices stating that Muslims "have no bells" but instead relied upon calls to prayer from minarets.³⁰³ Rather than connecting unrelated texts & images, we can productively read this scene in broader terms: an expression of Latin Christian anxieties around Islamic defacement of churches, not to mention the threat of Islam silencing the soundscape of the Latin Christian city, both in the Levant and the mainland.³⁰⁴ Rosina's Buckland's observations provide further support for my interpretation of the "Sultan's bells" as liturgically important, as other hand-bells used throughout this manuscript correspond in relative size to those found in (Figure 1). While these bells, elsewhere are "legitimized through their mention in the psalms," the Sultan's

³⁰¹ Hugh Kennedy, *Muslim Spain and Portugal: A Political History of al-Andalus* (London: Routledge, 1996), 119-120. Dana E. Katz, "The Conversion of Iberia's Bells," *Material Religion* 17, no. 1 (2021): 82-86.

³⁰² Iris Shagrir, "Urban soundscape: defining space and community in twelfth-century of Jerusalem," in *Communicating the Middle Ages* (Routledge, 2018), 112-115.

³⁰³ Denys Pringle, *Pilgrimage to Jerusalem and the Holy Land, 1187-1291* (Routledge, 2016), 102.

³⁰⁴ Shagrir, "Urban soundscape," 103-104.

possession of them perverts their devotional purpose.³⁰⁵ The villain thus serves as a sign of sonic disruption, one that is ultimately corrected by his defeat. Ostensibly, the Christian figure in fighting his opponent then reclaims the stolen bells, to return them to their rightful places. The materiality of these gold painted baubles corresponds with the same material logic of the fallen “Saracenic” helmet discussed earlier. By defeating the Sultan, the Plantagenet Prince restores these items, allowing for the golden peel of bells to ring once again in the “Holy Land,” connecting again to the allusion at the top of this folio. Moreover, this eventuality has been presupposed in the manufacture of the manuscript itself. The gold bells are already in Christian hands, as it belongs to Lord Geoffrey Luttrell, with the opening of the manuscript telling us so.³⁰⁶ The bells always sing, as the oral conveyance of the text makes their sounds come to life. Buckland reads the Luttrell Psalter “holistically, with the inscribed text and painted imagery both merely an indication of the actual performance.”³⁰⁷ The recitation of this moment in the psalter, with the lines above and just after the illumination reading “thou art my support? Why hast thou forgotten me? and why go I mourning, whilst my enemy afflicteth me?” activate the visual narrative.³⁰⁸ Perhaps this line alongside the Crusade iconography engendered a lamentation at Edward’s loss in 1270 or the sack of Acre 1291 and renders an imagined conquest to reclaim its soundscape. By interpreting this scene in its material context, we locate pathways that privilege its own crusading narratives than imported ones.

³⁰⁵ Rosina Buckland, “Sounds of the Psalter: Orality and musical symbolism in the Luttrell Psalter,” *Music in Art* XXVIII 1-2 (2003): 93.

³⁰⁶ “Dominus Galfridus Louterell me fieri facit,” See: Janet Backhouse, *Medieval Manuscripts in the British Library: The Luttrell Psalter* (New York: New Amsterdam, 1989) 5. Colophon on 202v states this.

³⁰⁷ Rosina Buckland, “Sounds of the Psalter: Orality and musical symbolism in the Luttrell Psalter,” *Music in Art* XXVIII 1-2 (2003): 94.

³⁰⁸ Galatians 3:28. For a longer discussion of the intersection of this verse and race see: Denise Kimber Buell, “Race and universalism in early Christianity,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 10, no. 4 (2002): 429-468.

IV. Sultan of Babylon—A “Saracenic” Prince

A redesignation of this scene does not preclude the possibility of these characters being Richard & Saladin but rather places them within a wider contextual fabric. In other words, these images serve as vessels for any number of English Princes of “Christendom” battling their given Islamic rival, imagining an indelible, eternal crusade instead of circumscribing the scene temporally to the 3rd one. Furthermore, by not limiting interpretation to superficial iconography, and deploying the crypto-visual lens we can better understand medieval racializing structures. Racialization in this scene then is not simply accomplished through heroic conquest of an epidermally different creature but through a material repossession of the “Holy Land,” evidenced not only in the act of patronage but in the performance of the manuscript. When framing this image as specifically Richard & Saladin, scholars buttress a medieval past where the body of the Princely Islamic Other(ed) in crusader narratives must always be “Saladin.” Such actions not only condense a wide range of political figures into a caricature but produce an ahistorical narrative. Yet is the deployment of the term “Sultan of Babylon” to designate this character not similarly an ahistorical caricature? After all, the text does not identify him as such, and the character does not possess a specific iconographic program which correlates to the figure. As noted in the introduction and elsewhere in this chapter, the term “Sultan of Babylon” does not always appear directly alongside the subject (as in the cases of Laban or Esclabor). Rather, I use “Sultan of Babylon” as a critical term in itself to encapsulate the vagaries of Latin Christian world-building, to identify the “Saracen Prince” who not only serves as a political ruler of Muslims but as a fantastical foil hailing from an ill-defined region of Islamic control. Here devoid of specificity and context, this application of “Sultan of Babylon” fits well—representing the princely embodiment of all that the Latins would view as “Saracenic.”

The term “Saracen/Saracenic” is crucial to my understanding of the “Sultan of Babylon.” While some scholars have noted that certain texts never name him as a “Saracen” explicitly but instead denote him with the class title of “Sultan,” I argue that he is always a “Sultan of Saracens” even if only ever implicitly.³⁰⁹ Laban in *Fierabras* demands that Lucifer (a Muslim king under his command) summon *his* “Saracens.”³¹⁰ The invocation of his title in the *Legenda Maior* is quickly followed by his association with “Saracens.”³¹¹ Even when the text refers to Esclabor as a “pagan” and not “Saracen” explicitly the polity of his origin (Babylon) signals to the reader the implication signals to the medieval reader his type of religious difference. In each of these cases, he represents or commands all the “Saracens” under him. Yet the word, though long employed in scholarship, has more recently faced important criticism by Shookfeh Rajabzadeh who directs our attention to its uncritical use.³¹² Drawing on the work of Katherine Scarfe Beckett and Geraldine Heng, she reminds us that the Latin Christian understanding of “Saracen” stems from a false etymology which claims that Muslims themselves claim lineage from Abraham’s legitimate wife Sarah, instead of Hagar.³¹³ In deploying the term, Latin Christians accuse Muslims of being lying, deceitful and ashamed of their genealogy.³¹⁴ Thus, Rajabzadeh calls on scholars to replace “Saracen” with Muslim due to its racist implications both in the medieval past and the contemporary present, except in specific circumstances.³¹⁵

³⁰⁹ Rajabzadeh, “Depoliticized Saracen,” 7 (footnote 4).

³¹⁰ “Laban d’Espagne est issu de sun nef. A sun pavilon voit, q’est bien curtainéz. Lucafer de Baldas en ad apelléz; C’est un fort roi de la loi paienez. <Faistes tost aparailer dis mil Sarrazins arméz>. Brandin, “La Destruction de Rome et Fierabras,” 33 (fol. 67r).

³¹¹ Tolan, *St. Francis and the Sultan*, 109. See also: Bonaventura, *Vita di San Francesco*, 235– “Fra i cristiani e i saraceni era in corso una guerra tanto implacabile che non si poteva attraversare la strada.” See also: Museo Francescano Codice INV. NR. 1266 f. 54v.

³¹² Rajabzadeh, “Depoliticized Saracen,” 2-3.

³¹³ Katharine Scarfe Beckett, *Anglo-Saxon perceptions of the Islamic world* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 95-101. See also: Heng, *Invention of Race*, 112.

³¹⁴ Rajabzadeh, “Depoliticized Saracen,” 2-3.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

While I agree that this term should always be signposted as problematic and racist, the policing of its terminological use in scholarship raises disciplinary concerns which themselves lead to other racializing problems. The etymological understanding of “Saracen” itself is not as neat as Rajabzadeh, and others have defined it. It has become vogue recently for scholars writing on the racialization of Muslims to cite this history which comes from Isidore of Seville’s seventh century *Etymologies*.³¹⁶ However, as Christopher Michael Herde notes, the theologian also suggests that “Saracen” could refer to the land they hail from the “hot deserts” of Syria.³¹⁷ He goes on to compare *Etymologies* with later texts that provide a definition for “Saracen” that resists any Abrahamic connection including Isidore’s narrative. Herde explains that in the *History of the Holy Grail* narrative from the thirteenth century dispenses with the Islamic connection to Hagar and instead connects to the fictional city of Sarras. The text relates:

Those who say that Saracens are named after Abraham’s first wife Sara are not to be believed, for this was falsely invented nor does it seem reasonable. [...] They were called Saracens after this city named Sarras because this was the first city where they became certain of what they worshiped. And in this city was founded and established the sect that the Saracens maintained until the coming of Mohammed who was sent to save them, though he damned himself first, and them afterwards, by his gluttony. Before the founding of the sect, the people of Sarras had no faith, but worshiped everything that pleased them, so that what they worshiped one day was not worshiped the next.³¹⁸

This evidence derived from one romance narrative is not conclusive to determine any shift in the understanding of “Saracen” after the 13th century. Rather, while Isidore’s *Etymologies* remained popular into the later Middle Ages, its continued importance does not

³¹⁶ Stephen A Barney ed., *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). 192.

³¹⁷ Christopher Michael Herde, “A new fantasy of crusade: Sarras in the vulgate cycle,” (Master’s Thesis, University of Louisville, 2019), 17-19. See also *Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, 195.

³¹⁸ *Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, 195.

preclude other definitions of this term.³¹⁹ In other words, even though “Saracen” contains imposter implications frequently, it may simultaneously refer to geography, a polity with undulating religious convictions or one established before Muhammad’s arrival. An excellent example of this phenomenon may be found in fifteenth-century *Speculum Historiale* illumination of the Byzantine Emperor Heraclius fighting the Persians who function as a visual preamble to the conflict between Crusaders and Muslims (**Figure 37**).³²⁰ The Persians here are not historically Muslims and yet they are certainly “Saracened” with their tortils, pointed hats and their banner inscribed with Pseudo-Arabic.³²¹ Other uses of “Saracen” demonstrate a distinction of this term from Muslim from the medieval European Latin Christian perspective. Some versions of Marin Sanudo’s *Liber Secretorum* include a rubric describing the Sultan of Babylon as “dom[inus] Saracenor[um] et Mulsimanor[um]” (lord of the “Saracens” and the Muslims), amongst his other titles.³²² The fact that these groups are distinguished in a propaganda text designed to inform would-be Crusader princes about the complexities of the Islamic world should give modern scholars pause when thinking that “Saracen” is synonymous with “Muslim.”

In insisting upon replacing this term with Muslim, scholars inadvertently paper over the asymmetrical relationship between “Saracen” and “Islamic,” thereby privileging a genealogical etymology which more easily connects to modern concepts of race-making (to serve as a

³¹⁹ Winston Black, “Isidore of Seville in Scholastic Europe,” in *A Companion to Isidore of Seville*, ed. Andrew Fear & Jamie Wood (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 570-594.

³²⁰ There is a long association between Heraclius, crusade, and French royalty. See: Guilherme Queiroz de Souza, “Heraclius, emperor of Byzantium,” *Revista Digital de Iconografia Medieval* 7, no. 14 (2015): 28. M. Cecilia Gaposchkin, “Louis IX and the Triumphal Cross of Constantine,” *French Historical Studies* 46, no. 1 (2023): 3-35. Barbara Baert, *A Heritage of Holy Wood: The Legend of the True Cross in Text and Image*, trans. Lee Preedy, (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 185-193. Daniel H. Weiss, *Art and Crusade in the age of Saint Louis* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 15. For the inclusion of these scenes in the *Grande Chroniques de France* see: Hedeman, *The Royal Image*, 229-267.

³²¹ For Pseudo-Arabic/Pseudo-Kufic see: Rosamond E. Mack, *Bazaar to Piazza: Islamic Trade and Italian Art, 1300-1600* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 51-54.

³²² For one version of Sanudo’s manuscript which contains this rubric see: Rome, Vatican Library, Reg. Lat. 548 f. 2v. See also: Locke, *Book of Secrets*, 27. The spelling of “Mulsimanorum” reflects the spelling in this manuscript. This term is the earliest use of “Muslim” I have encountered in European sources.

quintessential example for the racialization of Muslims from the premodern past). These types of complexities also extend to the multiplicitous uses of “Saracen” for Saxons, ill-defined pagans, and the conflations between these categories not to mention the Semitic roots of this terminology.³²³ When faced with these types of nuances Rajabzadeh states that scholars should “understand, as best as we can, which identity group is being racialized under the Saracen label and document that.”³²⁴

Yet such distinctions become lost in the disciplinary translation between literary studies and art history, where optical codes have multiple simultaneously occurring meanings, such as that seen in the Persians/Muslims. Returning to **Figure 1** I am compelled to ask, what iconographic element from this racist caricature can we distill as something “Muslim,” even from the problematic Latin Christian perspective? Certainly, the decontextualized Ethiopian head on the Sultan’s shield does not do so. While the imagery draws on textual narratives which state that the head or “Apollo” or Muhammad decorate “Saracenic” banners, Ethiopian bodies are not inherently Islamic.³²⁵ To say so would be to fall into the rhetorical trap of the iconography which conflates Ethiopians and, Muslims together. The hooked nose, more consistently attributed to

³²³ Indeed “Saracens” referred to a wide variety of groups including pre-Christian Trojans, Saxons, Baltic “pagans” or non-Europeans generally. See: E. Jane Burns, “Saracen Silk and the Virgin’s Chemise: Cultural Crossings in Cloth,” *Speculum*, vol. 81, no. 2, (2006): 376. Siobhain Bly Calkin, *Saracens and the Making of English Identity: The Auchinleck Manuscript* (Routledge, 2005), 180. Alan V. Murray, “The Saracens of the Baltic: Pagan and Christian Lithuanians in the Perception of English and French Crusaders to Late Medieval Prussia,” *Journal of Baltic Studies* 41, no. 4 (2010): 413–29. Huot, *Outsiders*, 158. Furthermore, the term “Saracen can just refer to a language in addition to a people. For example, Wilbrand of Oldenburg refers to “Syrians” who speak “Saracen” but are otherwise Christian (though follow the “law of Paul.”) See: Denys Pringle, *Pilgrimage to Jerusalem and the Holy Land, 1187–1291* (Routledge, 2012), 40. Finally, “Saracen” may possibly come from an Arabic root including س-ر-ق meaning “to steal”. As Irfan Shahid writes, this term as a “self-designation [...] does not seem improbable.” For this and other Arabic etymologies see: Irfan Shahid, *Rome and the Arabs: A Prolegomenon to the Study of Byzantium and the Arabs*, (Washington D.C., Dumbarton Oaks, 1984), 126-127 (for quote), and 123-141.

³²⁴ Rajabzadeh, “Depoliticized Saracen,” 7 (footnote 2).

³²⁵ Strickland, *Saracens, Demons & Jews*, 166, 179. See also: Paul Bancourt, *Les Musulmans dans les chansons de geste du cycle du roi*, 2 vols. (Aix-en-Provence: Publications Diffusion, 1982), vol. 1, 914-915. See also: Mark Cruse, “Costuming the Past: Heraldry in Illustrations of the “Roman d’Alexandre” (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 264),” *Gesta* 45, no. 1 (2006): 55-56.

depictions of Jewish people and demons than those of Muslims has been transplanted to draw the viewer's attention to physiognomic difference.³²⁶ Blue skin tones were not employed exclusively for Muslims but attributed to a variety of peoples including "Indians," "Ethiopians" and "Saracens" in contemporaneously produced English texts.³²⁷ In other words, even though the character might be understood as Muslim due to his position across from a Christian, the various signs which characterize him are not uniquely so. To simply identify him as an "Muslim Prince" erases the multi-valent technology which recombines/remixes different signs for whatever racializing purpose at hand.³²⁸ In many ways, this conflation is not unlike the modern status of "mixed identification" which Swathi Rana describes as the experience of South East Asians, Middle-Easterners and Latinos under the umbrella of "brownness" and therefore a threat to white hegemony.³²⁹ Similarly, Latin Christians, in imagining their Islamic opponent, drew upon various racializing threads that they had created (or inherited) for different Others, refitting them

³²⁶ As Asa Mittman writes: "a Jew without a hooked nose is still a Jew." This is to say that this iconography is not a prerequisite for the racialization of Jewish people, though is often used to depict them in dehumanized ways. Still, Camille specifically identifies dark-skinned figures with this feature as Jewish elsewhere in the *Luttrell Psalter*. See: Asa Simon Mittman, "Are the 'monstrous races' races?," *postmedieval: a journal of medieval cultural studies* 6, no. 1 (2015): 46. See also: Camille, *Mirror in Parchment*, 282-283. For the broader discussion of this racist physiognomic iconography in art see: Sara Lipton, *Dark mirror: the medieval origins of anti-Jewish iconography* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2014). Asa Simon Mittman, "Introduction: The Impact of Monsters and Monster Studies," in *Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous*, ed. Asa Simon Mittman, with Peter Dendle (London: Ashgate, 2012), 1-14. Pamela Patton, *Art of Estrangement: Redefining Jews in Reconquest Spain* (University Park: Penn State Press, 2012), 67-71.

³²⁷ Kathleen Ann Kelly "'Blue' Indians, Ethiopians, and Saracens in Middle English Narrative Texts." *Parergon* 11, no. 1 (1993): 35-52. We also see the use of blue skin as a marker of racialized class in Jewish manuscripts in Spain see: Pamela A. Patton, "What Did Medieval Slavery Look Like? Color, Race, and Unfreedom in Later Medieval Iberia," *Speculum* 97, no. 3 (2022): 650.

³²⁸ Queer feminist scholar Legacy Russel uses the term "remix" to describe the process by which PoCs and queer folks resist the normative. As they write "to remix is to rearrange, to add to an original recording. The spirit of remixing is about finding ways to innovate with what's been given, creating something new from something already there." While Russel views remix in terms of liberation this language can also be used to productively describe a weapon of racialization in the premodern past. That Latin Christians, in imagining their Islamic opponent, drew upon various racializing "original tracks" that they had created (or inherited) for different Others, refitting them into a new amalgamation. Legacy Russell, *Glitch Feminism, A Manifesto* (London: Verso, 2020), 10.

³²⁹ Swathi Rana 'Brownness: Mixed Identifications in Minority Immigrant Literature, 1900–1960,' (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 2012), 3-14.

into a new amalgamation. Thus, instead of eliding those other identities under the marker “Muslim,” “Saracen” (or “Saracenic”) can more accurately describe these collaged constructions.

Jeffrey Jerome Cohen has previously written “cultural specificities were lost as the inhabitants of Iberia and the East were unified beneath the sign *Saracen*, a racialized figure of ultimate difference who condensed everything inimical to the fragile Christian selfsame.”³³⁰ Nuancing this reading slightly through the lens of “mixed identification”, I use “Saracen/ic” to refer to the chimeric-codes Latin Christians employed in rendering Muslims: be those codes Islamic or not. Just as Sultan Laban rallies various polities under his banner in the first section, so too does “Saracenic” pull from a variety of topographical, religious, ethnic and cultural references. In **Figure 1**, we see those groups etched onto the Sultan’s visual comportment—through iconographic elements elsewhere deployed against Ethiopians, Jews, Muslims, and Indians all occurring simultaneously. Furthermore, in preserving this term we reclaim its problematic deployment not only in the medieval texts but in modern art history. In the early twentieth century Bannister Fletcher described “Saracenic” architecture as “the product of a religion which had no special country.”³³¹ As the Latin Christian visual racialization of Muslims pulls from so many sources, the continued use of this term acknowledges both its Islamophobic implications and the plethora of unrecognized groups which make-up this imagination of Muslims. Such groups include those who exist in moral limbo, such as Esclabor, who converts but subsequently engages in actions attributed to his previous religion—“Saracenic” still but Muslim no longer.³³²

³³⁰ Cohen, “On Saracen Enjoyment,” 115.

³³¹ Bannister Fletcher, *A History of Architecture on the Comparative Method for the Student, Craftsman, and Amateur* (New York Charles Scribner’s Sons 1901), 473.

³³² I have used a version of this phrase before. See: Narayanan, “Sir Palamedes the Indelibly ‘Saracen’ Knight,” 341.

Beyond a narrow definition, we find other uses for this term which can correct the fantasy as fantasy and emphasize the fragility of its manufacturing. Throughout this chapter I have sought to demonstrate that the “Saracenic Sultan of Babylon” so easily troubles normative/monstrous boundaries, so quickly falls out of ethnophilic favor, and sometimes even straddles both categories simultaneously. Much like Babylon, “Saracen” defies definition, instead possessing a malleable meaning shaped by the narratives inflected onto it. When confronted with the complex codes of Latin Christian racialization we cannot simply accept Muslim at face value, much as we should not accept an easy designation of Saladin.

Chapter 2: Sword of the Sultan --The Nile and the Anthropocene

In the modern West, there is a tendency to approach the Nile with a measure of Orientalizing fantasy. Such characterizations are no doubt informed by Hegelian notions of Egypt as a place of stasis and mystery, which in turn were themselves informed by the writings of Herodotus and the curiosity that Ancient Greeks had for Egyptian religious practices.³³³ This intellectual lineage certainly colors our perspective and presentation of both land and water.³³⁴ If popular culture accounts ranging from Agatha Christie's *Death on the Nile*, Elizabeth Taylor's *Cleopatra* or Charlton Heston's *Khartoum* have taught us anything, it is that the shores of the Nile contain luxury, the wondrous and, no small amount of danger.

The Nile played a parallel, if not identical role, in the medieval Christian imagination. The river held important Biblical connotations, with the travel narratives of Sir John of Mandeville calling it one of the four rivers of Paradise.³³⁵ This same narrator addresses the promise of wealth in the Nile which purportedly contained various precious materials including "the wood that is called lignum aloes" referring to a sweet-smelling incense.³³⁶ Other texts even alert their readers to the presence of bizarre and toothy creatures known as crocodiles.³³⁷ Yet beyond these theological, material and fantastic resonances, the river was ascribed military value

³³³ See: Jay Lampert, "Hegel and Ancient Egypt History and Becoming," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 35 no. 1 (1995): 43-44. & John Stewart, "Hegel and the Egyptian Religion as a Mystery or Enigma: The Inner and the Outer," *Filozofia* 72 no. 1 (2017): 54-56.

³³⁴ Said has previously articulated how the West constructs "knowledge" of the East. See: Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 38. To a lesser extent we can also understand this perception of the Nile through a post-colonial application of Braudel's *long durée*. See: Fernand Braudel, "Histoire et Sciences Sociales: La longue durée," *Reseaux* (1987): 7-37.

³³⁵ John Mandeville. *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville*, trans. C.W.R.D Moseley (New York: Penguin Books Ltd., 1983) 184.

³³⁶ John Mandeville. *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville*, trans. C.W.R.D Moseley (New York: Penguin Books Ltd., 1983) 68-69, 197.

³³⁷ Jay Rubenstein, *Nebuchadnezzar's Dream: The Crusades, Apocalyptic Prophecy, and the End of History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 53-54.

because its possession was understood as crucial to controlling the Outremer. After Salah-al-din's conquest of Jerusalem in 1187, Crusader expeditions of the thirteenth century realized that in order to conquer and maintain the "Holy Land," one had to conquer Egypt and to conquer Egypt one had to take the Nile.³³⁸ Indeed, in addition to its other attributes, the Nile served as a point of access in crusade narratives. The river's awesome power remained fixed in the crusade propaganda and memory of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries as any planned incursion would be informed by the Christian losses on the Nile's shores throughout the thirteenth century.

The illumination from Giovanni Villani's *Nuova Cronica* dated from the fourteenth century depicts a scene from the battle of Al-Mansura in 1250 C.E. during the Seventh Crusade (**Figure 1**). Petrarch's contemporaneous writings, which praised Philip VI's planned crusade, may explain why a French adventure is recounted in a text glorifying the history of Florence.³³⁹ After capturing the city of Damietta which sits at the mouth of the Nile, the French king Louis IX and his forces continue south, only to be stopped at their subsequent objective. The Christian army possesses all the accoutrements of combat and conquest with the foremost figure holding a marshal's baton and the following soldiers carrying shields and a flag emblazoned with the French royal coat of arms, signaling their colonizing intentions.

On the far bank, just outside the city walls, the Islamic ruler, who is racialized by his turban and his identity Sultan of "Babylon," directs his workers to divert the river and flood the invaders.³⁴⁰ The Nile's shining, rushing waters, carefully articulated by white highlights against

³³⁸ Megan Cassidy-Welch, "'O Damietta': war memory and crusade in thirteenth-century Egypt," *Journal of Medieval History* 40, no. 3 (2014): 346.

³³⁹ Nancy Bisaha, "Petrarch's vision of the Muslim and Byzantine East," *Speculum* 76, no. 2 (2001): 287-288, 294.

³⁴⁰ The text that accompanies Figure 1 does not explicitly call this character "Sultan of Babylon" though this is heavily implied. "andare per forza d'arme al Caro e Babbillonia d'Egitto, ov'era il soldano e tutto suo podere," [the Christians] by force of arms went to Cairo and Babylon of Egypt, where the Sultan and all his holdings were. See: Giovanni Villani, *Nuova Cronica di Giovanni Villani*, ed. Biblioteca Italiana Zanichelli (Intangible Press,

the azure waves, quickly swallow up the crusaders. Unlike his Christian counterparts, the “Sultan of Babylon” does not need to openly display military paraphernalia or his own coat of arms. Even though he and his soldiers carry swords, these weapons have not yet been drawn from their scabbards. Instead, the Sultan needs but to point, and the Nile bends to his will as his enemies disappear before him. As the text states, this maneuver defeats the crusaders, precipitating the surrender and imprisonment of the French king.³⁴¹

While the image depicts a historical event, it is certainly not mimetic of the event itself. Nor does the illumination simply render a military strategy recorded in the chronicle but rather produces a fantasized cultural memory.³⁴² This fourteenth-century manuscript responds (to some degree) to the Sack of Acre 1291, which signified the collapse of the last crusader state in the Levant. The event not only traumatized Latin Christian Europe but had been precipitated by a different “Sultan of Babylon.”³⁴³ Thus, the Sultan’s inclusion here is imbued with European Latin Christian anxiety of defeat at the hands of Muslims.

This chapter considers how the medieval European Latin Christian visual program cast the Nile as a weapon in the “Sultan of Babylon’s” armory, a tool he could control and manipulate against the crusaders. The river symbolizes all the power of that undrawn blade girdled at the

Philadelphia, 2010), 3700. [From what I was able to find this seems to be a digitized version of Giuseppe Porta’s transliterated edition from the 1990-1991. Given that Kindle does not always have page numbers I have provided the “location” number in lieu of them.]

³⁴¹ “E fu preso il detto re Luis” (and King Louis was taken). See: Villani, *Nuova Cronica*, 2949.

³⁴² As Nicholas Paul and Suzanne Yeager have powerfully stated when discussing crusade through Halbwachs’ “collective memory,” “societal constructions of religion, race, and other signs were continually made, unmade [and] imagined [...] over the course of centuries.” Similarly, the Latin Christian illuminations of the Nile, given the displacement from actual events in both time and space capture imaginations rather than a reality. See: Nicholas Paul & Suzanne Yeager, “Introduction,” in *Remembering the Crusades: Myth, Legend, and Identity*, ed. by Nicholas Paul and Suzanne Yeager (Baltimore: John Hopkins University, 2012), 9. See also: Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, trans. Lewis A. Cosser (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1992), 182-188.

³⁴³ John France, “Introduction,” in *Acre and Its Falls*, ed. John France (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 9. For “Sultan of Babylon” at Acre (al-Ashraf Khalil) see: Viard, *Les Grandes Chroniques*, 140 & The ‘Templar of Tyre’: Part III of the ‘Deeds of the Cypriots,’ trans. Paul Crawford (Burlington: Ashgate, 2003), 105-107.

Sultan's waist. Like a sword, the Nile shimmers, gleams, cuts, divides, determines battles, and shapes who controls the land. If the Muslim foot soldiers of other manuscripts use scimitars or curved bows to halt crusader progress, then the Sultan employs his environmental weapon to do the same.

I argue that in fourteenth and fifteenth century Latin Christian chronicles and propaganda manuscripts, the Nile embodied the Sultan's racialized ability to impede and antagonize crusade success. With the river as a powerful tool, the Islamic ruler could decimate opponents, make his territory insurmountable to assault and even dictate the terms of defeat. To this extent, I theorize this imagined weaponization of the Nile through the entwinement of "premodern critical race studies" and the "Anthropocene." While medievalists have discussed the geographical index of racialization, especially as it relates to climate, less attention has been paid to topography as an embodiment of racialized behavior. For this reason, I turn to the "Anthropocene" a term originally coined by chemist Paul Crutzen to describe humans as "geological forces."³⁴⁴ Humanities disciplines have since deployed this term to discuss social effects upon ecology including how human endeavors and activities, as well as imagination, work to reshape the environment and landscapes.³⁴⁵

Similarly, Latin Christian relationships with Islamic polities shape their engagement with the Nile. Recent scholarship from medieval studies has begun to think critically about the relationship between crusades and nature. In the introduction of their edited collection Jessalyn Bird and Elizabeth Lapina trace out the recent historiography that has brought together animal

³⁴⁴ Paul Crutzen, "The 'anthropocene,'" *Journal de Physique Archives IV France* 12 no. 10 (2002):1-5

³⁴⁵ Eva Horn & Hannes Bergthaller, *The Anthropocene: Key Issues for the Humanities* (London: Routledge, 2019), 1-16.

studies, agricultural investigations, and abundant topographies alongside crusade narratives.³⁴⁶

As they write “if crusading involved not only religious but economic, social, and political factors, how was crusaders’ perception of nature shaped by all of these influences?”³⁴⁷ This chapter takes up this question in regards to Latin Christian perceptions of the Nile and positions it in dialogue with the interlaced narratives of racialization, colonialism and the Anthropocene.³⁴⁸ The river functions as a metaphor for the racialized power, threat and destructive capability of the “Sultan,” one that potentially could lose these implications if the “correct” actors possessed it. After all, crusade narratives did not merely wish to overcome the river but also employ it to their own advantage. In the desire to reclaim the Levant, Italian manuscripts particularly provide instructions on how to use the Nile while illuminating fantasies about turning the river against the Sultan. Furthermore, beyond the confines of the Nile, Biblical history provided comfort with the knowledge that the ruler of Egypt did not truly control its hydrogeopolitics. Evidently, this fluvial force was a double-edged blade, both foe and friend. While often an obstacle wielded by the enemy, if the waters could be turned it would become a powerful ally.³⁴⁹

³⁴⁶ Jessalynn L. Bird, and Elizabeth Lapina, “Introduction,” in *The Crusades and Nature: Natural and Supernatural Environments in the Middle Ages* (Springer International Publishing AG, 2024), 1-14. For some of the historiography that Bird and Lapina provide see: Ronnie Ellenblum, *Frankish Rural Settlement in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), Aleks G. Pluskowski, *Environment, Colonization and the Baltic Crusader States* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2019), Aleks G. Pluskowski, *Ecologies of Crusading, Colonization and Religious Conversion in the Medieval Baltic* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2019). Abigail Agresta, *The Keys to Bread and Wine: Faith, Nature, and Infrastructure in Late Medieval Valencia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2022). ; Natasha R. Hodgson, “Lions, Tigers and Bears: Encounters with Wild Animals and Bestial Imagery in the context of crusading to the Latin East,” *Viator* 4, no. 1 (2013): 65–93. For some salient chapters in Bird & Lapina’s collection *The Crusades and Nature* see: H.E. Crowley, “A Land of Milk and Honey? Agrarian Environments in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem,” 15-43. Linda Paterson, “Real Animals in the *Siège d’Antioche*,” 85-112.

³⁴⁷ Bird & Lapina, *The Crusades and Nature*, 13.

³⁴⁸ For the connections between the anthropocene, race and colonialism see: Andrew S. Matthews, “Anthropology and the Anthropocene: Criticisms, experiments, and collaborations,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 49, no. 1 (2020): 67-82.

³⁴⁹ I have purposefully used Carl Schmitt’s political theorizations of “Friend/Enemy” as a way to meditate on the Latin Christian perspectives regarding the river. As Schmitt states the “the criterion of the friend-and-enemy distinction in no way implies that one particular nation must forever be the friend or enemy of another specific nation.” Much the same way, medieval European Latin Christian characterizations of the Nile change based on

I. The Nature of the Nile *is* the Nature of the Sultan

While the historical Sultans actively weaponized the Nile against Christian forces, the illuminations of such events also imply some deeper quality about “Babylon” and its ruler.³⁵⁰

The Latin Christian crusaders understood the river as a site of violence, not only for the events that took place on the Nile but for its very nature. One crusading travel account states that “fishes of the river and of the sea, as though fearing nothing, piled into our sleeping quarters,” during a storm.³⁵¹ Evidently, the tumultuous nature of the Nile is uncontrollable as it literally vomits out its contents.³⁵² These descriptions of the river were not simply Latin Christian exaggerations. Islamic polities too held anxieties about the river’s unpredictability. Not only could the yearly flooding of the Nile, and its potential grounding upend trading routes, but it was difficult to navigate. According to John P. Cooper, the Cairo Geniza documents demonstrate that some travelers were terrified by their experiences, including one who sailed with Sultan al-Afdal

which polities (both real and imagined) possessed it. However, unlike Schmitt’s framework, the Nile could hold a simultaneous position of friend/enemy because of a constant fear of Islamic control and hope for Christian dominance. Despite the problematics of Schmitt’s political theorizations, perhaps they also reflect something about the legacy of Latin Christian society. Despite the problematics of Schmitt’s political theorizations, perhaps they also reflect something about the legacy of Latin Christian society. More recently, Wendy Shaw discusses the issues of approaching “Islamic Art” from a Western (what she terms Christianate) “Art Historical” perspective. She notes that in this discipline “subjects are invited to project their own identities into a relationship with a historical imaginary, conceived either as their own (in nationalism), admirable (in an ally), or alienating (in a foe.)” While on one hand it is essentializing to condense a thousand years of history into a neat category of “Western,” given the political dynamics of crusade and medieval race-making perhaps friend/enemy may be a productive lens for considering the fourteenth and fifteenth century visions of the Nile see: Carl Schmitt, *Concept of the Political*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 34. See also: Wendy Shaw, *What is Islamic Art: Between Religion and Perception* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019) 326-327.

³⁵⁰ Muhammad Yaseen Gada, “Why the Crusades Failed? Narrating the Episode After the Fall of Jerusalem,” *ICR Journal* 6, no. 4 (2015): 541-544. See also: Nezar AlSayyad, *Nile: Urban Histories on the Banks of a River* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 173-174.

³⁵¹ Cassidy-Welch, “O Damietta”: 348. For the Nile during King Louis crusades see: Caroline Smith, *Crusading in the Age of Joinville* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2006), 111, 128, 134.

³⁵² This temperamental nature of the river has been documented scientifically as well. See: Fekri A. Hassan, “Extreme Nile floods and famines in Medieval Egypt (AD 930–1500) and their Climatic Implications,” *Quaternary International* 173-174 (2007): 101-112.

writing “we went down the Nile and stayed several days on the river, enduring great horrors on it.”³⁵³ Thus, even on the presumably luxurious cruise of the Sultan, the Nile proved to be a dangerous expedition. Furthermore, the mouths of the rivers often threatened destruction even for experienced sailors. Al-Bakri writes that at these points “the waves of the Nile are greatest there due to the Nile current, and banks of sand rise up beneath the water.”³⁵⁴ Thus from both the European Latin Christian and Egyptian Islamic perspectives the Nile was tumultuous, dangerous and violent. This reality does not, however, make the Latin Christian narrative of the Sultan’s weaponization of the Nile simply a documentary account of reality. The properties of natural occurring phenomena are often conveniently inflected onto the people or polity which it resides adjacent to. A useful analogue for this concept may be found in the ways British colonial endeavors perceived the large number of snakes in India during the Raj of the nineteenth-century. Rahul Bhaumik observes that the subcontinent certainly did not lack for snakes and their presence impacted the lives of colonists.³⁵⁵ Yet this reality reified the British perception of the colony. Armed with an epistemology of Satan-as-serpent “the colonisers marginalised Indian snakes and condemned the Indians as they used to maintain a normal relationship with these reptiles and even worshiped them.”³⁵⁶ While medieval European Latin Christian perceptions of the Nile do not function in the same explicitly colonial context, this example does demonstrate how natural properties of a place become politicized by an invading force. Much like the British connecting the morality of India with its reptilian residents, so too does the roiling Nile

³⁵³ John P. Cooper, *The Medieval Nile: Route, Navigation, and Landscape in Islamic Egypt* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2014), 142.

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 145.

³⁵⁵ Rahul Bhaumik, “Indian Snakes and Snaky India: British Orientalist Construction of a Snake-Ridden Landscape during the Nineteenth Century,” *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities* 9, no. 240 (2016): 234.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 240.

correspond to the Latin Christian polemics regarding the “exorbitance” associated with the more fantastical Sultans of Babylon as seen in Chapter 1. This “excessiveness” of the river can also be productively applied to interpreting the “Sultan of Babylon.”³⁵⁷ As the leader of this polity, everything in it (subjects, lands, bodies of water, animals, economies) *reflects* some aspect of the Sultan himself, an extension of his power and authority over his domain.³⁵⁸ Scholars such as Geraldine Heng, Susan Conklin Akbari, and Debra Strickland have collectively suggested that medieval textual and visual polemics racialized the Islamic Other(ed) not only through their religion, skin color, equipment, and costume but also through their geography.³⁵⁹ As the river serves as an integral part of “Babylon’s” geography, its violent nature represents the inherent and untamed threat that the Sultan poses to the Latin Christian reconquest of the “Holy Land.” Thus, the Nile is both a tool of the racialized enemy and a reflection of his racialized body politic.

III. History of Outremer: Nile as Decimation, Defense & Defeat

In no uncertain terms, Latin Christians illuminated the Nile as an Islamic offensive weapon. A fourteenth-century French manuscript of the *History of Outremer* (Paris, BnF MS 22495) produced in the context of Philip VI’s (1293-1350) new planned crusade against the Mamluks, depicts the battle of al-Mansurah in 1221 during the Fifth Crusade (**Figure 2**).³⁶⁰

³⁵⁷ Cohen, “On Saracen Enjoyment,” 129-130.

³⁵⁸ This point will be further developed in Chapter 3 where I discuss the Sultan’s two bodies.

³⁵⁹ A number of scholars have discussed these topics though I only list a few here. For “cartographic” and “epidermal” race: See Heng, *Invention*, 35 & 42. For costume/acoutrement see: Debra Higgs Strickland, *Saracen, Demons & Jews: Making Monsters in Medieval Art* (Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 2003), 174-181. For climate and geography see: Suzanne Conklin Akbari, *Idols in the East: European Representations of Islam and the Orient, 1100-1450* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), 147-150.

³⁶⁰ *History of Outremer* has a long and multi-layered history. The first version was written by Bishop William of Tyre in Latin chronicling the events of the First Crusade and its aftermath until 1184 (William died in 1186). Subsequent chroniclers translated the text into the vernacular and expanded the events recorded well into the thirteenth century. For the context of this manuscript see: Maureen Quigley, “Romantic Geography and Crusades: British Library Royal ms. 19 DL.” *Peregrinations: Journal of Medieval Art and Architecture* 2. no. 3 (2009). See: Philip D. Handyside, *The Old French William of Tyre* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 1-8. & Jarslov Folda, “Manuscripts of Outremer by *William of Tyre*: a Handlist,” *Scriptorium* 27 no. 1 (1973): 90-95. For Philip VI’s planned crusade see: Christopher J. Tyerman “Philip VI and the Recovery of the Holy Land,” *The English Historical Review* 100 no.

Richard Leeson has previously commented on the production of this manuscript, writing that by the time it “was painted and bound, the crusade objectives that motivated its creation were compromised [...] Nonetheless, crusade remained a major component of French royal identity.”³⁶¹ Given the backdrop of an expedition into Egypt, it is of little surprise that the manuscript memorializes previous crusader experience with the river. On the left side, crusaders stand outside the city walls, carrying shields emblazoned with creatures of prey while one knight wields a disproportionately large sword. On the opposite side, the Sultan and his warriors sit in a boat, sailing out from an opening in the battlements. As if the brown skin and turbans were not a sufficient marker of their racialized alterity, the opening has been decorated with star motifs, perhaps a reference to the Islamic star or an essentialized version of infamous “polyhedral geometry” found in Islamic art.³⁶²

The rubric on the same folio labels the scene: “how the Sultan did cut [open] the sluices and how we [Crusaders] were interred [flooded] up to our throats.”³⁶³ The chronicle matches the historical evidence as previous scholars have confirmed that al-Kamil (Sultan of Egypt between 1218-1238) deployed this tactic during the battle.³⁶⁴ However, the image itself does not actually convey the textual or historical narrative. Unlike the pictorial narrative from Villani’s chronicle discussed at the outset of this chapter the illumination does not depict workers diverting the river

394 (1985): 25-52. See also: Norman J. Housley, “The Franco-Papal Crusade Negotiations of 1322–3,” *Papers of the British School at Rome* 48 (1980): 181.

³⁶¹ Richard A. Leeson, “Chivalry and Alterity: Saladin and the Remembrance of Crusade in a Walters *“Histoire D’Outremer,”* *The Journal of the Walters Art Museum* (2010): 88. See also: Susanna Throop, “Mirrored images: the Passion and the First Crusade in a fourteenth-century Parisian illuminated manuscript (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS fr. 352),” *Journal of Medieval History* 41.2 (2015): 190.

³⁶² Shaw, *Islamic Art*, 282-283. Shaw also explains the connections between the stars and geometry within Islam.

³⁶³ “Comment le soudan fist couper les escluses et comment li nostre estoient enterre jusques aus gueules” (268 r). My translation. Paris, BnF MS fr. 22495,” *Bibliothèque nationale de France: Manuscrits* <<https://archivesetmanuscrits.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cc52269p>>. Accessed April 20, 2021.

³⁶⁴ Charles D. Stanton, *Medieval Maritime Warfare* (South Yorkshire: Pen & Sword Maritime, 2015), 98.

or mechanisms for opening sluices. Instead, the Sultan points and the waters flow towards the soldiers, rising to their necks, thereby echoing the text. The crusaders experience a violence comparable to the fish flung from the river in the travel narrative. For all their armaments, the Christians have been utterly displaced, being “flooded” out of the scene, with their feet beginning to break through the borders of the illumination. Conversely, the Muslims remain empty handed, though safe in their boat.

The utter lack of weaponry on the Islamic side invites the viewer to think about how the Sultan is able to destroy the Christians, despite the latter’s superior number. Note that the angle of the waters moving against the crusaders mimics that of the Sultan’s arm as if responding to a command to reach up and drown his enemy. The illuminator has purposefully omitted any “Saracen” scimitars in order to emphasize the Sultan wielding the Nile. The absence of any gates or sluices to be released visually conveys the idea that the “lord of Babylon” can direct the river with an almost supernatural ability.³⁶⁵ If the Islamic princes of other manuscripts engage in bizarre dietary habits or send forth monstrous creatures, then the character here represents the terrifying prospect of one who could manipulate fluvial movement with a whim. In the Latin Christian imaginary, the Sultan could destabilize and destroy the crusaders not necessarily through solid and tangible figures (ships, soldiers, swords) but through the liquid and ephemeral force of the river. Such elemental firepower memorializes medieval European Latin Christian anxieties of military impotency and awareness of the Nile’s destructive capability.

³⁶⁵ The text also states the Sultan’s galleys blockaded the Nile preventing the Christians from acquiring supplies. Thus, the Sultan can be understood as using the Nile to “strangle” in two ways: both cutting off aid and drowning the crusaders. See: “comment li sarrazin avalernet leur galies pardessouz le pont de fer et se mistrent entre l’ost aus crestiens et damiete” (268 r). “BnF fr. 22495, *Bibliothèque nationale de France*. <<https://archivesetmanuscripts.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cc52269p>>. For the al-Kamil’s blockade See: Gada, “Why the Crusades Failed,” 541-542.

The illumination not only depicts the Nile's offensive strength, but it also subtly alludes to the river's defensive power. While the illuminator has used several different types of blue for this scene, the pale blue of the Nile has been reflected onto the archway beneath the battlements themselves. Perhaps this color parallelism intends to communicate the water's reflection on the battlements. Yet this similarity, accompanied by the walls rising out of the water, ties the river with the architectural structure that symbolizes the Sultan's polity; thereby communicating the city's dependence on the river and, more broadly, Babylon's dependence on the Nile. What is more, the blue facade gives birth to the sprawling towers that reach far above the confines of the illumination, to the very edge of the manuscript folio. Such hieratic and spatial constructions allow the illuminator to suggest that the Nile produces extremely fortified landscapes.

The blue water and walls speckled with pseudo-Islamic motifs, connect back to everything the Sultan possesses and rules, an embodiment of his insurmountable power which threaten the contemporaneous French endeavors. These visual narratives articulate racialization because they thwart the crusaders' conquest and imagined "rightful" ownership of the "Holy Land." After all, under the backdrop of Philip VI's new crusade against Mamluk Egypt to rescue the "Holy Land," the Muslims are not supposed to control Jerusalem, so everything they use to maintain their control represents their religious "incorrectness."³⁶⁶ Indeed, those immortal lines from the *Chanson de Roland* "Pagans are wrong, Christians are right" seem to haunt the confines of the scene, with the Nile's power standing in as that which maintains this "wrongness."³⁶⁷

³⁶⁶ Christopher J. Tyerman, "Philip VI and the Recovery of the Holy Land," *The English Historical Review* 100, no. 394 (1985): 25-38.

³⁶⁷ *La Chanson de Roland*, ed. Joseph Bédier (Paris: Piazza, 1922.), 1015. For a critical analysis of this phrase in the *Chanson de Roland* See: Sharon Kinoshita, "'Pagans are wrong and Christians are right': Alterity, Gender, and Nation in the Chanson de Roland," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31, no. 1 (2001): 79-84.

Other manuscripts present the Sultan's power over the river not through the politics of battle but those of defeat. A manuscript, produced for the French Chancellor Guillaume de Ursins in the fifteenth century (between 1447-1454, Paris BnF MS Latin. 4915), and narrating the *Mare Historiarum*, a universal history created by Giovanni Collona in Rome during the fourteenth-century contains one such example.³⁶⁸ As will be discussed later, the political moment of the manuscript's production alongside the motivations of its patron respond to renewed European Latin Christian anxieties of Islamic victories in the fifteenth century. **Figure 3** presents King John I of Jerusalem's surrender of Damietta to al-Kamil shortly after al-Mansurah.³⁶⁹ Both armies meet on a flooded field, with the hooves of their horses breaking the water, while the Nile's waves still lap around them. In the distance we find the city, whose facade has been mirrored onto the river. The text itself tethers the Nile with the Sultan's military capabilities the Nile as one of the reasons for defeat stating "and now, at the summit of the evils, the river of the Nile, as usual, stretched itself through Egypt."³⁷⁰

This visual reversal of the *Outremer* manuscript, where the river's color is reflected back onto the battlements, repeats the hydro-political connections between Babylon and the Nile. Indeed, the illumination foregrounds the river's significance not only because the waters utterly surround the respective parties, but because the blueness of the entire program drowns out the

³⁶⁸ For previous discussions on the connections between patron and manuscript see: Peter Shervey Lewis, "The Chancellor's Two Bodies: Note on a Miniature in BNP lat. 4915," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 55, no. 1 (1992): 263-265.

³⁶⁹ Megan Cassidy-Welch, *War and Memory at the Time of the Fifth Crusade* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2019), 60-61.

³⁷⁰ "ea ad malorum cummulum ap nils fluvis more solito per eyiptum se merpiebat extendere." Paris, BnF MS Latin 4915 404r.

scene. Though the illuminator depicts John's horse in a trot, perhaps signifying a coveted triumph, the Muslims have clearly won as the Sultan turns his gaze towards the city.³⁷¹

Still, upon first glance, it is somewhat difficult to differentiate between the Muslims and Christians as they appear nearly indistinguishable from one another, with both armies dressed in similar gold armor. Even the process of identifying the respective rulers is complicated.

Ostensibly, the left figure (entering from the "Western" side) represents King John as he wears blue and gold, the royal colors of France.³⁷² Given that Guillaume de Ursins served as the French Chancellor during the reign of Charles VII whose vassal Philip III Duke of Burgundy planned a crusade against the Ottomans, this color scheme potentially alludes to the French (and Valois) authority in crusade matters, as well as a subtle reminder of a previous loss to be corrected.³⁷³

This would make it logical to assume that al-Kamil is the figure at right (entering from the "Eastern" side) as indicated in the lines on his cap evoking a turban and by the tassels on his white horse.³⁷⁴

³⁷¹ This trotting recalls that of Marcus Aurelius' famous equestrian statue which would have been known to medieval people. See: Dale Kinney, "The horse, the king and the cuckoo: medieval narrations of the statue of Marcus Aurelius," *Word & Image*, 18 no. 1 (2002): 382. This image was usually understood as an image of Constantine in the Middle Ages see: Richard Krautheimer, *Rome: profile of a city, 312-1308* (Princeton University Press, 2000), 199.

³⁷² Given this manuscript's French provenance, royalty writ large could be communicated by deploying similar colors as that of the French monarchy. Moreover, while John was not the King of France but rather Jerusalem, he was a native born French noble who married the Queen of Jerusalem. The King of France (Phillip II) may have facilitated this arrangement. Both John's heritage and political affiliations offer alternative reasons for his costume here. For a parallel example regarding the color scheme. See: Anne D. Hedeman, *The Royal Image: Illustrations of the Grandes Chroniques de France 1274-1422* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 163. For John of Brienne's political/marital life See: Guy Perry, *John of Brienne: King of Jerusalem, Emperor of Constantinople, c. 1175-1237* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 31-46. Additionally, the left/right positionalities of the Crusader/Islamic armies speak to Latin Christian perceptions of their control over the Holy Land. This is to say that in order to get to Damietta, John would have actually entered from the East (right). Such visual positionalities potentially demonstrate Latin Christian imaginations about colonization, viewing an "Eastern" place as part of Latin "Christendom." See also: Heng, *Invention*, 125-126.

³⁷³ Rolf Strøm-Olsen, "Political Narrative and Symbolism in the Feast of the Pheasant (1454)," *Viator* 46, no. 3 (2015): 321, 334. As Storm-Olsen notes Philip of Burgundy invokes the name of the French King at the feast requesting his liege lord's permission to go on crusade despite their political rivalry.

³⁷⁴ David Nicolle, "Horse Armour in the Medieval Islamic Middle East," *Arabian Humanities* 8 (2017): 39. Apparently, Islamic warriors in some 12th-13th century contexts had tassels on their steeds.

However, if all of this is true, what could explain the Christian cross held on the *Islamic* side? An answer may be found in the preceding illumination (**Figure 4**) which presents King John, accompanied by his bishops, and his army carrying black flags emblazoned with gold crosses departing on their crusade. The horizontal bar of the foremost cross exhibits a slight entasis on the left side, possibly as a perspective effect as found in **Figure 5**. This widening of the cross also appears in the one held by the Muslims in **Figure 3**, albeit on the right side of the horizontal bar. It is important to note that this illumination only contains one cross and that the crosses on the crusader army's flags have suddenly disappeared. These subtle details suggest important expropriations. The Sultan has literally taken away the Christian army's cross, a powerful metaphor for the Islamic ruler removing the crusaders' ability to crusade.³⁷⁵ On one hand the appearance of the cross in the Sultan's hands rhyme with historical Fifth Crusade accounts of Islamic degradation of Christian iconography.³⁷⁶ On the other hand, the visual program here alludes to the textual narrative recounted earlier in the manuscript of Heraklios' recapturing of the True Cross from the hands of the Persians.³⁷⁷ Moreover, **Figure 3** appears on the verso of the folio that precedes **Figure 4** so that the viewer would have encountered these images in sequence. The visual organization makes this shift all the more evident from one side to another, communicating Latin Christian possession of "the cross" and its subsequent loss.

The illumination conveys crusader defeat by rendering the Islamic usurpation of Christian iconography at the site of the Nile. Victory in this battle has not been determined through force of arms, as both sides appear to have equal numbers. Rather, the river has

³⁷⁵ Potentially, the crosses on the Christian flags have faded away due to damage though I am not certain. However, even if this is the case, the hieratic scale of the cross on the right side clearly notes that the Muslims have taken away the Christian ability to crusade.

³⁷⁶ Jessalynn Lea Bird, "Damiatta the Whore, the Purification of the Virgin Mary, and the Crusade Movement," *Medieval Sermon Studies* 65, no. 1 (2021): 5.

³⁷⁷ BnF MS fr. 4915, f. 301r.

completely halted the Latin Christian advance as demonstrated in the flooded landscape. Like the scenes in the *Nuova Chronica* and the *History of Outremer* manuscripts, the Sultan's fantastic power over the river determines military outcomes without drawing his actual sword. Indeed, the blueness of the entire program continuously reminds the viewer of the weapon employed in this "Saracenic" reconquest. The scene implicitly notes the facilitator of this fluvial triumph as the cross appears to the Sultan's immediate right. Poised on the river, the "Sultan of Babylon" renders the crusaders powerless by seizing their religious justifications for conquest.

The entire composition situates the Nile as the focal point through which the Sultan can commit theft of Christian symbols as well as the "Holy Land" writ large. Such compositions create a racialized matrix linking the river to the Sultan's unholy ability to pervert Latin Christian iconography by taking it into his own hands, allegorizing his political control over Damietta and through the city, the road to Jerusalem. Additionally, we can read this scene as an inversion of Latin Christian epistemological order. Chet Van Duzer observes that on folio 26v the illuminator has superimposed the V-shape in order to render Noah's division of the world amongst his sons, with the descendants of Iaphet as Europeans while those of Shem and Ham have been relegated to monstrous races thereby creating an "ethnocentric" epistemology (**Figure 6**).³⁷⁸ He notes that this shape is intended to evoke the less-common depiction of a V-shaped *mappamundi*, with the diagonal lines representing the world's waters, as opposed to the more common T-O map.³⁷⁹ Though not as obvious as the diagonals in **Figure 6**, the crusade scene of **Figure 3** with the armies receding on either side and the distant city create lines of perspective receding backwards, thereby creating a Λ -shape. The Sultan's fluvial powers have literally turned

³⁷⁸ Chet van Duzer, "A Neglected Type of Medieval *Mappamundi* and Its Re-imaging in the *Mare Historiarum* (BnF MS Lat. 4915, Fol. 26v)." *Viator* 43, no. 2 (2012): 288-289, 277 for "ethnocentric".

³⁷⁹ *Ibid* 279-285.

the world upside down. Furthermore, if **Figure 6** represents divine order, with the various genealogies segregated by bodies of water then **Figure 3** represents a reversal where that water has swallowed those borders. The Sultan's weaponization of the Nile upsets divine order both because it prevents Latin Christian victory and because landmass boundaries which are associated with the genealogical divisions amongst the descendants of the sons of Noah, suddenly disappear. Evidently, he who controls the Nile determines not only the politics of crusade into the "Holy Land," but plays at transforming the world order.

It is worth pausing our discussion of the Nile here to consider this topographic manipulation elsewhere in this manuscript as well as the political realities surrounding its production. I previously mentioned the Valois associations in the blue-gold costuming of John of Brienne, perhaps etching a French desire to "correct" the loss of the "Holy Land." Yet the 15th-century French had little vested interest in the retaking of Jerusalem via the Nile specifically, given the new threat of the Ottoman Turks. Thus, we are prompted to ask, what was the effect of illuminating the Damietta scene beyond simply chronicling a historical event? An answer may be found once again in a preceding folio, 401v, which renders the leveling of Jerusalem's walls at the hands of al-Mu'azzam Isa, the son of Sultan al-Adil, and nephew of the famous Saladin (**Figure 7**).³⁸⁰ The illuminator depicts the prince dressed in a multi-tiered yellow/gold turban and blue robe, paralleling European Latin Christian royalty elsewhere in the manuscript and perhaps symbolizing his usurpation of imagined French royal authority over the land.³⁸¹ Around him, his soldiers hammer away at stone battlements, leaving the church-like building still standing but

³⁸⁰ Paul E. Chevedden, "Fortifications and the development of defensive planning during the crusader period," *The Circle of War in the Middle Ages: Essays on Medieval Military and Naval History* edited by Donald J. Kagay, L. J. Andrew Villalon (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1999): 40. See also: Adrian Boas, "Some Reflections on Urban Landscapes in the Kingdom of Jerusalem: Archaeological Research in Jerusalem and Acre," In *Dei Gesta Per Francos*, ed. Michel Balard, Benjamin Z. Kedar (London: Routledge, 2017), 241-260.

³⁸¹ The reasons and implications of this type of costuming shall be discussed further in Chapter 4.

exposed to “Saracenic” defilement. The rubric above the scene supports this interpretation as it states: “qualiter Cordamus filius Saladin destruxit Jerusalem muros eius”---how Cordamus, the son of Saladin destroyed the walls of Jerusalem,” with the text below describing that he specifically targeted the areas surrounding the Temple Mount and the Tower of David.³⁸² While “Coharadmus” is not identified as the “Sultan of Babylon,” his actions are certainly associated with the Islamic ruler whose name appears in the rubric at the top of the facing folio (402r), followed by an illumination rendering John of Brienne’s initial victory at Damietta before latter losing it on 404r to al-Kamil (the previously discussed Figure 3). Furthermore, the misattribution of Corharadmus (al’Mu’azzam Isa) as the son of Saladin, who the manuscript elsewhere identifies as the Sultan of Egypt strengthens this “Babylonian” connection.³⁸³ The viewer who would first encounter **(Figure 7)** and then **(Figure 3)**, would observe that the distinct yet connected Islamic princes both engage in the act of threatening sacred topography. Coharadmus literally tears down the Holy City and al-Kamil bars the entrance of its liberators.

In the case of the former, this Islamic terraforming is accompanied by the coat of arms of Guillaume de Ursins **(Figure 8)**. While the heraldry and bear-sigils of the French Chancellor and patron appear in numerous places throughout the manuscript, its inclusion here may hold particular meaning.³⁸⁴ Sitting just below the illumination and attached to the capitol which describes Corharadmus’ actions, the shield makes a promise to defend divine order from Islamic perversion, a promise which exists beyond just the historical events of the 13th century and extends to the political threat of the Ottoman Turks in the 15th century. The aftermath of the

³⁸² “coharadmus filius saladin cogregato suorum exceratu venit Ih[e]r[usa]l[e]m atque hit suorum concilio verbem funditus destruxit intus forisq[ue]s preter templum domim et turrem david.” Both the rubric and the main text misidentifies Coharadmus as the son of Saladin instead of his nephew. BnF Latin 4915., 401v.

³⁸³ BnF Latin 4915., 387r.

³⁸⁴ Lewis, “The Chancellor's Two Bodies: Note on a Miniature,” 263-265.

attack certainly produced an effect on the European Latin Christian psyche writ large not to mention as Norman Housley writes “strategically, what mattered most was the fact that in 1453 the Christian frontier was already hundreds of miles further west” as a result of Ottoman incursions.³⁸⁵ Discussions of an anti-Turkish crusade arose in the aftermath, fielded by Pope Pius II and nominally supported by various princes. Yet for the French crown this “defense” often only existed in the abstract, the rhetorical, the hypothetical or for its own political benefit within Europe.³⁸⁶ Ironically enough Guillaume de Ursins himself squelched a budding call for crusade against the Turks. According to Johnathan Harris, Ursins received a letter from a Milanese contact in 1454 regarding two Byzantine refugees who tried to ask Latin Christian rulers to attack the Turks. The Chancellor advised Charles VII that it was not a great time for crusade due to the king’s ongoing problems with the English Crown. Nonetheless Ursins sent back a letter praising the Byzantine defense of “Christendom.”³⁸⁷ That the French Chancellor crippled a potential crusade against the Turks is not a contradiction to the narrative of defending “Christendom” I have provided above regarding **Figure 8**. Rather, this difference provides an insight into the mentality of the French aristocracy as it relates to the process of racializing Muslim opponents. A good Christian knight could both view the might of Islam as an existential threat, and perform an imagined resistance in his own patronage, but need not necessarily take the cross nor take any real political action. Returning once again to **Figure 3** the illumination parallels those of contemporaneously produced images depicting the Fall of Constantinople, such as that painted by Jean le Taveriner (**Figure 9**). Both images present snapshots of already lost

³⁸⁵ Norman Housley, *Crusading and the Ottoman Threat, 1453-1505* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 10.

³⁸⁶ Housley, *Crusading and the Ottoman Threat* 38, 90. See also Vincent Hardi, “The Italian League, Francesco Sforza, and Charles VII (1454-1461),” *Studies in the Renaissance* 6 (1959): 153.

³⁸⁷ Jonathan Harris, “Byzantine refugees as crusade propagandists: the travels of Nicholas Agallon,” in *The Crusade in the Fifteenth Century*, ed. Norman Housley, pp. 34-46 (London: Routledge, 2016), 35-39.

battles, cities surrounded by blue waters trapping Christians, as Islamic forces remove (or prepare to remove) their authority. Thus, while the elite French audience was not making any plans regarding the Nile or the Bosphorous they could reread scenes like Damietta, as analogues of their own historical moment. In doing so, the Sultan of Babylon's terraforming of "Christian" topography functions as a metaphor for the "flood" of Ottoman Turks to do the same to the whole of Europe.

IV. The Nile as an Aniconic Sultan & The Not-So Invincible Sultan

Thus far I have provided examples of the Sultan decimating and defeating his European Latin Christian opponents by weaponizing the Nile; however, the narratives surrounding the river possess a greater complexity. An image from *Les Grandes Chroniques de France* BnF fr. 2813 f. 281r renders St. Louis' capture of Damietta in 1249 further demonstrates the river's defensive capabilities even in the Sultan's absence (**Figure 10**). Produced for Charles V, King of France (r.1364-80), the illumination depicts the crusader forces landing their fleet near the city, firing their bows at the presumably Islamic defenders, though these two sides have not been distinguished with any iconographical markers.³⁸⁸ As the first soldier on the European Latin Christian side disembarks, he stands on undulating, uneven ground. The thick ropes of paint that shape the topography creates a sense of swelling, as the coiled layers of earth and the Nile wrap around the tower, lifting up and elongating the spire, seemingly insurmountable. This serpentine

³⁸⁸ For more recent discussions of BnF fr. 2813 and Charles V see: Anne D. Hedeman, "History & Visual Memory of King Charles V of France," in *Royauté, écriture et théâtre au Moyen Âge: Mélanges en l'honneur d'Élisabeth Lalou*, ed. Marie Bouhaïk-Gironès, Alexis Grélois, Xavier Hélary (Mont Saint-Aignan, Rouen and Le Havre University Press, 2024): 289-310. See also: Anne D. Hedeman, "Power and Authority in Visual Paratext: The Case of the *Grandes Chroniques de France*," in *Art, Power, and Resistance in the Middle Ages* (Penn State University Press, 2025): 165-188.

landscape recalls the medieval comparisons of the river to the Lernaean Hydra, evoking a monstrous quality in addition to height.³⁸⁹

To some extent the scene is fairly typical of other amphibious battles found in this manuscript. Folio 237r (**Figure 11**), Folio 245v (**Figure 12**) and Folio 299v (**Figure 13**) represent the Siege of Acre (1189/1191), the Siege of Constantinople (1203) and the Siege of Tunis (1270) respectively.³⁹⁰ The viewer may have readily understood the crusade contexts in at least three of these four illuminations given the swirling arabesque motifs which cover the background, tethering together this non-figural imagery with the types of materials contemporaneously imported from the Middle East into European ports.³⁹¹ These illuminations depict a city on the right hand side, in some cases with water surrounding it (as in **Figure 10** and **Figure 13**), while the Latin Christian warriors in a boat ride the waves into the shore. Despite the overall compositional similarity, each of these illuminations attends to a different type of topography, differentiated in both color and form. Ranging from the burbling Bosphorus against other crags of Constantinople, to the verdant hills of Acre, to the sandy (though curiously vegetated) shores of Tunisia, the visual program imagines a variety of geographical contexts. The programmatic order of encounter (**Figure 10**), with **Figure 11** and **Figure 12** preceding it earlier in the manuscript would have been a striking contrast, bringing the viewer's attention to

³⁸⁹ Cassidy-Welch, *War and Memory at the Time of the Fifth Crusade*, 346. The Nile of course was also heavily associated with other reptilian "dragon-like" creatures such as the crocodile which represented evil. Interestingly enough the Nile was also home to a different creature called the "hydrus" who had an antagonistic relationship with the crocodile. Previous scholarship has read this creature as an allegory for Christ during the Harrowing of Hell. See also: George C. Druce, "The symbolism of the crocodile in the Middle Ages." *Archaeological Journal* 66, no. 1 (1909): 321-322. Marijana Nestorov, "A Traveler's Guide to Crocodiles in the Middle Ages." *Lucida Intervalla* 43 (2014): 143. Llúcia Martín "Aquatic animals in the Catalan Bestiari." *Reinardus: Yearbook of the International Reynard Society* 21, no. 1 (2009): 124-143.

³⁹⁰ A depiction of the Trojan War in this manuscript also includes this geographic framing between land and sea. See BnF fr. 2813 f. 4r.

³⁹¹ Rosamond E. Mack, *Bazaar to Piazza: Islamic Trade and Italian Art, 1300-1600* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 21-48. See also: Deborah Howard, *Venice & The East: The Impact of the Islamic World on Venetian Architecture 1100-1500* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 43-62.

the serpentine melding of river and earth. In this sense (**Figure 10**) is unique amongst the amphibious assault imagery as it emphasizes that the shape of the water mimics the shape of the land, twisting together these two aspects thereby illustrating their inseparability. The Nile is part of Babylon. Also particular to the (**Figure 10**) is the location of the discussion of the river. The first six lines of text in the second column of the folio, and to the immediate right of the illumination) relates that the Christians “found a great abundance of Saracens who entered the port (of Damietta) against them and guarded against a river which comes from the terrestrial paradise, called Nilus.”³⁹² Thus when reading the description of the Nile’s properties the viewer would simultaneously encounter its visual manifestation. The connection created between text and image here primes the viewer for meditating upon multiple layers of crusade-inspired meaning. If Jerusalem functions as a version of terrestrial paradise and the Nile both flows from Eden and serves as a military conduit to the Holy City, then the text-image relationship here reifies both a practical and religious *need* to control the river.³⁹³ Perhaps the river’s terraforming and elsewhere supernatural properties result from its Edenic source and that under the control of the Muslims serves as a bulwark preventing Latin Christian entry into the “Holy Land.” Adjacent to the text, the twisted topography functions as an analogue for the Sultan’s corruption of that which flows from God’s most perfect creation, much as he has profaned the “Holy Land” by controlling it. Yet in contrast to the images on MS. Chigiano L VIII 296 f. 82r and BnF 22495 f. 268r depicted in **Figure 1** and **Figure 2** the Sultan is nowhere to be found, unable to wield the

³⁹² “ils trouvèrent grant foison de Sarrazins qui leur contredh'ent le port et se tindrent tuit serré et rengié seur une rivière qui vient de vers paradiz terrestre, que l'en apelle Nilus, qui iluec endroit chiet en mer assez près du port de Damiete, et se mistrent tantost les Sarrazins en galies et en barges pour aler contre euls.” Jules Marie Édouard Viard, *Les Grandes Chroniques de France*, vol. 7 (Paris: Société de l'histoire de France, 1920-1953), 142.

³⁹³ Lydia Walker discusses a version of such narratives as found in Jacques de Vitry’s *Historia orientalis* See: Lydia M. Walker, “Miraculous rivers and monstrous cities: landscapes and gender performance in thirteenth-century crusading culture.” *Journal of Medieval History* 47, no. 3 (2021): 395. Lawrence E. Strager, “Jerusalem as Eden.” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 26, no. 3 (2000): 36-47.

river as he does in those images. The text states (beginning 15 lines from the bottom of the right-hand column of the folio) that the prince is not able to come to the battle, as he lies bedridden due to illness a mile away.³⁹⁴ Thus, even in moments where the Sultan cannot open sluices or raise waters against his foes, the Nile rises to defend his kingdom.

The racialized-religious body of the Sultan here manifests aniconically, in the shape of the river that attempts to impede rightful Christian authority of a known saint's military expedition. A more vivid example of this phenomenon may be found in the *Les Belles Heures* made for Jean Duke of Berry in the fifteenth-century now in the Cloisters (**Figure 14**). The illumination presents Louis and his crusaders in a ship sailing towards Damietta, its "minaret-like towers" possibly providing the viewer a clue about the Islamic nature of this destination.³⁹⁵ As the saint holds his hands in prayer the vessel aims towards a narrow strait formed by a pair of jagged sea stacks, which rise menacingly above the French. The waves crashing around these sharp rocks threaten to batter the boats into splinters. Rendering the site where the mouth of the Nile empties from Egypt into the Mediterranean, the combination of land and water communicates danger. The narrowness of this strait suggests an impossibility to thread through a natural defense system. Much like **Figure 10** the illuminator presents the topography itself as resisting the Christian forces. The marginalia provide further evidence for this interpretation. Hanging just to the right of the scene we find a strange monstrous creature, perhaps a dragon, with its reptilian body and wings and leonine face and paws. The depiction of this creature is not specific to this illumination: many folios throughout the *Suffrages of Saints* include similar

³⁹⁴ "En bataille ne fu pas le Soudan de Babiloine qui estoit venus des parties de Damas et se tenoit a une mille." Viard, *Les Grandes Chroniques*, vol 7, 143. See also BnF 2813 f. 281r Lines 15-11 from the bottom of the right column.

³⁹⁵ Timothy B. Husband, *The Art of Illumination: The Limbourg Brothers and the Belles Heures of Jean de France, Duc de Berry* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2009) 206.

dragon-like marginal creatures.³⁹⁶ Despite this regularity in the preceding and subsequent folios, it is worth considering how a viewer might have understood this iconography alongside a scene of crusade endeavor. The dragon after all is long associated with Islam and indeed with its princely leaders.³⁹⁷ European Latin Christian illuminations of crusader battles often emblazon the mythical creature on flags on the Islamic side, opposed to the Christian crosses.³⁹⁸ Crusade propagandist Joachim of Fiore's *Book of Figures* includes an illumination of a seven-headed dragon alluding to the Apocalypse, with one of its heads labeled "Saladin."³⁹⁹ This is not to say that the marginal dragon represents the Sultan. Rather, the presence of the dragon in combination with the dangerous topography would signpost to the reader to recall narratives of the Seventh Crusade, Damietta, Islam, the Nile, and the Sultan of Babylon, even though the underlying text does not mention any of these terms or events explicitly. When discussing medieval visual literacy through one of the duke's other famous illuminated manuscripts, the *Très Riches Heures*, Anna Dow notes "images can be read for their narrative meaning outside of the accompanying text."⁴⁰⁰ A reader familiar with the context of this scene would interpret the dragon as the "demon" that St. Louis faced, as so many of his fellow saints faced differently metaphorical or even literal ones. Between the marginal dragon and an illumination of the antagonistic Nile, the entire folio symbolically recalls the opponent of the Saint that a reader informed by the stories of the Seventh crusade would know to be the Sultan of Babylon. Such a reader would readily be found in Jean Duke of Berry, who was not only a prolific patron in his own right but was also the

³⁹⁶ Ibid., 70-71.

³⁹⁷ Iris Shagrir, "Thadeus of Naples on the Fall of Acre," in *Acre and Its Falls*, ed. John France (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 162.

³⁹⁸ For one example see: Royal MS 16 G VI, fol. 167r.

³⁹⁹ Jay Rubenstein, *Nebuchadnezzar's Dream: The Crusades, Apocalyptic Prophecy and the End of History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 181-182, 194.

⁴⁰⁰ Anna Dow, "Interweaving Methodologies: New Approaches to Visual Literacy in Medieval Manuscript Reception," in *Learning to See: The Meanings, Modes and Methods of Visual Literacy*, pp. 127-141 (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 130.

brother of King Charles V (for whom Paris, BnF 2813 was produced) and also regent for Charles VI. Given that similar “Siege of Damietta” scenes appeared in both the *Grandes Chroniques* produced for Charles V and Charles VI (**Figure 10 & Figure 15** respectively), we can certainly view the Duke of Berry as having participated in a court culture which understood the Nile (and its ruler) as forces which impeded the saint. After all, as Anne D. Hedeman has argued, Valois princes actively memorialized Louis IX and his crusades and emphasized their own connections to this past, in part, as a way to legitimize their own royal authority.⁴⁰¹

In both cases, the lack of the Sultan’s bodily visual figuring in the illuminations and his absence from the battle (or indeed the textual narrative) does not diminish his presence and echo in the wider context of this crusade account. In the case of BnF fr. 2813, it is his soldiers, his boats, his towers, his assassins and his river that plague St. Louis’ forces ever since they arrive in the “Holy Land.”⁴⁰² In the case of the *Tres Belles Heures*, the folio immediately following St. Louis commemorates “Saint” Charlemagne.⁴⁰³ Such a programmatic order may have recalled for the reader Charlemagne’s own confrontations with Iberian Muslims which according to the *Pseudo-Turpin* tradition interpolated into the *Grandes Chroniques* presents the French ruler facing various emissaries of the “Admiral of Babylon.”⁴⁰⁴ More importantly, in both scenarios

⁴⁰¹ Anne D. Hedeman, “Constructing Saint Louis in John the Good’s *Grandes Chroniques de France* (Royal MS. 16 G. VI),” *Electronic British Library Journal* 10 (2014): 19. See also: Anne D. Hedeman, “Valois legitimacy: Editorial changes in Charles V’s *Grandes chroniques de France*,” *The Art Bulletin*, 66(1) (1984): 99-106. See also: Hedeman, *The Royal Image: Illustrations of the Grandes Chroniques de France 1274-1422* (University of California Press, 1991), 62-68.

⁴⁰² Viard, *Les Grandes Chroniques*, vol 7, 137-138. According to the text the Sultan of Babylon sent assassins to poison Louis IX.

⁴⁰³ Husband, *The Art of Illumination*, 208-209. Charlemagne received a disputed canonization in the 12th century and continued to be venerated in 14th century France. See: Ann Austin Latowsky, *The Emperor of the World: Charlemagne and the Construction of Imperial Authority, 800–1229* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013), 183–214. See also: R. Folz, “Aspects du culte liturgique de Saint Charlemagne en France,” *In Karl der Grosse Lebenswerk und Nachleben* 4, ed. W. Braunfels (Dusseldorf, 1968), 92- 94.

⁴⁰⁴ For one example see: Robert Levine, *A Thirteenth-Century Life of Charlemagne* (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1991), 121.

the medieval viewer knows the ultimate outcome. The saint manages to overcome the Sultan's topography and captures Damietta.

Returning again to BnF 2813 (**Figure 10**), as the reader turns the folio to the verso side, they would read the result of the Latin Christian overcoming the Nile through the "correction" of the sacred topography of Babylon. After taking Damietta, which includes the death of the "Apostate of Damietta," St. Louis conducts both a sanitary and ritual cleansing of the city.⁴⁰⁵ First he orders the removal of corpses, animals and filth from the streets.⁴⁰⁶ Subsequently, the papal legate enters a "mahamorrie" destroying the false images within and consecrating in its place an image of the Virgin Mary.⁴⁰⁷ Thus, the conquest of the Nile (again a conduit to terrestrial paradise) is immediately accompanied by a description of a change in the religious landscape as well. Regardless of the historicity of this thirteenth-century event, the fourteenth-century reader, encountering first the visualized victory at the Nile and reading the subsequent account of the cleansing would have understood the scene to represent a Christianizing of the landscape. In this way, the actions at Damietta function as an anticipation (or preview) of the eventual desired result inside the walls of Jerusalem. The interaction between this seemingly innocuous image of battle and the textual narrative participate in a broader theme of celebrating crusader victory present throughout the manuscript.⁴⁰⁸ Even though Charles V never went on crusade James McGee notes the ways that the king had an interest in the broader endeavor.⁴⁰⁹ Not only did he possess many texts pertaining to crusade, he also appointed the famed crusade propagandist Philip of Mezières as his son's (the future Charles VI's) tutor. McGee writes "it is

⁴⁰⁵ Viard, *Les Grandes Chroniques*, vol 7, 143-145, 143 (for apostate of Damietta).

⁴⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 144.

⁴⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 145.

⁴⁰⁸ Hedeman, *The Royal Image*, 131-132.

⁴⁰⁹ James Magee. "Crusading at the Court of Charles VI, 1388–1396." *French History* 12, no. 4 (1998): 368-370.

possible that his [Charles V's] failure to take the Cross frustrated him and he hoped to see the French crusading tradition continued under his son."⁴¹⁰ Similarly, through the rendering of such scenes the French king could vicariously perform his association with the victorious crusade through his famous royal predecessor.

Yet this apparent victory does not live long. Later on, the reader learns that St. Louis is forced to remain at Damietta for an extended period due to the river's flooding, something that the text analogizes to the previous problems experienced by King John of Brienne who also took the city during the Fifth Crusade.⁴¹¹ Even in a moment of conquest, the memory of the Nile's ability to hinder still haunts the folios. Ultimately, the Muslims' capture the French King following the battle of al-Mansurah as he attempts to retreat back to Damietta though this scene is not illuminated here. Instead, the subsequent illumination on f. 285 depicts Louis sailing back to France, none the worse for wear. The program of *Les Grandes Chroniques de France* BnF fr. 2813's visualization of the Seventh Crusade exemplifies a practice across French manuscripts. As seen in the *Très Belles Heures*, the visual program commemorates the saint's life not through his later suffering at the hands of the Muslims but at the cusp of his victory. The *Mare Historiarium*, even while depicting Louis' subsequent capture in later folios, links the politics of military success with a spiritual one, as found in the reconsecration of the church on the right side (**Figure 16**). As the Christian knights stand ready to shatter the Muslim face-shield in the foreground, a metaphor for "Saracenic" idolatry, the bishop already stands in the city and before the altar. This image serves as a striking contrast to that of (**Figure 3**) in the same manuscript where John of Brienne surrenders at the Nile outside the city gates and with Christian

⁴¹⁰ Ibid., 369. See also: James Magee. "Politics, society and the Crusade in England and France, 1378-1400," PhD Diss, University of Leicester 1997, 84.

⁴¹¹ Viard, *Les Grandes Chroniques*, vol. 7, 144-145.

iconography on the incorrect side. No longer does the Nile “flood” the image, now only peeking out just below the boats on the left side, tamed by Louis’ forces. Different types of French manuscripts memorialize the king’s initial victory (whether they include the subsequent arrest or not) for obvious reasons. Louis’ momentary victory at Damietta serves as a blow against the sword of Islam: the Sultan of Babylon. By withstanding the danger of the Nile Delta, he overcomes his political and religious foil. In understanding Egyptian topography as an aniconic representation of the Sultan, we can also discern a guarantee etched into these illuminations. That the Latins writ large *could* wrest control of the Nile from the Sultan’s grasp much as Louis had demonstrated. Evidently, the Sultan’s authority over the Nile, though powerful, is not invincible.

V. Nile as Site of Desire

When the Mamluk Sultan Baybars came to power in 1260 C.E. he filled parts of the Nile with rocks in order to prevent future crusader incursions into Egypt.⁴¹² Nonetheless, such actions did not stop the Latin Christians from fantasizing about the river. In the same way that medieval Europeans associated the Nile with its Islamic ruler, so too did they understand that a change in political control could allow new potentialities for utilizing the river. Starting in the twelfth century, Latin Christian legends imagined such political reversals through the mythical Christian king of the East, Prester John.⁴¹³

According to the earliest accounts, this emperor supposedly conquered the “Persians and [the] Medes [as well as a group] called the Samiards,” casting him as a “Saracen-slayer” in his

⁴¹² James M. Powell, *Anatomy of a Crusade 1213-1221* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania, 1986), 140. Still such actions did not prevent Peter I king of Cyprus going on the Alexandrian Crusade. See: Paul Cobb, *The Race for Paradise* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 241-243.

⁴¹³ Keagen Brewer, *Prester John: Legend and its Sources* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2015), 8. The domain of Prester John is somewhat undefined as it includes lands “beyond Armenia and Persia in the further East.”

own right.⁴¹⁴ These narratives increased in popularity during the fourteenth century, likely in response to the 1291 Sack of Acre as medieval Europeans more pressingly desired an ally to “turn the tide” against the Muslims. This notion can be taken quite literally in regard to the Nile. Indeed, a fourteenth-century travel narrative from Niccolò di Poggibonsi states that the Sultan feared Prester John because of the *latter’s* power over the Nile. Here, the traveler leaves out exactly how the Christian king could control the river, perhaps suggesting a supernatural power like that visualized in the *History of Outremer* manuscript (**Figure 2**). A different contemporaneous Italian narrative goes a step further by stating that it was actually Prester John who operated the Nile sluices and that the Sultan had to pay his neighbor a tribute for the privilege of using these waters.⁴¹⁵ We find visual evidence of Prester John’s authority over Eastern waters, even if not specifically the Nile, in a fifteenth-century manuscript of the *Travels of Sir John Mandeville* (**Figure 17**). The illuminator has rendered Prester John (here the emperor of Ind), looking out from his battlements at a fleet of boats, in part symbolizing the rich economy of the king’s lands. The swirling waters which surround his kingdom also correspond to the textual description just below which relates that the rivers from Paradise make up the isles surrounding his kingdom. If the waters of the Nile also hail from Paradise, and pass first through Ind (as the text relates earlier), then Prester John effectively controls the passageway of the waters into Egypt.⁴¹⁶ These narratives about the Eastern king’s authority over the Nile demonstrate the Latin Christian conception of the river as a weapon for both sides. As Tadesse Tamrat states, the ability to deploy the Nile against the Muslims was “seriously considered by

⁴¹⁴ Richard Pankhurst, “Ethiopia’s Alleged Control of the Nile,” ed. Hagai Gershoni & Israel Erlikh, in *The Nile: Histories, Cultures, Myths*, 25-38 (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000), 31-32.

⁴¹⁵ Emery van Donzel, “The Legend of the Blue Nile in Europe,” ed. Hagai Gershoni & Israel Erlikh, in *The Nile: Histories, Cultures, Myths*, 121-138 (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000) 122.

⁴¹⁶ BnF fr. 2810 f. 150v: “autrement appellee Nil et vient du paradis terrestre [...] et cette rivere vient du padis parmy les deser d’Ynde.”

the leaders of the later crusades.”⁴¹⁷ The stories about Prester John evidently resonated with the practical planning for crusade.

We can also find evidence of Latin Christian desire for the Nile in the very manuscripts that depict the Sultan’s destructive deployment of the river. Take for example the text that accompanies the illumination from Villani’s *Nuova Cronica* discussed earlier. When giving a description of the river, the text states “the Sultan, knowing that he was in that part [of the country] that he liked, masterfully made the banks of the river of the Calice break in several parts, which flows out of the river of the Nile, whose banks are like those that are above the river of the Po in Lombardy.”⁴¹⁸ This Italian text does not innocently state Egyptian topography but gives *directions* to its readers. Not only does it provide the specific part of the Nile (the Calice or in Arabic, Khaleej) that the Sultan turned against the crusaders, but provides an Italian fluvial equivalent for better apprehending the African river’s properties.⁴¹⁹ As Susanna Partsch originally argues, Villani oversaw the production of these images alongside the text, a point furthered by Guiseppa Zanichelli who notes the absence of illuminators directions in the manuscripts suggests Villani’s direct involvement.⁴²⁰ If Partsch’s and Zanichelli’s interpretation

⁴¹⁷ Taddesse Tamrat, *Church and State in Ethiopia, 1270-1527* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 256.

⁴¹⁸ “il soldano conoscendo ch’egli erano in quella parte ch’a llui piaceva, maestrevolmente fece rompere in più parti gli argini del fiume del Calice, ch’esce dal fiume del Nilo, i quali argini sono a modo di quelli che sono sopra il fiume del Po in Lombardia” (my translation). Villani, *Nuova Cronica*, Location 3700.

⁴¹⁹ For this connection of “calice” and “khaleej” see: William Desborough Cooley, *Claudius Ptolemy and the Nile: Or, An Inquiry Into that Geographer’s Real Merits and Speculative Errors, His Knowledge of Eastern Africa and the Authenticity of the Mountains of the Moon* (London: JW Parker and Son, 1854), 76.

⁴²⁰ Susanna Partsch, *Profane Buchmalerei der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft im spätmittelalterlichen Florenz. Der Specchio Umano des Getreidehändlers Domenico Lenzi* (Worms: Werner, 1981) 93-97. See: Guiseppa Z. Zanichelli, “La Cronica di Giovanni Villani e la nascita del racconto storico illustrato a Firenze nella prima metà del Trecento, in *Il Villani illustrato: Firenze e l’Italia medievale nelle 253 immagini del ms. Chigiano L VIII 296 della Biblioteca Vaticana*, ed. Chiara Furgoni (Vatican: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 2005), 76. See also: Chiara Frugoni, “L’ideologia del Villani nello specchio dell’unico manoscritto figurato della *Nuova cronica*,” in *Il Villani illustrato: Firenze e l’Italia medievale nelle 253 immagini del ms. Chigiano L VIII 296 della Biblioteca Vaticana*, ed. Chiara Furgoni (Vatican: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 2005), 7. For a rejection of this interpretation in favor of these illuminations being overseen by Villani’s brother Matteo See: Verena Gebhard, “Representation of Florentine history and creation of communal myths in the illustrated *Nuova Cronica* of Giovanni Villani,” *Iconographica* 8 (2009): 78.

stands, then the inclusion of this comparison, merely two lines above the illumination in the left column, is pregnant with meaning. At the site of visualizing crusade failure, Villani sought to provide his reader with a more familiar and local analogue that might have been useful information for the European king who loses in the illumination.

The context of Villani's chronicle is critical for understanding why the Florentine included such descriptions in his history. Villani was inspired to write his text by the 1300 Jubilee orchestrated by Pope Boniface VIII in Rome.⁴²¹ Having been in attendance during the celebration of the city, he wanted to produce a history which commemorated Florence, in much the same way that he had read stories written by "great masters" from Virgil to Paulo Orosio.⁴²² Yet the concept of jubilee did not simply celebrate Rome but coincided with a blow to the imagined Latin Christian authority over the "Holy Land." Gary Dickson demonstrates that a crusade ethos pervaded Boniface's Jubilee. As he notes the celebration was staged "a mere nine years" after the Fall of Acre in 1291, positioning Rome as a "new Latin Jerusalem."⁴²³ He goes on to state that around the year 1300, purported news spread of the Mongols retaking Jerusalem for Christianity.⁴²⁴ Such legends trade in European Latin Christian fantasies of what Sierra Lomuto has previously termed "exotic allies" whereby the Latins could find religious partners in the East Asian opponents of the Mamluks.⁴²⁵ As Dickson also observes, the presence of this story demonstrates a hope in retaking the "Holy Land" which occurred simultaneously with the

⁴²¹ Chiara Frugoni, "L'ideologia del Villani nello specchio dell'unico manoscritto figurato della Nuova cronica," in *Il Villani illustrato: Firenze e l'Italia medievale nelle 253 immagini del ms. Chigiano L VIII 296 della Biblioteca Vaticana*, ed. Chiara Frugoni (Vatican: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 2005), 9.

⁴²² Ibid.

⁴²³ Gary Dickson, "The crowd at the feet of Pope Boniface VIII: pilgrimage, crusade and the first Roman Jubilee (1300)," *Journal of Medieval History* 25, no. 4 (1999): 288.

⁴²⁴ Ibid.

⁴²⁵ Sierra Lomuto, "The Mongol Princess of Tars: Global Relations and Racial Formation in The King of Tars (c. 1330)," *Exemplaria*, 31 no. 3. (2019): 174-175.

festival.⁴²⁶ Finally the connections between crusade and jubilee possess a larger life beyond the immediate geopolitical anxieties of the 14th century. Previous scholarship from Raymonde Foreville has tethered together the concepts of pilgrimage, crusade and jubilee, with each being a successor to the other.⁴²⁷ Villani himself describes his own attendance at the jubilee as a pilgrimage, something itself long associated with the concept of crusade.⁴²⁸ The fact that the 1300 Jubilee commemorates a Holy Year paralleled the calendrical considerations which characterized the calls for the early crusades also reinforces these associations.⁴²⁹ Given the wider political context not to mention the Florentine's own acknowledgment of the religious aspect, Villani may have picked up on this broader ethos of crusade reconquest and integrated this messaging into his own text. After all, the Villani manuscript contains no shortage of crusader memorialization scenes from the Second Crusade to the Sixth.⁴³⁰ Furthermore, other, more important political figures also picked up on this crusade ethos which informed their gift-giving practices to the papacy in this year. According to Norman Housely, Charles II of Anjou delivered the region of Lucera, recently cleansed of its Muslim population in the same year, to the pope.⁴³¹ Thus, Villani may have also been aware of this expulsion, imbued with crusade implications, when writing his chronicle. Finally, as mentioned at the start of this chapter, Villani, much like Petrarch, may have been well aware of Philip VI's planned crusade in 1332.⁴³² Perhaps in building an equivalent history to Rome, Villani sought to situate Florence, while not

⁴²⁶ Dickson, "The crowd at the feet of Pope Boniface VIII." 288.

⁴²⁷ Raymonde Foreville, 'Pèlerinage, croisade, et jubile au moyen âge, *Amis de Saint François*, n.s., 7 (1961), 48–61.

⁴²⁸ Giovanni Villani, *Nuova Cronica*, a cura di G. Porta, 3 vol. (Parma, Guanda 1990-1991), Book 1, Chapter 9, pg 36. Frugoni, "L'ideologia del Villani," 9.

⁴²⁹ Dickson, "The crowd at the feet of Pope Boniface VIII." 287.

⁴³⁰ For some examples see: *Nuova Cronica*., MS Chigiano L VIII 296 folios: 60v, 75r, 82r, 115v, 150v.

⁴³¹ Norman Housley, "The crusades and Islam" *Medieval Encounters* 13, no. 2 (2007): 190.

⁴³² Bisaha, "Petrarch's vision of the Muslim," 287-288.

necessarily a “new Jerusalem,” as a city participating in the spirit of reconquering the “Holy Land.”

While this context might explain why the commemoration of crusade holds such an important place in Villani’s text it still does not completely clarify why Villani provides familiar analogues to the Nile. For these, we must consider the broader Italian relationship with the Mamluk Sultanate, a complex one which straddled trade and crusade. While the dichotomy of these two aspects may seem contradictory to a modern view, this dual-pronged approach sought to establish Latin Christian hegemony throughout the Mediterranean. As Thomas Dale writes about one of the most explicit practitioners of this contradictory foreign policy, “Venice saw itself as reviving the peace and prosperity of an inclusive empire through trade, crusade, and conversion but [...] it is a Christian, Latin European identity that is understood as the norm to which others are assimilated.”⁴³³ Indeed, Venice is the quintessential example for understanding the complexity of Islamic-Italian interaction. In 1302, only a handful of years after the Fall of Acre, ignoring Papal Bulls forbidding trade with Islamic polities, and concurrent with the Venetian merchant Marin Sanudo calling for a new crusade, Venetian ambassador Guido da Canal received confirmation from Sultan al-Nasir Muhammad regarding a preliminary “pact” between the two polities.⁴³⁴ Later, in 1344 Doge Andrea Dandolo received a letter from Sultan Imad al-din confirming trade relations.⁴³⁵ In contrast, Florence did not set up trade relations with the Mamluks until 1422, nearly a hundred years after Villani wrote his *Nuova Cronica*. This

⁴³³ Thomas E. A. Dale, “Cultural Encounter, Race, and a Humanist Ideology of Empire in the Art of Trecento Venice.” *Speculum* 98, no. 1 (2023): 42.

⁴³⁴ Alessandro Rizzo, “Travelling and trading through mamluk territory: chancery documents guaranteeing mobility to Christian merchants,” *History and Society during the Mamluk Period (1250–1517): Studies of the Annemarie Schimmel Institute for Advanced Study III*, ed. Bethany J. Walker, Abdelkader Al Ghouz. (Bonn University Press, 2021): 493.

⁴³⁵ *Ibid.*, 494.

temporal gap however does not disrupt the broader “Italian attitude” regarding trade. Of course, “Italian” is a modern construction. However, I use it here to describe a prevailing mercantile mentality among several city-states which characterized their relationships with Islamic polities. As Cristian Caselli has argued, when they did establish contact, the Florentines copied the precedent and model that the Venetians previously established.⁴³⁶ Furthermore, Florence had certainly capitalized on the promise of the Mediterranean with their importation of “infidel” slaves.⁴³⁷

Thus Villani, a banker and diplomat, may have been a rhetorical early adopter of the Venetian model (as represented by Sanudo’s crusade propaganda concurrent with the state’s trade negotiation). This is to say that he must have understood, much like Sanudo, the benefits found at the crossroads of crusade and trade. A knowledge of Egyptian topography such as that provided through Villani’s analogues for the Nile was certainly valuable information for potential travelers and merchants on their journeys to the bountiful shores. And if the opportunity eventually arose to conduct a crusade, this information could help control the source of economic benefit. We find a clue to the veracity of this interpretation in Florentine travel narratives from the late-fourteenth century. Giuseppe Cecere has previously written on the travel documents of three Italian merchants who went on pilgrimage together to Jerusalem, stopping in important Egyptian cities and pilgrimage sites as well. While the travelers expressed various sentiments

⁴³⁶ Cristian Caselli, “Strategies for Transcultural Trade Relations: Florentine Attempts to Reproduce the Venetian Commercial System in the Mamluk Empire (First Half of the Fifteenth Century),” in *Union in Separation: Diasporic Groups and Identities in the Eastern Mediterranean (1100-1800)*, ed., Georg Christ; Franz-Julius Morche, ; Roberto Zaugg Wolfgang; Stefan Burkhard; Alexander D. Beihammer (Paris: Viella, 2015) 267-285. Rizzo, “Travelling and Trading, 494. See also: Alessandro Rizzo, “Three Mamluk Letters Concerning the Florentine Trade in Egypt and Syria: a New Interpretation,” In *Mamluk Cairo, a Crossroads for Embassies*, ed. Frédéric Bauden and Malika Dekkiche (Brill, 2018): 782.

⁴³⁷ Angela Zhang “Rethinking “Domestic Enemies”: Slavery and Race Formation in Late Medieval Florence,” *Speculum* 99, no. 2 (2024): 417-425. Hannah Barker, *That most precious merchandise: The Mediterranean trade in Black Sea slaves, 1260-1500* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020).

disparaging and admiring the Mamluk state, all of them articulated what Cecere describes as a general “Crusader Spirit.”⁴³⁸ Giorgio Gucci repeatedly evokes the sacred topography of Egypt, writing about various sites through the hagiographical contexts of St. Catherine, Louis and Mark.⁴³⁹ Simone Sigoli discusses the impressive wealth of Egypt, something Cecere suggests functions as an encouragement for his potential readers to whet their lips about this potential booty. Furthermore, Sigoli also mentions Prester John’s control of the Nile sluices discussed earlier. While Cecere contends that the inclusion of this reference seeks to assuage readers that they had “nothing to fear” from the Sultan, I posit that this articulation seeks to provide a parallel but different type of guarantee—that if the Latins ever needed an Eastern ally, they certainly had one. Perhaps most crucially, Lionardo Frescobaldi was charged with collecting military intelligence by the King of Naples.⁴⁴⁰ The only explanation as to why the Neapolitan crown wanted this information would be that they anticipated some type of military adventure into Egypt. The variety of narratives produced by three people on the same trip certainly speaks to a broader Florentine ethos which parallels the complexity that we find in Venice. Each account expresses a desire for the lands that touch the Nile, ranging from Gucci’s religious re-inscription of Mamluk lands as well as the more practical planning and opportunities outlined in Sigoli and Frescobaldi.

While this chapter primarily focuses on Latin Christian perceptions of the Sultan and the Nile holistically, it is important at this juncture of “desire” for the river, to contrast the Italian idiom with the French royal ones discussed earlier. Certainly, the temporal distance between

⁴³⁸ Guisepee Cecere, “Between Trade and Religion: Three Florentine Merchants in Mamluk Cairo,” In *Union in Separation: Diasporic Groups and Identities in the Eastern Mediterranean (1100-1800)*, ed., Georg Christ, Franz-Julius Morche, Roberto Zaugg, Wolfgang Kaiser, Stefan Burkhardt, and Alexander D. Beihammer, 229-250 (Rome: Viella, 2015), 250.

⁴³⁹ *Ibid.*, 248-249.

⁴⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 239.

these examples explains some of their differences. Some of the French manuscripts date from the 15th century (the exceptions being BnF 22495 coinciding from Philip VI's plans for crusade in 1332 and BnF 2813 of Charles V). As previously discussed, in this later time period, a political moment where the French crown has no real intention of taking back the "Holy Land," refers to the crusades in the context of a growing Turkish threat. Villani and the aforementioned travelers and the two French manuscripts mentioned above are written during the aftermath of the Fall of Acre in 1291, where a shock at the loss of the last crusader outpost gripped Europe in a vice of crusader zeal if not action.⁴⁴¹

Placing these contextual considerations on one side, we can also observe a difference in mentality. Both "desire" the conquest of the river but do so in opposite directions. On the one hand, the French manuscripts tend to memorialize *previous* victory on the Nile through St. Louis, who functions as a paragon for future endeavors. Even when images depict the king's capture at al-Mansurah, that the king managed to conquer Damietta is good enough to secure his position as victorious crusader. Through these manuscripts, the Valois king (and their courtiers), could point back to their more "successful" Capetian predecessor, valorizing their previous victory, even while never intending to lift a finger for crusade. In some ways the French version of Louis IX's crusade in the fifteenth century parallels Louis IX's purported perspective, during the Seventh Crusade. According to al-Maqrizi, the late fourteenth-, early fifteenth-century Egyptian historian, when the French King landed in Egypt, he sent a letter to as-Salih. While al-Maqrizi's work is displaced from the historical event, the writings of Jean de Joinville, the French king's

⁴⁴¹ John France, "Introduction," in *Acre and Its Falls*, ed. John France (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 2, 9.

chronicler, corroborates this epistolary exchange, even if not this specific message.⁴⁴² The letter, translated from al-Maqrizi's Arabic version states:

As it is not hidden from you that I am head of the Christian community, as I acknowledge that you are head of the Mohammedan community. You know also the [Muslim] population of Andalusia pays tribute to us and gives us gifts, and we drive them before us like a herd of cattle, killing the men, widowing the women, capturing their daughters and infants, emptying their houses. I have given you sufficient demonstration [of our strength], and the best advice I can offer. Even if you were to promise me anything on oath and to appear before the priests and monks and carry a candle before me as an act of obedience to the Cross, it would not deter me from attacking you and fighting you on the land that is dearest to you. If this country falls into my hands, it will be mine as a gift. If you keep it by victory over me, you may do as you will with me. I have told you about the armies obedient to me, filling the mountains and the plains, numerous as the stones of the earth and poised against you like the swords of Destiny.⁴⁴³

Again, it should be reiterated that this message is historically displaced and thus should be taken with a grain of salt as potential Islamic propaganda against their Frankish foes. However, if we take al-Maqrizi's words as at least a partial record of Louis' letter we can gain several points of insight into the crusader psychology which may have informed future generations. The invocation of Al-Andalus as a site of encounter suggests that the French viewed crusade against Muslims as an endeavor both foreign and domestic. Indeed, with the successes of Ottoman Turks, the French court in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries may have viewed crusade as an increasingly domestic concern. The letter also suggests that converting the Islamic ruler mattered less than gaining geopolitical control over the "Holy Land." Finally, Louis viewed his potential

⁴⁴² Nezar AlSayyad, *Nile: Urban Histories on the Banks of a River* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 171-172.

⁴⁴³ أما بعد فإنه لم يخف عنك أمين الأمة العيسوية كما أنى أقول انك أمين الأمة المحمدية - وانه غير خاف عنك أن أهل جزائر الأندلس يحملون .
 إلينا الأموال والهديان، ونحن تسوقهم سوق البقر، و نقتل الرجال ونرمل النساء، و نستأسر البنات و الصبيان و نخلى منهم الديار. وقد أبديت لك ما فيه الكفاية، و بذلت لك النصح الى النهاية. فلو حلفت لي بكل بكل الأيمان، و دخلت على القسوس والرهبان، و حملت قدامى الشمع طاعة للصليبان، ما ردنى ذلك عن الوصول إليك، و قتلك في أعز البقاع عليك. فإن كانت البلاد لي، فيا هدية حصلت في يدى، و ان كانت البلاد لك و الغلبة على، فيدك العليا ممتدة التز و قد عرفتك و حذرتك، من عساكر قد حضرت في طاعتى، تملأ والجبل، و عددهم كعدد الحصى، و هم مرسلون اليك بأسيايف القضا
 For Arabic see: Maqrīzī, Aḥmad ibn 'Alī, 1364-1442, *Kitāb al-sulūk li-ma'rifat duwal al-mulūk* vol. 2 (Al-Qāhira: Lajnat al-ta'lif wa-al-tarjamah wa-al-nashr 1939), 334. See also Nezar AlSayyad, *Nile: Urban Histories on the Banks of a River* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 171. See also: Francesco Gabrieli, *Arab Historians of the Crusades* (London: Routledge, 1957), 300-301.

victory over his Islamic counterpart as “Destiny” or inevitable, because of course God was on his side. Continuing in this mentality, the French courtly society in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries performs a predetermined ownership, a gift already claimed, where the Christian king has already defeated the Islamic one and could do so again.

On the other hand, the “Italian attitude” that we find in Villani, in the three travelers, and as will be discussed presently, in Sanudo, attempts to facilitate *future* pragmatic plans, providing didactic data (to one degree or another). Once again, I use “Italian” here to describe a seemingly shared impulse regarding crusade and the Nile amongst several city states. Knowledge of the Nile becomes a weapon in itself. Ostensibly, if Italian military commanders understood the Nile better by comparing it with an analogue in their own lands, they would have an easier time overcoming Islamic resistance. The *Nuova Cronica* particularly does not rely upon a mythical leader to divert the river but instead offers a practical path for understanding a foreign entity through a domestic counterpart, perhaps a sign of the knowledge of Florentine, Venetian and Genevan merchants traveling to Egypt. Whether the Po actually mimics the Nile in reality or whether crusader captains read this chronicle is neither here nor there. Rather, the inclusion of this information speaks volumes about the Venetian & Florentine psyches regarding the river and crusade. Returning again to the image in the *Nuova Cronica* (**Figure 1**), the scene takes on new meanings. Far from simply visualizing Louis’ defeat, the combination of text and image function as both a symbol of the Sultan’s power and a quiet warning to crusaders of “what not to do.” While the chronicle illuminates the decimation of Latin Christians on the banks of the Nile it simultaneously lays the ground for future conquest.

VI. Sanudo and the Nile

The Venetian fantasy of re-taking and weaponizing the Nile may most clearly be found in Marin Sanudo Torsello's *The Book of the Secrets of the Faithful of the Cross*. Written by the Venetian merchant and diplomat between 1300-1321, this work minutely describes a plan for a new crusade, even calculating the costs for the endeavor.⁴⁴⁴ More importantly, the text spends an incredible amount of time describing the Nile, its various parts, the benefits of attacking the Sultan on the Nile, failed crusader endeavors of the past because of the Nile, not to mention a very specific strategy for conquering the "island of Raxetus" as a means of maintaining control over the river.⁴⁴⁵

A depiction of an imagined battle between Christian and Islamic forces further clarifies medieval European Latin Christian hopes of strategically using the Nile.⁴⁴⁶ A bas de page from a version of Sanudo's text in British Library MS Additional 27376 presents light-skinned Latin Christians on the left-hand side riding out of a city (**Figure 18**). The middle of the scene depicts a ship on a body of water with a crenelated tower situated in its hull and manned by light-skinned though turban-wearing Muslims. Meanwhile the "Sultan of Babylon," identified by his leopard steed and pointed crown, is pursued by black-skinned, turban-wearing, Nubian Christians on the

⁴⁴⁴ Marino Sanudo Torsello, *The Book of the Secrets of the Faithful of the Cross Liber Secretorum Fidelium Crucis*, ed. Peter Locke (London: Routledge, 2016), 11. As Peter Locke states in his critical introduction to this text, despite being a merchant, the Venetian's religious fervor appears genuine (10-11). On the other hand, Geraldine Heng has noted that Italian merchants frequently sold Islamic polities raw materials to build weapons against the Latin Christians. Thus, a successful new crusade could have both filled Venice's coffers but potentially threatened a valuable trade partner. See: Heng, *Invention*, 152.

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid. 53-55 (for parts of the Nile), 99-100 (for benefits of controlling the Nile), 150 (Island of Raxetus), 269-271 (previous crusader losses on the Nile).

⁴⁴⁶ For the historiography of the Sanudo maps see: Stefan Schröder, "Religious Knowledge within Changing Cartographical Worldviews: Spatial Concepts and Functions of Maps in Marino Sanudo's 'Liber secretorum fidelium crucis' (c. 1321)," in *Geography and Religious Knowledge in the Medieval World*, ed. Christoph Mauntel (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2021), 189-220. Julia Harte, "How One Fourteenth-century Venetian Remembered the Crusades: The Maps and Memories of Marino Sanudo," *Penn History Review* 15/2 (2008):9-17. Evelyn Edson, "Reviving the Crusade: Sanudo's Schemes and Vesconte's Maps," in *Eastward Bound: Travel and Travellers, 1050-1550*, ed. Rosamund Allen (Manchester, UK, 2004), 131-55. Stefan Schröder, "Religious Knowledge within Changing Cartographical Worldviews: Spatial Concepts and Functions of Maps in Marino Sanudo's 'Liber secretorum fidelium crucis' (c. 1321)," in *Geography and Religious Knowledge in the Medieval World*, ed. Christoph Mauntel (Berlin, 2021), 189-220.

ride-side of the image.⁴⁴⁷ Jean Devisse and Michel Mollat have analyzed a similar scene in a different version of Sanudo's text. They note that the Western and Eastern Christians form a "pincers movement," suggesting a Latin Christian fantasy that the two sides will join forces against the Sultan's horde.⁴⁴⁸ While Devisse and Mollat excellently analyze the text-image relationship in terms of the military tactics of this "future" crusader siege, they overlook the specific location of this battle.

This imagined confrontation does not take place anywhere in "Babylon" but specifically *on the shores of the Nile*. Admittedly, no chapter in Sanudo's work directly corresponds with the scene depicted in this illumination. The one that comes closest simply states "great help will be brought to them [crusaders] by the black-skinned African Christians from Nubia, and other countries above Egypt" never making the location explicit.⁴⁴⁹ However, the crenellated tower and boat found here recalls the boat and battlements found in the *History of Outremer* manuscript (**Figure 2**) albeit a condensed and essentialized version. Instead of the boat sailing forth from an opening in the battlements in **Figure 18** the city simply sits in the boat itself. The maps found in several Sanudo manuscripts (including from British Library Additional MS 27376) confirm the Latin Christian understanding of Cairo writ large as a river city. **Figure 19** and **Figure 20** both show a large castle labeled "Babilonia" sitting at the intersection of two Nile branches. Just above we find another battlement labeled "Kayr," with the abbreviation sign–

⁴⁴⁷ Sanudo, *The Book of the Secrets*, 27. The text here identifies the "Sultan of Babylon" as "Lord Sultan Nasit," a reference to an-Nasir Muhammad.

⁴⁴⁸ Jean Devisse, Michel Mollat, and William Granger Ryan, "2. The Appeal to the Ethiopian," in *The Image of the Black in Western Art, Volume II: From the Early Christian Era to the "Age of Discovery," Part 2: Africans in the Christian Ordinance of the World*, ed. David Bindman and Henry Louis Gates Jr. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010). Accessed April 30, 2021. <https://www-aaepportal-com.ezproxy.library.wisc.edu/?id=-16972>. In a footnote, the authors suggest this could be Prester John's forces. They also note how the leopard symbolizes the "Sultan of Babylon" in a different illumination.

⁴⁴⁹ Sanudo, *The Book of the Secrets*, 71. While the Nile is not mentioned in this chapter it is mentioned again in the next when discussing Egypt's geography: "the land of Egypt is stretched out along the river Nile." (72).

“Kayr[us], referring to Cairo (al-Fustat) which is also connected to another small tributary. To the immediate left of the large castle of Babylon and just below “Kayr” another small battlement sits surrounded by the two branches, labeled as “Castrum de Gisi” perhaps referring to the Giza Complex. This then could possibly make the island Rawda Island, which sits some seventeen kilometers west. We find another similar castle island, here unlabeled, further down the Nile towards Damietta which opens onto the Delta. While I have thus far outlined the mapmakers/labelers understanding of the Egyptian topography, some existing scholarship questions this assessment. Cortney Berg’s excellent article on Sanudo’s maps notes the conflation of the Red Sea and Dead Sea in the Additional 27376 map, as well as its placement of Acre as part of “Terra Aegypti.”⁴⁵⁰ While Berg suggests these decisions can be explained by the mapmakers’ lack of understanding, I argue that such conflations were purposeful and respond to the geopolitical moment which led to the map’s creation in the first place.⁴⁵¹ Thus, Sanudo’s text responds to the 1291 Sack of Acre at the hands of the Mamluk Sultanate based in Egypt. The conflation could just as easily be an acknowledgement that all these locations were effectively under the polity which controlled Egypt at the time. Either way, the distinctly labeled locations at the very least suggest the mapmaker’s complex knowledge and further suggest that he understood Cairo and other Egyptian settlements as bound to and surrounded by the Nile river. This perception of Cairo as a site surrounded by the Nile extends beyond just the Italian context. As the image on the Hereford map demonstrates, medieval Europeans in general understood the city to sit between two branches, much like the Sanudo map’s depiction of Rawda Island (**Figure 21**). Given the fact that water also surrounds the boat-tower in the illumination (**Figure 18**) and

⁴⁵⁰ Cortney Berg, “Sanudo’s Vision, Vesconte’s Expertise, and the Ghost Hand: Reception of the Maps in the MS Additional 27376,” *Material Culture Review* 94 (2022): 42.

⁴⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 44.

the repeated invocation of the Nile throughout the text, the construction here serves as a visual proxy for an Egyptian city on the Nile.⁴⁵² Whether Damietta or Cairo, the “pincers movement” suggests a siege upon some Egyptian city that sits on the river. The illuminator has depicted a war on two fronts, turning the offensive and defense capabilities of the Nile against the Sultan.

Still, the illumination does not merely celebrate imagined Latin Christian victory but also showcases the nature of the Nile as both friend and foe. Unlike the “Saracens” in the *Outremer* manuscript, the scene here does not vilify religious enemies for their darker skin color. Moreover, the most optically Othered polity (the black-skinned African Christians) represent a potential “exotic ally” that could only be found on the opposite side of the Nile.⁴⁵³ This is to say that the Nile serves as the meeting site for these two groups-- the Europeans entering from the West (the left) side of the illumination and the Nubians from the East (right).

At the same time, the manuscript racially vilifies the Sultan for his geographical location by centering on his fantastical actions--namely riding a leopard into battle. The text even transforms the Sultan into an animal, calling him a “pard,” a term I contend that previous scholarship has mistranslated as “panther” which is a creature usually associated with Christ in medieval bestiaries.⁴⁵⁴ On the other hand, the “pard” and its bastard child “leo-pard” (by way of the lion) are frequently conflated as particularly violent “bloodthirsty” animals, with the latter representing illegitimacy as a result of its miscegenated origins.⁴⁵⁵ Furthermore, the leopard

⁴⁵² Other scholars such as Thomas E.A. Dale have interpreted this boat-tower in as belonging to the Christians. See: Dale, “Cultural Encounter, Race, and a Humanist Ideology,” 37.

⁴⁵³ Sierra Lomuto, “The Mongol Princess of Tars: Global Relations and Racial Formation in *The King of Tars* (c. 1330),” *Exemplaria*, 31 no. 3. (2019): 174-177. Lomuto also demonstrates how Latin Christians tethered the myth of Prester John and with Chinggis Khan and the Mongols.

⁴⁵⁴ Pamela Gravestock, “Did imaginary animals exist,” *The Mark of the Beast*, ed Debra Hassig, 119-135 (Routledge, 2013), 126.

⁴⁵⁵ Margaret Haist, “The lion, bloodline, and kingship,” In *The Mark of the Beast*, ed. Debra Hassig, (Routledge, 2013): 11-12.

holds other negative connotations beyond just its ancestry. In addition to addressing bizarre animal mounts which often Orientalize the “Saracen,” Sherry Lindquist and Asa Simon Mittman also observe the violence exhibited and attributed to the leopard.⁴⁵⁶ A French *Book of Hours* dating from the fifteenth century, depicts the personification of anger stabbing himself with a sword while riding on a leopard. Evidently the animal did not only symbolize the dangers of mixed parentage but allegorized self and socially destructive behavior—concepts which conveniently recall Latin Christian accusations about Islam. Hailing from a different visual tradition, Italian illuminated manuscripts of Dante’s *Inferno* depict Muhammad as a sectarian, a point communicated visually as the prophet literally tears himself in half.⁴⁵⁷ Given the cascading visual associations between leopard/Anger-Personified/ Self-Harm & Muhammad, that the Sultan potentially rides upon this animal represents an intersection of religion and emotional behavior that is antithetical to Christian order.

Whether pard or leo-pard, the decision to depict the Sultan mounted on the creature elevates the narrative beyond mimicking the text. The “big cat” motif was understood as a symbol of the Egyptian Sultan in both the Latin Christian West and the Islamic East. Indeed, the latter may have informed the former as the historical Sultan Baybars (literally great panther) used such animals in his own visual iconography. While the lion holds important connotations in Islam, with over one hundred words in Arabic for the creature, the lion rampant is most commonly attributed to the Mamluk Sultan Baybars. As Paul Balog writes, while the sleeping “constellation of the lion” was a common sign in coins minted during Salah-ad-Din’s reign, the

⁴⁵⁶ Sherry Lindquist and Asa Mittman have also discussed bizarre animal mounts which Orientalize the “Saracen.” Sherry C. M. Lindquist & Asa Simon Mittman, *Medieval Monsters: Terrors, Aliens, Wonders* (New York: The Morgan Library & Museum, 2018), 99-101.

⁴⁵⁷ Heather Coffey, “Encountering the Body of Muhammad: Intersections between Mi’raj narratives, the Shaqq al Sadr, and the Divina Commedia in the Age before Print (1300-1500),” in *Constructing the Image of Muhammad in Europe*, ed. Avinoam Shalem (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), 52-60.

“walking lion” was iconography repeatedly used under Baybars.⁴⁵⁸ Italian merchants traveling East may have been well aware of this emblem as a sign of the Mamluk Sultan. Baybars had etched this symbol on his coinage, mosques and madrasas from Cairo to Damascus.⁴⁵⁹ Indeed this iconography even informed later Italian imagery of crusader encounters with Mamluks. We find one such example in the fourteenth century “Treatise of the Vices” by Cocharelli of Genoa, which includes this symbol in the form of black shields decorated with white lions when depicting the Mamluk Sultan Qalawun’s attack on Tripoli in 1289.⁴⁶⁰ The leopard motif appears multiple times throughout the various Sanudo manuscripts aside from just the Sultan riding it. In the Vatican manuscript, Latin 2972, the Sultan of Babylon, whilst atop his leopard steed, rides into battle with a banner that depicts a white lion sigil on a black field above his head, thereby creating a double articulation of this motif.⁴⁶¹ Elsewhere in the same manuscript on folio 14r, the leopard is depicted with a lasso around a group of Christians corresponding with text that states that the Sultan (allegorized as a pard) attacks the King of Armenia and holds Eastern Christians captive.⁴⁶² Perhaps this text-image connection serves as an allusion to Baybars’ historical capture of the Armenian prince Leo during the Battle of Mari in 1266.⁴⁶³

⁴⁵⁸ Paul Balog, “New Considerations on Mamlūk Heraldry,” *Museum Notes (American Numismatic Society)* 22 (1977): 194-195.

⁴⁵⁹ Mario Marcenaro, “Genova, due miniature del XIV secolo: una al Museo Nazionale del Bargello di Firenze e una alla British Library di Londra,” *Atti della Società Ligure di Storia Patria*, n.s. 55/2 (2015): 9-10. Heghnar Zeitlian Watenpaugh, *The Image of An Ottoman City: Imperial Architecture and Urban Experience in Aleppo in the 16th and 17th Centuries* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 198.

⁴⁶⁰ Marcenaro, “Genova, due miniature del XIV secolo,” 9-10. See also: Chiara Concina, “The Cocharelli Codex as a Source for the History of the Latin East: The Fall of Tripoli and Acre” *Crusades* 18.1 (2019): 100.

⁴⁶¹ While Concina has rightly identifies the black-white banner in Sanudo’s manuscript as an allusion to the iconography of the Mamluk Sultan Baybars she does not comment on the fact that the creature the Sultan rides in Sanudo is also an illusion to this same iconography. See: Concina, “The Cocharelli Codex as a Source for the History of the Latin East: The Fall of Tripoli and Acre” *Crusades* 18.1 (2019): 100, 118 (in image caption).

⁴⁶² Sanudo, *The Book of the Secrets*, 65. See also: Bernhard Degenhart and Annegrit Schmitt, “Marino Sanudo und Paolino Veneto: Zwei Literaten des 14. Jahrhunderts in ihrer Wirkung auf Buchillustrierung und Kartographie in Venedig, Avignon und Neapel,” *Römisches Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte* 14 (1973): 29.

⁴⁶³ Angus Donal Stewart, *The Armenian Kingdom and the Mamluks: war and diplomacy during the reigns of Het'um II (1289-1307)*. Vol. 34 (Brill, 2001), 48-49.

Early in the text, Sanudo names the Sultan of Babylon “lord Nasit” a reference to the ruling Sultan al-Nasir Muhammad at the time of the text’s creation.⁴⁶⁴ Interestingly enough, the historical al-Nasir did not deploy figural imagery. Instead, he chose a calligraphic emblem in a radial shape which was often accompanied by the floral motif included on his madrasa.⁴⁶⁵ As Rachel Ward explains in a case study of the Sultan’s metalware, only two out of twenty-six objects contain more traditional symbols such as lions or eagles.⁴⁶⁶ Furthermore, the Sultan also removed lions from his predecessor’s architectural constructions.⁴⁶⁷ Thus the two historical rulers’ royal articulations dramatically differed. By invoking the name of al-Nasir Muhammad and employing the sigil of Baybars to represent him, text and image condense various Muslim leaders into the “Sultan of Babylon” an essentialized ahistorical caricature identified through his uncanny and strange ability to ride the ferocious animal. Far from just an indicator of weirdness, the connotations surrounding the leopard are grafted onto its rider. This allegorical vehicle (moving the Sultan into combat) represents his violence against the Christians. Its miscegenated genealogies echo the claims of illegitimacy that Latin Christian polemical writings levelled against Islam for claiming a lineage from Sarah instead of Hagar. In an ironic twist the historical symbols of the Mamluk leader fit well with existing Latin Christian iconography for violence and illegitimacy thereby reifying their notions of the Sultan’s inherently sinful behavior.

⁴⁶⁴ Sanudo, *The Book of the Secrets*, 27-28

⁴⁶⁵ Michael Meinecke, “Die mamlukischen Fayencemosaikdekorationen: Eine Werkstatt aus Tabrīz in Kairo (1330– 1350),” *Kunst des Orients* 11 (1976–77): 85-144. See also: Abouseif, *Cairo of the Mamluks*, 177.

⁴⁶⁶ Rachel Ward, “Brass, Gold and Silver from Mamluk Egypt: Metal Vessels Made for Sultan Al-Nāṣir Muḥammad,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 14 no. 1 (2004): 59.

⁴⁶⁷ Ward, “Brass, Gold and Silver from Mamluk Egypt,” 63.

The iconography found in Sanudo's manuscript articulates the foreign, bizarre, and dangerous nature of the Islamic leader in relation to his topography.⁴⁶⁸ On the shores of the Nile, the "Sultan of Babylon" engages in similar exotic practices which characterize his counterparts in other texts while embodying the violence of the adjacent surging waters. Along the banks of the river, his steed symbolizes his perverse possession of the "Holy Land," denying the "rightful" entrance of the Crusaders. But as the text and image remind the viewer, all is not lost--if the Nile is taken, then these threats dissipate. This illumination suggests that medieval Europeans understood the Nile as a nexus of possibilities, a site which catalogues both the Sultan's geographically racialized behavior and a place where Latin Christians could potentially find dark-skinned allies. Thus, the river does not have any agency of its own but responds to the various geopolitical actors who engage with it.

VII. Beyond the Nile: Only God Controls the Egyptian Waters

The Nile lacked agency not only in a terrestrial sense but in a spiritual one as well. In discussing the river as a politicized metaphor, I have elided an important facet of Latin Christian epistemology: an all-powerful God. He alone, as the Creator, could actually control all the waters of the world, the Nile and otherwise. **Figure 22** from a 15th century French manuscript demonstrates God's control of the Red Sea, during the Exodus. Moses stands before the pursuing armies, his staff and the presupposed law of the Ten Commandments in his right hand while his left is raised in exaltation. Above him floats God the Father in a blue mandorla, holding the orb of the world in his left hand and with his right he points down towards the sea. The inanimate red waters follow his gesture, clearing a path in front of Moses and pushing the waves back onto the

⁴⁶⁸ Sherry Lindquist and Asa Mittman have also discussed bizarre animal mounts which Orientalizes the "Saracen." Sherry C. M. Lindquist & Asa Simon Mittman, *Medieval Monsters: Terrors, Aliens, Wonders* (New York: The Morgan Library & Museum, 2018), 99-101.

soldiers. The visual program echoes that found in **Figure 2** where the Sultan similarly orders the waters to rise. But whereas God moves the waters on behalf of the prophet, the Sultan perverts biblical precedent by daring to deploy Egyptian waters against the Lord’s chosen defenders of the “Holy Land.” By comparing these scenes, we can understand the Sultan of Babylon as an “anti-Moses.”⁴⁶⁹ Of course we find another Egypt-ruling “anti-Moses” in the form of Pharaoh who refuses to free the Hebrews, attempting to disrupt divine authority and as punishment drowns in his own sea. While not the same body of water, both the Nile and the Red Sea function as iconographic markers of Egypt in hermeneutics. Beyond the Latin Christian obsession with retaking the “Holy Land,” their broader interest in the premodern hydropolitics of Egypt connects to a topographical biblical history, one which guarantees that God would never allow the enemies of Christianity to win.

To illustrate this point, I would like to consider an illumination from *Diurnal de Rene II de Lorraine* Paris, BnF Latin 10491 a diurnal produced for the French born Rene II Duke of Lorraine (**Figure 23**).⁴⁷⁰ The image depicts a similar scene from Exodus as (**Figure 22**) as the Hebrews cross the Red Sea and out of Egypt. Moses, presented here with the “horns of light” emanating from his head, guides his followers with a pointed finger indicating speech.⁴⁷¹ Behind

⁴⁶⁹ I owe the coining of this phrase “anti-Moses” for the Sultan to Walter S. Melion, in a conversation on March 19th, 2024.

⁴⁷⁰ For previous scholarship BnF Latin 10491 as well as its association with the French illuminator Georges Trubert see: N. Reynaud, ‘Georges Trubert, enlumineur du Roi René et de René II de Lorraine’, *Revue de l’art*, 35 (1977), pp. 41–63. See also: *Ecriture et enluminure en Lorraine au Moyen Age* (exh. cat. by S. Collin-Roset, M. Parisse and M. Paulmier-Foucart, Nancy, Mus. Hist. Lorrain, 1984), pp. 199–202. Robin Raybould, *The Sibyl Series of the Fifteenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 143-148. A. Demarquay Rook. “Trubert, Georges,” *Grove Art Online*. 2003; Accessed 25 June, 2024.

<https://www.oxfordartonline.com/groveart/view/10.1093/gao/9781884446054.001.0001/oao-9781884446054-c-7000086378.1>. For other references to the manuscript BnF 10491 see: Charlotte Denoël, *Saint André: culte et iconographie en France, Ve-XVe siècles* (Paris: Ecole des Chartes, 2004), 166 n. 48. See also: Robin Raybould, *The Sibyl Series of the Fifteenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 147-148.

⁴⁷¹ It cannot go unmentioned that these “horns” are also engaged in a racialization and monsterization of Moses as a Jewish character. For a discussion of this trope see: Stephen Bertman, “The antisemitic origin of Michelangelo’s horned Moses,” *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 27.4 (2009): 95-106. See also: Asa Simon

him the crimson waters close around Pharaoh and his army, with Pharaoh himself here cast in the guise of an Ottoman Sultan with a turban surmounted by a tarboosh.⁴⁷² This scene typologizes Latin Christians as pre-Christian Hebrews, responding to contemporaneous anxieties of Islamic incursions chasing Christians out of “Christendom.” After all, the fifteenth century dating of this manuscript coincides with the 1453 Ottoman Sack of Constantinople.

Racialization here is not necessarily formulated through Pharaoh’s headwear, which remains fairly consistent with Latin Christian paintings of Ottoman Sultans, such as Gentile Bellini’s famous portrait of Mehmet II from 1480 (**Figure 24**).⁴⁷³ The sartorial marker only serves as a visual cue of this character’s origins but does not constitute a polemic. Instead, topographical separation determines racialized differences along religious lines. Red water like spilled blood and verdant lands of promised futures delineate those who drown versus those who do not. The various types of topography serve as metaphors containing those who are part of God’s promise and those outside the fold. Thus, the Sultan/Pharaoh becomes racialized for his displacement, his status as being flooded out, as not being saved, both literally and in the hereafter. Additionally, this displacement by way of Egyptian waters conveys the impotency of the leader who purports to rule over this land. Contrasting with scenes such as (**Figure 22**) the Exodus scene here offers a desired corrective of more contemporaneous events through Biblical

Mittman, “In Those Days: Giants And The Giant Moses In The Old English Illustrated Hexateuch,” in *Imagining the Jew: Jewishness in Anglo-Saxon Literature and Culture*, ed. Samantha Zacher (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016), 237-309.” See also: Asa Simon Mittman, *Cartographies of Exclusion Anti-Semitic Mapping in Medieval England* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2024) 94-95, 104, 113.

⁴⁷² Also known in Turkish as a *fez*. See: *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “tarboosh (n.),” July 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/9202109388>.

⁴⁷³ For a discussion of Bellini’s painting of Mehmet II see: Gülru Necipoğlu, “Visual cosmopolitanism and creative translation: Artistic conversations with Renaissance Italy in Mehmed II’s Constantinople,” *Muqarnas Online* 29, no. 1 (2012): 1-81. See also: Elizabeth Rodini, “The sultan’s true face? Gentile Bellini, Mehmet II, and the values of verisimilitude,” in *The Turk and Islam in the Western Eye, 1450-1750: Visual Imagery before Orientalism* ed. James G. Harper (Routledge 2017): 21-41.

ones. Whatever terrestrial powers Islamic leaders might possess, in the Latin Christian worldview, God clearly controls all bodies of water as he had certainly done through Moses. The scene reinscribes epistemological certitude and in so doing, reminds the viewer of the superficiality of Islamic power and control as only temporary.⁴⁷⁴

Indeed, we can read this instability as revealing a masquerade. The sartorial aspects that racialize the Sultan are not those of cultural difference but those of mimicking European Latin Christian kingship. In fact, he wears a blue tunic with gold trim alongside a crown surmounted with golden crosses. This costume would have certainly been visually striking to the viewer when taken in the broader scheme of the manuscript's composition as it presents St. Louis dressed in blue and gold later in the manuscript.⁴⁷⁵ By depicting this enemy in the royal colors of France in a French manuscript complete with Christian iconography, the illumination racializes the Sultan in an unexpected way. The Islamic ruler is accused of imposterism, stealing a position that does not belong to him.⁴⁷⁶ Furthermore, apart from the turban/tarboosh the image of the Sultan contains no other Orientalizing marker, despite the repeated occurrence of gold “*naksh*” script on blue walls elsewhere in this manuscript to decorate scenes from the life of David or as backgrounds for saints.⁴⁷⁷ Rosamond Mack explains the ways that Latin Christians often appropriated and viewed Arabic as symbols of the Christian past.⁴⁷⁸ The visual program

⁴⁷⁴ I borrow the phrasing of colonial certitude from Asa Mittman. See: Asa Simon Mittman, “Mandeville’s Jews, colonialism, certainty, and art history,” in *Post-Colonizing the Medieval Image*, ed. Eva Frojmovic & Catherine E. Karkov (London: Routledge, 2017), 91.

⁴⁷⁵ BnF Latin 10491 f. 217v.

⁴⁷⁶ This theme of Islamic imposterism will be further developed in Chapter 3.

⁴⁷⁷ Adrien de Longpérier “De l’emploi des caractères arabes dans l’ornementation chez les peuples chrétiens de l’Occident,” *Revue Archéologique* 2, no. 2 (1845): 705. See also: Sarah Flitti, “An Orientalizing fad of the Sieneese: Reading Arabic Pseudo-Inscriptions from the mid-19th to the mid-20th century.” *Finxit. Dialoghi tra arte e scrittura dal Medioevo all’Età Moderna* 2 (2023): 133-160. For examples of this phenomenon in the manuscript see BnF 10491 Latin f. 154v, 214r, 217v.

⁴⁷⁸ Rosamond E. Mack, *Bazaar to Piazza: Islamic Trade and Italian Art, 1300-1600* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 65-71. For examples of Arabic used for items of religious and/or liturgical importance see:

purposefully depicts the Sultan with European Latin Christian crosses and garb to reinforce his inauthenticity just as it conversely uses pseudo-Arabic as a sign of Biblical authenticity and through color choices French authority. This imposterism is reinforced by the Pharaoh-Sultan's ultimate fate. Despite his hieratic scale, the ruler does not truly have any agency over the waters that he purports to control. As the Pharaoh attempts to impersonate French royalty the viewer sees that he does not possess divinely granted authority, preventing him from saving himself from this watery grave. The composition reinforces this reading by reminding the viewer where royal authority ultimately flows from. At the back of the fleeing Hebrews, as if protecting the rear, stand a Mother and Child dressed in blue and gold respectively, both curiously gazing at the viewer. Potentially, Madonna and Child have been inserted into this typological narrative to allegorize the bulwark of Latin Christian legitimacy juxtaposed against Islamic illegitimacy. Once again, this divide between the two sides has been determined through topography, not only through the shoreline but through the mediating mountainous rock in the background. On its summit sits a European-style castle, with its tall battlements evoking the types of crusader strongholds one might find in the "Holy Land," such as Krak de Chevaliers or Kerak Castle in Jordan.⁴⁷⁹ The presence of these architectural structures reinscribes a militarized version of the same promise created by the Virgin and Child. Here at the Red Sea, set in the Biblical past of Egypt, God ensures that the *Islamic* incursion could go no further.

Staale Sinding-Larsen, "Saint Peter's Chair in Venice," in *Art and the Ape of Nature—Studies in Honor of H. W. Janson*, ed. Mosche Barasch & Lucy Sandler (New York: Prentice Hall 1981), 35-36. See also: Thomas Dale, "Cultural hybridity in medieval Venice: Reinventing the East at San Marco after the Fourth Crusade, in *San Marco, Byzantium, and the myths of Venice*, ed. Henry Maguire and Robert S. Nelson (Washington, D. C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 2010): 180.

⁴⁷⁹ For some discussions of the architecture of these respective locations see: Benjamin Michaudel, "Le Crac des Chevaliers, quintessence de l'architecture militaire mamelouke," *Les Annales Islamologiques* 38 (2004): 45-77. Lorenzo Fragai, "New Research Perspectives on the Mamluk Qāa at Kerak Castle: Building Archaeology and Historical Contextualization," *Journal of Islamic Archaeology* 6, no. 2 (2019): 187-208.

Under the backdrop of biblical history, we find a visual slippage between the Pharaoh of Egypt and the Ottoman Sultan, creating yet another iteration in the ever-expanding guises of the “Sultan of Babylon.” This curious conflation of the Egyptian Pharaoh and Sultan of Babylon follows a similar logic to the comparison I have discussed above between the Sack of Damietta scene in the *Mare Historiarum* (**Figure 3**) and of the Fall of Constantinople (**Figure 9**). In both, the French courtly society encountering this image would not be making plans to retake Egypt but rather reading the scene in their contemporary context, facing a looming threat of the Ottoman Turks. Yet unlike the previous comparison, the fifteenth-century French image of the Crossing of the Red Sea (**Figure 23**) provides a more hopeful perspective, one in which the waters do not mark European Latin Christian defeat but instead become the grave for Muslims warriors. The pictorial narrative presented here is not merely concerned with hydro-politics but offers comfort by providing a religious alternative to the more practical plans outlined by Florentine and Venetian writers for retaking the Nile in the previous century. Regardless of any Islamic leader’s topographical, geographical or geopolitical capabilities, their powers ultimately succumbed to divine intervention.

Latin Christians illuminated the Nile as a controllable ecological force entwined into the very land that the racialized Sultan ruled, embodying every threat he constituted. Yet, as with any arms-race, they also imagined their own possession of the weapon. Thus, the Nile not only functioned as an antagonist thwarting crusader success but was also viewed simultaneously to be desirable. Even though historical Islamic rulers turned the river against their enemies, the Latin Christian fixation upon this fluvial power across multiple manuscripts remains curious. Choosing what to illuminate is always a political choice.⁴⁸⁰ Perhaps the repeated inclusion of the Sultan at

⁴⁸⁰ Chantal Mouffe, Rosalyn Deutsche, Branden W. Joseph and Thomas Keenan, “Every form of art has a political dimension,” *Grey Room* no. 2 (2001): 99-100.

the Nile articulates a constant dream of securing the “Holy Land.” The river serves as a reminder, etched into every past battle narrative, or every future victory, of the menace that the “Sultan of Babylon” poses to the epistemological boundaries of Latin “Christendom.” Though the crusaders never conquered Egypt or retook Outremer, the Nile remained a primary protagonist in the opposition to the crusaders but also offered them an opportunity in the medieval European Latin Christian imaginary.

Chapter 3: “Babylon Comes Over Our Walls:” Visualizing Racialization-as-replacement through the “Sack of Acre” in *Les Grandes Chroniques de France*.

An illumination from Ms. fr. 2608, a *Grandes Chroniques* manuscript dated from the 1390s, and produced for the French King Charles VI, depicts the violent displacement of Acre’s inhabitants during the infamous sack in 1291 (**Figure 1**).⁴⁸¹ The constricted rendering of the buildings – crenellated towers, walls, drawbridge, portcullis, and other red roofed battlements – reach the borders of the illumination, dwarfing the blue background, an indicator of the city’s significance. In the midst of this labyrinthine construction, a “Saracen horde,” Othered by their *tortils*, turbans and at least one Phrygian cap, swarm the area.⁴⁸² On the right side of the image, several figures proceed to toss a woman over the wall and into the moat below. As they do, another “Saracen” scrambles up a ladder to assist his compatriots or at least to gain entrance into the city. At the wide-open gates on the opposite side, a second group of “Saracens” begins their procession. The costumes of the foremost figures have been damaged with age but the blurred lines of paint that flow backwards, a host of characters pushing their way onto the chain-held drawbridge opening into the city. The figure wearing the multi-tiered white turban and decorative red collar is perhaps the “Sultan of Babylon,” who is responsible for Acre’s destruction, as mentioned in the rubric at the top of the folio.⁴⁸³ It should be noted that no “Saracen” carries a weapon, giving credence to the notion that this scene, in part, portrays a parade; bows, scimitars and spears are not needed against an already subdued population. The

⁴⁸¹ Anne D. Hedeman, *The Royal Image: Illustrations of the Grandes Chroniques de France 1274-1422* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 140.

⁴⁸² For examples see: Debra Higgs Strickland, *Saracen, Demons & Jews: Making Monsters in Medieval Art* (Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 2003), 181 (*tortil*), 174 (turban), 105 (Phrygian cap).

⁴⁸³ “Comment Acre fu destruite par le soudan de Babiloine.” For the purposes of reading text, I am using Viard’s transcription. See: Jules Marie Édouard Viard, *Les Grandes Chroniques de France*, vol. 8 (Paris: Société de l’histoire de France, 1920-1953), 140.

two sides of the illumination work in tandem to etch a larger visual narrative. As the “Saracens” expel the Christians, they simultaneously begin to occupy the city, painting a stark account of removal and replacement. In the shallow grave below, the bearded, decapitated head and the body of a spindly-armed woman continue to bear witness, with eyes wide open, to an “invasion” that is all but concluded. This chapter will focus on the reimagination of this conquest and the racialization of the Sultan of Babylon and his people for their role as usurpers of “rightful” authority because they have replaced Latin Christians in the “Holy Land.”

In his introduction to *Acre and its Falls*, John France states that “the fall of Acre to the Mamluks of Egypt and Syria in 1291 had an immense impact on medieval Europe,” and goes on to describe the event as a “shock.”⁴⁸⁴ While this edited collection includes necessary interventions into the reception of Acre’s sack writ large, noticeably missing are any art historical approaches to this topic. Indeed, the visual memory of the city in mainland Europe is consequential as evidenced by illuminations of its destruction in French royal chronicles. The walls in **Figure 1** serve as key symbols for not only the defense of territory but also the last major crusader stronghold in the Levant. Thus, the loss of these battlements marks the end of Latin Christian hard power in the Outremer.⁴⁸⁵ Nonetheless, such images do not merely serve as “documentation” of the geo-political realities but have socio-cultural undertones as well. Nicholas Paul and Suzanne Yeager have previously discussed the theoretical links between crusade and “collective” social memory.⁴⁸⁶ To his point, Jaroslav Folda argues that the increased production of William of Tyre’s *History of Outremer* manuscripts in France and Italy after 1291

⁴⁸⁴ John France, “Introduction,” in *Acre and Its Falls*, ed. John France (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 2, 9.

⁴⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

⁴⁸⁶ Nicholas Paul and Suzanne Yeager, “Introduction: Crusading and the Work of Memory, Past and Present,” in *Remembering the Crusades: Myth, Image and Identity*, ed. Nicholas Paul and Suzanne Yeager (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), 6-10.

demonstrates the increased Latin Christian fetishization of “Holy Land Reconquest” via nostalgia for the First Crusade.⁴⁸⁷ Indeed, we can find visual examples of the “shock” which John France mentions to the Sack of Acre in one of these William of Tyre manuscripts. BnF fr. 2825 includes an anonymous text recounting the Fall of Acre which begins in 361v. The rubric states “ci commence la destruction d’Acre” and hangs just above an illumination of the Fall (**Figure 2**), the composition of which very much parallels that found in Figure 1.⁴⁸⁸ This is to say that similar to Figure 1, Figure 2 depicts an invading force, throwing the residents of the cities over the walls. Despite the somewhat more confused iconography of Figure 2, with the allegiances of the red-dressed soldier and the sword-wielding woman difficult to determine, as well as the absence of more conventional Orientalizing iconography, save for one Muslim warrior in the second-level battlements who wears a *tortil*, the image suggests a convention for the depiction of this scene that would inform later creations. The presence of this text/image demonstrates the anxiety which Folda describes as being evidenced in the number of William of Tyre manuscripts produced in the aftermath of 1291 with the added layer of an account of the event which created the anxiety in the first place. What is perhaps more interesting is that, as the rubric suggests, this illumination appears at the beginning of this account, with the intervening 13 folios to the end of the manuscript describing all the details of the 1291 event. The final blow to the city in the text occurs on 374 recto, the final folio of the manuscript. The folio begins with the red rubric clearly stating “the destruction of Acre.”⁴⁸⁹ As the reader turns the page to read

⁴⁸⁷ Jorsolva Folda, “Commemorating the Fall of Jerusalem: Remembering the First Crusade in Text, Liturgy, and Image,” in *Remembering the Crusades: Myth, Image, Identity*, ed. Nicholas Paul & Suzanne Yeager (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), 139-145.

⁴⁸⁸ Jean-Pierre Aniel, “La Rubrique et l’image dans le manuscrit médiéval: quelques remarques,” in *Qu’est-ce que nommer? L’image légendée entre monde monastique et pensée scolastique: Actes du colloque du RILMA, Institut universitaire de France (Paris, INHA, 17–18 octobre 2008)*, ed. Christian Heck (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), 107.

⁴⁸⁹ For previous discussion of this manuscript and the Sack of Acre see: Nancy Vine Durling, “The *Destruction D’Acre* and its Epistolary Prologue (BnF fr. 24430),” *Viator* 42 no. 1 (2011): 141, 167-168.

the conclusion of this narrative they are immediately faced with a snarling, fanged head that the scribe has drawn from the tail of the “G” that they are so fond of decorating throughout the manuscript (**Figure 3**). This doodle is something of an outlier in this manuscript. Of the 374 folios, there are only 3 examples that I could find of similar head doodles.⁴⁹⁰ However, **Figure 3** is unique in that it is the only one to render the face as a visage which approaches the demonic. With the last line of the text on the opposite invoking the Christian retaking of the “Holy Land” through the glory of God, the image takes on meaning beyond just that of an idle drawing.⁴⁹¹ Instead here it functions as a reflection of the scribe’s psychology, a pictographic manifestation of exactly how terrifying, “shocking,” and shattering the Islamic victory was to Latin Christian epistemology and to the scribe himself as he writes these words onto the folio.

If the event so traumatized the European psyche, what are the implications of illuminating Acre’s sack in the life of a French king in the *Grandes Chroniques de France*, especially when said king (Philip the Fair) played no part in the actual military moment, which functions as little more than a textual footnote in this section of his own life?⁴⁹² Perhaps it is because the “Saracen” attack on Acre is not couched as just an attack on a foreign location but against French authority as well. In other words, an attack upon the “Holy Land” serves as a metaphorical blow to the French crown, in its role as “Prince of Christendom” or “rex christianissimus--the most Christian king,” after the mold of Louis IX.⁴⁹³ Such imaginations

⁴⁹⁰ See BnF fr. 2825 f. 302v, 334v, 374v.

⁴⁹¹ Text in French in 2825 last line calling for the return of the Holy Land MS fr. 2825 f. 374v. “puissant seulement la gloire de dieu auont recouurer la sainte terre.” For Nancy Durling’s transliteration based on BnF fr. 24430 “il laissent leur gloire propre et quierent seulement le gloire de Diu en recouurer le Tierre Sainte.” See Durling, *The Destruction D’Acre*, 166.

⁴⁹² Viard, *Les Grandes Chroniques de France*, vol. 9 (1920-1953) 140, 144. The chapters regarding Acre minimize Philip IV, only mentioning the birth of his son Louis (140) and in passing when addressing the king’s brother Charles of Valois (144).

⁴⁹³ Anne D. Hedeman, *The Royal Image: Illustrations of the Grandes Chroniques de France 1274-1422* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 1-3. Asa Mittman has recently critiqued the scholarly use of “Christendom.”

would also make French society the new “Chosen People.”⁴⁹⁴ The *Grandes Chroniques* visual tradition frames Acre (and the Levant) as not only an extension of “Christendom” in general but land under France’s specific protection, even after the end of the crusader states. This narrative is not at all surprising given the long tradition of French “claims” to the “Holy Land,” a tradition that goes hand in hand with the France-as-Christian-“nation” construction. Furthermore, the desire to retake the crusader states clearly lived in the minds of French kings, made obvious through the numerous expeditions planned by the crown after Acre’s fall.⁴⁹⁵ If the illuminated folios pertaining to Acre in *Les Grandes Chroniques* function to preserve the idea of French colonization, then a siege upon Acre is akin to a siege of Paris itself.⁴⁹⁶ Thus any polity, especially an Islamic one, that would be audacious and presumptive enough to invade would not only be a “conqueror” but a “replacer” as well. Ironically enough the fictional inheritors of Latin Christian “Holy Land,” once threatened with the same actions that their crusader predecessors sought to enact against the previous population, bemoan the foulness of their own displacement.

While the term is often used to refer to the locations in which Christianity resides, he instead argues that the term is more appropriate not as an ill-defined political location of Christians but as “the active practice of Christianness.” I adopt Mittman’s important reframing whenever I refer to “Christendom” with the added caveat that the Holy Land under Islamic control would be understood as “places in which the active practice of Christianness need to be restored.” Asa Simon Mittman, *Cartographies of Exclusion: Anti-Semitic Mapping in Medieval England* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2025), 37-38.

⁴⁹⁴ Jacques Krynen, “‘Rex Christianissimus;’ A medieval theme at the roots of French absolutism,” *History and Anthropology* 4 no.1 (1989): 79.

⁴⁹⁵ See: Daniel H. Weiss, “The Old Testament Image and the Rise of Crusader Culture in France,” in *France and the Holy Land: Frankish Culture at the End of the Crusades.*, ed. Daniel H. Weiss & Lisa Mahoney (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 3-4. Earl Jeffrey Richards, “The Uncertainty in Defining France as Nation” in *Inscribing the Hundred Years’ War in French and English Cultures*, ed. Denise Nowakowski Baker (New York: State University of New York Press, 2000), 159-161. Susanna A. Throop, *The Crusades: An Epitome* (Leeds, Kismet Press, 2018), 159-160. Sylvia Schein, *Fideles Crucis: The Papacy, the West and the Recovery of the Holy Land 1274-1314* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991).

⁴⁹⁶ For crusade and colonization see: Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 123-126.

I frame the French account as “fiction” because even before 1291, the ruler of Acre and “King of Jerusalem” was not the King of France but rather Henry II, King of Cyprus.⁴⁹⁷ This chapter serves as a case study for investigating the racialization of the Sultan of Babylon through the lens of what I will be theorizing as an imagined *replacement*. The textual treatment and visual figuring in “Sack of Acre” sections from *Les Grandes Chroniques de France* (GCF) articulate the French crown’s perceptions of “Saracenic” illegitimacy, racializing the occupying force (and its leader) for shattering the former’s self-constructed role as “Defenders of Christendom.” In other words, the Sultan and his polity function as *replacers* of royal French authority and its claims to *certitude* of the Levant.⁴⁹⁸ These illuminations are not always as explicit as **Figure 1** and so *replacement* is often communicated visually by illuminating the “Saracens” as destructive imposters. Much as demonstrated in Chapters 1 & 2 the iconography of the Sultan, despite the lack of a stock-type in rendering the Sultan or his Islamic forces, the various permutations nonetheless convey notions of usurpation.

I. Parameters and Context of the Chapter

Before continuing my discussion of the terms *certitude* and *replacement*, it is necessary to establish the parameters and context. I have limited the scope of Sack of Acre scenes discussed in this chapter to that established by Anne D. Hedeman’s excellent monograph *The Royal Image: Illustrations of Les Grandes Chroniques de France 1274-1422*. In her “Catalogue of Manuscripts” the author identifies seven (7) instances of the “Sack of Acre,” cataloguing the event under “Philip IV, 6.” I discuss all 7 in the pages below, though some in greater detail than

⁴⁹⁷ *The ‘Templar of Tyre’: Part III of the ‘Deeds of the Cypriots,’* trans. Paul Crawford (Burlington: Ashgate, 2003), 86.

⁴⁹⁸ Asa Simon Mittman, “Mandeville’s Jews, colonialism, certainty, and art history,” in *Post-Colonizing the Medieval Image*, ed. Eva Frojmovic & Catherine E. Karkov (London: Routledge, 2017), 91.

others. As Hedeman notes, other *GCF* manuscripts do survive. However, these have not been completely cataloged and so are missing from this discussion.⁴⁹⁹

The second restriction directly correlates with the first. All seven instances discussed date from the 1330s onward, produced during the Valois dynasty. However, the text that surrounds these images comes from Guillaume de Nangis' *Chronicon*, originating from the time of Philip IV (1285-1315).⁵⁰⁰ Thus the manuscripts used here contain Valois-era images informed by Capetian texts. Theoretically, if any Capetian manuscripts included illuminated scenes of Acre's Fall, they would likely have displayed similar iconography, but these hypothetical images are beyond the scope of my study. Hedeman demonstrates that the Valois dynasty legitimized their reign by connecting themselves to the Capetians via the *GCF* tradition.⁵⁰¹ Furthermore, as Gabrielle Spiegel explains, "from 1285-1460, the writing of the *Grandes Chroniques* took on a fully institutionalized character" as a royal historiography.⁵⁰² Granted, image production is not perfectly synonymous with textual record. *GCF* manuscripts were produced for both royals and nobility, so manuscripts for different audiences may have yielded different results. Still, given the significance of the "Sack of Acre," the royal commissions and the *religion royale* of the court probably reflected one another.⁵⁰³ I use "Capetian/Valois", "royal French" and the "French crown" interchangeably throughout this chapter to refer to a shared crusader narrative across two dynasties and their court culture.

⁴⁹⁹ For the "Catalogue of Manuscripts" see: Hedeman, *The Royal Image*, 193-268. For the un-consulted manuscripts, 191-192.

⁵⁰⁰ Gabrielle M: Spiegel, *The Chronicle Tradition of Saint-Denis-A Survey* (Wetteren, Belgium: Brookline, Mass. and Leyden, 1978), 120.

⁵⁰¹ Anne D. Hedeman, "Valois Legitimacy: Editorial Changes in Charles V's *Grandes Chroniques de France*," *Art Bulletin* 66 no. 1 (1984): 104-106.

⁵⁰² Spiegel, *The Chronicle Tradition of Saint-Denis-A Survey*, 121-122.

⁵⁰³ Hedeman, *Royal Image*, xx-xxi.

II. Geographical Racialization, Certitude, Replacement & Destructive-Imposterism

Previous scholarship has certainly addressed some of the important intersections of racialization and geography. As Benjamin Braude demonstrates, Europeans clearly constructed cartographical identities through the T-O map delineation of Europe, Asia and Africa.⁵⁰⁴ Even Robert Bartlett, who challenges the word *race* in favor of ethnicity when discussing the medieval, couches his argument in terms “geographical determinism.”⁵⁰⁵ By this, Bartlett means that within the Latin Christian worldview, where one comes from determines one’s physical and behavioral characteristics.⁵⁰⁶ Suzanne Akbari expands upon these narratives in her investigation of climate, temperament and skin color. For example, Akbari notes that Bartholomeus Anglicus links darker skin with hot regions, resulting in an imbalance of the humors.⁵⁰⁷ Other scholars have engaged with the slippages between “raced religions” (Jews, Muslims) and the “monstrous races” hailing from far off places. Using illuminations from the *Wonders of the East* or the *Romance of Alexander*, Debra Strickland has analyzed the conflation of “Saracen” bodies with those of cynocephali (dog-headed people), giants, cyclopes and other hybrids.⁵⁰⁸ Most Recently, Asa Mittman has attended to “cartographic race” as it relates to the depiction of Jewish people in

⁵⁰⁴ Benjamin Braude, “The Sons of Noah and the Construction of Ethnic and Geographical Identities in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods, *The William and Mary Quarterly* 54 no. 1. (1997): 114-115.

⁵⁰⁵ Robert Bartlett, “Medieval and Modern Concepts of Race and Ethnicity,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31 no. 1. (2001): 44-47.

⁵⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁵⁰⁷ Suzanne Conklin Akbari, “The diversity of mankind in The Book of John Mandeville,” in *Eastward Bound: Travel and Travelers, 1050-1550*, ed. Rosamund Allen (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 157-166. See also: Suzanne Conklin Akbari, *Idols in the East: European Representations of Islam and the Orient, 1100-1450* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), 162-163.

⁵⁰⁸ Debra Higgs Strickland, “Monstrosity and Race in the Late Middle Ages,” in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and The Monstrous*, ed. Asa Simon Mittman with Peter J. Dendle (New York: Routledge, 2016), 374-378. See also: Debra Higgs Strickland, *Saracens, demons, & Jews: making monsters in medieval art*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

the famed Hereford map. According to Mittman, this visual text embodied Latin Christian policing of bodies from the “Holy Land” to England as well as a medium which captures the anti-Semitic desire of Jewish expulsion from England.⁵⁰⁹

While acknowledging the important work done with race and geography, I would argue that these approaches are not completely satisfactory. The contributions of Braude, Bartlett, Akbari, Strickland focus on geography as a facilitator of medieval ethnicity/race-making instead of the so-called usurpation of geography to Other its conquerors. Mittman’s most recent work comes the closest in being a study of the visual program that coincides with the expulsion of Jewish people from England, but still, this is not the exact same situation as that which occurs in Sack of Acre scenes. While the *GCF* declares the foreignness of the Muslims it also pointedly vilifies them for conquering the “Holy Land,” a region which is frequently imagined as under France’s guardianship. For these perspectives I turn to Asa Mittman’s earlier work where he employs the useful terminology of *certitude*, which he defines as the “colonial perspective, secure in its superiority over the Other, of the correctness of its own perspective; of the medieval geographical enterprise.”⁵¹⁰ Mittman approaches his analysis of the *Book of Sir John Mandeville* as an imagined Latin Christian (as opposed to Jewish) possession of Jerusalem and the “Promised Land.” Reading *Mandeville* alongside Matthew Paris’ map from the *Chronica Majora*, the author remarks on the inclusion of the “Templum Domini” (the Templar base) within the Holy City even after it had already fallen into the hands of the Muslim Khorezmians at the time of the map’s production (**Figure 4**). For Mittman, such an inscription “is hopeful,

⁵⁰⁹ Asa Simon Mittman, *Cartographies of Exclusion: Anti-Semitic Mapping in Medieval England* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2025), 27-40.

⁵¹⁰ Asa Simon Mittman, “Mandeville’s Jews, colonialism, certainty, and art history,” in *Post-Colonizing the Medieval Image*, ed. Eva Frojmovic & Catherine E. Karkov (London: Routledge, 2017), 91.

wishful, and even defiant,”⁵¹¹ suggesting a Latin Christian desire for future reclamation. Similarly, I posit that the French depiction of Acre’s fall reflects much the same inclination. The certitude of the French crown, not possessing direct geo-political control, manifests itself in *Les Grandes Chroniques* by emphasizing the French king’s imagined role as “Protector of Christendom.” However, *certitude* serves as only one piece of the puzzle. How does the colonizing force cope with the disruption of its “security?” In the case of the *Chronica Majora*, the absence of a population denotes Islamic occupation.⁵¹² The absence is not a neutral stance but a visual manifestation of replacement. By emptying the Templum Domini of its supposed owners, by (in Mittman’s words) creating a “wishful” tone in its labeling as such despite its loss, the absence subtly implies that some uninvited polity who is not supposed to be there has cleared out the previous one and taken its place.

Indeed, we can find another, more concrete example of this absence as certitude in a *GCF* manuscript which does *not* depict the “Sack of Acre” scene. British Library MS Sloane 2433 was produced in the late fourteenth century as evidenced by the manuscript ending with the coronation of Charles VI (1380). Though its provenance is somewhat obscure, the manuscript probably came out of the Paris *librarie* system which produced *Grandes Chroniques* manuscripts for the nobility.⁵¹³ Hedeman notes that several manuscripts, including Sloane 2433, display notations providing directions to illuminators that effectively function as longer rubrics, especially in locations where the corresponding illuminations do not appear.⁵¹⁴ In her catalogue of manuscripts, she interestingly notes that this happens 34 times throughout Sloane 2433, with

⁵¹¹ Ibid., 109.

⁵¹² Ibid., 106.

⁵¹³ Hedeman, *The Royal Image*, 31

⁵¹⁴ Ibid., 43.

one example being the Sack of Acre during the reign of Philip I in, Chapter 6. The manuscript now at the British Library is split into three volumes (A, B & C) with the Sack of Acre text appearing near the start of C. Like the other 33 cases in the manuscript, this particular illumination does not appear and the space allotted for it has been used for an extended rubric which does not appear in the normal versions of the text.⁵¹⁵ Yet unlike the 33 other examples found in the manuscript, this text-filled space where the sack of Acre scene is supposed to be, possesses the remainder of a gold border much like all the spaces which contain illuminations. Indeed, it seems that this area may have been *scrapped off*, with the gold and even some of the rubric being damaged in the process. As such a material outlier in the manuscript, one may conjecture that the removal of this scene was purposeful. Similar to Mittman's interpretation to the *Chronica Majora* map, the space allocated for the Sack of Acre illumination was left as a textual palimpsest which obscures the Crusaders' loss of Acre and their replacement by Islamic rule. Put another way the inserted caption, which bemoans the Mamluk conquest as the loss of the city that provided "aid and succor to the Christians in that land" functions to reestablish colonial certitude by not reimagining it in the royal history of French kings.⁵¹⁶

I envision *replacement* as a counterpart, an echo or a complement to certitude. If certitude functions as the articulation of colonial correctness, then replacement serves as the response to an untenable reality when that correctness shatters. It is a clarion call that denounces the usurper as unjust, disorderly, illegitimate and, of course, temporary because certitude endures.

Replacement can be imagined in different ways. While the *Chronica Majora* figures

⁵¹⁵ British Library Sloane 2433C f 2v. Following the rubric "Comment Acre fut Prise": Et comment le roy de chypre qui garde estoit de las ville d'Acre se defend beuteu seuiet affiu jour [...] contre sarrasins mais les sarrasins lendemain assissent la ville paient les murs rentrent dedes et furent les grant occasion de me gent et atranenterent et abatuent les temples et églises esdifees en la des ville et adiees adieu et aussi fut acre fut prise par les mescrans qui est l'aide et le secours de crestienne en celle partie dont ce fie domutatte itrant.

⁵¹⁶ Ibid. "l'aide et le secours de crestienne en celle partie."

replacement via depopulation, **Figure 1** renders the process far more obvious through re-population. This incoming body becomes racialized not only due to their geographical origins but also for their geographical destinations (that is to say the lands the “Saracens” wish to conquer and control).

IIA. The Sultan and his Polity

Thinking about the “invaders” in the “Sack of Acre” images as a “Saracen polity” may be useful in negotiating the topographic and political nature of *replacement*. Medievalists have already begun to tool their studies of race through comparable modes. Heng analyzes the Latin Christian treatment of the Nizari Muslims or “Assassins” as a “civilization identity” of “Saracen” deviance, complete with their own nefarious leader, the Old Man of the Mountain.⁵¹⁷ Sierra Lomuto entertains the presence of various international polities, if not all Islamic, in her examination of the Mongol Princess in *King of Tars*.⁵¹⁸ As mentioned in chapter 1, Cohen reads Laban in *Sultan of Babylon* through the “politics of disgust” as part of the “sign *Saracen*, a racialized figure of ultimate difference who condensed everything inimical to the fragile Christian selfsame.”⁵¹⁹ Somewhat more recently, Victoria Turner devotes an entire chapter to “race and community,” focusing on the Prophet Muhammad as a “construction of Saracen (communal) identity.”⁵²⁰ The thread which connects all of these studies is the centrality of a

⁵¹⁷ Heng, *The Invention of Race*, 127-138.

⁵¹⁸ Sierra Lomuto, “The Mongol Princess of Tars: Global Relations and Racial Formation in *The King of Tars* (c. 1330),” *Exemplaria* 31 no. 3. (2019): 171.

⁵¹⁹ Cohen, “On Saracen Enjoyment, 115. See also: Ange-Marie Hancock, *The Politics of Disgust: The Public Identity of the Welfare Queen* (New York, New York University Press, 2004) 6-14. While Hancock defines this concept more alongside American democracy and precedes Cohen’s work, I do find this term useful in reading the *Saracen*. As Hancock states “The attribution of individual blame conflates a person’s public action [...] with his or her private identity.”

⁵²⁰ Victoria Turner, *Theorizing Medieval Race: Saracen Representations in Old French Literature* (Cambridge: Legenda, 2019), 135.

political figure as the representative Other defined, in part, by geography. The construction “Sultan of Babylon,” much like “Old Man of the Mountain” or “King of Tars,” articulates polity: a marriage between office and place.⁵²¹ Indeed, the very language describing the events leading up to Acre within the *GCF* engenders a discussion of polity. For example, when a group of Christians kill “Saracens” outside of Acre, the Sultan of Babylon (here referring to al-Ashraf’s father Qalawun) is angered by the death of “ses serjans.”⁵²² The text utilizes the possessive of “serjans” or “gent,” coming from the Latin “gens,” to refer to the *Sultan’s people*.⁵²³ In other words, the Sultan’s geographical territory and the people residing within it are inextricably linked to him.

As outlined in the introduction and in previous chapters the onus of alterity falls upon the leader, whether the polity constitutes deviance, exoticism, disgust, or religious difference, to name a few. In the middle of the twentieth century Ernst Kantorowicz theorized the ways the medieval European Latin Christian courts understood the “king’s two bodies”, including both a personal body and an institutional one that symbolized the body politic.⁵²⁴ While Kantorowicz’s primary focus is English kingship, this framework is useful both for considering the French king as well as his Islamic foil in the context of a “royal historiography.”⁵²⁵ Previous scholarship has

⁵²¹ Claire Weeda, “Ethnic Identification and Stereotypes in Western Europe, circa 1100–1300.” *History Compass* 12, no. 7 (2014): 586-606.

⁵²² Viard, *Les Grandes Chroniques de France*, vol. 9 (1920-1953) 140.

⁵²³ For “gens” meaning blood, stock & people see: Bartlett, “Medieval and Modern Concepts of Race and Ethnicity,” 42-43. Another example of this possessive to denote polity can be found when Ashraf Khalil succeeds his father’s throne the text refers to him as “prince, souden et gouverneur principal de toute sa gent” (prince, sultan and senior governor of all his people). See: Viard, *Les Grandes Chroniques de France*, vol. 9 (1920-1953) 141.

⁵²⁴ Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958), 1-23. For a discussion of the “King’s Two Bodies” applied to a French context see: Elizabeth A.R. Brown, “The French Royal Funeral Ceremony and the King’s Two Bodies: Ernst H. Kantorowicz, Ralph E. Giesey and the Construction of a Paradigm.” *Special issue, “Le Corps du Prince” Micrologus* 22 (2014): 105-137.

⁵²⁵ Gabrielle M Spiegel, “Medieval canon formation and the rise of royal historiography in Old French prose,” *MLN* 108, no. 4 (1993): 638-658.

observed the ways that crusade era romances positions the Sultan's court parallels those of Latin Christian ones.⁵²⁶ If the various political actors surrounding the European king function as extensions of the ruler's power and authority, so too do those surrounding the Islamic prince. Circumstances of the *GCF* imagined the Sultan and his people in connected yet specific ways for their actions at Acre.

IIB. Destructive Imposterism

It is one thing to theorize about French narratives of displacement via "Saracenic" conquest but something else entirely to find that concept in the vellum and ink produced by medieval scribes and illuminators. How does the racialization of *replacement* appear visually in *GCF*, especially when not obvious? Admittedly, not all the images so simply demonstrate this concept by depicting the expulsion of Christians as found in **Figure 1**, so seeing replacement may require a different lens. Conventional thinking, or at least thinking about race as we do in our own moment, would bring bodily characteristics (hair, skin color, and physiognomy) to the forefront of this conversation. Assuredly, raced *replacement* might be readily conveyed epidermally by depicting dark-skinned "Saracens" hurling white-skinned Christians over walls.⁵²⁷ However, a close inspection of **Figure 1** will reveal that the color of the "Saracens" and Christians is quite similar, making skin tone not the operative sign of alterity here. As I discussed earlier, Dorothy Kim calls our attention to the dangers of "ocularcentric fixation on medieval race as epidural and visual."⁵²⁸ To her point, it is not what skin color (or any number of the usual

⁵²⁶ William Wistar Comfort, "The Literary Role of the Saracens in the French Epic," *PMLA* 55 no. 3 (1940): 631.

⁵²⁷ Heng, *The Invention of Race*, 8.

⁵²⁸ Dorothy Kim, "Introduction to literature compass special cluster: Critical race and the Middle Ages." *Literature Compass* 16 (2019): 4. Kim specifically uses the term "epidural" and not "epidermal," perhaps to imply that the medieval imaginations of skin color have a "deeper" level where the exterior body is a manifestation of the interior soul.

suspects used to mark the alterity, such as costume, weapons and, accoutrements) do in themselves but what they convey about the racialized “Saracen” polity. In other words, these tactile elements are used to denote imagined behavioral qualities. Recurring motifs across multiple manuscripts demonstrate that the *GCF* often relies upon notions of “Saracen” destructivity and imposterism as the means to convey race-as-replacement.

To be clear, notions of “Saracen” violence pervade Latin Christian narratives. Lynn Tarte Ramey states “the Saracen as a bringer of death and destruction lingered in the portrayal of the Saracen in medieval French literature” creating a binary of “good versus evil [or] right versus wrong.”⁵²⁹ However, destruction does not remain a constant in renderings of “Saracens.” When Sharon Kinoshita unpacks the infamous verse from the *Chanson de Roland* “pagans are wrong and Christians are right” she does so along the lines of gender rather than violence.⁵³⁰ Furthermore, John Victor Tolan & Geraldine Heng both discuss the ways Saladin serves as a paragon of Christian chivalric virtue, in one romance becoming an “ami to the French queen.”⁵³¹ Furthermore, when the famous Sultan conquers the “Holy Land” in 1187, Latin Christian texts couch his invasion not as a result of Islamic barbarism but divine punishment--Saladin the “scourge of the Lord.”⁵³² Finally, we cannot categorize all types of “Saracen” ferocity as a homogeneous type any more than we can consider it an indelible characteristic. The martial prowess of the “Saracen” knight Palamedes when he beheads his “Saracen” opponent Corsabrin

⁵²⁹ Lynn Tarte Ramey, *Christian, Saracen and Genre in Medieval French Literature: Imagination and Cultural Interaction in the French Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 2013), 7-8.

⁵³⁰ Sharon Kinoshita, “Pagans are wrong and Christian are Right: Alterity, Gender and Nation in the *Chanson de Roland*,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31 no.1 (2001): 91. For this reading of Kinoshita see Siobhain Bly Calkin, “The Anxieties of Encounter and Exchange: Saracens and Christian Heroism in *Sir Beves of Hamtoun*. *Florilegium* 21 (2004): 140-141, 152.

⁵³¹ John Victor Tolan, *Sons of Ishmael: Muslims through European Eyes in the Middle Ages* (Tallahassee: University of Florida Press, 2008), 91-97. Heng, *The Invention of Race*, 139-140.

⁵³² Tolan, *Sons of Ishmael*, 82-83.

in *Le Morte D'Arthur* can hardly be considered the same “violence” as the Emir of Cordoba’s assault on Santiago de Compostela in the *Pseudo-Turpin*.⁵³³ This is because a potentially future (though not already) Christian knight slaying a “Saracen” enemy engages in a noble act while a Islamic prince profaning and pilfering a church commits a travesty. Nonetheless, in the “sack of Acre” illuminations, “Saracen” violence undoubtedly denotes racialized behavior. The rubric that often accompanies the image of Acre’s Fall reads “Comment Acre fu destruite par le soudan of Babylon” or “how Acre was destroyed by the Sultan of Babylon.”⁵³⁴ Destruction works as a prerequisite for replacement as one must decimate an enemy in order to supplant it.

Imposterism, the second and perhaps more striking element for visualizing replacement, has also been an important part of framing Islam within postcolonial theory. Edward Said traces Orientalizing narratives back to the Middle Ages, suggesting that Latin Christians viewed Mohammad as a pretender and the founder of a religion which imitates “a true religion” (Christianity).⁵³⁵ Medieval polemics frequently associate Islam with the anti-Christ, a term that both refers to the apocalyptic pretender and to “enemies of the church” more generally.⁵³⁶ As John Victor Tolan states, Latin Christian narratives casts Mohammad as a “false prophet,” citing early writings from Eulogius in Spain from the ninth century, which echo Akbari’s observation that Muhammad “is seen as an imperfect reflection of Christ” referencing Lydgate’s *Fall of Princes* in the fifteenth century.⁵³⁷ The construction of Mohammad as a religious imposter apparently endured in medieval time and space. However, Latin Christian accusations of Islamic

⁵³³ Thomas Malory, *Le Morte D'Arthur* (Hertfordshire, Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1996), 444-445. & Robert Levine, *Thirteenth Century Life of Charlemagne* (Lewiston, New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), 138-139.

⁵³⁴ Viard, *Les Grandes Chroniques*, vol. 8, 140.

⁵³⁵ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 66. Discussion of imposterism 60-72.

⁵³⁶ John Victor Tolan, *Saracens: Islam in the European Imagination* (New York: University of Columbia Press, 2002), 8-10.

⁵³⁷ Suzanne Conklin Akbari, “The Rhetoric of Antichrist in Western Lives of Muhammad,” *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 8 no. 3 (1997): 298-299 & Tolan, *Saracens*, 87-93.

imposterism did not only encompass the theological but bled into the socio-cultural fabric, particularly in the thirteenth century. The Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 called for the sartorial demarcation of “raced religions” namely “Saracens” and Jews. These groups were required to wear certain types of clothing to indicate their non-Christian status within Europe. According to Heng, the Latin Christians had some “biopolitical” anxieties of imperceptible Others, especially in the face of potential sex between Christians and non-Christians.⁵³⁸ Nearly one hundred years prior to Lateran IV, the Council of Nablus (1120) in Jerusalem “issued [similar] regulations forbidding Muslims to dress like Franks.”⁵³⁹ Dorothy Kim uses the helpful phrasing of “passing” as a more contemporary contextualization of medieval European Latin Christian fears.⁵⁴⁰ The “Saracen” who can “pass” would be a wolf in sheep’s clothing, an imposter in the midst of Christians. Thus, Latin Christians not only penned religious polemics against imposterism but created laws to prevent its imagined physical manifestation within “Christendom.” If medieval Europeans were so fixated on “Saracenic” pretenders, how else would they visually render the conquest of “Christian land” by Islamic conquerors? In addition to their destruction, *GCF* conveys “Saracen” replacement by depicting as Muslims imposters who either attempt to spread their “false” religion or appear in the guise of Latin Christians.

III. French *Certitude*: Defending the “Holy Land”

⁵³⁸ Heng, *The Invention of Race*, 80. See also: Solomon Grayzel, *The Church and the Jews in the XIIIth Century: a Study of their Relations during the years 1198–1254, based on the Papal Letters and the Conciliar Decrees of the Period* (New York: Heron Press, 1966), 308.

⁵³⁹ David Jacoby, “Society, Culture, and the Arts in Crusader Acre,” in *France and the Holy Land: Frankish Culture at the End of the Crusades*, ed. Daniel H. Weiss & Lisa Mahoney (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 107.

⁵⁴⁰ Dorothy Kim, “Reframing Race and Jewish/Christian Relations in the Middle Ages.” *De Gruyter Open* 13 (2015): 57-58.

In order to demonstrate “Saracen” *replacement*, we must first understand French *certitude* in the “Holy Land.” The scenes in *Les Grandes Chroniques* do not just visualize the replacement of Christianity in general but that of the French “nation,” despite not actually controlling the area in 1291. This term is somewhat problematic as medieval French kings did not rule a secular state in the manner of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.⁵⁴¹ However, even scholars who question the use of “nation” in the Middle Ages recognize some of its origins within the time period.⁵⁴² While problematizing the notion of the “French nation” during the Hundred Years War, Earl Jeffrey Richards acknowledges that the *GCF* “‘not only cultivates the strongest sense of national heritage’ but also claims a special, divinely instituted prerogative for the French Kingdom.”⁵⁴³ Erik Inglis’ art historical analysis of *GCF* manuscripts, albeit from a slightly later period than discussed here (circa. 1450), has also traced the connections between the *GCF*, the French crown and, the beginnings of a “nation.”⁵⁴⁴ More recent scholars have also used “nation” in regard to later crusade history. Suzanne Throop explains that after 1300 “people transferred crusading ideas more and more to national identities [...] as European monarchs strengthened their positions and increasingly claimed to rule over distinct nations.”⁵⁴⁵ In the context of this chapter, I use the term “nation” loosely as a way to communicate French royal power and the key role it imagined for itself within “Christendom”–

⁵⁴¹ Earl Jeffrey Richards, “The Uncertainty in Defining France as a Nation,” in *Inscribing the Hundred Years’ War in French and English Cultures*, ed. Denise N. Baker (Albany: State of New York University Press, 2000) 161.

⁵⁴² Patrick Geary, *The Myth of Nations: The Medieval Origins of Europe*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

⁵⁴³ Richards, “The Uncertainty in Defining France, 161.” For the internal quote which Richards cites see: Roger Ray, “Historiography, European,” in *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, Joseph Strayer, editor in chief (New York: Scribner, 1985), 6: 264.

⁵⁴⁴ Erik Inglis, *Jean Fouquet and the invention of France: art and nation after the Hundred Years War* (London: Yale University Press, 2011).

⁵⁴⁵ Throop. *The Crusades: An Epitome*, 159.

the *certitude* of its position regarding the “Holy Land,” especially in the aftermath of Louis IX.⁵⁴⁶

IIIA. Longstanding French “Claims” to the “Holy Land

“ Even before the sainted crusader king, Louis IX, the French crown had ample reason to believe they held a special responsibility over Outremer, given their cultural mythology. During the ninth century, Charlemagne’s chronicler Einhard wrote about the emperor’s diplomatic embassy to the Abbasid ruler Harun al-Rashid. According to the *Vita Karoli Magni*, the Caliph supposedly gave Charlemagne a series of fabulous presents including spices, an elephant and stewardship over the Holy Sepulcher.⁵⁴⁷ This story’s importance clearly endured as it also appears in the *Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle* as part of the *GCF*, with one important modification. Instead of the “King of Persia” delivering Jerusalem to the French Emperor, Charlemagne leads a military expedition to conquer the “Holy Land” himself. According to Hedeman, in the “popular imagination [...] of the twelfth and thirteenth century Charlemagne’s empire was equated with the Kingdom of France.”⁵⁴⁸ Thus reworking this narrative emphasizes that the French king has been a successful crusader, predating the First Crusade, Philip Augustus and Louis IX, dating back to the Frankish period. Indeed, these imaginations accentuate the “originality” of France protecting the “Holy Land.”

Following the First Crusade in the eleventh century, France played an important part in building the crusader kingdoms. Robert Ousterhout has traced the French Gothic influence in

⁵⁴⁶ Hedeman, *The Royal Image*, 5-6.

⁵⁴⁷ Einhard, *The Life of Charlemagne*, trans. Samuel Epes Turner (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1880), 43.

⁵⁴⁸ Hedeman, *The Royal Image*, 170.

ecclesiastical and military constructions in “Holy Land.”⁵⁴⁹ Of course, other scholars have also noted the important contributions of the French literature produced in these colonies.⁵⁵⁰ Parisian illuminators even played a direct role in Outremer manuscript production during the latter part of the thirteenth century.⁵⁵¹ More directly, Charles of Anjou, brother of Louis IX claimed the title of King of Jerusalem, thereby forming a connection between the Angevin lineage (an offshoot of the Capetian line) and the “Holy Land,” a claim that the mainland French crown supported until 1285. At this time, Philip IV switched his support to Henry II of Cyprus.⁵⁵² Shortly before 1291, Philip himself was allegedly offered the title “custodia Terre Sancte” but refused. Jonathan Riley-Smith argues that this may have been because “if the Christians were to be driven out of Palestine [Philip IV] would be implicated in the disaster.”⁵⁵³ As it turned out, the Latin Christians did lose this land and the responsibility was placed on Henry II’s shoulders, at least by the French. Despite Philip IV’s backing before 1291, something changed in the aftermath as evidenced in the *GCF*. The text recounting the life of Philip IV relates that in the midst of the siege of Acre, the King of Cyprus fled “by sea shamefully and villainously.”⁵⁵⁴ Guillaume’s words once again connote Henry’s responsibility when he states that Acre fell because Christians did not come to the city’s aid, no doubt in part referring to the king’s abandonment.⁵⁵⁵ While

⁵⁴⁹ Robert, Ousterhout, “The French Connection? Construction of Vaults and Cultural Identity in Crusader Architecture,” in *France and the Holy Land: Frankish Culture at the End of the Crusades*, ed. Daniel H. Weiss & Lisa Mahoney (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 77-81.

⁵⁵⁰ Laura K. Morreale & Nicholas L. Paul, “Introduction,” in *The French of Outremer: Communities and Communications in the Crusading Mediterranean* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018), 11-15.

⁵⁵¹ Jaroslav Folda, *Crusader Art in the Holy Land, From the Third Crusade to the Fall of Acre, 1187-1291* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 434-444.

⁵⁵² Jonathan Riley-Smith, “The Crown of France and Acre, 1254-1291,” in *France and the Holy Land: Frankish Culture at the End of the Crusades*, ed. Daniel H. Weiss & Lisa Mahoney (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 54-55. Henry of Cyprus also descended from a French family originating from Poitou. See: Nicholas Coureas, “The Lusignan Kingdom of Cyprus and the sea, 13-15th centuries,” in *The Sea in History-The Medieval World*, ed. Michel Balard & Christian Buchet (Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, Boydell Press, 2017), 369-370.

⁵⁵³ Riley-Smith, “The Crown of France and Acre, 1254-1291,” 55-56.

⁵⁵⁴ “par mer laidement et vilainement.” Viard, *Les Grandes Chroniques*, vol. 8, 142.

⁵⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 143-144. “Et ainsi Acre, la cite qui estoit le secours et l’aide de crestiente en ycelles parties d’outre mer, par leurs pechiez, et ce requerans, fu destruite des anemis de la foy: car il ne fu de touz les crestians qui a ces

Philip IV may not have been keen on taking control of the “Holy Land” before the fall, his chronicle certainly capitalizes on Cyprian failure. The chapter immediately following Acre’s destruction unsurprisingly casts the French king in a central role for leading the reconquest of the “Holy Land.”⁵⁵⁶ Historically, while Philip did plan an expedition he died before it came to fruition and the chronicle makes no further mention of these plans.⁵⁵⁷ Still, the French crown touted their important position in rescuing Outremer, as both Philip and his brother Charles of Valois justified their petitions for imperial tiaras by framing themselves as the best candidates to lead a new crusade.⁵⁵⁸ Furthermore, following Acre’s fall, the *Romance de Merlin* text which prophesies a mythical French emperor reconquering the “Holy Land” gained renewed popularity in the mainland.⁵⁵⁹ Imagined French authority endured into the Valois dynasty as evidenced by the (albeit never executed) crusade efforts of Philip VI and John II, as well as the more successful expedition under Charles VI.⁵⁶⁰ Their plans may give some indication as to why the Valois manuscripts contain the “Sack of Acre,” a way of reclaiming what was lost during the Capetian dynasty.

The dissatisfaction with Henry of Cyprus as “King of Jerusalem” coupled with repeated textual and historical formulations of the French ruler as a both “crusader” and “savior of the

angoisses secourut.” (And so, Acre, the city which was the succor and aid of Christians in the lands of Outremer was destroyed by the enemies of the faith, because none of all the Christians who helped the city.) My phrasing is not a direct translation.

⁵⁵⁶ Ibid. 146.

⁵⁵⁷ Norman Housley, *The Avignon Papacy and the Crusades, 1305-1378* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 11-14.

⁵⁵⁸ Björn Weiler, “‘Negotium Terrae Sanctae’ in the Political Discourse of Latin Christendom, 1215-1311,” *The International History Review* 25 no. 1 (2003): 30-31.

⁵⁵⁹ Schein, *Fideles Crucis*, 119. See also: Charles W. Connell, “The Fall of Acre in 1291 in the Court of Medieval Public Opinion,” ed. John France (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 135-136.

⁵⁶⁰ Charles VI entered the “Barbary Crusade” in 1388 which was an expedition to Tunisia rather than the Holy Land. See: Peter Lock, *The Routledge Companion to the Crusades* (New York: Routledge), 189-192 (Philip VI), 197 (John II) 198-201 (Charles VI).

Holy Land” provides some potential insight into the “Capetian/Valois” *certitude*. The chapters regarding Acre make no overt geo-political claims to Outremer, but rather more spiritual ones, highlighting France’s fantasized role in its defense. In the *GCF*, other Latin Christians are simply not up to the task; the French king and the French king alone can claim, reclaim and protect the “Holy Land.” This distinction between Latin Christian and French-Latin Christian is admittedly a fine one, and maybe one that only exists because of the “Capetian/Valois” context. After all, the *GCF* is a French manuscript tradition designed to legitimize and elevate the status of the French Kings. This being the case, the distinction between these categories is that because the French king is considered in this text to be the “most Christian king” in “Christendom,” his status, and the assault visited upon his purported authority is more profound than Latin Christian writ large.

IIIB. Rendering France at Acre: Certitude and Replacement

Perhaps an illumination can better demonstrate the concepts of certitude and replacement than the text alone. The British Library’s manuscript Royal 20 C VII (**Figure 5**) depicts the scene which precedes Acre’s Fall. A group of knights decimate “Saracen” warriors; this is not a battle but a slaughter as none of the Christians appear wounded. The Islamic forces are not hyper-Orientalized, only the somewhat ostentatious frilled pauldrons which are used almost exclusively in this manuscript for Muslim warriors and, a single curved scimitar laying across their bodies denote their foreignness.⁵⁶¹ Rather, the scene communicates “Saracen” difference by emphasizing what they are not, namely representatives of the French crown. Complete with the

⁵⁶¹ Other places in the manuscript where the frilled pauldrons are used. For another example, in this manuscript of the frilled pauldrons associated with Muslims see British Library Royal 20C VII f. 88v depicting the death of Picazo the son of Belle Marne (Abu Malik Abd al-Wahid).

fleur-de-lis banner behind him, the large knight dressed in blue, and gold raises his dagger above his head as he prepares to land a fatal blow, painting a clear picture of a French presence.

However, the text surrounding this image makes no reference to a French force. While Philip IV did maintain a battalion of soldiers at Acre, this group does not appear to be the one in question.⁵⁶² According to the chronicle, the city had made peace with the Sultan of Babylon (this is not Ashraf Khalil but his father Qalawun). The pope, being afraid for the safety of the “Holy Land,” sends crusaders who break the treaty, massacring “Saracens” outside of Acre. This angers the Sultan, who demands that those responsible be delivered to him, which the Christians refuse, precipitating his subsequent siege.⁵⁶³ It must be noted that the text does not particularly valorize the actions of these crusaders.⁵⁶⁴ More importantly, the narrative does not specify whether the Pope's army was uniquely Capetian, bringing into question why these soldiers wear these costumes. The *GCF* seems to recount an undetailed version of a historical event from 1290. Responding to Henry II's call for assistance in Outremer, Pope Nicholas IV dispatched a host of Italians commanded by the Doge of Venice's son, Nicolo Tiepolo, who subsequently massacred Muslims and Syrian Christians in areas outside Acre.⁵⁶⁵

Evidently, Capetian forces played no part in this military moment. Indeed, the flag found in **Figure 5** would better reflect historical accounts if it were the winged lion of St. Mark.

However, we must remember that images do not merely supplement the immediate textual or

⁵⁶² Riley-Smith, “The Crown of France and Acre, 1254-1291,” 55-56.

⁵⁶³ Viard, *Les Grandes Chroniques*, vol. 8, 139-140.

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid. According to the text the crusaders killed both men & women Saracens. “et, sans miséricorde, les Sarrasins de chascun sexe” (and without mercy, [killed] Saracens of each sex.)

⁵⁶⁵ *The ‘Templar of Tyre’: Part III of the ‘Deeds of the Cypriots,’* trans. Paul Crawford (Burlington: Ashgate, 2003), 101-102.

historical narratives; rather, they create their own.⁵⁶⁶ Here, *GCF* fabricates “Capetian/Valois” intervention because the larger political agenda of the chronicle needs to repeat the crown's role within “Christendom” at every crusade juncture. In other words, royal French authority becomes inscribed onto the visual program as a continuous marker of colonial certitude, injecting their presence where they might otherwise be absent.

The appearance of French armies outside of Acre plays another role in this particular manuscript's scheme as **Figure 5** directly precedes the “Sack of Acre” illumination (**Figure 6**) on verso of the same folio. Once again, the “Saracens” do not appear vilified physiognomically or otherwise, with the possible, mild exceptions of the bearded bowman in the white tunic and the handsomely armored knight with what could be a turban wrapped around his spiraled helmet wearing green and red. Still, these markers appear unclear at best. The primary way we know that these arrow launching figures represent “Saracens” is through the text. Nonetheless, the close spatial relationship between **Figure 5** and **Figure 6** communicates a powerful message of Islamic alterity. If the first image depicts royal French forces “defending” the outskirts of Acre from “Saracens,” what are the implications of “Saracens” besieging the city with a turn of the folio? The interactive nature of the manuscript alerts the viewer that something has changed, that the roles have been reversed. Suddenly, the emblems and visual dominance of the French have been deleted, removed and, supplanted by a different polity who engage in diametrically opposing actions: the French protect the walls whereas the “Saracens” attack them. The Islamic siege of Acre not only assaults “Christendom” writ large but represents the shattering of the French colonial certitude. As the “Saracens” usurp visual space so too are they depicted as

⁵⁶⁶ Stephen G. Nichols, “The Image as Textual Unconscious: Medieval Manuscripts,” *L'Esprit Créateur* 29, no. 1 (1989): 11-13. Nichols notes that the “preconceptions about the primacy of the word treat the image though it were simply an extension of the discourse register.” Nichols' argument focuses on allowing the image its own agency.

usurping royal authority. In contrast to the manuscript shown in **Figure 1**, this manuscript does not render replacement by expulsion and occupation but rather through the significant iconographic shift between parallel images on different sides of a single folio. Thus, the “Saracens” become racialized not through physical or cultural features necessarily but by *whom* they have managed to visually expunge. As the reader turns the folio from **Figure 5 (24r)** to **Figure 6 (24v)**, the victorious fleur-de-lis banner disappears only to be replaced by a crimson flag on the Islamic side. The mildly Orientalized costume along with the absence of the French symbols found on the preceding folio provides cues noting that the normative polity has been replaced by an Other(ed).

IV. Replacement as Destructive-Imposterism in *Les Grandes Chroniques*

Concepts of usurpation are not always so neatly illustrated within other *GCF* manuscripts as those found in **Figures 1, 2 & 6**. *Replacement* might literally be understood either through ejection or deletion, however, of the manuscripts consulted, I have not been able to find additional examples. Furthermore, the subject matter of **Figure 5** appears to be something of an outlier, creating difficulty in ascertaining the extent this scene contributed to reading the “Sack of Acre” beyond Royal 20 C VII.⁵⁶⁷ More regularly, illuminators employ “Saracenic” “destructive-imposterism” as a way of demonstrating replacement. In some ways, these images more powerfully maintain the imagined certitude as they often visually mark the invaders as illegitimate juxtaposed against the defenders. Several illuminations even depict an active resistance, with the Christian forces striking out against the enemy. Despite the shared approach

⁵⁶⁷ Hedeman’s catalogue does not provide another example of the Christians killing the Saracens outside Acre. See: Hedeman, *The Royal Image*, 193-268.

in imagining a more metaphorical usurpation, no two illuminations accomplish this goal in the same fashion.

Some images purposefully blur the boundaries between the Christian defenders of Acre and the “Saracen” invaders. **Figure 7** comes from a *GCF* in the Castres, Bibliothèque Municipal, presenting a messy, unclear battle scene. The illumination depicts Acre with a series of fortifications turrets with a singular scaled dome, perhaps an attempt to echo Jerusalem which had been iconographically identified through the Dome of the Rock (or the *Templum Domini*) in numerous Latin Christian maps.⁵⁶⁸ By incorporating elements of the Holy City onto Acre, the image frames the latter as a spiritual successor to the former, the last line of defense in Outremer. From the open portcullis, a Christian army sallies forth, though this deduction could only be made because of the text which alerts the viewer to Acre’s siege. Indeed, the two forces appear nearly indistinguishable from one another in skin color, physiognomy, costume, and accouterments. Towards the center of the image two figures meet in battle: on the right a closed helmeted-knight upon a brown horse and a red tunic, on the left an open-helmeted warrior with pinkish garb and white steed. The dead figures that lay beneath the riders reflect the respective costume colors reinforcing the division between these two sides.

Other subtle differences between the two living combatants provide some demarcation of alterity. Firstly, the ostensibly “Saracen” figure carries a ridiculously large sword. While not the traditional scimitar attributed to Islamic figures, its idiosyncratic nature dominates the visual field as if he could decapitate all his opponents in one fell swing. Moreover, the “Saracen” uses such a cumbersome weapon that his bicep, forearm and, elbow exit the scene, entering into the

⁵⁶⁸ Katharina Galor and Hanswulf Bloedhorn, *The Crusader and Ayyubid Periods: The Archaeology of Jerusalem* (New Haven: Yale University Press 2013), 186.

border and even breaking out of it. Scholars such as Kathy Lavezzo, Jeffrey Cohen & Asa Mittman have all analyzed the implications of borders and the monstrous dangers that inhabit them.⁵⁶⁹ More specifically, Mittman has argued that the blemmyae from the *Wonders of the East* who grasps its own borders seeks to leave the illumination and enter into the world of the spectator.⁵⁷⁰ Similarly, the “Saracen” warrior’s instrument of violence causes him to expand beyond his confines: an ocular allegory for “Saracen” destruction pouring onto pages which chronicle French royal authority. The imagery implies that Outremer’s collapse heralds the end of the rest of “Christendom,” including and most importantly, France herself. Arguably, “Saracen” destructivity illustrates the potentiality of *replacement* on both micro (Outremer) and macro (Europe) levels. This reading certainly echoes the anxieties of Latin Christians writ large post-1291. As suggested in Thaddeus of Naples’ *Ystoria*, a contemporary mainland account of the Acre’s Fall, Europeans viewed the event as an eschatological one, comparing the Sultan “in such apocalyptic terms as the old serpent, the great dragon and Lucifer.”⁵⁷¹ Yet if this siege represents a threat of such magnitude, who are the knights who ride out of Acre? The text never makes any explicit mention of a battle in the open field, nor does the historical evidence provide any. Perhaps this difference is simply indicative of artistic interpretation. Furthermore, these figures may not just represent the historical defenders but could also serve as metaphors for the continued French defense of “Christendom,” valiantly attempting to impede the “Saracens” from spreading beyond their borders, both figurative and literal. Indeed, this interpretation can be

⁵⁶⁹ Kathy Lavezzo, *Angels on the Edge of the World: Geography, Literature, and English Community, 1000–1534* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 15-20. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, “Hybrids, Monsters, Borderlands: The Bodies of Gerald of Wales,” in *The Postcolonial Middle Ages*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), 87. Asa Simon Mittman, *Medieval Maps and Monsters in Medieval England* (New York: Routledge, 2006) 50.

⁵⁷⁰ Mittman, *Medieval Maps and Monsters*, 100-111.

⁵⁷¹ Iris Shagrir, “Thaddeus of Naples on the Fall of Acre,” in *Acre and Its Falls*, ed. John France (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 162.

supported through the manuscript's owner, Jeanne d'Amboise, who married the chancellor to Philip VI.⁵⁷² Perhaps to echo the crusade rhetoric of the king, these patrons commissioned a scene that represents an unending battle, a "Holy Land" not yet fallen. Once again, this composition parallels the imagination of certitude that Mittman observes in the Matthew Paris maps.

This illumination also constructs Otherness, paradoxically, through similarity, as the viewer cannot visually distinguish one side from another. The white skin of the "Saracen" warrior does not appear any different from that of his opponents, nor does his rather European armor suggest alterity. Previously, Debra Strickland has noticed these trends in other Latin Christian manuscripts, arguing that in certain scenarios "Saracens" need to appear as an honorable foe and "worthiness had to be translated into some conventionally recognizable form."⁵⁷³ In other words, worthy "Saracens" would appear as Christian knights in size and appearance. John Victor Tolan buttresses this point when he states that "it is not honorable to slaughter mere beasts" suggesting that physiognomic otherness might not always be employed to imagine "Saracens."⁵⁷⁴ Susan Conklin Akbari and Cord Whitaker provide alternative ways of reading specifically white skin in regard to Islamic foes. They postulate that whiteness denotes the preparation or potentiality of "Saracen" conversion.⁵⁷⁵ While each of these scholars' examples support their respective arguments, these explanations do not fit with the textual parameters accompanying this illumination. The "Fall of Acre" depicts the destruction of

⁵⁷² Hedeman, *The Royal Image*, 83.

⁵⁷³ Strickland, *Saracens, Demons & Jews*, 126.

⁵⁷⁴ Tolan, *Saracens: Islam in the European Imagination*, 126.

⁵⁷⁵ Suzanne Conklin Akbari, *Idols in the East: European Representations of Islam and the Orient, 1100-1450* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009) 156. Cord J. Whitaker, "Black Metaphors in the King of Tars," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 112 no. 2 (2013): 172.

“Christendom’s” power. The text calls these conquerors “enemies of the faith” making certain that the Sultan and his polity are not all too keen on conversion at this moment.⁵⁷⁶

Given these circumstances, what would be the reasons for not depicting this enemy as an Other, if not by skin color than at least through the Orientalized costume as found in **Figure 1**? To unpack the reasons for presenting the “Saracens” in this fashion I return to Heng’s discussion of the “bio-political” anxieties. As made evident through Lateran IV and the Council of Nablus, the Latin Christians clearly worried about the “passing Saracen” who might enter their society either through an assimilation of physiognomic likeness to the European Latin Christians or shared costume, respectively. **Figure 7** represents the embodiment of both those fears, a body of abjection that could infiltrate and usurp.⁵⁷⁷ Potentially, this explains the closed helmet of the Christian knight and the open one of the “Saracen.” The European Latin Christian elite viewer would understand what the former should look like, but the appearance of the latter functions as a jarring reminder of the most terrifying “Saracen,” an invisible one. Contrary to Madeline Caviness’ assertion of the synonymy of whiteness and purity after the thirteenth century, skin color could also be used as a symbol of “Saracen” imposterism.⁵⁷⁸ Rendering the “Saracen” as indiscernible articulates their ever-present aptitude as replacers, at home and abroad. Such depictions of course rhyme with the well-established Latin Christian trope of deceitful Muslims,

⁵⁷⁶ Viard, *Les Grandes Chroniques*, vol. 8, 143-144.

⁵⁷⁷ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 5-13 Michael Uebel first illustrated the connections between Latin Christian perceptions of Saracens. See: Michael Uebel, “Unthinking the Monster: Twelfth-Century Responses to Saracen Alterity,” in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, (Twin Cities: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 266-267, 280-282.

⁵⁷⁸ Madeline Caviness, “From the Self-Invention of the Whiteman in the Thirteenth Century to The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly,” *Different Visions: A Journal of New Perspectives in Medieval Art* 1 (2008): 18.

ranging from Muhammad as a father of lies to Muslims who promise to convert and then renege on that promise.⁵⁷⁹

V. Epidermal Replacement

Over the course of this project, I have endeavored to not center epidermal difference as a primary site of racialization. However, it would be irresponsible not to acknowledge that the expected markers can communicate replacement and even imposterism in “Sack of Acre” scenes. One such case can be found in Brussels Royal Albert Ier MS. 5 produced in the fourteenth century (**Figure 8**). Anne D. Hedeman identifies the manuscript as the work produced by the group of illuminators called the *Master of the Roman de Fauvel*.⁵⁸⁰ The image depicts the Sultan of Babylon on the left hand side distinguished by the star motif on his shoulder pauldron, his flowing beard and his dark brown skin—darker than any of the host of “Saracens” who accompany him. On the right-hand side his soldiers attempt to surround the city and collapse its walls, perhaps seeking a way inside. High on the battlements in the center of the image, Acre’s defenders pull back their bow, ready to release their arrows into the Sultan while the Islamic prince's own soldiers prepare a trebuchet to return fire. The illumination is a contrast to that just discussed in **Figure 7** where all participants in the battle have been painted white. Here instead the defenders alone have been clearly painted white. The intended replacement seems more obvious than some of the previously discussed images—that the brown-skinned Muslims will ultimately take the city and rid it of its white-skinned occupants. A different color (and the cultural meanings therein) will unseat European Latin Christian authority. Still, the technology of

⁵⁷⁹ Jo Ann Hoepfner Moran Cruz, “Popular attitudes towards Islam in medieval Europe,” in *Travelers, Intellectuals, and the World Beyond Medieval Europe*, ed. James Muldoon (Routledge, 2017), 171-197.

⁵⁸⁰ Hedeman, *The Royal Image*, 74.

the codex does not allow for an isolated reading and in fact reinforces the socio-religious change in the usage of the manuscript. As previously mentioned, a scene of Edward I paying homage to Philip IV usually begins the life of Philip IV in the *GCF*. Certainly, the illumination of the scene is far more canonical than the sack of Acre scenes. This scene also appears in this manuscript nearby—on the recto of the same folio. The image depicts the red-robed Edward in a kneeling posture kissing the unbearded French king whose once blue and silver robe has now tarnished. The onlookers, clearly differentiated in their costume as members of the French and English court, function as an acknowledgment of the homage paid. The fundamental purpose for the inclusion of this scene corresponds to the political backdrop of the fourteenth century and the Hundred Year’s War. The dynastic shift from Capetian to Valois French dynasties following the death of Charles IV created an opportunity for the English king Edward III to claim the French crown.⁵⁸¹ Given the 1330s production of the manuscript, we can interpret the inclusion of this scene as a royal reinforcement of imagined English vassalage to France, with a rendering of a different Edward who more correctly performs his role than the pretender with his namesake.

Yet the illumination’s adjacency to the Sack of Acre situates this scene in a broader geopolitical framework. Even as the function of the illumination seeks to reject English encroachment on French authority they have been rendered as fellow European Latin Christians. In contrast to **Figure 7**, where similarity between Christians and Muslims articulates anxiety, here we find evidence for Madeline Caviness’ thesis about the meaning of painting figures white. That is to say the internal purity of all Christians, manifests externally binding them together despite their internal squabbles— and in direct opposition with their religious antagonists.⁵⁸²

⁵⁸¹ Christopher Thomas Allmand, *The Hundred Years War: England and France at War c. 1300-c. 1450* (Cambridge University Press, 1988), 10-12.

⁵⁸² Caviness, “From the Self-Invention of the Whiteman in the Thirteenth Century,” 18.

Turning the folio facilitates this optical contrast between epidermally united Christian Europeans against the brown Muslims. The Sultan and his “Saracens” represent a far more existential threat— challenges to imagined French authority which cannot be resolved through diplomacy as they might with the English. Imposterism here functions differently, and perhaps more obviously, because turning the folio from the French mainland to the “Holy Land” makes clear that the Muslims are not supposed to be there.

The production of this manuscript may provide a clue to explain the reasons for the more obvious rendering of replacement. As Hedeman notes, the manuscript was not a royal one and as such reflects the desires of its patron. She provides one example of an outlier in the “unedited text describing John of Jerusalem’s trip to Rome to ask for papal assistance for the Holy Land.”⁵⁸³ Evidently this noble patron had an interest in crusade narratives. We can interpret the inclusion of the illumination of this text as the visualization of an early warning to resist what would eventually happen to the Kingdom of Jerusalem in 1291.⁵⁸⁴ Hedeman states that the text suggests that the text positions John as the last king of Jerusalem and notes that unlike a royal manuscript the text does not position the French king as a successor for this role.⁵⁸⁵ I would resist this dismissal of the tether between the French king’s special role even in this non-royal context. Far from dismissing King John, the text singles him out as the one king to attend the funeral of Philip II. Given that both John and Philip Augustus are crusader princes, and that John had come to Europe looking for crusade assistance, the invocation of one next to the other creates a textual tie between them of parity if not homage.⁵⁸⁶ This association is further emphasized in the visual

⁵⁸³ Hedeman, *The Royal Image*, 75.

⁵⁸⁴ Royal Albert Ier MS. 5, 308r.

⁵⁸⁵ Hedeman, *The Royal Image*, 82.

⁵⁸⁶ Royal Albert Ier MS. 5, 308r. “Et la fu present Jehan le roi de Jerusalem nouvellement despose -1- poi devant estoit venus en France.”

program in the turning of the folio which contains the Arms of the King of Jerusalem transforms into the Fleur de lis banner of Philip's successor Louis VIII.⁵⁸⁷ Far from a lack of interest between the French crown and Jerusalem, if Hedeman's statement about the patron's tastes stands, then the program reinforces such connections. Returning again to **Figure 8** it should be noted that of all scenes containing Muslims in this manuscript (including scenes from Carolingian and Capetian reigns) the Sultan of Babylon and his forces are singular in their hieratic scale, number and their epidermal difference. In other words, if the patron was indeed concerned with the Islamic threat against French authority, it was the Sack of Acre which seemed most pressing.

Figure 8 is not alone in employing epidermal difference as a method of articulating "Saracen" seizure. The *GCF* originally made for Charles VI, though before his coronation (**Figure 9**) depicts the Islamic foes in tunics and tortils, and what might have once been darker skin color than the Christian forces throwing rocks over the walls. Like **Figure 8**, this illumination forefronts the Sultan of Babylon as an important indicator of the Other, placing him upon a white horse at the head of his regiment. In fact, it is against this animal that we can best see the subtle epidermal alterity. While the horse's color matches the tone of Acre's defenders, the Sultan's skin is a slightly browner hue, especially on his leg. The darkness of his bearded face clearly contrasts with his pink tunic. Even if this characteristic does not provide a satisfactory marker, another attribute denotes his racialization: the sultan wears no shoes on his feet. Perhaps when Christians appear without their shoes, the narrative may have positive connotations, as found in barefooted saints, monks or even crusaders.⁵⁸⁸ However, when applied

⁵⁸⁷ Royal Albert Ier MS. 5, 308v.

⁵⁸⁸ Tolán, *Saracens: Islam in the European Imagination*, 215, 241, 110 (respectively). For nudeness as humility see: Franco Mormando, "Nudus nudum Christum sequi": The Franciscans and Differing Interpretations of Male

to an Orientalized enemy, a lack of clothing certainly takes on new overtones. Sherry Lindquist and Asa Mittman propose that the wildness of the “Saracens” from *Vita patrum* can be observed through their partial nakedness.⁵⁸⁹ Lynn Ramey also comments on nakedness and monstrosity particularly when considering the cynocephali, a group we have already discussed as conflated with “Saracens.”⁵⁹⁰ On the other hand, Philippe Senac has argued that historical evidence exists of Muslims going into battle barefoot, suggesting this characteristic does not necessarily mean barbarity.⁵⁹¹ While this fact may stand in general, what is the explanation for the “Saracen” soldiers, who clearly wear long, pointed shoes as they assault Acre? The illuminator has deleted the Sultan’s footwear, items that he should otherwise be wearing much like his soldiers standing in front of him, in order to reveal something more about the leader of the invading Islamic polity.

In continuing with Ramey’s line of thinking, the Sultan’s feet do not reflect normativity and have been etched as three frog-like toes. This tripartite construction is consistent with other more fantastic images of “Saracens.” Margaret Sinex describes “Saracen”-devils in the Vienna Bible with “long pointed ears, legs ending in *three-toed paws*, toothy grins and protruding noses.”⁵⁹² While the Sultan does not appear as incredible as those in Sinex’s example, his toes announce his monstrosity. Cohen states that “the monster dwells at the gates of (cultural)

Nakedness in Fifteenth-Century Italy,” in *Fifteenth-Century Studies Vol. 33*, ed. Edelgard E. DuBruck, Barbara I. Gusick & William C. McDonald, (Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2008) 174-176.

⁵⁸⁹ Sherry C. M. Lindquist, Asa Simon Mittman, *Medieval Monsters: Terrors, Aliens, Wonders* (New York: The Morgan Library & Museum, 2018), 98-100.

⁵⁹⁰ Lynn Ramey, “Monstrous Alterity in Early Modern Travel Accounts: Lessons from the Ambiguous Medieval Discourse on Humanness,” *L’Esprit Créateur* 48, no. 1 (2008): 87.

⁵⁹¹ Philippe Sénac, *L’Image de l’Autre: l’Occident médiéval face à l’Islam* (Paris: Flammarion, 1983). Strickland, *Saracens, Demons & Jews*, 181.

⁵⁹² Margaret Sinex, ““Monsterized Saracens, Tolkien’s Haradrim, and Other Medieval ‘Fantasy Products,’” *Tolkien Studies* 7 (2010): 185 (emphasis added). Unfortunately, Sinex article does not contain illuminations and have been unable to find which images they specifically refer to.

difference,”⁵⁹³ explaining that the monster is a force of destruction, one which “threatens to destroy not just individual members of a society, but the very cultural apparatus through which individuality is constituted and allowed.”⁵⁹⁴ Within **Figure 9**, the threatened apparatus is the promise of “Capetian/Valois” defense over the “Holy Land” as symbolized in the ordered, uniform, blue and gold background. Royal French certitude verges on collapse as this three-toed figure promises to replace it with monstrous “Saracen” destruction.

The Sultan’s monstrosity can also be read as an indicator of his imposterism at the most fundamental level: that he is in fact *inhuman* but pretending to be human. However, the character’s imagined deception goes beyond this superficial observation. As the Sultan approaches the city, he and his entourage carry no swords, though the illuminator clearly renders his hands. The right remains near the reins as the left is slightly raised in the manner of the *adlocutio*, the gesture of oration.⁵⁹⁵ The Sultan does not require any traditional weapons because he possesses the deadliest one, the act of speech. As previously mentioned, medieval Europeans viewed Islam as the antithesis of Christianity, and Muhammad as an imposter of Christ. Victoria Turner demonstrates that mainland anti-Islamic narratives, such as *Le Roman de Mahomet*, frame the prophet as an orator spreading his lies.⁵⁹⁶ In the absence of Muhammad, the Sultan of Babylon becomes the ambassador of Islam, again wielding this rhetorical tool, promising to invert the religious dynamic in Outremer. Earlier polemics refer to the religion as the “excrement of all the ancient heresies, [which] Muhammad revomited.”⁵⁹⁷ Islam, by Latin Christian

⁵⁹³ Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, “Monster Culture (Seven Theses), in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Twin Cities: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 7-8.

⁵⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁵⁹⁵ Helen F. North, “Emblems of Eloquence,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 137, no. 3 (1993): 418-419. While the author discusses this gesture in a Roman context, it certainly had afterlives in medieval imagery.

⁵⁹⁶ Turner, *Theorizing Medieval Race*, 146-148. See also: “Destructive-Imposterism” section for Islam as imposter.

⁵⁹⁷ Tolan, *Saracens: Islam in the European Imagination*, 155.

definition, is a compilation of disgusting behaviors. Jean de Veisse originally postulated that outward appearance reflected inward corruption for medieval Europeans, specifically in analyzing the meanings of black or dark skin.⁵⁹⁸ Similarly, the Sultan's monstrous foot is a metonym for all the misshapen and hideous aspects of his beliefs.⁵⁹⁹ Furthermore, the monstrous nature of the Sultan adheres to the more "fanciful" depictions of the prophet.⁶⁰⁰ Strickland notes one image which presents Muhammad with a fish tail termination, in his otherwise human appearance.⁶⁰¹ Thus, the Sultan mimics the Prophet in both function (speech) and form (appearance), further indicating that the former serves as a successor to the later, or at the very least the military arm of Islam.⁶⁰² If Muhammad impersonates Christ then the Sultan of Babylon impersonates the Prince of "Christendom."

While the Sultan rides upon his triumphantly trotting steed, his soldiers begin to do what their leader augurs--they physically destroy Acre. The three "Saracens" closest to the city undermine the walls. Cracks in the structure portend the imminent collapse of the city. The text surrounding the scene emphasizes "Saracen" destruction, in preparation for and in describing, the ultimate replacement. During the siege, the narrative relates, the "Saracens" turned their siege engines towards the city and fired upon the Christians for ten days, an attack which caused a

⁵⁹⁸ Jean Devisse, *The Image of the Black in Western Art: From the Early Christian Era to the "Age of Discovery,"* trans. William G. Ryan Vol 2. Pt. 1: *From the Demonic Threat to the incarnation of Sainthood* (New York: William Morrow, 1979), 59-61.

⁵⁹⁹ Cohen makes a similar observation regarding Laban who represents all of the Saracen disgusting habits, specifically their diet as Laban eats fried snakes and beasts' blood. See: Cohen, "On Saracen Enjoyment," 129.

⁶⁰⁰ Suzanne Conklin Akbari, *Idols in the East: European Representations of Islam and the Orient, 1100-1450* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), 225-231. Akbari uses the terms "fanciful" & "realistic" to differentiate different types of Latin Christian depictions of the Muhammad and Muslims in general.

⁶⁰¹ Strickland, *Saracens, Demons & Jews*, 190.

⁶⁰² Technically the successor to the Prophet was the Caliph but not the Sultan. However, by 1258 the Mongols had conquered Baghdad and deposed the Caliph's reign. The Mamluks would later establish al-Hakim as the new Caliph keeping him at Cairo as a puppet for their legitimacy. In some ways al-Ashraf held the power of caliph without actually holding the title. It would be interesting to know if the Latin Christian knew about the interior politics of the Mamluk state as this would further reify the binary, I have laid out above. P.M. Holt, "Some Observations on the Abbasid Caliphate of Cairo," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 47 no. 3 (1984): 501-502.

great deal of damage.⁶⁰³ Not only does the narrative identify the mode of violence but the duration as well. The repetition of terminology (*instrumens*, *grosses pierres* and *engins* refer to large siege weapons while *perrières* refers to mortar or stones) conveys the insurmountable capability and endurance of “Saracen” firepower, as visualized in **Figure 8**. It may be argued that the language used simply reflected historical military tactics employed by the Mamluks. For example, Ashraf Khalil did bring cedar trees from Syria to make siege weapons.⁶⁰⁴ Furthermore, evidence from the *Templar of Tyre*, a firsthand account of Acre’s fall, shows that the Mamluk Sultan directed his soldiers to mine the “King’s Wall [and] the Tower of the Countess of Blois.”⁶⁰⁵

Still, the symbolic value of this illumination remains ideologically pregnant as these “Saracens” terraform the landscape, preparing it for their own occupation. Unlike **Figures 2, 6, 7 & 8**, in **Figure 9** the invaders carry no swords or bows, and are only armed with pickaxes. Their danger lies in their ability to commit topographical & structural obliteration. The chronicle provides support for this interpretation. When the “Saracens” finally take Acre, “the foul miscreants took the city and destroyed everything, the walls, the towers, and the churches until the foundations were all upside down.”⁶⁰⁶ As the Sultan threatens to invert the religious dynamic

⁶⁰³ Viard, *Les Grandes Chroniques*, vol. 8, 141-142. Adapted from “ses instruments fist apareillier entour la cité et assaillir les crestiens qui dedens estoient, du quart jour de may par dix jours, continuelment envoiant et gettant dedens la cité grosses pierres, à perrières et à engins, dont il leur firent grand dommage.” My phrasing is not a direct translation.

⁶⁰⁴ Robert Irwin, *The Middle East in the Middle Ages: The Early Mamluk Sultanate 1250-1382* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986), 77.

⁶⁰⁵ *The ‘Templar of Tyre,’* trans. Crawford, 106-107. Ashraf’s father Qalawun used a similar technique at Tripoli as well. See: 100.

⁶⁰⁶ Viard, *Les Grandes Chroniques*, vol. 8, 143. “Et ainsi les desloiaux mescréans pristrent la cité et la trébuchièrent et destruirent, avec les murs et les tours et les maisons et les églises jusques aux fondemens tout ce dessus dessous; dont ce fu très grant damage.”

of Acre, so too does his polity literally invert Outremer's political topography, challenging the French king's protection of this realm, spiritually and otherwise.⁶⁰⁷

VI. Imposterism as Masquerade

Some illuminations take the narrative of the Sultan usurping the Capetian/Valois ruler much more literally. At first glance, the version of the narrative depicted in a manuscript now in Lyons (**Figure 10**), dating from the late fourteenth century, differs little from previous "Sack of Acre" images. The "Saracen" polity once again approaches the city's walls, this time with raised spears. They are presented as an innumerable horde whose volume swells beyond the borders. While they are many, we are not able to discern them as individuals. Rather they form an amorphous body of heads, essentializing the racial Other into a single figure, the Sultan of Babylon.⁶⁰⁸ This rendering emphasizes the Sultan's importance, the political "buck" visually starts and stops with him. Furthermore, the repetition of the white horse (also found in **Figures 7 & 9**) implies that this iconography may have a greater significance. Medieval apocalyptic manuscripts frequently present Christ riding a white horse.⁶⁰⁹ Given the eschatological narratives associated with the Sultan, it is possible for him to represent an/the "anti-Christ," not unlike the

⁶⁰⁷ To be clear the Mamluks did raze the city and some of their specific actions may have intended to engender a feeling of usurpation in the previous occupants. After the sack, al-Ashraf ordered the "Gothic facade of one of Acre's churches" to be taken back with him to Cairo while also leading a train of captured Franks. The spolia and citizenry undoubtedly functioned as emblems for his conquest. While the *GCF* does not mention either of these incidents, it certainly re-inscribes the historical displacement felt by Outremer onto a Capetian/Valois narrative. I was not able to find any sources stating whether the mainland Latin Christians knew about the appropriation of the facade as it does not appear in the *Templar of Tyre*. If they did, this may have had an effect on the visual program especially if they understood the French architectural and artistic influences in Outremer. For the captives & facade taken to Cairo see: Paul Cobb, *The Race for Paradise* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 237-238.

⁶⁰⁸ This method for displaying a "raced religion" is not uncommon. For a parallel example of imagining Jews see: Richard Cole, "One of several Jews? The Jewish Massed Body in Old Norse Literature," *postmedieval: a journal of medieval cultural studies* 5, no.3 (2014) 346-358.

⁶⁰⁹ Patrick M. De Winter, "Visions of the Apocalypse in Medieval England and France," *The Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art* 70 no. 10 (1983): 397, 412.

frequent characterizations of Muhammad and Muslims in general.⁶¹⁰ While there remains a textual lacuna for this reading of the “Saracen” steed, Henry of Cossey, an English Franciscan apocalyptic commentator, provides a singular example. According to David Burr, “the white horse of Revelation 6:8 is seen as a symbol of Muslim hypocrisy, a subject Henry expatiates with gusto.”⁶¹¹ If **Figure 10** reflects the Franciscan’s interpretation, then the Sultan’s steed symbolizes all of the lies, heresy, and theological destruction of the “Saracen” imposter.

Despite some of these similarities, other elements have become less pronounced. Most noticeably, “Saracen” physical destruction has been curbed to a large extent. While the horde possesses weapons, they do not communicate the same levels of violence: no Christians have been flung, no walls demolished, and no swords of gargantuan proportions appear. I return again to the prominence of the Sultan in this scene. The lord of Babylon and his soldiers have been Othered through the *tortils* wrapped around their helmets with no other racializing qualities, possessing the same white skin color (similar to **Figure 7**) as their opponents. More curious, however, are the Sultan’s clothes: gold gloves, poleyn and belt along with a blue surcoat, colors which evoke the royal arms of France. In addition to “passing” epidermally, the Sultan has effectively stolen the French king’s clothes and now masquerades in Outremer, visually dressed as its protector! This imagined Islamic appropriation of royal French costume appears in other French manuscripts and demonstrates that such depictions are not simply an attempt to create visual parity between Christian and Islamic rulers.⁶¹² Paris BnF Arsenal MS 5070, produced in the fifteenth century, illuminates the moment in Boccaccio’s *Decameron* where the fabricated

⁶¹⁰ Akbari, “The Rhetoric of Antichrist, 298-299.

⁶¹¹ David Burr, “Antichrist and Islam in Medieval Franciscan Exegesis,” in *Medieval Christian Perceptions of Islam: A Book of Essays*, ed. John Victor Tolan (New York: Routledge, 1996), 143.

⁶¹² Debra Higgs Strickland, *Saracens, demons, & Jews: making monsters in medieval art*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 126.

“Sultan of Babylon” Beminedab sends his daughter off to be married to an Iberian Muslim prince (**Figure 11**).⁶¹³ The Sultan wears a blue robe with gold symbols which appear close to the fleur-de-lis but not the same, with their rounded circular leaves. The princess similarly wears the costume of contemporary female courtiers albeit her hennin has been reformed into a piled turban-like hat. The sartorial presentation of both the Sultan and the princess subtly gestures at the joke at the heart of the narrative. The princess’s ship is lost in a storm, precipitating her adventure back to Egypt, all whilst “sleeping with eight men belike ten thousand times,” only to be given to her Muslim fiancé as if she remained a virgin.⁶¹⁴ When considering the text, the visual parity between Islamic royalty with their Latin Christian counterparts is revealed to be a farce. While they might appear culturally analogous to the Europeans, the Muslim princess does not behave like a good Christian one while the Sultan is blind to her actions, actions made clear to both the European Latin Christian characters who sleep with her as well as the reader of the manuscript.

A more obvious example of “replacement” by virtue of sartorial similarity may be found in the *GCF* manuscript in Paris, BnF fr. 2604, that contains a scene depicting the Sultan of Babylon meeting his royal lieutenants Marsile and Baligant as he sends them into Spain to challenge Charlemagne (**Figure 12**). The Sultan’s shield and that of one of the princes have been emblazoned with birds. This choice may be a reference to a Latin Christian narrative dating back to the twelfth century, whereby the Prophet trains a dove to come to his ear, giving the illusion that he is receiving his revelation from the Holy Spirit. The narrative of Muhammad as a pseudo-sorcerer and charlatan once again trades in Latin Christian accusations of Islam performing a

⁶¹³ Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Decameron*, trans. Guido Waldman (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 112-113.

⁶¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 132.

false legitimacy and appropriating Christian symbols.⁶¹⁵ By including the dove symbol in this moment of Islamic bannering, the program represents the Sultan and his subordinate continuing this religious masquerade, an implication made more poignant by the other shield in the scene. Concurrent with the confessional implications of the doves, we also find the other Islamic prince carrying a shield emblazoned with the fleur-de-lis, the sigil of the King of France. The entire composition imagines various Islamic rulers presenting themselves as both spiritual and temporal replacements to French Latin Christian authority. Interestingly enough for a *GCF* manuscript, this fleur-de-lis carried by the Muslim prince is one of only two clearly discernible fleur-de-lis that I have been able to identify in the entire manuscript. Perhaps even more significant, the other fleur-de-lis appears on the robe of the French king Philip IV as he receives homage from Edward I of England (**Figure 13**). The Sack of Acre, while not depicted in a narrative illumination, occurs just after this scene of homage. While the two fleurs-de-lis are separated by 212 folios, the fact that there are only two in the entire manuscript warrants further consideration. Perhaps we can see these respective symbols as metaphorical bookends—the first appearing at the inception of “crusade” narrative with Muslim rulers challenging Carolingian (French) authority and the second being a reinscription of the inheritors of that authority over the “Holy Land” just before the Sack of Acre narrative, in addition to the more transparent articulation of Valois legitimacy against English challenges in the throes of the Hundred Years War.

Returning to (**Figure 10**), as the “Defender of Christendom” would preserve the “Holy Land,” so too does this replacer promise its dismantlement. Victoria Turner offers a potential

⁶¹⁵ Svetlana Luchitskaja, “The image of Muhammad in Latin chronography of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries,” *Journal of Medieval History* 26, no. 2 (2000): 115-126. See also Thomae Tusci, *Gesta imperatorum et pontificum, Monumenta Germaniae Historica: Series Scriptorum*, vol. 23, ed. George Heinrich Pertz (Germany: Hiersemann, 1872), 493.

counterpoint to this interpretation. Through a case study of the *chansons de geste* they suggest that “disguise” instead of functioning as “an arena for depicting anxieties surrounding the identification of Islam with Antichrist [imposter] is actually an opportunity to assimilate the Saracen.”⁶¹⁶ However, context is everything. Whereas in Turner’s example the “Saracen” king Ganor manages to integrate into Latin Christian society, the Sultan at Acre cannot. He becomes ontologically locked into that ever-present rubric which accompanies him--“how the Sultan of Babylon destroyed Acre.” There is no possibility for assimilation because he himself has obliterated the possibility. Instead, by committing iconographic mimicry, the visual program accuses the Sultan of seeking to claim and pervert the French king’s special role.

The “imitating Saracen” appears again in **Figure 14**. Compositionally, the illumination reflects the formal qualities of **Figure 10**, the same forest of “Saracens” with their field of spears, coming to crash against the battlements. As in **Figure 7**, the “Saracens” dress in European Latin Christian armor, wearing no *tortils* or other markers of alterity. However, subtle differences articulate a distinct visualization of replacement. The illuminator depicts the Latin Christians with a peculiarly pink skin tone. Meanwhile, the “Saracens” remain masked, their helmets closed, all except for Sultan, again at the front. **Figure 15** provides a detail of this scene showing the foremost defender and the “Saracen” prince gazing at each other with pointed spears emphasizing this sightline. The illuminator has intentionally opened the Sultan’s helmet, allowing the viewer to contemplate the epidermal differences, with the “Saracen” leader’s skin possibly containing a tint of blueish grey.⁶¹⁷ The various shades of grey used to depict these

⁶¹⁶ Victoria Turner, “The Anti-Christ(ian): Comparing Christian and Saracen Disguise in Old French Chansons de Geste,” *French Studies Bulletin* 31 no. 117 (2010): 87. The inclusion of “imposter” here is my own. While Turner does not use the word in this sentence they push against the notion of the disguised Saracen as an imposter. See: 84-85.

⁶¹⁷ The color blue is a somewhat common descriptor for Saracens. See: Kathleen Ann Kelly, “Blue’ Indians, Ethiopians, and Saracens in Middle English narrative texts,” *Parergon* 1 no.11 (1993): 49-51.

figures, save for a few gold highlights and skin tone, only make more pronounced the curious contrast. Even accounting for damage, something uncanny emanates from the comparison. The Sultan appears “almost the same but not quite,” evoking Homi Bhabha’s articulation of mimicry.⁶¹⁸ While the image does not carry the larger implications of anti-colonizer “mockery” that Bhabha attaches, the definition usefully describes this illumination.⁶¹⁹ Instead, imagined “Saracen” mimicry here reflects Latin Christian anxiety, accusation and even relief. The invaders almost “pass,” only circumvented at the last moment by the Sultan’s alterity, revealing the “Saracens” collective imposterism and subsequently reassuring the viewer that Islamic polities cannot permanently *replace*. In other words, “Saracenic” otherness always comes out, their illegitimacy always laid bare. Cord Whitaker has noted that in *The King of Tars* the Sultan of Damas, despite his transfiguration from black to white followed by his baptism, continues to display “Saracen” barbarity in his crusading efforts.⁶²⁰ The character remains “Saracen” on the most fundamental level. Even though the Sultan of Babylon neither metamorphosizes nor converts, the iconography here renders a parallel narrative. The open helmet provides a window into the Sultan’s soul; his Christian costume could not obfuscate his “Saraceness.” The Sultans of both the fantastical and historical texts are unable to hide their internal, indelible characteristics behind different facades of racial similarity.

As if in response to the Sultan’s unveiled mimicry, the imagery powerfully reasserts colonial certitude. From the top of the walls, a Christian knight’s sword strikes through his border and stabs into the first word of the rubric above.⁶²¹ The red letters read “histoire comment

⁶¹⁸ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 122.

⁶¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 123, 165-172.

⁶²⁰ Whitaker, “Black Metaphors in the King of Tars,” 189.

⁶²¹ In her discussion of medieval memory Mary Carruthers discusses the notion of “forgetting” through text of image. The sword serves as a way to metaphorically wipe away the event from the embodiment of royal memory.

Acre fu prise” or “history of how Acre was seized.” The defender seems to seek to scratch out the geo-political reality of the “Holy Land’s” new occupiers from the French royal chronicles. Perhaps the blade has been rendered this way because, in the minds of the Latin Christian illuminator, this “history” will not endure, and “Saracenic” replacement will not last.

The implications of the Christian sword scratching out the perseverance of Islamic control of the “Holy Land” is not an outlier. Indeed, the image corresponds with iconography that appears in other manuscript traditions remembering the Sack of Acre. Marin Sanudo’s *Liber Secretorum Fidelium Crucis* while not depicting the Sack itself does provide an illumination depicting God’s vengeance against the Muslims. British Library 27376 f. 131r, Vatican Lat. 2972 f. 90r, Vat. Lat. 2971, and Vatican Reg. Cristae 548 f. 112 all represent compositionally similar scenes illuminated in a historiated initial of a disembodied arm wielding a sword above a group of corpses or at times grislier, a series of decapitated heads. The specificities of the bodies range from indistinguishable from Latin Christians to more ethnicized ones such as that found in Koninklijke Bibliotheek van België MS. 9347-48 of brown faces, black beards and turbans (**Figure 16**). Still, epidermal differences are not quite as important as the messaging of the scene gleaned from the text. The narrative following the historiated initial begins by invoking Deuteronomy and the vengeance that is God’s prerogative to take against the unjust. The text goes on to state that in the aftermath of Acre’s sack, God took his vengeance on the Sultanate of Egypt. Naming al-Ashraf Malik Khalil as “Seraph, that prosecutor of thee Christian name” the text relates that following the Sultan’s declaration of wanting to conquer Cyprus, he is

See: Mary Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric, and the Making of Images, 400-1200* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 54.

assassinated by his emirs.⁶²² Furthermore, each of his successors recorded in Sanudo's propaganda (listed as Bedeyre, Gothbega, & Leschin) are also assassinated, each by the other, relatively corresponding to the historical deaths of Baybars al-Jashankir, Kitbugha & Lajin.⁶²³ Returning to **Figure 16** itself, the image does not depict God slaying the bodies of any Muslims but the heads of the Mamluk Sultan who sacked Acre and his successors. The text-image interaction rationalizes Mamluk political instability, a polity characterized by rampant assassinations especially in the aftermath of al-Ashraf Malik Khalil, as divine retribution for daring to assault the Kingdom of Jerusalem.⁶²⁴ Comparing the *Grandes Chroniques* illumination (**Figure 14**) and the *Liber Secretorum* illumination (**Figure 16**) we can observe a pattern emerging which insists on a broader Latin Christian certitude, an impulse to correct the reality of their usurped authority which is commemorated either meta-textually (with the sword scratching out "history" in the former) or metaphysically (with God scratching out the Islamic royal line).

If the sword symbolizes God's actions in the latter, then whose actions does the soldier's sword symbolize in the former? Who would reestablish Christianity in Outremer? Within the folios of this Valois manuscript illuminating a Capetian history, the answer can only be the French King, the "Prince of Christendom." The prophecy found in the *Romance of Merlin* has

⁶²² Marino Sanudo Torsello, *The Book of the Secrets of the Faithful of the Cross Liber Secretorum Fidelium Crucis*, ed. Peter Locke (London: Routledge, 2016), 371.

⁶²³ Here it is important to note that Sanudo's text does not directly connect to the historical reality. While Sanudo later makes mention of al-Nasir Muhammad as another successor of his brother al-Ashraf, he does not mention al-Nasir's first or second reigns which followed his brother. Additionally, the order of Mamluk Sultans has been misunderstood. Following the overthrow of al-Nasir's first reign was Kitubagha (Gothbega) and then Lajin (Leschin), followed by the second reign of al-Nasir and then Baybars II (Bedeyre) and ultimately culminating in the al-Nasir's third reign. See Sanudo Torsello, *The Book of Secrets*, 371. See also: Nasser O. Rabbat, *The Citadel of Cairo: A New Interpretation of Royal Mamluk Architecture* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 182-187.

⁶²⁴ Daniel Beaumont, "Political Violence and Ideology in Mamluk Society," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 8 (2004): 201-225.

been metaphorically grafted onto the illumination, promising a future leader whose sword will reestablish the certitude of French colonial rule.

Neither the visual narrative of racial mimicry nor that of French reconquest should be all that surprising given the provenance of the manuscript. Its original owner was John of Montaigu, the chamberlain to Charles VI.⁶²⁵ In 1388 Charles VI ordered a crusade against the Tunisian Hafsids, the same polity Louis IX had faced in the Eighth Crusade of 1270.⁶²⁶ The military reality of Charles's reign may have been reflected in the manuscript produced for his courtiers. While the Barbary Crusade did not land in the Levant (rather Tunisia), the expedition remained an opportunity for the crown to "defend" "Christendom" from Islamic corsairs.⁶²⁷ Perhaps the repeated inclusion of Acre's Fall across several manuscripts affiliated with Charles suggests the French king's desire to frame his own crusade as retribution against the "Saracenic" replacer. In fact, **Figures 1, 9, 10, & 14** all come from manuscripts associated with Charles VI's reign. The Sloane manuscript that ends with the coronation of Charles VI and includes the space for the Sack of Acre scene but is filled with text also comes from this time period. That would mean at least four out of the seven total instances that Hedeman catalogues are from the reign of a single king.⁶²⁸ This certainly implies that the "Sack of Acre" was a significant illumination for Charles VI's court, especially because of the small number of manuscripts which contain the scene. Given the date of the Barbary crusade (1388) and the dates of these manuscripts, the agenda of the former may have influenced the latter. Indeed, narrowing down the chronology adds further credence to this assertion. While the manuscript of **Figure 9** dates from the 1370s, the

⁶²⁵ Hedeman, *The Royal Image*, 144.

⁶²⁶ Peter Locke, *The Routledge Companion to the Crusades*, 198-201. See also: Michael Lower, *The Tunis Crusade of 1270: a Mediterranean History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 43-55.

⁶²⁷ Locke, *Companion to the Crusades*, 199.

⁶²⁸ For the provenance of these images see: Hedeman, *The Royal Image*, 140.

manuscript of **Figure 1** was produced in 1390 and visually associates Charles VI with Louis IX, tying together the patron and his saintly crusader predecessor.⁶²⁹ Hedeman has observed that **Figure 10 & 14** were probably both courtly copies based on the manuscript in which **Figure 1** appears.⁶³⁰ Because **Figure 14** appears in the manuscript of the King's chamberlain, and was copied from the King who compares himself with the French paragon of crusading, the "Holy Land" scenes would certainly hold special meaning. To this extent, the sword which blots out "history" in **Figure 14** may be metaphorically referring to Charles VI, beginning to reestablish French authority against "Saracen" owned polities.

VII. Mutual Replacement: The Mamluk Perspective

Despite different illuminations, "Sack of Acre" scenes carry the enduring motif of *replacement* whether explicit or otherwise. The fateful 1291 conquest might have weighed heavily on the minds of the Latin Christians, but it also served as an important part of the royal French narrative over time. The commemoration of this significant fall in *Les Grandes Chroniques de France* promulgated the imagination of eventual reconquest. Still, viewing these scenes as only a premodern Orientalist fantasy of perceived takeover would be a mistake. Racing-as-replacement cuts both ways. Taking direction from Heng's encouragement to understand power systems outside Europe and not simply "blame the West and not the rest," we should at least momentarily consider Mamluk perspectives.⁶³¹ Indeed, the Mamluks themselves were not native to the Levant, having largely come from the Eurasian Steppes and the

⁶²⁹ Ibid., 142.

⁶³⁰ Ibid., 145.

⁶³¹ Heng, *The Invention of Race*, 12.

Caucuses.⁶³² One Islamic commentator even noted the ethnic distinction after al-Ashraf's victory, stating "praise be to God, the nation of the Cross has fallen, through the Turks the religion of the chosen Arab has triumphed!"⁶³³ Not unlike the French, the Mamluk call for *jihad* against Acre articulated their own colonial certitude in claiming the land.⁶³⁴ Furthermore, during his short reign, the epithets of Sultan al-Ashraf came to include "tamer of the worshippers of crosses, ruler of the armies of the Franks [and] destroyer of Acre and the coastal regions."⁶³⁵ In an ironic twist, the Mamluks evidently viewed themselves as justifiable conquerors, removing the Latin Christian "replacer." Indeed, these Islamic narratives are not simply communicated through royal articulations that edify Sultanic accomplishments but in artistic performances that far precede the French imaginations of their colonial certitude of the Levant. When al-Ashraf Malik Khalil conquered Acre, a Gothic portal from one of the city's churches was brought back to Cairo (**Figure 17**).⁶³⁶ While the Sultan did not live long enough to install the doorway into any of his constructions, the performance of Christian iconography brought back to the Islamic capital, and moved alongside (or perhaps even moved by) the captured Christians of the city itself, functions as a powerful metaphor for colonial certitude.⁶³⁷ By engaging in the action of

⁶³² Niall Christie, *Muslims and Crusaders: Christianity's Wars in the Middle East, 1095-1382, From the Islamic Sources* (London, Routledge, 2014), 103-104

⁶³³ Cobb, *Race for Paradise*, 239.

⁶³⁴ Carole Hillenbrand, *The Crusades: Islamic Perspective* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 238.

⁶³⁵ *Ibid.*, 231.

⁶³⁶ There is some dispute as to which church in Acre the portal was taken. For a variety of perspectives alongside the vast interest and historiography of this portal see: Vardit Shotten-Hallel, "Reconstructing the Hospitaller Church of St. John, Acre, with the Help of Gravier d'Ortières's Drawing of 1685–1687," *Crusades* 9, no. 1 (2010): 185-198. Philippe Plagnieux, "Le portail d'Acre transporté au Caire: sources et diffusion des modèles rayonnants en Terre sainte au milieu du XIIIe siècle," *Bulletin monumental* 164, no. 1 (2006): 61-66. Philipp Speiser, "The Sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad Madrasah in Cairo: Restoration and Archaeological Investigation," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 12 (2008): 197-221. For other discussions of the Gothic portal see: Catherine Harding, and Nancy Micklewright, "Mamluks and Venetians: An Intercultural Perspective on Fourteenth-Century Material Culture in the Mediterranean," *RACAR: revue d'art canadienne/Canadian Art Review* 24, no. 2 (1997): 48. Doris Behrens-Abouseif, *Islamic Architecture in Cairo: An Introduction* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 100-101. Lobna Abdel Azim Sherif "Layers of meaning: An interpretive analysis of three early Mamluk buildings" PhD diss. (University of Michigan, 1988).

⁶³⁷ Julien Loiseau, "Frankish Captives in Mamlūk Cairo," *Al-Masaq* 23, no. 1 (2011): 37-52.

spoliation, the Mamluk polity consumes its geopolitical opponent, quite literally re-placing the inhabitants and contents of the city to a new location, thereby establishing its new authority stretching from the Levant to Egypt. The implications of the Mamluk deployment of this portal had a broader implication beyond the immediate aftermath of Acre's fall. The doorway was eventually installed into the madrasa commissioned by one of al-Ashraf Malik Khalil's short-lived successors al-Adil Kitbugha. When an-Nasir Muhammad, Khalil's younger brother returned for his third reign, he completed and repossessed the madrasa for his family's use.⁶³⁸ The inscription invokes the Sultan's *laqab* as "Victor of the World and of Religion" as well as the son of his father Qalawun as-Salihi.⁶³⁹ Textually, the invocation completes a circuit connecting Nasir Muhammad to a broader lineage of highly effective *mujahideen*. The text hangs over a portal brought back by his brother from the Acre, a siege began by his father Qalawun who was himself previously part of the cadre of Mamluk warriors owned by a different famous mujahid Sultan as-Salih who fought against a previous generation of Crusaders led by St. Louis (thereby explaining the "Salihi" *nisba* adjective used to describe Qalawun in the inscription). Like the black-white ablaq stone masonry, a distinctive feature of Mamluk architecture which now decorates the edges of the aperture and connects the "Islamic" and "Crusader" aspects of the portal so that the dark and light stones sit *above* and *below* the Gothic arch, thereby surrounding it, the text commemorates a generational struggle which culminates in the supersession of Islamic authority. As Erik Gustafson rightly notes that this inscription "replaces a presumed

⁶³⁸ Erik Gustafson "A Crusader Portal on a Cairene Madrasa," in *Palimpsests: Buildings, Sites, Time*, ed. Nadja Aksamija, Clark Maines and Phillip Wagoner (Turnhout: Brepols, 2017), 61-64.

⁶³⁹ "بسملة أمر بإنشاء هذه القبة الشريفة و المدرسة المباركة السلطان الأجل الملك الناصر ناصر الدنيا والدين محمد بن السلطان الملك المنص سيف" Étienne Combe, Jean Sauvaget, and Gaston Wiet, *Répertoire chronologique d'épigraphie arabe*, vol. 13 (Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1944), 183.

Crusader lintel necessary to support the tympanum structurally.”⁶⁴⁰ In other words the seat on which this appropriated architectural feature sits is supported by the Mamluk state, a powerful metaphor for the incorporation of a fallen enemy into the fabric of expanded territorial control.

Parallel narratives of propaganda run on oppositional sides, continuing to nuance understandings of crusade colonization. Beyond the mutual uses of replacement in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the visual implications of Sack of Acre scenes do not terminate with the medieval past and have an afterlife in the medievalisms of contemporary racist discourse. During the last decade the UK, France, Italy and the United States have all experienced a xenophobic panic tethered to the notion that the presence of Muslims in these nations would translate to Islamic religious law, culture, and populations overruling the normative customs. In a speech made on the United States House Floor in May 2024, Representative Chip Roy of Texas stated “I have some serious concerns about Sharia law [...] and whether that will be forced on the American people.”⁶⁴¹ Elsewhere in his speech Roy drew an analogy to language frequently used by right-wing UK groups about the overrunning of the country by Muslims.⁶⁴² Italy has aggressively attempted to control sacred topography by using zoning laws to limit and restrict the construction of mosques.⁶⁴³ Of course Renard Camus’ *Le Grand Remplacement*, a now popular neologism used more broadly, is a far right touchstone which focused specifically on the

⁶⁴⁰ Gustafson “A Crusader Portal on a Cairene Madrasa,” 72.

⁶⁴¹ Tara Suter, “Chip Roy raises ‘strong concerns’ Sharia law will be ‘forced upon the American people’” *The Hill*, 05/08/24, accessed 3/13/2025, <https://thehill.com/homenews/house/4651114-chip-roy-sharia-law-will-soon-be-forced-upon-the-american-people/>.

⁶⁴² Ibid.

⁶⁴³ See: “No place to pray for Muslim workers in Italian city,” *Arab News*, 05/06/2024 (accessed 3/13/2025), <https://www.arabnews.com/node/2505401/world>. See also: “Italian town in turmoil after far-right mayor bans Muslim prayers,” *The Guardian*, February 18th, 2024, Accessed 11/10/2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/feb/18/italian-town-monfalcone-rightwing-mayor-muslim-prayers-ban>

replacement of French culture by an Islamic one.⁶⁴⁴ Nor can we simply say “white European bad” as Hindu nationalists have taken these narratives for their own as they attempt to “cleanse” India of its Islamic past and present.⁶⁴⁵ Over seven hundred years after these illuminations, a new crusade begins, seeking to undo an imagined usurpation from an enemy who are similarly feared to subvert, undo, or replace “European” (or otherwise) dominions.

⁶⁴⁴ Renaud Camus, *Le Grand Remplacement* (Paris: Reinhard, 2011).

⁶⁴⁵ Sagnik Dutta and Tahir Abbas, “Protecting the people: populism and masculine security in India and Hungary,” *Journal of Political Ideologies* (2024): 1-23.

Conclusion

Evidently, the “Sultan of Babylon” troubled the elite European Latin Christian psyche. Like some pre-modern Islamic supervillain, he possesses a series of awesome powers and abilities. In Chapter 1, focusing on the more fantastical versions of the Sultan as found in epic poetry, romance and hagiography, I demonstrated how he ruled over a particular but nebulous land of an indefinable people who truly cannot be converted sufficiently. Chapter 2 addresses his control of the Nile and his ability to manipulate it, while also serving as the site on which he engages in other “perverse” behaviors from wielding the cross to riding a leopard into battle. Chapter 3 focuses on the historical memory of an event, and the visual response it produced which framed the Sultan as stealing the authority and position of the Princes of “Christendom.” Underpinning this entire project is a crypto-visual lens which allows us to encounter and understand the Sultan’s various racialized incarnations instead of zeroing in on the versions which seem the most familiar with our contemporary moment. Still, not unlike modern depictions of all-powerful Orientalized caricatures in medieval-inspired fantasy narratives, the Sultan has “many names and many forms.”⁶⁴⁶ And while modern racialization functions very differently, at least in this way, the Sultan embodies the slippage of racialization of today—where a variety of accusations and attributions may be cast on a group simultaneously.

While I have addressed many of the forms of the Sultan of Babylon, I have left out some important examples which require further investigation in the future. Even though I briefly talk about the Mamluk Sultan Baybars, his memorialization in Europe deserves a deeper

⁶⁴⁶ In some ways the “Sultan of Babylon” functions similar to but participates in a different lineage from the “Snake Sorcerer” trope in medievalism-inspired sword and sorcery. See Tirumular (Drew) Narayanan, “‘The Sorcerer Has Many Names, Many Forms’: Finding Identity & ‘Crypto-Visuality’ through Thulsa Doom,” *Different Visions: New Perspectives on Medieval Art* 11 (2025) <https://doi.org/10.61302/JJJI2461>.

investigation. The villainy that he represents in medieval European Latin Christian manuscripts is akin to the heroism that Saladin so often receives. To some extent the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century anxieties about the Sultan were informed by the devastation that he wrought against the crusaders of his own time. Other “Sultans of Babylon” may be found across the Atlantic Sea. In his article about reenactments of the crusade, Alan Murray discusses plays produced in the Spanish colonies in which the roles of the Sultan of Babylon and his “Saracens” are played by indigenous populations. Such theatrical performances create new racializing dynamics bringing together crusader polemics to reinforce the “New World” colonizing technology.⁶⁴⁷ Productions such as the *Conquest of Jerusalem* in 16th century Tlaxcala offer even more complicated modulations of the Sultan of Babylon, naming him Hernan Cortes.⁶⁴⁸

Finally, there remains one last form I have left ancillary to my discussion of the “Sultan of Babylon.” Throughout this project, a specter, the Sultan of the Turks, has hung in the background. He appears in order to explain the reasons for the Latin Christian anxieties when illuminating the “Sultan of Babylon” during a period where the Mamluk Sultan did not function as a military threat. At times he functions as a sign that buttresses the epistemological certainty that Latin Christianity would not fall to Islam. With the rise of the Ottomans in the mid-fifteenth and early sixteenth century, the threat that the Sultan once posed changed in response to the realpolitik. European Latin Christian interests shifted from Egypt to Turkey, with the 1453 Sack of Constantinople. In her recent work on sixteenth and seventeenth century constructions of Blackness, Nomie Ndiaye offers the racial matrix as a critical framework, where racializing

⁶⁴⁷ Alan V. Murray, “From Jerusalem to Mexico: Unity and Diversity in Crusading, Eleventh to Sixteenth Centuries,” in *Legacies of the Crusades: Proceedings of the Ninth Conference of the Society for the Study of the Crusades and the Latin East, Odense, 27 June–1 July 2016, Volume 1* (Brepols, 2016), 21-44.

⁶⁴⁸ Nicole T. Hughes, “The Sultan Hernán Cortés: The Double Staging of The Conquest of Jerusalem,” *Representations* 152, no. 1 (2020): 55-84.

narratives often require a “rebooting.”⁶⁴⁹ Similarly, the Sultan of Babylon is “updated” to become “Il Gran Turco” (the Grand Turk), the Ottoman Sultan. On one hand, many parallels may be drawn between these two figures, with the anxieties about the former informing the latter. Yet, on the other hand, such changes do not simply imply lateral movements as the change in their identifying titles also demonstrates a shift from “office polity” to “princely racialized ethnicity.” These types of distinctions borne out textually and visually allow us to consider the nuances around the conceptualization of racialization between these periods. Indeed, the increased use of portraiture and print to give breath to a contemporaneous racialized enemy, rather than viewing the Islamic Other(ed) through a portal into the past serves as a key method to understand this shift.⁶⁵⁰

In the end of course, the “Grand Turk” disappears as well. In the aftermath of World War I the Ottoman Empire collapsed, and with it the Sultan. No new prince rises out of Islam as a new villain for the Western perspective as Global hegemonic power had shifted. While other racializing and Islamophobic narratives persisted following World War II, such as greedy oil-sheiks or fanatical Islamists, their characterizations should not be viewed as occupying the same

⁶⁴⁹ Noémie Ndiaye, *Scripts of Blackness: Early Modern Performance Culture and the Making of Race* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2022), 8.

⁶⁵⁰ For some of the scholarship regarding the depiction of the “Grand Turk” see: Gülru Necipoğlu, “Visual cosmopolitanism and creative translation: Artistic conversations with Renaissance Italy in Mehmed II’s Constantinople,” *Muqarnas Online* 29, no. 1 (2012): 1-81. Laura Stagno, “Turks in Genoese Art, 16th–18th Centuries: Roles and Images: A First Approach,” in *Jews and Muslims Made Visible in Christian Iberia and Beyond, 14th to 18th Centuries*, ed. Ed. Borja Franco Llopis and Antonio Urquizar-Herrera, (Brill, 2019), 296-330. Kate Fleet, “Italian perceptions of the Turks in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries,” *Journal of Mediterranean Studies* 5, no. 2 (1995): 159-172. Bronwen Wilson. “Reflecting on the Turk in late sixteenth-century Venetian portrait books,” *Word & image* 19, no. 1-2 (2003): 38-58. Peter Burke, “Translating the Turks.” in *Why concepts matter: Translating social and political thought*, ed. Martin J. Burke & Melvin Richter (Brill, 2012) 141-152. Nancy Bisaha, “‘New Barbarian’ or Worthy Adversary? Humanist Constructs of the Ottoman Turks in Fifteenth-Century Italy,” in *Western Views of Islam in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Perception of Other*, ed. David R. Blanks & Michael Frassetto, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan 1999), 185-205. Mustafa Soykut, *Historical Image of the Turk in Europe, 15th Century to the Present: Political and Civilisational Aspects* (Piscataway, NJ, USA: Gorgias Press, 2010). Laura Stagno and Borja Franco Llopis, “A Brief Review of the Scholarly Literature on Representation of the “Turk” and Images of Lepanto in Italy and Iberia.” in *Lepanto and Beyond: Images of Religious Alterity from Genoa and the Christian Mediterranean* ed. Laura Stagno & Borja Franco Llopis (Leuven University Press, 2021): 17-66.

role that the Sultan had previously filled.⁶⁵¹ Though those types participate in the medieval European Latin Christian intellectual lineage which polemicized an avaricious Prophet Muhammad or the Old Man of the Mountain, they do not represent the same bastion of geographic authority and military power that the Sultan once represented. Perhaps as a result of this geopolitical disappearance, the “Sultan” was diminished in the Western imaginary. Examples can be found in films such as *The Thief of Baghdad* (1940) or Disney’s *Aladdin* (1992) where the Sultan character is reduced to a figure of infantilization and ridicule.⁶⁵² Indeed, much like Babylon, the land of cartoon Agrabah also embodies a vague location, filled with a heterogenous population all within Islamdom. Yet gone now is the powerful Islamic prince who could decimate foreign enemies, replaced with an avuncularly impotent figurehead who can barely keep his own kingdom under his control. Unlike the medieval Sultan, the (post)modern ones are limited to their own geographies. In other words, he no longer interacts with the European world because whatever challenges he faces remain internal. Once defeated, the Sultan sits on a shelf within a glass bottle, complete with all his trappings but no longer a threat.

This dissertation sought to demonstrate that of the many Muslim characters racialized in Latin Christian narratives, the Sultan of Babylon is arguably of the most important, second only

⁶⁵¹ Two examples immediately come to mind for these respective caricatures. First the oil-obsessed Bab el-Ehr from Herge’s *Tintin*. Second Salim Abu Aziz the villainous leader of the Islamist organization of “Crimson Jihad” in the film *True Lies* (1994). For a discussion of these tropes see: Jack G Shaheen, “Reel bad Arabs: How Hollywood vilifies a people,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 588, no. 1 (2003): 171-193. Nilanjana Chatterjee and Anindita Chatterjee. “Arab World in Hergé’s *The Adventures of Tintin*: Making Visible the Idea of Terra Nullius.” *Contemporary Review of the Middle East* 11, no. 1 (2024): 9-22.

⁶⁵² For some scholarly examinations of these characters see: Lee Artz, “The righteousness of self-centered royals: The world according to Disney animation,” *Critical Arts: A Journal of South-North Cultural and Media Studies* 18, no. 1 (2004): 127-130. Erin Addison. “Saving other women from other men: Disney’s *Aladdin*.” *Camera Obscura: Feminism, Culture, and Media Studies* 11, no. 1 (1993): 13. Abderrahmene Bourenane, “Authenticity and discourses in *Aladdin* (1992),” *Journal of Arab & Muslim Media Research* 13, no. 2 (2020): 235-250. Gábor Gergely, “The Nature of the Exile: Discourse and Power in *The Thief of Bagdad*,” *Journal of British Cinema and Television* 9, no. 2 (2012): 159-176. Johnathan Ganim, “Framing the West and Staging the East” in *Hollywood in the Holy Land*, ed. Nicholas Haydock and E.L. Ridsen (Jefferson NC: McFarland & Company Inc., 2009): 31-46.

perhaps to the Prophet Muhammad. While previous scholarship has placed a great deal of emphasis on the treatment of Muslims writ large, focusing on a single figure has allowed me to address the ways that the political leader embodied the fears and anxieties that European elites held regarding Islam. Indeed, the “Saracens” cannot challenge Christian authority without a force, a leader, a prince, to command them. Focusing on a singular character gave me the added benefit of limiting my primary sources. While there are many depictions of Muslims in medieval European art, fewer exist of the Sultan. Thus, the extant material cordoned my scope and perhaps required a different lens of interpretation. At the start of this project, I received a question from my committee asking whether the object of study explained my methodology or whether the object of study was being interpreted through my methodology. At this point of conclusion, my answer to the question favors the latter. Still, it should be noted that this project has entirely employed manuscripts as the primary objects of study. Thus, perhaps “crypto-visibility” may be a useful way for explaining this type of material in the medieval past, though further work is required to make this assessment and must consult other types of visual media (sculpture, public painting). Finally, I hope that this methodology will simply inspire different modes of visualizing racialization but also give language to describe some of the excellent art historical work on this topic in recent years.

Figures

Introduction/Chapter 1 Figures



Figure 1: Plantagenet Prince battles the “Sultan of Babylon.” Luttrell Psalter. British Library Additional MS 42130 fol. 82r. England, 14th century.



Figure 2: Laban battles Charlemagne. From *Fierabras*. British Library Egerton 3028 fol. 116r. England, 14th century.



Figure 3: Pope Eleutherius. From *Roman De Brut*. British Library Egerton 3028 fol. 4. England, 14th century.



Figure 4: The pope receives council, *La Destruction de Rome*, MS. Hannover, Niedersächsische Landesbibliothek, IV-578, fol. 8v, late 13th century, England.



Figure 5: Balan (Laban) refuses baptism, *Fierabras*, MS. Hannover, Niedersächsische Landesbibliothek, IV-578, fol. 96v, early 14th century, England.



Figure 6: Coronation of Guy de Bourgoigne, *Fierabras*, MS. Hannover, Niedersächsische Landesbibliothek, IV-578, fol. 97v, early 14th century, England.



Figure 7: Hereford Map (detail) depicting Greater/ Lesser Babylonia and Red Sea. Hereford Cathedral, England, circa. 1300 C.E.



Figure 8: Laban prays before his gods. From *La Destruction de Rome*. British Library Egerton 3028 fol. 64v. England, 14th century.



Figure 9: Detail of roundel depicting beard Jews in pointed hats, from *Moralized Bible*. Ca. 1227-1234, France. The Morgan Library & Museum; MS M. 240 fol. 1v.



Figure 10: Charlemagne praying and visited by an angel. From *Fierabras*. British Library Egerton 3028 fol. 89r. England, 14th century.

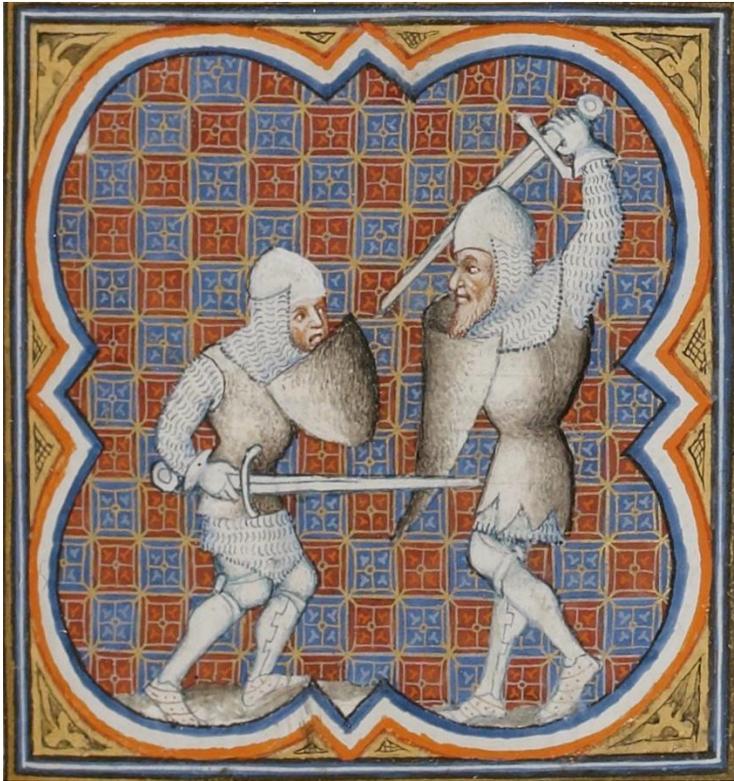


Figure 11: Combat of Roland and the giant Ferragut. Illuminated miniature from *Grandes Chroniques de France*, c1375-1380 (BnF Français 2813, fol. 118r).



Figure 12: Baptism of Laban (Sultan of Babylon). From *Fierabras*. Egerton MS 3028 fol. 117r. Anglo-Norman, 14th century.



Figure 13: Baptism of Ethelbert. From Egerton MS 3028 fol. 55r Anglo-Norman, 14th century.



Figure 14: Drunkenness of Noah, Palazzo Ducale, Venice, 1342–48.



Figure 15: Christ in the Wine Press, - BL Add MS 35166 fol. 24r, England, 13th century.



Figure 16: (Left): Fierabras, (Right): Charlemagne. From Egerton MS 3028 fol. 63v & fol. 83v Anglo-Norman, 14th century.



Figure 17: From Egerton MS 3028 fol. 118r Anglo-Norman, 14th century.



Figure 18: Armes of Esclabor le Mesconneu, France, Paris. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des manuscrits, Français 1437 fol. 71v.



Figure 19: Esclabor le Mesconneu tuant le lion (Paris, BnF, Français 356 fol. 1).



Figure 20: Esclabor kills the lion, presentation of the manuscript to Louis of Bruges (France, Paris. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des manuscrits, Français 359 fol. 1).



Figure 21: Armes de Ryons (France, Paris. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des manuscrits, Français 1437 fol. 22v.



Figure 22: Esclabor commits suicide. From *Post-Vulgate* Manuscript. BnF 112 (3) fol. 150r, 15th century, France.



Figure 23: Devil seduces a woman. From *Post-Vulgate* Manuscript. BnF 112 (3) fol. 151r, 15th century, France.



Figure 24: Armes of Esclabor, France, Paris. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des manuscrits, Français 1436 fol. 68.



Figure 25: Frederick meets Meledin: *Nuova Cronica*-MS. Chigiano L VIII 296-Biblioteca Vaticana, fol. 75.



Figure 26: Francis meets the Sultan, In *Legenda maior*. Museo dei Cappuccini, Rome MS 1266 fol. 54r. Italy, 15th century.



Figure 29: Sultan offers Francis Gold., In *Legenda maior*. Museo dei Cappuccini, Rome MS 1266 fol. 56r. Italy, 15th century.

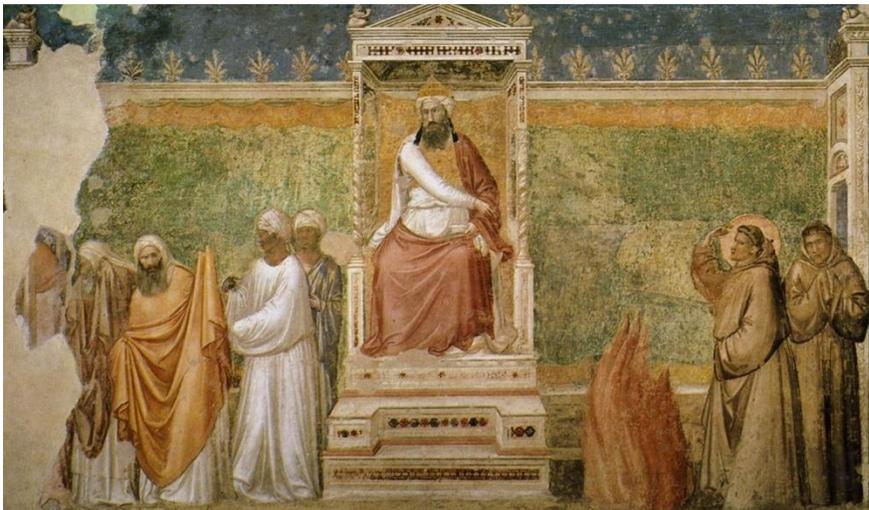


Figure 30: Giotto, St. Francis before the Sultan (Trial by fire), scene from the Stories of St. Francis, Basilica of Santa Croce, Bardi Chapel, 1317–25.



Figure 31: (Detail) Francis preaching with lambs in front of Sultan. Museo dei Cappuccini, Rome MS 1266 fol. 55r. Italy, 15th century.



Figure 32: Trial by Fire. In *Legenda maior*. Museo dei Cappuccini, Rome MS 1266 fol. 55v. Italy, 15th century.



Figure 33: Francis and Illuminatus beaten. In *Legenda maior*. Museo dei Cappuccini, Rome MS 1266 fol. 55r. Italy, 15th century.



Figure 34: Detail of "Sultan of Babylon." *Luttrell Psalter*. British Library Additional MS 42130 fol. 82r. England, 14th century.



Figure 35: St. John the Baptist and Blue-Faced Executioner. *Luttrell Psalter*, British Library Additional MS 42130 fol. 53v. England, 14th century.



Figure 36: King Arthur battles Lucius. From Egerton MS 3028 fol. 51. Anglo-Norman, 14th century.

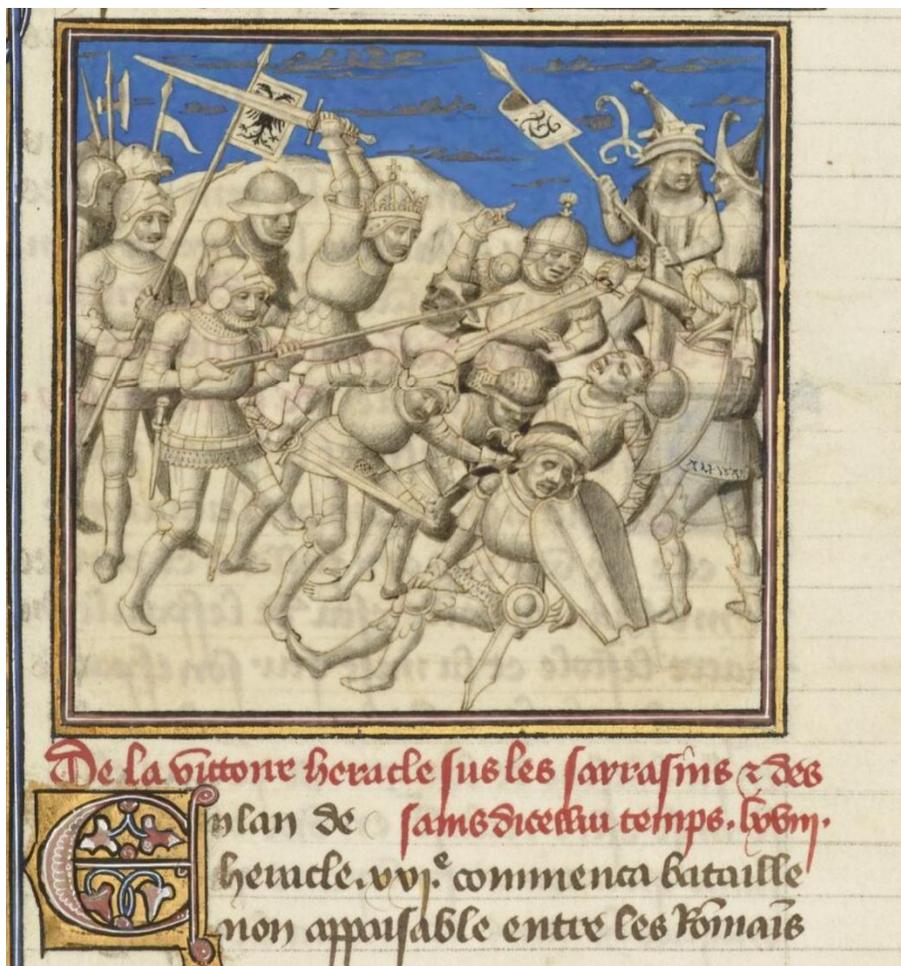


Figure 37: *Speculum historiale* BnF 310, fol. 315r, France, 15th century.

Chapter 2 Figures



Figure 1: Battle of Mansurah of 1250. *Nuova Cronica*. Italy, 14th century. MS. Chigiano L VIII 296-Biblioteca Vaticana, fol. 82r.

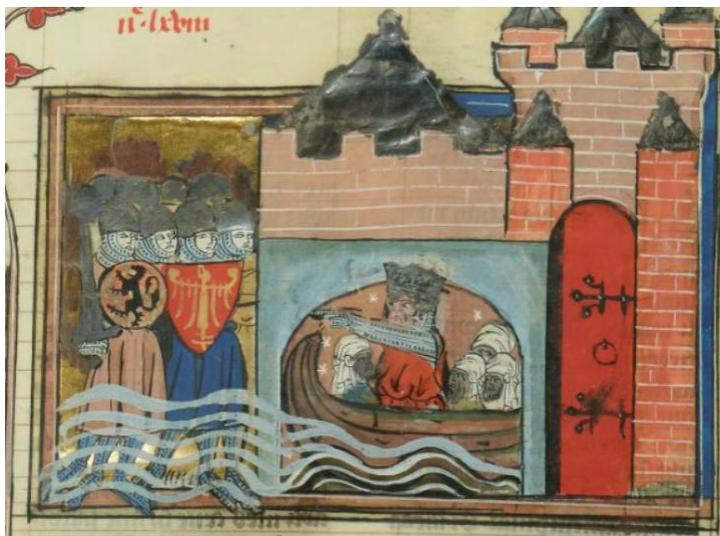


Figure 2: al-Kamil directs the Nile river at Mansurah (1221). *History of Outremer*, 14th century BnF 22495 fol. 268r.



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Figure 5: Detail of crusader cross. *Mare Historiarum*. BnF Latin fol. 403v, France, 15th century.



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Figure 10: Siege of Damietta (1249), *Les Grandes Chroniques de France*, BnF fr. 2813 fol. 281r, France, 15th century.



Figure 11: Siege of Acre (1189/1191), *Les Grandes Chroniques de France*, BnF fr. 2813 fol. 237r, France, 15th century.



Figure 12: Siege of Constantinople (1249), *Les Grandes Chroniques de France* BnF fr. 2813 fol. 245v, France, 15th century.



Figure 13: Siege of Tunis (1270), *Grandes Chroniques de France* BnF fr. 2813 fol. 299v, France, 15th century.



Figure 14: The Limbourg Brothers, St. Louis sails to Damietta, *The Belles Heures of Jean de France*, duc de Berry Cloisters, New York fol. 173r, France, 15th century.



Figure 15: Siege of Damietta (1249), *Les Grandes Chroniques de France*, BnF, Français 10135 fol. 328v, France, 14th century.



Figure 16: Louis arrives at Damietta. France, Paris. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des manuscrits, Latin 4915 fol. 413. 15th century.



Figure 17: Prester John in his capital, Paris, France. Paris, BnF, Français 2810 fol. 212, 15th century.



Figure 18: Crusaders and “Black-Skinned African Christians” attack Sultan of Babylon (riding leopard) on the shores of the Nile. *Liber secretorum fidelium crucis*. Additional 27376, fol. 8v, Northern Italy, 14th century.

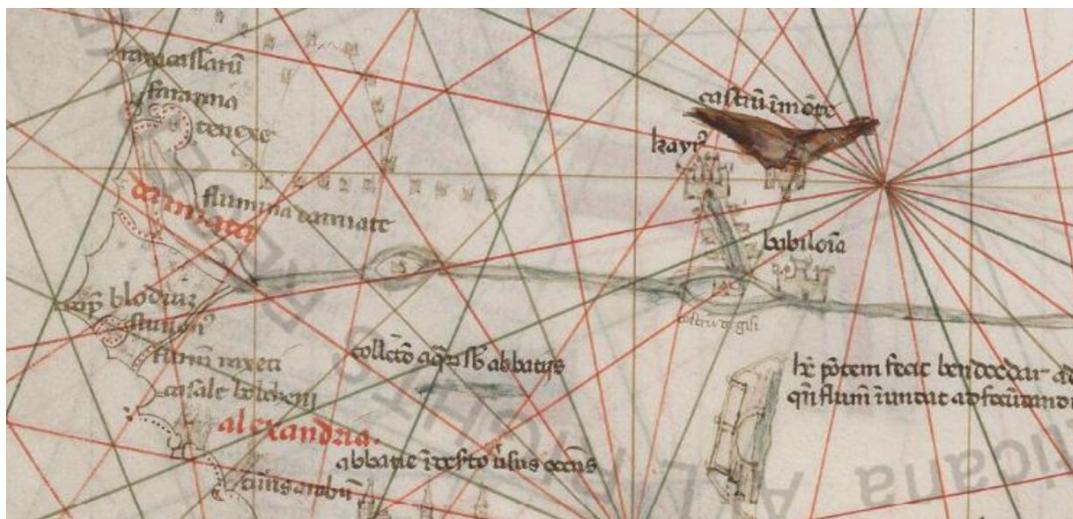


Figure 19: Map of Babylon and the Nile. *Liber secretorum fidelium crucis*. Vat. Lat. 2972 fol. 109r, Northern Italy, 14th century.

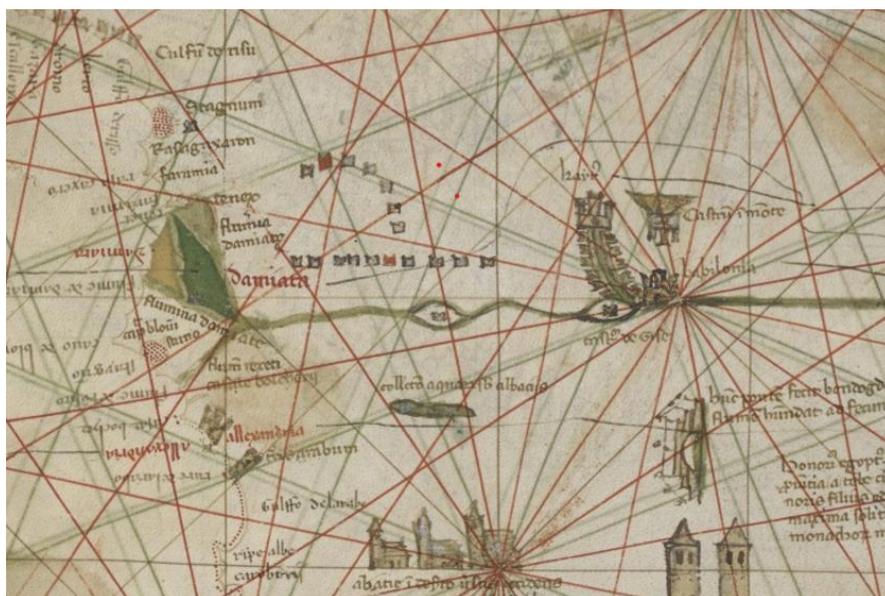


Figure 20: Map of Babylon and the Nile, *Liber secretorum fidelium crucis*. Additional 27376 fol. 183r, Northern Italy, 14th century.



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Figure 24: Gentile Bellini, *Portrait of Sultan Mehmet II*, Italy, 1480.

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Figure 1: Sack of Acre. From *Les Grandes Chroniques de France*. Paris, 1390s. Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Ms. fr. 2608, fol. 368v.



Figure 2: Sack of Acre. From William Tyre *History of Outremer*. Paris, 14th century. Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Ms. fr. 2825, fol. 361v.



Figure 3: Sack of Acre. From William Tyre *History of Outremer*. Paris, 14th century. Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Ms. fr. 2825, fol. 374v.



Figure 4: Detail of Jerusalem. From *Chronica Majora* (Matthew Paris). St. Albans, 13th century. Corpus Christi College, Cambridge Ms 26 fol. 4r.



Figure 5: Christians attack the Saracens. From *Les Grandes Chroniques de France*, Paris, 1400-1405. British Library Royal 20 C VII, fol. 24r.



Figure 6: Siege of Acre. From *Les Grandes Chroniques de France*, Paris, 1400-1405. British Library, Royal 20 C VII, fol. 24v.



Figure 7: Siege of Acre. From *Les Grandes Chroniques de France*, Paris, 1330s. Castres, Bibliothèque Municipale, fol. 347v.



Figure 8: Sultan attacks Acre. From *Les Grandes Chroniques de France*, Paris, 14th Century. Brussels Royal Albert Ier MS. 5. fol. 322v.



Figure 9: Sultan of Babylon sieges Acre. From *Les Grandes Chroniques de France*, Paris, 1370s. Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Ms. fr. 10135, fol. 371r.

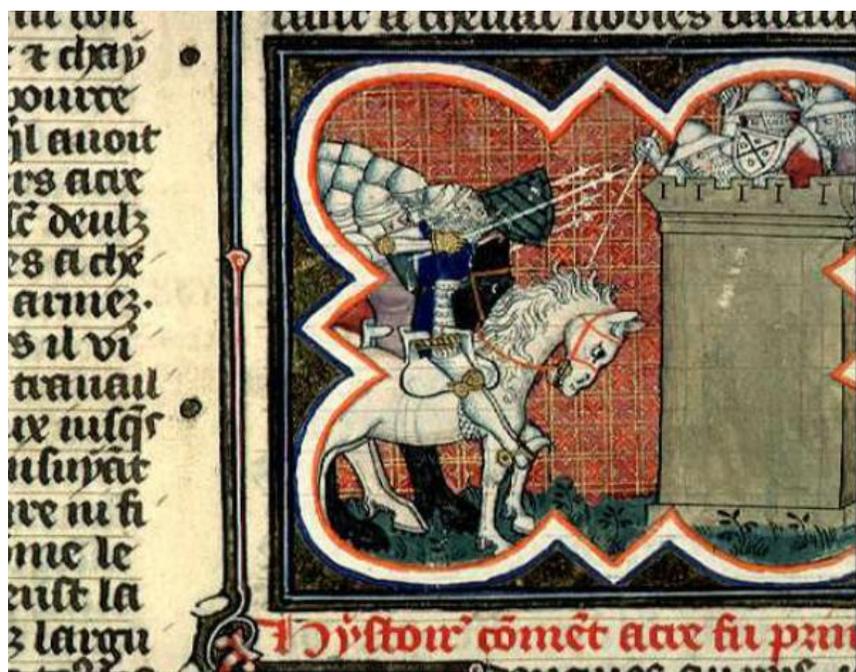


Figure 10: Sultan of Babylon conquers Acre. From *Les Grandes Chroniques de France*, Paris, 1390s. Bibliothèque municipale de Lyon: Ms 880 fol. 342v.



Figure 11: Princess Alatiel (Muslim Princess) lost at sea due to a Tempest, from *The Decameron*, 15th century, France. Paris, Arsenal, Ms-5070 réserve fol. 67.



Figure 12: Sultan meets Baligant and Marsile. From *Les Grandes Chroniques de France*, Paris, 1370s. Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Ms. fr. 2606, fol. 137r.



Figure 13: Edward I pays homage to Philip IV. From *Les Grandes Chroniques de France*, Paris, 1370s. Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Ms. fr. 2606, fol. 349r.



Figure 14: Sultan of Babylon sacks Acre. From *Les Grandes Chroniques de France*, Paris, 1390-1400. Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Hs. 2564, fol. 340r.



Figure 15: Sultan of Babylon sacks Acre (detail). From *Les Grandes Chroniques de France*, Paris, 1390-1400. Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Hs. 2564, fol. 340r.



Figure 16: God Strikes the Mamluks. *Liber Secretorum Fidelium Crucis*, 14th-century, Venice. Koninklijke Bibliotheek van België, MS. 9347-48, fol. 123r.



Figure 17: Acre Cathedral Portal inserted into Madrasa of al-Nasir Muhammad. 14th century. Cairo, Egypt.

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