

Race and Conversion in Late Medieval England

by

Cord J. Whitaker

Department of English  
Duke University

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Fiona Somerset, Supervisor

\_\_\_\_\_  
David Aers

\_\_\_\_\_  
Sarah Beckwith

\_\_\_\_\_  
Ruth Nissé

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of Doctor  
of Philosophy in the Department of  
English in the Graduate School  
of Duke University

2009

ABSTRACT

Race and Conversion in Late Medieval England

by

Cord J. Whitaker

Department of English  
Duke University

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Fiona Somerset, Supervisor

\_\_\_\_\_  
David Aers

\_\_\_\_\_  
Sarah Beckwith

\_\_\_\_\_  
Ruth Nissé

An abstract of a dissertation submitted in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree  
of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of  
English in the Graduate School  
of Duke University

2009

Copyright by  
Cord J. Whitaker  
2009

## Abstract

Despite general consensus among scholars that race in the West is an early modern phenomenon that dates to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, late medieval English texts of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries expend no small amount of effort depicting the differences between people—individuals and groups—and categorizing those people accordingly. The contexts for the English literary concern with human difference were the Crusades and associated economic expansion and travel into Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa. Scholars who have argued that race is present in medieval texts have generally claimed that race is subordinate to religion, the dominant cultural force in medieval Europe. In “Race and Conversion in Late Medieval England,” I argue that race is not necessarily subordinate to religion. Rather, racial and religious discourses compete with one another for ideological dominance. I examine three texts, juxtaposed in only one extant manuscript, London, British Library, MS Cotton Vespasian E.16; *The Three Kings of Cologne*, *The Siege of Jerusalem*, and the physiognomy portion of the *Secretum Secretorum* together narrate competition between race and religion as community-forming ideologies in England through their treatments of religious identity and physical characteristics. In addition, I study Chaucer’s *Man of Law’s Tale*, which distills down questions of religious difference to genealogy and the interpretation of blood. “Race and Conversion in Late Medieval England” argues that racial ideology emerges from and competes with religion in late medieval English literature as a means

of consolidating power in crusading Western Europe, even as the ever present possibility of Christian conversion threatens to undermine the essentializing work of race.

**Dedication**

For Dad, who taught me to write; for Grandma, who taught me to love; and for Chris,  
who taught me to laugh.

## Contents

Abstract.....	iv
List of Abbreviations .....	ix
Acknowledgements.....	x
Introduction.....	1
The Cotton Vespasian E.16 Manuscript.....	1
This Dissertation's Purpose.....	5
Relevant Approaches to Race and Conversion .....	8
1. Blacks, Jews, and Race-Thinking in the <i>Three Kings of Cologne</i> .....	22
Jaspar, the Nestorians, and Blackness .....	29
The Uses (and Instability) of Africa in the European World .....	47
Race-Thinking, Eastern Christians, and Jews .....	58
2. Redirecting the Physiognomer's Gaze in the <i>Secretum Secretorum</i> .....	71
Versions.....	74
The Text, Its Reader, and Its Science .....	78
Doubt, Exemplum, and Other-Directedness.....	86
The Significance of Skin in Abbreviated Physiognomies .....	95
Physiognomy and Race .....	107
3. Making Blood Speak: Romans, Jews, and Race War in the <i>Siege of Jerusalem</i> .....	112
Who's Who in the Siege of Jerusalem?.....	118
The Rational Conversion of the Romans.....	121
Tolerance and Violence.....	136

Criticizing Race War through Christian Hospitality .....	153
The Peculiarities of MS Cotton Vespasian E.16 .....	172
4. Blood and Baptism in Chaucer's <i>Man of Law's Tale</i> .....	177
Why Blood?.....	181
Interpreting Genealogical Blood .....	192
Interpreting Holy Blood .....	199
Racializing Interpretive Strategies .....	212
Conclusion: Real and Metaphorical Color in Late Medieval English Literature.....	219
References.....	229
Biography.....	238



## List of Abbreviations

MS.....manuscript

CV.....London, British Library, MS Cotton Vespasian E.16

PL..... J.P. Migne, *Patrologiae Cursus Completus Series Latina* (Paris: 1844-5).

R7.....London, British Library, MS Royal 18.A.7

R10.....London, British Library, MS Royal 18.A.10

SPGL..... Richard Foerster, ed., *Scriptores Physiognomonici Graeci et Latini*, Vol. 2  
(Stuttgart/Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1994).

## Acknowledgements

It has been a struggle to decide whether or not to write acknowledgments. In short, this dissertation is the product of too many sets of comments, too many conversations, and too many encouraging words. There is no way I can mention all the people who have helped and inspired me along the way.

Fiona Somerset is a powerful force, some might say a *triple powerful* force. First of all, her attention to detail could put most senior editors to shame. Secondly, her ability to care about her students' personal welfare while demanding they produce ever better results means that I have felt at once cared for and corrected, treated with humanity and assiduously instructed. Finally, Fiona's boundless energy has inspired me to keep running even when I felt I could run no more. When Fiona told me that she "believed" in this dissertation, I knew that no matter how hard it got, no matter how much life got in the way, I had to reach the finish line. There was no other option. Teacher, coach, and conductor—Fiona fills all of these roles with grace befitting an angel, the kind of angel that never fails to bring you life-sustaining manna during a long sojourn in the desert.

Sarah Beckwith and David Aers have supported my growth as a scholar, and as a person, in ways I never expected when I came to Duke. They have counseled me through trials and traumas, through relationships broken and mended. When I have felt myself nearly crushed by the weighty pressures of professional and personal life, David and Sarah have always been ready to recommend salves for the mind, body, and soul. As

different as their advice has sometimes been, the results have always managed to coalesce into perfect harmony.

Just when I was convinced that working with the *Siege of Jerusalem* would be the death of me, Ruth Nissé swept in from the University of Nebraska with a fresh perspective and a much needed encouraging smile. Her supreme knowledge of the Jewish Middle Ages and her unparalleled insight into medieval Jewish-Christian relations, coupled with her no-nonsense approach to literary analysis, completely revolutionized my relationship with the *Siege*. No longer did the poem seem to me an impenetrable fortress. Instead, it yielded up the potential productivity of its internal inconsistencies, and set the stage for the rest of my dissertation to come into being.

In addition to my committee members, I owe more than a few thanks to the two people who inspired me to pursue a doctorate in English while I was still an undergraduate. In Maurice Wallace's freshman seminar at Yale I first realized that discussing literature made me feel free. Maurice introduced me to the Anglo-Caribbean poetics of Derek Walcott, the concept of *hybridity*, and the notion that a text might just mean something different than what the author intended. He showed me that literature, its production and its criticism, could empower me to talk about race and its effects on human relations as well as to consider the place of religious belief in African-American society, the African diaspora more generally, and the world as a whole. I was freed and hooked all at once. This dissertation on race and Christian conversion in late medieval

England is in no small part due to the thoughts Maurice inspired in me all those years ago.

When Maurice left Yale and came to Duke after my freshman year, I worried that my English literature studies would be set adrift. Then I wandered into Elizabeth Fowler's course on Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. I was enamored of Elizabeth's knowledge on everything from Middle English poetry to baseball. Under her wing, I learned to read Middle English, to read medieval literature critically, and how to engage productively with literary criticism. One semester in her course was enough to convince me that I wanted to follow in her footsteps. One lifetime in her debt will not be enough.

I am also indebted to Srinivas Aravamudan, who read very early versions of the *Siege of Jerusalem* chapter and inspired me to keep working "slowly but steadily"; Ian Baucom, who turned my attention helpfully to Gauri Viswanathan's work on religious conversion in political life; Russ Leo, an attentive reader and a patient friend with whom I've discussed more particularities of the dissertation (and more imagined versions of the dissertation) than I care to recount; and Matthew Irvin, a friend and colleague together with whom I have learned the value of collaboration over competition.

Tom Manneh and Ionie Townsend made it possible for me to research at the British Library by opening up their London homes to me on many occasions. They introduced me to the London only Londoners know, and it has been my second home ever since.

Lesley Curtis is my first reader on everything, and she is my most trusted critic. With her, I share life as well as work.

This dissertation has been completed with generous support from the Duke Endowment, the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship Program, and the Ford Foundation Diversity Fellowship Program.

I am eternally indebted to my parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and friends. Some are still with us. Some have gone on. All have been instrumental in making me who I am.

## Introduction

### *The Cotton Vespasian E.16 Manuscript*

In the British Library sits a little studied, well-worn, mostly unadorned mid-fifteenth-century manuscript shelfmarked Cotton Vespasian E.16. Little is known about the manuscript's history. It appears to have been compiled by binding together fragments of a fifteenth-century MS with a thirteenth-century charter from Lincoln Cathedral and a sixteenth-century Latin chronicle of Lichfield. The *Siege of Jerusalem's* editors, Ralph Hanna III and David Lawton, suggest an East Midlands provenance based on the compilation with the Lincoln charter as well as a number of scribal forms that, according to the *Linguistic Atlas of Late Medieval English*, correspond to forms used in Leicester, the Soke of Peterborough, South Lincolnshire, or Oakham, Rutland.<sup>1</sup> The *Siege of Jerusalem's* likely composition at Augustinian Bolton Priory in the West Riding of Yorkshire, i.e., just north of the West Midlands, also lends itself to the possibility of the manuscript's East Midlands provenance. A poem produced at Bolton could have been considered relatively local material to a compiler in the East Midlands. The sixteenth-century inclusion of the Lichfield chronicle also makes sense since Lichfield is near the border between the East and West Midlands.

The MS came to the British Library by way of Robert Cotton's library, from whence comes its current shelfmark. Cotton, who lived from 1571 to 1631, began in the 1620s to organize his library by placing the busts of the twelve Caesars and two imperial

---

<sup>1</sup> Ralph Hanna III and David Lawton, eds. *The Siege of Jerusalem* (Oxford: Early English Text Society/Oxford University Press, 2003), xviii.

ladies, Cleopatra and Faustina, atop his book cabinets. A book's shelfmark begins with the name of the figure depicted atop the cabinet.<sup>2</sup> From the top down, each shelf was marked with a letter; the top shelf was A, the next shelf down was B, and so forth. The numbers corresponded to the book's position from the shelf's beginning. MS Cotton Vespasian E.16 (CV) was in the Vespasian cabinet, on the fifth shelf from the top, and the sixteenth book in the sequence.<sup>3</sup>

Two of CV's texts, the *Three Kings of Cologne* and the *Secretum Secretorum*, are more or less direct copies of MSS in the Royal Collection—MSS Royal 18.A.10 and 18.A.7 respectively. In the 1609 catalog of prominent Catholic noble Lord John Lumley's library (c.1533-1609), both MSS were listed.<sup>4</sup> The MSS went with most of Lumley's collection when it was transferred to King James I after Lumley died. The vast majority of the collection was taken to St. James's Palace, where it was to be used by James I's eldest son, Prince Henry. There it became part of the Royal Library.<sup>5</sup> Though Lumley's Catholic identity did not always benefit him—under Queen Elizabeth I his suspected

---

<sup>2</sup> Colin G. C. Tite, *The Manuscript Library of Sir Robert Cotton* (London: British Library, 1994), 85-90. The scheme in which the books were arranged before the implementation of the emperor arrangement is unknown. The emperor arrangement, likely occasioned by the purchase of what was to become known as Cotton House in 1622, was very much incomplete by the time of Sir Robert's death in 1631. Between that year and the next, a catalog was produced, now British Library Additional MS 36789 that does not use the then incomplete emperor arrangement. Tite, 90-99, uses this catalog to reconstruct what the order of the book cabinets must have been.

<sup>3</sup> Henceforth MS Cotton Vespasian E.16 will often be referred to as CV. CV will generally refer only the fifteenth-century portion of the MS, with which this dissertation is concerned.

<sup>4</sup> See the 1609 catalog of Lumley's library ordered by Prince Henry on Lumley's death, edited in a modern edition by Sears Jayne and Francis R. Johnson, *The Lumley Library: The Catalogue of 1609* (London, The British Museum, 1956), 113, entry 853, and 192, entry 1596. The MSS were likely in Lumley's library before 1596 when Lumley had made a now lost catalog. Jayne and Johnson, 9, tell us that Lumley bought fewer and fewer books after that date.

<sup>5</sup> George F. Warner and Julius P. Gilson, *Catalogue of Western Manuscripts in the Old Royal and King's Collections*, Vol. 1 (London: Longmans, Green & Co.; Quaritch; Oxford University Press, 1921), xix.

allegiance to Mary landed him in the Tower from 1570 through 1573—it has benefited students of medieval English religion and literature.<sup>6</sup> Together with his father-in-law Henry Fitzalan, Earl of Arundel, and his brother-in-law Humphrey Lloyd, he collected many texts and fragments of texts from the libraries of monastic houses dissolved under Henry VIII. These included MSS from Bury St. Edmunds, the London Dominicans, the Canterbury Grey Friars, Saint Augustine's, Canterbury, Winchester Cathedral, Hyde Abbey, St. Albans, Merton, Worcester, Bristol, Gloucester, Pershore, Henton, Athelney, Tintern, Jervaulx, Gisburn, Monk Bretton, and a number of others.<sup>7</sup> MSS Royal 18.A.10 and 18.A.7 may have been among those gathered from monastic libraries. At any rate, the *Three Kings* and the *Secretum* would have fit Lumley's overwhelming interest in history, geography, and science.<sup>8</sup>

At some point, the fifteenth-century portion of Cotton Vespasian E.16 would have had to reside in the vicinity of MSS Royal 18.A.7 and 18.A.10. While the fifteenth-century whereabouts of the Royal MSS and CV are unknown, the evidence for CV's East Midlands, Lincoln-area provenance and the relationship between the Royal MSS and CV make it entirely possible that the Royal MSS resided in a Lincoln-area monastery as well. It is also notable that the name of Laurence Nowell, dean of Lichfield from 1560 until his

---

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Jayne and Johnson, 7-9, show that in Lumley's extensive collection there were over 600 volumes devoted to history. He also had an extensive collection on medicine and geography, the latter of which was part and parcel of his "scholarly bent toward the history of other peoples."



death in 1576, appears on the fly-leaf of the *Beowulf* MS, now Cotton Vitellius A.15.<sup>9</sup> The *Beowulf* MS ended up in Robert Cotton's library, attesting to the movement of at least this prominent MS from Lichfield into Cotton's hands.<sup>10</sup> The same trajectory for CV is certainly possible, given its binding with the Lichfield chronicle. Perhaps the Royal MSS and CV spent some time at Lichfield together.

Sir Robert Cotton may have known Lumley's library. At very least, he knew much of what was in, or would soon be in, the Royal Library. In 1609-12, after Lumley's 1609 death and around the time of Prince Henry's (d. 1612), Cotton drew up a list headed "Books I want," preserved in British Library Harleian MS 1879, fol. 10v. The list includes what is now Royal MS 17 F.IV or 18 E.III-IV, both of which contain *Le Livre de Valerius Maximus*.<sup>11</sup> Though neither of these MSS is listed in the catalog of Lumley's library, Cotton and Lumley, as avid book collectors of the aristocracy, would likely have known of one another's libraries. At least eight Lumley manuscripts made their way into Cotton's collection.<sup>12</sup>

The Royal MSS and CV met again in the early 1700s. When Robert Cotton died, he left his collection to his son Thomas Cotton, who died in 1662, and his grandson Sir

---

<sup>9</sup> For Nowell's dates, see Joyce M. Horn, "Canons residentiary of Lichfield," *Fasti Ecclesiae Anglicanae 1541-1857*, Vol 10: Coventry and Lichfield diocese (London: Institute of Historical Research, 2003), 78-94. For discussion of Nowell's signature and its implications for his receipt of the *Beowulf* MS, see Stanley I. Rypins "The 'Beowulf' Codex," *Modern Philology*, 17.9 (Jan., 1920): 541-547, esp. 546-7.

<sup>10</sup> Tite, *The Manuscript Library*, 13-14, offers evidence that the *Beowulf* MS was in Cotton's collection by 1608 when Archbishop Richard Bancroft borrowed it.

<sup>11</sup> Tite, *The Manuscript Library*, 11, and Tite, *The Early Records of Sir Robert Cotton's Library: Formation, Cataloguing, Use* (London: British Library, 2003), 238.

<sup>12</sup> Jayne and Johnson, 11.

John Cotton, who died in 1702. John Cotton negotiated the transfer of the collection to Great Britain at his death. According to the British Library, “This was the first time that the British nation became responsible for a collection of books or manuscripts, an important stage towards the creation of a national, public library.” On October 23, 1731, the Royal and Cotton Vespasian collections were being held at Ashburnham House, Westminster, when a devastating fire broke out. According to a contemporary magazine description, “almost all the printed Books were consumed and part of the Manuscripts.”<sup>13</sup> Both the Royal MSS and CV were saved. In 1753, the Cotton collection became foundational to the collection of the British Museum. The Royal collection was entrusted to the British Museum by George II in 1757.

### ***This Dissertation’s Purpose***

In her 1976 *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Middle English Romances*, Gisela Guddat-Figge describes the manuscript. Her description, along with the merits of the individual texts included in the MS, is the impetus for this dissertation:

The manuscript is of strangely heterogeneous contents. The transition from the religious narratives in the first part of the MS to the scientific tracts following them takes place within one quire. Items might have been entered over a longer period of time, perhaps even been commissioned by successive owners. On the other hand, the manuscript might fit in with monastic surroundings where both religious and scientific material would

---

<sup>13</sup> Sylvanus Urban, “Casualties,” *The Gentleman's Magazine: or, Trader's monthly intelligencer*, 1.1-12 (Jan.-Dec. 1731): 451. Among notable MSS that barely escaped were the Beowulf MS and the Codex Alexandrinus. For a detailed account of the fire, its aftermath, and conservation and restoration efforts since, see Andrew Prescott, “‘Their Present Miserable State of Cremation’: the Restoration of the Cotton Library,” in C.J. Wright, ed., *Sir Robert Cotton as Collector: Essays on an Early Stuart Courtier and His Legacy* (London: British Library Publications, 1997), 391-454.

be of interest – a hypothesis at least tentatively supported by the Cathedral charters and the Latin chronicle bound up with the manuscript. Nothing, however, is known about the early history of the manuscript.<sup>14</sup>

Guddat-Figge is right to note that the religious and scientific contents would have fit well into the context of monastic learning: after all, Roger Bacon, who produced his own scholarly version of the *Secretum Secretorum* in the thirteenth century, was both a Franciscan and deeply interested in the explanation of natural phenomena through science. It is not surprising that the *Three Kings* and the *Siege of Jerusalem*, concerned with religious history, are included with the scientific *Secretum*. It is equally unsurprising that the narrative *Three Kings* and the *Siege* are included with the *Secretum* physiognomy, which incorporates elements of a narrative and those of a manual. On these accounts, Guddat-Figge's comment that the "manuscript is of strangely heterogeneous contents" seems wrongheaded.

Upon reading three of the texts included in the MS—the *Three Kings of Cologne*, the *Secretum* physiognomy, and the *Siege of Jerusalem*—I find that a different kind of "heterogeneity" emerges. Each text is concerned with religious and/or physical heterogeneity among humans and what to do about it. When the *Three Kings* tells the story of how the bodies of the three holy kings who visited the Christ child end up in Cologne, it catalogs various eastern peoples—Christian and non-Christian—and devotes much attention to the differences between them. The *Secretum Secretorum* physiognomy in CV places its readers in control of the ability to judge humans based on physical

---

<sup>14</sup> Guddat-Figge, *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Middle English Romances* (Munich: W. Fink, 1976), 179.

heterogeneity. The *Secretum* associates specific physical traits with character and behavior. In addition, it turns its reader away from traditional physiognomic self-reflection toward an unrelenting focus on the physical traits and character of others. The *Siege of Jerusalem* schizophrenically vacillates between asserting intractable difference between Jews and Christians and suggesting that the two groups' shared religious genealogy means that they also share humanity. Finally, I conclude with a chapter on Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale* because it combines thought on religious, physical, and genealogical difference in a *tour de force* of literary imagination. The project of the three texts in CV, I argue, is to construct a world in which some differences are acceptable and even necessary while others are unacceptable. The *Man of Law's Tale's* all-too-tidy ending demonstrates what that world might look like. In short, taken together, the four texts make sense of a late medieval world that, like today's, features ever "higher, faster, and wider-ranging mobility."<sup>15</sup> The dissertation concludes that race-thinking, the idea that physical and other manifestations of identity signify absolute and unchangeable (that is, essential) difference, emerges from thinking on religious difference as a means of consolidating global power in the hands of western European Christendom.

---

<sup>15</sup> I take this turn of phrase from Joseph Ziegler's "Text and Context: On the Rise of Physiognomic Thought in the Later Middle Ages," in Yitzhak Hen, ed., *De Sion exhibit lex et verbum domini de Hierusalem: Essays on Medieval Law, Liturgy, and Literature in Honour of Amnon Linder* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2001), 182. Ziegler writes that "from the twelfth century onwards...the vibrant Latin West opened up to economic and cultural exchanges that involved high, fast, and wide-ranging mobility."

### ***Relevant Approaches to Race and Conversion***

In order to examine racial and religious difference in late medieval English literature, it is necessary to make use of several theories of race. To argue that race-thinking emerged from the shadow of Crusades-era religious difference in western Europe in the late Middle Ages is necessarily to argue that the idea was not yet fully formed. Rather, it was nascent and in flux.<sup>16</sup> The idea of race remains multi-faceted today, and it would not be sensible to seek it out in medieval texts according to only a single theory as to how race operates and affects humans' lived experiences. This study takes as foundational philosopher Hannah Arendt's theory of *race-thinking*, developed in her 1951 *Origins of Totalitarianism*; social critic and historian Michel Foucault's thinking on the illusory nature of racial distinction developed in his 1976 lectures at the Collège de France; and theologian George Kelsey's thinking on the history of race and its effects on the practice of Christianity in the modern western world, especially the United States, in his 1965 *Racism and the Christian Understanding of Man*. Taken together, these theories depict a mode of thinking that can be readily discerned in the texts of MS Cotton Vespasian E.16 and Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale*.

Hannah Arendt's *race-thinking* replaces the term *race* in much of this dissertation. The latter implies a fully-fledged racial ideology, a "system based upon a single opinion that proved strong enough to attract and persuade a majority of people and broad enough

---

<sup>16</sup> This is, of course, not to say that elements of what eventually became racial ideology are not present well before the late Middle Ages. Notions that informed early modern African slavery can be traced back to the pre-Christian-era Mediterranean world. See Orlando Patterson's seminal study *Slavery and Social Death: a Comparative Study* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).

to lead them through the various experiences and situations of an average modern life.”<sup>17</sup> Arendt argues that race did not become a full-fledged ideology until the late nineteenth century. Until then, she argues, race-thinking, or the “interpretation of history as the natural fight” between essentially different races, “had been one of the many free opinions which, within the general framework of liberalism, argued and fought each other to win the consent of public opinion.”<sup>18</sup> Race-thinking is useful for this study because by its very definition it is in conflict and competition with other ways of viewing the world. Race-thinking describes the medieval situation more accurately than race because in the Middle Ages, I argue, race-thinking competes with Christendom’s quest for world dominance and the associated doctrine that any rational person could, and would, convert to Christianity. Medieval literature makes an important contribution to the idea of race-thinking in that, while Arendt places the advent of race-thinking in the eighteenth century, the texts studied herein show race-thinking to be alive and well in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

Foucault’s 1976 lectures at the Collège de France, collected in English as *Society Must Be Defended*, help illuminate the processes by which the texts accept some people and suggest the domination of others. In each of this dissertation’s subject texts, a group (or groups) of people is positioned against or admitted into a western European Christian norm. In the *Three Kings*, the *Secretum*, the *Siege*, and the *Man of Law’s Tale*, eastern

---

<sup>17</sup> *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Schocken Books, 2004), 211.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 211. Arendt writes that only two general opinions have gained such dominance as to become ideologies, or explanations for reality, in the modern world. These are class struggle and race struggle.

Christians, people with a variety of physical differences, Jews, Muslims, and pagan converts to Christianity are judged; they are sometimes marginalized and they are sometimes judged good, or *normal*, enough to become part of western European Christendom. Foucault's goal is to study the dynamics of power—that is, how one group comes to define the norm while another is considered abnormal and is pushed to the margins.

In his lecture of January 21, 1976, Foucault theorizes that the power dynamic relies on a “binary structure” he calls “race war” that is deeply embedded in society. Foucault defines race war as that which occurs whenever one group seeks to subjugate another:

The war that is going on beneath order and peace, the war that undermines our society and divides it in a binary mode is, basically, a race war. At a very early stage, we find the basic elements that make the war possible, and then ensure its continuation, pursuit, and development: ethnic differences, differences between languages, different degrees of force, vigor, energy, and violence; the differences between savagery and barbarism; the conquest and subjugation of one race by another. The social body is basically articulated around two races.<sup>19</sup>

He also cites an impressive variety of justifications for race war. Foucault's idea of race serves well this study of nascent race-thinking in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in that it lays bare the multiplicity of categories of difference that underwrite race war. Despite the numerous potential causes for race war, they each have the same effect: the splitting of “the social body” into “two races.”

---

<sup>19</sup> Michel Foucault, “*Society Must Be Defended*”: *Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-1976*, ed. Mauro Bertani and Alessandro Fontana, trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003), 50-1.

Medieval race-thinking is different from Arendt's race-thinking and Foucault's race war in that medieval texts often do not fully succeed in distilling down the multiple causes of race war to the final effect of ineluctable and absolute difference. Arendt, like Foucault, suggests the multiplicity of causes for race war when she writes that

totalitarian politics...use and abuse their own ideological and political elements until the basis of factual reality, from which the ideologies originally derived their strength and propaganda value—the reality of class struggle, for instance, or the interest conflict between Jews and their neighbors—have all but disappeared.<sup>20</sup>

Arendt is perhaps clearer than Foucault in her assertion that the particular categories and situations that lead to race war disappear under the weight of their own “use and abuse.” That is, in race-thinking as in race war, the multiple causes of perceived difference cede primacy to their singular effect. In the Middle Ages, this has not yet happened. The particularities of difference have not yet disappeared, and as a result texts have a much harder time executing what political analyst Samantha Power calls the subtle removal of “targets...from the realm of legal, national, and moral obligation.”<sup>21</sup>

In more than one case, medieval texts that devote too much attention to race war and its causes are left unable to produce a fully racial binary. For instance, my chapter on the *Three Kings of Cologne* points out the original text's association of black skin with positive and negative characters, the holy king Jaspar and the heretical descendants of his subjects. The translated and abbreviated *Three Kings* in CV, in an attempt at race-thinking, links up color with only a positive or negative character. Remarkably, the text

---

<sup>20</sup> Arendt, 8.

<sup>21</sup> Samantha Power, “Introduction” in Arendt, xviii.



goes against the already traditional stigma of blackness and associates blackness with the positive figure of Jaspar instead of the wicked Nestorians. The text, as my chapter shows, is ultimately more interested in the nuanced differences between orthodox and heretical belief than in color difference. The text's interest in nuance leads it to focus on many different groups of Christians and ultimately precludes it from producing a binary. Nonetheless, some elements of binary race-thinking are visible in that eastern Christians *tend* toward heresy while the western reader's orthodoxy is assumed.

In another example, texts that devote too much attention to the inner workings of race war are left contradicting themselves. In the *Siege of Jerusalem*, for instance, the text gives a lot of attention to Roman Christians' attempts to subjugate Jews and the possibility of their conversion. In fact, the inner workings of race war between Christians and Jews already had built into it the recognition of Jewish necessity that could, if pushed in the right direction, shade into a sympathetic recognition of Jewish humanity. The Old Testament was traditionally taken as the cultural and intellectual property of Jews, a fact to which Christians following Augustine's well known "doctrine of toleration" showed some amount of deference. In the *De Civitate Dei*, Augustine writes:

Iudaei autem, qui eum occiderunt et in eum credere noluerunt, quia oportebat eum mori et resurgere, uastati infelicius a Romanis funditusque a suo regno, ubi iam eis alienigenae dominabantur, eradicati dispersique per terras, quandoquidem ubique non desunt, per scripturas suas testimonio nobis sunt prophetias nos non finxisse de Christo....nobis quidem illae sufficiunt, quae de nostrorum inimicorum codicibus proferuntur, quos agnoscimus propter hoc testimonium, quod nobis inuiti

perhibent eosdem codices habendo atque seruando, per omnes gentes etiam ipsos esse dispersos, quaquauersum Christi ecclesia dilatatur.<sup>22</sup>

But the Jews who killed him and refused to believe in [Christ], to believe that he had to die and rise again, suffered a more wretched devastation at the hands of the Romans and were utterly uprooted from their kingdom, where they had already been under the dominion of foreigners. They were dispersed all over the world – for indeed there is no part of the earth where they are not to be found – and thus by evidence of their own Scriptures they bear witness for us that we have not fabricated the prophecies about Christ...As for us, we find those prophecies sufficient which are produced from the books of our opponents [the Jews]; for we recognize that it is in order to give this testimony, which, in spite of themselves, they supply for our benefit by their possession and preservation of those books, that they themselves are dispersed among all nations, in whatever direction the Christian Church spreads.<sup>23</sup>

Augustine continues, quoting Psalm 59: "...my God has shown me this in the case of my enemies. Do not slay them, lest at some time they forget your law; scatter them by your might." He elaborates on his theory that Jews preserve Old Testament prophecy in order to serve as witnesses to the truth of Christianity when he writes:

et ideo non eos occidit...ne obliti legem dei ad hoc, de quo agimus, testimonium nihil ualerent. ideo parum fuit, ut diceret: *ne occideris eos, ne quando obliuiscantur legem tuam*, nisi adderet etiam: disperge eos; quoniam si cum isto testimonio scripturarum in sua tantummodo terra, non ubique essent, profecto ecclesia, quae ubique est, eos prophetiarum, quae de Christo praemissae sunt, testes in omnibus gentibus habere non posset.<sup>24</sup>

And this is the reason for his forbearing to slay them...it is for fear that they should forget the Law of God and thus fail to bear witness on the point I am now dealing with. Thus it was not enough for the psalmist to say, 'Do not slay them, lest at some time they forget your Law,' without

---

<sup>22</sup> The Latin text is taken from *De Civitate Dei*, Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina XLVII/XIV, Vols. 1 and 2, ed. B. Dombart and A. Kalb (Turnhout: Brepols, 1955), 18.46.

<sup>23</sup> English translation is from Augustine, *City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), 18.46: 827-8.

<sup>24</sup> *De Civitate Dei*, 18.46.

adding, 'Scatter them.' For if they lived with that testimony of the Scriptures only in their own land, and not everywhere, the obvious result would be that the Church, which is everywhere, would not have them available among all nations as witnesses to the prophecies which were given beforehand concerning Christ.<sup>25</sup>

The sole purpose of the Jews' continued existence, according to Augustine, is to cover the earth with witnesses to Christian truth; Jews pave the way for global Christendom. Jews, therefore, must be tolerated in each and every Christian community that hopes to gain new converts because Jews have access to prophetic truth. That access is necessary in order for Christianity to prove that it has fulfilled and is fulfilling those prophecies. The *Siege*'s interest in the injunction against killing Jews in order that they might witness to Christian truth results in the text's striking sympathy for the Jews as well as its criticism of its own efforts to dehumanize them.

When the *Siege* admits the Jews' humanity, it recognizes the illusory nature of race-thinking and race war. Foucault is once again useful when he considers the illusoriness of the racial binary. He recasts "the theme of racial confrontations in terms of the theory of evolutionism and the struggle for existence" and defines "biologico-social racism" as

the idea...that the other race is basically not the race that came from elsewhere or that was, for a time, triumphant and dominant, but that it is a race that is permanently, ceaselessly infiltrating the social body, or which is, rather, constantly being re-created in and by the social fabric. In other words, what we see as a polarity, as a binary rift within society, is not a clash between two distinct races. It is the splitting of a single race into a

---

<sup>25</sup> Bettenson, 828.

superrace and a subrace. To put it a different way, it is the reappearance, within a single race, of the past of that race.<sup>26</sup>

The superrace sees itself as having evolved beyond the subrace. Inherent in that world view is the systematic forgetting that the superrace and the subrace share a single point of origin. Foucault exposes the “binary rift” as the misperception that race war is constituted by a divide between two distinct races. Rather, he asserts, it is a rift that tears the singular human race right down the middle. To expose this is to conclude that race is an illusory concept that divides the human race from itself.

This dissertation asks the question, what happens when the subrace is afforded the chance to become the superrace? In medieval English literature, humanity was cast not in terms of evolution but rather Christian identity and conversion. Historians of the Middle Ages, especially Jeremy Cohen and more recently Jonathan Elukin, have shown that twelfth- and thirteenth-century Christian thinkers, influenced by the advent of access to Greek thought in Latin, placed a new emphasis on reason. They believed that reason was the hallmark of humanity. They also believed that any rational human being, if presented Christianity in rational terms, would convert to Christianity.<sup>27</sup> When Muslims, Jews, or

---

<sup>26</sup> Foucault, 61.

<sup>27</sup> For rationalism in Christian thought on the conversion of non-Christians, see Jeremy Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews: The Evolution of Medieval Anti-Judaism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 24 and chapter 1 in general. See also Sheila Delany, *The Naked Text: Chaucer's Legend of Good Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 183-6; Anna Sapir Abulafia, *Christians and Jews in the Twelfth-Century Renaissance* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), chapters 3 and 6; Jonathan Elukin, “The Discovery of the Self: Jews and Conversion in the Twelfth Century,” in Michael A. Signer and John Van Engen, eds., *Jews and Christians in Twelfth-Century Europe* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 63-76.

pagans refused to convert they could be written off as inhuman, effectively dissolving, to use Power's term, Christians' "moral obligation" to them as fellow humans.

In addition to the idea of rational conversion, medieval literature often casts access to Christian conversion, and with it humanity, in terms of genealogy. This dissertation relies on Arendt's and Foucault's permissive notions of race in response to Ivan Hannaford's ambitious 1996 study *Race: the History of an Idea in the West*. Hannaford claims that though the word "race" entered the Spanish, Italian, French, English, and Scottish languages during the period 1200-1500, it meant "the swift course or current of a river or a trial of speed." He admits that in the later Middle Ages, the word sometimes referred to "the lineage or continuity of generations in families," citing *race's* similarity to the Latin *gens*, meaning clan or family.<sup>28</sup> Hannaford is right to note the lack of "the dispositions and presuppositions of race and ethnicity" in the Middle Ages, but he fails to recognize the strong, if subtle, connection between genealogy and race-thinking in the Middle Ages. The notion of genealogical inheritance was bound up with the idea of who could, or would, convert to Christianity well before the seventeenth century. In fact, this dissertation, and especially the chapter on the *Man of Law's Tale*, argues that genealogy's role in questions of Christian conversion is a key factor in the development of medieval race-thinking.

For the importance of genealogy to Christian conversion, this dissertation takes cues on the intersections of race and religion from theologian George Kelsey, teacher and

---

<sup>28</sup> Ivan Hannaford, *Race: the History of an Idea in the West* (Baltimore: the Johns Hopkins University Press/Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1996), 4-6.

mentor to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. In *Racism and the Christian Understanding of Man*, released in 1965 at the height of the American Civil Rights Movement, Kelsey argues that white American Christians no longer worship Christ. Instead, they worship white racial identity so thoroughly that they exclude Christ from their worship. He argues that when racism becomes a “faith,” “the fundamental racist affirmation” is that “the in-race is glorious and pure as to its being, and out-races are defective and depraved as to their being.”<sup>29</sup> In order to define essential depravity, Kelsey turns to blood, traditionally the symbol of genealogical relations, as the marker of ontological-biological group membership.<sup>30</sup> Defectiveness and depravity are perceived to be passed genealogically, by blood.

Kelsey’s idea that the notion of essential depravity has corrupted faith by replacing Christ with whiteness has implications for medieval race-thinking as it appears in Chaucer’s tale. In a scene imagined by one of the *Man of Law’s Tale’s* characters, the sacramental blood of Christ is replaced with the blood of murdered Muslims. Those Muslims had planned to convert to Christianity. Their leader’s genealogy and the territorial history of a second non-Christian group in the tale figure prominently, bearing heavily on who successfully converts and who does not. Blood takes on multiple

---

<sup>29</sup> George Kelsey, *Racism and the Christian Understanding of Man* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1965), 24.

<sup>30</sup> *Ontological-biological* is my term for the idea that essence is conveyed through bodily appearance. I garner the term from Geraldine Heng’s assertion in her *Empire of Magic: Medieval Romance and the Politics of Cultural Fantasy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 234, that in the *King of Tars* the Sultan’s “physical body is ontologically rearranged, his color is stripped from him and he loses his race along with his religion. On becoming a Christian, the Sultan’s bodily transformation describes his admission into another cultural-biological formation, European Christianity...”

meanings as a symbol for genealogy, a symbol of Christian identity, and the stuff spilled from violated bodies. Each text studied in this dissertation lends itself to the analysis of genealogical relations and their effects on religious identity, but only in Chaucer's is the connection between genealogy and religious identity made as clear as it is when Muslim blood is (unfavorably) compared to Christ's and Christians'. The assertion of the Muslims' essential blood-borne depravity in the face of successful English pagan conversion suggests that Christ's blood is constrained by race-thinking so that it can only baptize certain people.

Such constraint is not a foregone conclusion in Chaucer's sources. Take, for example, the *King of Tars*, which likely dates to the late thirteenth or early fourteenth centuries.<sup>31</sup> The *King of Tars* is possibly a predecessor of Oxford Dominican Nicholas Trevet's early fourteenth-century *Les Cronicles*. The *King of Tars*, through Trevet's work, is considered a source for Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale*.<sup>32</sup> In the *King of Tars*, religious mixing has physical implications. The Christian princess of Tars, who is described "as white as feþer of swan...wiþ rode red so blosme on brere & eyyen stepe & gray...wiþ...white swere," marries a "heþen" sultan.<sup>33</sup> When he hears of her beauty, he sends word that he wants to marry her. If she is not given to him, he vows to wage war on

---

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 228, and Nicholas Trevet, "Life of Constance," in W.F. Bryan and Germaine Dempster, eds., *Sources and Analogues of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1941), 167. See also Lillian Hornstein, "Trivet's Constance and the King of Tars," *Modern Language Notes* 55 (1940): 354-7, and her *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English*, 130-1, 289-90.

<sup>32</sup> See my chapter on the *Man of Law's Tale* below.

<sup>33</sup> See Anon., 1100-1500 (Middle English Romances): *The King of Tars* (1888) in *Chadwyck-Healey English Poetry Full-Text Database* (Cambridge, UK: Chadwyck-Healey, 1992), lines 5, 12, and 14-16. Accessed 18 October 2007.

the Christian kingdom of Tars. The princess refuses to marry the sultan, and he wages a war in which 30,000 Christian knights are killed. Rather than have anyone else die for her, she agrees to marry the sultan. Though she pretends to worship his idols, she secretly continues to practice Christianity. The couple has a child, but the child is born a shapeless, lifeless lump of flesh. That is, until the child is baptized into Christianity. Upon receiving baptism, the child miraculously becomes a beautiful little baby: “Feirer child miyt non be bore” (775). The child, when it is not clearly Christian or “heþen,” has no human identity at all. The text suggests that it is not possible to interpret the place of a religiously mixed person among humans, at least not until they can be recognized as fully one religion or another. Baptism, not at all constrained by the child’s bi-religious identity, facilitates the child’s entrance into humanity. In contrast to Chaucer’s tale, baptism does not discriminate against the fully Muslim sultan either. The sultan, who before “blac & lopely was” (922), agrees to convert to Christianity after his converted child becomes human. As soon as he converts, the sultan “al white bicom þurch godes gras/ & clere wip outen blame” (922-4). His skin instantly changes from black to white. In addition to the *King of Tars*’ implications for color and race-thinking, which will be treated in my chapter on the *Man of Law’s Tale* below, the *King of Tars*’ conversions evidence the extent to which the power of baptism and Christ’s blood is constrained in the *Man of Law’s Tale*.

My chapter on the *Secretum Secretorum* physiognomy finds another of Kelsey’s ideas illuminating. In a 1978 article entitled “The Racist Search for the Self,” Kelsey identifies a basic tenet of modern racism, which he calls “other-directedness,” or “the



propulsion of the self into the external relations of society” in which a person’s “motivation is from the outside; he acts according to the expectations of others, and is guided by social custom, expediency, and the ‘going thing.’”<sup>34</sup> The *Secretum Secretorum* chapter argues that the physiognomy turns to other-directedness in reaction to a general trend of self-directedness in late medieval thought on conversion. The trend toward self-directedness was occasioned by the ever increasing commerce and communication among Christians, Jews, Muslims, and pagans in Europe and the Mediterranean world that characterized the late Middle Ages. In the face of difference, concern over Christian conversion and whether certain conversions were factual hit a fever pitch leading to, as historian Jonathan Elukin has put it, “an ever increasing need for some confirmation that the interior person had truly changed.”<sup>35</sup> In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Elukin locates “medieval culture’s new emphasis on the interior self,” in which Christians began to look “with obsessive interest into the workings of their interior selves, and they began to study and reflect systematically upon their own minds, hearts, and souls.”<sup>36</sup>

The physiognomy in CV turns from this introspective position toward an “other-directed” point of view that presages modern race-thinking. My chapter shows that in the process of abbreviation and translation from Latin to French and English, the *Secretum* physiognomy denies the possibility of interior spiritual change and sets the stage for race-thinking’s system of absolutist difference. The medieval physiognomy achieves this not by suggesting one emulate others’ adherence to social custom or the “going thing” but

---

<sup>34</sup> George Kelsey, “The Racist Search for the Self,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 6.2 (1978), 240-56, at 245.

<sup>35</sup> Elukin, 69.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

rather by focusing one's attentions on the other in order to judge him without judging oneself. The self-examination necessary for interior change is jettisoned in favor of the assertion that physiognomic science is so accurate and precise that the physiognomer knows his subject's behaviors and interior motivations better than his subject does.

The texts collected in CV together narrate the means by which the borders of normative western European Christian identity are constructed and maintained. In the *Three Kings of Cologne*, numerous groups of eastern Christians are termed heretics and set apart, some more than others, from western Christians. Color is also manipulated in a way that suggests a tendency toward race-thinking. The text's interest in the particularities of difference, however, ultimately overshadows that tendency. In the *Secretum Secretorum*, readers are given the tools they need in order to consider themselves omniscient judges capable of deciding whether others are worthy or unworthy of interaction and acceptance. In the *Siege of Jerusalem*, the conflict between sharing religious history with the Jews and positioning them outside Christendom's borders is laid bare. In the *Man of Law's Tale*, the possibility of Christian conversion is placed in the service of race-thinking when genealogical conditions are shown to dictate who can and who cannot convert. All four texts, though in remarkably different ways, are concerned with delineating the borders of Christendom. To put it another way, each text strives to figure out what a Christian community in the late Middle Ages ought to look like. Arendt's, Foucault's, and Kelsey's thought on race and religion is immensely helpful in teasing out how each text does its particular work.

## 1. Blacks, Jews, and Race-Thinking in the *Three Kings of Cologne*

Should one wander into a stationery store during the Christmas shopping season, he will be confronted with a preponderance of Christmas cards. Next to the cards depicting Santa Claus, Christmas trees, and doves representing the Holy Spirit, he will also find cards boasting of three vaguely Oriental men traversing a desert on camelback. Quite often, Bethlehem can be seen in the distance. This card may have “And a star will rise in the East” inscribed below the image. This is but one late stage in the long legendary tradition of the three kings who came to visit the baby Jesus shortly after his birth in Bethlehem.

In a 1954 article for *History Today* editor and poet Geoffrey Grigson writes on the legend. Remarking on the power of the story, he writes that the legend is “complex, fantastic, full of marvel, treasure, orientalism, glitter, colour, perfume, impossibility....” He goes on to say that the legend is “a powerful instrument in history which has grown out of the few curt sentences to be found in St. Matthew’s Gospel....Wonder collected wonder or bred new wonders around itself.”<sup>1</sup> The legend grew out of a very short mention of the Christ child’s visitors in the gospel of Matthew (2:1-12) which tells nothing of their number, their names, or from whence exactly they came. When Grigson writes that “wonder collected wonder,” he explicitly refers to the myriad miracles in the story and he implicitly describes the power of cultural imagination that gives shape to an

---

<sup>1</sup> Geoffrey Grigson, “The Three Kings of Cologne,” *History Today* (Dec. 1954; repr. Dec. 1991): 29-34.

otherwise shapeless story. The fourteenth-century *Historia Trium Regum* and its English translation the *Three Kings of Cologne*, the focus of this chapter, support Grigson's point about the tale's accretionary power. The *Three Kings* asserts a number of times that it draws its information and authority from "diuerse bokes."

The legend's accretionary power lends to its epic scope. The *Historia Trium Regum* was first written in Latin in Germany in the mid-fourteenth century, and by 1400, it had appeared in English as the *Three Kings of Cologne*.<sup>2</sup> The version with which this chapter deals appears in British Library manuscript Cotton Vespasian E.16. It is a very close copy of the oldest extant English version in British Library MS Royal 18.A.10, which is possibly the first English copy.<sup>3</sup> At very least, MS Royal 18.A.10 dates from around the same time as the first English copy (1400).<sup>4</sup> The *Three Kings* recounts

---

<sup>2</sup> It has been suggested that John of Hildesheim wrote the Latin *Three Kings* in celebration of the two-hundredth anniversary of the translation of the three magi's relics to Cologne Cathedral. The relics arrived at Cologne in 1164 and the two-hundredth anniversary would have taken place in 1364. Art historian Paul H.D. Kaplan, in *The Rise of the Black Magus in Western Art* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1985), 62, somewhat more precisely dates the text to between 1364 and 1375. He bases his conjecture on the fact that Florentinus of Wevelinghoven, to whom John dedicates his text, assumed the bishopric of Munster in 1364 and also on the date of John's death in 1375. In 2000, Frank Schaer, in *The Three Kings of Cologne, Edited from London, Lambeth Palace MS 491* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 2000), 17 (a translation independent of that in the Cotton Vespasian and Royal MSS), confirms the date though he allows for the possibilities that the dedication to Florentinus is a later addition and that John of Hildesheim may not be the actual author. If each of these is the case, then the text can be dated to anytime between 1351 and 1389.

<sup>3</sup> Hereafter, as in this dissertation's introduction, MS Cotton Vespasian E.16 will often be referred to by the siglum CV. Its exemplar, MS Royal 18.A.10, will be referred to as R10 so as not to be confused with MS Royal 18.A.7, which figures prominently in my second chapter, on the *Secretum Secretorum* physiognomy. That MS will be referred to as R7. In all cases, the manuscripts will sometimes be referred to by their full names. In the current chapter, the R10 and CV versions will often be referred to together because the latter is such a close copy of the former. In those moments, the combined siglum R10CV will be used. In my second chapter, the combined siglum R7CV will be often be used.

<sup>4</sup> C. Horstmann, ed., *The Three Kings of Cologne: An Early English Translation of the "Historia Trium Regum"* (London: Early English Text Society, 1886), v-vi. Horstmann notes that the MS's "language and dialect are very nearly original," though he lays out a number of differences from the Latin source as well as other additions that lead him to believe it is not the original English text. He also notes that our manuscript, Cotton Vespasian E.16 is a "literal copy" of MS Royal 18.A.10. Schaer 18, 26, confirms that

Christian history from the Old Testament prophecy of Balaam through the lives of the three kings who worshipped Christ in the manger to the translation of their bodies to Cologne, Germany, 1100 years later.<sup>5</sup> The story is a wonder not just for its diversity of cultural interests (history, geography, identity), but for its historical breadth as well.

The *Three Kings* employs its cultural imagination in order to make sense of religious and physical differences worldwide. This chapter focuses especially on blackness in the *Three Kings*. The tradition that one of the three kings is black comes, in part, from Psalms 71:9-11. The scripture reads “ante eum procident Aethiopes et inimici eius pulverem lingent,” which the Doaii-Rheims translates “Before him the Ethiopians

---

Horstmann’s “remains the standard edition” of the “standard” prose *Three Kings of Cologne* in English, itself an abridgement of the fuller Latin original. Horstmann also prints the Latin *Historia Trium Regum*, to which I will refer throughout this chapter. Schaer confirms that Horstmann’s remains the standard edition of the Latin, but he adds that Horstmann’s Latin better represents the usual version of the text when its footnotes are reinstated. Schaer also reaffirms Horstmann’s dating of the English prose translation to circa 1400.

<sup>5</sup> Lars Bisgaard, “A Black Mystery: the Hagiography of the Three Magi,” in Tuomas M.S. Lehtonen and Kurt Villads Jensen, eds., *Medieval History Writing and Crusading Ideology* (Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 2005), 122. Bisgaard notes “a growing tendency” to describe the magi—from the Latin *magus*, probably meaning “a member of the priestly class in ancient Persia involved in astrology and astronomy”—as kings after the fourth-century split between the celebrations of Christmas and Epiphany in the Latin Church. He ascribes the shift to calling the magi kings to the interpretation of Psalm 72 that takes it as prophesying about the magi: “The kings of Tarshish and the isles shall offer gifts, the kings of Arabia and Sheba shall bring tribute. All kings shall pay him homage, all nations shall serve him.” Bisgaard is not alone in noting the shift in the three men’s identities: Historian Bernard Hamilton, “Prester John and the *Three Kings of Cologne*,” in Henry Mayr-Harting and R.I. Moore, eds., *Studies in Medieval History Presented to R.H.C. Davis* (London: The Hambledon Press, 1985), 181, attributes the identification as kings to Tertullian. Commenting on Psalm 72, “The kings of Arabia and Saba shall bring gifts to him,” Tertullian argues that the magi are indeed the fulfillment of the Psalm; he writes “almost the entire East has kings who are Magi.” Hamilton quotes Tertullian’s *Adversus Iudaeos*, ix, 12, in A Kroymann, ed., *Corpus Christianorum*, Series Latina, II, ii (1954), 1367-8. Hamilton, 182-90, goes on to argue that Rainald of Dassel, late twelfth-century archbishop of Cologne and chancellor to Holy Roman Emperor Frederick I Barbarossa, commissioned the lives of the magi and related texts in order to assert the correctness of the kind of Christian kingship Frederick I asserted. I will use the terms *kings* and *magi* interchangeably in this chapter though, for the most part, I will follow the *Three Kings* text in calling them kings.

shall fall down: and his enemies shall lick the ground.” Even as “Ethiopians” are identified with Christ’s enemies, the text tells us that one of the three reverend magi who came to worship him is Ethiopian “wherof is no doute.”<sup>6</sup> “Ethiopian” is the classical and medieval catch-all descriptor for black-skinned people.<sup>7</sup> While some medieval texts describe the black king as “fuscus,” meaning dark or swarthy, others go so far as to call him “niger,” unequivocally black.<sup>8</sup> The *Three Kings* falls into the latter category, calling Jaspar “ethiops niger,” or “a blak Ethiop.”<sup>9</sup> In addition to associating Jaspar with Christ’s black Ethiopian enemies, the text identifies the Nestorian Christians, whom it calls “the worst heretics in the world,” as black, too. This chapter takes as remarkable the intimate connection between this very holy black king and these horrible black heretics, who in fact constitute a very Christian, eastern sect.<sup>10</sup> The connection between Jaspar and the

---

<sup>6</sup> CV, fol. 53b, and Horstmann, 73.

<sup>7</sup> Kaplan, 4, points out that “In ancient times ‘Ethiopian’ was generically used to describe black people, but was also understood to specify the inhabitants of that East African land; between about 600 and 1300 it was the generic use which predominated.”

<sup>8</sup> Kaplan, 26-8, bases his comparison of *fuscus* and *niger* on a mid-eighth-century account of the three kings of Irish or possibly Anglo-Saxon origin, in which Balthasar is described as “dark”: “Tertius, *fuscus*, integer barbatus, Balthasar nomine, habens tunicam rubeam, albo vario, calceamentis milenicis amictus: per myrrham Filium hominis moriturum professus est” [The third (wise man), *dark*, fully bearded, named Balthasar, having a red tunic, a short white mantle, fits into green slippers: by [means of his] myrrh the death of the Son of man is foretold.] The Latin *fuscus*, meaning dark or swarthy, could refer to the king’s hair or beard. Kaplan has shown that by the late tenth or eleventh century in Ireland, the much more specific term “niger” comes into use when describing Balthasar in the *Catechesis Celtica*, a collection of homilies: “Tertius, Patizara nomine, fuscus, *niger*, integer barbatus, tunicam rubeam et sagum album habens, et calceamentis millenicis indutus.” [Third, named Patizara, dark, *black*, fully bearded, having a red tunic and short white cloak, and dressed in green slippers.] Kaplan quotes from *Excerptiones Patrum, Collectanea, Flores ex Diversis, Quaestiones et Parabolae*, in J.P. Migne, *Patrologiae Cursus Completus Series Latina* (Paris: 1844-5), (hereafter *PL*), 94, col. 541, and from Vatican Reg. Lat. 49, VII, commentum de verbis ioh. ii. 1-11, fs. 45v-47r. The passage is also cited in A. Wilmart, *Analecta Reginensia*, Vatican City, 1933, 73-4, and in McNally, “Three Holy Kings,” 685 (emphasis mine). The English translation is Kaplan’s. Throughout this dissertation, all translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

<sup>9</sup> CV, fol. 53b, and Horstmann, 73, 237.

<sup>10</sup> I will define Nestorian Christianity more fully below.

Nestorians, because they are presented in such disparate lights, begs the question what does blackness mean in the *Three Kings*?

One meaning of blackness in Christendom is that Christianity has global reach. The *Three Kings* asserts the global influence of Christianity, especially east of the Levant, and explains how worldwide Christianity came to exist. In the *Three Kings*, an Old Testament prophecy comes to pass: In Numbers 24:17, the prophet Balaam predicts “orietur stella ex Iacob et consurget virga de Israhel.” The Douai-Rheims translates the prophecy: “A star shall rise out of Jacob and a scepter shall spring up from Israel.” This star is interpreted as the star that the three kings follow, and the scepter is synecdoche for Christ as king of the Jews and, for that matter, of the whole world.<sup>11</sup> The three kings’ decisions to follow the star, and converge at Jerusalem has the effect of bringing the world together; by the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, depictions of the three kings often show them as representatives of the three known continents: Europe, Asia, and Africa.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> Rashi, *Chumash with Targum Onkelos, Haphtaroth and Rashi’s Commentary*, trans. R. A.M. Silbermann and Rev. M. Rosenbaum (Jerusalem: Silbermann Family, 5745), 120. Even the famed eleventh-century rabbi Rashi, in his commentary on the Torah, interprets this passage as meaning a king will rise out of the Jewish people. For Rashi, this king is David: “A STAR COMETH OUT OF JACOB – Understand this as the Targum does (‘a king will arise from Jacob’)...AND A *SHEVET* RISES OUT OF ISRAEL – a king, who chastises *with the rod (Shevet)* and has sovereign power...AND PIERCETH THE CORNERS OF MOAB – This is a reference to David of whom it is stated, (2 Sam. VIII. 2) ‘[And he smote Moab] ... making them to lie down on the ground and he measured two lines to put to death etc.’” Capitalization is Silbermann and Rosenbaum’s indicating Rashi’s quotation of the scripture, which is followed by his lowercase analysis.

<sup>12</sup> Kaplan, 34, cites Saint Bruno, *Commentarium in Matthaeum*, in *PL*, 168, col. 1338. Bruno, the founder of the Carthusian order, identified the three magi-kings as “tres homines, tribus partibus orbis, Asie, Europae atque Africae” [three men, of the three parts of the globe, Asia, Europe, and Africa].

Jews figure prominently in the text as a foil to Christian claims that Christ fulfills Balaam's prophecy. In the East, the text tells us, Balaam's prophecy leads to disagreement between Christians and Jews.

First 3e schul vndirstonde þat þe story of þes þre blessyd kynges was first bygunne of þe prophecie of Balaam, the prest of Madian, prophete: þe which Balaam amonge all opere prophecied an seyde *Orietur stella ex Iacob* [& *exurget homo de Israel & ipse dominabitur omnium gencium*,]<sup>13</sup> þat is to seye: a sterre shall springe of Iacob and a man shall rise vp of Israel and schal be lorde of all folk—as it is conteynede fullich in the olde testament. Of þis Balaam is altercacioun in þe eeste bytwix cristen men & Iewes: ffor þe Iewis seize in her bokis that Balaam was no prophete but a enchantour and þorw wicchecraft and þe deuelys craft he prophecied; wherefore in writing he schulde be cleped a enchantour and no prophete. Azens þe Iewes þe cristen men seie þat Balaam was a paynym and was þe first prophete þat was no Iewe, and prophecied to hem þat were no Iewes, and right gloriouslych prophecied of þe Incarnacioun of oure lorde Ihesu and of þe coming of þes iij kynges...god of grete loue schewed to Balaam by a aungell þorowe tokenes...as hit is aforseyde, for Balaam was þe first prophete þat was no Iewe, and prophecied to hem þat were no Iewes: þefore [þe Iewes] cleped hym a enchantour and no prophete.<sup>14</sup>

According to the text, eastern Christians and Jews battle over the truth of Balaam's prophecy. Christians say he was a prophet and that his prophecy in Numbers 24:17 predicts the rise of the star and the birth of Christ. Jews say he was simply a magician and his prophecy means nothing. The text finally exposes the real argument: Balaam's identity. The disagreement between Jews and Christians is over whether a non-Jew can properly offer Old Testament prophecy, and whether he can offer it to non-Jews:

---

<sup>13</sup> I supply this portion of Balaam's prophecy from Cambridge MS University Library E.e. 4.32, presented by Horstmann in a facing-page edition with MS Cotton Vespasian E.16.

<sup>14</sup> CV, fol. 38b, and Horstmann, 5. Brackets indicate places where I have restored readings from Horstmann's footnotes to the main body of the text. I do this in accordance with Schaer's, 18, assertion that Horstmann's Latin better represents the usual version of the *Historia Trium Regum* when the footnotes are reinstated.



According to the text, Balaam was the first prophet that “was not a Jew, and prophesied to those that were not Jews: *therefore* the Jews called him a magician and no prophet” (emphasis mine).

In the *Three Kings*, the conflict over Balaam’s identity and the worth of his prophecy evolves into a competition between Jews, eastern Christians, and western Christian readers. The text articulates the contest in terms of identity based on genealogy—since Balaam was not a Jew, Christians argue, he was perfect to prophesy to non-Jews. The result is a race-thinking hierarchy involving western and eastern Christians and Jews.<sup>15</sup> This chapter argues that the *Three Kings*’ race-thinking hierarchy, ultimately interested in religious identity, is constructed through blackness.

Through the manipulation of physical blackness and religious identity, the *Three Kings* seeks to make sense of a Western European world in which, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, blackness has multiple valences. On the one hand, African Christianity is necessary for the survival of western Christendom in the face of the threat from Islam. In this respect, blackness is important as an indicator of Christianity’s worldwide status and has no bearing on a black person’s essence. On the other hand, blackness was associated with Islam. In this respect, blackness is symbolically significant as the external physical indicator of the sullied state of a non-Christian’s soul.

The association of blackness and Christ’s enemies clashes with the association between black skin and Christendom’s worldwide reach. The result is the construction of

---

<sup>15</sup> “Race-thinking” here means the adherence to the idea of static identity groups from which any member is not usually allowed to defect. These groups are informed by genealogy. I have addressed *race-thinking*, as thought by Hannah Arendt, in the introduction to this dissertation, and I will also do so below.

a black identity that is subordinate to Christian identity while also integral to the notion of Christian hegemony: Christianity's power and truth are demonstrated when *even Ethiopians* come to worship. While black Christians are given something of a place at the proverbial table, Jews, who ridicule Balaam's Gentile-friendly prophesy, are not. The *Three Kings*' treatment of the Magian story reveals that in order to deal with (and assert) the fact that Christendom transcends physical and geographical difference, new paradigms for human difference—both within and outside Christianity—are necessary. This chapter's goal is to examine how the *Three Kings* goes about constructing paradigms for differentiating western Christians, eastern Christians, and Jews.

### ***Jaspar, the Nestorians, and Blackness***

In the *Three Kings*, the black king Jaspar's connection to the eastern Christian Nestorians, who jealously hang onto Jaspar's body after he dies, is watertight. It does not mean, however, that the Nestorians' blackness is taken for granted. Though Jaspar is usually black, the Nestorians are sometimes not. The CV *Three Kings*, along with the R10 version of which it is a copy, is notable for omitting the Nestorians' blackness while the Latin *Historia* and comparable English translations have Jaspar and the Nestorians sharing black skin. This section first treats the tradition of blackness with which the *Three Kings*, in general, works. Then, it offers a word on the historical Nestorians who figure so prominently in the *Three Kings*. Finally, this section treats the implications of Jaspar's and the Nestorians' blackness in the *Three Kings*.

Likely written in Latin sometime shortly after 1364—at least sixty years after the *King of Tars*, the thirteenth- or early fourteenth-century English text that prohibits black

Christianity treated in my introduction—the *Three Kings* does not preclude the prospect of practicing Christians having black skin, even though blackness is also associated with Christ’s enemies.<sup>16</sup> The *Three Kings* (which appears in England another forty years after its Latin production in Germany) fully embraces the tradition that one of the three holy kings was black. Describing the three kings and their gifts, the text states that Melchior, king of Nubia and Arabia, “was leest of stature of body” and presented Christ with a round apple of gold and thirty gold pennies; Balthasar, king of Godolis and Saba, is of a “meene stature” and offers incense; finally, “Iaspar, kyng of Thaars and of þe yle of Egryswell, he was mooste in persone; and he was *blak Ethiop, wherof is no doute*.”<sup>17</sup> Such a certain ascription is notable when only a few decades before, the *King of Tars* so emphatically asserted that blackness and Christianity were not compatible.

The tradition that one of the kings was Ethiopian was, by the fourteenth century, longstanding. Allusions to Ethiopia in the context of the kings can be dated at least as early as St. Hilary of Poitiers (c.315-367/8). Hilary wrote that Psalms 67:32, which reads that “Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands to God,” was fulfilled “by the coming of the Magi from the East.” Hilary then mentions the eunuch of the Queen of Ethiopia who is converted by St. Philip in Acts 8:27-40. For Hilary, the East and Ethiopia represent the same environs from which the kings come.<sup>18</sup> As noted above, in a mid-eighth-century

---

<sup>16</sup> Bisgaard, 128.

<sup>17</sup> CV, fol. 53b, and Horstmann, 71-3 (emphasis mine).

<sup>18</sup> Kaplan, 23-4. See also Kaplan’s n. 29 in which he quotes St. Hilary of Poitiers, *Psalmorum Explanationem*, in *Quotquot extant opera*, Paris, 1652, 823: “Expleta autem haec eadem sunt vel Magis ex oriente venientibus, vel tunc cum in Apostolos Spiritus sanctus divini ignis modo venit. Nam illie ad praedicationis Euangelicae cognitionem etiam ex Aegypto conuenisse scribuntur: quibus magnitudinem

Irish or possibly Anglo-Saxon account of the three kings, Balthasar is described as “dark”: “Tertius, *fuscus*, integer barbatus, Balthasar nomine, habens tunicam rubeam, albo vario, calceamentis milenicis amictus: per myrrham Filium hominis moriturum professus est.” [The third (king), *dark*, fully bearded, named Balthasar, having a red tunic, a short white mantle, fits into green slippers: by (means of his) myrrh the death of the Son of man is foretold.]<sup>19</sup> Nonetheless, the Latin “*fuscus*,” meaning dark or swarthy, could refer to the king’s hair or beard. Kaplan has shown that by the late tenth or eleventh century in Ireland, the much more specific term “*niger*” comes into use when describing Balthasar. The Irish tradition in which Balthasar has black skin, he argues, then takes root in Germany. There John of Hildesheim would have been exposed to the idea.<sup>20</sup>

The notion that one of the kings was black allowed theologians to argue that the three magi represented the three parts of the known world—Europe, Asia, and Africa. The Ethiopian identity of one of the kings was seen as proof that Christendom was global. The notion that Ethiopians coming to worship Christ was notable was largely based in the prophecy of Psalm 71:9-11 mentioned above and taken to signify Ethiopian

---

divini muneris tanquam legatis renunciatis Aegyptus prope vniuersa est iam fidelis, Aethiopia vero, in Candaces eunucho fidei confessione praeuenit manus suas. Dum ipse baptismi gratiam sibi postulat, dicens: ‘Ecce aqua, quis prohibet me baptizari?’”

<sup>19</sup> *Excerptiones Patrum, Collectanea, Flores ex Diversis, Quaestiones et Parabola*, in J.P. Migne, *Patrologiae Cursus Completus Series Latina* (Paris: 1844-5), (hereafter *PL*), 94, col. 541, quoted in Kaplan, 26 (emphasis mine). The English translation is Kaplan’s.

<sup>20</sup> Kaplan, 29. Kaplan cites as his evidence for the movement of the black king tradition to Germany an early thirteenth-century prayer of the nuns at Schönaue, not more than a day’s journey from Cologne: “Rex Baltasar, qui niger et rubea tunica indutus et calciamentorum varietate...te rogo pro peccatis et negligentis meis.” [King Baltasar, who is black and wears a red tunic and multicolored slippers...I pray to you for my sins and deficiencies]. The translation is Kaplan’s.

submission to Christ. The verse does not escape John of Hildesheim, or his English translator: After he announces Jaspar's blackness "wherof is no doute," he continues:

...wherof þe prophete seiþe: "Coram illo procident Ethiopes & inimici eius terram lingent, Venient ad te qui detrahebant tibi, & adorabunt vestigial pedum tuorum,/ This is to seye: tofore hym schul falle down Ethiops, and hys enemyes schul lik þe erþe; They schul come to þe þat bakbited þe, and þei schul worschipe þe steppes of þi feet."<sup>21</sup>

[...about which [David] says: "Coram illo procident Ethiopes et inimici eius terram lingent, Venient ad te qui detrahebant tibi, et adorabunt vestigial pedum tuorum." This is to say: "Before him will fall down Ethiopians, and his enemies will lick the earth; they will come to you that backbit you, and they will worship the steps of your feet.]

Blacks are here presented as prophecy-fulfilling "Gentiles par excellence," to use Kaplan's term.<sup>22</sup> As a result, their conversion, along with the identification of one king as Asian and one as European, asserts the world-converting power of Christ.<sup>23</sup> If the Ethiopians can convert, the logic goes, then certainly anyone can.

The legend's interest in worldwide Christendom leads it, paradoxically, to question the worth of conversions and Christian identity around the globe. The conversion of the Ethiopians, Christ's former enemies, asserts the world-converting power of Christ in both Latin and English texts, but in the Latin *Historia* it does so with a caveat. According to the Latin *Historia* and the R10CV text, Nestorian Christians are "þe

---

<sup>21</sup> CV, fol. 53b, and Horstmann, 73.

<sup>22</sup> Kaplan, 23.

<sup>23</sup> In addition to Saint Bruno's assertion, Bisgaard, 134, notes that fifteenth-century prints of the three magi-kings made it clear that "not only did the three kings represent different ages; they also come from different continents, Asia, Africa, and Europe. Thus the whole world adored the Christ child."

worste heretikes in þe worlde.”<sup>24</sup> According to the Latin text, and not the R10CV text,

Nestorians and Ethiopians are one and the same:

et hij in omnibus partibus Orientis omnibus [alijs] Christianis sunt exosi  
[et despecti]; de [eorum] heresi circa xl regna fuerunt et sunt [omnium]  
infecta; et sunt pro maiori parte Ethiopes nigri...<sup>25</sup>

[and these in all parts of the East are hated and despised by all other  
Christians; of their heresy around forty realms were and are infected; and  
for the most part they are black Ethiopians...]

The Nestorians are examples of Christendom’s worldwide reach as Ethiopians and an example of conversion gone wrong, as heretics, at the same time.<sup>26</sup> The Nestorians’ identification with heresy in both Latin and English exemplifies the text’s interest in constructing a hierarchy that suggests some Christians are better than others.

Why would the *Three Kings* saddle Nestorians with the negative value judgment that they are heretics when it could foreground Christendom’s global reach instead? The answer lay in the Nestorian Church’s power to compete with Latin Christianity for the claim to Christian orthodoxy. In the eighth century, under Timothy, the Nestorian *catholicos* (the eastern Church’s equivalent to the Catholic pope), the Nestorian Church had metropolitan sees (the equivalents of the English metropolitan sees at York and Canterbury) in at least twenty-eight cities stretching from Jerusalem to modern-day

---

<sup>24</sup> CV, fol. 68b, and Horstmann, 146-7. The identification of Nestorians with heretics occurs in all known manuscripts, including the Royal, Cambridge, and Cotton Vespasian manuscripts.

<sup>25</sup> Horstmann, 279.

<sup>26</sup> In the R10CV version, Nestorians are the “worst heretics” but they are never identified with black Ethiopians. The Nestorians’ relationship to Jaspar may imply that the Nestorians are black in R10CV’s abbreviated English *Three Kings*, but as I will show below, the R10CV version takes pains to distance Jaspar and the Nestorians from one another.

Beijing. Sees were most heavily concentrated in the Tigris and Euphrates River valleys.<sup>27</sup> According to historian Philip Jenkins's 2008 *The Lost History of Christianity*, the Nestorian Church (or the Church of the East, as medieval Nestorians would have called themselves) may have included a quarter of the world's Christians.<sup>28</sup> This estimate alone, given that the Christian world consisted of only two other organized churches with as much power—the Roman Catholic Church in western Europe and the Eastern Orthodox Church based in Constantinople—speaks to the Church of the East's potential challenge to the Latin Church in the Middle Ages.<sup>29</sup>

The *Three Kings*' anxiety over the Nestorian challenge to the Latin Church was bolstered by the traditional theological ascription of heresy to the Nestorians. Jenkins offers an admittedly oversimplified description of the differences between orthodox and Nestorian belief:

---

<sup>27</sup> Philip Jenkins, *The Lost History of Christianity: The Thousand-Year Golden Age of the Church in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia—And How It Died* (New York: HarperOne, 2008), 4-13, especially figure 1.1 on pages 12 and 13. This map shows the locations of the twenty-eight metropolitan sees.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>29</sup> Jenkins criticizes historiographers who persist in the anachronistic position that Church history is synonymous with the development of Western Europe. Jenkins, 4, writes: "...rediscovering the lost Christian worlds of Africa and Asia raises sobering questions about the nature of historical memory. How can we possibly have forgotten such a vast story? In terms of the story of Christianity, which we usually associate so centrally with the making of 'the West,' much of what we think we know is inaccurate, in terms of the places and times at which things happened and how religious change occurred." That is to say, in modern times Christian historiography has been overwhelmingly Eurocentric. The Nestorian Church survives today as the Holy Apostolic Catholic Assyrian Church of the East and has dioceses worldwide, though its numbers and influence are much reduced. Jenkins, 24, points out that several million Christians in southern India today are the "remnants" of Nestorian Christianity, though most of them have since assimilated to the Catholic or Orthodox Churches. By the 1920s, the Nestorians were reduced to what Alphonse Mingana, in *The Early Spread of Christianity in Central Asia and the Far East* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1925), 20, called "a miserable community of about forty thousand refugees" in northern Iraq. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the *Catholic Encyclopedia* cited the "latest" statistics as accounting for approximately 35,000 Nestorians in Persia. Today, Jenkins, 24, points out, the catholicos sits in Chicago.

According to the Catholic or Orthodox, who eventually triumphed within the Roman Empire, Christ had two natures, which were conjoined and commingled. Many Easterners followed the Patriarch Nestorius, who accepted the two natures but held that these were not absolutely united in the mystical sense taught by the Orthodox. This meant that the Virgin Mary could not rightly be called the Mother of God. Following bitter struggles, these *Nestorians* were cast out of the fold at Ephesus in 431.<sup>30</sup>

The *Catholic Encyclopedia*, published in 1911, explains further the theology of Nestorius and the Antiochene school from which he came. In 428, Nestorius was chosen by Emperor Theodosius II to be Patriarch of Constantinople. In the end of 428 or early 429 he preached a sermon against the notion of *Theokotos*, or the idea that Mary is the Mother of God. He argued that Mary was the mother of the humanity assumed by Christ but that she could not be the mother of Christ's Godliness: "Ferri tamen potest hoc vocabulum proper ipsum considerationem, quod solum nominetur de virgine hoc verbum hoc propter inseparable templum Dei Verbi ex ipsa, non quia mater sit Dei Verbi; nemo enim antiquiorem se parit." [Nevertheless, this idea can be brought to consideration, that this word only names the virgin on account of the fact that the *temple* of the Word of God is inseparable from herself, not because she is the mother of the Word of God; no one indeed can bear that which is older than herself].<sup>31</sup> Nestorius was condemned as a heretic

---

<sup>30</sup> Jenkins, ix-x.

<sup>31</sup> *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Nestorius and Nestorianism," (by John Chapman), <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/10755a.htm> (accessed June 26, 2009, emphasis mine). Chapman displays a marked orthodox Catholic bias against Nestorius's idea, writing of Nestorius's concession that "such an admission is worse than useless, for it involves the whole error that the Blessed Virgin is not the mother of the Second Person of the Holy Trinity... In the same letter he speaks quite correctly of the 'two Natures which are adored in the one Person of the Only-begotten by a perfect and unconfused conjunction,' but this could not palliate his mistake that the blessed Virgin is mother of one nature, not of the person (a son is necessarily a person not a nature), not the fallacy: 'No one can bring forth a son older than herself.'"



in 430 and retired to Antioch. Several years later he was banished to the Oasis. In 435, Theodosius II condemned Nestorius's writings to be burnt.<sup>32</sup>

A comparison of the *Historia's* and the *Three Kings'* treatments of the Nestorians' relationship to Persia reveals that the texts position Nestorians differently with regard to orthodox Christianity. Persia is important to the text's treatments of Nestorians because Nestorius's teachings became synonymous with Christianity in Persia after the fifth century. A school for Persians had existed in Roman Edessa, located in what is today Southeast Turkey, since the fourth century. After Nisibis ceased to be ruled by the Roman Empire in 363 AD, Christians in Persia were persecuted; many were attracted by the peaceful study the school in Edessa, which was still Roman, could offer. The students learned Antiochene theology, including Nestorian thinking on Christ's human and divine natures. Until 457, the school had the protection of its former director Ibas, who had become Bishop of Edessa. When he died, the Persians were driven out of Edessa by the Monophysites,<sup>33</sup> a heretical sect (as far as the West was concerned) who believed that "Christ had only one nature, so that the divine overwhelmed the human."<sup>34</sup> The Nestorian students returned to Persia. In order to distinguish the Persian Church from Antioch and Constantinople, Barsauma, the bishop of Nisibis, had all non-Nestorian Christians driven from Persia, and the Persian Church, "formally committed to the theology of Antioch," was organized.

---

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Jenkins, x.

In both the Latin *Historia* and the English *Three Kings*, the Nestorians are not quite Persians even though they inhabit the same region. The Latin *Historia* explicitly casts the Nestorians as neighbors to Persia who are also better than the Persians. After describing how Muslims and Jews hold the three kings in reverence, the *Historia* describes the Nestorians:

Item Perse, licet sint absque aliqua fide vel lege, tamen cum Christianis in eccleijs eorum orant, secundum quod a parentibus eorum vel [et] alijs sunt instructi. Tamen dicunt quod postquam corpora trium Regum de Oriente de partibus eorum [de oriente in occidentem] fuerunt translata, quod [extunc] stella [magis]<sup>35</sup> in partibus eorum et regnis Nestorinorum [postmodum non] sit visa. Vnde Nestorini, pessimi heretici, *Persarum vicini*, ex invidia odiose in oppositum allegiant, dicentes: quod stella maris in Persyde [et eorum regnis] non videatur, hoc nec sit nec euenisset propter [ex ipsorum trium Regum translacione]...<sup>36</sup>

[In Persia, while it is legal to be without either faith or law, they nevertheless pray in their Christian churches, following that which they were taught by their parents or others. Still they say that after the bodies of the three kings of the Orient were translated from the East to the West, that from then on the star had not been seen any more in their parts and in the realm of the Nestorians. Thus the Nestorians, the worst heretics, *neighbors of Persia*, from hateful envy allege against them, saying: that the star would no longer be seen in Persia and their realms, and that this would not have happened had not the three kings been translated from them...]

---

<sup>35</sup> Horstmann prints “maris,” “of the sea” in the main body of his text. “Stella maris” can refer to the Virgin Mary. In a footnote, 297, n. 5, Horstmann offers that later prints have “magis.” I have chosen “magis” as it seems to make more sense in the context of the three kings story. Nonetheless, a question about the Mediterranean Sea follows this passage and makes “maris” a viable possibility. If “maris” is the correct reading, then the passage may mean to link the magi’s star with the Virgin Mary more directly than the way already implied by the star’s leading the magi to her and her baby.

<sup>36</sup> Horstmann, 297 (emphasis mine). Brackets indicate footnotes I have reinstated into the main text. I have only reinstated footnotes that Horstmann does not ascribe to a particular MS. The majority of those that I have not included refer to MS Corpus Christi College Cambridge 275 (Horstmann’s siglum CC), which he considers bad and full of mistakes.

The *Historia* goes to great lengths to distance the Nestorians from the Persians. Persians are faithless, and the Nestorians are by definition Christian. The Nestorians, envious of the Persians, even blame the Persians for the translation of the three kings to Milan. Though the Nestorians are the “worst heretics in the world” in the *Historia*, their concern over Jaspar’s body, the star, and their accusation of the Persians confirms their Christianity. It is apparent that they are better than Persians who live “without faith or law” (though they are not necessarily better than Persians who do pray in churches). The Latin text uses the Persians as a device for carefully positioning the Nestorians as heretics while reminding its readers that heretics are Christians nonetheless.

The R10CV version of the *Three Kings* is much less interested in Persia. In fact, it is sparse in its definition of the Nestorians altogether. In a discussion of how heretics, Jews, and Muslims all worship the kings, the R10CV states of the Nestorians:

And þe forþe þe Nestorynes do no reuerence to seynt Thomas by-cause of þis prophecie; neiþer þei do no worschippe to þes iij. Kyngis; and when þei make preestis among hem, þei make hem swere þat in here masse þei schule accurse all hem þat were at þe counseil & helpyng to do away þe body of her kyng Iaspar. And þes Nestorynes be þe worste heretykes in þe world, and for her cursednesse þei were wondirliche destroyed.<sup>37</sup>

The Nestorians, according to the R10CV, are defined by their refusal to worship St. Thomas the Apostle or the three kings. According to the text, the Nestorians’ refusal stems from their anger and jealousy at Jaspar’s body having been taken to join those of the other kings and their anger at a prophecy that St. Thomas’s body will be taken to be united with those of the kings, too. The text goes on to detail how the Nestorians are

---

<sup>37</sup> CV, fol. 68b, and Horstmann, 147.

“wonderlich destroyed” when the Tartars (Mongols) rise up from within their ranks. Unlike the *Historia*, the R10CV says nothing of Nestorians being neighbors to Persians nor are they jealous of Persians or angry at them. The Nestorians are never called Persians. The Nestorians can be linked to Persia through Jaspar, however: the R10CV *Three Kings* tells us that “þre worschippeful and blessyd kyngis...regned in Ynde, Caldee and Peers.” The text continues by naming these places the three Indias. It breaks them down further still and tells us that Jaspar rules the third India (Peers, or Persia) in which is the isle “Egriswilla.”<sup>38</sup> The Latin text’s interest in setting Nestorians and Persians apart gives way in the *Three Kings* to much greater emphasis on the Nestorians’ identity as the “worst heretics” who are “wondirlich destroyed.” The English abbreviation’s disinterest in the faithless Persians conveys its greater interest in setting up an intra-Christian hierarchy than one that includes non-Christians.

In the R10CV version the Nestorians are not designated black Ethiopians, and the omission suggests that in the abbreviated English *Three Kings* a character judgment is attached to blackness that is not present in the *Historia*. In the *Historia*, the fact that Jaspar and the Nestorians are black is presented as a matter of fact. The Latin version connects Jaspar with the Nestorians in the passage immediately following the one in which Persians are called faithless and lawless:

Nestorini, Persarum vicini [de quibus est supradictum], sunt homines de regno Tharsis et insule Egrisuele [nati, in quibus regnauit Iaspar tercius

---

<sup>38</sup> CV, fol. 53b, and Horstmann, 39, 45.

rex Ethiops qui domino mirram obtulit], heretici pessimi, [et eorum heresi in oriente] fuerunt circa xl regna infecta [et corrupta.]<sup>39</sup>

[The Nestorians, neighbors of Persia, of whom it is aforesaid, are born men of the realm of Tharsis and the island of Egriswill, in which reigned Jaspar, the third king, the Ethiopian who offered myrrh to the lord, the worst heretics, and of their heresy in the east there were about forty realms infected and corrupted.]

The fact that the Nestorians are the “worst heretics” and they are the subjects of Jaspar, the “third king...who offered myrrh to the Lord” seems not at all surprising. There is little suggestion that Jaspar and the Nestorians should be similar in character because they come from the same place. As noted above, the Nestorians “sunt pro maiori parte Ethiopes nigri...”<sup>40</sup> [for the most part they are black Ethiopians...]. The *Historia* notes the Nestorians’ blackness and Jaspar’s too when it states: “et erat Malchiar minor in persona, Balthazar mediocris, Jaspar maior in persona, *et ethiops niger*, de quo nulli dubium.”<sup>41</sup> [and Melchior was least in person, Balthasar of medium size, Jaspar most in person, *and a black Ethiopian*, of which there is no doubt.] The R10CV follows the *Historia* exactly in calling Jaspar “blak Ethiop, wherof is no doute,” but it never designates the Nestorians black. In the *Historia*, it is acceptable for holy, blessed Jaspar and the wickedly heretical Nestorians to be black together. In the R10CV *Three Kings* it is not. As the R10CV version strives to create starker boundaries within Christendom, it is unable to get the Nestorian’s blackness and Jaspar’s to jive. Physical difference

---

<sup>39</sup> Horstmann, 297.

<sup>40</sup> Horstmann, 279.

<sup>41</sup> Horstmann, 237 (emphasis mine).

becomes a shorthand for setting off Christians from less orthodox Christians when other things about them—geography and kinship—would unite them.

At first glance, Jaspar's blackness makes it hard to argue that blackness carries a negative value judgment, but close comparison of his and the Nestorians' blackness reveals the extent to which Jaspar's blackness may have raised scribes' eyebrows even as its implications for worldwide Christendom intrigued them. As shown above, in the Latin and in the English translations the announcement of Jaspar's blackness is accompanied by the emphatic "wherof is no doute" or "de quo nulli dubium." Rather than suggest pure certainty, the text seems to protest too much and the reader gets the impression that there is reason to doubt Jaspar's blackness. The traditional association between blackness and non-Christian identity, as seen in the *King of Tars*, may have been one reason for such doubt.

In versions where the Nestorians are black, there is no such thinly veiled doubt about their blackness. In the Cambridge MS *Three Kings* (which also appears in Horstmann's edition) as in the *Historia*, Nestorian blackness is included among negative attributes in a matter-of-fact manner. Immediately before announcing the Nestorians' blackness, the *Historia* tells us "de eorum heresi circa xl regna fuerunt et sunt omnium infecta" [of their heresy around forty realms were and are infected].<sup>42</sup> The Nestorians' identity as "for the most part black Ethiopians" follows on the heels of that statement as if it speaks to the Nestorian infection. What is more, at least one English manuscript, MS

---

<sup>42</sup> Horstmann, 279.

Harley 1704, follows the Latin in claiming that the Nestorians offend other Christians by painting Christian figures black: “and þey peynt god and oure lady & þe iij kynges & seint Thomas in her Chirches all in blacke, and þe devell al white—and þis þey do in dispite of all oþer Cristen men.” It is for this that they are “hated and despised by all Christians in all parts of the East.”<sup>43</sup> The appearance of Nestorian blackness in some manuscripts and not in others bespeaks a lack of comfort with the black magus tradition on the part of some, even as others promote it. The R10CV versions take a middle-of-the-road stance, attaching a positive value judgment to blackness by attributing it to Jaspar yet registering the traditional denigration of blackness by doubting that anyone good can be black. In order not to confuse matters further, the R10CV version omits the Nestorians’ blackness.<sup>44</sup>

The *Three Kings* sits with the discomfort of a black Jaspar when it could make use of a tradition that takes blackness as a springboard for the metaphorical whitewashing of the soul through Christ; the *Three Kings* is more interested in the real-world implications of blackness than in its spiritual implications. The slippage between views that held blackness as a positive attribute and a negative attribute can be traced back at

---

<sup>43</sup> Horstmann, 146-7 and 146, n. 1. This passage follows the Latin *Historia*, but does not appear in the R10CV version. See. Horstmann, 279.

<sup>44</sup> See Ernst Höpfner and Julius Zacher, eds., *Zeitschrift für Deutsche Philologie* 19 (1887): 13, and Bisgaard, 129 and note 43. Lars Bisgaard has shown that one of John of Hildesheim’s main sources was the German travel narrative *Orientbericht*, which identifies Jaspar as from Tharsis and all of Tharsis’s inhabitants as “black as Moors.” Höpfner and Zacher print the full text: “Vort dat lant van tharsi, da Jaspar konink was, da is ouch here over prieser Johann, ind die lude sint as swartze as Moir.” Perhaps the Cambridge and Harley scribes had exemplars that retained the attribution of blackness to Nestorians while the Royal and Cotton Vespasian scribes did not. If Schaer, 18, is right that Horstmann’s *Historia* with the footnotes restored is a viable reconstruction of the Latin that the English translator would have most likely had on hand, then the onus for the omission of Nestorian blackness must fall on the translator of the R10CV version and not on his Latin exemplar.

least as far as Saint Augustine. In his commentary on the Psalms, St. Augustine lays bare the foreignness of “Ethiopian” blacks. Commenting on Psalms 71:9, he writes:

*Coram illo decident Aethiopes, et inimici ejus terram lingent. Per Aethiopes, a parte totum, omnes gentes significavit; eam eligens gentem, quam potissimum nominaret, quae in finibus terrae est... Hanc terram lingendo, id est, talium auctoritate vaniloqua delectati, eos amando, et in suavissimos habendo, contradicunt divinis eloquiis, quibus catholica Ecclesia praenuntiata est, non in aliqua parte terrarum futura, sicut quaelibet schismata; sed in universo mundo fructificando atque crescendo, usque ad ipsos Aethiopes, extremos videlicet et teterrimos hominum, perventura.*<sup>45</sup>

[Before him will fall down Ethiopians, and his enemies will lick the ground. By Ethiopians, from part the whole, is meant all people; choosing those people, whom are most principally called, that are in the ends of the earth... This licking the earth, that is, delighting in the vain speeches of such authorities, loving them, and holding them dear, they contradict the divine word, that the Catholic Church has been foretold not to be in any particular part of the world, as certain schisms; but in all the world bearing fruit and growing, is come even to the same Ethiopians, clearly the most remote and foulest (or blackest) of men.]

For Augustine, blacks exist at the “ends of the earth.” The prophecy that they will fall down at the feet of the Lord indicates that the Church will spread through the entire earth. Here, Augustine uses the Ethiopians as a metaphor for “all people...most principally called, that are in the ends of the earth.” The Ethiopians’ identification as “the most remote and foulest of men” works on both real and metaphorical levels. Conversion and salvation aside, in the real world blacks are denigrated. That fact makes them the perfect symbol for the salvation of the world.

---

<sup>45</sup> Augustine, *Ennarationes in Psalmos*, in *PL*, 36, col. 909 (emphasis mine). Translation is mine, with reference to that of Kaplan, 23, and that of Frank M. Snowden, Jr., *Blacks in Antiquity: Ethiopians in the Greco-Roman Experience* (Cambridge, MA: 1970), 204. “Teterrimos” translates to “foulest” or “ugliest.” Snowden translates the word as “blackest.”



In a sermon on Psalms 73:14, Augustine clearly juxtaposes the reality of blackness and the metaphorical nature of whitewashing, suggesting his greater interest in the latter. Psalm 73:14 reads: “tu confregisti capita Leviathan dedisti eum in escam populo Aethiopum” [Thou hast broken the heads of the dragon: thou hast given him to be meat for the people of the Ethiopians”].<sup>46</sup> Augustine takes it upon himself to define the Ethiopians:

*Dedisti eum in escam populis Aethiopibus. Quid est hoc? Quomodo intelligo populos Aethiopes? Quomodo, nisi per hos, omnes Gentes? Et bene per nigros; Aethiopes enim nigri sunt. Ipsi vocantur ad fidem, qui nigri fuerunt; ipsi prorsus, ut dicatur eis: *Fuistis enim aliquando tenebrae; nunc autem lux in Domino* (Ephes. V, 8). Ipsi prorsus vocantur nigri; sed ne remaneant nigri: de his enim fit Ecclesia, cui dicitur, *Quae est ista quae ascendit dealbata* (Cant. VIII, 5, sec. LXX)? Quid enim de nigra factum est, nisi quod dictum est: *Nigra sum, et speciosa* (Cant. I, 4)?<sup>47</sup>*

[*You have felled him to be a dish for the people of Ethiopia. What is this? How do I understand the people of Ethiopia? How, unless by them, all peoples? And well by black men; Ethiopians indeed are black. Themselves called to the faith, that before were black; just them, in order that it be said to them: *You indeed were sometimes darkness; now however you are light in the Lord* (Ephesians 5:8). Just them that were called black; but may they not remain black: from these indeed is made the Church, of whom it said, *Who is she that comes up having been washed white* (Song of Songs 8:5)? What indeed of the black woman is made, unless what is said: *I am black, and beautiful* (Song of Songs 1:4)?]*

Augustine at once defines Ethiopians as physically black people and blackness as a symbol for the sin-stained state of every person’s soul. He uses the case of the black beloved in Song of Songs 8:5, in which she is “washed white” in order to assert that

---

<sup>46</sup> These passages are taken from the Vulgate and the Douai-Rheims English versions.

<sup>47</sup> Augustine, *Ennarationes in Psalmos*, in *PL* 36, 938. Translation is mine, with reference to Kaplan 23 and n. 27, and Snowden 204. Italics indicate Augustine’s scriptural quotations. Roman text indicates his commentary.

belief in Christ purifies the soul, metaphorically washing it white. Augustine slips effortlessly between two modes of blackness. At one moment, he means the dark skin of Ethiopians. At the next, he means the state of the soul sullied by sin. Like the black beloved, who says “I *am* black” in the present tense, salvation and metaphorical whitewashing do not change the black Ethiopian’s physical blackness. For Augustine, blackness is an affront, but it is not physical blackness that concerns him. Blackness—at least the blackness that matters—is metaphorical blackness; real blackness is secondary.

In the *Three Kings* it is not metaphorical blackness that matters most; rather, real blackness is primary and reflects spiritual difference. Though it does so uncomfortably, the *Three Kings* throws out the notion of blackness as a metaphor for the unsaved soul when it ascribes blackness to Jaspar and not the Nestorians. Perhaps the reader is meant to take Jaspar as having been metaphorically washed white, in the same vein as the “black but beautiful” beloved in the *Song of Songs*, but there is little evidence to that effect. Jaspar is never described as white in body or in soul; he remains physically black. The *Three Kings* does not sublimate physical blackness into metaphorical blackness in order to work around the necessity of black Christians, with whose blackness European Christianity was traditionally uncomfortable. Rather, the *Three Kings* sits with the discomfort of a black Jaspar. When the R10CV text omits the Nestorians’ blackness, it asserts, unlike Augustine, that a given physical appearance must be consistent with a given spiritual state. Though for Augustine the black beloved can be spiritually whitewashed and remain physically black, Jaspar’s physical blackness in the R10CV

*Three Kings* corresponds to his good spiritual condition; the spiritually stained Nestorians must no longer share his black appearance.

The seemingly untenable situation in which Jaspas is surprisingly but certainly black and the Nestorians are sometimes black and sometimes not has to do with unstable and exploitative ideas of Africa in medieval European culture. In his 1997 “The Sons of Noah and the Construction of Ethnic and Geographical Identities in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods,” historian Benjamin Braude thoroughly examines the roots of the Curse of Ham myth that has been used in modern times to condemn blacks to inferiority. The myth asserts that black Africans sprang from Noah’s son Ham and that Ham’s progeny were cursed because he saw and mocked his drunken father’s nakedness. Arguing that the myth’s history (and historiography) is the history of people “seeing what one has been socially conditioned to see,” Braude concludes that “the racial identities of [Noah’s three sons] have been remarkably unstable. Shem, Ham, and Japhet have been ever-changing projections of the likes and dislikes, hatreds and loves, prejudices and fears, needs and rationales through which society continually constructs and reconstructs its selves and its opposites.”<sup>48</sup> Blackness, Braude shows, is an unstable concept whose meaning depends on who perceives it and the purpose for which it is employed. In the Nestorians and Jaspas, two different purposes and perceptions of blackness clash.

---

<sup>48</sup> 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* 54:1 (1997): 119,142.

### ***The Uses (and Instability) of Africa in the European World***

The question of what blackness means in the *Three Kings* might be best approached by asking what Africa means in medieval Christendom. The late Middle Ages saw Africa become increasingly central to Christians' dream of global reach as Asia became less and less Christian and more Muslim. At the same time, different kinds of encounters with Africa created different perceptions of Africa, even different Africas, in European discourse. Paul Kaplan suggests that the Nestorians are sometimes black and sometimes not in the *Historia* "probably because John [of Hildesheim] now shifts away from his earlier exceptional placement of Tharsis in third India, and instead identifies it with Tartary." He goes on to say that "John's inconsistency about Tharsis and its inhabitants is simply the result of his uncritical method of compiling information," and that John makes Jaspar black because it was suggested by contemporary beliefs about Prester John.<sup>49</sup> This section argues that the Nestorians' variable blackness is more than the effect of "uncritical methods" and bad geography. Rather, the dynamics of the Nestorians' waning power in the East and competing visions of Africans as Christian on one hand and as cursed on the other converge to reveal, if not create, a fundamental understanding of Africa as exploitable for European gain.

The Nestorians, despite their heresy and eventual destruction, were understood as an Asian people who could have been—even should have been—allies of western Christendom. They were of the land of Prester John, the mythical Christian king of

---

<sup>49</sup> Kaplan, 65.

“Ynde” (India) beyond Islamic lands. If only he were reached, the story went, he could help Christianity surround and defeat Muslim forces. The legend of Prester John of Ynde has been addressed by most scholars who have approached the *Three Kings*. Bisgaard notes that Otto, twelfth-century bishop of Friesing, half brother to Conrad III, and uncle to Holy Roman Emperor Frederick Barbarossa, identified Prester John as a “lineal descendant of the Magi.”<sup>50</sup> Kaplan notes that Otto’s was the first mention of Prester John in Church literature.<sup>51</sup> Otto had called Prester John “a Christian, albeit a Nestorian.”<sup>52</sup> Thirteenth-century scholastic Oliver, canon in Cologne and then bishop of Paderborn and cardinal-bishop of Sabina, in his *Historia Damiatina* argued that Prester John had conquered parts of Persia and that his descendants had attacked Genghis Khan’s Mongols. Bisgaard, like most other modern scholars, concludes that the fascination with Prester John was in the interest of Christian forces surrounding and defeating the Muslims: “With the Latin Church to the west the Arabs had enemies in all directions.”<sup>53</sup>

The *Three Kings* asserts how useful the Nestorians ought to be for Latin Christendom when it places Prester John among them. According to the *Three Kings*, the three kings return to their Indian, Chaldean, and Persian lands after worshipping the Christ child. They pray that they not die until baptized. Fortunately for them, St. Thomas the Apostle comes to India to preach.<sup>54</sup> (He is still revered by modern adherents of the Church of the East as their church’s founder). The three kings then set up a Christian

---

<sup>50</sup> Bisgaard, 127, quoting Kaplan, 59.

<sup>51</sup> Kaplan, 58-9.

<sup>52</sup> Otto is quoted in Kaplan, 45.

<sup>53</sup> Bisgaard, 127.

<sup>54</sup> CV, fol. 60b, and Horstmann, 107-9.

government. Two years before they die, they name a spiritual leader, whom they call Patriarch Thomas in honor of the saint. They also choose a temporal ruler whom they title Prester John, in honor of St. John the Evangelist and Saint John the Baptist.<sup>55</sup> If Prester John really were going to be the savior of Christendom in the fight against Islam, his Nestorian subjects ought to be allies of western Christendom.

The R10CV version's interest in creating ever more stark divisions within Christianity plays out in its depiction of the Nestorians relationship to Prester John. The text distances Nestorians from Prester John in order to condemn the Nestorians while preserving the possibility that Prester John will help Latin Christendom. Nestorians turn from their true Christian ways in order to become enemies of Christianity. The *Three Kings* tells us that the Nestorians cease to revere the three kings when the kings' bodies are translated to Milan, and that the Nestorians also cease to revere St. Thomas the Apostle because of a prophecy that his will be taken away from them as well. The Cambridge MS of the *Three Kings* says that part of the Nestorians' heresy was that "þes Nestorynes forsoke preester Iohn and Thomas her patriark and were rebel azens hem and azens þe laws of holy chirche."<sup>56</sup> In the corresponding passage, the Royal and Cotton Vespasian texts say only that the Nestorians cease to do reverence to Thomas or the three

---

<sup>55</sup> CV, fol. 63a, and Horstmann, 115-117. The Royal MS, and consequently the CV, also claims that the secular ruler is called Prester John because "the lord of Ynde is cleped Preestre Iohn." This rather redundant statement suggests that the scribe, based on other knowledge of Prester John, assumes that this story is not the foundation myth for Prester John and therefore lists Prester John among the others for whom this second Prester John is named. The Cambridge MS is much more conservative, stating only that the *Three Kings'* Prester John is named for St. John the Evangelist.

<sup>56</sup> Horstmann, 146.

kings. Prester John is not mentioned here.<sup>57</sup> Though the R10CV mentions the creation of the office of Prester John in India, the text is silent about the Nestorians turning on him.

The R10CV is even more conspicuous in its silence about the Nestorians' previous relationship with Prester John when the Nestorians turn to Prester John for help against the Tartars, or Genghis Khan's Mongols. When the Nestorians are attacked by the Tartars, who rise up from within their own ranks, they turn to Prester John for help. The Latin *Historia* states:

Cum itaque populus Thartarorum erupisset et [omnia regna terras] et provincias infidelicum et specialiter istorum Nestorinorum [cepissent and destruxissent et ipsos sine misericordia interfecissent et funditus deleuissent], extunc ipsi Nestorini a presbitero Johanne auxilium implorabant et se ad fidem [pristinam] et ad suum dominium sub tribute se conuersuros et reuersuros spoponderunt.<sup>58</sup>

[When this people of the Tartars burst forth and had taken and destroyed all the lands of the unfaithful and especially of these Nestorians and had killed them without mercy and utterly destroyed them, from then the same Nestorians implored Prester John for help and they pledged that they would convert and return to their former faith and his dominion under tribute.]

The Cambridge MS has a relatively faithful translation:

whan þes Tartarynes had þus conquered þe londys and þe kingdoms of þes Nestorynes, þan þe Nestorynes zede to Preester Iohn and bihette hym þat þey wolde turne azene to her ferst lawe and be tributary to hym, so þat he wolde helpe hem.<sup>59</sup>

---

<sup>57</sup> CV, fol. 68b, and Horstmann, 145, 7. Prester John is, of course, named as the king of India elsewhere in the Royal and Cotton Vespasian texts, but his exact relationship to the Nestorians is left up to the reader's assumption.

<sup>58</sup> Horstmann, 301.

<sup>59</sup> Horstmann, 148.

Both the *Historia* and the Cambridge MSS are clear about the Nestorians' previous allegiance to Prester John. They promise to "return to their former faith. They pledge to "turne again to their first law." Turning to Prester John is turning to a former protector against whom they have rebelled.

The R10CV version portrays a relationship between Prester John and the Nestorians that is markedly different. In addition to never being called black Ethiopians in the Royal and Cotton Vespasian text, the Nestorians are never said to have forsaken or rebelled against Prester John. In the passage corresponding to the Nestorians' promise to return to their faith and their subjection to Prester John in the *Historia* and the Cambridge MS, the R10CV version simply says that "whan þes Tartarynes had conquered þes Nestorynes and all her londys, þan þes Nestorynes 3ede to preest Iohn and preyed hym of helpe and 3af hym gret giftes."<sup>60</sup> There is no reference at all to a previous relationship between Prester John and the Nestorians. The R10CV version's dissociation of Prester John from the Nestorians reflects a general trend as western Christendom turns away from Asia in the search for its savior in the fight against Islam.

In the late Middle Ages, western Christendom had good reason to seek its help elsewhere than in the Nestorians, for reasons other than the *Three Kings*' obsessively loud cry of heresy suggests. The R10CV *Three Kings* seems keenly aware of the decline of the Nestorians when it distances Prester John from a dying breed. Already during the time of the Nestorian catholicos Timothy, in the eighth century, Christians in the East

---

<sup>60</sup> CV, fol. 69a, and Horstmann, 149.



lived under Muslim political power. When the Muslim caliph Harun al-Rashid moved his seat from Seleucia to Baghdad, Timothy went with him. As Jenkins puts it, “Timothy lived in a universe that was culturally and spiritually Christian but politically Muslim, and he coped quite well with that situation.”<sup>61</sup> Six hundred years later, in the fourteenth century, that was no longer the case. Christians were the victims of ethnic and religious cleansing: “church hierarchies were destroyed, priests and monks were killed, enslaved, or expelled, and monasteries and cathedrals fell silent.”<sup>62</sup> According to David B. Barrett’s estimates in the *World Christian Encyclopedia*, the number of Asian Christians fell from 21 million in 1200 to 3.2 million in 1500. The proportion of the world’s total Christians living in Asia and Africa fell from thirty-four percent to 6 percent.<sup>63</sup> That the *Three Kings*’ Nestorians fall away from their worship of the three kings and, in some versions, Prester John reflects the real-life decline of Nestorian power and numbers in late medieval Asia.<sup>64</sup>

The Royal and Cotton Vespasian *Three Kings* represents a shift in representations of Prester John that takes him from being placed in Asia to being placed in Africa. Though the R10CV text does not attribute blackness to Prester John, its significant efforts

---

<sup>61</sup> Jenkins, 16.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 23.

<sup>63</sup> Numbers are taken from the chart “Christians and Population by Continent,” in David B. Barrett, ed., *World Christian Encyclopedia: a Comparative Study of Churches and Religions in the Modern World, AD 1900-2000*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. (Nairobi, Kenya: Oxford University Press, 1982), 796, and quoted in Jenkins, 23-4. Numbers reflect his figures for South Asia and East Asia combined.

<sup>64</sup> Jenkins, 30-34, describes the fall of the Church in Asia and Africa as a confluence of events including peaceful conversions to Islam before the twelfth century, largely as a result of Muslim social and political influence in the region and Muslim immigration from other lands. In the years around 1300, however, Islam took a coercive turn in which “Muslims attacked Christians as subversives and traitors, even accusing them of plotting mega-terror attacks on beloved mosques and public monuments.”

to silence the depth of his connection to the Nestorians unmoor him from the Asian context in which the other versions so firmly place him.<sup>65</sup> The Royal and Cotton Vespasian's Nestorians remain associated with the Mongolians, and thereby with Asia. Kaplan elucidates: in the 1200s Prester John was "nearly always placed in Asia, and quite frequently identified with Ghengis Khan, lord of the Tartars." Because of this association, "it is hardly surprising that these Tartars (that is, Mongols) were most often named as the people of the Magi."<sup>66</sup> If, of course, the Royal and Cotton Vespasian text meant for Prester John to remain associated with the Nestorians and their Tartar brethren, it would certainly have included the fact of his intimate former connection to them.

Moving Prester John from Asia to Ethiopia was not a terribly taxing endeavor, but it has huge implications for the *Three Kings*' effort to differentiate among Christians. Kaplan, as Braude has confirmed since,<sup>67</sup> notes an association between India and Ethiopia in medieval geographical knowledge. In medieval European parlance, "Ynde" often included Ethiopia.<sup>68</sup> Furthermore, in the twelfth century, most inhabitants of Ethiopia and Nubia were Christian; it is likely that some in western Christendom would have known this, though medieval Europeans' knowledge of Ethiopian and Nubian

---

<sup>65</sup> Prester John is not explicitly called black in the R10CV *Three Kings*, but his close connection to black Jaspar, one of the three kings who creates the office, remains in tact. Through Jaspar, the Prester could be presumed to be black. In fact, Bisgaard, 127, points out that the move to Oliver's identification of Prester John's "descendants in Ethiopia and Africa" and Otto of Freising's assertion that Prester John was one of the "lineal descendants of the Magi" ... would implicitly mean that one of the three Magi had been black." It also suggests that the Prester is black himself.

<sup>66</sup> Kaplan, 58-9.

<sup>67</sup> Braude, 126.

<sup>68</sup> Kaplan, 46.

Christianity varied widely.<sup>69</sup> Despite the association between India and Ethiopia, Kaplan identifies a fourteenth-century tendency to associate Prester John and his descendants with Ethiopia *per se*. From 1220 forward, Kaplan claims, Genghis Khan's and the Mongols' incursions into Muslim lands led Europeans to look to him, or at least one of his associates, as Prester John. When Genghis started attacking the edges of Christian Europe in the 1240s, this association became undesirable, and by the 1330s, some thirty years before the *Historia* was written, the "more advanced and reliable" European travel writers had begun to look for the Prester in Ethiopia.<sup>70</sup> Since the three kings had been cited as coming from Asia, Europe, and Africa since at least the eleventh century, and the standard conception of the world consisted of those three continents, it only made sense that if Prester John could not be adequately identified in Asia, he must be in Africa. Moving Prester John to Ethiopia along with Jaspar gives the holy Christian figures distance from the Mongolians, and in the *Three Kings*, from the Nestorians.

Increasing the geographical distance between Prester John and the Nestorians is just one more way the *Three Kings* constructs the stark divisions of its intra-Christian hierarchy. The move to Africa in particular has big implications for Africa's place in the Latin Christian imagination. In Augustine's reading of Psalm 71:9, Ethiopia is a boon and a burden to western Christendom, at once a sign of global Christendom and the traditional home of the "foulest" of men. If Prester John were indeed found in Ethiopia,

---

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 46-7.

<sup>70</sup> Kaplan, 48.

Ethiopia could become more of a boon than a burden, and the association of blackness with non- or anti-Christianity could be dropped.

Braude has shown that there existed the potential for blackness to be fully accepted in the western European mindset. In showing that the associations between Noah's sons and the three parts of the world were unstable, Braude takes for his example Italian versions of John Mandeville's *Travels*, "the single most popular European work of secular literature in the late medieval, early modern period,"<sup>71</sup> in which Japheth, the son of Noah who is usually associated with Europe, is associated with Europe and Ethiopia:

Given the growth of Christian Ethiopian contacts with Italy and the growing myth of the Ethiopian Prester John in the fifteenth century, it is not surprising that Italian editions of Mandeville should have reinforced these ties by linking Japheth to Christian Europe and Christian Ethiopia. Italians had every reason to know that Ethiopians were different from themselves, but such a vulgar and superficial corporeal conceptualization of ancestry and relationships could be overwhelmed by the more profound affinity of faith.<sup>72</sup>

It makes perfect sense that Italians, so close to Africa geographically and encompassing the Roman center of Latin Christendom, would not have been surprised by Ethiopian Christians nor at all concerned about their physical blackness. After all, Jacopo da Verona had written in the 1330s of two different groups of African monks in residence at the Church of the Nativity in Jerusalem, and in 1402 black emissaries described as representatives of "Lord Prester John, lord of the regions of India" arrived in Europe.<sup>73</sup>

---

<sup>71</sup> Braude, 106.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 126.

<sup>73</sup> Kaplan, 54-7.

European, especially Mediterranean, contact with Ethiopians was far from unheard of. Nonetheless, some stigma remained.<sup>74</sup>

That stigma, along with the Curse of Ham that Braude so eloquently treats, played into the hands of Portuguese slavers who helped to construct the view of Africa that would characterize modernity. Braude very convincingly shows that the Curse of Ham tradition, though often thought to be established in the Middle Ages, is in fact an invention of such slavers' seventeenth- and eighteenth-century need to justify African slavery.<sup>75</sup> The slavers' highly negative view of African blackness eventually won out over the view that attributes blackness to Jaspas. Braude argues that this

very different image of the so-called black African...originated through European contacts in West Africa, not East Africa, among pagans and Muslims, not Christians, and among states that offered little potential alliance in the struggle with Islam.<sup>76</sup>

This image led to the modern "conception of Africa"—that is, as a place that is absolutely different from Europe and whose people could be exploited to the utmost extent possible. This view, Braude argues, was constructed by "Iberian adventurer-explorers in search of booty, human or otherwise, not priests, pilgrims, and envoys."<sup>77</sup>

When the Portuguese slavers discarded the notion of a Christian Africa that could help Europeans in the fight against Islam, it was simply a matter of choosing one discourse over another. There was plenty of conventional knowledge to support the view

---

<sup>74</sup> Kaplan, 65, n. 273. Kaplan attributes European discomfort with blackness, and the *Three Kings'* discomfort with Nestorian blackness in particular, to "the widespread medieval association of black color with demons and infidels."

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 137-9.

<sup>76</sup> Braude, 127.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

that the black African could be enslaved—from Augustine’s argument that black Ethiopians were the “foulest” of men to the *Historia*’s claim that the Nestorians were black and wicked. There was another way, too, in which European slavers inherited the knowledge of their forefathers—exploitation.

The exploitation of Africa was in fact nothing new, since the belief in Prester John and his “Ynde” and then the movement of Prester John from Asiatic India to Ethiopia were from the outset exploitative movements. The hope in Prester John was not for the purpose of helping him. Rather, it was for the purpose of helping Christian Europe defeat the Muslims. He was a person to be appealed to for help, not a person who could be afforded assistance himself: the *Three Kings* shows as much when the Nestorians appeal to him for help:

and anoon þis Preestre Iohn was in good wille to helpe hem. . . . And þen Preestre Iohn assentyd to her counseyll and sent hys eldest sone, þe which was clepyd Daud, with gret multitude of pepil azens þe Tartarynes in helpynge of þes Nestorynes.<sup>78</sup>

Prester John turns out to be little more than a pawn in a divine plan to teach the Nestorians a lesson. Though the Nestorians think they will certainly win with Prester John on their side, he suffers horrible defeat for having helped them. He was warned ahead of time when the three kings came to him in a dream, and they “chargyd hym þat he schulde in no manere helpe ne confort þes Nestorynes, for it was goddis wille þat þei schoulde vtterlich be destroyed for her malice and her wikkydnesse.” The Tartars kill

---

<sup>78</sup> CV, fol. 69a, and Horstmann, 149, 51. Augmenting the “great multitude,” the Cambridge MS has that Prester John sends David with a “strong host.”

Prester John's son and all the host of warriors who were with him. Prester John repents of having disobeyed and the three kings arrange a treaty between him and the Tartars' leader. Prester John, his own disobedience aside, is exploited by the *Three Kings* as a means to make apparent the might of the three kings. He is exploited by the Nestorians as a convenient (and thought-to-be foolproof) means of help.

Moving Prester John to Africa is equally exploitative in that the goal is to preserve the comforting Prester John myth while dissociating it from the less-than-comforting attacks of the Mongols on Europe's eastern fringes. While Braude is right to say that medieval and early modern Europeans and modern historiographers see what they have been "conditioned to see," it is also correct to say that medieval Europeans saw in the Nestorians, Jaspar, Prester John, and in Asia and Africa, that which they wanted to see at any given time. With access to the power of such malleable images, it is no wonder that Iberian slavers were able to obscure black Africans' participation in Christendom with the discourse that Africans, inherently cursed, needed to be enslaved.

### ***Race-Thinking, Eastern Christians, and Jews***

Hannah Arendt defines race-thinking as "the interpretation of history as the natural fight of races." What race-thinking means is the adherence to the idea of static identity groups from which any member is not usually allowed to defect. When groups that cohere because of some marker of identity—be it skin color, genealogy, or belief—come into contact and compete for social, cultural, or some other form of dominance, race-thinking is born. The *Historia* enacts race-thinking in a peculiarly medieval way;

though the text is very concerned with differentiating groups of people, blackness is not necessarily attached to a value judgment. The R10CV *Three Kings* presages modern race-thinking in that a value judgment is attached to blackness, and blackness cannot be attributed to positive and negative figures at once.

Medieval race-thinking, unlike its modern incarnation, is not characterized by the use of skin color as the sole discriminant of character or group membership. Instead, the *Three Kings* makes race-thinking judgments on the basis of heterodoxy. Note that in the *Historia*, Nestorians are described as heretics first and only then as black Ethiopians. Heresy is the text's first concern. The *Three Kings* ends with a catalog of eastern Christians that makes apparent the primacy of its concern with heterodoxy and orthodoxy.

The R10CV text models a more modern mode of race-thinking when it distills its differentiated subjects down to an ever smaller number of groups. In his *Black Marxism: the Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, Cedric J. Robinson locates in medieval civilization "the tendency...not to homogenize but to differentiate—to exaggerate regional, subcultural, dialectical differences into 'racial' ones."<sup>79</sup> Such differentiation remains part of modern race-thinking but on a much smaller scale. As noted in this dissertation's introduction, Foucault theorizes race in his 1976 lectures at the Collège de France that society is split by "race war" into a "binary structure." That is, society is

---

<sup>79</sup> Robinson (London/Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Zed Books, 1983; 3<sup>rd</sup> impression, 1991), 27. Robinson's book argues generally that Marxism has embedded within it the racial preoccupations of Europe and that race-thinking tendencies can be seen in intra-European relations well before the advent of early modern African slavery.



“basically articulated around two races.”<sup>80</sup> The Latin *Historia* models differentiation among many subjects when it devotes long passages to the Jews and Muslims who are allied with Christians in that they also worship the three kings.<sup>81</sup> In the R10CV *Three Kings*, on the other hand, the only non-Christians who worship the three kings are Saracens and Turks.<sup>82</sup> The variety of acceptable groups contracts further in the *Three Kings* when Nestorian heresy is highlighted without its ameliorating comparison to Persian perfidy. When the *Three Kings* uses blackness to effectively sever the connection between Jaspar and the Nestorians, it achieves the binary division Foucault ascribes to modern race-thinking.

The R10CV text also effects binary race-thinking when it uses the Jews to set pagans and Christians apart from one another. In the *Three Kings* the Jews no longer worship the three kings. When the kings travel home from Bethlehem, the Jews try their best to make sure the pagans do not learn the kings’ real identities. They fear that the pagans will convert to Christianity if they learn who the kings really are and what brought them to Bethlehem in the first place. The text positions the Jews as the wall that keeps pagans from becoming Christians. Once the Jews’ efforts fail and pagans convert, the text turns its attention to those same pagans’ eventual heresy. With the Jews out of the picture and faithless characters like the *Historia*’s Persians nowhere to be found, the text sets up the Nestorians as the “worst heretics” and then eliminates them altogether, effectively setting up another binary structure—between Nestorians and all other

---

<sup>80</sup> Foucault, 50-1.

<sup>81</sup> Horstmann, 295.

<sup>82</sup> CV, fol. 68b, and Horstmann, 145.

Christians, including other less offensive heretics. At the last, even these sects, including the Nubiani, Soldini, Indi, Greci, Suriani, Maronici, Ysmyni, Maromini, Nicholaite, and Mandopolos, are judged against a Latin Christian norm. The *Three Kings* abbreviation results in a hierarchical Christian world whose acceptable participants are much reduced from those in the *Historia*: Western Christians rule and less offensive (than Nestorians) eastern Christian sects are allowed to exist.

From the outset, the Latin *Historia* provides a more ecumenical view of the worship of the kings than the R10CV text does. The *Historia* introduces various sects by name the first time the reader meets them:

Item [notandum est] in [quali et quanto honore et] reuerencia habeantur hij tres Reges beati ab omnibus [hereticis et] scismaticis in omnibus [prouincijs et] partibus Orientis qui adhuc ibidem [degunt et] permanserunt, [et] sciendum [est] quod [in oriente et in omnibus partibus vltamarinis fides christiana [in diuersas partes et hominum sectas est diuisa, secundum hos homines quorum nomina sequuntur: Nubiani, Soldini, Nestorini, Latini, Indi, Armeni, Greci, Siriani, Georgiani, Nycolaite, Jacobite, Copti, Ysini, Marronini et Mandopolos, et [ex hijs omnibus Christianis ibidem super omnes predictos homines et hereticos, preter in ipsorum hereticorum proprijs terris et regnis, quidam semper habent principatum...]]<sup>83</sup>

[Also it has been noted in what and how much honor and reverence these three blessed kings are held by all heretics and schismatics in all provinces and parts of the East who continue and remain to this day, and it has been understood that in the East and in all parts overseas the Christian faith is divided into diverse parts and sects of men, following these men whose names follow: Nubiani, Soldini, Nestorini, Latini, Indi, Armeni, Greci, Siriani, Georgiani, Nycolaite, Jacobite, Copti, Ysini, Marronini and Mandopolos, and from these all Christians in that place are over all previously named men and heretics other than in these heretics' own lands and realms, in which they have always held rule.]

---

<sup>83</sup> Horstmann, 277.

The *Historia* gestures toward the placement of Christians and heretics into a binary structure, but it only gestures: while there is clear division between Christians and heretics, the sheer number of heretical sects makes it difficult to distinguish them. In the next pages, the text elucidates the difference between the various sects with such details as whose priests marry and whose remain celibate.

When the *Three Kings* first introduces heretical groups, it lumps them together in an indistinct mass and juxtaposes them to orthodox Christians.<sup>84</sup> The text discusses devotion to the *Three Kings* at Epiphany:

þer be also diuers sectys and partyes of crysten men, and euerych holt hys oppinioun and hys bileue by hym-self, and do certeyn deuocioun & reuerence to þes .iiij. kyngis and to þe feest of þe Epiphanye; ffor all þes Cristen men, al-þouȝ þat þei be heretykes and of mysbileue, ȝit þei do greet reuerence to þes .iiij. worþi kyngis, as ȝe schul here afterward. For all þes Cristenmen and heretikes, of what degree þat þei be of, þei faste on Cristemasse-day til azens nyȝt...<sup>85</sup>

Though the sects are named at this point in the *Historia* and in the corresponding passages of other English versions (including the Cambridge MS), they are not named at this point in the R10CV text. The result is that the abbreviated R10CV *Three Kings* distills difference down to “Cristenmen and heretikes.”

The R10CV *Three Kings*, in its simplified difference, tends toward a binary structure. The watershed difference in the Nestorians’ blackness makes the case. To

---

<sup>84</sup> The indistinction between heretical groups does not persist throughout the entire CV *Three Kings*. The CV text ends by addressing the distinctions between groups. The CV text, however, ends imperfectly, breaking off after discussing the particular characteristics of only the Nestorians, Melchior’s Nubiani, Balthasar’s Soldini, and Prester John’s Indy.

<sup>85</sup> CV, fol. 67b, and Horstmann, 141.

attribute blackness to the Nestorians and Jaspar at once, as the *Historia* does, is part of the medieval understanding of skin color that Braude has so elegantly addressed. As Braude says of the Italian Mandeville texts, late medieval Europeans considered black skin a “vulgar and superficial corporeal conceptualization of ancestry and relationships.”<sup>86</sup> In the *Historia*, blackness persists in the holy and the heretical simultaneously because it is not seen as a marker of exclusivity or essential difference. The R10CV *Three Kings* omits powerful assertions of Nestorian blackness, including the *Historia*’s assertion that Nestorians “in ecclesijs eorum depingunt Christum et suam matrem et tres reges et beatum sanctum Thomam nigros et dyabolos albos, in despectum aliorum prout inferius plura de ipsis audientur.”<sup>87</sup> [in their churches paint Christ and his mother and the three kings and blessed Thomas black and devils white, in despite of others as even the lowest of them will have heard.] Such omissions, along with the retention of Jaspar’s blackness, suggest that the R10CV *Three Kings* finds blackness exclusive. The text’s translators and scribes perceive the discomfort of attributing blackness to both Jaspar and the Nestorians; they find the evidence for Jaspar’s blackness stronger, more important, and more worth retaining. In contrast to early modern and modern race, the text reflects no need to bind blackness with evil *per se*, but it does find the need to bind blackness with either evil *or* good. The *Three Kings*’ perception of blackness as an exclusive marker of identity, and a positive marker thereof, asserts the growth of binary race-thinking in the Middle Ages.

---

<sup>86</sup> Braude, 126-7.

<sup>87</sup> Horstmann, 279.

The *Three Kings* further contracts the spectrum of acceptable groups when it uses the Jews as the mechanism by which it creates a binary structure between orthodox and heretical Christians. In the *Three Kings*, Christians claim that Balaam was a non-Jewish prophet with divine knowledge. Jews are said to claim that Balaam was an “enchantour and no prophete.”<sup>88</sup> While it is unclear if the *Three Kings* really refers to any particular Jewish texts, Jewish rabbinical tradition testifies to an unsympathetic reading of Balaam. In the biblical text, before Balaam offers the prophecy of which the *Three Kings* makes so much, he is called on by Balak, leader of the Moabites, to prophecy against the Israelites. The Israelites are encamped on Moabite land, and the Moabites feel their security is threatened. Balak hopes to have them cursed. According to Numbers 22:11, Balak’s messengers come to Balaam saying “Behold, there is a people come out of Egypt, and it covereth the face of the earth: come now, imprecate me them; peradventure I shall be able to fight with them, and drive them out.” God responds to Balaam: “Thou shalt not go with them; thou shalt not curse the people: for they are blessed.”<sup>89</sup>

Medieval Jewish reactions to Balaam were not positive. He accedes to God’s will and he blesses the Israelites accordingly, but this is not what he wants to do. Rashi’s commentary attributes the blessing to God and takes a very negative view of Balaam’s own desires.<sup>90</sup> In Numbers 22:9, when the Moabite messengers have just come to

---

<sup>88</sup> The Middle English translation is a literal rendering of the Latin. Therefore, I will not compare the English and Latin here.

<sup>89</sup> Silberman, 108. This is Silberman’s translation from the Hebrew.

<sup>90</sup> The *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (New York: MacMillan Reference USA, 2006), s.v. “Balaam,” does not entirely agree with Rashi’s treatment, stating that Balaam’s “firm obedience to God’s will is viewed with

Balaam, God asks Balaam, “Who are these men with thee?” Rashi interprets this as a trick from God who “intended to delude” Balaam. Balaam, according to Rashi, is fooled and says “It seems, then, that there are times when everything is not manifest to [God]; His knowledge is not always alike. I will select a time when I can curse and when He will not observe it.”<sup>91</sup> The point is that, even though Balaam does not curse the Israelites in the end—he refuses when he says to Balak “How shall I imprecate, whom God hath not imprecated?”<sup>92</sup>—he really desires to curse them. When the Moabites first approach him, Balaam rightly says “If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the Eternal my God, to do less or more.” Rashi interprets Balaam’s response to mean that Balaam was

avaricious and covetous of other people’s wealth. [Balaam] said: [Balak] ought to give me all his silver and gold, for, behold, he would otherwise have to hire many armies to fight against [the Israelites]. Even then it is doubtful whether he would conquer or not conquer, but “I” would certainly conquer.<sup>93</sup>

By Numbers 24:13, Balaam has, to Balak’s chagrin, several times confirmed God’s blessing of the Israelites. He repeats “If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the commandment of the Eternal...” Rashi identifies a key difference between this and its first iteration: “Here it does not say “the Lord my God,” as is said at first (22:18), because he had now become conscious that he was regarded by the

---

great favor” in Numbers chapters 22 through 24 at the same time as “Balaam is seen in a hostile light in several other biblical sources.”

<sup>91</sup> Silberman, 108.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 109.

Holy One, blessed be he, as something vile and banished from His presence.”<sup>94</sup> Rashi’s view of a self-interested, avaricious, wicked Balaam is unrelenting.

The *Three Kings* uses the disagreement over Balaam’s prophecy to distill the world down to Christians and Jews and then assert that Christians replace Jews as the keepers of divine truth. As mentioned in the dissertation’s introduction, the Augustinian doctrine of toleration dictated that Jews served as witnesses to the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. The debate is cast clearly as a binary argument:

Azens þe Iewes þe cristen men seie þat Balaam was a paynym and was þe first prophete þat was no Iewe, and prophecied to hem þat were no Iewes...as hit is aforseyde, for Balaam was þe first prophete þat was no Iewe, and prophecied to hem þat were no Iewes: þefore [þe Iewes] cleped hym a enchantour and no prophete.<sup>95</sup>

According to the *Three Kings*’ description of the argument, there are but two groups of people competing for control of the prophecy: Christians born of pagans who converted, and Jews. The Jews are replaced as the keepers of prophetic truth when the people of India take Balaam’s prophecy to heart. On the hill of Vaws, the highest hill in the “kyngdome of Ynde,” watchmen make sure that first the “children of Israel” and then the Romans are not advancing into India. There, they also wait for the star.<sup>96</sup> The Indians, who become “true Christians” after the three kings preach to them, effectively replace the Jews as keepers of the prophecy.

---

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>95</sup> CV, fol. 38b, and Horstmann, 5.

<sup>96</sup> CV, fol. 39a, and Horstmann, 9. The *Three Kings* states: “Than all þe grete lordis & all þe oper peple in Inde and in þe eest desired gretlich to see þat sterre, and bihetten 3iftes to þe keepers of þis hill Vaws and more-ouer hired hem with grete wages, þat, 3if it so were þat þei s3ize by day or by ny3t fer or nere any list or any sterre in þe eyr or in þe firmament oper þan was se3ize tofore-tyme, anoon þei schulde schewe and sende hem worde.”

Since the entire three kings legend rests on Balaam's prophecy, the Jews are relegated to the role of those who try to block the prophecy's fulfillment and keep Christians and pagans divided. On the latter account they achieve a modicum of success and help to construct the binary structure that divides orthodox from heretical Christians. When the kings make their way home from Bethlehem, their processions so impress the pagans they pass that

for þis wondirful doynge þe paynmys þat haddyn no knowleche of holy writte ne of þe birþe of Crist, cleped þes iij kynges Magos; and þe Iewes þat knewe þe scriptures and þe berþe of Crist and þe place, of enuye and of falsnesse excited þe paynmys all aboute to calle hem Magos—and so hit was brouzt in to vse, and allwey contynueþ in to þis day<sup>97</sup>

In this inventive explanation for the variable use of *rex* and *magus* to describe the kings, the Jews seek to thwart pagan conversion.<sup>98</sup> The Jews' plan is foiled when the three kings return home. In their respective lands, each "preched and tolde to all þe pepil all þat þei had seyze, herde and do in all her weye...Wherþrow many paynmys leften her errours and her mawmettis, and worschipped þe childe Christ."<sup>99</sup>

Though the eastern pagans are quick to follow the three kings' lead, they are also quick to fall away; the Jews are subtly implicated. After the three kings die, eastern Christians "diuers erroures and opinyouns of heresy" are "excited" among the people by

---

<sup>97</sup> CV, fol. 56a, and Horstmann, 85. The text asserts that the three men are indeed kings when it claims "with-oute doute þei were glorious and worschifful kyngis...as *cristen* men þat dwellen þere bere witnesse" (emphasis mine).

<sup>98</sup> See note 4 above for some rather more plausible theories as to the reason(s) for the shift from calling Melchior, Balthasar, and Jaspas magi to calling them kings. These include Tertullian's interpretation of the magi as the fulfillment of the kings prophesied in Psalm 72, the fourth century split between the celebrations of Christmas and Easter in the Latin Church, and Rainald of Dassel and Holy Roman Emperor Frederick I Barbarossa's interest in promoting the idea of holy kingship.

<sup>99</sup> CV, fol. 56b, and Horstmann, 87.



the devil and his “wicked angels.”<sup>100</sup> The Jews initially “excited” the pagans to misrecognize the kings. The Jews’ influence over the pagans implicitly links the Jews with Satan. The pagans-cum-Christians appear to be easily influenced, or at least continually targeted by anti-Christian forces in a way that Latin Christians are not.

The *Three Kings* finishes the work of constructing an intra-Christian binary structure after the Nestorians, the “worst heretics,” are made the poster children for eastern heresy. While it may seem detrimental to the orthodox-heretical binary structure that the Nestorians are “destroyed and put out of her londes,”<sup>101</sup> effectively putting an end to the “subrace,” the text’s commitment to a binary structure is so strong that it soon passes judgment on less offensive eastern Christian sects. The Nubiani (Nubians) are said to be “trewe cristen men,” and the Indians are said to be “gode cristen men.”<sup>102</sup> The Soldini from Godolis and Sheba, where Balthasar was king, are “somewhat corrupt in þeire feip.”<sup>103</sup> The Greci (Greeks’) priests have wives and do not believe in the Holy Spirit. Then there are the Suriani (Syrians) who swear far too often, the Maronici (Maronites) whose priests and deacons take wives and who only say mass at Easter and Christmas, and the Mandopolos who have no priests but worship communally. All but the Nubiani and the Indi are heretics, and their offenses go from bad to worse.

The standard by which all groups are judged is Latin orthodoxy, familiar territory for the *Historia*’s and the English *Three Kings*’ readers. Membership of groups like the

---

<sup>100</sup> CV, fol. 64a, and Horstmann, 123.

<sup>101</sup> CV, fol. 69b, and Horstmann, 151.

<sup>102</sup> CV, fol. 69b, and Horstmann, 153.

<sup>103</sup> The CV text breaks off near the end of the discussion of the Indian mass. The details of other heretical groups here is supplied from the Royal MS.

Greci, Suriani, Maronici, and Mandopolos in the Christian fold is not decided based on any single characteristic that ranges across them. They are not all one skin color; they do not all commit the same heresy. Instead, they are judged against the Roman Catholic orthodox norm; deviation from it constitutes heresy. Even the “true Christian” Nubiani and the “good Christian” Indians are examined against the norm. Though the *Three Kings* does not consider them heretics, their idiosyncratic customs in the celebration of mass requires explanation. They put the three kings at the very center of their worship. The Nubiani’s priests wear crowns of gold or silver on their heads, in token of the three kings, when they go to the alter. The Indi’s priests hang a crown of gold over the alter, and the priest, the deacon, and the southdeacon approach the alter from different directions, meeting together along the way in token of how the three kings met together near Calvary.

When the *Three Kings* lays claim to ecumenicism at its end, it reveals the insidious nature of race-thinking; once employed, race-thinking is inescapable. Following the *Historia* in an attempt to salvage all Christian belief, heretical or not, the text appeals to the common ground of three kings worship:

And so þes diuers sectys of þat contreyes of the eest, and many oþer, þe which were long to telle, all-þou3 þat þei holde diuers opiniouns of eresyes azens þe lawe of holichirche and þe byleue, 3it euery partye doiþ a special reuerence and a deuocioun to þes .iiij. worschippfull kyngis.<sup>104</sup>

Heresy is excusable as long as the three kings are worshipped, and the Nestorians’ jealous refusal to do so is their problem. The *Three Kings* valiantly attempts to bring all

---

<sup>104</sup> Horstmann, 157. The CV text breaks off before its end. The ending is attested in the R10 text.

worshippers of the kings together, from east and Latin west, but it fails to do so completely. The caveat “all-þouȝ þat þei holde diuers opiniouns of eresyes aȝens þe lawe of holichirche and þe byleue” reveals the text’s bias toward Latin Christianity. The *Historia* ends by denouncing the Nestorians, unabashedly praising the Nubiani “gloriosis,” and proclaiming the world’s worship and love for the three kings.<sup>105</sup> In its final statement, the English abbreviated *Three Kings of Cologne* as it appears in the Royal 18.A.10 and Cotton Vespasian E.16 MSS proclaims that eastern Christians, no matter how devout, will never be quite as good as the text’s orthodox western readers. The difference is inescapable and absolute.

---

<sup>105</sup> Horstmann, 310-12. Even the English abbreviation in the Cambridge MS omits the CV text’s caveat about “diverse” heretical opinions. Instead, the Cambridge text criticizes its own readers, focusing on the lack of comparable three kings worship “in þis contrey.”

## 2. Redirecting the Physiognomer's Gaze in the *Secretum Secretorum*

Physiognomy has been defined as “the art of deciphering one’s character by the external appearance of his or her bodily organs and an analysis of their size, proportion, shape, colour, hairiness, and motion.”<sup>1</sup> The twelfth through fourteenth centuries saw the increased circulation of physiognomies in the Latin West.<sup>2</sup> The popularity of the *Secretum Secretorum* and other physiognomies in the Latin West coincides with what medieval historian Joseph Ziegler has called a time when “the vibrant Latin West opened up to economic and cultural exchanges that involved high, fast, and wide-ranging mobility.”<sup>3</sup> Physiognomies empower their readers in a historical moment in which judgments had to be made quickly about an ever-widening array of people.

---

<sup>1</sup> Joseph Ziegler, “Text and Context: On the Rise of Physiognomic Thought in the Later Middle Ages” in Yitzhak Hen, ed., *De Sion exhibit lex et verbum domini de Hierusalem: Essays on Medieval Law, Liturgy, and Literature in Honour of Amnon Linder* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2001), 159-182, esp. 159.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 176. Roger Bacon had commented on the *Secretum Secretorum* by the late 1260s. The second book of Rhazes’s *Liber ad regem Almansorem* is a physiognomy and had circulated independently in the Latin West from the beginning of the thirteenth century. Also, there is evidence for the presence of physiognomies among the holdings of a Benedictine Library, Dover Priory, and the library of the Austin friars at York in the late fourteenth century.

<sup>3</sup> Ziegler, 182, refers here to the increased commercial and other travel between West and East occasioned by the Crusades. In *England and the Crusades* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1988), 276-80, Christopher Tyerman shows that, though English crusading activity in the Mediterranean paled in comparison to English activity against pagans in the Baltic region, there was significant English travel eastward in order to engage with Muslims directly. Much of the English intervention in the Mediterranean theater, especially Spain and North Africa, Tyerman shows, was a product of England’s competition with France for Spain’s allegiance. The increased speed and breadth of “mobility” in the world is also attested by the culture in which Iain Higgins situates the *Book of John Mandeville* in his celebrated 1997 study *Writing East: The “Travels” of Sir John Mandeville* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997). Higgins, 67, writes that the mid-fourteenth-century *Book of John Mandeville* was informed by contemporary diversity of language, geography, and thought on western Christendom and its borders: “within about fifty years of 1356 *The Book* was circulating widely on both sides of the English Channel in a total of eight languages—French, Czech, Dutch, English, German, Italian, Spanish, and Latin—and within about fifty years more it would be available in another two: Danish and Irish....its potential readers and hearers were doubtless ready for a work that offered them, among other things, an entertaining inventory of

The implications of physiognomies' manuscript contexts for their cultural import have only recently begun to be studied.<sup>4</sup> Physiognomies, often from Aristotelian, pseudo-Aristotelian, and Arabic sources, circulated both with attendant source material and as freestanding. The English afterlife of one particular pseudo-Aristotelian physiognomy is the subject of this chapter. The *Secretum Secretorum* is a Latin translation of the Arabic *Kitab sirr-al-asrar*, or more simply *Sirr-al-asrar* and survives in some 500 manuscripts.<sup>5</sup> Mahmoud Manzalaoui, the *Secretum*'s modern editor, informs the reader that the Arabic *Kitab sirr-al-asrar* can be traced back to the ninth century when, according to the Proem of the oldest extant Arabic version, it was translated from Greek into Arabic by the well-known translator Yahya ibn-al-Bitriq. The texts of the *Sirr* claim that it is a letter from Aristotle to Alexander, sent to him during his conquest of Persia. The *Secretum* was

---

eastern 'choses estranges' mixed with a celebration of 'universal' religious devotion, a critique of contemporary Christian failings, and intermittent prophecies of Christian world dominion" (6). The *Book*'s interest in eastern strangeness and Christian world dominion results in a text that offers "information about the earth and its inhabitants...instead of advice on distances, dispensations, or diarrhea" as earlier travel writings had done (67). Political scientist Cary J. Nederman in *Worlds of Difference: European Discourses of Toleration, c. 1100-c.1550* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000) has shown that the fourteenth century saw European recognition and concern over diversity of thought within Christendom and outside of it: "Beneath the veneer of religious singularity, European Christendom during the Middle Ages struggled endlessly with manifestations of difference...long before the Reformation—indeed as early as about 1100—religious toleration (sometimes in conjunction with other forms of tolerance, such as forbearance of philosophical, cultural, and political difference) received reasoned defense from various quarters in Latin Christendom, orthodox as well as dissenting." Nederman claims that the texts he addresses are drawn together by a singular theme: "[the texts'] recognition that by God's own ordination, the human world is composed of difference...some form of toleration is rendered necessary by the conditions...imposed by divinely created (if flawed) human nature itself" (4-5). In light of the multiplicity of approaches to diversity—physical, geographic, religious, political—among scholars of medieval culture and among medieval people themselves, I follow Ziegler's simple formulation that in a faster, bigger world, people needed to judge others quickly and accurately. His formulation is at once all-encompassing and succinct.

<sup>4</sup> Ziegler, "Text and Context: On the Rise of Physiognomic Thought," 160.

<sup>5</sup> Mahmoud Manzalaoui, *Secretum Secretorum: Nine English Versions*, Vol. 1 (Oxford: Early English Text Society/Oxford University Press, 1977), ix.

translated from Arabic into Latin in the first half of the thirteenth century. It had been translated from Latin into English by the end of the fourteenth century.<sup>6</sup> In the mid-fifteenth-century portion of MS Cotton Vespasian E.16 (CV), a much abbreviated freestanding version of the physiognomy from the Latin-cum-English *Secretum Secretorum* follows the *Three Kings of Cologne* and the *Siege of Jerusalem*.<sup>7</sup>

The *Secretum* physiognomy complicates the work of the other texts in CV. In the *Three Kings* and the *Siege*, human commonalities expose the fragility of religious and physical difference only to be shut down as the texts' conclusions assert nearly absolute alterity between groups. The specter of shared humanity remains at the conclusion of each, making the assertion of absolute difference ring false; at very least, the assertion seems forced. This chapter argues that as the *Secretum* physiognomy undergoes the compression process that leads to the version in CV, it becomes increasingly suitable for practical use in situations that require quick and unreflective judgments of another person's character. The result is a text that vaunts the accuracy and precision of physiognomic science. It omits the possibility that multiple causes can lead to the same physiognomic trait and the subsequent fact that the same physiognomic trait, depending on its cause, may call for different character judgments. In fact, at times the text omits causes of traits altogether, suggesting that certain traits are the results of *a priori*

---

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., xv-xvi. The date of latest translation from Latin to English is deduced from the date of the English *Secretum* in MS Sloane 213, circa 1400.

<sup>7</sup> Manzalaoui, ix-x. According to Manzalaoui, most medievals would have accepted the *Secretum* as a genuine Aristotelian document. The *Secretum* excerpt appears in a hand different than that of the *Three Kings* or the *Siege*, but it appears to be contemporaneous with the copy of the *Siege*, which dates it to the second half of the fifteenth century.

conditions whose significations are non-negotiable. The physiognomy uses color strategically in order to position western Europeans as potential masters of physiognomic science. The text also turns away from fuller *Secreta* physiognomies' interest in promoting self-reflection in their readers. The comprehensive *Secretum* ultimately turns the Christian reader's gaze inward, suggesting he question his own position with regard to the ideal virtuous (and Christian) man against whom the physiognomical subject is judged. The abbreviated *Secretum*, on the other hand, redirects the reader's gaze outward, focusing exclusively on the subject to be judged. Ultimately, the *Secretum* physiognomy in CV positions its reader as a master of physiognomy who is himself impervious to judgment in order that he might imagine himself part of a late medieval movement, certainly influenced by the Crusades, toward western European world domination.

### ***Versions***

This chapter compares several contemporaneous versions of the *Secretum* physiognomy with the Cotton Vespasian E.16 version. Manzalaoui's edition descends from Robert Steele's 1898 *Three Prose Versions of the Secreta Secretorum*, published by the Early English Text Society.<sup>8</sup> When Robert Steele first published the 1898 edition, he included the version in MS. Royal 18.A.7 (hereafter R7). In 1995, George R. Keiser used

---

<sup>8</sup> Robert Steele, *Three Prose Versions of the Secreta Secretorum* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1898), 39. Manzalaoui, xii, says of his own edition that he seeks to improve upon Steele's work by using sigils to "indicate the subordination of subsections to main divisions, and the historical stratification of the portions of the *Secretum*." He also seeks to "make possible comparison with Steele's text and commentary" as well as Ismail Ali's English translation of the Arabic *Sirr* as it appears in Steele's 1920 edition of the Latin *Secretum* (Fascicule V of *Opera hactenus inedita Rogeri Baconi* [London: Oxford University Press, 1920]).

the Cotton Vespasian physiognomy to fill in the lacuna left by a missing leaf in R7.

Having compared what is extant of R7 with the free-standing physiognomy in CV, Keiser concludes that one is a copy of the other.<sup>9</sup> In keeping with Keiser's work, this chapter will consider the version in CV a copy of the R7 version. The copies are nearly identical, and this study takes differences between them as laden with meaning because the differences are so minute. This study will compare the two versions in order to arrive at a greater understanding of the rationale behind including the physiognomy in the Cotton Vespasian manuscript.

The CV and R7 texts both appear to be descended from the Latin translation of the *Sirr* attributed to Phillipus Tripolitanus and written in the first half of the thirteenth century. Tripolitanus, working for the bishop of Tripoli, produced what appears to be one of only two works translated from Arabic into Latin in Crusader lands. Phillipus's text circulated widely in the late Middle Ages, as some 350 extant manuscripts are known, including abbreviations and adaptations. (The full version of Phillipus's text usually features the physiognomy at the end and is generally referred to as the 'Vulgate')

---

<sup>9</sup> George R. Keiser, "Filling a Lacuna in a Middle English '*Secretum Secretorum*,'" *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 96:4 (1995): 381-8. Keiser, 381, concludes that the physiognomy in CV is a copy of the the physiognomy in R7 when he writes: "It is now possible to supply a version of the missing text from another British Library MS, Cotton Vespasian E.16, which contains a copy of the physiognomy treatise in the form of a free-standing work." The CV and R7 texts' similarity and likely copying relationship is also attested by the genealogy of CV's *Three Kings of Cologne*, which has been identified as a copy of the *Three Kings* in MS Royal 18.A.10 (R10, See my chapter on the *Three Kings*). Before residing in the Royal collection, both MSS 18.A.7 and 18.A.10 were in the sixteenth-century collection of Lord John Lumley. Warner and Gilson, xix, point out that much of Lumley's collection came from the libraries of dissolved monastic houses. The R7 and R10 MSS may have resided together earlier than that and served as exemplars for the CV scribe at the same time and in the same place. The full Cotton Vespasian physiognomy has been edited only once, in Keiser, 386-8.



*Secretum*.)<sup>10</sup> The R7 and CV versions appear descended from an abbreviation of Tripolitanus's Latin full text, which was then translated into French, and finally into English.<sup>11</sup>

In order to better understand the CV scribe's rationale for including the *Secretum* physiognomy, this chapter will continue the comparative work begun by Manzalaoui in his *Nine English Versions*. In order to shed light on the compression process generally, the chapter will compare the physiognomy in CV with that in British Library MS Sloane 213. The Sloane MS contains only the physiognomy section and a section on onomancy, and it is an English translation of the physiognomy in the Latin Vulgate *Secretum*.<sup>12</sup> The Sloane MS is valuable for this study in that it is an English version, circa 1400, in which the physiognomy has not been much compressed at all. Direct comparison between this English translation of the Vulgate and English abbreviations will yield a sense of the

---

<sup>10</sup> Manzalaoui, xv-xvi.

<sup>11</sup> See Manzalaoui's textual genealogy on xlvii. Roger Bacon produced a glossed version of the Latin full text of the Vulgate *Secretum* some time around 1268. It was edited by Robert Steele in *Opera hactenus inedita Rogeri Baconi*, vol. 5 (London: Oxford University Press, 1920). Steele dates Bacon's *Secretum* to around 1257. For the position that Bacon composed his version after 1268, see Steven J. Williams, "Roger Bacon and His Edition of the Pseudo-Aristotelian *Secretum Secretorum*," *Speculum* 69.1 (Jan. 1994): 57-73, esp. 61-63. Manzalaoui refers to Bacon's work as a "glossed version" in order to distinguish it from a modern scholarly edition of the sort Manzalaoui himself produces. Williams, on the other hand, is mainly interested in reconfiguring the date of composition and the *Secretum*'s place in Bacon's "intellectual biography." Williams asserts, against Steele's argument that the *Secretum* was produced before Bacon had "developed that high regard for astronomical accuracy seen in his mature work," that Bacon's *Secretum* is a product of his mature work. Williams refers to Bacon's *Secretum* as a scholarly "edition," likely with the goal of presenting Bacon as a scholar of the first order and without interest in distinguishing between medieval and modern scholarly practice. The current study will refer to Bacon's work as a "glossed version."

<sup>12</sup> There is some debate about whether the physiognomy is directly descended of the Vulgate. The onomancy section is not included in the Vulgate, though it may have been included by Phillipus. It may be that the onomancy section and the physiognomy in MS Sloane 213 do not have the same source. Manzalaoui, xvii, xlvii, seems to think that the physiognomy is that of the Vulgate, regardless of the scribe's source for the onomancy. He classes MS Sloane 213 with Latin MSS that transcribe the physiognomy separately from other sections of the text, including MSS Sloane 1313, Egerton 874, Bodley Douce 45 and Lat. Class. d. 17, and Arras 741.

extent to which the CV physiognomy and related abbreviations are compressed as well as a sense of the literary effect of compression on *Secreta* physiognomies generally.

This chapter will also compare abbreviations with other abbreviations in order to arrive at some conclusions about the effects of compression in CV in particular.

Manzalaoui does not include the R7 or CV versions in his *Nine English Versions*, as his goal was to “produce a corpus of all known early English versions of the *Secretum* which have not already been edited.”<sup>13</sup> The R7 *Secretum* had already been sufficiently edited by Steele in 1898, and the CV version of the *Secretum* went unremarked by scholars, and was likely unknown to them, until Keiser published on it in 1995. In addition to comparing the R7 and CV versions with one another, this chapter will build upon Manzalaoui’s work by comparing the Royal and Cotton Vespasian texts (henceforth R7CV when taken together) with versions in MS University College Oxford 85 and Robert Copland’s 1528 printed edition. Manzalaoui includes the Oxford and Copland versions in his *Nine English Versions*, and he has shown that they are English rescensions of the same French abbreviation of Phillipus’s text as the R7CV physiognomy. As a representative of the French source for all these English versions, this chapter will consider the version of the French abbreviation of Phillipus’s text in Cambridge University Library MS Ff.I.33, folios 1-33, also included in Manzalaoui’s edition.<sup>14</sup> Comparison with these texts will illuminate the CV scribe’s compression process. The

---

<sup>13</sup> Manzalaoui, xlvi.

<sup>14</sup> Manzalaoui, 226-389. Manzalaoui’s *Nine English Versions* in fact prints MS University College 85 and Robert Copland’s version together with the French abbreviation of Tripolitanus’s text, elucidating their relationship to one another.

decisions made in compressing the text, some intentional and some perhaps erroneous, will shed light on the social purpose CV's *Secretum* scribe may have hoped for his text.

This chapter will also address a particularly illuminating aspect of the CV text's abbreviation. The CV physiognomy offers none of the historical information about the *Secretum*'s (pseudo-) Aristotelian roots found in the other versions, including the R7 text. All other versions used in this chapter offer greater context for their physiognomies. The R7, University College Oxford, and Copland versions all contain full *Secreta*, based on the same French abbreviation as the CV physiognomy. In the Sloane MS, the onomancy and physiognomy appear without the rest of the *Secretum*, but the physiognomy provides background information in an attempt to make up for its lack of context. As a result, all of these physiognomies are more contextualized than Cotton Vespasian's. The literary effect of the CV text's omission of the *Secretum*'s purported Aristotelian context is a major piece of this chapter's evidence.

### ***The Text, Its Reader, and Its Science***

Like Keiser's work, this chapter identifies changes between the R7 and the CV physiognomies.<sup>15</sup> Unlike Keiser's work, this chapter hypothesizes that the changes between versions (including but not limited to changes between the R7 and CV MSS) are

---

<sup>15</sup> Keiser, 381, cites a number of differences between the Royal and Cotton Vespasian physiognomies and mostly attributes them to scribal error, with the notable exception of the opening address, which is discussed below.

indicative of a strategy for putting English readers in control of decidedly non-English physiognomic material.

In comparison to the R7 text, the CV physiognomy presents itself as practical content fit for any reader. Keiser cites the circulation of the *Secretum* physiognomy, especially as a free-standing excerpt, as “another indication of the widespread interest in the *Secretum Secretorum* and its influence in late medieval England.” He goes on to say that the “existence of the Cotton Vespasian text of the physiognomy is further evidence...that the physiognomy book at the end of the *Secretum Secretorum* had a life of its own.”<sup>16</sup> Keiser argues that the CV scribe is aware that in excerpting the physiognomy from the full *Secretum* in the R7 MS, he has to make some changes. Keiser compares the opening of the R7 version:

Amonge all othir thingis caste the to knowe the mervelous science of  
ffysnomye, for therbi thou shalt knowe the natures and the condicions of  
alle folke.<sup>17</sup>

with the opening of the CV version:

Among all þinges who þat woll knowe the marvelous science of ffysnomy  
he shall knowe the nature and condicions of all folke.<sup>18</sup>

Keiser argues that “it was necessary for the adaptor to delete the ‘caste the,’ which is part of the fictional rationale for the text, a treatise addressed to Alexander by its author, Aristotle.”<sup>19</sup> This is to say that “the” is a direct personal address from Aristotle to Alexander and that, in adapting the text to a free-standing format, the address has to be

---

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 382.

<sup>17</sup> Steele, 38; Keiser, 383.

<sup>18</sup> CV, fol. 83a.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

changed. The Cotton Vespasian scribe goes with the much less personal “who þat woll knowe.” This change opens up the text’s knowledge for any reader; no longer is it a letter from Aristotle to Alexander. Instead, the resulting text is a piece of practical information fitting for “fifteenth-century English readers who copied practical texts.”<sup>20</sup>

Keiser’s article is uninterested in the ideas that lay behind the scribe’s decisions— notwithstanding Keiser’s interest in what it takes to make the piece a sensible free-standing physiognomy—and he calls the new opening “remarkably graceful.” This chapter asserts that the change in fact repositions the reader in order to assert the accuracy, even infallibility, of physiognomic science. The new address removes all trace of second-person point-of-view and makes the opening more concise. The result is a markedly impersonal address that implies a different understanding of the reader’s position with respect to the physiognomic material. “Caste the” suggests not only that the material is for the consumption of a particular person (Alexander); it also tells us that Alexander’s knowledge of the physiognomy is not a foregone conclusion. Alexander must “cast” or *try* to know the material. In addition to making the addressee indefinite, the change to “who þat woll knowe” makes the acquisition of physiognomic knowledge a matter of the reader’s will. While there is some question in the Royal MS as to whether physiognomy will ultimately prove knowable, there is no such question in the Cotton Vespasian MS: if someone’s will to know physiognomy is strong enough, he will know it. If the scribe’s only goal were to remove the Aristotelian context in order to make the

---

<sup>20</sup> Keiser, 382.

text free-standing, he could just as easily have changed the address to read “he who will cast to know” or some such thing. Indeed, the scribe’s change suggests a concern with making clear that physiognomic knowledge is accurate and truthful; if the current reader turns out not to be he “who þat woll knowe,” it is not the science’s fault, it is the reader’s.

The CV scribe was not alone. According to Ziegler, many medieval thinkers attempted “to structure the science so that erroneous judgment would be reduced to a bearable minimum.”<sup>21</sup> The CV version’s concern with the accuracy of physiognomy is highlighted by comparison to the opening of the physiognomy in MS University College Oxford 85. The Oxford MS’s opening address conveys both the uncertain truth of physiognomy and the difficulty of the subject.<sup>22</sup> The Oxford scribe opens with:

Amonge all othir thinges erthly, I will that thou vndirstande and knowe a parte of the noble science callyd phisonomye, wherby thou shall have vndirstandinge of the nature and condicions of the peeple.<sup>23</sup>

This version makes clear that physiognomy is an “earthly” science, suggesting that it is less perfect than divine truth. Furthermore, the opening is an inversion of that in the CV text. While the CV text is concerned with the reader’s will, here the command to “understand” and “know” physiognomy is qualified by the speaker’s (Aristotle’s) will. While the CV version hints that a person’s will to know the science might be lacking, the Oxford version accepts that possibility without blaming the unwilling learner for the

---

<sup>21</sup> Ziegler, “Text and Context,” 162.

<sup>22</sup> Manzalaoui, xxix-xl. In Manzalaoui’s opinion, with reference to that of Mr. Neil Ker and Professor Auvo Kurvinen, University College, Oxford MS 85 dates from the latter half of the fifteenth century and was produced by a “professional scribe who copied extremely faithfully.”

<sup>23</sup> University College Oxford MS, p. 130; Manzalaoui, 376. The Oxford MS is paginated instead of foliated.

science's failure. Finally, the Oxford version's Aristotle wishes that Alexander know only a part of the science, suggesting that it might be too much for him to know the whole corpus of physiognomic knowledge. The Oxford version accepts the potential problems of physiognomic knowledge—its earthliness, the chance that the student's will will not match the teacher's, and the science's vastness—while the Cotton Vespasian version goes out of its way to assert physiognomy's truthfulness and accuracy.

The Cotton Vespasian text's position that physiognomy is accurate makes the following judgments possible: A man that is "of feeble color" is lecherous and "inclined to evil vices." A man who is not born with all his limbs, or has a birthmark on his face, is considered of "evil forme" and he should be avoided. The "best form," the text claims, is in "men "pat haue þe eyen and þe heer blak, þe visage round, coloured white & rede & bron medled togedres." Also men who have heads that are not too small nor too big, speak little, and have sweet voices have "whole and true hearts." A man with soft hair is "debonaire," meek, and has a "colde brayn." A man with hard and thick hair is a fool. A man with black hair loves reason and justice. A man with red hair angers quickly. A man with hair of a middling color "loves peace and charity." A man with large eyes is envious and slothful. A man with brown eyes is courteous, fair, and true. A man with long stretching eyes is malicious. One with eyes "liche an asse, euer lokyng downward" is foolhardy and evil. A man whose eyes "turne lightly with a long visage" is "baratous," or quarrelsome, and peevish. A man with red eyes is strong and of great courage. A man with "tatches," or blemishes, around the eye in white, black, or red is the "worst of all men." The characteristics and associated judgments continue in this vein in full *Secreta*,

making the job of a ruler who needs to make quick judgments about those with whom he keeps company that much easier. In the CV version, where the text is divested of its Aristotelian context, it makes judgments easier for anyone who needs to size up anyone else.

In addition to the Cotton Vespasian scribe's interest in the truth and accuracy of physiognomy, his compression makes the science seem more precise as well. The list of examples above makes clear that physiognomy requires a number of prejudgments and comparisons about exactly how to characterize a particular physical trait. For instance, before a physiognomer can decide whether a person is malicious, foolhardy and evil, or quarrelsome and peevish, he must first decide whether his subject's eyes are long and stretching, like an ass's, or turn lightly with a long visage. Each of these judgments depends upon an individual's experience and his subsequent standards of comparison. The traits upon which the CV version bases judgments require subjective comparisons, as opposed to a relatively clear-cut trait like blue eyes versus brown. The CV version's subjective judgments, however, remain much more precise than those in other, longer versions of the *Secretum* physiognomy.

Take, for instance, the discussion of the nose in the Sloane and Cotton Vespasian MSS. In the Sloane MS, which as noted above has not been much compressed, the discussion of the nose is as follows:

Nose when it es sotyl and smalle, he þat owes  
it is wrathfull and angry. Who þat has a longe nose straght to þe  
mouthe he is gentill, worthy and hardy. Whose nose es like an ape,  
he es hasty. Schorte nose toknes a schrewe, and if þe noseholes be  
wyde also, þat es a synger and liccherous. Whose nose holes has



grete openyng, he es hard and wrathfull; and when þe nose es brode  
in þe mydell and goyng to heght, þat man es wordefull and lufyng to  
lye and lyenge. þat man es euenest and best, whose nose es medioker  
in length, and medioker in brede at þe ende, and þe holes are  
nought to mykel.<sup>24</sup>

The Cotton Vespasian version is more concise in its description of the nose:

he þat hath þe nose thynne is angry and sone wroth //  
he þat hath long nose and streight to þe mouth is a good man  
and an hardy & a temporate // he þat is snatted is lightly troubled.  
And he þat hath grete nose þirles is slough unde &  
lightly wroth/ he þat hath the nose brode in þe myddys goyng  
upward is a grete spekere and a liere // but þe best nose /  
is of meane lengthe and þe noseþirles noght to grete  
ne to litell<sup>25</sup>

Compare Sloane's "sotyl and smalle" to Cotton Vespasian's "thynne." "Sotyl" carries a significantly larger range of meanings, from finely wrought and delicate (the most likely here) to cunning and crafty.<sup>26</sup> "Thynne" has a much smaller range of possible meanings. According to the *MED* all of "thynne's" possible meanings involve quantity, including "narrow," "slender," "sparse," and "not dense."<sup>27</sup> The scribe who chooses "thynne" over "sotil" is interested in precise descriptions that make physiognomic interpretation easier. Comparison with Roger Bacon's Latin *Secretum* also attests the Cotton Vespasian scribe's interest in precision: Bacon's section on the nose begins, "Nasus cum fuerit subtilis, ejus dominus est valde iracundus" [When the nose is subtle, its lord is greatly hot-tempered].<sup>28</sup> The Sloane MS is far closer to the Latin, but the Cotton Vespasian

---

<sup>24</sup> Manzalaoui, 12; Sloane 213 MS, fol. 119rb.

<sup>25</sup> Cotton Vespasian MS, lines 66-71 (emphasis original).

<sup>26</sup> *MED*, s.v. "sotil." For instance, Chaucer refers to "many subtile flatereres" in the *Tale of Melibee*.

<sup>27</sup> *MED*, s.v. "thynne."

<sup>28</sup> Bacon, 168.

version is much more precise. It is far easier to judge whether a nose is narrow than whether it is “finely wrought.” Though narrowness remains a subjective notion, it is less subject to interpretation than is subtleness.

Another example of the Cotton Vespasian scribe’s interest in precision lay in his choice of “snatted,” or flattened, over “like an ape.” While the Sloane MS’s description is more colorful and provides a rhetorically effective comparison of the hasty man to an ape, it does little to make physiognomic judgment easy. First of all, the novice physiognomer would have to know something about apes in order to recall the image to mind. Other abbreviations, such as that in the Oxford MS, also avoid the ape comparison. The ape comparison ultimately comes from a misreading of the Latin. Steele’s 1920 edition of the Latin Vulgate, as it was prepared and glossed by Roger Bacon, reads “Nasus vero simus, est impetuosus,” or “The nose in truth flattened, he is impetuous.”<sup>29</sup> The word “simus,” or flattened, is very close to the word for ape, “simius.” As the two words are only one letter different when they appear in the nominative form, which agrees with “nasus,” it would not be at all difficult to confuse the terms on the basis of appearance. On the basis of sense, however, “flattened,” is the much more sensible reading. The choice of “simius” may indicate a less than practical interest in rhetorical flourish on the part of the Sloane scribe or at very least an extreme preference for *difficilior lectio*, the scribal and editorial practice of choosing the more difficult reading when faced with a situation in which the most sensible reading is less than obvious. The

---

<sup>29</sup> Roger Bacon, viii.

CV text's scribe prefers good sense that facilitates precise judgment over sensational and imprecise judgments like the Sloane scribe's "like an ape."

The Cotton Vespasian scribe's changes suggest his interest in conveying practical knowledge that, as Ziegler puts it, could be used to fill the late Middle Ages' "specific need for classifying tools that would enable people to pass an immediate judgment concerning people they met for the first time in social, commercial, or political circumstances."<sup>30</sup> The text's disinterest in the specifics of its pseudo-Aristotelian history and its interest in accuracy and precision over and above expanded versions reflect the text's striving to present itself and its science as suitable for use in practical circumstances.

### ***Doubt, Exemplum, and Other-Directedness***

The *Secretum* physiognomy's Cotton Vespasian scribe has good reason to promote the accuracy and precision of physiognomy; the text responds to a long tradition of doubt about the worth of physiognomy. The text responds to that doubt with more than the omission of its purported historical context and attention to good sense and ease of use. The CV text manipulates the *Secretum* physiognomy's traditional focus on judging oneself at the same time as judging others until the physiognomer's gaze is completely "other-directed."<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup> Ziegler, "Text and Context," 182.

<sup>31</sup> I borrow the term "other-directed" from theologian George Kelsey's "The Racist Search for the Self," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 6.2 (1978): 240-56, which is discussed below. Kelsey, 243, borrows the term

Andreas Capellanus's *Art of Courtly Love*, a Latin treatise on courtly love in the context of the social estates written at the court of Marie (de Champagne) de Troyes between 1184 and 1186, provides a late twelfth-century French example of doubt about physiognomy.<sup>32</sup> In the case of a man of the middle class courting the attention of a woman of the higher nobility, Andreas writes that the noblewoman says:

Although good character may ennoble a commoner, still it cannot change his rank to the extent of making him a lord or a vavasor unless this is done by the power of the prince, who may add nobility to the good character of any man he pleases, and so it is proper that you should be refused advancement to the love of a countess.... You contend that you are renowned among the warriors, yet in you I see many things that are harmful or opposed to such service. For although soldiers ought naturally to have long, slender calves and a moderate-sized foot, longer than is broad and looking as though formed with some skill, I see that your calves are fat and roundly turned, ending abruptly, and your feet are huge and immensely spread out so that they are as broad as they are long.

The middle class man responds:

...that objection you raised about my large, flabby legs and my big feet doesn't show much intelligence. Men say that in the further parts of Italy there lives a man of a line of counts who has slender legs and is descended from the best of parents who enjoyed great privileges in the sacred palace; he himself is famous for every kind of beauty and is said to have immense wealth, and yet, so they say, he has no character at all—all good habits fear to adorn him, and in him everything bad has found a home. On the

---

from David Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd* (Garden City, NY: Double Day & Co., 1953), 28-38. I use Kelsey's 1965 *Racism and the Christian Understanding of Man* at length in my chapter on blood in Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale*.

<sup>32</sup> Andreas's book was "almost certainly meant to portray conditions" at the court of Queen Eleanor, Countess Marie de Troye's mother, at Poitiers between 1170 and 1174. Eleanor, the granddaughter of troubadour Duke William of Aquitaine had introduced the ideas of courtly love and fostered its literature in the courts of France and England during her reigns as queen of each. See John Jay Parry's "Introduction" in Andreas Capellanus, *The Art of Courtly Love* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), 12-13. For the date of 1184-6, see Arpad Steiner, "The Identity of the Italian 'Count' in Andreas Capellanus's *De Amore*," *Speculum* 13.3 (July 1938): 308.

other hand, there is a king in Hungary who has very fat, round legs, and long, broad feet and who is almost wholly destitute of beauty; yet because the worth of his character shines so bright, he deserved to receive the glory of the royal crown, and proclamations of his praise resound throughout almost the whole world... You should learn to base your objections on a man's character, not on his legs...

The woman concedes the faultiness of physiognomy when she responds, "You seem to have a reasonable defense, but what good deeds glorify you, what sort of character makes you worthy to obtain what you ask, I have never heard."<sup>33</sup> The woman immediately backs off the physiognomy argument, ceding to the middle class man's argument that character is far more important than physical traits that *might* indicate character. The speed with which the noblewoman shifts her focus to deeds, and the man's vehement argument that the lady's use of physiognomy "doesn't show much intelligence" together speak to doubt about physiognomy's overall worth in twelfth-century France.

The *Secretum* physiognomy reacts to doubt about the worth of physiognomy when it opens with a story that suggests the potential fallibility of physiognomy while preserving its general accuracy:

And [in physiognomy] labored a grete Clerke that hight ffysnomyas, þe whiche science treteþ of þe qualitees & natures of all folke. In the tyme of þis ffysnomyas regned þe excellent docotour Ypocras. And bycause þat þis ffysnomyas had such a name of wisdam, the disciples of ypocras portreyden the likenesse of theire maister and baren hit to ffisnomyass and bade hym iuge þe nature of hym þat hit was like. And þanne he said, 'þe man þat is like þis ffigure is lecherouse and baretous and boystous'. Thanne þay þat hadden brought this figure to hym þey seyden, 'A, ffool, this is þe figure of þe wise ypocras, þe best man and wisest þat leueth'. And þanne said ffisnomyas, 'I wote wele þat þis is þe ffigure of wise ypocras. And þat I haue said & iuged it is soth, but of his high wisdam and

---

<sup>33</sup> Andreas Capellanus, 57-8.

reson he refrayneth himself from þis vices þat nature sheweth in hym'.  
 This disciples comen home to here maister and told hym of þeire doing,  
 and þanne said ypocras, 'I haue herd moche good spoken of þe wisdam of  
 this ffisnomyas. 'But hit is nowe proved in doing, so þat I shall euermore  
 hereafter holden hym a passing wise man. For trewly he iuged trouth in  
 me.<sup>34</sup>

The *Secretum* physiognomy sums up the story with the admonition that "hit is not lefull  
 to Iuge of one signe in a man. But thou most consider all þe signes in hym and þanne take  
 heede to þe signe that aboundeth in a man and deme to þe best and moost party of nature  
 &c explicit."<sup>35</sup> The legendary story appears in numerous places where the *Secretum* is  
 referenced, either explicitly or implicitly. Albertus Magnus uses it in the introductory  
 chapter to physiognomy in his *De animalibus libri*; in his physiognomy, as in Bacon's  
 Vulgate *Secreta*, the Ffisnomyas character is named Philemon.<sup>36</sup> The story also appears  
 in another version with Socrates substituting for Hippocrates and Zopyros for

---

<sup>34</sup> Keiser, 386; Cotton Vespasian MS, fol. 83a.

<sup>35</sup> Keiser, 388; Cotton Vespasian MS, fol. 85a. The instruction to avoid judging from one sign alone can be traced to Rhazes's physiognomy, in its Latin translation by Gerard. Rhazes's Chapter 58, in Richard Foerster, ed., *Scriptores Physiognomonici Graeci et Latini* (hereafter *SPGL*), vol. 2, (Stuttgart/Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1994), 179, reads: "Oportet ut cum iudicare volueris, non unam tantum attendas intentionem, sed in quantum vales ad ipsarum intendas aggregationem et si quando significationum acciderit contrarietas, ipsarum virtutes et testimonia metiaris. Deinde ad fortiores ipsarum declina et earum iudica testimonio et similiter quando plures sunt. Praeterea scire debes, quod faciei significatio et praecipue oculorum omnibus aliis significationibus in fortitudine et firmitudine praeiudicat." [It is right that when you desire to judge, you not pay so much attention to one intention, but be influenced by however many of them in aggregate and when it falls out that there is contrariety of signs, measure their strengths and testimonies. Then decline toward the stronger of them and judge their testimony and do similarly when there are many. In addition you must know which sign of the face and of the eyes especially and all other signs in order to prejudice in strength and firmness.]

<sup>36</sup> The physiognomer is also named Philemon in Phillipus's Latin abbreviation. (See *SPGL*, Vol. 2, 187-91.) The French Cambridge University Library MS Ff.I.33, R7, CV, Oxford, and Copland, however, all use Ffisnomyas. The change must have taken place somewhere in between the Latin abbreviation and the French abbreviated redaction: MS Ff.I.33, fol. 32r, introduces the physiognomer as "tres saiges philosophes qui avoit nom phisonomias le quel ensercha les natures et les qualites detoutes creatures" [the very wise philosopher that was named Phynomias that searched the natures and qualities of all creatures].

Ffysnomyas.<sup>37</sup> Joseph Ziegler has shown that the legend worked its way into sermons as well.<sup>38</sup> The legend plays out exactly what the warning drawn from Rhazes asserts: physiognomy can be misleading. Hippocrates confirms what his disciples would never believe: he is given by nature to lechery, quarrelsomeness, and coarseness. The take-home message is that a man can resist the vices that are physiognomically indicated in him. The exemplum at once validates physiognomy, which is correct in discerning a vicious nature in Hippocrates, and asserts that physiognomy can be overcome. The exemplum uses the possibility of a physiognomic subject's extraordinary character to explain away cases in which physiognomy proves incorrect about a person's behavior.

The Cotton Vespasian and related versions' treatment of Hippocrates's self mastery reveals much about physiognomy's interest in inspiring self-direction—the tendency to examine, judge, and improve oneself—in its reader. Some versions—Bacon's Vulgate, MS Sloane 213, and Copland's print—go into specifics about how Hippocrates overcomes his natural tendencies. In Bacon's version, when Hippocrates informs his disciples that Ffysnomyas was correct about his physiognomy, the great doctor states:

---

<sup>37</sup> In order to avoid confusion, from here forward I will refer to the physiognomer only as Ffysnomyas, following the Cotton Vespasian MS and its close relatives. I will use this name regardless of whether he is named Ffysnomyas, Physnomias, or Philemon in the text at hand.

<sup>38</sup> Ziegler, "Text and Context," 167, cites Giovanni da San Gimignano, OP's (d. c. 1333) sermon on Romans 6:19 on the human propensity toward evil, or "the infirmity of your flesh." Giovanni attributes an example to the physiognomy of Polus (a corruption of Philemon according to Ziegler). In the story, all physiognomic and astral signs point to Hippocrates being an indecent sorcerer, yet Giovanni argues "he was amongst the best of all intellectuals and nobody surpassed him in integrity and decency. This could only have happened by the choice to be decent."

Verumptamen ex quo ego respexi, consideravi hec turpia esse et reprobanda, constitui meam animam regem supra ipsam, et retraxi eam ab eis, et triumphavi super retencionem concupisencie mee.<sup>39</sup>

[Nevertheless I considered the truth from him, I considered closely these things shameful and to be rejected, I positioned my soul king over itself, and I drew it back from [those shameful things], and I triumphed over the retention of my concupiscence.]

Hippocrates is very much an active participant in his quest to overcome concupiscence.

The passage underscores his proactive stance when it uses five active verbs in the first person to describe his actions: *respexi*, *consideravi*, *constitui*, *retraxi*, and *triumphavi*.

Hippocrates's assertion that he makes his soul "king" over his body further emphasizes the active nature of his fight against concupiscence.

MS Sloane 213 offers further evidence that the *Secretum* physiognomy advises readers to be self-directed in their physiognomic judgments. As in the Vulgate, Hippocrates says to his disciples:

And þan saide Ypocras, 'Trewly Philomon saide soothe, and he lafte noght of þe leste letter of þe treuthe. Neuerþeles, sithen I beheld and knewe me schapli to þese thynges filthy and reprouable, I ordeyned my soul kyng aboue my body, and so I withdrew my body fro þise thynges and I ouercome it in wísholdyng of my foule luste.'<sup>40</sup>

After the standard warning not to judge by one sign alone, the Sloane MS rationalizes its advice to be a self-directed physiognomer:

And þus þer þou knows þi self or any oþer schaply and bowable to any vice by way of þi compleccion, do þi self and councele oþer to do as Ypocras did, and make þi soule to reule þi body by gode resone and discrecion, withstanding by virtue þo vyces to whilke þou art conable

---

<sup>39</sup> Bacon, 165.

<sup>40</sup> Manzalaoui, 11.



borne of compleccion, and þan þou sale be praysed and holden wyse  
before God mekil more þan if þe making of þi compleccion were gyuen al  
to virtue. For he þat is made most brothil and stondes strongest, sal moste  
be thanked of God. Here-to acordes seynt Poule, saying on þis maner, ‘No  
man sale be crowned, bot als he has lawfully and stalworthly stryue. ’<sup>41</sup>

The Sloane MS physiognomy exhibits a strong preference for second-person address, using the second-person vocative or possessive pronoun nine times in as many lines. The text quotes Second Timothy 2:5, in which Paul writes that he who would gain mastery over any enemy must do so “lawfully” in order for his mastery to be recognized.<sup>42</sup> In its epistolary context, this verse exhorts its reader to avoid profane business in favor of the sacred. The physiognomy scribe shifts the emphasis from “lawfully” to “stryuene,” instructing that no one is rewarded unless he has striven against his own evil inclinations. To strive against one’s own physiognomically indicated vices is, as St. Paul’s text puts it, to “labour as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.”<sup>43</sup> In this context, physiognomy provides a road map for how to be a better Christian.

The Oxford version manipulates the Hippocrates exemplum in order to assert the ever-increasing importance of other-directedness in a world focused on judging others instead of judging oneself. In Copland’s print version, like Bacon’s Vulgate and MS Sloane 213’s English versions, Hippocrates addresses his own strategy. When Hippocrates tells his disciples that Ffysomyas judged him correctly, he adds “But reason that is in me ouercometh and ruleth the vyces of my complexion.” In the Oxford MS,

---

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Second Timothy 2:5 reads “For he also that striveth for the mastery, is not crowned, except he strive lawfully.”

<sup>43</sup> Doaii-Rheims, Second Timothy 2:3.

neither Hippocrates's reason nor wisdom is mentioned. When Ffysnomyas answers Hippocrates's protesting disciples, he says, "I knowe well that this is the figure of the noble doctoure Ypocras. And I haue tolde you what I knowe by my science." When the disciples return to Hippocrates and tell him what transpired with Ffysnomyas, Hippocrates states, "Truly Phisonomias hath tolde you the playn trouthe of my compleccion, wherynne were all the seid vices."<sup>44</sup> The text makes no explicit mention of self-mastery as the MS Sloane 213 physiognomy does. While other versions supply talk of reason and wisdom after these statements—and Bacon's Vulgate *Secretum* and MS Sloane 213 go the farthest in their considerations of positioning the soul and drawing it back from vice, etc.—the Oxford MS remains silent on these matters.<sup>45</sup> The Oxford MS physiognomy is ultimately uninterested in self-examination and self-mastery. The text's overwhelming thrust is toward the importance of judging others. It fits the bill for what Ziegler calls the "need for classifying tools that would enable people to pass an immediate judgment concerning people" that "became particularly urgent from the second half of the twelfth century onwards."<sup>46</sup>

In the R7CV version, physiognomic science is even more other-directed than in MS Oxford University College 85. In the R7CV version, Hippocrates does not give voice to his own methods. Rather, an omniscient Ffysnomyas announces the means by which Hippocrates overcomes his vicious tendencies. When Hippocrates's disciples protest

---

<sup>44</sup> Manzalaoui, 378.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 386. Reason does, however, appear in other portions of the Oxford MS *Secretum*: for instance, following the physiognomy the next passage begins "For whan a wyse man is angry he sheweth it not outward by his reason." The omission of reason from the physiognomy is notable.

<sup>46</sup> Ziegler, "Text and Context," 182.

Ffysnomyas's pronouncement that Hippocrates is "lecherouse and baratous and boystous," FFysnomyas answers them: "I wote wele þat þis is þe figure of wise ypocras. And þat I haue said & juged it is soth, but of his high wisdom and reson he refrayneth himself from þis vices þat nature sheweth in hym."<sup>47</sup> Ffysnomyas knows that Hippocrates has overcome his tendencies toward vice with "his high wisdom and reson."<sup>48</sup> Hippocrates does not himself state how he has overcome vice. He does not mention positioning his soul as king over his body. Instead, Hippocrates says:

I haue herd moche good spoken of þe wisdom of  
 this ffisnomyas but hit is wolfe proved in doying so þat  
 I shall euermore hereafter holden hym a passing wise man for  
 trewly he high iuged trouth in me<sup>49</sup>

Hippocrates affirms that Ffsnomyas is right and leaves it at that. The result is that the narrative focus is placed on Ffysnomyas and his ability to judge correctly. The text is focused on judging others, not on judging oneself. The movement of Hippocrates's method for conquering vice from his voice into the physiognomer's voice further promotes physiognomy as a successful science. Not only does the physiognomer know what vices are indicated by physical traits, he also knows whether his subject has overcome those vices and indeed how he has done so. The physiognomer knows the physiognomic subject better than the subject knows himself.

The Cotton Vespasian physiognomy is even slightly more other-directed than the nearly identical R7 version. As noted above, the CV version's opening address—the

---

<sup>47</sup> Keiser, 386; CV, fol. 83a; Steele, 38.

<sup>48</sup> Keiser, 386; CV, fol. 83a; Steele, 39.

<sup>49</sup> Keiser, 386; CV, fol. 83a; Steele, 38.

removal of “caste the” in favor of “who þat woll knowe”—does more than suggest the accuracy and truth of physiognomy; its removal of second-person address makes the addressee indefinite and focuses physiognomic judgment on persons other than the reader. Though second-person address persists in other portions of the text, its deletion in the opening coupled with the omission of Hippocrates’s self-reflection suggests that one spend more time looking at others than at himself. The reader is invited to use physiognomy as a means of judging who it is “þat woll knowe.” The CV version is even more other-directed than the R7 version.

When physiognomy is not explicitly positioned as a road map for bettering oneself, the reader is bereft of the main means of combating physiognomically indicated vices in himself. In fact, if the R7CV presentation of Ffysnomyas and Hippocrates is to be believed, then a physiognomer is better at judging whether and how a man has overcome his vices than is that man himself. What begins in full *Secreta* physiognomies as the suggestion that one should better himself while judging others evolves in the R7 and CV versions, and especially the latter, into the suggestion that one should focus first and foremost on judging others.

### ***The Significance of Skin in Abbreviated Physiognomies***

In her *Skin: On the Cultural Border between Self and the World*, Claudia Benthien argues that “only in the late eighteenth century was the epidermis able to develop into a surface that could bear semantic meaning and on which individuality could

reveal itself, and that only then did skin become the ‘parade ground of physiognomy.’”<sup>50</sup>

In a 2005 article, published four years after his “Text and Context: On the Rise of Physiognomic Thought,” Joseph Ziegler takes on Benthien’s idea, arguing that medieval people thought about skin. He goes so far as to show how they thought about skin as distinct from the flesh it immediately covers in medieval “learned” physiognomies.<sup>51</sup> Ziegler shows that physiognomic judgments on the skin generally considered its wrinkles, smoothness or hairiness, luminosity, refinement, blemishes, and finally its color. Despite physiognomies’ interest in skin color, and blackness in particular, Ziegler warns his readers that medieval physiognomies “cannot automatically be used for reconstructing medieval attitudes to black people.”<sup>52</sup> Like Ziegler’s work, the current chapter recognizes the difficulty of reconstructing medieval attitudes toward black people

---

<sup>50</sup> Ziegler paraphrases and quotes Benthien in his 2005 article “Skin and Character in Medieval and Early Renaissance Physiognomy,” *Micrologus: Natura, Scienze e Società Medievali; Nature, Sciences and Medieval Societies* 13 (2005): 511. See also Claudia Benthien, trans. T Dunlap, *Skin: On the Cultural Border between Self and the World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

<sup>51</sup> For this point, he relies especially on Aristotle’s *Problems* X.24 and X.27 as well as Rolandus Scriptoris’s circa 1430 *Reductorium phisonomie*, dedicated to the Duke of Bedford and currently held at the Biblioteca Ajuda in Lisbon (MS 52.XIII.18). Ziegler, “Skin and Character,” 514, writes “the fact that human hair was perceived to be attached to the flesh, not only to the skin...allowed human skin a position of autonomy in relation to the flesh. Unlike animal skin, which was ‘caro indurata et inspissata,’ the overwhelmingly refined human skin was not of the same nature as the flesh.”

<sup>52</sup> Ziegler, “Skin and Character,” 533 and 534 n. 83, cites V. Groebner’s “Haben Hautfarben eine Geschichte? Personenbeschreibungen und ihre Kategorien zwischen dem 13. und dem 16. Jahrhundert” *Zeitschrift für historische Forschung* 30 (2003), 1-18. Ziegler paraphrases, “Groebner shows how only in the sixteenth century did skin colour gradually emerge as an essential category for distinguishing ethnic identities, thus altering the concept of complexion from a tool describing individual physiological and mental characteristics to a tool describing collectivities.” While Groebner and Ziegler may be correct that the full-blown understanding of ethnic groups as distinct races comes later than the fifteenth century, this chapter is interested in medieval physiognomy’s role in laying the groundwork for the racial understanding of human existence. Interestingly, some of Ziegler’s own evidence suggests ethnic, or at very least ethno-geographic physiognomic judgments that tend toward collective identification.

since they varied considerably depending on other factors, including religion, as shown in my chapter on the *Three Kings of Cologne* and elsewhere in this dissertation.

Unlike Zeigler's work, this chapter is interested in the attitudes of physiognomies and their readers toward blackness, whiteness, and skin color in general as opposed to scribes' attitudes toward black people *per se*. The CV and related abbreviations omit the causes of color difference so thoroughly that they portray skin color as a natural condition that signifies the essence of the human it covers. The process of abbreviation also greatly reduces the range of skin color's potential meanings. The resulting text revises the *Secretum* physiognomy's traditional understanding of skin color in order to reorient the western European reader's relationship to what the physiognomy designates as the best skin color. Comparison between the Latin *Secretum*, the CV physiognomy, and other vernacular versions demonstrates that abbreviations tend to change the physiognomer's relationship to color in a way that privileges western European readers.

In the long tradition of the use of color in medieval physiognomy, "temperate" color is for the most part lauded as a sign of good character. In his argument that medieval people were aware of the skin as an organ to which meaning could be attached, Ziegler takes for his examples William de Mirica's commentary on Pseudo-Aristotle's physiognomy dedicated to Pope Clement VI (1342-1352), Rolandus Scriptoris's *Reductorium phosonomie* dedicated to the Duke of Bedford around 1430, and Rhazes's *Liber ad regem Almansorem* (the physiognomy book of which had been translated from Arabic into Latin by Gerard of Cremona and circulated independently in the Latin West

since the early thirteenth century).<sup>53</sup> The current chapter is, unlike Zeigler's work, interested in the fact that all of the above vaunt temperate color.<sup>54</sup> Rhazes writes, in a chapter titled "Significationes colorum" [Significations of colors]:

Color rufus vel rubeus sanguinis et caloris innuit multitudinem. Color vero inter rubeum et album medius aequalem significant complexionem, si cum hoc cutis a pilis nuda fuerit. Cuius autem color est velut flamma ignis, irascibilis est et maniacus. Cuius etiam color rubeus et clarus conspicitur, verecundus est. cuius praeterea color viridis apparet vel niger, irascibilis est.<sup>55</sup>

[Red color or redness of blood and heat refers to a multitude. In truth, color midway between red and white signifies a temperate complexion, if the skin were also without hair. He, however, whose color is like a flame of fire is irascible and a maniac. He whose color appears to be red and bright, he is modest. Also, he whose color appears green or black is irascible.]

Rhazes's work reflects the standard medieval physiognomic ideas that a temperate complexion signifies a temperate person and that a temperate person is the best person to have in one's employ. A man's character can be discerned through his skin color, and temperate skin color is that immediately in between red and white. Too much red, and any greenness or blackness is extreme and means that a man has an extreme personality tending toward anger.

William de Mirica's physiognomy also uses color to vaunt the temperate complexion over the extreme. He writes

Nigredo vero signum est melancholice dispositionis et sicci humoris in corpora dominantis [...]. Cum igitur nigredo albedo et precipue quando

---

<sup>53</sup> Ziegler, "Skin and Character," 512, and "Text and Context," 176.

<sup>54</sup> Ziegler, "Skin and Character," 529-32, recognizes this fact but focuses instead on his article's goal: to show that the skin has physiognomic meaning, regardless of what those meanings are.

<sup>55</sup> *SPGL*, vol. 2, 163-4.

intense fuerint sint signum frigiditatis, sequitur quod etiam sint signa timiditatis ut dicit hic Aristotiles.<sup>56</sup>

[Blackness, in truth, is a sign of a melancholy disposition and dryness of fluid dominating in the body.... When there is blackness or whiteness, and in particular when they are intense, they are signs of frigidity; they are also signs of timidity, says Aristotle.]

William's "et precipue quando intense fuerint" asserts the importance of noting the intensity of whiteness or blackness when deciding if a person's physiognomy indicates that they are overly timid. Neither extreme is a good thing. William allows for the possibility of less intense whiteness or blackness, however, which would presumably bring with it less intense behavior.

The difference between full and abbreviated *Secreta* physiognomies is the extent to which they treat the causes of complexion; expanded physiognomies make a point of going into detail about how and why some people have temperate complexions and others do not. As physiognomies are abbreviated, the focus on the causes of physical traits cedes primacy to a focus on traits' physiognomic interpretations. Ziegler notes that there are different kinds of blackness, set apart by their causes. He writes:

...the melancholic black, for example, had nothing to do with the blackness of the Egyptians or the Mauritians, which was accidentally (*per accidens*) caused by the burning effect of the sun's heat that burns the subcutaneous blood (situated between skin and the flesh) and turns the body organs black<sup>57</sup>

Melancholic blacks, following de Mirica's reading of Aristotle, receive their hue from their "cold and dry" constitutions while blacks who live in hot regions receive their hue

---

<sup>56</sup> Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Can. Misc. 350, 1941. Quoted in Ziegler, "Skin and Character," 534, n. 84.

<sup>57</sup> For this, Ziegler turns to William de Mirica, 194v-195r.



from the sun's burning effect on their blood. William de Mirica's physiognomy also asserts that black skin is caused by geography:

Est enim nigredo in Ethiopibus et Mauris a calore solis. Nam Mauritania est quedam region in Ethiopia calidissima. In qua propter calorem et ardorem continuum solis sanguinis subcutaneous aduritur et sic adustus denigrator. Cuius sanguis denigrare diffusionem inter cutem et carnem omnia membra generaliter denigrantur.<sup>58</sup>

[Blackness in Ethiopians and Mauritians is indeed by the heat of the sun. For Mauritania is that region in Ethiopia that is hottest. In which, on account of the unrelenting heat and fire of the sun, the subcutaneous blood is burned and thus having been burned it is made black. In him whose blood has been blackened by diffusion between the skin and the flesh all members are generally blackened.]

William de Mirica's physiognomy evidences the fact that physiognomies focus primarily on causes of physiognomic differentiation.

Rolandus's *Reductiorum*, though not an abbreviated physiognomy, takes a step toward preferring effects over causes. According to Rolandus, blackness has the same effect in melancholic blacks as it does in those blackened by the sun. Rolandus writes:

Color fuscus vehementem significant frigiditatem propter resolutionem caloris. Ob quam minuitur sanguis et congelatur ille paucus remanens, et ad nigredinem conuertitur et cutis mutat colorem, et ideo ethiopes citissime ad senium perueniunt quia in xxx anno. Et quia tales paucum habent calorem, debiles sunt.<sup>59</sup>

[Dark color signifies vehement frigidity on account of the loss of heat. On account of which the blood is reduced and congealed until there is only a little of it remaining, and it is converted to blackness and the skin changes color, and therefore Ethiopians come most swiftly to old age, in thirty years. Because they have such little heat, they are feeble]

---

<sup>58</sup> William de Mirica, 194v-195r. Quoted in Ziegler, "Skin and Character," 533, n. 81.

<sup>59</sup> Rolandus, 40r. Quoted in Ziegler, "Skin and Character," 534, n. 82.

Despite Zeigler's assertion that the "melancholic black...had nothing to do with blackness of the Egyptians or the Mauritians," another look at Ziegler's evidence yields another conclusion. The melancholic black and the phlegmatic white, according to William de Mirica, are timid. Referring to Rolandus's passage, Ziegler notes that "those with extremely dark colour who live in southern, hot regions...are timid, weak, and deceitful..."<sup>60</sup> One group is "feeble." The other is "timid" and "weak." What then is the difference between melancholic blacks and those burned by the sun? Ultimately blackness seems to have the same result regardless of its cause.

Though William de Mirica's expanded physiognomy deals at length with the causes of physical traits, it gives its reader a glimpse into a world where causes cede primacy to their effects. Immediately after asserting that black skin is caused by geography, William writes:

Unde primus inhabitans Ethiopiam sic denigrates est sed postea  
cohoperante caloris solis continuitate primi illius habitatoris uitium est in  
posteris propagatum ut ex nigro patre et nigra matre nigri fetus generaliter  
nascantur...<sup>61</sup>

[Thus the first inhabitants of Ethiopia were made black, but after combining with the continual heat of the sun the defects of those first inhabitants were propagated in their descendants such that from a black father and a black mother a black baby was generally born.]

William's assertion that black parents, regardless of how they became black, generally have black children goes a long way toward the notion that black people are naturally always-already black. William's assertion comes very close to naturalizing blackness.

---

<sup>60</sup> Ziegler, "Skin and Character," 533.

<sup>61</sup> William de Mirica, 194v-195r. Quoted in Ziegler, "Skin and Character," 533, n. 81.

According to his logic, anyone who spent enough time in a hot region could become black. Subsequently, he could produce black children. Nonetheless, William does not foray completely into race-thinking; his use of “generaliter” (generally) allows for the possibility that blackness in the progeny of the sun-burned is not necessarily a foregone conclusion. It is just exceedingly likely. William’s physiognomy is not guilty of naturalizing difference since it spends such a long time discussing its causes, but it certainly show its reader how one might get to the idea of natural difference.

Compressed physiognomies tend to naturalize difference completely. In the interest of practicality, they ignore different etiologies if they lead to the same physical trait and character judgment. The result is that skin color can be read not as a geographic phenomenon but rather as something inherent in a man’s identity. The R7CV abbreviated physiognomies are a prime example of texts that naturalize color. The R7CV version naturalizes hair and skin color:

The best fourme is in mene men þat haue þe eyen and þe heer blak, þe visage round, coloured white & rede & bron medled togedres.<sup>62</sup>

These physiognomies offer no information about how the skin got to be red, white, or brown, a far cry from the physiognomies that concern themselves with the sun’s heat and the dryness or moistness of one’s humors. The R7CV text finds etiologies, and for that matter humoral physiology on the whole, unnecessary. The R7CV *Secretum* physiognomy provides a shortcut to physiognomic judgment that, in ignoring etiologies

---

<sup>62</sup> Cotton Vespasian MS, fol. 83b; Keiser, 386; Steele, 39. Because the Cotton Vespasian and Royal versions are so similar, from here forward, I cite both though quotes are generally drawn from the Cotton Vespasian MS.

for skin color, allows them to be understood as collective identities whose causes are an unnecessary distraction. That is, whiteness, redness, brownness (and blackness) are inherent conditions that simply *are*.

In addition, full and abbreviated *Secreta* tend to differ in their use of blackness *per se*. In Roger Bacon's Vulgate *Secretum*, blackness is a key part of what makes up a temperate complexion. At the end of a passage in which Bacon's *Secretum* extols the benefits of temperate color, it sums up the appearance of "optima temperancia" :

Quando vero natura declinat ad nigredinem et croecitatem, tunc est optima temperancia; creacio hec placeat tibi, hanc habeas tecum.<sup>63</sup>

[When in truth nature declines toward blackness and yellowness, then this is optimal temperance; this creation will please you, this person keep with you].

Bacon's version does not quite contradict the notion that too much blackness signifies frigidity and timidity; in order to signify temperance, blackness must be mixed with yellowness. It is nonetheless important to note that "nigredinem" does not remain part of the constitution of temperance in the abbreviations with which this chapter is concerned.

The abbreviations—R7, CV, and the closely related French Cambridge University Library MS F.f.I.33—prefer to follow only the first portion of *Secretum* passage, which is rather less explicit about the benefits of blackness. Immediately before extolling blackness, Roger Bacon's Vulgate *Secretum* reads

Equior et temperacior creatura est que convenit mediocritati stature cum nigredine oculorum et capillorum et cum rotunditate vultus. Albedo vero commixta rubedini est bona. Et fuscus color temperatus cum integritate

---

<sup>63</sup> Bacon, 167.

corporis, et rectitude stature ac capitis mediocritas in parvitate et magnitudine, et raritas verborum nisi cum necesse fuerit, mediocritas in sonoritate vocis et subtilitate...”<sup>64</sup>

[The creature more even and temperate is he that brings together mediocre stature with black eyes and hair and with a round face. White, in truth, mixed with red is good. And temperately dark color with a whole body, and right stature and a head midway in between smallness and largeness, and rare of words unless they become necessary, moderateness in melodiousness and refined nature of the voice].

Though we cannot be certain either the R7, CV, or the MS Ff.I.33 scribes had access to Bacon’s version, which was circulating in England as early as the late 1260s, we do know that the English versions follow the French in rendering the word for dark, *fuscus*, as brown instead of black. The French reads “La meilleur complecion qui sort est de celui qui est de moyenne forme quia les yeux et les cheueux noirs et le visage ront et la couleur entre blanche et vermeilles et broune meslee ensemble.”<sup>65</sup>

The explicit mention of blackness, regardless of its role in temperateness, seems to be too much for the abbreviated physiognomies. They are silent on the worth of a man whose complexion “declines toward blackness,” preferring to translate instead the section *immediately* before it that uses the less committal “fuscus color temperatus.” The R7CV texts’ proclamation on the worth of a man with the “visage round, coloured white & rede & bron medled togedres” is followed by

---

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Cambridge University Library MS Ff.I.33, fol. 32v. [The best complexion is of the sort that he is of mean form and that the eyes and hair are black and the visage round and colored between white and red and brown mixed together.]

Poo men haue hole hertes and trewe þat haue þe hede mene not to litell ne to grete and speken litell but if hit be need and þe voice swete. Such complexioun is good and suche men take nygh to þe.<sup>66</sup>

This passage corresponds to the Vulgate's passage on the size of the head and the voice.

The only detail from that section that this passage in the abbreviation does not render is the "optima temperancia" of a man whose skin approaches blackness and yellowness.

This information must have struck an abbreviator as either unnecessary or incorrect as it does not make its way into Cotton Vespasian and its relatives.<sup>67</sup> It certainly speaks to the influence of other texts, detractors of blackness like Rhazes, on the reception of the *Secretum*. Even though the *Secretum* originally lauds blackness, it had to be brought into line with accepted knowledge on the undesirability of black skin.

The abbreviations' comfort with *fuscus* and discomfort with *nigredinem* is explained by the former's ambiguity and the latter's specificity. Art historian Paul Kaplan has shown that the Irish collection of homilies known as the *Catechesis Celtica* (preserved in the late tenth- or early eleventh-century MS Vat. Reg. lat. 49) understands

---

<sup>66</sup> Keiser, 386; Cotton Vespasian MS, fol. 83b; Steele, 39.

<sup>67</sup> Both University College Oxford MS 85 and Robert Copland's print version also omit any mention of black skin as a marker of "optima temperancia." The Oxford MS, Manzalaoui 378, has: "Latinge the wite that the best compleccion that is, is he that is of meene stature, and that his here of his hede, and yien, ben blake, the visage rounde, the colour medilde betwixt rede, white, and browne, and that is body be holl and right vp, the hede in a meene, nothir to miche nor to little, that he speke little but yf neede be, and the voice of his woorde sweete. Such a man were good and necessarie to be aboute thy persooone." Copland, Manzalaoui 379, has: "The best complexion that is is he that this of meane coloure with browne eyes & here and his visage between whyte and reed with an vpright body with a heed of metely bynesse and that speketh not but of nede be with a softe voice suche a complexion is good and such men haue about the." Interestingly, MS Oxford includes brown in the description of the best skin tone, corresponding to "fuscus" in Bacon's version and "bron" in Royal and Cotton Vespasian, while Copland's version transfers brown to eyes and hair, which are black in other versions. It is tempting, though unfounded without comparison to Copland's exemplars, to conclude that Copland's exemplar's scribes may have understood that black hair, though fitting for a Mediterranean context, would be best rendered in an English context as brown hair. Copland's version lauds skin that is white and red with no mention of brown skin.

*fuscus* and *niger* as distinct, though related, adjectives.<sup>68</sup> The text, edited in Migne's

*Patrologia Latina* reads:

Tertius, Patizara nomine, *fuscus*, *niger*, intiger barbatus, tunicam rubeam et sagum album habens, et calceamentis millenicis indutus.

[Third, named Patizara, *dark*, *black*, fully bearded, having a red tunic and short white cloak, and dressed in green slippers.]<sup>69</sup>

The *Catechesis*, in juxtaposing “*fuscus*” and “*niger*,” understands both terms as necessary and therefore different. The fact that Bacon's Vulgate uses both *fuscus* and *nigredinem* attests to the same.<sup>70</sup> The abbreviations' preference for *fuscus* over *nigredinem* is indicative of an effort to prepare the texts for a western European context: darkness is so non-specific as to be observable in many a white English or Frenchman; blackness, on the other hand, would indicate foreign—that is, Middle Eastern or African—origins.

Abbreviated physiognomies naturalize blackness while attempting to change the reader's perception of blackness and reorient his relationship to blackness. The reader who was familiar with the Vulgate *Secretum* physiognomy and other non-compressed versions would have been surprised to find such a lack of etiologies for skin color and a lack of blackness in general as that in the R7CV text. The reader who gained all his physiognomic knowledge from the R7CV text, however, would have been surprised to

---

<sup>68</sup> Kaplan, 26-8.

<sup>69</sup> Kaplan quotes from *Excerptiones Patrum, Collectanea, Flores ex Diversis, Quaestiones et Parabolae*, in *PL*, 94, col. 541, and from Vatican Reg. Lat. 49, VII, commentum de verbis ioh. Ii. 1-11, fs. 45v-47r (emphasis mine). The English translation is Kaplan's.

<sup>70</sup> My point here is not that *fuscus* and *niger* are always necessarily different. Rather, *fuscus* can be translated as dark or black while *niger* is specifically black.

find that physical conditions had causes at all. He would also have been surprised to find that blackness was a key part of “the best fourme.” To the original readers of physiognomies similar to that in the Vulgate *Secretum* blackness would have been a familiar concept. To the readers of R7CV blackness would have been foreign, tinged with mystery, and would have had little relevance for making judgments in much of the western European world.

The skin’s easy visibility made it the perfect surface for the kinds of accurate, precise, and fast judgments that abbreviated versions were supposed to facilitate. The skin is also the perfect surface for scribes and readers to use as a means of constructing their own collective identities.

### ***Physiognomy and Race***

What emerges from the study of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century compressed *Secreta* physiognomies is a picture of how physiognomy and its scribes respond to its use in new contexts and for new purposes. The assertion of physiognomy’s accuracy and precision, the naturalization of blackness and other conditions, and a tendency toward other-directedness combine in abbreviated physiognomy to produce race-thinking that seeks to handle the differences within an ever expanding world, within Christendom and without. Late medieval compressed physiognomy is just one step among many in the development of modern race-thinking as a system for judging others.

The R7CV and Oxford versions’ focus on the will—the reader’s will to learn physiognomy and the teacher’s will that he learn it—uses a traditionally self-directed idea



to promote other-directedness. This gesture demonstrates the revolutionary extent of the compressed physiognomy's focus on the other. Late medieval monastic life was in general colored by a focus on the self—on, as R.W. Southern puts it, the examination of oneself “in the intimacy of his own mind and will.”<sup>71</sup> In the eleventh century, St. Anselm reworked the twelve stages of humility in the Benedictine Rule, giving it “a strictly logical and a more internal character.”<sup>72</sup> In his *Liber de Similitudinibus*, Anselm writes that the stages of humility are like a mountain to be climbed. He describes the first step: “Primus itaque gradus in monte humilitatis, est cognitio sui. Hunc unusquisque sic debet habere ut se inferiorem omnibus judicet... [The first step on the mountain of humility is to know yourself. One must do this in order that he judge himself inferior to all]”<sup>73</sup> St. Bernard, writing in the twelfth century, goes beyond Anselm's interest in knowing the self to what Southern calls “[laying] bare the recesses of the soul.”<sup>74</sup> In both cases, the Christian life is motivated by a deep knowledge of the self. The compressed physiognomies, in which the opening address is ever more impersonal and Hippocrates's self mastery is downplayed in favor of an all-knowing physiognomer, call on the tradition of self-examination while subordinating it to the other-directed examination that serves the science's self-promoting ends. While the reader may find himself questioning whether his own will to learn physiognomic science is strong enough, the abbreviated physiognomy reader's inspiration to examine himself ends there.

---

<sup>71</sup> R.W. Southern, *The Making of the Middle Ages* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953, repr. 1992), 225-31.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 227.

<sup>73</sup> Anselm, in *PL* 159, col. 665.

<sup>74</sup> Southern, 229.

The physiognomy's other-directedness is an early example of the relationship between self and other that has been identified as a major factor in twentieth-century racism. In 1978, theologian George Kelsey identified a particular other-directed way of constituting the self as at the root of racism. Kelsey writes that the racist's "worth is measured by the degree to which he can qualify as a pure member of the group." Kelsey identifies the "racist herd" as a

human collectivity whose spirit and conduct generate alienation, rivalry, and hostility. Accordingly, the internal cohesion and attraction of its own members are proportionate to the external repulsion of other groups; and, since the individual is swallowed up by the herd, he cannot realize himself as an individual.<sup>75</sup>

The modern racist's lack of individuality echoes the R7CV physiognomy's turn to impersonal address and lack of introspection. The student of physiognomy is taken up into his own, if not racist, then physiognomers' "herd" in which his individuality is not at issue. (Meanwhile, it is very much at issue in the uncompressed physiognomies in which Hippocrates represents the individual's ability to overcome his concupiscence.) The physiognomies' subordination of self-examination to other-directedness foreshadows the erasure of the individual self intrinsic to modern racism.

While a focus on the other is common to medieval and modern race-thinking, the operations of modern and medieval race-thinking are significantly different. Kelsey goes on to describe the racist's other-directedness as "the propulsion of the self into the external relations of society" in which the "inner spiritual potentialities of the person

---

<sup>75</sup> Kelsey, "The Racist Search," 243.

have been emptied” because “his motivation is from the outside; he acts according to the expectations of others, and is guided by social custom, expediency, and the ‘going thing.’”<sup>76</sup> The medieval physiognomer’s other-directedness, however, does not stem from acting “according to the expectations of others.” Rather, it comes from a lack of introspection. All depravity is ascribed to the judged and “inner spiritual potentialities” have still been emptied, but in the Middle Ages these things occur because the spiritual journey of examining one’s own will that Anselm and Bernard propose does not take place. Compressed physiognomy disallows the possibility that a person can orchestrate, execute, and judge his own inner spiritual change, putting the onus instead on the physiognomic judge. The R7CV physiognomy willfully uses the tools of self-reflection for the judgment of others while modern racism relies on the collusion of the self with an oppressive and repressive society of co-racists.

Like modern racism, the other-directed physiognomy ascribes all depravity to the character of the judged; the difference is how it does so. Late medieval compressed physiognomies seek to tackle a world of ever-expanding diversity by reducing variables that can preclude the efficacy of physiognomic judgment. In addition to self-examination and mastery, these variables include etiologies of physical difference and differences not easily observed in the practical everyday use of physiognomies in western Europe, such as blackness of skin. The *Secretum Secretorum* physiognomy’s popularity—the “life of its own” Keiser cites—represents a programmatic fourteenth- and fifteenth-century effort

---

<sup>76</sup> Kelsey, “The Racist Search,” 245.

to construct a world in which the judge and the judged are absolutely separate entities,  
and in which physiognomic knowledge is the domain of western Europeans.

### 3. Making Blood Speak: Romans, Jews, and Race War in the *Siege of Jerusalem*

In his 1928 novel *Dark Princess*, W.E.B. DuBois's reluctant hero Matthew Towns finds himself arguing for the inclusion of African Americans in a world coalition of darker peoples. In order to do so, he scrutinizes the meaning of blood. The coalition seeks to subvert white European imperial-colonial power. The coalition's leaders question whether African Americans are up to the task. As he prepares to respond to the group's doubts, Towns is overwhelmed with passion. As a result, he thinks one thing and says another. The text tells us that Towns *thinks* to say that "there's as much high-born blood among American Negroes as among any people." What comes out of his mouth instead is that American blacks are "common people" who "come out of the depths—the blood and mud of battle. And from just such depths...came most of the worthwhile things in this old world." The Japanese coalition member responds, "It is perhaps both true and untrue... Certainly Mr. Towns has expressed a fine and human hope, although I fear that always blood must tell." Towns's response:

"No, it mustn't," cried Matthew, "unless it is allowed to talk. Its speech is accidental today. There is some *weak, thin* stuff called blood, which not even a crown can make speak intelligently; and at the same time some of the noblest blood God ever made is dumb with chains and poverty."<sup>1</sup>

In the space of a single page, "blood" signifies three different things. When Towns thinks to speak on "high-born blood," blood signifies the lineage of nobility. When Towns

---

<sup>1</sup> W.E.B. DuBois, *Dark Princess* (Jackson, MS: Banner Books/University Press of Mississippi, 1995), 22-3 (emphasis mine).

speaks of the “blood and mud of battle,” he means the spilled blood resulting from battle against oppression. When he speaks of the “blood” that is “dumb with chains and poverty,” he refers to those who are oppressed because of their racial genealogy. Their “noblest” blood is not recognized as noble at all. Blood has many meanings, and it seems, Towns tells us, that a good interpretation is hard to come by.

In calling blood “weak” and “thin,” Towns questions lineage as a discriminant of character. Blood, even in the hands of world powers and their representatives, cannot be interpreted (i.e., made to “speak”) “intelligently.” When Towns says that “some of the noblest blood God ever made is dumb with chains and poverty,” “blood” at once metonymically represents the “high-born” nobility and racially oppressed African Americans. African Americans, the juxtaposition suggests, are a people at once oppressed and deserving of royal treatment. Towns refutes the idea that oppression and nobility derive from a people’s genealogical blood, telling us that they do not derive from anything inherent in a people’s lineage. Rather, those conditions spring from the dominant *interpretation* of a group’s lineage, or how blood is made to “speak.” When Towns calls blood “weak and thin” he asserts that blood has no inherent value. It is instead subject to multiple and even conflicting interpretations. Using blood as an excuse to saddle the “noblest” blood with “chains and poverty” is anything but making blood “speak intelligently.”

What does Matthew Towns’s estimation of racial blood have to do with the anonymously authored, late fourteenth-century alliterative *Siege of Jerusalem*? The *Siege* is about race-thinking in the interpretation of Roman, Christian, and Jewish genealogies.

It struggles to delineate the differences between Roman, Christian, and Jewish identities as well as the subsequent worth of each. The poem chronicles the Roman siege on the Jews of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. The poem depicts first-century Roman generals as Christians when textual evidence to the contrary is likely available to the poet.<sup>2</sup> The poem then pits these Christian Romans against the Jewish people, and Romans and Jews interpret and react to one another's identities. Roman and Jewish blood requires interpretation in the *Siege of Jerusalem*, and ultimately the poem, like Towns's speech, asserts the fallaciousness of blood difference.

From at least the time of St. Augustine's writing the *City of God*, the position of Jews in Christendom was a matter of interpretation. In what has come to be known as Augustine's doctrine of toleration, Augustine writes that Christians must allow Jews to live among them so that they might serve as testimonies to the truth (*testimonium veritatis*) of Old Testament prophecies concerning Christ.<sup>3</sup> In a letter to the King of France dated May 9, 1244, Pope Innocent IV echoes the Augustinian position, but he adds a layer of invective while at the same time suggesting that the Jews may eventually convert. He speaks of a thin but effective veil that keeps medieval Jewry from seeing the truth of Christianity:

---

<sup>2</sup> The text takes many of its details from first-century Jewish historian Josephus's *De bello Iudaico* (*The Jewish Wars*). The sieges he writes about at Jotapata and Jerusalem had nothing to do with any Christian impulses on the Romans' part, nor does Josephus convey them as such. For more information on the poem's sources, some of which present the Romans as Christians while others do not, see footnote 10.

<sup>3</sup> St. Augustine, *The City of God*, XVIII, 46, trans. H. Bettenson (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), 827. For a useful description of Augustine's position and its effects on medieval Jews, see Anna Sapir Abulafia, 65-6.

The wicked perfidy of the Jews, from whose hearts our Redeemer has not removed the *veil of blindness* because of the enormity of their crime, but has so far permitted to remain in blindness such as in a measure covers Israel, does not heed, as it should, the fact that Christian piety received them and patiently allows them to live among them through pity only.<sup>4</sup>

In that the veil is what keeps Jews from seeing Christian truth, the veil is the barrier that separates Jews and Christians. Pope Innocent interprets Jewish identity. He recognizes the fact that Jews can be interpreted as God's chosen people and Christianity's predecessors on one hand, and Christ's killers on the other. Choosing the latter interpretation, he emphasizes that the veil of blindness remains in place, but he also recognizes the potential for Jews to convert when he says that the Jews have been permitted to remain in blindness "*so far*." The *Siege of Jerusalem* challenges the veil's integrity. It brings together discourses that would keep the veil in place indefinitely with those that would remove it. The resulting poem alternately revels in the Jews' punishment and sympathizes with them as suffering human beings.

The *Siege* shows religious conversion in the fourteenth century to be at odds with *race-thinking*, the concept Hannah Arendt defines as the "interpretation of history as the natural fight" between essentially different races.<sup>5</sup> The poem asks, must the veil of blindness remain in place? Can Jews convert to Christianity? Can pagans convert? Christian doctrine holds that, by revelation through God's grace, any human can become Christian. In theory, this included Jews and pagans. From the twelfth century forward,

---

<sup>4</sup> Printed and translated in Solomon Grayzel, *The Church and the Jews in the XIIIth Century*. Rev. ed. (New York: Hermon Press, 1966), 250-51.

<sup>5</sup> Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Schocken Books, 2004), 211. For a further explanation of race-thinking, see this dissertation's introduction.



some preachers took a rationalistic approach to converting Jews, Muslims, and pagans; that is, they sought to convert non-Christians by appealing to their reason. Reason, many medieval thinkers believed, was shared by all humans and would ultimately lead a person to accept Christ.<sup>6</sup> It is on this model that Roman pagans are converted to Christianity early in the *Siege*. Rationalism results in race-thinking with regard to the difference between the convertible and the unconvertible. When Jews remain unconverted in the poem, their humanity can be called into question: if Jews were human, the logic goes, they would have reason; if they had reason, they would convert. The fact remains, however, that Christianity is founded on Jewish conversion. This makes it difficult to completely write off Jews as an unconvertible and inhuman race.

The *Siege*, likely written at Augustinian Bolton Priory in the West Riding of Yorkshire, is influenced by its environment as it explores the idea of human difference.<sup>7</sup> While rationalists questioned who was human, Augustinian canons in late medieval England were interested in negotiating communal boundaries *among* humans. While the Augustinian rule called for limitless sharing and caring within an Augustinian community, it dictated little need for sharing with or caring for those outside the community. In the late Middle Ages, however, Augustinian canons were known for the

---

<sup>6</sup> For a thorough discussion of reason in medieval Christian thought, see Anna Sapir Abulafia, *Christians and Jews*, especially chapters three and six. See also my section below entitled “The Rational Conversion of the Romans” for an in-depth discussion of how rationalism works in the *Siege*.

<sup>7</sup> See Ralph Hanna, III, “Contextualizing the *Siege of Jerusalem*,” *Yearbook of Langland Studies* 6 (1992): 109-21, and Ralph Hanna, III, and David Lawton, eds. *The Siege of Jerusalem* (Oxford: EETS, 2002), xxvi-xxxv and lii-liv. In “Contextualizing the *Siege of Jerusalem*,” Hanna suggests the poem’s production at Augustinian Bolton Priory sometime in the 1380s. In their edition, Hanna and Lawton reaffirm composition in the West Riding of Yorkshire in the 1370s or 80s based on linguistic and manuscript evidence. All my citations of the *Siege of Jerusalem* refer to Hanna and Lawton’s edition.

care they provided to outsiders. Although Augustinians had come to resemble Benedictine monks (who had dominated England prior to the late eleventh century) in almost every way by the end of the fifteenth century, there always remained one major difference: Augustinians were much more committed than Benedictines to serving the outside world.<sup>8</sup> Augustinians generally found that human need was a good reason to transgress communal boundaries. In the *Siege*, the Jewish leader practices something that looks a lot like Augustinian hospitality when he recognizes Roman general Titus's humanity and cares for him. Since Josephus remains unconverted but assumes the purported role of a hospitable Christian, his actions put the rationalists' racial divide between Christians and unconverted Jews in serious jeopardy. In the *Siege*, the Augustinian belief in humanity across communal borders clashes with rationalist claims that some people are unconvertible and therefore inhuman.

The poem, like *Dark Princess*, is concerned with lineage and violence, but does the *Siege* make blood "speak intelligently"—i.e., is blood interpreted in a way that does not assume essential difference and condemn the "noblest blood" to "chains and poverty"? This chapter examines how the *Siege* does just that when it employs rationalistic conversion and Augustinian hospitality in order to address the question of Jewish-Christian essential, genealogical difference. Using a rationalistic approach, Roman pagans are readily converted to Christianity. The Jews appear essentially

---

<sup>8</sup> See T. Scott Holmes, "The Austin Canons in England in the Twelfth Century," *Journal of Theological Studies* (19): 343-356, especially 348-9. Augustinian canons' commitment to hospitality, Holmes argues, was an effect of their constitutive charge as religious and clerics. This charge directed them to lead a life somewhere between the contemplative life enjoyed by Benedictine monks and the active life of the secular priest.

unconvertible when they resist the Romans' attempts to convert them. Finally, the Jewish military leader proves to be better at Christian hospitality than are the poem's Christians. This chapter will consider how the poem manipulates its sources as it navigates the conflicting discourses of religious conversion and race difference. I will also consider how the version of the *Siege* in MS Cotton Vespasian E.16 addresses the Jewish-Christian question differently from other versions. In the end, this chapter argues that the *Siege* uses blood to say that there is no essential difference between Jews and Christians after all; race war, so the *Siege* shows us, is a perversion of rational conversion discourse.

### ***Who's Who in the Siege of Jerusalem?***

The *Siege* purports to be a text about Christian history, but it turns out to be as much about Christians' inability to call history incontestably their own.<sup>9</sup> It opens with a brief rehearsal of Christianity in Rome. Tiberius, Pilate, and Herod figure prominently in the first ten lines. Christ is crucified in the third through fifth stanzas. In the sixth stanza, approximately forty years pass during which the Jews, the poem tells us, should have converted. In the seventh stanza, we enter the time of the poem, in which Emperor Vespasian (or Waspasian in the poem's parlance) and his son Titus will soon rule Rome.

---

<sup>9</sup> Christine Chism, *Alliterative Revivals* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 155-187, especially 155 and 174-8. In her chapter "Profiting from Precursors in the *Siege of Jerusalem*," Chism writes that the poem "explores the genealogical anxieties stemming from Christianity's supersession of its Jewish predecessor." I agree that this is absolutely the case. Chism goes on to argue that the poem "works to transform [its anxieties] into imperial and economic certainties." She suggests that by the end of the poem, the Jews are evacuated of personhood and transformed into financial vehicles for Christian exploitation. I argue on the contrary that the poem's Augustinian influence leads it to question Roman Christian humanity because of intolerant treatment of Jews. At the same time, I argue that through Josephus's healing of Titus the poem suggests Jewish humanity.

Both suffer maladies that are cured at their conversions to Christianity. They and their forces decide that Christ's death must be avenged on the Jews of Jerusalem. The remainder of the poem details the siege of the city and the eventual vanquishing of the Jews, taking many of its details from Jewish historian Josephus's account of the Roman sieges on Jotapata and Jerusalem in 70 A.D.<sup>10</sup> In the process, the poem makes much of the Jews' humanity; heart-wrenching scenes of Jewish suffering belie the Roman belief that the Jews must be exterminated. A Jewish general, based on and named for Josephus, figures prominently in the text; his military know-how, along with a sympathetic vision of the city's Jewry, begs the question whether history belongs to Jews or Christians. For that matter, the text asks, can it belong to both?

---

<sup>10</sup> See footnote 2. The *Siege* poet makes an arguably deliberate choice to make his Romans Christians. For the first two hundred or so lines of the *Siege*, the poet takes as his source the eighth-century Latin *Vindicta Salvatoris*. In the *Vindicta*, Titus is healed of his canker and he and Vespasian do indeed convert to Christianity. The story of the nest of wasps in Vespasian's nose and the healing thereof is taken from Jacobus de Voragine's thirteenth-century *Legenda Aurea*, an encyclopedic collection of information about the lives of the saints. The *Legenda* details Vespasian's conversion as part and parcel of his healing. Titus's later illness and his healing by Josephus, of much importance to the current chapter, are also derived from the *Legenda*. After the *Siege*'s line 789, much of the poem is derived from Ranulf Higden's fourteenth-century chronicle the *Polychronicon*. The *Siege* poet took much of his material from Book 4, chapters 9 and 10, which describe the Roman civil wars of 68-69 AD and include a portion from Josephus's *De bello Iudaico*. The *Vindicta*, *Legenda*, and *Polychronicon* were identified as sources in the Hanna and Lawton edition's predecessor *The Siege of Jerusalem*, eds. E. Kölbing and Mabel Day (Oxford: Early English Text Society, 1932). Hanna and Lawton improve upon Kölbing and Day's edition by identifying two more sources. One of these is the thirteenth-century French *Bible en français*, which Phyllis Moe has shown to be the *Siege* poet's source for lines 205-80 and 321-728 of the *Siege*. In the *Bible en Français*, Vespasian is healed of leprosy and converted, but Titus is not mentioned. While in the *Siege*, the emperor Nero is antagonistic toward Christians, the *Bible* depicts the Roman emperor as Vespasian's sympathetic brother who converts as well. This evidence suggests that the *Siege* poet chooses to depict an ideological conflict between Vespasian and the Roman emperor where the *Bible* does not. While Josephus's *De bello Iudaico* corresponds to and underlies, to some extent, the other accounts of the destruction of Jerusalem, Hanna and Lawton make a compelling case that the *Siege* poet also worked with, or from memory of, a Latin Josephus. They suggest that the poet consulted the literal Latin translation of the *Jewish Wars* usually attributed to fourth-century Rufinus of Aquileia and standard in the Middle Ages. See Hanna and Lawton, xxxvii-lv, especially xl-lii. In the *Jewish Wars*, Titus and Vespasian are not described as Christians.

The text's sympathetic treatment of the Jews has intrigued critics, causing them to question, rightly, whether the poem's Jews represent Jews *per se*, some less specific group that includes Jews, or an inanimate social force such as capital. The effort that the *Siege of Jerusalem*'s critics have put forth to figure out exactly what the Jews stand for is notable, especially in comparison to the relatively small body of *Siege* criticism overall.<sup>11</sup> Beginning with a rehearsal of the various arguments makes clear just how well this poem avoids having any single straightforward narrative. It also gives us a firm critical foundation from which to consider the poem's use of the rationalistic approach to conversion and Augustinian hospitality as it alternately affirms and questions characters' group identities.

A brief survey of critical stances shows us that the Jews are made for identity trouble. In 1992, Ralph Hanna, III, one of the two editors of the 2002 Early English Text Society edition of the *Siege*, identified the Jews as representative of those besieged at the 1190 massacre of York.<sup>12</sup> In 1995, Elisa Narin Van Court suggested that the poem's first-century Jews stand in direct relationship to late medieval Jews.<sup>13</sup> Others have suggested a more flexible identity for the Jews. In the same year that Hanna made his York argument, Mary Hamel argued that the Jews are the quintessential Other, standing in for Jews,

---

<sup>11</sup> For instance, only one monograph on the *Siege* exists, Bonnie Millar's *The Siege of Jerusalem in its Physical, Literary and Historical Contexts* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000).

<sup>12</sup> Hanna, "Contextualizing the *Siege of Jerusalem*," 114. The 1190 York massacre, according to twelfth-century chronicler William of Newburgh, occurred when a group of York citizens were preparing to go on Crusade. As an angry mob, they attacked the wealthy Jewish families to whom they owed money. The Jews took refuge in Clifford's Tower, where they were besieged. In the end, many of the Jews committed mass suicide. Those who did not were killed by their tormentors. Hanna draws compelling parallels between the violence at York and the violence in the *Siege*.

<sup>13</sup> Elisa Narin van Court, "The *Siege of Jerusalem* and Augustinian Historians: Writing About Jews in Fourteenth-Century England," *Chaucer Review* 29 (1995): 227-48, at 228.

Saracens, and heretics all muddled together.<sup>14</sup> She contends, quite rightly, that lumping non-orthodox Christians together is part and parcel of the poem's crusading ideology. In a 2002 chapter in her *Alliterative Revivals*, Christine Chism argues that the Jews are a financial vehicle. Ultimately evacuated of personhood, they are ensconced completely within the Western European financial debacle that was the Crusades. She argues that the poem's Jews are bound up with anxieties about the growth of England's import culture in the fourteenth century and the subsequent rise of capital. Chism concludes that the Jews are reduced to gold and other such movable wealth.<sup>15</sup> In 2004, Suzanne Yeager argued for the shifting identities of Rome, Romans, Jews, and Jerusalem throughout the *Siege*. She writes that "the roles of the Jews and the Romans were not stable...with either group acting as antagonists or representatives of Christianity."<sup>16</sup> Yeager is correct; the Jews' and the Romans' identities are made to shift. This chapter explores how those shifting identities illumine the battle between racial and religious discourse in the poem.

### ***The Rational Conversion of the Romans***

The *Siege of Jerusalem* exposes religious difference for a barrier just as thin and weak as blood difference when the poem begins with the conversion of pagan Romans. These Romans convert neither by force nor through incontestable divine revelation. Rather, they convert through discussion with a Greek shipman named Nathan at

---

<sup>14</sup> Mary Hamel, "Siege of Jerusalem as a Crusading Poem," in Barbara N. Sargent-Baur, ed., *Journeys Toward God: Pilgrimage and Crusade* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute, 1992), 177-94, at 187.

<sup>15</sup> Chism, 174-78. See footnote 9.

<sup>16</sup> Suzanne M. Yeager, "The Siege of Jerusalem and Biblical Exegesis: Writing about Romans in Fourteenth-Century England," *The Chaucer Review* 39.1 (2004): 70-102.

Bordeaux (76). He testifies to the truth of Christianity. Titus and Vespasian are both cured of their grotesque maladies, and they and their Roman retinues convert as a result. The conversion is tidy, and it is clear that pagans can convert. All it takes is to tell them about Christ. Subsequent Roman attempts to convert Jews, on the other hand, fail. In this failure, the *Siege* of Jerusalem manipulates Christian ideas about conversion. The poem highlights the idea that difference between Christians, vis-à-vis Romans, and Jews is absolute: Romans convert; Jews do not. Then the *Siege* exposes this difference as fallacious.

The Romans' conversion is steeped in late medieval rationalist conversion discourse. In the twelfth century, Catholic scholars began to see the merits of converting Jews and others using reason instead of force. In *The Friars and the Jews: the Evolution of Medieval Anti-Judaism*, historian Jeremy Cohen writes that Anselm of Canterbury (c. 1033-1109) "infused his theological investigations with a tolerant spirit of free intellectual inquiry."<sup>17</sup> Cohen tells us that Peter the Venerable, abbot of Cluny, (c.1092-1156), wrote from the point of view that any man is "naturally endowed with the mental faculties to recognize the truth of Christianity."<sup>18</sup> Writing on the plight of Jews in late medieval northwestern Europe, historian Anna Sapir Abulafia concurs with Cohen. She

---

<sup>17</sup> Jeremy Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews: The Evolution of Medieval Anti-Judaism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 24. See especially chapter 1. Cohen challenges the notion that rationalism took hold in the twelfth century with writers such as Peter the Venerable. Instead, he finds Peter and other tenth-, eleventh-, and twelfth-century polemicists take an older Augustinian approach. In this approach, knowledge of Judaism is biblical and has little to do with Judaism as it is practiced by contemporaries. Furthermore, they do not call for the destruction of the Jews, respectful as they are of Augustine's doctrine of toleration. He identifies the development of a more vehement brand of anti-Judaism in the thirteenth century, resulting from the influence of Dominicans and Franciscans as well as increased knowledge of contemporary Judaism.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

writes that reason, or *ratio*, could be defined as “the intuitive quality which human beings possess and with which they are able to perceive truth.”<sup>19</sup> Appealing to Muslims’ reason, Peter writes to an Islamic audience,

I do not attack you...as some of us often do, by arms, but by words; not by force but by reason; not in hatred but in love...[Man] endowed with reason, which no other species has,...is known to love what is like himself, led by reason...[Hence] I love you; loving, I write to you; writing, I invite you to salvation.<sup>20</sup>

The new focus on reason impacted literary culture in England. For instance, English scholar Robert Ketton translated the Koran into Latin. It was then widely diffused among scholars in England and Europe. Starting in 1141, Ketton’s work was sponsored by Peter. In the thirteenth century, it was used by Oxford Franciscan Roger Bacon in order to argue in favor of preaching instead of crusading.<sup>21</sup> A man’s reason, according to rationalist thinkers, would lead him to accept Christianity once he heard about it.<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> Anna Sapir Abulafia, 23.

<sup>20</sup> James Kritzeck, *Peter the Venerable and Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), 161-2. Quoted in Sheila Delany, *The Naked Text: Chaucer’s Legend of Good Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 183-6. Other rationalists included eleventh-century Saint Peter Damian, thirteenth-century Flemish Franciscan William of Rubroek, thirteenth-century Dominican William of Tripoli, and Oxford Franciscan Roger Bacon. Delany, writing on medieval Christian responses to Islam, identifies Peter Damian and William of Tripoli as among “critics of crusade” who believed in Muslims’ rationality. They believed in the importance of refuting Islam in a rational fashion, point by point. Peter’s premise, according to Delany, was that the enemy (Muslims in this case) offered a “monotheistic faith with an ethics and a high intellectual tradition of its own, a faith that could, for just those reasons, pose a genuinely attractive alternative to Christianity.” Delany finds it notable that in his *Summa totius heresis ac diabolicae sectae Saracenorum*, Peter considers Islam a “heresy.” In fact, he considers it the “compendium of all heresies,” noting its similarities to the Sabellian, Nestorian, and Manichean heresies. Delany interprets Peter to be saying that Islam is so similar to Christianity that Muslims must possess reason; they are just somewhat misguided.

<sup>21</sup> Delany, 184. For a discussion of the establishment of the Dominican and Franciscan orders, see R.I. Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society: Power and Deviance in Western Europe, 950-1250* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1987; repr. 1998), 36-9 and his chapter 4. The Franciscan and Dominican orders were both established by the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215. In the thirteenth century, they came to be the administrators in charge of the Inquisition, a campaign to detect heresy and heterodoxy through the use of reason instead of older methods like trial by ordeal. The Franciscan and Dominican turn



Telling the Romans about Christianity is precisely what Nathan does. Titus asks Nathan if he knows of any cure for the canker on his cheek. In the process of telling Titus about the veil of Veronica, a relic with healing powers believed to contain an imprint of Christ's visage, Nathan recaps Christ's story:

'Nay, non of þo', quod Nathan, 'bot now wole Y telle.  
þer was a lede in our londe while he lif hadde  
Preued for a prophete þrow preysed dedes  
And born in Bethleem one by of a burden schene,

And so a mayde vnmarred þat neuer man touched,  
As clene as clef þat cristalle of sprynges.  
Without hosebondes helpe saue þe Holy Goste  
A kyng and a knaue child so conceyued at ere;

A taknyng of þe Triniyte touched hire hadde,  
þre persones in o place preued togedres.  
Eche grayn is o god and of god bot alle,  
And alle þre ben bot one as elders vs tellen.

.....

þe secunde persone þe Sone sent was to erþe  
To take careynes kynde of a clene mayde;  
So vnknown he came caytifis to helpe  
And wro3t wonders ynowe till he wo driede.

.....

When Crist hadde heried Helle and was hennes passed,

---

to reason is very important to my argument below that the *Siege* sets up a race war between Christians and Jews only to criticize the persecution of the latter and assert that race war is based on false principles.

<sup>22</sup> Anna Sapir Abulafia, 47. Peter Abelard (1079-1142) went so far as to theorize the concept of "double revelation," which held that there were two routes to divine Christian revelation. One of these was through Old Testament prophecy. The other was through the works of non-Christian philosophers who, Abelard claimed, had identified the Word of God through reason. He theorized that hearing or reading, studying, and understanding either source would lead one to salvation.

For þat manded man Mathie þey chossyn;  
3it vn baptized were boþe Barnabe and Poule  
And nozt knewen of Crist bot comen sone after.

Þe princes and þe prelates azen þe Paske tyme  
Alle þei hatte in herte for his holy werkes.  
Hit was a doylful dede whan þey his deþ caste:  
Þrow Pilat pyned he was, þe prouost of Rome.

And þat worliche wif whom Y arst nempned  
Hap his visage in hire veil— Veronyk so hatte—  
Peynted purely and playn þat no point wantep:  
For loue he left hit hire til hire lyues ende.

Þer is no gome on þis grounde þat is grym wounded,  
Meselry ne meschef ne man vpon erþe,  
Þat kneleþ down to þat cloþ and on Crist leueþ,  
Bot alle hapnep to hele in an handwyle. (101-172)<sup>23</sup>

Nathan moves chronologically and methodically through Christ's story. The result is the intended one: the non-Christian perceives that Christianity is truth and he subsequently converts. Preaching to the unconverted proves effective.

Nathan himself undergoes a textual conversion that, in addition to his preaching, speaks to the *Siege's* concern with rationalism. In the *Siege*, Nathan is a Greek. The *Siege*

---

<sup>23</sup> Due to the length of this passage, I translate here: "No, I know none of those cures," said Nathan, "but now I will tell./There was a man in our land who while he lived/Proved a prophet through his praised deeds/And was born in Bethlehem of a beautiful maiden,// And she an unmarried maiden that man had never touched,/As clean as a cliff that springs from crystal./Without husband's help save the Holy Ghost/A king and a knave child she conceived.// A token of the Trinity had touched her,/Three persons in one place proved together./Each part is of God and of God but all,/And all three are one as elders tell us.// The second person, the son, was sent to earth/To take man's nature of a clean maiden;/So unknown he came to help captives/And wrought wonders enough until he healed their woe.// When Christ had harrowed Hell and had passed hence,/In that cursed man's place [the apostles] chose Matthew;/Yet unbaptized were both Barnabas and Paul/And they did not know of Christ, but they came soon after.// The princes and prelates about Easter time/They all hated him in heart for his holy works./It was a doleful deed when they cast his death:/Through Pilate, the provost of Rome, he was killed.// And that worthy wife whom I named before/Has his visage in her veil—Veronica she is called—/Painted purely and plain, wanting no point:/For love, he left it to her until her life's end// There is no man on this ground that is gravely wounded,/With sickness nor misfortune nor man upon earth,/That kneels down to that cloth and believes on Christ,/That will not be brought to health in a moment."

describes him as “Nathan, Neymes sone of Grecys” [Nathan, Nahum’s son, of the Greeks] (45).<sup>24</sup> In the eighth-century Latin *Vindicta Salvatoris*, the source for the *Siege*’s first two hundred lines or so, he is an Arab or Jew as well as a Greek. In the *Vindicta* that would have been known to the *Siege* poet, and that Hanna and Lawton print in their *Siege* edition, Nathan is first described as an “Ishmaelite,” or Arab (8).<sup>25</sup> Two extant manuscripts also render him an “isreliticus,” or an Israelite.<sup>26</sup> In line 21 of Hanna and Lawton’s *Vindicta*, Nathan identifies himself as a Greek in addition to being an Arab. When asked who he is, he responds, “Ego sum Nathan filius Nahim de gente Grecorum...” [I am Nathan son of Nahum of the people of Greece]. The *Siege*, in conflict with the *Vindicta*, never once identifies Nathan as anything other than a Greek.<sup>27</sup>

It is not uncommon for the *Siege* poet to compress his sources, as Hanna and Lawton point out, and perhaps this is why Nathan is only identified as a Greek.<sup>28</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

<sup>25</sup> I quote from Hanna and Lawton’s partial edition of the Latin poem, included in Appendix A of their *Siege* volume. They use as their base-text British Library, MS Harley 595, fols. 3r-9r. They claim to correct the poem into a form comparable to that available to the *Siege* poet by using minority readings from eleven other manuscripts that allow the poem to more closely match what the *Siege* poet translated. For Appendix A, see *Siege*, 159-163.

<sup>26</sup> These are Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 90, fols. 88v-90v and Cambridge, Peterhouse, MS 242 (II), fols. 21va-23ra. “Ishmaelite” usually refers to Arabs, considered descendants of Abraham’s son Ishmael by the Egyptian slave girl Hagar. Paul, in his letter to the Galatians, associates Jews with Hagar and Ishmael. He writes that Hagar and Ishmael represent an old covenant, corresponding to earthly Jerusalem, that is superseded by a new covenant, personified in Isaac’s birth to Sarah and corresponding to a heavenly new Jerusalem (Gal. 4:21-31). While “Ishmaelite” most directly refers to Arabs, Paul’s interpretation makes possible the term’s loose application to Jews as those who persist in an outdated covenant with God. Taking Paul’s letter into account, scribal substitution of “isreliticus” and “Ishmaelite” for one another is not surprising.

<sup>27</sup> In Alexander Walker’s translation from the Latin in *Apocryphal Gospels, Acts, and Revelations* (Edinburgh, 1870), 246, Nathan calls himself an Ishmaelite who is subject, like Jews, to Pontius Pilate. Nathan says of himself, “I am Nathan, the son of Nahum, of the race of the Ishmaelites, and I am a subject of Pontius Pilate in Judea.”

<sup>28</sup> Hanna and Lawton, lxxix, write of the *Siege* poet, “The poetic handling of the divergent source materials extends from freehand amplification to compression and narrative summary: a predictable range, but one

Nonetheless, the poet's freehand amplifications (apparently original additions that augment his sources) suggest a concerted effort to Hellenize Nathan. The *Siege* tells its readers that

Nathan toward Nero nome on his way  
Ouer þe Grekys grounde myd þe grym yþes. (53-4)

[Nathan toward Nero made his way  
Over the Greek's land, in the midst of grim waves]

The *Siege*'s analogue in the *Vindicta* says nothing about the Greek's land. Instead, the *Vindicta* describes Nathan's leave-taking in this way: "Missus est enim ad Tiberium imperatorem ad portandum ei magnam pecuniam ad urbem Rome." [Indeed, he was sent to Emperor Tiberius carrying with him a great amount of money to the city of Rome]. Furthermore, the Latin text mentions Nathan's troubles at sea in three lines, but none of them mention Greece. The *Vindicta* offers the *Siege* poet another chance to identify Nathan as an Arab or Jew in addition to being Greek when, in the Latin poem, he is asked his identity. In the *Siege*, he is never asked his identity directly. He is only asked how far he has come. He responds simply "out of Syria" (83). Nevertheless, when the *Siege* identifies Nathan as "sone of Grecys" and says that he has traveled over the "Grekys grounde," the poem firmly establishes his Greek identity.

Nathan's Greek identity associates him with rationalist thought. Abulafia has shown that the concept of rational conversion was heavily informed by the increased

---

that speaks to the assurance with which the poet combines eclectic materials and which argues for literary judgment and a sense of purpose."

access to and prominence of classical thought for late medieval thinkers. Abulafia writes that twelfth-century thinkers were “absorbing a great amount of Stoic thought about reason and natural law.”<sup>29</sup> The Stoics believed that godlike Reason governed the universe. As a result, reason became central to thought on God as eleventh- and twelfth-century scholars increasingly consulted the works of Plato, Cicero, Seneca, and Aristotle firsthand. In a society in which classical thought had gained so much purchase, it is not likely that Nathan’s Greek identity is accidental.

The scriptural content of Nathan’s speech is in line with the rational tradition as well. Medieval Christian thinkers attempted to reconcile their view of reason as the human capacity to perceive truth with the existence of non-Christian beliefs by staging literary disputations between Christian characters and Jewish or pagan characters. The Christian’s purpose in such debates is to prove the truth of Christianity point by point and thereby convert his interlocutor. Disputations can be divided into those that use scriptural authority and those that use philosophical argument. Cohen and Abulafia have both pointed out that Gilbert Crispin’s eleventh-century *Disputatio Iudei et Christiani*, one of the most famous disputations, relies mainly on scriptural authority. On the other hand, Crispin’s companion piece *Disputatio Christiani cum Gentili*, a disputation with a Gentile or pagan, relies on reason to answer rational questions, such as why God did not prevent the Fall of Man.<sup>30</sup> Both forms of disputation literature—scriptural and philosophical—

---

<sup>29</sup> Anna Sapir Abulafia, 6.

<sup>30</sup> See Cohen, 25-7. Cohen argues that Crispin’s dialogue is literary artifice produced by Christians for Christians; he argues against the dialogue’s modern editor, who insists that Crispin’s debate did take place. Cohen takes the text’s reliance on Old Testament scriptural authority as a sign that Crispin, unfamiliar with

belong to a tradition that expects a non-Christian to perceive Christian truth from hearing preaching and using his reason.

Nathan's speech is like so-called disputations in that the non-Christian participant is more or less silent. Jeremy Cohen bases his argument that disputations are mainly literary in nature—that is, they are produced by Christians for Christian consumption—on the one-sidedness of disputations. He writes of Crispin's *Disputatio Iudei et Christiani*:

The literary artifice in Crispin's account of the dialogue—if one really did occur—is unmistakable: the Jew begins the discussion and speaks again, usually briefly, six times, posing a total of seven questions to be answered by Crispin in seven rather lengthy monologues. What Jew well trained in debate and accustomed to exchanging ideas with his friend the abbot—the way in which Crispin describes him—would have willingly submitted himself to such an exhausting harangue?<sup>31</sup>

Another one-sided disputation occurs in the *Dialogus inter Christianum et Iudeum de fide Catholica* (written 1123-48), incorrectly ascribed to William of Champeaux.<sup>32</sup> In this piece, the Christian argues the Jew into a corner, and the Jew agrees to accept the Christian's rational arguments about the Incarnation. As a result, the second half of the disputation is more correctly described as a monologue.<sup>33</sup> In another example of one-sided argument, Odo of Cambrai's *Disputatio Contra Judaeum Leonem Nomin de*

---

contemporary Judaism, treated Judaism as a “stagnant theological artifact.” He also argues that at the hands of Dominicans and Franciscans, real-world disputations took on contemporary Judaism in the thirteenth century. See also Anna Sapir Abulafia, 78-9.

<sup>31</sup> Cohen, 26.

<sup>32</sup> Anna Sapir Abulafia, 81.

<sup>33</sup> See *Dialogus*, in *PL*, 163, cols. 1060-1072.

*Adventu Christi Filii Dei* (written 1106-13), the Jew Leo asks how Christ could possibly make amends for mankind's sins. Odo's proof that Christ can make recompense for man's sins, and that he is absolutely necessary to do so, takes up the next thirty or so lines. Leo only interjects with questions twice before he admits that he has no rational objections against Odo's rational arguments.<sup>34</sup> Nathan's seventy-two line speech is indeed one-sided. Like Leo, Titus asks several questions in response to Nathan. For instance, he asks what "token" Christ left for those who believed in him.

In addition to being a Greek and offering one-sided preaching, Nathan addresses doctrinal points that associate his speech with disputation. Nathan elaborates on theological points about which the *Vindicta* is either nearly or completely silent. These are some of the very sticking points on which disputations focused, and which monotheistic Jews would have had the hardest time swallowing: the Incarnation, the Virgin Birth, and the Trinity.<sup>35</sup> While the *Vindicta* simply states that Christ "erat missus a Deo et natus ex virgine" [was sent by God and born from a virgin] (32), Nathan goes on about the Virgin as an "unmarred maiden never touched by man." He calls her "as clean as a cliff that springs from crystal." Then he drives the point home, saying she "was without husband's help, save for the Holy Ghost." The *Vindicta* says nothing of the Trinity until it talks of Christ's ascension and his command to baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost (49). Nathan, however, explains that Mary has been touched

---

<sup>34</sup> *Disputatio*, in *PL*, 160, col. 1109. Leo states, "Rationabiliter loquenti non habeo quod rationabiliter objiciam" [*Reasonably speaking, I do not consider my objection reasonable*].

<sup>35</sup> Anna Sapir Abulafia, 79. Abulafia describes the Incarnation and the Trinity as "the most controversial issues of the Jewish-Christian debate." These are exactly the issues Crispin's *Disputation with a Gentile* sets out to cover.

by the Trinity, and that the Trinity is “three persons in one place” and that “all three are but one.” Nathan’s concerns are the concerns of the disputation tradition, and Titus’s conversion is a rational one.

Rational conversion calls for a break with one’s religious and genealogical past: if to be Christian is rational, then to self-identify otherwise must be irrational. Titus is so completely won over that he turns on his own Roman imperial heritage:

‘A Rome renayed!’ quod þe kyng. ‘a riche emperor,  
Cesar, synful wreche, þat sente hym fram Rome,  
Why nadde þy lycam be leyd low vnder erþe  
Whan Pilat prouost was made such a prince to iugge?’

And or þis words were wonne to þe ende,  
þe cankere þat þe kyng hadde clenly was heled:  
Without faute þe face of flesche and of hyde,  
As new as þe nebbe þat neuer was wemmyd

.....  
Bot now bayne me my bone, blessed lord,  
To stire Nero with noye and newen his sorowe,  
And Y schal buske me boun hem bale forto wyrche  
To do þe deueles of dawe and þy dep venge. (177-88)<sup>36</sup>

Conversion changes Titus’s identity completely. Titus turns on one of the authors of his Roman heritage when he maligns Caesar. He also turns on present day Rome when he promises to harm Nero, the current Roman emperor, in order to avenge Christ.

---

<sup>36</sup> Translated here: “‘At Rome reigned!’ said the king, ‘a rich emperor,/Caesar, sinful wretch, that sent him from Rome,/Why was not your body laid low/When Pilate the provost was made to judge such a prince?//And before these words were said to their end,/The canker that the king had was healed:/Without fault his face, of flesh and skin,/As new as a face that never was wounded// But now grant me my request, blessed Lord,/To bother Nero with annoyance and renew his sorrow,/and I will consider myself bound to work harm on them/To give the devils their due and to avenge your death.’”



The *Siege* poet adds to the *Vindicta* again, amplifying the difference between Christian Rome and pagan Rome. In the *Vindicta*, Titus responds to Nathan by blaming the Roman emperor. Titus exclaims:

Ve, ve tibi Tyberi, qui wlneratus lepra circumdatus scandalo, qui tales  
duces misisti in terram tuam, qui occiderunt filium Dei, liberatorem  
animarum nostrarum. Verumptamen si fuissent ante faciem meam, ego eos  
occidissem in ore gladii, et aliquos in lingo suspendissem, qui occiderunt  
quem oculi mei videre non fuerunt digni. (60-5)

[Woe, woe to you Tiberius, who is ulcerous and enveloped in leprosy by  
this scandal, who made such leaders in your land, who killed the son of  
God, savior of our souls. With force, if they had been before my face, I  
would have killed them, after the manner of the sword, and I would have  
suspended them on the cross, those who killed him whom my eyes were  
not worthy to see.]<sup>37</sup>

It is unclear who Titus means by the “leaders” Tiberius made. Does he mean Jewish leaders, the Pharisees? Or does he mean Roman imperial leaders such as Pontius Pilate? Though the version of the *Vindicta* available to the *Siege* poet may at first leave indeterminate the identity of the faulty leaders, the Jews ultimately take the blame.<sup>38</sup> The *Siege* poet follows suit, but first he makes no bones about the fact that Roman power plays an important role in Christ’s death. Titus, a Roman himself, speaks judgmentally about Rome when he asks why Caesar’s body was not laid low as soon as Pilate judged

---

<sup>37</sup> My translation, with reference to Alexander Walker, 246.

<sup>38</sup> Some versions of the *Vindicta* make clear that Titus means to attack Jews. See Constantin von Tischendorf, *Evangelia Apocrypha* (Liepzig, 1876), 474. Tischendorf prints: “cum meis manibus occiderem eorum Iudaeorum corpora et in lignum crudum suspenderem, quia perdiderunt dominum meum...” [with my hands I would have killed the Jews and their bodies I would have suspended on the cruel cross, those who killed my lord]. Hanna and Lawton point out that the Latin text available in later medieval England would have differed considerably from such texts. The medieval English *Vindicta* makes it much more difficult to discern whether the Jews or the Roman leaders are at fault. Nonetheless, in all versions Titus and Vespasian attack the Jews of Jerusalem.

Christ. For the *Siege* poet, the appointed leader in question is Pontius Pilate, and the poet has Titus criticize pagan Rome.

With pagan Rome, the poet criticizes the notion of static Roman identity. Titus's healing is not based on proclaimed belief in Christ. That comes directly *after* his healing. Titus is healed at the moment he recognizes Christ's death as Rome's fault. Furthermore, his healing inspires him to "stire Nero with noye." Along with Nero, he attacks the Roman political structure. Titus is made whole as soon as his heritage is broken. The reader might extrapolate from Titus's healing that the continuity of Roman identity must be overcome before someone, or perhaps Rome itself, can be Christian.

Indeed the poem introduces a Christian Rome to replace pagan Rome. Titus's genealogy is broken when he turns on Rome, but he reaffirms his Romanness at line 198, only ten lines after he vows to avenge Christ. Early on in the poem, at lines 33 and following, we learn that illness runs in Titus's family:

Also [Titus's] fader of flesche a ferly bytide:  
A bikere of waspen bees bredde in his nose,  
Hyued vp in his hed— he hadde hem of zoupe—  
And Waspasian was called þe waspene bees after. (33-6)

[Also, a wonder befell Titus's earthly father  
A nest of wasps bred in his nose  
Hived up in his head—he had them since youth—  
And he was called Waspasian after the wasps.]

Titus's father Vespasian fantastically has a nest of wasps living in his nose. At line 198, Titus, healed of his leprosy-like canker, goes to see his father at Rome: "Suþ with þe sondesman he souzt vnto Rome / þe ferly and the faire cure his fadere to schewe" [Then with the messenger he went to Rome / in order to show his father the wonder and the fair

cure]. In Titus's travels from Bordeaux to Rome, his primary intention is not to avenge Christ, though it is on his mind. First things first, he must show his father the cure. The fact is, thanks to the *Siege* poet's intervention, there are two Romes—a non-Christian Rome and a Christian Rome. Titus's break is with the non-Christian version, and his continued devotion to his father represents the advent of a new Christian Roman heritage.

Christian Rome, however, is shown to be far from perfect. The Jews at first appear to be irrational, but the poem ultimately questions the Romans' reason more than the Jews'. The *Siege*'s Jews refuse to convert, despite Titus and Vespasian's attempts. It would seem that the Jews willfully hold on to their Jewish identity irrationally, like Leo in Odo's disputation.<sup>39</sup> The Jews, however, quite reasonably send to the Romans for information when Vespasian sets up a siege around Jerusalem. Vespasian refuses to deal with their messengers. Instead, he sends his own into the city with demands. The Jews humiliate the twelve Roman knights. They bind them and cut off their hair and beards. They strip the knights to their underwear. They blacken their skin with ink. They then tie wheels of cheese to the knights' necks (361-8).<sup>40</sup> The Jews' harsh response may make them appear as if they cannot be reasoned with, but when the Jews first send to Vespasian for information, they certainly seem willing to listen.

---

<sup>39</sup> Odo, col. 1109. After Leo tells Odo that he has no rational reason for refusing to accept Christianity, he says: "Non credo tamen, ne, subtilitate verborum et versutia deceptus, a firmissima stabilitate sanctae legis evanescam." [I do not believe nevertheless, having been trapped with logic of words and cunning, I will die in the firmest stability to holy law.] Leo puts no stock in Odo's reason, deriding it as "logic of words and cunning."

<sup>40</sup> Hanna and Lawton, 113, suggest that with cheeses the Jews mock the imperial orbs so often used in Roman decoration.

The Jews' action is indeed a *response in kind* to Roman actions. The Romans' unwillingness to engage the Jews' rational faculties is to blame for the Jews' refusal to listen further. When Vespasian first sends his messengers they demand that the Jews give themselves up. All the men, including religious officials, are to wear only white shirts and carry the staffs that signify their offices. For his role in the Crucifixion, they are to give up high priest Caiphus especially. Vespasian threatens that if they do not comply, he will come over the walls and "no stone will stand upon stone" (355-6). The Romans effectively communicate a desire for revenge, but they never communicate a desire for the Jews to use their reason and come to truth; the Jews are never offered anything like Nathan's speech. When they humiliate the Roman knights, the Jews simply respond to one irrational gesture with another.

The *Siege* describes both sides as unreasonable and potentially inhuman. When Vespasian has another chance to rationally present Christianity to the Jews in lines 764 and following, he does no such thing. Vespasian knocks at the gates of Jerusalem. He warns the Jews that unless they "know [Christ] for their king, they will suffer more." When the Jews refuse to respond, Vespasian "þan wroþe as a wode bore" [angry as a mad, or wild, boar], turns from the gates and proclaims "3if 3e as dogges wol dey, þe deuel haue þat recche!" [If you will die as dogs, may the devil take anyone who cares!] (786). The poem's identification of Vespasian as a wild boar rather weakens his subsequent judgment of the Jewish people as dogs. Still, no one in this exchange looks

particularly rational; the Jews respond with clever tricks but not with questions for discussion.

Even as the Romans question the Jews' humanity because they will not convert, the poem questions the Romans' humanity because of their approach. While Vespasian and Titus are clearly able to rationally "perceive truth," they are not particularly well suited to impart it. The result is that the Jews never have the chance to perceive it. Never do the Jews have Christian "law and lore" laid out for them. The Romans' unwillingness to impart Christian truth through reasoning and preaching calls their grasp of truth, and their "innate human capacity" to perceive it, into question. The *Siege* presents race-thinking in the fact that Romans convert easily while Jews are essentially unconvertible. Then the poem undermines race-thinking when it demonstrates that the Jews' non-conversion is the Romans' fault.

### ***Tolerance and Violence***

In the *Siege*, the Roman oppressor and the Jewish oppressed are shown to be intimately engaged in a power struggle in which their respective (and variable) positions—and even their existence—profoundly depend on the other's. In Dubois's novel, Matthew Towns nearly strikes a fatal blow to the white oppressor and only barely avoids committing an act of race violence. He is very much involved in a revolutionary plan to derail and destroy a KKK special train on which he serves as a porter. He only stops the violent plan when he realizes that the Indian princess, a coalition leader and

Towns's beloved, is on board. While he is willing to sacrifice himself, he will not sacrifice her. When Towns discovers that the princess is on board, it becomes quite literally the case that in order for the princess (and with her the coalition) to continue to exist so must the Ku Klux Klan.

In *Dark Princess*, Dubois understands racial difference as involving a struggle between peace and violence. He sees the races as in a conversation that promises peace but constantly threatens to break into bloodshed. The *Siege's* understanding of difference is not so far off. The text walks a fine line between Augustinian toleration and the later, more vehement form of persecution that refuses to take a Jew's no for an answer.<sup>41</sup> Near the beginning of the text, the text mentions that in the forty winters since Christ's death, the Jews should have converted. The subtext here is that if they were to convert, all would be well. Conversely, after Titus and Vespasian's conversions, the Roman warriors immediately vow to avenge Christ's death on the Jews. In contrast to their proclamations, they offer the Jews the chance to convert. The Jews, however, mock the offer, and the Romans launch a terrible siege. At each turn, there is a chance for peace. At each turn peace is thwarted. The result is bloodshed.

The tension between the *Siege's* peace-promising sympathy toward its Jews and the violent siege has prompted scholarly debate about the poem's attitude toward Jewish-Christian relations. Ralph Hanna famously said of the poem that it has a "perfectly deserved reputation as the chocolate-covered tarantula of the alliterative movement.

---

<sup>41</sup> Though I have heretofore only addressed rationalism in terms of its tolerance, I will address the growth of persecution out of rationalism below. We have already seen one example in that the poem makes the Jews out to be irrational when in fact closer reading reveals that the Romans act irrationally first.

Indeed, the poem is so offensive as to exist on the suppressed margins of critical attention, unaccompanied by commentary.”<sup>42</sup> A.C. Spearing calls it “a brilliant and repellent work of art.”<sup>43</sup> Elisa Narin van Court writes that she thinks “there is more chocolate here than tarantula albeit bittersweet, but very rich indeed.” She goes on to say that “what animates this narrative is not a univocal and monolithic anti-Judaism, but ambivalence and, at times, a profound confusion about Jews, Christians, and violence.”<sup>44</sup> Van Court’s estimation holds more water, and it is congruent with Yeager’s idea that the Jews and Romans both represent Christians at various points throughout the poem. Yeager concludes that the Romans’ and Jews’ shifting identities have much to do with the poem’s critique of Christian sin and its deleterious effects on Christian campaigns in the Holy Land.<sup>45</sup> The ambivalence and confusion Van Court and Yeager identify has to do with the recognition of shared history between Christians and Jews as well as the recognition of shared humanity between contemporary Christians and Jews.

---

<sup>42</sup> Hanna, “Contextualizing,” 109.

<sup>43</sup> A.C. Spearing, *Readings in Medieval Poetry* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

<sup>44</sup> Narin van Court, 248.

<sup>45</sup> In “*The Siege of Jerusalem* and Biblical Exegesis: Writing about Romans in Fourteenth-Century England,” Yeager claims that the poem criticizes the contemporary Church. She points out that the poem flattens out time between its fourteenth-century readers and its first-century AD characters, making Romans out to be courtly and holy late medieval knights. Citing Christian adaptation of Jewish exegetical tradition, Yeager, 81, writes that “turning now to an exegetical investigation, one sees that the roles of the Jews and the Romans were not stable and could take on morally interchangeable attributes, with either group acting as antagonists or representatives of Christianity.” Using twelfth-century monastic thinker Joachim of Fiore’s prediction that the anti-Christ would rise from the papal seat in Rome, Yeager reads the *Siege* in the historical context of the Great Schism and Christian defeats in the Crusades. She shows that Joachim’s writings lead later exegetes to question the morality of Western Christendom; they speculate that Christian malfeasance may be the cause of losses in the Holy Land. Yeager concludes that the *Siege* not only urges its readers to participate in the campaign against Christianity’s enemies, be they Muslim or Jewish. The poem also suggests that a Christian, through sin, may be the enemy of Christianity himself. I argue that the sin the *Siege* addresses is in fact Christian non-acceptance of the necessity of, and religious kinship with, Jews and Judaism.

In its attempt to come out on top, each group seeks to control Judeo-Christian history. Certainly this seems a paradoxical thing to do given that this history is, by its very definition, a shared one. French cultural critic Rene Girard's theory of scapegoating is illuminating here. In his 1982 *The Scapegoat* (or *Le Bouc émissaire*), Girard considers difference in terms of cultural norms, or *nomos*. Girard writes

It is not the other *nomos* that is seen in the other, but anomaly, nor is it another norm but abnormality... Even in the most closed cultures men believe they are free and open to the universal; their differential character makes the narrowest cultural fields seem inexhaustible from within.<sup>46</sup>

It is another socially constructed norm (*nomos*) that is present in the other, but the in-group's perception is distorted; instead of seeing the presence of a different norm, the in-group sees only the other's difference from its own norm. That is, rather than acknowledge the existence of another cultural *nomos*, the in-group judges the other according to its own cultural standards. This is achieved by imagining all acceptable difference as already incorporated into the in-group's own *nomos*. The idea of *nomos* includes history, law, language, and other cultural norms, but Girard does not identify groups in terms of their cultural histories *per se*.<sup>47</sup>

The problem for the *Siege* is that Jewish and Christian *nomoi* are not as different as expected, especially when it comes to their histories. Competitive claims to the same Old Testament history with different socially organizing *teloi* (the Mosaic Law and the

---

<sup>46</sup> René Girard, *The Scapegoat*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986; Paris: Grasset, 1982), 22.

<sup>47</sup> This is to say that while *nomos* includes a generally accepted and socially constructed history, a national foundation myth for instance, Girard does not discuss history as distinct from the rest of a *nomos* (law, language, etc).



expected messiah for Jews, the risen Christ for Christians) require that history be considered apart from the rest of the Christian and Jewish *nomoi*. Girard theorizes that victims are persecuted not for their difference, but rather for the fact that they bear the signs of difference but are not in fact as different as expected. He writes:

Religious, ethnic, or national minorities are never actually reproached for their difference, but for not being as different as expected, and in the end for not differing at all... In all the vocabulary of tribal or national prejudices hatred is expressed, not for difference, but for its absence.<sup>48</sup>

For the *Siege*'s medieval Christians and Jews, the absence of difference in cultural histories is paramount. In order for each group's organizing *telos* to make sense, each group must be firmly in control of its own history. The two systems pose a threat to one another because, as Girard puts it, "difference that exists outside the system is terrifying because it reveals the truth of the system, its relativity, its fragility, and its mortality."<sup>49</sup> That is, the fact that there are two different *nomoi*, both based on the Old Testament, reveals that Judaism and Christianity are both interpretive systems.

The idea of a competitive relationship between Christian and Jewish *nomoi* is in opposition to Augustinian tolerance's claim that Jews are witnesses to Christian truth, and the notion of Jewish-Christian competition severely complicates Christian claims to truth. Near its beginning, the *Siege* emphasizes Jewish biblical textual history when high priest Caiphus's attendants read from Old Testament scrolls during the first day of battle:

Lered men of þe lawe þat loude coupe synge  
With sawters seten hym by and þe psalmys tolde

---

<sup>48</sup> Girard, *Scapegoat*, 22.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

Of dousty Daud þe kyng and oþer dere storijs  
Of Iosue þe noble Iewe and Iudas þe knyzt.

Cayphas of þe kyst kyppid a rolle  
And radde how þe folke ran þro3 þe rede water  
Whan Pharaο and his ferde were in þe floode drowned,  
And myche of Moyses lawe he mynned þat tyme. (477-484)

[Learned men of the law that could loudly sing  
With psalters sat by him and read aloud the psalms  
Of doughty King David and other treasured stories  
Of Joshua the noble Jew, and Judas the knight.<sup>50</sup>

Caiphus from the chest took a scroll  
And read how the people ran through the red water  
While Pharoah and his army were drowned in the flood,  
And much of Moses's law Caiphus expounded upon at that time.]

The episode makes clear the strength of the Jewish claim to biblical history. Vespasian responds by reminding his men of the suffering of Christ, blaming it on the Jews, and calling them “faiples folke.” The Jews’ clear command of Old Testament text makes Vespasian’s accusation of faithlessness ring stunningly false. It is apparent at this point that Roman claims to Christian history are on much shakier ground than the Jews’ claims. The two groups’ competing claims to Old Testament history and the right to interpret it

---

<sup>50</sup> Josephus, *The Jewish Wars*, I.ii, in *The New Complete Works of Josephus*, trans. William Whiston (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1999). Some have taken “Josue” to refer to Josephus, the Jewish general on whom the *Siege* poem’s Josephus character is based, who was captured by Romans at the siege of Jotapata in 66 A.D., and who authored *The Jewish Wars*, the source for so much of the *Siege*. Kölbing and Day choose ‘Iosephus’ in their edition. In their 2003 edition, Hanna and Lawton choose “Iosue” as it appears in the following MSS: British Library, MS Additional 31042 s. xv med.; Cambridge University Library, MS Mm.v.14 s. xv¼; Lambeth Palace Library, MS 491, part I s. xv¼; and Huntington Library, MS HM 128 s. xv in. ‘Ioseph’ appears in Bodleian Library, MS Laud Misc. 656 s. xiv. ex.; Princeton University Library, MS Taylor Medieval II s. xiv ex.; and British Library, MS Cotton Caligula A.ii, part I s. xv¾. It seems to me that Joshua, one of the Nine Worthies and the Jewish conqueror of Canaan, is a much more sensible choice given that the Jews are reading old stories. Stories of their current leader Josephus would be contemporary, to say the least. “Judas” refers to Judas Machabeus, one of the heroes of the battle for Jewish independence against Antiochus, ruler of Syria, and, according to Josephus, he was also “the first that made a league of friendship with the Romans” against Antiochus who sought control of all of Syria.

reveal an absence of difference that, according to Girard, “stirs up the immemorial tendency to persecution.”<sup>51</sup> For the Romans the continued existence of the Jewish *nomos*, which challenges the truth of the Romans’ new Christianity, is unacceptable.

Perhaps the most disturbing (and persecution-inspiring) parts of the absence of difference are the Jews’ and Christians’ parallel desires for material wealth. In lines 469-72, the poem expounds on the abundant wealth adorning Jewish high priest Caiphus’s elephant-back pavilion.

A which of white seluere walwed þerynne  
On foure goions of gold þat it fram grounde bare,  
A chosen chayre þerby an chaundeler twelfe  
Betyn al with bournde gold with brennande sergis. (469-472)

[A chest of white silver wallowed therein  
On four legs of gold that bore it up from the ground,  
A throne thereby and twelve candlesticks  
Made of burnished gold with burning candles]

Silver and gold abound in Caiphus’s pavilion. In lines 642-44, after winning the field the Romans greedily despoil the dead Jewish soldiers on the battlefield. The poem gives a laundry list of the spoils of war: they take “gold and goode stones, Byes, broches bryzt, besauntes riche.” The Christian reader who identifies with the Romans must ask if the Romans are all that different from the fallen Jews they despoil. At the same time, he must ask, can such a lack of difference exist alongside the watershed difference of belief (or not) in Christ? It would seem the only answer is for one group to persecute the other, to criminalize its members until the in-group no longer has to ponder the out-group’s

---

<sup>51</sup> Girard, *Scapegoat*, 22.

similarity to itself.<sup>52</sup> Girard concludes that “persecutors are never obsessed by difference but rather by its unutterable contrary, the lack of difference.”<sup>53</sup>

The solution to a threatening lack of difference is to assert absolute difference and criminalize it; the result is race violence. That is, the Romans exact wholesale vengeance on an entire group for what one particular group member did. The most egregious example in the *Siege* is the sale and enslavement of the Jewish people in response to Judas’s sale of Christ. By the siege’s end, “Nas no ston in þe stede stondande alofte” [there is no stone in the city left standing] and all has been “doun betyn and brent into blake erþe” [beaten down and burnt into black earth] (1289-92). After the Romans destroy the city, Pontius Pilate, Roman provost, is brought before Titus. He testifies as to how Christ was betrayed and put to death. Pilate is sent to prison in Vienne, France, for his part in the affair. There he commits suicide. Titus then inflicts punishment on the Jews. In retaliation for Judas Iscariot selling Christ for thirty pieces of silver, Titus sells all the surviving Jews into slavery. In the middle of the Roman host, he sets up a market. There, for a single penny, a Roman can purchase a bunch of thirty Jews tied together with ropes. Titus enacts a ghastly retributive reversal in which since Christ was worth thirty “penyes,” each Jew is worth one-thirtieth of a penny. Indeed, all the Jews are criminalized for what Judas did.

The sale of the Jews into slavery is not an isolated incident of race violence in the *Siege*. The visitation of vengeance on all who share Judas’s identity characterizes the

---

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 22. Girard writes that “victims seem predisposed to crimes that eliminate differences.” That is, victims are criminalized when they are judged according to the standards of the dominant group’s *nomos*.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

poem well before the Jews are sold off in the marketplace. During the third day of the siege, the poem tells us of two gruesome events within the city's walls. Vespasian is hit in the heel with a hand dart. It pins his foot to the side of his horse. His retinue rallies around him and fights the Jews with all the more rancor (815-23). The wound is clearly not life-threatening since we hear no more about it at all. The Roman response, however, is inordinate:

Engynes by þanne  
Were manye bent at þe bonke and to þe burwe þrewen.

Þer were selcouþes sen, as segges mowe here.  
A burne with a balwe ston was þe brayn cloue:  
Þe gretter pese of þe panne þe pyble forþ strikeþ  
Þat hit flow into the feld a forlong or more.

A woman bounden with barn was on þe bely hytte  
With a ston of a stayre, as þe storyj telleþ,  
Þat þe barn out brayed fram þe body clene  
Born vp as a bal ouer the burwe walles.

Burnes were brayned and brosed to deþ,  
Wymmen wide open walte vndere stones...(825-834)

[By then, many engines  
Had been set up at the bank and threw [stones] into the city.

There were many [signs] seen, as men may here.  
With a ballow stone, the brain of a man was cloven:  
the greater part of his skull the stone struck forth  
such that it flew a furlong or more into the field.

A woman pregnant with a baby was hit on the belly  
with a stone of a staff-sling, as the story tells,  
that the baby burst clean out her body  
and was born up as a ball over the city walls

Men were brained and bruised to death,

Women wide open lay under stones.]

These details are drawn from Josephus's *Jewish Wars*.<sup>54</sup> According to Josephus, the dart only wounded Vespasian a little: "no mighty impression could be made by the dart thrown so far off." Titus and the other warriors were greatly worried until Vespasian, "being superior to his pains...excited them to fight the Jews more briskly." This they did, and Josephus writes of the power of the Roman engines that night. An engine stone carries off the head of a man standing near Josephus. His skull flies "as far as three furlongs." A pregnant woman comes out of her house. She is struck in the belly with an engine stone and the fetus flies half a furlong."<sup>55</sup>

The *Siege* draws on some of the most violent events from Josephus's writings in order to underscore the violence visited on the Jews by the Romans. The *Siege* portrays the man, woman, and fetus as innocents—in Josephus, the man is a Jewish warrior, but the *Siege* does not include that fact—and the extent to which they are unjustly punished is laid bare.<sup>56</sup> The man, the woman, and her unborn baby all suffer for the deed of one hand-dartsman. The only things the man, woman, and baby share with the hand-dartsman is their Jewish identity and the fact that they inhabit Jerusalem. The racial criminalization of the Jews is an abundant theme in the *Siege of Jerusalem*.

---

<sup>54</sup> Paul L. Meier, "Introduction," in Josephus, trans. Whiston, 10. The *Jewish Wars* (written 76-79 A.D.) and Josephus's later *Antiquities* (93-94 A.D.) provide a "vital political, topographical, economic, social, intellectual, and religious supplement to our biblical information" according to Meier. The *Jewish Wars* is widely considered the most comprehensive source for the details of the Roman siege of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. In it, the siege from which these details are taken actually occurs not at Jerusalem but at Jotapata, before Titus marches on Jerusalem.

<sup>55</sup> Josephus, III:vii, 789.

<sup>56</sup> The *Siege* underscores the fact that it is only Jewishness that links these characters to the Jewish general Josephus: in Josephus, the man who loses his head is a fellow warrior standing near to Josephus. When the *Siege* compresses its source, it identifies the man only as a "man."

The *Siege*, however, is far from one-sided with regard to the Jews. The poem picks apart the racial criminalization of the Jews when it shows them suffering famine inside the city. The suffering is so great that it produces sympathy for the Jews. After a short cease-fire, Titus renews the siege at lines 1065 and following:

And Tytus segyþ þe toun þer tene is on hande  
For hard hunger and hote þat hem is bylompyn.

Now of þe tene in þe toun were tore forto telle,  
What moryne and meschef for mete is byfalle.  
For fourty days byfor þey no fode hadde,  
Noþer fisch ne flesch freke on to byte—

Bred, browet ne broþe, ne beste vpon lyue,  
Wyn ne water to drynke bot wope of hemself.  
Olde scheldes and schone scharply þey eten:  
þat liflode for ladies was luper to chewe.

Fellen down for defaute, flatte to the þe grounde,  
Ded as a dore-nayl, eche day many hundred.  
Wo wakynd þycke: as wolues þey ferde—  
þe wyght waried on þe woke all his wombe-fille. (1065-78)

[And Titus sieges the town where affliction is on hand  
For hard and hot hunger is befallen [the Jews].

Now of the affliction in the town it were difficult to tell  
What widespread death and mischief is befallen them for lack of meat  
For fourty days prior they had had no food  
Not fish nor meat for a man to bite on—

Not bread, nor stew, nor broth, nor living beast,  
Wine, not water to drink, except their own tears.  
Old shields and shoes eagerly they eat:  
That sustenance for ladies was to chew leather.

Fallen down for lack, flat to the ground  
Dead as a doornail, each day many hundred.  
Woe was stirred up thick: as wolves they fared—

A man warred on the weak in order to fill his womb.]

The reduction of Jewish society is pitiable, and details such as the city's ladies eating shoe leather and hundreds falling down dead of starvation emphasize Jewish distress. This distress is especially inordinate in that Titus's illness is healed by the Jewish general Josephus himself (1029-67) and that Titus responds with the renewal of affliction upon the Jews. What is more, the Jews' forty days of forced fasting calls to mind Christ's forty days of temptation in the wilderness. The Romans' violence against a group whose situation so clearly echoes Christ's temptation is a thinly veiled criticism of the Romans' criminalization of the Jews<sup>57</sup>: As the criminalization of Christ was unjust, the *Siege* implies, so is that of the Jews. At this point, it is hard for the reader to think of the Jews as despicable enemies; after all, they have the same desires and motivations as Romans; at that, they have already been beaten into submission. The inordinate punishment of the Jews and the association of their suffering with Christ's certainly tips the scale of suffering in the Jews' favor. The *Siege* suggests that taking vengeance on the Jews as a collective is almost as unjust as crucifying Christ.

The poem's vacillation between sympathy for the Jews and violence against them reflects a thirteenth-century shift in the Christian understanding of Judaism. Van Court argues that Augustine's doctrine of toleration informs the poem's sympathy;<sup>58</sup> she is

---

<sup>57</sup> Of course, the situations are not exactly the same. The Jews' fast occurs under duress, to say the least. It is the length of the fast, forty days, that draws the association.

<sup>58</sup> Narin van Court, 246, writes that "if the intensified anti-Judaism of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries was due, at least in part, to an attenuation of the doctrine of toleration, then it could be argued that those who continued to adhere to the old Augustinian position ('Slay them not, lest my people forget') would respond to violence against the Jews with sympathy and outrage." If the poem was written at



correct. While the recognition of shared history, as I have shown above, leads to the denial of that history and finally to racial violence, the sympathetic treatment of the Jews hangs on Christians' perception of the Jews as progenitors of and witnesses to Christian history. Thirteenth-century rationalism took on a much more violent tone as the Jews appeared to be much more of a threat to Christianity than they once were. R.I. Moore points out in his *Formation of a Persecuting Society* that Jews were certainly subject to persecution in the eleventh and twelfth centuries—note the tradition of striking Jews in the face on Easter Sunday that sprung up in southwestern France in the early eleventh century or the blood libel allegations at Norwich in 1150.<sup>59</sup> According to Cohen, however, the thirteenth century saw the beginning of an inveterate and unrelenting persecution of the Jews in Europe like none before it.

The thirteenth century saw such persecution of Jews for economic as well as religious reasons. Jews' dominance in the marketplace threatened the commercial aspirations of the new Christian bourgeoisie.<sup>60</sup> The early thirteenth-century rise of the Dominican and Franciscan orders only exacerbated economic fears as many Dominicans and Franciscans came from the merchant classes and had significant commercial interactions with Jews.<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, the Dominican and Franciscan concern for

---

Augustinian Bolton Priory, as Hanna and Narin van Court both suggest, the sympathetic tone matches with that of Augustinian canon William of Newburgh and late thirteenth-century Augustinian Thomas Wykes in their writings on the Jewish experience in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

<sup>59</sup> Moore, 32, 34.

<sup>60</sup> Cohen, 43.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 41-3.

Catholic orthodoxy, their direct relationship to the papacy, and commitment to active life outside the monastery positioned them well to serve the Inquisition's goal of eradicating heterodoxy.<sup>62</sup> Jews, Cohen points out, were "often accused of promoting heretical ideas and giving aid to heretics." In addition, while Jews were not officially under the jurisdiction of the Inquisition, "both Christian converts to Judaism and Jewish converts to Christianity who "relapsed" into their former religion came under the jurisdiction of the Inquisition."<sup>63</sup> Cohen argues that as a result, by the thirteenth century the Dominican- and Franciscan-led Inquisition was taking a more serious interest in contemporary Jewish affairs.

Increased interaction with contemporary Jews ultimately led to increased intolerance. In the early 1230s, Jewish writers perceived the dangers of the Inquisition intruding into internal Jewish affairs when rumors circulated that a Southern French rabbi had appealed to Christian friars to have the books of Jewish philosopher-theologian Moses Maimonides burned.<sup>64</sup> Such interference in contemporary Jewish affairs and

---

<sup>62</sup> The Inquisition, much like the Crusades, is a major historical site for examining Christian hegemony in the late Middle Ages. Cultural anthropologist Irene Silverblatt, *Modern Inquisitions: Peru and the Colonial Origins of the Civilized World* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 31-2, has noted the Inquisition's fear of converts' relapse to non-Christianity in early modern Spain. Silverblatt writes that the Spanish Inquisition was founded at the end of the fifteenth century to defend against "perceived threats to security and religious integrity." The perceived threat came from the recently baptized "New Christian" community born of forced conversions in the fourteenth century. She continues, "according to its dictates, baptized men and women of Jewish (or Muslim) descent were considered stained by ancestral heresies, regardless of conversion to Christianity or commitment to the faith." The Inquisition, in Spain as well as further west, was largely born of fear that Jews were so similar to Christians that Christians (whether previously Jewish or not) might easily become Jewish.

<sup>63</sup> Cohen, 48.

<sup>64</sup> Cohen, 52-60, discusses the rumor that Rabbi Solomon ben Abraham of Montpellier handed over Jewish thinker Moses Maimonides's books to Christian authorities as heretical Jewish texts to be burned. The rumor inspired a number of Jewish writers to condemn Rabbi Solomon as well as the "Preachers" (Dominicans, and possibly also Franciscans; "Preachers" refers to the "Order of Preachers," an early name

theology culminated in the 1242 burning of “ten to twelve thousand” copies of the Talmud at Paris.<sup>65</sup> Once Jews become a real and present-day threat to Christian hegemony, sympathy gives way to the assertion of absolute difference (in opposition to shared history) and ensuing race violence. The contemporary reality of Jews and Judaism, coupled with the threat of conversion to or relapse into Judaism exacerbates the competition between Christians and Jews for control of Old Testament history and its contemporary interpretation in the late Middle Ages.

The shift that Cohen has identified from the somewhat tolerant disputation style of Peter the Venerable and his contemporaries to the increasingly *intolerant* methods of Dominicans and Franciscans in the thirteenth century begs the questions: what is Christian evangelism supposed to look like? And what is the difference between the evangelizers and those to whom they preach? Even in Dominican and Franciscan milieus, the long-standing Augustinian idea persisted.<sup>66</sup> This led to rather ambivalent relationships

---

for the Dominicans) involved. The extent to which Maimonides’s books were actually burned or to which Rabbi Solomon was involved, Cohen argues, is uncertain.

<sup>65</sup> Cohen, 63–4, note 23. Neither the exact date nor the exact number of copies burned is certain. It does appear certain, however, that this burning actually happened.

<sup>66</sup> There is perhaps no better theologian to represent the ambivalence toward Jewry in the late middle ages than the thirteenth-century Dominican Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas [*Summa Theologiae* II.2(10.8)]. (London: Blackfriars, 1964–80; repr. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006), hereafter *ST*. Also quoted in Cohen, 48] writes: “Among unbelievers there are some who have never received the faith, such as heathens and Jews. These are by no means to be compelled, for belief is voluntary. Nevertheless the faithful, if they are able, should compel them not to hinder the faith whether by their blasphemies or evil persuasions or even open persecutions. It is for this reason that Christ’s faithful often wage war on infidels, not indeed for the purpose of forcing them to believe, because even were they to conquer them and take them captive, they should still leave them free to believe or not, but for the purpose of stopping them from obstructing the faith of Christ.” Here Aquinas groups Jews with infidels (Muslims and pagans) instead of the traditional Augustinian association that takes Jews as Christian predecessors. Remnants of the doctrine of toleration are apparent in that Jews (and others) are allowed to persist in believing whatever they like. Whereas

between friars and Jews. For instance, during the blood libel allegations of 1255 at Lincoln, friars of both orders sought to protect Jews.<sup>67</sup> The frequency of mendicant protection, however, paled in comparison to what Cohen calls the “most predominant attitude of the friars toward the Jews...an aggressive missionary spirit and often violent animosity.”<sup>68</sup> Twelfth-century Augustinian chronicler William of Newburgh reports that during the massacre of Jews at York in 1190, the angry mob is spurred on by an overzealous friar named Richard Malabeste.<sup>69</sup> Franciscans were also implicated in the blood libel that occurred after the death of a young girl in the French town of Valréas in 1247. Dominicans and Franciscans together were involved in the blood libel massacre at Troyes in 1288.<sup>70</sup> The friars certainly understood that Jews and Christians shared Old Testament history. The vacillation between protection and violence indicates that, at times, friars thought Jews worth saving—perhaps Jews’ sameness to Christians would win out and they would convert—and at other times friars asserted the absolute difference of the Jews, justifying the visitation of violence upon them. Unfortunately, the latter was the predominant attitude.

---

Augustine suggested allowing them to exist as subjugated but more or less free people, Aquinas restricts them to conquered captives for fear that they will “obstruct the faith of Christ”—that is, he fears that they will cause Christians to convert to Judaism, Islam, or paganism.

<sup>67</sup> Cohen, 42-3.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>69</sup> William of Newburgh, *The History of William of Newburgh*, Chapter VIII, in Joseph Stephenson, ed., *The Church Historians of England*, vol. 4, pt. 2., 562.

<sup>70</sup> Cohen, 43-4.

The assertion of absolute difference necessary for race violence requires wresting Old Testament history away from the Jews. One way of doing this is claiming that contemporary Judaism is not biblical Judaism. Cohen makes a point of the attack on rabbinic Judaism, and on the Talmud in particular. Recalling the burning of the Talmud at Paris in 1242, Cohen writes that Pope Gregory IX

seems to have launched the campaign against the Talmud because he believed the Jews' reliance on their "oral" rabbinic legal tradition to constitute a shameful heresy. According to the pope, Talmudic Judaism denoted a rejection of biblical religion, and without the Talmud, the Jews would be more likely to accede to the truth of Scripture and accept Christianity.<sup>71</sup>

With contemporary medieval Judaism out of the way, an unimpeded continuum between Jewish history and the Christian present is possible. Bound up with the Christian claim to Jewish history is the assertion that contemporary Jews have turned on their own history: that is, they have enacted a "shameful heresy." Jewish-Christian history, then, becomes solely Christian history since Jews have given it up. Once shared history is done away with, race violence can ensue. As Aquinas puts it, "Christ's faithful often wage war on infidels...for the purpose of stopping them from obstructing the faith of Christ."<sup>72</sup> This is a far cry from the Augustinian position that Jews are necessary for the spread of Christianity.

---

<sup>71</sup> Cohen, 66. For more on the Christian attack on contemporary Jewish religion, see the entirety of Cohen's chapter 3, especially 60-76.

<sup>72</sup> See footnote 66, on Aquinas, above.

### ***Criticizing Race War through Christian Hospitality***

The *Siege* achieves its criticism of the criminalization of the Jews mainly by giving the Jews the moral high ground and subsequently questioning the righteousness of the Roman Christians. As I have shown, the poem uses inordinate violence to produce sympathy for its Jews (its ostensible antagonists). Reading the poem through the lens of French historian and theorist Michel Foucault's theory of "race war" illuminates how the poem not only criticizes the obfuscation of shared history between the Christians and the Jews but also goes a step further: The poem asserts shared humanity between the two groups, exposing the divisions between the two as false and dangerous.

The competition over shared history lends itself to a discussion of Foucault's "race war," which allows us to look more closely at how the *Siege* exposes its own anti-Semitism as false and foolhardy. In his 1976 lectures, Foucault seeks to "emancipate [the] analysis of power from three assumptions—of subject, unity, and law." By this he means to study power relations as apart from a theory of sovereignty that, in his view, "presupposes the subject; its goal is to establish the essential unity of power, and it is always deployed within the preexisting element of the law."<sup>73</sup> The *Siege* exposes the

---

<sup>73</sup> Foucault, 44-5. Sovereignty, for Foucault, is a theory that necessarily tries to show "how a subject—understood as meaning an individual who is naturally endowed (or endowed by nature) with rights, capabilities, and so on—can and must become a subject, this time in the sense of an element that is subjectified in a power relationship." He goes on to say that sovereignty "assumes from the outset the existence of a multiplicity of powers that are not power in the political sense of the term; they are capacities, possibilities, potentials, and it can constitute them as powers in the political sense of the term only if it has in the meantime established a moment of fundamental and foundational unity between possibilities and powers, namely the unity of power." In his analysis, it is this unity of power that Foucault resists. Rather than consider power relations as from a single source, he means to examine how apparatuses of power interact and support one another.

pitfalls of Christian power over Jews in much the same terms when it exposes the inner workings (and failures) of Roman Christian sovereignty.

The *Siege* deconstructs, from its outset, the basic assumptions of sovereignty. Titus's and Vespasian's conversions challenge the notion of a static or unified subject: their motivations change in wholesale fashion upon conversion. In addition, the unity of Roman power is disrupted in that Titus's and Vespasian's motivations are diametrically opposed to Nero's. This becomes especially apparent when Vespasian denounces Nero's claim to tribute from Jerusalem in lines 501 and following:

Y quyte-clayme þe querels of all quyk burnes  
And clayme of euereche kyng saue of Crist one...  
Hit nedip̃ nozt at þis note of Nero to mynne  
Ne to trete of no trewe for tribute þat he askep̃:  
His querel Y quit-cleyme, wheþer he wilnep̃...(501-7)

[I quitclaim the quarrels of all living men  
And the claims of every king save Christ only...  
It is not needful at this occasion to mind Nero  
Nor to treat of any truce in exchange for tribute that he demands:  
His quarrel I quitclaim, whether or not he will.]

Unity of Roman power is further disrupted in lines 897 and following: Nero, having killed the Pope, Saint Paul, his own mother and wife, and numerous others for practicing Christianity, is deposed by the Roman people. He commits suicide. Shortly after, the emperor Galba is elected. He lasts only several months before he is murdered by Otho. Otho subsequently becomes emperor. He commits suicide after only three months. Vitellius rises to the imperial throne. The *Siege* tells us that he makes the mistake of killing Vespasian's brother Sabinus. Vespasian sends a force to Rome that murders Vitellius in vengeance. He had only held the throne seven months, according to the poem.

Vespasian is soon called to leave Jerusalem and fill the imperial seat. In the end, Roman power appears anything but unified. The rule of law, however, is maintained. Titus and Vespasian are chosen to go to Jerusalem by a council in lines 269 through 272, and Vespasian is elected emperor by a council in lines 957 through 964. Disunity of subject and disunity of power under Roman law undermines the integrity of Roman identity. The *Siege* and Foucault agree in that, as the fount of power and social organization, sovereignty is an illusion.

The *Siege of Jerusalem* is far more interested in, to use Foucault's words, the "relations or operators of domination" that "manufacture subjects" than it is in power that is derived from sovereignty.<sup>74</sup> The *Siege* depicts the idea that the "blood and mud of battle" is what produces subjects when it sets up Vespasian as an ideal and just emperor at the end of the text.<sup>75</sup> He is ideal simply for the fact that he lasts longer than any of his immediate predecessors. In addition, he metes out justice to Pontius Pilate and the "perfidious" Jews who take the rap as Christ killers. In the poem, an ugly battle brings forth justice (or what the poem presents as justice). Out of battle comes Vespasian's power, others' subjection to his power, and justice. At the poem's end, the illusion of power has been reconstructed, but its illusory nature has been exposed. Furthermore, the

---

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> As WEB Dubois, 22-3, writes that that American blacks are "common people" who "come out of the depths—the blood and mud of battle," so Foucault, 50, writes that "War obviously presided over the birth of States: right, peace, and laws were born in the blood and mud of battles." It is no coincidence that DuBois and Foucault use the phrase "blood and mud of battle." For both thinkers, the dynamics of power as constituted through war are intrinsic to the understanding of race. While DuBois depicts a race war in narrative form, Foucault terms the power struggle as such.



reader's impressions of the poem's most compelling characters—its subjects: Titus, Vespasian, and Josephus—have been produced by war.

Since sovereignty is thoroughly undermined, the reader is left to question the “peace” Vespasian imposes. After all, the Jews still exist even though they are sold off into slavery. What is more, the poem has shown the Jews sympathy before—could it now cast them off into subjection so dismissively? Peace, as Foucault reminds us, is not the end of war. Rather “in the smallest of its cogs, peace is waging a secret war...Peace itself is a coded war.”<sup>76</sup> War, he tells us, always goes on beneath peace. The *Siege* devotes the majority of its text to the action of war and, as shown above, very little to properly functioning sovereignty. In light of the fates of the previous emperors and the fate of the Jews at Vespasian's hand, we might easily doubt the stability of Vespasian's sovereignty and that of the peace with which the poem concludes. The poem does not leave its reader with the impression that the war is over; this has led Mary Hamel to argue that poem is crusading propaganda, meant to inspire readers to wage war on Jews, Muslims, and heretics.<sup>77</sup>

If Foucault and Hamel are right, then the *Siege* ends with Vespasian not so much on top of world as with Vespasian (and Rome) *against* the world, interminably.. The

---

<sup>76</sup> Foucault, 50-1.

<sup>77</sup> Hamel, 177-94. Moore, 29, 81, also notes the increasing propensity in the late Middle Ages to lump Jews in with Muslims and heretics. He points it out with regard to the *Song of Roland* especially, in which “Charlemagne [revenges] the death of his friend by the destruction of the synagogues of Saragossa along with the mosques, and the forced conversion of the worshippers in them.” Moore points out that this was out of step with the historical Charlemagne's practices, as Jews enjoyed protection at his court and he even relaxed limitations on Jews' ability to give evidence in court. The *Song of Roland's* depiction of Charlemagne speaks more to the anti-Semitic literary preoccupations of its time than it does to the historical Charlemagne.

*Siege*, however, is critical of interminable race war; it exposes the falseness of the division between Jews and Christians as well as the division's persistence when the Roman forces demand that the Jews convert. To return to a scene cited above, in lines 764 and following, Vespasian knocks at the gates of Jerusalem. He calls for the Jews to come forth and warns them that unless they "know [Christ] for their king, they will suffer more." When the Jews refuse to respond, Vespasian "þan wroþe as a wode bore" [*angry as a mad, or wild, boar*], turns from the gates and proclaims

3if 3e as dogges wol dey, þe deuel haue þat recche!  
 And or I wende fro þis walle 3e schul wordes schewe  
 And efte spaklokere speke or Y 3our speche owene! (786-8)

[If you will die as dogs, [you will] have the devil that cares!  
 And before I go from this wall, you will speak words  
 And in reply you will more prudently speak before I will acknowledge your  
 speech!]

When Vespasian knocks at the gate while making demands—seeking his admission and Jewish submission—he lays claim to leadership of the Jews and ownership of the Jewish-Christian history he assumed upon conversion. Vespasian's anger at not being acknowledged propels him into the greatest rage he experiences in the poem ("angry as a wild boar") because, in his view, the Jews contest his religious heritage by refusing to acknowledge him as their leader. Vespasian's belief that he should be acknowledged as the Jews' leader reveals the falseness of the racial binary in the *Siege*: Jews and Christians can be interpreted as a single group, but they are split and made to look like two. The real reason for Vespasian's anger is not that the Jews do not recognize his sovereignty but that they refuse to recognize kinship with Christians. The vehemence of

Vespasian's anger draws the reader's attention to the aborted chance at unity as well as the reasons (wrath, inhumanity) that peace cannot be had.

Before Vespasian's offer to the Jews is rebuffed, his desire to, and belief that he can, fold the Jews into Christian community conveys an unwitting knowledge on his part that the Jews are indeed human. The *Siege* goes to great lengths to drive home the point that they are. In lines 1057 through 1060, the poem highlights Titus's and the Jews' shared humanity. Titus falls ill from an excess of joy when his father is elected Roman emperor. In lines 1027 through 1040, the Romans search for someone to heal him. Finally Josephus, the "noble surgeon" (1039) consents to come from the city to do so. Drawing on Jacobus's *Golden Legend*, the *Siege* poet tells us that Josephus brings from the city a slave who Titus hates and arranges dinner. Seated at the same table, Josephus's anger at seeing the slave counters his joy and he is healed. Titus asks how he can repay Josephus. Josephus responds:

þan sayþ Josophus; "þis segge haþ þe holpyn,  
And here haþ be þy bote, þoʒ þou hym bale wolde.  
þerfor graunte hym þy grace aʒen his goode dede,  
And be frende *with* þy foman þat frendschup haþ *serued*!" (1027-40)

[Then says Josephus; "This man has helped you,  
And here he has been your healing, though you would harm him.  
Therefore grant him your grace in repayment for his good deed,  
And be friends with your enemy who has served you in friendship!"]

The *Siege* skips many of the details that its source, the *Golden Legend*, offers about the healing.<sup>78</sup> In the *Legend*, Josephus brings a slave who Titus hates. In the *Siege* Josephus brings out a man “that [Titus] most hated” (1047). The man is not very well defined at all in the poem. In fact, he is so ill defined that pronouns become unclear and, after the healing he and Josephus become indistinguishable from one another. Instead of friendship—presumably friendship would mean the cessation of siege—Titus offers wealth. The man refuses the wealth and returns to the city, but it is unclear whether the man who has refused wealth and returned to the city is Josephus or the unnamed man. While possible, it is unlikely that the *Siege* poet would allow two characters to morph into one through carelessness. He does not distinguish between Josephus and his helper

---

<sup>78</sup> “Saint James, Apostle,” chapter 67, in Jacobus de Voragine’s *Legenda Aurea*, translated in English as *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, trans. William Granger Ryan, vol. 1 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993). As opposed to some of the *Siege* poet’s other sources, like the *Vindicta Salvatoris* which is about Christian vengeance against Jews, Jacobus de Voragine’s *Legenda* is an internal Christian text concerned with Christian history and devotion instead of competition against Jews. Jacobus considers several reasons for the destruction of Jerusalem, including retribution for the execution of James the Just, per Josephus’s assertion; the crucifixion of Christ; and finally the Jews’ refusal to convert no matter how many marvelous signs God sent them over the forty years between Christ’s death and the destruction of Jerusalem. Jacobus then offers the same “admittedly apocryphal” history of Vespasian’s conversion that, in addition to the *Vindicta*, informs the beginning of the *Siege*: Vespasian converts to Christianity and is cured of his characteristic ailment—the *Siege* claims he has wasps in his nose and the *Legenda* claims worms; both texts suggest his name is drawn from his illness. Unlike the *Siege*, which would lead one to believe that Josephus was an active general at Jerusalem, the *Legenda* more accurately asserts that Josephus was captured before the Roman siege of Jerusalem, during their first attack on Judea at Jotapata. In order to save his own life, Josephus goes before Vespasian and prophesies the death of the Roman emperor and Vespasian’s election. Messengers from Rome arrive shortly thereafter and confirm Josephus’s prophesy, assuring the Jewish general’s life and high place among the Romans. Jacobus then tells the story of Titus’s illness. Titus is so happy and excited at his father’s election that he gets a chill and the muscles in one of his legs seize up, causing paralysis. Only Josephus is able to deduce what seems obvious in Jacobus’s telling: that “Titus had been debilitated by an excess of joy and gladness.” To everyone else, the cause and nature of the illness are unknown. Josephus knows that “opposites are cured by opposites” and “what is brought on by love is often dispelled by dislike.” He then brings in a slave who annoys Titus so much that his very name usually upsets the ruler. He arranges a festive dinner and sits the slave at his own right hand, directly across the table from Titus. When Titus sees the slave, he is “heated by his fit of fury” whereas he was before “chilled by joy.” When heated, his sinews loosen and his paralysis is cured.

because, in contrast with Titus, they are one.<sup>79</sup> They offer life itself to Titus and his community while he offers in return the life of a lone individual, who would be displaced outside his community, leading the reader to wonder whether this lonely life would be any life at all. Titus offers riches that likely have very little use inside a besieged city anyway. While the whole scene is drawn from *De Sancto Jacoba Apostola* in the *Legenda*, Titus's offer of reward appears to be original.<sup>80</sup>

When Josephus and his helper go out of their way to heal Titus, the poem presents the common humanity of Jews and Roman Christians; when Titus offers a pathetic reward, it shows the Romans reject the notion of shared humanity, or "freundschaft." For the Romans to grant friendship would be to admit the viability of the alternative Jewish *nomos*. The Jews' unexpected humanity, which threatens the system of dominance that the Romans desire, is revealed when Josephus heals Titus. Josephus asks for "safe conduct" for whomever he would like to bring with him to help him heal Titus (1043-4). Safe-conduct between the city and the Roman camp symbolizes the spiritual bridge between the two parties. It is clearer than ever that, as Foucault puts it, "they are one race split and made to look like two." On top of the Jews' and Romans' shared spiritual roots, Josephus's kindness and superior knowledge depicts Jews as just as human, if not better humans, than the Roman Christians.

---

<sup>79</sup> Alternately, the confusion about who returns to Jerusalem may be introduced by the fact that in the *Golden Legend*, the hated man is one of Titus's own slaves. In the *Siege*, the man Titus hates appears to come from Jerusalem along with Josephus. The *Golden Legend* says nothing of Josephus or the slave returning to Jerusalem.

<sup>80</sup> Millar, 72. The offer of reward may be the *Siege* poet's interpretation of the "favor" Titus offers the slave in the *Golden Legend*.

The *Siege* reveals that the biggest obstructers of Christian faith might be the Roman Christians themselves. When Titus rejects Josephus's advice to befriend the man, he rejects shared humanity between Jews and Christians. He rejects literacy and what would have been taken as intelligent behavior and policy in the context of late medieval thought on reason. It is telling that Caiphus's attendants read from Old Testament scrolls during the first day of battle, in lines 477-84, and Vespasian responds by calling them faithless. Just as easily—perhaps more easily—as he battles and enslaves the Jews, he could have engaged in rational disputation with them instead. When the Jews read from the Old Testament, they give Vespasian the chance to do just that.

In Josephus's character, the *Siege of Jerusalem* actively exposes the foolishness of Christian race war on Jews. The retributive violence enacted against the Jews—the man hit in the head with a ballow stone, the woman whose unborn baby is hurled from her belly—are the things that have caused critics such as Hanna to criticize the text for its persecutory violence. According to such a view, the *Siege* is what René Girard calls a “persecution text,”<sup>81</sup> which “has its roots in a real persecution described from the perspective of the persecutors...the persecutors are convinced that their violence is justified; they consider themselves judges, and therefore they must have guilty victims.”<sup>82</sup> Girard argues that literary texts (“unreliable testimony”) are better than reliable historical testimony of persecutory events because “the conclusive document

---

<sup>81</sup> Girard defines this term most fully in his *Des choses caches depuis la foundation du monde* (Paris: Grasset, 1978), 136-62. See also the English translation *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, trans. Stephen Bann and Michael Metteer (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), chapter 5.

<sup>82</sup> Girard, *Scapegoat*, 6.

belongs to persecutors who are too naïve to cover the traces of their crimes.”<sup>83</sup> That is, close reading of literary texts reveals persecution of which the writer was not conscious. The *Siege of Jerusalem* belies Girard’s assertion somewhat. Though it is a literary text, the *Siege* exposes Christian crimes by depicting the horrors inflicted on Jews by Christians and then depicting Christians who are too unlearned and naïve to know they have committed crimes at all. The text itself, and presumably its author, are not naïve, but Titus and Vespasian certainly are. Josephus foils Titus and Vespasian’s race war when he joins the Romans and eventually writes the poem’s source text; despite the insistence of some parts of the poem, Josephus is evidence that not all Jews deserve to suffer for the acts of one.

The *Siege of Jerusalem*’s lack of naïvete has everything to do with the context in which it was written. The *Siege* has not been called a “chocolate-covered tarantula” for nothing. In my reading, the “chocolate” is the text’s mask as an uncomplicated persecution text. Once you bite through the chocolate, the hairy surprise is the extent to which the text reveals division in the medieval Christian community over the issue of Jewry. Josephus’s decision to heal Titus is a bold role reversal informed by medieval monastic and ecclesiastical doctrine, especially with regard to Christian hospitality. The poem’s likely production at the Augustinian Bolton Priory in the West Riding of Yorkshire means that the text would most likely have been written by a relatively well

---

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 8.

educated Augustinian canon regular. It should not surprise us if the canon brings his professional preoccupations to bear on his text.

In an Augustinian context, Josephus's generosity in healing Titus is not surprising. A long tradition of Christian hospitality accompanied religious life. When Benedict of Nursia (c.480 – c.550) wrote the Benedictine Rule in the sixth century, he gave a central place to monastic hospitality. For Benedict boundaries between monks and seculars are to be kept in place *and* transgressed. In fact, it is the occasional transgression of upheld limits, with consistent reference to those limits, which makes Christian hospitality something special. Benedict devotes Chapter 53 of his rule, titled *De Hospitibus Suscipiendis*, (*On the Reception of Guests*) to the customs that must be observed when guests arrive at a Benedictine monastery. Benedict takes much of his material from the earlier monastic Rule of the Master. Translator and commentator Terrence G. Kardong points out that the Rule of the Master is “extremely suspicious toward guests” and only welcomes clerics and monks.<sup>84</sup> Benedict is much more open to all guests, taking his cues from Genesis 18, where the Lord visits Abraham and Sarah in the persons of three unexpected guests. In her book *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition*, Christian social ethicist Christine Pohl points out that Benedict also works with reference to Christ's identification with the stranger in Matthew 25:35.<sup>85</sup> Benedict stresses that all guests, regardless of clerical or secular status,

---

<sup>84</sup> Terrence G. Kardong, *Benedict's Rule: A Translation and Commentary* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1996), 421.

<sup>85</sup> Christine Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI/ Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), 47.



are to be invited in: he begins his chapter with “All guests who arrive should be received as Christ.”<sup>86</sup>

Benedict’s monastic hospitality, however, is carefully circumscribed by ritual; he imagines the guest walking into a strange world that is not his own. Pohl writes that Benedict “gave a central place to hospitality to strangers while protecting other disciplines of the monastery from disturbance.”<sup>87</sup> According to the Rule, the guest is not to be left alone, lest he get into some kind of mischief or corrupt any of the brothers. The guest is to be led to prayer, and afterward, the “superior or his appointee should sit with them.” Then in verse 9, Benedict writes that the “Divine Law,” that is Scripture, will be read to the guest before he eats. Kardong notes in this regulation Benedict’s desire to the let the guest know that he is in a world very different from the more secular one he just left.<sup>88</sup>

The Augustinian canon who likely produced the *Siege of Jerusalem* would have had a less restrictive idea of Christian hospitality than did Benedictines, in part because the Augustinian Rule had little concern for hospitality beyond the monastery’s walls and in part because Augustinian canons were not monks. Founded in 1154, Bolton Priory’s canons originally followed the Augustinian Rule, which was by no means as open to outside guests as Benedict’s. An Augustinian canon under the influence of only the Augustinian rule would have been predisposed to thinking about hospitality inside the monastery, among fellow monks only. In his rule, Augustine writes: “Before all else, live

---

<sup>86</sup> All translations of Benedict’s Rule are from Kardong.

<sup>87</sup> Pohl, 46.

<sup>88</sup> Kardong, 426.

together in harmony, being of one mind and one heart on the way to God.”<sup>89</sup> He writes of hospitality between stronger and weaker monks and between wealthy monks and poor ones.<sup>90</sup> The utmost goal of the monk, according to Augustine, is to care for one another in whatever ways necessary. Both rich and poor should “be concerned for the interests of the community rather than for [his] own.” Augustine writes that this is how one can judge how much progress he has made in his conversion. He goes on, “Thus in all the fleeting necessities of human life *something sublime and permanent* reveals itself, *namely love*.”<sup>91</sup> Augustine, however, makes no mention of loving the guest. Rather he imagines a monastery that makes use of goods sent from the outside world when new adherents donate their possessions for common use in the community and when parents or relatives send monks new clothes or other useful items.<sup>92</sup> He makes no other mention of the outside world. The monastery, for Augustine, is more exclusive than it is for Benedict.

The Augustinian Rule, however, did not completely circumscribe the life of the Augustinian canons, who were charged with both contemplative and active roles. In England in the eleventh through fifteenth centuries, Augustinians occupied a space between the monasticism of Benedictines and the ministerial work of the secular priest. In resolving a debate about the perfection of the contemplative life versus the active life, Aquinas concludes that the life of canons regular, because they are “clerical religious”

---

<sup>89</sup> St. Augustine, *The Rule of St. Augustine*, trans. Raymond Canning, OSA (Garden City, NY: Image, 1986), 11.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 14, 12.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, 20 (emphasis original).

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., chapter 1, article 3, and chapter 5, article 3.

charged with both, is more perfect than the singularly contemplative life of monks.<sup>93</sup> The canon's clerical work requires he do ministerial work outside the walls of a religious house. Such work was not required of monks, nor was it mentioned in the Augustinian Rule.<sup>94</sup>

Augustinians would have considered it their duty to care for the community around them. Unlike Benedictine monks, canons were regularly commissioned the care of churches in the vicinity of Augustinian houses:

Now it must be noticed in the account of all these [Augustinian] foundations that the endowments were churches. Estates are sometimes mentioned, and especially in later times, but they are the exception. Enough land was given for their support and what was added was to be the sphere of their labour. This is not the case in the story of [Benedictine] monastic foundations. In early cartularies of the Benedictines you hardly

---

<sup>93</sup> In the *ST II.2* (184.8-189.8), Aquinas tackles the question of whether it is lawful to transfer between religious orders: "Ad secundum dicendum quod utraque religio, scilicet monachorum et canonicorum regularium, ordinatur ad opera vitae contemplativae, Inter quae praecipua sunt ea quae aguntur in divinis mysteriis, ad quae ordinatur directe ordo canonicorum regularium, quibus per se competit ut sint clerici religiosi. Sed ad religionem monachorum non per se competit quod sint clerici... Et ideo, quamvis ordo monachorum sit arctior observantiae, si monachi essent laici, liceret transire ab ordine monachorum ad ordinem canonicorum regularium..." [The religious life of monks and of canons regular is ordained to the acts of the contemplative life. Chief among these are the ones connected with the celebration of the liturgy, to which the orders of canons regular are especially directed. They are therefore clerical religious. But the religious life of monks does not require that they be clerics... Therefore, although an order of monks may be stricter in observance, if the monks are lay religious, it would be lawful to transfer from an order of monks to an order of canons regular.] Aquinas concludes that one can pass from one religious institute to another only if the new institution supports a brother's trajectory toward increased perfection. Because canons regular, as "clerical religious," devote themselves to contemplative life as well as clerical work, Aquinas concludes that theirs is the more perfect life.

<sup>94</sup> There is some debate about the rule's original intended recipients. The *Catholic Encyclopedia* still notes that Letter 211, the basis for the rule, was originally developed for the sisters at Hippo in 423 where Augustine's sister was a nun, as a result of some quarrels among the sisters. In *The Augustinians in the Middle Ages: 1256-1356* (Villanova: Augustinian Historical Institute, 1984), 10, David Gutierrez notes that Augustine may have produced the same letter in masculine form and that it was in use by monastic legislators from the sixth century forward. On the other hand, the rule did continue to circulate in its feminine form. Holmes, 347-8, writes that the letter was "directed to some turbulent and worldly minded nuns. But there was no evidence that Augustine drew up a rule for the disciplined life of the canonical clergy." Holmes argues that Ivo, Bishop of Chartres (1090-1116), used the letter and other of Augustine's writings to draw up a comprehensive rule.

ever find such items. The age when the monasteries acquired the advowsons of distant churches had not yet arrived. The Austin Canons came first, and churches were given them not as means of enrichment but to be scenes of ministerial work.<sup>95</sup>

Living the contemplative and active lives, Augustinians regularly ministered to the country folk and travelled outside their houses to do their duties at sometimes distant churches.<sup>96</sup> The annals of the Augustinian house at Bruton give particular testimony of the dangers its Canons “incurred from the freer contact with the outer world to which their duties exposed them.”<sup>97</sup> Augustinians were, by far, freer in their hospitality to those outside the house than were Benedictines. Augustinian houses were established in remote and dangerous places, especially along the frontier with an unconquered Wales. Nonetheless, they moved away from Benedict’s suspicion of outsiders. Instead, a canon might bring to dinner a stranger (with the permission of the prior), and the poor no longer had to wait outside the priory for food. They were taken in and nursed inside its walls.<sup>98</sup>

Augustinian Canons’ interest in transgressing borders through hospitality certainly makes an Augustinian house a likely place for the composition of a text as interested in transgressing the borders between Judaism, Christianity, and Romanness as

---

<sup>95</sup> Holmes, 350-1.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 350-2. The missionary nature of Augustinian houses has its root in their foundation in contested lands in which other religious houses, such as those of the Benedictines, were not well established. Holmes points out at length that many Augustinian houses were founded on the frontiers of wild and unconquered Wales “where the dioceses of Hereford and Lichfield, between the dense forests and dangerous swamps, looked down the valleys and across the open wold to the lands of the then unconquered Welsh.” For instance, an Augustinian church was consecrated at Llanthony, “a narrow strip of Monmouthshire running north-west between Brecknockshire and Herefordshire, bounded on the east by the Black Mountains and on the west by the hills of Brecknockshire” in 1108. As a priory, this church oversaw a number of nearby churches. Fifteen years later, the church had to be moved to the second Llanthony, closer to Gloucester, because of the violence of the Welsh of Brecon.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 353-4.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 356.

the *Siege*. When it came to hospitality, Augustinian houses were well positioned to criticize the mainstream Church's practice. Christine Pohl notes that in the fourth century, Christian hospitality was "most clearly articulated," citing Jerome's, Lactantius's, and Chrysostom's definitions of Christian hospitality, as "welcoming the 'least' with no concern for advantage or ambition."<sup>99</sup> While, as Holmes points out, the hungry and the poor were welcomed into the Augustinian priory, Pohl argues that by 1500, among non-Augustinians "except for hospitality to household servants and their dependents, most provision for the poor was done at the gate, not within the house."<sup>100</sup> Furthermore, Pohl cites episcopal hospitality that would be more aptly described as "displays of power often evidenced through the size and the magnificence of their entertainment" that demonstrated what Felicity Heal calls "elaborate deference to rank and power."<sup>101</sup> If Holmes's and Pohl's studies are correct, then an Augustinian author had every reason to question the Christianity, vis-à-vis the *Siege's* Romans, of others in the Church by depicting Jewish Josephus as better at the practice of Christian hospitality than Christians.

Josephus's wisdom as to how to heal Titus conveys not only Jewish humanity and hospitality, but also an educational fissure within late medieval Christian society. R.I.

---

<sup>99</sup> Pohl, 47. Pohl blames the collapse of the ethics of Christian hospitality on the increase in Church wealth, power, and influence from the time of Constantine's acceptance of Christianity through the late Middle Ages. In the Middle Ages, she notes the differentiation of kinds and sites of care for the poor, sick, and otherwise needy. She notes the impersonality of hospitals for the sick and the increase in vagrancy due to the Black Death and the resulting labor crisis in addition to the lavish and classed nature of episcopal entertaining. The removal of hospitality from the site of the "worshipping community," the Church itself, is another reason she cites for the diminution of Christian hospitality.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 50, and Felicity Heal, "The Archbishops of Canterbury and the Practice of Hospitality," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 33 (Oct. 1982): 551. Also quoted in Pohl, 50.

Moore points out that in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, “the entire range of persecution...might be described...as the transformation of the procedures and disabilities associated with legal infamy into an instrument of universal application, which could be brought to bear at will upon any situation or any group of people...”<sup>102</sup>

The “transformation” involved the growth of a class of literate clerks, the *literati*, who relied on reason “in whose name they claimed to rule.”<sup>103</sup> In addition to the respect given to Josephus’s historical writings and his superior military and medical knowledge in the *Siege of Jerusalem* poem, the *Siege* concretely associates Josephus with the *literati* in the adjectives it uses to describe him. Josephus undergoes a transformation when he is called “gynful” or tricky at line 813, a “noble surgeon” at line 1039 when he comes forth to heal Titus, and finally a “gentle clerk” at the end of the poem when he heads off to Rome in order to write the *Jewish Wars* at line 1325. Josephus’s learned advice to Titus that the man should be rewarded with friendship rather than wealth is an example of what Moore identifies as a clerical and professional attack on unlearned persons’ ways of doing things.<sup>104</sup>

Vespasian and Titus’s heritage does not automatically entitle them to the literate clerkly status attributed to Josephus. The new clerkly class based their power on “the

---

<sup>102</sup> i.e., the Inquisition. See Moore, 132-3.

<sup>103</sup> The growth of this clerkly class had everything to do with the rise of Dominicans and Franciscans, who believed conversion should occur through reason and consequently conducted the Inquisition in a manner they considered rational. While not all learned clerks with ambition were Dominican or Franciscan, both Moore and Cohen have shown that the two orders’ rise to power was indicative of the growing influence of reason in Christian political and social life generally.

<sup>104</sup> Moore, 134, cites as an example of the learned’s attack on the unlearned the the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries’ replacement of local juries for the identification of lepers with professional medical practitioners.

counting of money, the sealed writ, the legal tag.” Moore writes that “the antithesis between *clericus* and *laicus* no longer corresponded to the familiar distinctions between noble and non-noble or clerk and layman...it came to seem no more incongruous to disparage an archbishop of Canterbury’s culture by calling him a layman than to describe as *clericus* a knight or even a king who could read and write...”<sup>105</sup> Late medieval Christian society was at odds with itself; the *literati* were in possession of a means to preferment that the illiterate were not. Literacy cut across the established social order of estates and rank, and advisorship to the king now had everything to do with access to what Moore calls “the new technologies of government.”<sup>106</sup> Vespasian’s illiterate response to Caiphus and his lawyers’ Old Testament reading demonstrates that, while Vespasian possesses the right genealogy and rank, he lacks the literacy necessary for preferment and power in the late medieval age of reason.

For some medieval people, Josephus’s Jewishness would have associated him with the *literati*. One of Peter Abelard’s students perceived Jews as having a better educational system than Christians:

If the Christians educate their sons, they do so not for God, but for gain, in order that the one brother, if he be a clerk, may help his father and his mother and his other brothers... But the Jews, out of zeal for God and love of the law, put as many sons as they have to letters, that each may understand God’s law...A Jew, however poor, if he had ten sons would put them all to letters, not for gain, as the Christians do, but for the

---

<sup>105</sup> Moore, 138.

<sup>106</sup> See Moore, 138, and chapter 4 in general. Moore links the rise of the *literati* with the Dominican- and Franciscan-led Inquisition. Inquest was a learned means of detecting heterodoxy as opposed to the earlier forms of trial by ordeal.

understanding of God's law, and not only his sons but his daughters.<sup>107</sup>

The writer is jealous of Jewish motivations for education as well as Jewish ability to educate their children. The Jewish educational system predisposed Jews to medical practice, and Jews served as doctors to Alfonso VI of Castile, Henry I of England, Alfonse of Poitiers, and a number of popes including Alexander III.<sup>108</sup> In the context of Jewish success, and medical success in particular, it is no surprise that out of everyone attendant on Titus, Josephus is the only one who knows that Titus "had been debilitated by an excess of joy and gladness" and that "opposites are cured by opposites."<sup>109</sup>

Augustinian canons, who celebrated mass and were certainly learned otherwise as well—note the *Siege* poet's command of various sources—would have identified with the learned Josephus. Furthermore, an Augustinian canon would have readily seen the worth of creating a well-educated Josephus character who is also the paragon of Christian hospitality. In Josephus, who mirrors the poem's goal of breaking down religio-cultural barriers, the Augustinian writer creates a version of himself.

In the contexts of the suppression of the common history of Judaism and Christianity, increased Dominican and Franciscan violence against the Jews, the associated rise in the power of the *literati*, and a characteristically Augustinian concern with hospitality across borders, Titus's healing by Josephus offers a powerful lesson about Christian hospitality. In the healing, the Augustinian poet shows his reader what

---

<sup>107</sup> Quoted by Moore, 150, from B. Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952), 78.

<sup>108</sup> Moore, 148.

<sup>109</sup> Jacobus de Voragine, chapter 67. See also my footnote 78, in which I offer Jacobus's telling of Titus's healing in more detail.



evangelism and conversion ought to (and ought not) look like. When Josephus tells Titus to become friends with his enemy and Titus responds by renewing the siege, the Augustinian author shows his reader what not to do. Rather, the text suggests that the proper, and even Christian, thing to do is to accept the viability of the alternate Jewish *nomos* in the hope that the two *nomoi* can be peacefully merged into one through the recognition of shared history and shared humanity. Of course, this proposed merger retains the element of Foucaultian race war that requires the dominant (Christian) group subsume the Jewish other, the subrace, into itself. The Augustinian's innovation is to suggest this be done peacefully, through hospitality instead of war.

When the Romans respond to the Jews with warfare instead of "friendship," the race war they wage is exposed as little more than a jealous reaction to the Jews' real righteousness. The Augustinian author lays claim to hospitality for the educated when the jealous Roman warrior unwittingly (and sickeningly) echoes the Crucifixion of Christ: Titus's sale of the Jews into slavery is a supremely unlearned reaction when he at no point recognizes that, in punishing those with whom Christ shares genealogical blood and with whom Christians share a history, he in effect re-crucifies Christ. Titus's punishment of the Jews is far too close to the Crucifixion for comfort.

### ***The Peculiarities of MS Cotton Vespasian E.16***

In *Dark Princess*, Matthew Towns claims that blood cannot be intelligently interpreted, but the fragment of the *Siege* that appears in CV argues differently. As Hanna and Lawton note, this version begins imperfectly around their line 966. The poem begins

on the manuscript's folio 70 and concludes on folio 77. Folio 77 shows a quire mark *xvj*. The previous extant quire mark is *xiii*, and the editors deduce that two quires must have been lost sometime before the manuscript was bound together.<sup>110</sup> The result is that the poem begins *in medias res*. If indeed the quires were lost before the current manuscript was compiled, the CV's compiler may have included the fragmentary poem because its beginning intrigued him. It is impossible to know. It is apparent, however, that the imperfect beginning concerns characteristics imbued by genealogy, a concern it shares with *The Three Kings of Cologne*, the *Secretum Secretorum*, and most spectacularly the *Man of Law's Tale*.

As it stands, the CV's *Siege* begins with Vespasian's proclamation of blood kinship among Romans.<sup>111</sup> Upon receiving letters from Rome informing him of his election to the imperial seat, Vespasian calls together his council and addresses them:

Ye ben borin of my blood þat me best wolde  
 My sonne is next mysilve and opere sibbe many  
 Sir Sabyne of Surry a segge þat I trust  
 And opere frendes full fele þat feithe owen to me (969-972)<sup>112</sup>

[You have been born of my blood that would do your best for me  
 My son is next to me and other kinfolk many  
 Sir Sabyne of Syria, a man that I trust  
 And many other friends that owe their loyalty to me]

For Vespasian, loyalty springs from blood kinship. Because his men are "borin" of Vespasian's blood, they do their best for him. Only the Cotton Vespasian version offers

---

<sup>110</sup> Hanna and Lawton, xvii.

<sup>111</sup> It may be tempting to read the *Siege* as such a violent poem that an imperfect beginning near any mention of blood would be probable, but "blood" or "bloody" only appears in the poem eleven times. This is a small number for a poem as engaged with war as this one.

<sup>112</sup> I quote from CV instead of Hanna and Lawton's edition here.

“borin.” Others similarly convey the idea of blood kinship, but less strongly. Hanna and Lawton’s edition uses “burnes of my blod,” *men* of my blood. Other variants include “barnes,” also men, in Huntington Library MS HM 128 and “lordes” in British Library MS Cotton Caligula A.ii, part I.<sup>113</sup> Being a “burne” of a bloodline identifies one as a man first, and as a member of a bloodline second. To be “borin of [Vespasian’s] blood” conveys directly the act of being born into a bloodline and gives the bloodline primacy. For Vespasian, blood does speak, and it speaks of loyalty—the same blood-borne loyalty that makes Titus rush home to his father with news of his cure before avenging Christ.

The show of blood-borne loyalty is strong. When Vespasian is called to Rome, Titus and Vespasian’s kinsman Sir Sabyn, along with Titus and his brother Domitian, vow to stay until Jerusalem is taken. Titus rises to sovereign of the expedition. When “a boke on a brode scheld was brouzt on to swere” men hold it in their hands and barons kiss it, all in swearing their loyalty to Titus, “the trewe kyng,” until they take the city (1010-12). Blood keeps the battle going when it wanes. In addition, Josephus heals Titus through blood. When Josephus brings Titus’s enemy into his presence, Titus’s “hert in hoote ire sodainly arises/ þe *blode* beganne with þe heete to breede in þe veynes” (1050-1).<sup>114</sup> Thanks to the restored flow of blood, Titus is restored to health. Blood—in its genealogical and biological senses—is what makes the siege on Jerusalem possible.

A man’s blood is of paramount significance in the *Siege* narrative, and any proper reading of the poem must take that into account. The CV scribe clearly reads the

---

<sup>113</sup> Hanna and Lawton, 66, line 969.

<sup>114</sup> Again I quote the Cotton Vespasian version, though this quotation roughly corresponds with other manuscript versions (emphasis mine).

importance of a man's blood in the poem. After Titus has renewed the siege, he is found riding around the town with a small retinue of only sixty. Jewish soldiers have mined their way under the city wall. Five hundred come rushing out from under the wall and attack Titus and his small retinue. Battle ensues. Hanna and Lawton's edition tells us that:

Schaftes schedred were sone and scheldes yþrelled,  
Many schalke þrow-schot with þe scharpe ende,  
*Brunyes* and briȝt yren blody byrunne,  
And many segge at þat saute souȝte to þe grounde (1121-1124, emphasis mine)

[Spear-shafts were soon shattered and shields pierced,  
Many warriors were shot through with the sharp end [of the spear shafts]  
*Mail coats* and bright iron ran bloody,  
And many a man at that assault fell to the ground]

The Cotton Vespasian version paints a slightly different picture.

Shaftes sheuered were sone, sheldes were þrilled  
Many a segge þrouȝ shotte with þe sharpe ende  
*Bernes* and bright Irne blody be ronne  
And many a barin at abraid brusshed to þe dede.<sup>115</sup>

[Spear-shafts soon quivered, shields were pierced  
Many a man was shot through with the sharp end  
*Men* and bright iron ran with blood  
And many a man at a moment was hastened to death]

The take-home message is the same: the battle is brutal, spears pierce shields, and many are killed. The Cotton Vespasian scribe's decision to depict *men* running with blood, as opposed to their coats of armor running with blood, is one he shares only with the scribe of Lambeth Palace Library MS 491, part I. One might easily mistake "brunyes" (alternate spellings include brunie, brunee, brenie, brene, and burne) for "berne," but the choice

---

<sup>115</sup> CV, fol. 72v (emphasis mine).

nonetheless gives us insight into the scribe's thinking. He imagines not spilled blood on armor, but *blood running from bodies*. Both Romans and Jews die in the assault, and the poet does not specify whose blood runs. Out with blood spills the loyalty Vespasian earlier defines by blood. Out with blood spills the only thing that makes (or rather is perceived as making) the warring groups different. Now mingled together, the blood of Christians and Jews is one.

When Josephus heals Titus, shared humanity momentarily supersedes the delusion that blood separates groups—be they religious or, as DuBois's Matthew Towns demonstrates, racial. The Romans owe their newfound Christianity to Jewish religious heritage, and accordingly Titus and the Romans assume the religious genealogy of the Jews. Titus, for his part, owes the biological blood flowing through his heart to a Jew. Finally, the blood of Romans and Jews literally runs together in the battlefield. When Titus responds to Josephus with renewed warfare, and it results in bloodied bodies and indistinguishable allegiances, the poem makes clear that blood difference is indeed a divisive and dangerous illusion, but one that is perhaps inescapable.

#### 4. Blood and Baptism in Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale*

In her 1994 *The Naked Text: Chaucer's Legend of Good Women*, Sheila Delany writes of the *Man of Law's Tale* that Chaucer was “able to deconstruct gender difference” among Christians, but the “same possibility did not exist for an alien ideology embodied in Orientals who, although exposed to Christian truth, rejected it.” She goes on to say that “the conscious infidel” is “eternally Other.”<sup>1</sup> Delany finds that Chaucer's essentialism with regard to Muslims has its basis in “old-fashioned patristic-popular Orientalism” in which non-Christians are enemies with which to war. That is, Chaucer rejects the rationalistic approach to conversion (in which one appeals to a Muslim's reason in order to convert him) that had developed since the twelfth century.<sup>2</sup>

This chapter contends that Chaucer's essentialism is at its core different than the “patristic-popular Orientalism” Delany cites. Instead of viewing non-Christians as enemies on the basis of patristic tradition, the *Man of Law's Tale* offers blood-borne essentialism. In the tale, blood is the node at which the sacramental theology of baptism and conversion meets genealogy. The result is an essentialist ideology more akin to our modern notion of static racial difference than to what this dissertation asserts is a standard medieval (and modern) notion that anyone, regardless of genealogy, can convert to Christianity. While the rise of racial thinking, a discourse of ineluctable and absolute

---

<sup>1</sup> Sheila Delany, *The Naked Text: Chaucer's Legend of Good Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 186.

<sup>2</sup> Delany, 184, cites as rationalists Robert Ketton who translated the Qur'an into Latin in the twelfth century as well as his sponsor Peter the Venerable, twelfth-century abbot of Cluny, who considered Islam a Christian heresy.

difference, is traditionally considered a seventeenth-century phenomenon, this chapter aims to show that race-thinking emerges from religious discourse in the fourteenth century.<sup>3</sup> As Delany points out, Chaucer deconstructs gender difference while he reifies religious difference as something insurmountable, at least in the case of Muslims. In the case of Northumbrian (read: English) pagans, however, Chaucer shows that religious difference can indeed be overcome.<sup>4</sup> This chapter examines the difference in the tale's treatments of Syrian Muslims and Northumbrian pagans in order to arrive at an understanding of the emergence of medieval race-thinking.

Through the shedding of blood and the reorganization of genealogical relationships, the tale shows Syrians and Northumbrians to be very similar in some ways and very different in others. Custance, the Christian daughter of the Roman emperor, travels to Syria in order to marry the Muslim Sultan, who is prepared to convert his entire sultanate to Christianity in order to marry her. Her mother-in-law-to-be massacres the Christians, the Sultan, and his supporters in order to preserve Islam in Syria. Custance is the only Christian left alive, and, at least in the Sultaness's imagination, she is covered in the blood of the slaughtered. The menacing matron puts Custance out to sea in a rudderless boat. Custance is consequently cut off from her familial and communal roots: no Romans know her whereabouts or whether she is alive or dead. Years later, Custance

---

<sup>3</sup> As noted elsewhere in this dissertation, Hannah Arendt coined the term "race-thinking" in her 1951 book *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 211. She defines the term as "the interpretation of history as a natural fight of races."

<sup>4</sup> Northumbria refers to the continent-facing coast of England in the region north of the River Humber. The region is an important scene of English conversion in eighth-century chronicler Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*. It is not surprising that the *Man of Law's Tale* takes it as a scene of English conversion. I will use the terms Northumbrian and English interchangeably throughout this chapter.

washes up on the shores of Northumbria. She befriends and converts the constable of the pagan King Alla and the constable's wife Hermengild. Near the middle of the tale, Hermengild is murdered by a jealous knight who seeks to have his way with Custance and has become frustrated at being rebuffed. He slits Hermengild's throat while she sleeps next to Custance. He then uses the bloody knife to frame the heroine. Custance is accused of the murder and is tried for it. She is proven innocent, marries the Northumbrian king Alla, and converts pagan Northumbria to Christianity. Custance then has a baby with Alla. Custance's English mother-in-law then separates Custance from her new family by putting her out to sea again. Custance returns to Rome where she and her son are eventually reunited with Alla and Custance's father. Despite rejection from both Syrian and Northumbrian communities, Custance successfully brings only the Northumbrian community into her familial fold.

One of the story's most remarkable features is that the planned conversion of the Syrians finds completion in the English Northumbrians. Is it that Syrians cannot convert while Northumbrians can? It is this chapter's position that, ironically, conversion, the very doctrine that should subvert stasis, produces conditions amenable to the rise of static identity. Historian David Nirenberg's writing on religious difference between Muslims, Jews and Christians in medieval Southern France and northern Spain is illuminating:<sup>5</sup>

when medieval people made statements about the consequences of religious difference, they were making claims, not expressing accomplished reality, and these claims were subject to barter and

---

<sup>5</sup> See Robert I. Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society*. See also Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 7.



negotiation before they could achieve real force in any given situation.<sup>6</sup>

Against the backdrop of R.I. Moore's now classic argument that the late Middle Ages saw the birth of a "persecuting discourse" that put European power in Christian hands, Nirenberg finds that Islam, Judaism, and Christianity all put equally variable pressure on one another in medieval Southern France and Northern Spain.

If we follow Nirenberg's assertion that medieval religious difference is best characterized by the negotiation of power instead of the establishment of a fixed power relationship, then it starts to become clear why conversion is the place at which to begin an investigation of the rise of race-thinking. Conversion is the borderline at which Christian identity is negotiated in the Middle Ages. Through conversion, the non-Christian becomes a convert; but he can also convert back to his original faith, becoming apostate; and because the border-crossing works both ways, even the devout convert can always be suspected of apostasy, or of never really having converted in the first place. Race-thinking may very well be the doorstep to conversion's revolving door. With a static notion of difference in place that modifies the requirements for conversion, it becomes much easier to consistently assert rather than negotiate one's power over others.

This chapter aims to show that medieval religious discourse constructs a notion of *static* religious, cultural, and ethnic identity by interpreting the meanings of sacramental blood and genealogical blood. The chapter examines the Syrians' and Northumbrians'

---

<sup>6</sup> Nirenberg, 6.

relationships to Christianity in order to give the modern reader insight into the development of race-thinking in medieval England.

### ***Why Blood?***

Christian conversion's role in the rise of race, and that of Christianity at large, has been accepted by race critics for some time. In his 1965 *Racism and the Christian Understanding of Man*, theologian George Kelsey was one of the first scholars to explicitly explore the relationship between race, practiced Christianity, and history.<sup>7</sup> Kelsey historicizes race to the seventeenth century, arguing for stark differences between fifteenth-century and seventeenth-century slavery. Quoting social anthropologist Ina Corinne Brown, Kelsey writes:

In the fifteenth century Nicholas V issued a papal bull authorizing the Portuguese “to attack, subject, and reduce to *perpetual slavery* the Saracens, pagans, and other enemies of Christ southward of Cape Bojador and Non, including all the coast of Guinea.” The condition attached to this authorization was that the captives must be converted to Christianity, and conversion must be followed by *manumission*.<sup>8</sup>

According to Kelsey, fifteenth-century slavery has the express purpose of converting to Christianity “heathens,” including Saracens—that is, Muslims—pagans, and other non-

---

<sup>7</sup> George Kelsey, *Racism and the Christian Understanding of Man*, 24. Kelsey argues that racism detracts from Christianity, causing Christians to worship normative white racial identity along with Christ. He writes that “when the racist is also a Christian, which is often the case in America, he is frequently a polytheist.”

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 21-2 (emphasis mine). Kelsey quotes Ina Corinne Brown, *Race Relations in a Democracy* (New York: Harper, 1949), 41. The papal bull Kelsey and Brown reference is Pope Nicholas V's bull *Romanus Pontifex* of January 8, 1455 in which he praises the “Catholic kings and princes who...not only restrain the savage excesses of the Saracens and of other infidels, enemies of the Christian name, but also for the defense and increase of the faith vanquish them and their kingdoms and habitations...and subject them to their own temporal dominion.”

Christians. Once they are converted they are to be freed; at first glance, there appears to be little reference to the inferior essence of their being.

By the seventeenth century, Kelsey argues, slavery is no longer about conversion. Instead slavery is a means of economic gain and proponents of slavery offer little more than lip service to Christian conversion. Brown and Kelsey quote a 1602 memorial that the Archbishop of Valencia issued to Philip III of Spain. It reads:

Your majesty may, without any scruple of conscience, make slaves of all the Moriscos and may put them into your own galleys or mines, or sell them to strangers. And as to their children they may be all sold at good rates here in Spain, which will be so far from being a punishment, that it will be a mercy to them; since by that means they will all become Christians....By the holy execution of which piece of Justice, a great sum of money will flow into your majesty's treasury.<sup>9</sup>

Only 150 years later than Nicholas V's bull, this memorial makes no mention of manumitting converted slaves. At that, it says the children of slaves are slaves. Kelsey ascribes the shift to the growth of European colonialism and the fact that "as the techniques of human and natural exploitation became more effective, and the European nations competed for colonial power, the conversion and manumission of the slaves became a pattern of behavior contrary to the political and economic interests of the exploiters."<sup>10</sup> In other words, the idea of race grew up as an afterthought of European expansion, as a justification for it.<sup>11</sup> Kelsey argues that as race became more and more

---

<sup>9</sup> Ina Corinne Brown, *Race Relations in a Democracy* (New York: Harper, 1949), 41. Quoted in Kelsey, *Racism and the Christian Understanding of Man*, 22.

<sup>10</sup> Kelsey, *Racism and the Christian Understanding of Man*, 22.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

economically expedient, and therefore important, Christian conversion became less and less so. Manumission after conversion became undesirable.

While Kelsey argues that the de-emphasis on conversion in matters of slavery is an early seventeenth-century phenomenon, Chaucer's fourteenth-century Sultaness registers fears of conversion and subsequent slavery. Her fear speaks to the fact that an idea of slavery that did not privilege conversion and manumission was current in the fourteenth century. The Sultaness pretends to go along with her son's plan to convert to Christianity. In secret, she plans a massacre in order to preserve Islam in Syria. The Muslim Sultaness calls together her privy council and predicts what will happen if Syria converts:

What sholde us tyden of this newe lawe  
But thraldom to oure bodies and penance,  
And afterward in helle to be drawe,  
For we reneyed Mahoun oure creance?  
But lordes, wol ye maken assurance,  
As I shal seyn, assentyng to my lore,  
And I shal make us sauf for everemoore? (337-344) <sup>12</sup>

She argues that avoiding conversion will keep the Syrian people "sauf," safe, from "thraldom to oure bodies," or bodily slavery. <sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> *Man of Law's Tale*, in Chaucer, *Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987). All my Chaucer line numbers and references are from this edition.

<sup>13</sup> Even if "thraldom to our bodies" is not necessarily chattel slavery, it at very least uses language that could refer to slavery in order to imply the extent of Muslim subjection to Christians. Custance attributes to the lot of women the same "thraldom" and "penance" in line 286. It is with good reason that the first studies to address race in the *Man of Law's Tale* have largely been feminist. The first of these is Glory Dharamaj's "Multicultural Subjectivity in Reading Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale*" in *Medieval Feminist Newsletter* 16 (1993): 4-8. Several years later, Susan Schibanoff more extensively explores "racial" difference in "Worlds Apart: Orientalism, Antifeminism, and Heresy in Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale*" in *Exemplaria* 8.1 (1996): 59-96. Schibanoff argues that the tale uses orientalist discourse, in which Islam is dangerous precisely because of its extreme similarity to Christianity, in order to reinforce confraternity

The Sultanness's fear of slavery is apparently original to Chaucer. Chaucer's source for the scene (and for much of the tale) is the early fourteenth century Anglo-Norman "De la noble femme Constance" in *Les Cronicles*, a collection of universal history from the Creation through the fourteenth century written by Oxford Dominican historian and scholar Nicholas Trevet and completed around 1334.<sup>14</sup> (Chaucer's other source was Book II of Gower's *Confessio Amantis*. Completed around the same time as Chaucer's tale, the *Confessio* also uses Trevet as its source.)<sup>15</sup> In Trevet's tale, the Sultanness "qe ele avoit privé alliaunce de covenant ov sept cenx Sarasins qe s'abandonerent de vivre et morer en la querele" ["she made a secret alliance by covenant with seven hundred Saracens to commit themselves to abandon life and die in the quarrel"], but Trevet's Sultanness does not lament of slavery, nor does she meet with a council of advisers.<sup>16</sup> Chaucer's Sultanness, on the other hand, views the pending conversion as a matter worthy of political consultation, and she equates Christian conversion with unending slavery for her people. What the Sultanness fears is a far cry

---

between western Christian men against the female other. In "The Elvyssh Power of Constance: Christian Feminism in Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Man of Law's Tale*," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 23 (2001): 143-80, Elizabeth Robertson argues that Islam in the tale stands in for the threat that feminized apostolic Christianity, where the feminine is "less coercive, less hierarchical, and more communal," poses to 'masculine' institutional Roman Catholicism. It does, however, seem to me that it would be hard to characterize the Sultanness's behavior as "less coercive."

<sup>14</sup> For a discussion of Trevet's own relationship to the tale, see Robert M. Correale, "The Man of Law's Prologue and Tale," in Robert M. Correale and Mary Hamel, eds., *Sources and Analogues of the Canterbury Tales*, vol 2 (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2005), 279-88.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., and Geraldine Heng's *Empire of Magic: Medieval Romance and the Politics of Cultural Fantasy*, 228. See also Trevet's "Life of Constance," 167, and John Gower, "Tale of Constance," in Correale and Hamel, 330-350.

<sup>16</sup> Correale and Hamel, 301, lines 76-7. The text "De la noble femme Constance" is printed in Correale and Hamel's edition of *Sources and Analogues*, 296-329. The translation is mine with reference to Correale's.

from the slavery in the service of conversion, followed by manumission, that Kelsey attributes to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

Late medieval fear of enslavement upon conversion has everything to do with the discovery of new lands. The Canary Islands off the coast of Africa were (re-)discovered by a Portuguese expedition in 1341.<sup>17</sup> This discovery set off a debate between Portugal and Spain for control of the Canaries that lasted for over a century.<sup>18</sup> In his October 3, 1434 bull, Pope Eugenius IV (1431-47) warns against slaving in the islands, writing:

...sed quia nonnulli ex dicatarum insularum [insulis de Canaria] iam conversis ad fidem per aliquos Christiani nominis marinos piratas fuerunt hactenus capitvati, expedit ut nos qui omnium Christiani fidelium et praesertim talium noviter conversorum pastores et custodes existimus circa premissa taliter providere curemus ut et ipsi iam conversi securitate debita gaudeant, et alii a conversione metu captivitatis hujusmode minime retrahantur...<sup>19</sup>

[...But some from the said islands [the Canary Islands] already converted to the faith were by some sea pirates, Christians in name, taken captive; set them free in order that for all faithful Christians and especially such recent converts we be shepherds and guardians and care to provide that the same already converted persons, owed security, may rejoice, and others may not draw back from conversion for fear of captivity...]

---

<sup>17</sup> David Abulafia, *The Discovery of Mankind: Atlantic Encounters in the Age of Columbus* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), chapter 4, especially pages 36-39. Abulafia describes the first known landing by European sailors. In July 1341 three ships set out for the Canaries from Lisbon. While they knew of the islands' existence from previous reports, now lost, their cargo (horses and heavy arms) intimates that they expected to wage war against "well-defended towns and fortresses." It was clear they knew little of the islands' inhabitants. Abulafia points out that the Genoese Lançalotto Malocello had explored in those waters around 1336 and may have been one means by which they knew about the islands.

<sup>18</sup> Frances Gardiner Davenport, trans. and ed., *European Treaties Bearing on the History of the United States and its Dependencies* (Washington DC: Carnegie Institution, 1917), 9-10. After the discovery of the archipelago, the Castilian and Portuguese crowns claimed the islands for their own. While a number of papal bulls were issued in favor of each power, the dispute was not settled until 1479, when Portugal ceded control to Castile.

<sup>19</sup> Eugenius IV's bull appears in Don Rafael Torres Campos, *Carácter de la conquista y colonización de las Islas Canarias: Discursos leídos ante la Real Academia de la Historia* (Madrid, 1901), 207-8.

Some thirty years after Chaucer's death, Pope Eugenius's response to the situation in the Canaries proves well founded the Sultaness's fear that European Christians will enslave non-European converts. Eugenius seeks to avoid having Canarians feel just as the Sultaness does; he exhorts Christians not to enslave Canarians in order that they do not fear to convert.

By 1452, Pope Nicholas V (1447-55) had very different ideas about the Canaries and continental Africa. The 1455 bull that Kelsey quotes restates Nicholas V's June 18, 1452, bull *Dum Diversas*, which grants King Alfonso V of Portugal "general and indefinite powers to search out and conquer all pagans, enslave them and appropriate their lands and goods."<sup>20</sup> Nicholas writes:

...tuamque Regiam Magestatem in hujusmodi sanctissimo proposito confovere merito cupientes, tibi Sarracenos, et paganos, aliosque infideles, et Christi inimicos quoscunque, et ubicunque constitutos regna, ducatus, comitatus, principatus aliaque dominia, terras, loca, villae, castra, et quaecunque alia possessiones, bona mobilia et immobilia in quibuscunque rebús consistentia, et quocunque nomine censeantur, per eosdem Sarracenos, paganos, infideles, et Christi inimicos detenta, et possessa, etiam cujuscuque seu quorumcunque regis, seu principis, aut regum, vel principum regna, ducatus, comitatus, principatus, alique dominia, terrae, loca, villae, castra, possessiones, et bona hujusmodi fuerint, invadendi, conquerendi, expugnandi, et subjugandi, *illorumque personas in perpetuam servitutem redigendi.*<sup>21</sup>

[and your Royal Majesty, deserving of reward, by way of this most holy decree, we have cared for you to invade, conquer, assault, and subjugate the Saracens, and pagans, and other infidels, and whichever enemies of Christ, and wherever are constituted kingdoms, dukedoms, retinues,

---

<sup>20</sup> Davenport, 12.

<sup>21</sup> Quoted in Davenport, 17, note 37 (emphasis mine). This is Davenport's translation.

principalities and other dominions, lands, places, villages, fortresses, and whichever other possessions, both movable and immovable and consisting in whatever things, and held in whatever name, by the same Saracens, pagans, infidels, and enemies of Christ detained and possessed, and also whichever dukedoms, camps, principalities, or other dominions, lands, places, villages there were, whether ruled by king, or prince, or kings, or princes, dukes, fortresses, possessions, and goods, and their persons to *reduce to perpetual servitude*.]

Nicholas calls for complete conquest of any non-Christians who stand in the way of Portuguese control of the Canaries and the western coast of Africa. In addition to their goods and property, he instructs the Portuguese crown to seize their bodies and hold them in “perpetuam servitatem,” perpetual slavery. Contrary to Kelsey’s assertion that fifteenth-century slavery is a means to the ends of conversion and manumission, the Sultaness’s fear of perpetual slavery is realized in the Pope’s edict.<sup>22</sup>

Kelsey may be right to recognize that as race-thinking emerges in the West, conversion becomes less desirable, but the Sultaness’s fear and Nicholas’s bull evidence the fact that the idea that the slave is always a slave regardless of conversion is available

---

<sup>22</sup> Kelsey, too assured in his timeline, would have done well to use a complete quotation of the 1455 bull *Romanus Pontifex* instead of Brown’s paraphrase. The 1455 bull, like the 1452 bull it restates, says nothing about manumission. The bull reasserts beyond the shadow of a doubt the 1452 bull’s exhortation to enslave non-Christians: “Nos, premissa omnia et singula debita meditatione pensantes, ac attendantes quod cum olim prefato Alfonso Regiquoscunque Sarracenos et paganos aliosque Christi inimicos ubicunque constitutos, ac regna, ducatus, principatus, dominia, possessiones, et mobilia ac immobilia bona quaecunque per eos detenta ac possessa invadendi, coquirendi, expugnandi, debellandi, et subjugandi, illorumque personas *in perpetuam servitatem redigendi*, ac regna, ducatus, comitatus, principatus, dominia, possessiones, et bona sibi et successoribus suis applicandi, appropriandi, ac in suos successorumque suorum usus et utilitatem convertendi...” [We, weighing all and singular premises with appropriate meditation, and attending to how it was formerly mentioned to King Alfonso (V of Portugal)—as to Saracens and pagans and other enemies of Christ wherever constituted, and their kingdoms, dukedoms, principalities, dominions, possessions, and all movable and immovable goods whatsoever held and possessed by them—to invade, conquer, assault, vanquish, and subjugate, and *to reduce their persons to perpetual slavery*, and to apply and appropriate to himself and his successors their kingdoms, dukedoms, counties, principalities, dominions, possessions, and to convert them to his and his successors’ use and profit] (emphasis mine). This is my translation, with reference to that of Davenport, 16-17, 23.



to Chaucer in the late fourteenth century and persists in the early fifteenth. Kelsey argues that, by the seventeenth century, admitting the oppressed into full and equal humanity upon their conversion becomes not only undesirable for those in power, but theoretically impossible. It appears that Europeans' need to oppress non-Christians and control their goods makes manumission upon conversion hard to enforce for some and theoretically impossible for others in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries as well.

Kelsey and the Sultaness essentially ask the same question: who can be enslaved and why? The question might be rephrased, who is fully human and why? Both turn to blood for their answers. Kelsey considers genealogical blood a marker of in- or out-group status. He tells us that racism grows as faith until, in its most complete and *modern* form, “the fundamental racist affirmation” becomes that “the in-race is glorious and pure as to its being, and out-races are defective and depraved as to their being.”<sup>23</sup> Once race becomes a matter of essential being, then changing group membership is no longer possible. One set of people, defined by some commonly accepted marker, is the in-group, and those not possessing the necessary mark of in-group membership are categorically and immutably out.

For Kelsey, relying on an established concept of race in the Western world, “blood” is the mark of ontological group membership status. Explaining Ruth Benedict’s statement that the “duty to keep the ‘blood’ unmixed is a refinement based on so-called science,” Kelsey writes,

---

<sup>23</sup> Kelsey, *Racism and the Christian Understanding of Man*, 24.

the line of demarcation between groups is racial when the in-group seeks to keep its “blood” pure, no matter what the cultural state of affairs may be and no matter where the lines of political jurisdiction may be located.<sup>24</sup>

It is when groups seek to keep their genealogies separate, restricting intergroup marriage and childbirth, that a relationship becomes racial as opposed to ethnocentric.<sup>25</sup> Kelsey puts “blood” in scare quotes in order to convey that blood is a symbol for genealogy. That is, if members of the out-group can be discerned in one’s genealogical line, whether by physiognomy or some other marker, then that person is said to share the out-group’s blood. (Racial judgments are not based on empirical evidence that the blood running through the descendant’s veins is the *same* physical stuff as that of their ancestors; rather they are based on perceived descent, only symbolized by the notion of blood.) The blood of genealogy carries within itself the *defectiveness* and *depravity* of the out-group’s being. If a person is perceived to be depraved by blood, Kelsey argues, then the full humanity that should come with Christian conversion must be impossible for him. By the same token, a person depraved by blood can be enslaved.

The Sultanness, like Kelsey, interprets blood, but she interprets blood as genealogical *and* sacramental. Her genealogical interpretation stems from the fact that it is her son who is about to convert Syria to Christianity in order to marry a foreign woman

---

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 20. Quoting Ruth Benedict, *Race: Science and Politics* (rev. ed.; New York, 1947), 100-101.

<sup>25</sup> Benedict, 100. Quoted in Kelsey, 20. Benedict writes of ethnocentric enemies, “They do not keep their ‘blood’ separate; each tribe may have made a practice of raiding for women in the other group, and their ancestry therefore may be traceable to the despised group almost in the same proportion as their own vaunted one.”

of a different religion.<sup>26</sup> The idea of familial blood was certainly not foreign to Chaucer. He refers to characters' blood as a marker of identity several times, in the *Man of Law's Tale* and elsewhere. Chaucer refers to Custance's family blood when he refers to her "blood roial" in line 657. He also addresses the blood of lineage in the *Monk's Tale* when he relates the story of Zenobia in lines 2551-2.<sup>27</sup>

The Sultanness's sacramental interpretation of blood occurs in the presence of her council. The Sultanness brings up baptism and imagines Custance covered so thoroughly in blood that baptismal water will not wash it off (351-8).<sup>28</sup> The Sultanness offers a vituperative parody of baptism that uses blood in place of water. Like Kelsey's genealogical blood, quasi-baptismal blood marks the out-group (Custance, her Christian retinue, and Christians in general, according to the Sultanness). The Sultanness's quasi-baptism of Custance is one of the foci of this chapter.

Medievalists have long considered Eucharistic blood to be of major import to the literary criticism of medieval texts, and baptism has usually taken a back seat to Eucharist. Baptism has been perceived as wielding nowhere near the divisive power

---

<sup>26</sup> Chaucer is certainly interested in genealogical bloodlines. It is significant that Custance's nemeses are her two mothers-in-law, both women vehemently interested in preserving their bloodlines from what they see as Custance's polluting influence. Her second mother-in-law considers her "so strange a creature" in line 700, questioning Custance's origins, even to the point of questioning her humanity.

<sup>27</sup> Hannaford, 5. In his recent survey of the history of the idea of race, Ivan Hannaford notes that scientific race did not yet exist in the Middle Ages. Hannaford does, however, assert that in the late Middle Ages, the word "race" was sometimes used to refer to the "lineage or continuity of generations in families." He goes on to say that it was not until the seventeenth century that the term began to have a specific connotation different from Latin *gens*, or clan. In making his claim that the idea of race did not yet exist in the Middle Ages, Hannaford's own evidence shows that while full-fledged race may not have yet existed, its basis in the blood of lineage very much did.

<sup>28</sup> The passage is quoted and discussed at length below.

within Christian communities that debates around Eucharist did.<sup>29</sup> Both discourses, however—Eucharistic and baptismal—concern themselves with manifestations of blood and its role in the creation of communities and their borders.<sup>30</sup> While Eucharist is the means of persisting in the Christian community, baptism must come first. As baptism is the gateway to Christianity, the object of the Sultaness's fear, and the means by which the Sultaness parodies Christianity, this chapter takes baptismal washing and its associated symbols (water, blood) as the semiotics of the *Man of Law's Tale*. In the *Man of Law's Tale*, blood flows in order to construct a sacramental theology that asks: What is it to be human? Who should be subjugated? And what does a Christian community in the fourteenth century look like? That is, who can be baptized? The tale concludes that the boundaries of community are largely genealogical and not so dissimilar from our contemporary notion of racial communities.

---

<sup>29</sup> See, for example Miri Rubin's *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), and her *Gentile Tales: The Narrative Assault on Late Medieval Jews* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004). In her recent book on late medieval blood piety, *Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 13, historian Caroline Walker Bynum laments that "the tendency in recent scholarship to make Eucharist the semiotics of the late Middle Ages or to interpret all meditative practice as 'spiritual communion' obscures much."

<sup>30</sup> Bynum, 13, points out that "in many fifteenth-century devotions, [Christ's] side wound is invoked either as the source of all seven sacraments or as the source of two non-Eucharistic ones—penance (blood) and baptism (water)."

### ***Interpreting Genealogical Blood***

The *Man of Law's Tale* interprets blood. In the beginning, when Custance prepares to set forth from Rome, blood symbolizes genealogy. When the Sultanness imagines blood covering Custance, it symbolizes sacrament. Chaucer's tale begins with genealogy, and this chapter follows suit by investigating genealogical blood before the sacramental. Genealogical blood is of paramount importance to Custance's identity, and her blood and its effects are interpreted in wholly contradictory manners by different interpreters.

The *Man of Law's Tale* is a family romance: it makes much of Custance's Roman, and eventually English, familial bonds at the beginning and end of the tale. The *Man of Law's Tale's* action begins with tension over intermarriage and its effect on familial blood lines. When Custance learns that she is to be married to a Muslim Sultan in Syria, she laments her parents' decision but intends to honor it:

“Fader,” she seyde, “thy wrecched child Custance,  
Thy yonge doghter fostred up so softe,  
And ye, my mooder, my soverayn plesance  
Over alle thyng, out-taken Crist on-lofte,  
Custance youre child hire recomandeth ofte  
Unto youre grace, for I shal to Surrye,  
Ne shal I nevere seen yow moore with ye. (274-80)

Custance's heavy use of the language of family reminds the reader whose daughter she is and appeals to the power of family and community. Custance foregrounds her family's importance when she calls her mother her “sovereign pleasure,” apologetically referring to Christ as an afterthought. When she recommends herself to her mother's grace, she is as Christ asking God the Father to take the cup of suffering from his lips in Gethsemane:

she does not expect a reprieve, but she certainly would not mind an alternative. The narrator tells us as much when he states, “Custance...dresseth hire to wende; / For wel she seeth ther is noon oother ende” (264-6). For Custance, who is certain she will never see her beloved parents again, the creation of a new “blood” relationship in her marriage and eventual childbearing requires that she break “blood” ties with her parental family. To bridge the gap between the two families, which is in effect the intention of the marriage match, seems impossible to Custance, and the divide between Rome and Syria, between Christianity and Islam, seems so impassable that she cannot possibly hope to be reunited with her family. Custance has good reason to consider the difference between her old relationships and her new ones insurmountable: it turns out that she is correct about the divide between Syria and Rome, but thanks to her Northumbrian marriage, she does manage to unite her new family with the old.

If Custance’s lament at separation from her parents is not enough evidence of the tale’s concern with genealogy, Chaucer’s reference to Custance’s “blood” is. When tried for Hermengyld’s murder, which she did not commit, Custance is in mortal peril. The evidence is stacked against her, and since she is outside her community, having been cut off from Rome when the Sultanness put her out to sea, her royal identity is unknown.

Chaucer’s narrator describes the scene of Custance’s trial:

Have ye nat seyn somtyme a pale face,  
Among a prees, of hym that hath be lad  
Toward his deeth, wher as hym gat no grace,  
And swich a colour in has face hath had  
Men myghte knowe his face that was bistad  
Amonges alle the faces in that route?  
So stant Custance, and looketh hire aboute.

.....  
An Emperoures doghter stant allone;  
She hath no wight to whom to make hir mone.  
*O blood roial*, that stondest in this drede,  
Fer been they freendes at they grete nede! (645-51; 655-8, emphasis mine)

The narrator uses Custance's royal lineage synecdochically as the epitome of her identity. First, he tells us that Custance stands before the king and crowd. Then he distills down Custance's identity to the fact that she is the emperor's daughter. Finally, he reduces her to her "blood roial." Custance embodies her genealogical line, even when that line goes unrecognized by those around her.

Chaucer understands Custance's genealogical "blood" as in close relationship with her literal blood in order that Custance's blood can be interpreted visually. Custance's face is pale because all the blood has run out of it, and her face is compared to that of a condemned man going to the gallows; the narrator clues us in that she is as good as dead. The narrator also describes her standing before the king "as the lamb toward his death is brought," bringing to mind Christ's Crucifixion (617). The identity that Custance's blood stands for becomes most important when the possibility of literal bloodshed is most prevalent. Reflecting on Custance's bodily blood's reaction to fear in such close proximity to the synecdochic reference to her "blood roial," the tale equates Custance's genealogy with her bodily blood.

The use of blood as a symbol for genealogy was common in the Middle Ages, as now, but in the Middle Ages tangible, biological blood and genealogical blood were generally taken to be one and the same thing. The *OED* traces the use of "blood" as in kinship to an English song version of the story of Genesis and Exodus, circa 1250.

Referring to Abraham's son Isaac, the song tells us, "He was bigeten of kinde blod."<sup>31</sup> The *MED* traces its use to circa 1300, though possibly as early as 1225, in a version of *King Horn* found in Cambridge MS Gg.4.27, which reads "We beop..Icome of gode kenne Of Cristene blode & kynges."<sup>32</sup> Citing a variety of medieval sources that refer to lineage as blood, including Second Lateran's (1139) injunction that "ecclesiastical honours depend not on blood relationships, but on merit," Bettina Bildhauer writes, "Just as blood was imagined as suffusing and uniting the individual body, so it was envisaged as connecting the members of a social body, as blood was actually believed to be passed on from parents to children and shared between members of a family."<sup>33</sup> Chaucer's synecdochic reference to Custance as "blood roial" is more literal than the modern reader might expect; she is literally filled with her father's blood.

From her father's blood, Custance takes her form. Medieval physiological theory, following Aristotle, held that a man's blood, in the form of sperm, provided a fetus with form while a woman's menstrual blood provided raw, unformed matter. On medieval reproductive theory, Bildhauer cites Isidore of Seville:

Blood relatives are so called because they are born of one blood, that is, of one father's seed. For the seed of the man is the foam of blood, like water which batters the rocks and creates a white foam, or also like red wine, which becomes a whitish foam when stirred in a chalice.<sup>34</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup> *The story of Genesis and Exodus, an early English song c. 1250* (London: EETS, 1865, repr. 1873), 42, line 1452.

<sup>32</sup> Joseph Hall, ed., *King Horn* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901), 177.

<sup>33</sup> Bettina Bildhauer, *Medieval Blood* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2006), 134.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*



This is to say that semen and blood are the same stuff. On the purpose of blood in the form of semen, Bildhauer quotes Aristotle's *Generation of Animals*: "The female always provides the material, the male provides that which fashions the materials into shape; this, in our view, is the specific characteristic of each of the sexes."<sup>35</sup> Bildhauer explains, "Fathers thus contribute to human and animal bodies the form, the non-material shape with which it is stamped, while mothers contribute the material, the substance, the matter. No material is added to the embryo by the father's seed, simply an abstract shape, like that made by a seal."<sup>36</sup> The emperor authors Custance's form.

The interpretation of Custance's form underlay the *Man of Law's Tale* from its very beginning. In the tale, Syrian merchants travel to Rome on business. While there, they hear of Custance's beauty, youth, virtue, humility, courtesy, holiness, and generosity (162-8). In line 172, they make it their business to see her before they return to Syria. The tale does not convey the sense that they speak with her nor indeed that they interact with her at all. They only see her. Upon their return, the Sultan asks the merchants what news or wonders they have heard or seen. In response, they tell him about Custance:

Amonges othere thynges, specially,  
Thise marchantz han hym toold of dame Custance  
So greet noblesse in earnest, ceriously,  
That this Sowdan hat caught so greet pleasance  
To han hir figure in his remembrance,  
That al his lust and al his busy cure  
Was fo to love hire while his lyf may dure. (183-9)

---

<sup>35</sup> Aristotle, *Generation of Animals*, ed. and trans. A.L. Peck (London: Heinemann, 1963), 184-5 (2.738b). Quoted in Bildhauer, 87.

<sup>36</sup> Bildhauer, 88.

Despite all the report of her “noblesse,” the Sultan has Custance’s “figure” in mind. For the merchants, who must see her in order to believe the reports, and the Sultan, her character and deeds give way to her image. Her image, or form, in both cases, confirms the reports of her noble character. The generative relationship between biological blood, genealogical nobility, and physical form means that when the Syrians interpret Custance’s image, they interpret her blood as well.

In addition to the blood-borne beauty the tale attributes to Custance, the tale is also concerned with blood’s ability to contaminate. This is the main concern of King Alla’s mother Donegild when the king marries Custance in the second half of the tale.

Chaucer writes:

But who was woful, if I shal nat lye,  
Of this weddyng but Donegild, and namo,  
The kynges mooder, ful of tirannye?  
Hir thoughte hir cursed herte brast atwo.  
She wolde noght hir sone had do so;  
Hir thoughte a despit that he sholde take  
So *strange a creature* unto his make. (694-700, emphasis mine)

Medievalist and gender scholar Peggy McCracken has noted similarities between Chaucer’s tale and Jean Maillart’s early fourteenth century French *Roman du comte d’Anjou*. In the French tale, an aunt, the Countess of Chartres, becomes suspicious of her royal niece-in-law’s lineage and intercepts letters informing her nephew, who is out of the country just like Alla in the *Man of Law’s Tale*, that his wife has born him a child. As does Donegild in the *Man of Law’s Tale*, the aunt falsifies letters telling her nephew that

his wife has born him a monster.<sup>37</sup> McCracken argues that the countess is anxious about what the child will inherit from its mother's unknown genealogical blood.<sup>38</sup> Considering Custance a "strange creature," Donegild focuses on Custance's foreignness to the point that she questions Custance's humanity. Indeed, she makes clear her fears about genealogy when she claims in her falsified letters that Custance is an elf and that, as such, the baby is a "horrible feendly creature" (750-56).

The text's answer to the question of what it is to be human and what community looks like revolves around the interpretation of one's genealogical and biological blood. If one's genealogy is known, as Custance's is by the merchants and the Sultan, she is a known entity. She is interpreted as fully human and fully a member of a community with all the rights that pertain thereto. If on the other hand, one's genealogy is unknown, as Custance's is for Donegild, then one is interpreted as inhuman and existing outside community. The fact that Custance's genealogical roots are unknown allows Donegild to claim that Custance is biologically not a human being at all, but rather an elf. In both

---

<sup>37</sup> Peggy McCracken, *The Curse of Eve, the Wound of the Hero: Blood, Gender, and Medieval Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 65-6.

<sup>38</sup> McCracken, 71. She argues that the *roman* is obsessed with a new mother's customary lying-in period, or *gesine*, and implicitly with women's blood—the blood of parturition and genealogical bloodlines. The notion that blood was a potential contaminant was so strong that blood could pollute a child not only in the womb but after birth as well. Clarissa W. Atkinson, in *The Oldest Vocation: Christian Motherhood in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 60, and McCracken, 71, have discussed blood's role in the transmission of essential qualities after birth. Like semen, breastmilk was considered a purified form of blood. Equating blood and milk, late fourteenth and fifteenth century Franciscan Bernardino of Siena writes: "The child acquires certain of the customs of the one who suckles him. If the one who cares for him has evil customs or is of base condition, he will receive impress of those customs because of having sucked her polluted blood." McCracken cites "antisemitic fictions" that Jewish families required Christian wet-nurses to express their breast milk into toilets for three days after receiving the Eucharist. These stories, she says, are based on "the idea that breast-milk...can pass on the characteristics of the woman who nurses—even if she is not the mother of the child." Blood, then, has a life of its own, and when shared, whether by genealogical relation or otherwise, blood is a possible contaminant.

cases, it is the condition of the interpreter—knowledgeable or ignorant, biased for or biased against—that has everything to do with the interpretation of genealogical blood.

### ***Interpreting Holy Blood***

Custance's genealogical blood is not the only blood that requires interpretation. When the Sultaness imagines Custance covered in the blood of the slaughtered, the blood is at once indicative of foul murder, the Sultaness's sacrifice of her child to save Islam, and hatred of Christianity. At the same time, blood becomes sacramental as well as genealogical. Should the murdered would-be converts, in whose blood Custance is covered, be considered venerable Christian martyrs baptized in their own blood or violated Islamic infidels? The answer may be both. In order to explore how the *Man of Law's Tale* uses genealogy in the context of religious identity, this section examines medieval interpretations of sacramental blood.

In the tale, blood is interpreted in conflicting ways. Blood's ambiguity has its roots in late medieval religious practice. In her 2007 *Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond*, historian Caroline Walker Bynum has shown that in the thirteenth through fifteenth centuries European (especially but not exclusively northern European) devotional art, text, and reported visions became increasingly bloody.<sup>39</sup> The “frenzy for blood” extended far beyond art, text, and visions,

---

<sup>39</sup> Bynum, *Wonderful Blood*, 1-4.

and even beyond a fascination with the Eucharist to include a variety of blood relics.<sup>40</sup> These relics, which inspired a number of pilgrimage sites, included blood supposedly shed from Christ's side, bleeding pieces of the Cross, and bleeding Hosts. The variety of objects that were labeled *sanguis Christi*, Bynum shows, included "relics, contact relics, miracle hosts, desecrated wafers."<sup>41</sup> Almost all of these examples of *sanguis Christi* were "fraught with ambivalence." That is, they inspired two emotional reactions: one of worship of Christ and joy at his holiness, as evidenced by pilgrims' belief in the blood's healing powers, and disgust at the violence done to Christ, as evidenced by the rise of blood libel stories in the fifteenth century. Blood was at once a symbol of veneration and one of violation.<sup>42</sup>

The Sultaness interprets blood in a variety of ways—genealogical and sacramental, as an object of veneration and one of violation—and her uses of blood are all in the service of vaunting static religious identity over threatening conversion. First of all, the Sultaness mirrors Christian concerns with the genealogical blood of Christ when

---

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 4. Bynum points out that the fascination with the Eucharist had much to do with the clergy's withdrawal of the Eucharistic chalice from the laity in the twelfth century. She writes: "Mystics (especially women mystics), who were denied access to the cup at mass, repeatedly experienced both the flooding of ecstasy through their limbs and the taste of the wafer in their mouths as blood."

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 48, 68. Bynum writes that bleeding hosts—bleeding because abused by Jews—"tended to eclipse blood relics by the late fifteenth century."

<sup>42</sup> While *veneration and violation* are my paired terms for this dual discourse surrounding blood, Bynum and Bildhauer have both identified similar twinning. See Bildhauer, 135, for her treatment of the "blood of kinship and the blood of violence." In an article earlier than her book entitled "The Blood of Christ in the later Middle Ages," *Church History* 71.4 (December 2002): 685-714, at 699 and 713, Bynum writes that those who sought to venerate blood saw in it violation and "breach," or "access to the very heart of God" and refers to a culture of "blood veneration." The duality of discourse surrounds baptism as well as blood. In his Ph.D. dissertation, *Body Politics: Otherness and the Representation of Bodies in Late Medieval Writings* (University of British Columbia, 1997), 80-1, Martin Blum notes that the Sultaness's imagining Custance covered in blood and baptism's inability to cleanse her "highlights the negative side of baptism, which as a ritual of acceptance into the Christian community is also constructed as an instrument of exclusion against those who seek an existence outside the Christian faith."

she asserts her blood kinship to the Islamic God Allah. When she first calls her council together to announce her plan to stop Syria's conversion to Christianity, she proclaims:

But oon avow to grete God I heete,  
The lyf shal rather out of my body sterte  
Or Makometes lawe out of myn herte! (334-6)

She vows to give up her life before she will give up Islam. The terms with which she stakes her claim are of utmost importance: life and heart. Both terms call to mind blood, the means by which life could "start" or *spurt* out of her body. Furthermore, when she has her son, his retinue, and Custance's entourage stabbed to death, they presumably shed quite a bit of blood; as I have shown above, the Sultanness might very well consider her son's shed blood her own.<sup>43</sup> The Sultanness in effect pledges her blood to "Mohammad's law", preferring to preserve that in her heart over the genealogical blood her son embodies.<sup>44</sup> When she makes this choice, she subtly invokes a tradition in which Christians conceived of themselves as related by blood to Christ.

The tradition that held that humans could boast of kinship by blood with God in Christ is demonstrable in Wolfram von Eschenbach's Middle High German *Parzival*.

---

<sup>43</sup> While not explicit in Chaucer, John Gower's *Confessio Amantis* has the table so covered in blood that the cups and dishes are filled with it. Some scholars' work, including McCracken's, 71, would suggest that the Sultanness's murder of her son is definitely a violation of her own body. After all, he did come forth from her body, and according to Aristotelian theory, the raw material for his body is taken directly from the Sultanness's. Regardless of whether we find her murder of her son the same as self violation, the fact remains that her veneration of God requires the violation of her own genealogical bloodline.

<sup>44</sup> Following Edward Said's assertion that in the fifteenth century, Christians sought to "make it clear to Muslims that Islam was just a misguided version of Christianity" (Edward Said, *Orientalism* [New York: Vintage, 1979], 61), Schibanoff, 70, notes that "Islam was commonly misrepresented as a [Christian] heresy, a viper all the more dangerous for its proximity to Christianity's bosom, its intimacy with the 'true faith.'" The incorrect belief that Mohammed was to Islam as Christ was to Christianity, Said, 60, points out, is the reason for the "polemic name 'Mohammedanism.'" If one subscribes to this argument, then Chaucer's Sultanness, like her Christian counterparts who imagine themselves kin to Christ, certainly imagines herself kin to the Islamic God as manifest in the person of Mohammed.

Parzival unintentionally kills his mother, and the character Trevrizent likens the act to Cain killing Abel:

From Adam's kin came regret and joy, because he whom every angel looks up to does not deny his kinship with us, and because kinship is the vehicle of sin, so that we have to carry sin.<sup>45</sup>

Bildhauer writes, "Because of everyone's family ties to God and each other, Cain's sin, like all others, offends the rules of his father, God, and harms his offspring as well as being a transgression against his brother...the concept of blood-relations is thus inextricably linked to inevitable offenses against them..."<sup>46</sup> That is, Cain's act at once offends his father God and participates in the genealogical passing on of sin begun by Adam and Eve's transgression in the garden. In Trevrizent's estimation of Cain's action, the dual interpretations of veneration and violation are manifest: Adam's genealogical line inspires both "regret and joy" because sin is passed through Adam's genealogy and so is relationship to God. To put it another way, the venerable blood line shared between God and all humans has been violated by sin. Christ, of course, at once the "son of Man" and the son of God, is the lynchpin of the divine and human genealogical line Bildhauer locates in *Parzival*.

The Sultaness mirrors the Christian duality of blood veneration and violation when she makes her blood pledge to Mohammad. The Sultaness's blood pledge is certainly a sign of religious veneration—she worships Muhammad with her very life. Her

---

<sup>45</sup> Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival*, ed. Eberhard Nellman, 2 vols, Bibliothek des Mittelalters, 8 (Frankfurt/Main: Deutscher Klassiker-Verlag, 1994), 465, lines 1-6. Quoted and translated in Bildhauer, 136.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

pledge is inspired, however, by the fear that her religious identity will be violated. Her promise to violate her own body in order to save Syrian Islam, shedding her own blood if that is what it takes, emphasizes the very close relationship between veneration and violation.

In the tale, veneration and violation are inextricable from one another; the Sultaness's fear of violation leads to her interpretation of baptism as a violent act. When she imagines Custance covered in blood, the scene at once expresses her fear of violation and a violent (mis-) understanding of Christian baptism. During her privy council, the Sultaness conveys to her co-conspirators what she would like to see happen:

We shul firste feyne us christendom to take –  
Coold water shal nat greve us but a lite! –  
And I shal swich a feeste and revel make  
That, as I trowe, I shal the Sowdan quite.  
For thogh his wyf be cristned never so white,  
She shal have nede to wasshe away the rede,  
Though she a font-ful water with her lede. (351-8)

The Sultaness makes fun of Christian baptism and its claims that it washes the soul white with the blood of Christ.<sup>47</sup> The Sultaness vituperatively parodies baptism in response to the threat of being baptized herself. Her point of view is clear in that, in addition to making fun of baptism, she represents it as a violent act facilitated by mass murder. If the tradition of blood relic veneration Bynum examines teaches one anything, it is that negative associations with bloodshed cannot persist without their attendant positive

---

<sup>47</sup> Bynum, *Wonderful Blood*, 13 and note 80. Bynum points out that in many fifteenth-century devotions the sacraments of baptism and penance (and sometimes all the sacraments) are considered to have their origins in the water and blood that flowed from Christ's side at his Crucifixion. The scene in which Christ is stabbed in the side appears only in the gospel of John and not in any of the other canonical Crucifixion accounts.



associations. Certainly in Chaucer's medieval English text, doubtless written from a Christian viewpoint, the Sultaness's vituperative reading of baptism does not persist alone. Though a number of Christian conversions occur in the tale, the only description of baptism (or of sacrament at all) in the *Man of Law's Tale* is not a water baptism.<sup>48</sup> Rather, the Sultaness's imagined blood-washing of Custance recalls the Christian doctrinal and martyrological tradition of baptism by blood.<sup>49</sup>

Though Custance does not exactly undergo baptism by blood in the Sultaness's mind—to be a martyr, Custance would need to die—the Sultaness invokes the long tradition of blood baptism when she brings blood and baptism into such close proximity. Martyrdom is called “baptism by blood” as early as the beginning of the third century when Tertullian wrote his *De Baptismo*, an instruction manual on the necessity and effects of baptism for catechumens. Tertullian writes:

We have indeed, likewise, a *second* font, (itself withal *one with the former*,) of *blood*, to wit; concerning which the Lord said, “I have to be baptized with a baptism,” when He had been baptized already. For He had come “by means of water and blood,” just as John has written; that He might be baptized by the water, glorified by the blood; to make *us*, in like manner, *called by water, chosen by blood*. These two baptisms He sent out from the wound in His pierced side, in order that they who

---

<sup>48</sup> Beverly Boyd, *Chaucer and the Liturgy* (Philadelphia: Dorrance & Co., 1967), 47, 57. Boyd cites in this moment the *Canterbury Tales*’ “only descriptive references” to baptism. She suggests that Chaucer is little interested in ritual and that this speaks to his dislike of “the current emphasis upon ritual that accompanied the widespread adoption of the use of [the] Sarum [Missal].”

<sup>49</sup> Despite the Sultaness's imagined quasi-baptism, nowhere in the tale do we witness an actual and explicit baptism taking place. The Sultaness's imagined quasi-baptism highlights the place baptism *should* have in the narrative. Even though the Syrians are supposed to be baptized, Chaucer never tells us that the baptisms have occurred. In Trevet, we are told that the Sultaness throws the “first feast before the wedding” and that this feast occurred on the “first day of [Custance's] arrival” (Correale and Hamel, 301, lines 82-5). Chaucer is not so free with information about exactly when the feast occurs relative to Custance's arrival, but we can be fairly certain that the possibility of baptism is foreclosed. Indeed, the Sultaness's goal is to make sure that the baptisms of converts do not happen.

believed in His blood might be bathed with the water; they who had been bathed in the water might likewise drink the blood. This is the baptism which both stands in lieu of the fontal bathing when that has not been received, and restores it when lost.<sup>50</sup>

Tertullian writes that martyrdom can replace baptism for the unbaptized Christian or reconstitute baptism for the apostate. Though Custance is neither unbaptized nor apostate, it is apparent that the Sultanness's parodic treatment of baptism is less parodic than she thinks.

Exacerbating the fact that the Sultanness inadvertently refers to a real, doctrinal form of baptism is the fact that she refers to one that is even more powerful than standard water baptism. In the thirteenth century, Aquinas theorizes that baptism by blood is *more* efficacious than baptism by water or baptism of the Holy Spirit, Aquinas writes:

Nam passio Christi operatur quidem in baptismo aquae per quandam figuralem repraesentationem; in baptismo autem flaminis vel poenitentiae per quandam affectionem; sed in baptismo sanguinis per imitationem operis. Similiter etiam virtus Spiritus Sancti operatur in baptismo aquae per quandam virtutem latentem; in baptismo autem poenitentiae per cordis commotionem; sed in *baptismo sanguinis* per potissimum dilectionis et affectionis fervorem, secundum illud *Joan.*, *Majorem hac dilectionem nemo habet, ut animam suam ponat quis pro amicis suis.*<sup>51</sup>

[For the passion of Christ is at work in the baptism of water by way of a figurative representation; in the baptism of the spirit or repentance through a certain favourable disposition of the mind; but in the baptism of blood through imitation of the work of the passion. Likewise the power of the Holy Spirit acts in baptism of water through a certain hidden power; in the baptism of repentance through moving the heart; but in the *baptism of blood* by the highest degree of love and desire: "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."]

---

<sup>50</sup> Tertullian, *De Baptismo*, trans. Rev. S. Thelwall, in Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, eds., *Anti-Nicene Fathers: the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1978-1981), chapter 16 (emphasis original).

<sup>51</sup> *ST IIIa.66*(12) (emphasis mine). Aquinas quotes from John 15:13.

According to St. Thomas, “baptismo sanguinis,” baptism by blood, is the highest Christian act because of the fervor of the martyr’s love for God. “The highest degree of love and desire” for Aquinas means not only choosing God over life itself but imitating Christ’s death on the Cross. To be baptized by blood is the absolute best a Christian can do.

From the tale’s Christian point of view, the Sultaness no doubt misunderstands Christian baptism. The tale points this out when the Sultaness’s mean-spirited quasi-baptism, meant to destroy Custance, leads instead to good things for the displaced Roman princess, including the Christian conversion of all of England and her eventual return to Rome. The effect of the Sultaness’s blood-washing of Custance is to send Custance out to sea, bereft of family, community, or known identity. When Custance stands trial in Northumbria, the narrator laments in lines 655-8 the fact that, since no one knows she is the Roman emperor’s daughter, there is no one to whom she can plead for mercy: “An Emperoures doghter stant alone...Fer been they freendes at they grete nede!” A second blood-washing in Northumbria reverses these effects entirely. When this happens, the real power of baptism, regardless of the Sultaness’s misuse of the sacrament, shows through.

The second blood-washing, more subtle than the first, occurs when Custance’s friend and Christian protégé Hermengild is murdered in bed. While Custance and Hermengild sleep, a jealous knight, tired of his romantic advances being rebuffed by

Custance, breaks in and slits Hermengild's throat, leaving the bloody knife next to

Custance:

This knight, thurgh Sathanas temptaciouns,  
Al softly is to the bed ygo,  
And kitte the throte of Hermengyld atwo,  
And leyde the blody knyf by dame Custance...(597-601)

Custance is shocked when she wakes to find her friend dead. While Chaucer does not mention that Custance sleeps in the same bed with Hermengild, she does so in both of his sources, Trevet's and Gower's versions of the Constance story. Slit throats bleed, and it is not farfetched to imagine Custance covered in blood again, much as she was in the Sultaness's imagination.

While the Sultaness's blood bath leaves Custance bereft of family and identity, this second blood-washing reinstates her into community as a person with a known identity—an identity that is at once genealogical and sacramental. In a move original to Chaucer, Custance goes on trial for the murder and king Alla comes specifically to pass judgment. (In Trevet's work, the king had been on his way to meet Custance anyway because he had heard of her virtues.) Everyone testifies to Custance's virtue, except for the murderous knight. When the knight swears on a book of gospels that Custance is the killer, he is struck down by a disembodied hand and his eyes burst out of his head (666-72). Then,

A voys was herd in general audience,  
and seyde, "Thou has desclaundered, giltelees,  
The doghter of hooly chirche in heigh presence;  
Thus hastou doon, and yet hoolde I my pees! (673-76)

Custance is exonerated, and the second blood bath gives her a known identity and reinstates her into community. In fact, it is as a result of her exoneration that King Alla of Northumbria marries Custance in lines 690-3, “and thus hath Christ ymaad Custance a queene.” Furthermore, this known identity is as a baptized Christian, the “daughter of Holy Church.” One quasi-baptism leads to another: the violence and violation with which the Sultanness would imbue baptism is countered by the public recognition of Custance’s venerable character that the second quasi-baptism facilitates.

As I have shown, blood—whether semen, breast milk, or the relics of Christ’s (supposed) blood—is bound up with genealogy. The same is true of the blood of baptism. It is significant that Custance’s newly revealed identity is both religious and genealogical. As the daughter of Holy Church, she is identified as a Christian, and as the *daughter* of Holy Church she is identified as a member of a family unified by the sacrament of baptism. The profound association between baptism and genealogy is borne out in the similarity of Custance’s baptism to Christ’s. In the gospel of Matthew, Jesus is baptized by John the Baptist. In Matthew 3:17, a voice proclaims: “et ecce vox de caelis dicens hic est Filius meus dilectus in quo mihi conplacui” [This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.] Chaucer follows the biblical writer when he writes that “a voys was herd in general audience” and does not identify the voice as God’s; the biblical writer calls it simply “a voice from heaven.” The tale’s allusion to Christ’s baptism demonstrates that Christian baptism is from its inception a genealogical affair. And blood baptism, given blood’s independent association with genealogy, is all the more so.

Lest the allusion to Christ's baptism be too subtle an invocation of the association between Custance's washings in blood and genealogy, her washing in Hermengild's blood results directly in the creation of Custance's new Northumbrian family and the eventual unification of that family with Custance's Roman family. Upon Custance's exoneration, as shown above, the Northumbrian king marries her and makes her a Northumbrian queen. They have a baby together, and as I have also shown above, Custance's English mother-in-law worries over Custance's unknown genealogy and suspects impurity in her blood. Donegild puts Custance out to sea again, and she finally ends up back in Rome, where King Alla eventually finds her and his son. Custance then reveals her identity to her father, the Roman emperor, and her English family and her Roman family become one. Not only does Hermengild's blood reconstitute Custance as a person with an identity, it also ushers in an entirely new set of familial relations. Genealogy finally triumphs when Custance and Alla's son Maurice, of both Roman and English blood, succeeds his grandfather as Roman emperor.

The tale posits genealogy as the answer to the fear of apostasy, the revolving door of Christian conversion. The tale highlights in particular one very wicked apostate Christian. After Donegild puts Custance out to sea and before she runs into the Roman senator who rescues her, Custance washes ashore in a non-Christian realm:

Under an hethen castel, atte laste,  
Of which the name in my text noght I fynde,  
Custance, and eek hir child, the see up caste  
.....  
Doun fro the castle comth ther many a wight  
To gauren on this ship and on Custance.

But shortly, from the castel, on a nyght,  
The lords styward—God yeve hym meschance!—  
A theef, that hadde reneyed oure creance,  
Cam into ship alone, and seyde he sholde  
Hir lemman be, wher-so she wolde or nolde. (904-17)

The steward and thief, who has renounced his Christian belief, attempts to rape Custance.

By the grace of God, he is thrown overboard from Custance's boat and drowns (922-3).

In Nicholas Trevet's version, though Chaucer leaves out this detail, the apostate knight asks Custance (Constance in Trevet's version) to take him somewhere where he can return to the Christian life. Trevet's apostate only tries to rape her once they are out at sea. While Trevet separates the apostate's original intention of returning to Christianity from his later intention to commit rape—Trevet tells us lust does not get the better of the man until they have embarked—Chaucer's apostate boards the ship with the intention of rape. Chaucer's tale presents two cases of apostasy: the Sultan and his retinue, who are apostate Muslims, and the apostate steward. In both cases, the apostates die. The tale concludes that there is no room for apostasy.

In England, apostasy *per se* does not happen, but something similar does, and genealogy triumphs over pagan religious identity. When the Sultanness puts Custance out to sea, she unwittingly sends her to a pagan, but formerly Christian land. Chaucer writes of England's Christian history:

In al that lond no Cristen dorste route;  
Alle Cristen folk been fled fro that contree  
Thurgh payens, that conquereden al aboute  
The plages of the north, by land and see,  
To Walys fledde the Cristyanytee  
Of olde Britons dwellynge in this ile... (540-5)

Pagans have displaced English Christians, pushing them into Wales. Not all English Christians have vacated Northumbria, however. Chaucer continues:

But yet nere Cristene Britons so exiled  
That ther nere somme that in hir privetee  
Honoured Crist and hethen folk bigiled. (547-9)

Crypto-Christians are alive and well in Northumbria, but for their own safety they must pretend to be apostate, beguiling the “heathen folk” in power. Since these crypto-Christians have never really renounced their Christianity, the tale makes clear that apostasy is not a problem for England. At the same time, Northumbrian Christians do *appear* to be apostate.

The problem Custance corrects is not apostasy, but rather public acceptance of English Christianity. Through her efforts, English Christians no longer have to pretend to be apostate; she reveals England’s Christian past and an attendant predisposition to Christianity. Custance and her friend Hermengild are confronted by an old crypto-Christian while playing on the beach. In lines 561 and following the blind crypto-Christian asks newly converted Hermengild to heal him. The old Christian cries out, “In name of Crist... Dame Hermengyld, yif me my sighte agayn!” (562). Hermengild is frightened to do so, but Custance convinces her, attributing the healing to “Cristes myght” (570). The old man, one of the Christians who never left Northumbria, represents England’s Christian past. After Custance is washed in Hermengild’s blood and divinely cleared of the murder, “for this miracle.../And by Custances mediacioun, /The kyng—and many another in that place—/Converted was, thanked be Cristes grace!” (683-6) The



old man is now free to practice Christianity publicly. The tale suggests that England's Christian history is what allows Custance's ideas to take hold—after all, Hermengild's faith is not tested until she heals the old crypto-Christian man, and the healing inspires Hermengild's staunchly pagan husband to convert (568-74). Though English history is not quite the same thing as blood genealogy, it is an iteration of the past which combines with the revelation of Custance's kinship to God, her marriage to Alla, and the combination of English and Roman blood in Maurice to thoroughly fold England into Roman Christianity.

Where genealogical links to Christianity, or even a Christian regional past, are present, apostasy stands no chance. The Sultanness's mistake is that she believes this is the case from a Muslim standpoint as well. If genealogy constructs religious identity, as she thinks it should for her son, the possibility of conversion can be foreclosed. Unfortunately for her, she impedes Syrian conversion, but the result is the Roman destruction of Syria. We learn in lines 964-5 that the senator who picks Custance up on the sea is just returning from a Roman mission "on Surryens to taken heigh vengeance./They brennen, sleen, and brynge [Syrians] to meschance/Ful many a day."

### ***Racializing Interpretive Strategies***

One could argue that the Sultanness should have played along with the Romans, perhaps practicing Islam in secret, but a question arises: if Christian genealogy and/or a Christian past are as important to Christian identity as they seem to be, *could* she and the Syrians have successfully converted? The Northumbrians' conversion and the Syrians'

lack thereof has everything to do with each group's interpretation of baptism—after all, the Northumbrians interpret Custance as the “daughter of Holy Church” and conversion as solidarity with her while the Syrians, thanks to the Sultanness, see conversion as the pathway to slavery. At the root of each group's interpretations lay its access to interpretive resources. There is one key resource to which both groups do not have equal access: grace.

The Northumbrians have access to grace. When King Alla and his retinue interpret the disembodied voice's proclamation, they do so on at least two levels: literally, they understand Custance's genealogical link to “holy Church,” but they also understand that they are to believe in Christ. They do not come to the latter understanding on their own. Chaucer informs us that “The kyng—and many another in that place—/Converted was, *thanked be Cristes grace!*”(684-6, emphasis mine). It is grace that allows the Northumbrians to understand what they are now to believe as a result of what they have witnessed.

In addition, it is grace that brings Custance to England in the first place. In lines 478-504, Chaucer compares Custance's sustenance at sea to Mary of Egypt's sustenance in the desert and the feeding of the five thousand with loaves and fishes. Following immediately on the heels of what amounts to a sermon on grace, he tells the reader:

She dryveth forth into oure occian  
Thurghout oure wilde see, til atte laste  
Under an hoold that nempnen I ne kan,  
Fer in Northumberlond the wawe hire caste... (505-508)

God's grace brings Custance nowhere other than England. The supernatural means of her sustenance at sea and arrival in England make it no surprise that she comes as a herald of Christian grace *for* England.

When one compares the Syrian attempt at conversion with the Northumbrian conversion, it is apparent that the Syrian conversion is not a matter of grace. In addition to the fact that Chaucer explicitly names grace in the English conversion, grace also appears in the form of instant understanding and conversion among the English. The term "grace" does not appear at all in the context of the Syrian would-be conversions, and the Syrians are anything but instantaneous in their conversion. The Syrian conversion is a political decision made in order that the Sultan might gain Custance's hand in marriage. Rather than decide to convert instantaneously, the Sultan's advisers hold a council in which

Diverse men diverse thynges seyden;  
They argumenten, casten up and down;  
Many a subtil resoun forth they leyden;  
They speken of magyk and abusioun.  
But finally, as in conclusioun,  
They kan nat seen in that noon advantage  
Ne in noon oother wey, save mariage. (211-217)

Because of the law of *disparitas cultus*, which invalidated marriages between Christians and pagans, Jews, infidels, or Muslims, conversion is absolutely necessary.<sup>52</sup> The

---

<sup>52</sup> Paul E. Beichner, "Chaucer's Man of Law and *Disparitas Cultus*," *Speculum* 23.1 (1948): 70-5. Beichner locates in the council recognition of a spectrum between two senses of *disparitas cultus*. In one sense, it invalidates marriage between a Christian and a pagan, Jew, infidel, or Muslim. In the other sense, it prohibits marriage to a person baptized in a dissident, schismatic, heretical sect, but it *does not invalidate* the marriage. Beichner argues that when the council decides that "ther was swich diversitee/ Bitwene hir bothe lawes" that conversion is necessary, they refer to the strict sense, invoking the more extreme

decision is not motivated by the Holy Spirit, not motivated by the heart, not motivated by “dilection and love” to quote Aquinas. Instead, the decision to convert is for the Sultan a matter of courtly love—unless he gains Custance’s love “he nas but deed” (209)— and for his advisers it is a matter of politics. Grace saves Custance at sea on three different occasions, but grace never visits the Syrians: if it did, the plot to murder the Sultan and his retinue would not be successful. For that matter, Syrians would not end up “burned, slain, and brought to mischance” by the Romans.

Why is grace available in England and not in Syria? While the sacrament of baptism ought to admit no theological difference between converting a Syrian Muslim and converting an English pagan, the xenophobic crusading society of the fourteenth century (in which people were reading material far more violently assertive of ineluctable difference than the *Man of Law’s Tale*, such as the *Siege of Jerusalem*) certainly does. To deny the out-group the opportunity to receive baptism would deny the power of baptism itself. In order to deny baptism to the out-group and still assert the power of baptism to transgress borders, the in-group must suggest that something is inherently wrong with the out-group; that is, they lack something that would allow them to take full advantage of baptism. In the *Man of Law’s Tale*, they lack the God-given grace necessary to properly

---

difference between a Muslim and an orthodox Christian than that between an orthodox Christian and a heretic. Beichner does not go into further implications of this assertion, but in the social context of the Crusades and some theologians’ claims that Islam was a heresy, it seems that the decision that the marriage would be invalid without conversion is of paramount importance to the tale’s understanding of Islam. Islam appears not as a heresy but as a completely different religion from Christianity.

understand, and therefore receive, baptism. For that matter, they are not afforded the grace necessary to understand the implications of quasi-baptismal blood-washings either.

The interpretation of blood is the hinge on which both religious and racial discourses hang in the *Man of Law's Tale*. Blood-washings simulate baptism by blood when Custance is washed in the Syrians' blood and in Hermengild's. Genealogical blood ties between the Sultanness and the Sultan are threatened by baptism. Genealogical blood ties unite England and Rome in Custance, Alla, Custance's father, and Maurice. When potential converts are denied access to the resources required to receive baptism because of their genealogy—that is, because of who the Sultan's mother is—blood becomes a fully racial sign. The difference between Syrians and Muslims is, because genealogical and ultimately absolute, racial.

The division between English access to grace and Syrian lack thereof is drawn along racial lines, and the dynamic between grace and race-thinking is a telling one. In her *Empire of Magic: Medieval Romance and the Politics of Cultural Fantasy*, Geraldine Heng studies the *King of Tars*, possibly a predecessor of Nicholas Trevet's French life of Constance.<sup>53</sup> Heng considers what happens in the *King of Tars* when Constance has a child with the Muslim Sultan, a possibility that is foreclosed in the *Man of Law's Tale*. Constance bears a "shapeless lump of flesh: insensate, inanimate, and with "neither 'blood' nor 'bone' nor 'limbs.'" Heng terms it a "true monstrosity."<sup>54</sup> When the lump of flesh is baptized and given the name John, on the feast day of John the Baptist no less, it

---

<sup>53</sup> In my chapter on the *Three Kings of Cologne* above, I address the physical and allegorical implications of skin color in the *King of Tars* at length.

<sup>54</sup> Heng, 228.

instantly transforms into a beautiful little baby. The *King of Tars* leads Heng to theorize that religion is not merely cultural but that it also “shapes and instructs” biology.<sup>55</sup> She goes on to say that the “assertion in literature that physical matter can be interfered with and ontologically rewritten—changed in essence and composition—by religious conversion is a peculiarly medieval one” and she terms the dynamic *race-religion* and claims that it functions as a “single indivisible discourse.”<sup>56</sup>

Heng certainly recognizes that race and religion work together in medieval discourses of difference, but her idea of a “single *indivisible* discourse” does not account for what happens in the *Man of Law’s Tale*. Heng’s idea works in the *King of Tars*, where religion trumps race. In that story, the Sultan converts after he witnesses the miracle with the baby John. When the Sultan converts, his skin goes from black to white, and racial difference proves no match for religion. In the *Man of Law’s Tale*, on the contrary, there is finally no conversion for the Muslim Sultan. The fact that Chaucer never tells us whether the conversions have actually taken place or they are only scheduled allows the reader to experience the difficulty of interpreting baptism: the reader is left to question whether the Syrians have been baptized or not, whether by water or their own blood. There is no ambiguity in the case of the Northumbrians, however, and with them the reader experiences a clear, grace-driven interpretation of baptism. In the *Man of Law’s Tale*, religion does not trump race. On the contrary, the race-thinking notion of absolute difference directs religion. The ability for race and religion to trade dominant positions—

---

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 234.

one directing the narrative in the *King of Tars* and the other directing the *King of Tars*' descendant *Man of Law's Tale*—argues for not a single discourse, but rather two discourses that sometimes work in concert.

To return to George Kelsey's theory of blood purity, in which members of the out-race are "depraved as to their very being," the *Man of Law's Tale* alerts its readers that depravity and purity, and violation and veneration, are subject to one's point of view. The Sultaness certainly believes the converts have given up their Islamic purity in favor of Christian depravity. The tale, on the other hand, with a Christian heroine and written for a Christian audience, views the Sultaness as depraved. Race-thinking emerges in the tale as the way to make sense of these disparate views. The Sultaness's fear of slavery based on religious difference gives way to Donegild's fear of monstrosity based on genealogical blood difference. Then both give way to the justification and veneration of Custance's religious and genealogical identities. The meaning of blood—religious and genealogical—is shown to be a matter of interpretation. The tale asserts the dominance of the Christian point of view, but not before showing that race-thinking must be used to strictly control access to conversion in order that the Christian point of view can dominate its competitors.

## Conclusion: Real and Metaphorical Color in Late Medieval English Literature

In contrast to Heng's assertion that race and religion are parts of a single discourse, this dissertation shows that race-thinking and religion are sometimes at cross-purposes. Blackness, though often associated with non-Christian depravity, can persist in Christian converts. The suggestion that the black convert would become white in the *King of Tars* is metaphorical; medieval people knew full well that in the real world black skin did not necessarily signify non-Christian identity. The confusion brought on by blackness in literature that is sometimes stable and sometimes not is at root a problem of the difference between reality and metaphor.

Augustine's writing on the black beloved in the *Song of Songs* offers a complex metaphor that could lead to the (mistaken) assertion that race and religion are inseparable in medieval literature. I return to a quote of Augustine's used above in my chapter on the *Three Kings*. In a sermon on Psalms 73:14, "tu confregisti capita Leviathan dedisti eum in escam populo Aethiopum" or "Thou hast broken the heads of the dragon: thou hast given him to be meat for the people of the Ethiopians,"<sup>1</sup> Augustine sets out his thoughts on black Ethiopians. He writes

*Dedisti eum in escam populis Aethiopibus. Quid est hoc? Quomodo intelligo populos Aethiopes? Quomodo, nisi per hos, omnes Gentes? Et bene per nigros; Aethiopes enim nigri sunt. Ipsi vocantur ad fidem, qui nigri fuerunt; ipsi prorsus, ut dicatur eis: Fuistis enim aliquando tenebrae; nunc autem lux in Domino (Ephes. V, 8). Ipsi prorsus vocantur nigri; sed ne remaneant nigri: de his enim fit Ecclesia, cui dicitur, Quae est ista quae ascendit dealbata (Cant. VIII, 5, sec. LXX)? Quid enim de nigra factum*

---

<sup>1</sup> The Latin is taken from the Vulgate and the English from the Douai-Rheims translation.



est, nisi quod dictum est: *Nigra sum, et speciosa* (Cant. I, 4)?<sup>2</sup>

[You have felled him to be a dish for the people of Ethiopia. What is this? How do I understand the people of Ethiopia? How, unless by them, all peoples? And well by black men; Ethiopians indeed are black. Themselves called to the faith, that before were black; just them, in order that it be said to them: “You indeed were sometimes darkness; now however you are light in the Lord (*Ephesians* 5:8). Just them that were called black; but may they not remain black: from these indeed is made the Church, of whom it said, “Who is she that comes up having been washed white (*Song of Songs* 8:5)? What indeed of the black woman is made, unless what is said: “I am black, and beautiful” (*Song of Songs* 1:4)?]

At first glance, it seems Augustine means to use Ethiopians as a metaphor for all people. He says as much. Then it seems he is firmly grounded in the real world when he writes “Ethiopians indeed are black.” Then he suggests that once called to faith, Ethiopians are no longer black: “that before were black.” Then he interprets *Ephesians* 5:8, which speaks of being darkness and becoming light in the Lord, to mean that black people, once converted, become light. Light takes the position usually ascribed to white as black’s opposite. Augustine uses Ethiopians as an example of people who are physically black, then uses physical blackness as a metaphor for the sin-stained soul, and then suggests that the souls of all people who become Christian are “washed white.” Rather than turn to some white figure for confirmation, Augustine re-grounds his reader in the reality of corporeal blackness when he refers to the “black, and beautiful” beloved of the *Song of Songs*. It is not the case that she was black, and now converted, is beautiful; rather, her blackness and beauty are concurrent. Augustine in fact emphasizes the whiteness of her

---

<sup>2</sup> Augustine, *Ennarationes in Psalmos*, in *PL* 36, 938 (emphasis original). Translation is mine, with reference to Kaplan, 23 and n. 27, and Snowden, 204.

soul by setting it off against the continued blackness of her body; she is at once “washed white” and “black, and beautiful.” The real, black body is only important in that it serves as a black backdrop against which the metaphorical whiteness of the purified soul can stand out. The reality of immutable skin color, for Augustine, is what makes his metaphor so compelling.

By the later Middle Ages, real blackness is not so readily at the service of metaphor. Bernard, abbot of Clairvaux (1090-1153), offers an example that is more contemporary with this dissertation’s subject texts than Augustine’s writings; Bernard is interested in real and metaphorical blackness, while holding them at a greater distance from one another than Augustine does. In 1138, Bernard returned from Rome to Clairvaux after helping to resolve the dispute between Pope Innocent II and his rival Anacletus II. Upon returning, he resumed the sermon cycle he had been writing on the *Song of the Songs* before he left for Rome.<sup>3</sup> In sermon 25, Bernard writes

Ecce quod dixeram in sermone, quia aemulis lacessentibus sponsa respondere cogatur, quae corpore quidem de numero adolescentularum esse videntur, animo autem longe sunt. Ait nempne: *Nigra sum, sed Formosa, filiae Ierusalem*. Patet quod detraherent ei, nigredinem improperantes. (25.1)<sup>4</sup>

[I mentioned in the previous sermon that the bride was compelled to give an answer to her envious assailants, who seemed to be physically a part of the group of maidens, but alienated from them in spirit. She said: ‘I am

---

<sup>3</sup> Bruce Holsinger, “The Color of Salvation: Desire, Death, and the Second Crusade in Bernard of Clairvaux’s *Sermons on the Song of Songs*,” in David Townsend and Andrew Taylor, eds., *The Tongue of the Fathers: Gender and Ideology in Twelfth-Century Latin* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 160.

<sup>4</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, J. LeClercq, H. Rochais, Ch. H. Talbot, eds. *Sermons sur le Cantique*, vol. 2 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1998), 258.

black but beautiful, daughters of Jerusalem.’ It would appear that they disparage and slander her on account of her blackness.]]<sup>5</sup>

Bernard certainly refers to the maiden’s physical blackness here, and he also recognizes it as a condition that could be disparaged. He continues in the third chapter of the sermon:

Videamus iam quid illu fuit dicere: *Nigra sum, sed Formosa*. Nullane in his verbis repugnantia est? Absit. Propter simplices dico, qui inter colorem et formam discernere non noverunt, cum forma ad compositionem pertineat, nigredo color sit. Non omne denique quod nigrum es, continuo et deforme est. Nigredo, verbi causa, in papilla non dedecet; et nigri quidam lapilli in ornamentis placent, et nigri capilli candidis vultibus etiam decorum augent et gratiam... Tali fortassis modo potest sponsa, cum pulchritudine utique compositionis, naevo non career nigredinis: sed sane *in loco perigrinationis suae*. (25.3)<sup>6</sup>

[Let us next examine what was meant by saying: “I am black but beautiful.” Is this a contradiction in terms? Certainly not. These remarks of mine are for simple persons who have not learned to distinguish between color and form; form refers to the shape of a thing, blackness is a color. Not everything there that is black is on that account ugly. For example blackness in the pupil of the eye is not unbecoming; black gems look glamorous in ornamental settings, and black locks above a pale face enhance its beauty and charm... And so the bride, despite the gracefulness of her person, is not without the stigma of blackness, but this is only in the place of her pilgrimage.]

When he contrasts her earthly blackness with her condition after she has done with the “place of her pilgrimage”—that is, earth—Bernard suggests that the bride will not be black in heaven and makes clear that he is well aware of the conflict between blackness’s metaphorical meaning and the pure state of the bride’s soul. Bernard nonetheless emphasizes the effects and uses of real earthly blackness. Bernard recognizes the

---

<sup>5</sup> For translations of Bernard, I rely on Killian Walsh’s translation in *On the Song of Songs I. The Works of Bernard of Clairvaux*, vol 2. Cistercian Fathers Series 4. (Spencer, MA: Cistercian Publications, 1971), and *On the Song of Songs II. The Works of Bernard of Clairvaux*, vol. 3. Cistercian Fathers Series 7. (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1976). Holsinger quotes Walsh’s translation on 165-6.

<sup>6</sup> Bernard, vol. 2, 262 (emphasis original).

immutability of the bride's physical blackness. He extols the benefits of blackness: The black pupil is "not unbecoming," and black gems are "glamorous." At that, the bride's blackness only makes her beautiful form shine forth more since "black locks above a pale face enhance its beauty and charm." Though Bernard recognizes the metaphorical tradition and soon turns to it wholeheartedly, he does not here position blacks as a metaphor for all people. Blackness remains a stigma which the bride, no matter her spiritual state, will endure all her life. For the moment, blackness is a real world condition that sets some people apart from others regardless of Christian identity.

In asserting the primacy of real world blackness over metaphorical blackness, Bernard shows his reader that race-thinking and real blackness constitute a separate entity from the discourse of religious difference and its use of blackness as a metaphor, even when the real and metaphorical modes are present in the same text at the same time. In Sermon 25, Bernard sets up the bride as a metaphor for the clergy. After "Patet quod detraherent ei, nigredinem improperantes" sermon 25.1 continues: "Sed adverte sponsae patientiam ac benignitatem."<sup>7</sup> [But, Bride, turn you to patience and kindness.] Bernard's use of the imperative here turns his sermon from relating the story of the bride into an exemplum for his listeners. When he says "adverte sponsae," the listener takes the place of the bride. He explains further in Sermon 25.2:

Omnibus quidem optanda ista perfectio, proprie autem optimorum forma est praelatorum. Sciunt quippe boni fidelesque praepositi, languentium sibi creditam animarum curam, non pompam.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 258.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 260

[Perfection of this kind is commendable for all, but is the model for prelates who wish to be worthy. Good and faithful superiors know that they have been chosen, not for the vain prestige of holding office, but to take care of ailing souls.]<sup>9</sup>

Bernard makes it clear that he means for the bride to be an example for his clerical audience. The bride's patience and kindness show the clerical reader how he should act. The bride is a metaphor for the clergy and indeed for the Ecclesia that the clergy constitutes.

Bernard uses metaphor as a means of asserting Latin Christendom's desire to dominate the furthest reaches of the globe:

Videsne quales in se habeat Ecclesia caelos, sum sit nihilominus ipsa, in sua quidem universitate, ingens quoddam caelum, extensum *a mari usque ad mare, et a flumine usque ad terminus orbis terrarum*? ...Ergo, exemplo *illius quae sursum est mater nostra*, haec quoque, quae adhuc peregrinator, habet caelos suos, homines spirituales, vita et opinione conspicuos, fide puros, spe firmos, latos caritate, contemplatione suspensos...*Hi enarrant gloriam Dei, hi extenti sicut pelles super omnem terram, legem vitae et disciplinae digito quidem Dei scriptam in semetipsis ostendunt, ad dandam scientiam salutis plebi eius*. Ostendunt et *Evangelium pacis*, quoniam Salomonis sunt pelles.<sup>10</sup>

[Do you not now see what heavens Ecclesia possesses within her, that she herself, in her universality, is an immense heaven, stretching out "from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth"?...Just like our mother above, this one, though still a pilgrim, has her own heaven: spiritual men outstanding in their lives and reputations, men of genuine faith, unshaken hope, generous love, men raised to the heights of contemplation....They proclaim the glory of God, and stretched out like skins over all the earth, make known the law of life and knowledge written by God's finger into

---

<sup>9</sup> Translation is Holsinger's, 166.

<sup>10</sup> Bernard, vol. 2, 340.

their own lives, “to give knowledge of salvation to his people.” They show forth the gospel of peace, because they are the skins of Solomon.]<sup>11</sup>

Bernard has in mind Augustine’s comment on skin in *Confessions* 13. In that passage, Augustine relates human skin (“how the Lord clothed men with skins when by sin they became mortal”) to the skins of Solomon mentioned by the beloved in *Song of Songs* 1:4.<sup>12</sup> Bernard interprets the skins stretched out over the earth, or the heavens, as a simile for the clergy who work worldwide. In addition to being associated with the heavens because they cover the globe, the clergy are also represented metaphorically by skins for writing when “the law of life and knowledge” is “written by God’s finger into their own lives.” Bernard asserts that the clergy cover the earth and bring the gospel with them.

The confusion between real and metaphorical blackness that leads to the misreading of race and religion as a single discourse in the Middle Ages is the result of the fact that the two discourses can be used for the same purpose, even when they are as distinct as they are in Bernard’s writings. (Let alone a situation like race and religion’s utter commingling in Augustine’s sermon on Psalms 73:14.) Medievalist Bruce Holsinger, in “The Color of Salvation: Desire, Death, and the Second Crusade in Bernard of Clairvaux’s *Sermons on the Song of Songs*,” shows that

in [Bernard’s] sermons 25 through 29, male homosocial relations are grounded specifically in a *black* female body. The Bride’s words, “I am black but beautiful...,” provoke Bernard both to explore the somatic and ethical significance of skin color and to instill thereby a militaristic will in

---

<sup>11</sup> Translation is Holsinger’s, 158.

<sup>12</sup> Holsinger, 158, quotes R.S. Pine-Coffin’s translation of the *Confessions* 13.5. *Song of Songs* 1:4 in the Vulgate reads “Nigra sum, sed formosa, filiæ Ierusalem, sicut tabernacula Cedar, sicut pelles Salomonis” [I am black, but beautiful, O daughters of Jerusalem, like the tents of Kedar, like the skins of Solomon.]

his readers to overcome the alterity that the Bride's blackness comes to represent.<sup>13</sup>

That is, the black female body's beauty and traditional reading as a representative of Ecclesia would have inspired Bernard's male, clerical auditors to wish to possess her. Her biblical familiarity would have led them to believe that they already did. The alterity of the black beauty had already been and was always being overcome. In her, alterity and familiarity converge, making her the perfect figure to represent a colonial impulse which was characterized by a desire to control the East and the belief that Christendom was always already entitled to do so.

The black female body is at once metaphorical and real. Holsinger writes that

for Bernard...it is the western male subject himself whose body paradoxically represents the ultimate object of colonialist desire. Enjoining his male readers to perform the objectified role of the Bride themselves, Bernard positions himself, his auditors, and the militant host his sermons address precisely as the abject victims of ethnic and religious violence, as blackened and feminized Christian subjects who must perform their own ravishment and defeat before they can hope to triumph.<sup>14</sup>

This is to say, in order to conquer the world for Christendom, the clergy must first conquer their own concupiscence and potentially wayward souls. The black female body is a metaphor for the clerical reader's interior self. The success of the metaphor, however, depends upon the imagination of the black female body as a *real body* capable of being possessed sexually. (The "militaristic will" Holsinger identifies is intentionally provocative.)

---

<sup>13</sup> Holsinger, 164-5 (emphasis original).

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 165.

Holsinger uses Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's theory of "homosocial" relations, "a desire to consolidate partnership with authoritative males in and through the bodies of females," to explicate what he sees as Bernard's use of female bodies to facilitate male-male relations. Bernard's black bride, Holsinger argues, "anticipates the tendency of later colonialist writings to deploy...at the ambiguous points of contact, at the borders and orifices of the contest zone...bodies whose sexual topographies are designed to provoke a collective desire for penetration and domination...."<sup>15</sup> The black female body's blackness associates her with what were for Europeans the furthest reaches of the globe, peopled with black inhabitants who would remain black whether converted or not. The bride's blackness makes her all the more desirable. Bernard explores the "ethical" and "somatic" implications of blackness indeed. The persistence of the bride's blackness in Bernard's writing reflects late medieval Latin Christendom's focus on the reality of global difference. In order for the bride-Ecclesia to remain an active force for Christendom's expansion in the world, she must *not* become white.

When blackness persists despite the black figure's spiritual state, racial discourse is shown to be a separate entity from religion, even though blackness may not be entirely dissociated from its negative metaphorical and spiritual implications. When blackness does not survive a black figure's conversion to Christianity, then racial discourse is

---

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 165. Holsinger cites Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 18, and Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 24.



shown to be at the service of religious discourse. In the latter case, race supports the suppositions of religious inferiority and superiority but by no means is it the same thing.

Race-thinking, this dissertation argues, overcomes religious discourse when the possibility of Christian conversion is withheld from non-Christians. The first, second, and fourth chapters of this study examine the means by which the *Three Kings of Cologne* and the *Siege of Jerusalem* texts in CV and Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale* effect the turn to race-thinking. The third chapter, on the *Secretum Secretorum* physiognomy in CV, studies how the text manipulates the physiognomy tradition in order to construct the other-directed point-of-view necessary to race-thinking. The text imagines a physiognomer who is able to judge others as unable to achieve a desirable identity while never questioning his own condition.

Among forms of cultural production, the literature of late medieval England is particularly well suited to the race-thinking work of consolidating western European collective identity because literary texts are able to move freely between real and metaphorical, as well as physical and spiritual, modes of differentiating persons. The texts collected in Cotton Vespasian MS E.16 stand as a testament to the existence of race-thinking in late medieval England as well as the indispensable role of literature in the construction, maintenance, and manipulation of borders between varieties of persons. This study examines moments in which borders are created and maintained as well as those in which they fail in the hope of contributing to the understanding of how race has worked in western European, English, and ultimately American culture since the late Middle Ages.

## References

- Abulafia, Anna Sapir. *Christians and Jews in the Twelfth-Century Renaissance*. London and New York: Routledge, 1994.
- Abulafia, David. *The Discovery of Mankind: Atlantic Encounters in the Age of Columbus*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008.
- Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Theologiae*. London: Blackfriars, 1964-80; repr. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- Arendt, Hannah. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. New York: Schocken Books, 2004.
- Atkinson, Clarissa W. *The Oldest Vocation: Christian Motherhood in the Middle Ages*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991.
- Augustine, St. *The Rule of St. Augustine*. Translated by Raymond Canning, OSA. Garden City, NY: Image, 1986.
- . *De Civitate Dei*. Corpus Christianorum. Series Latina XLVII/XIV. Vols. 1 and 2. Edited by B. Dombart and A. Kalb. Turnhout: Brepols, 1955.
- . *The City of God*. Translated by H. Bettenson. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984.
- Beichner, Paul E. "Chaucer's Man of Law and *Disparitas Cultus*," *Speculum* 23.1 (1948): 70-5.
- Benedict, Ruth. *Race: Science and Politics*. Rev. ed. New York, 1947.
- Benthien, Claudia. Translated by T Dunlap. *Skin: On the Cultural Border between Self and the World* New York: Columbia University Press, 2002.
- Bernard of Clairvaux. J. LeClercq, H. Rochais, Ch. H. Talbot, eds. *Sermons sur le Cantique*. Vol. 2. Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1998.
- Bildhauer, Bettina. *Medieval Blood*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2006.
- Bisgaard, Lars. "A Black Mystery: the Hagiography of the Three Magi," in Tuomas M.S. Lehtonen and Kurt Villads Jensen, eds. *Medieval History Writing and Crusading Ideology*. Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 2005.
- Blum, Martin. "Body Politics: Otherness and the Representation of Bodies in Late Medieval Writings." PhD diss., University of British Columbia, 1997.

- Boyd, Beverly. *Chaucer and the Liturgy*. Philadelphia: Dorrance & Co., 1967.
- Braude, Benjamin. "The Sons of Noah and the Construction of Ethnic and Geographical Identities in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 54:1 (1997): 103-142.
- Brown, Ina Corinne. *Race Relations in a Democracy*. New York: Harper, 1949.
- Bynum, Caroline Walker. "The Blood of Christ in the later Middle Ages," *Church History* 71:4 (December 2002): 685-714.
- Bynum, Caroline Walker. *Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007.
- Campos, Don Rafael Torres. *Carácter de la conquista y colonización de las Islas Canarias: Discursos leídos ante la Real Academia de la Historia*. Madrid, 1901.
- Chapman, John. "Nestorius and Nestorianism," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 10. New York: Robert Appleton Co., 1911.
- Chaucer, Geoffrey. *Riverside Chaucer*. Edited by Larry D. Benson. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987.
- Chism, Christine. *Alliterative Revivals*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002.
- Cohen, Jeremy. *The Friars and the Jews: The Evolution of Medieval Anti-Judaism*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982.
- Correale, Robert M. "The Man of Law's Prologue and Tale," in Robert M. Correale and Mary Hamels, eds., *Sources and Analogues of the Canterbury Tales*. Vol 2. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2005.
- Davenport, Frances Gardiner, trans. and ed., *European Treaties Bearing on the History of the United States and its Dependencies*. Washington DC: Carnegie Institution, 1917.
- Delany, Sheila. *The Naked Text: Chaucer's Legend of Good Women*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994.

- Dharamaj, Glory. "Multicultural Subjectivity in Reading Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale*." *Medieval Feminist Newsletter* 16 (1993).
- DuBois, W.E.B. *Dark Princess*. Jackson, MS: Banner Books/University Press of Mississippi, 1995.
- Elukin, Jonathan. "The Discovery of the Self: Jews and Conversion in the Twelfth Century," in Michael A. Signer and John Van Engen, eds., *Jews and Christians in Twelfth-Century Europe*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001.
- . "From Jew to Christian? Conversion and Immutability in Medieval Europe," in James Muldoon, ed., *Varieties of Religious Conversion in the Middle Ages*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997, 171-89.
- Encyclopaedia Judaica*. New York: MacMillian Reference USA, 2006.
- Eschenbach, Wolfram von. *Parzival*. Edited by Eberhard Nellman. 2 vols. Bibliothek des Mittelalters, 8. Frankfurt/Main: Deutscher Klassiker-Verlag, 1994.
- Foerster, Richard, ed., *Scriptores Physiognomonici Graeci et Latini*. Vol. 2. Stuttgart/Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1994.
- Foucault, Michel. "*Society Must Be Defended*": *Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-1976*. Edited by Mauro Bertani and Allesandro Fontana. Translated by David Macey. New York: Picador, 2003.
- Girard, René. *The Scapegoat*. Translated by Yvonne Freccero. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986; Paris: Grasset, 1982.
- . *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*. Translated by Stephen Bann and Michael Metteer. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987.
- Grayzel, Solomon. *The Church and the Jews in the XIIIth Century*. Rev. ed. New York: Hermon Press, 1966.
- Grigson, Geoffrey. "The Three Kings of Cologne." *History Today* (Dec. 1954; repr. Dec. 1991): 29-34.
- Guddat-Figge. *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Middle English Romances*. Munich: W. Fink, 1976.
- Gutierrez, David. *The Augustinians in the Middle Ages: 1256-1356*. Villanova: Augustinian Historical Institute, 1984.

- Hall, Joseph, ed. *King Horn*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901.
- Hamel, Mary. "Siege of Jerusalem as a Crusading Poem," in Barbara N. Sargent-Baur, ed. *Journeys Toward God: Pilgrimage and Crusade*. Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1992.
- Hamilton, Bernard, "Prester John and the *Three Kings of Cologne*," in Henry Mayr-Harting and R.I. Moore, eds., *Studies in Medieval History Presented to R.H.C. Davis*. London: The Hambledon Press, 1985.
- Hanna, Ralph, III and David Lawton, eds. *The Siege of Jerusalem*. Oxford: Early English Text Society/Oxford University Press, 2003.
- Hanna, Ralph, III. "Contextualizing the *Siege of Jerusalem*." *Yearbook of Langland Studies* 6 (1992): 109-21.
- Hannaford, Ivan, *Race: the History of an Idea in the West*. Baltimore: the Johns Hopkins University Press/Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1996.
- Heal, Felicity. "The Archbishops of Canterbury and the Practice of Hospitality." *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 33 (Oct. 1982): 544-63.
- Heng, Geraldine. *Empire of Magic: Medieval Romance and the Politics of Cultural Fantasy*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2003.
- Higgins, Iain. *Writing East: The "Travels" of Sir John Mandeville*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997.
- Holmes, T. Scott. "The Austin Canons in England in the Twelfth Century." *Journal of Theological Studies* 19 (1968): 343-356.
- Holsinger, Bruce. "The Color of Salvation: Desire, Death, and the Second Crusade in Bernard of Clairvaux's *Sermons on the Song of Songs*," in David Townsend and Andrew Taylor, eds., *The Tongue of the Fathers: Gender and Ideology in Twelfth-Century Latin*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998.
- Horn, Joyce M. "Canons residentiary of Lichfield," in *Fasti Ecclesiae Anglicanae 1541-1857*. Vol 10: Coventry and Lichfield diocese. London: Institute of Historical Research, 2003.
- Hornstein, Lillian. "Trivet's Constance and the King of Tars." *Modern Language Notes* 55.5 (1940): 354-57.

- and Mortimer J. Donovan, Charles W. Dunn, Robert M. Lumansky, Helaine Newstead, and H.M. Snyder. *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English*. New Haven: The Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1967.
- Horstmann, C., ed. *The Three Kings of Cologne: An Early English Translation of the "Historia Trium Regum."* London: Early English Text Society, 1886.
- Jacobus de Voragine. *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*. Translated by William Granger Ryan. Vol. 1. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993.
- Jenkins, Philip. *The Lost History of Christianity: The Thousand-Year Golden Age of the Church in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia—And How It Died*. New York: HarperOne, 2008.
- Josephus. *Jewish Wars*, in *The New Complete Works of Josephus*. Translated by William Whiston. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1999.
- Kaplan, Paul H.D. *The Rise of the Black Magus in Western Art*. Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1985.
- Kardong, Terrence G. *Benedict's Rule: A Translation and Commentary*. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1996.
- Keiser, George R. "Filling a Lacuna in a Middle English 'Secretum Secretorum,'" *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 96.4 (1995): 381-88.
- Kelsey, George. *Racism and the Christian Understanding of Man*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965.
- . "The Racist Search for the Self." *Journal of Religious Ethics* 6.2 (1978): 240-56.
- King of Tars*, in *Englische Studien. Organ für Englische Philologie unter Mitberücksichtigung des Englischen Unterrichtes auf Höheren Schulen*. London: Trübner & Co., 1888. Chadwyck-Healey English Poetry Full-Text Database. Cambridge, UK: Chadwyck-Healey, 1992.
- Kölbing, E., and Mabel Day, eds. *The Siege of Jerusalem*. Oxford: Early English Text Society, 1932.
- Kritzeck, James. *Peter the Venerable and Islam*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964.

- Malkiel, David. "Jews and Apostates in Medieval Europe—Boundaries Real and Imagined." *Past & Present* 1 (2007): 3-34.
- Manzalaoui, Mahmoud. *Secretum Secretorum: Nine English Versions*. Vol. 1. Oxford: Early English Text Society/Oxford University Press, 1977.
- McClintock, Anne. *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*. London and New York: Routledge, 1995.
- McCracken, Peggy. *The Curse of Eve, the Wound of the Hero: Blood, Gender, and Medieval Literature*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003.
- Migne, J.P. *Patrologiae Cursus Completus Series Latina*. Paris: 1844-5.
- Millar, Bonnie. *The Siege of Jerusalem in its Physical, Literary and Historical Contexts*. Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000.
- Mingana, Alphonse. *The Early Spread of Christianity in Central Asia and the Far East*. New York: Longmans, Green, 1925.
- Moore, R.I. *The Formation of a Persecuting Society: Power and Deviance in Western Europe, 950-1250*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1987; repr. 1998.
- Morris, Colin. *The Discovery of the Individual: 1050-1200*. London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge for the Church Historical Society, 1972; reprint Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press in association with the Medieval Academy of America, 1987.
- Narin van Court, Elisa. "The Siege of Jerusalem and Augustinian Historians: Writing About Jews in Fourteenth-Century England." *Chaucer Review* 29 (1995): 227-48.
- Nederman, Cary J. *Worlds of Difference: European Discourses of Toleration, c. 1100-c.1550*. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000.
- Nirenberg, David. *Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996.
- Parry, John Jay. "Introduction," in Andreas Capellanus, *The Art of Courtly Love*. Edited by John Jay Parry. New York: Columbia University Press, 1960.
- Pohl, Christine. *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition*. Grand Rapids, MI/ Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans, 1999.

- Prescott, Andrew. "'Their Present Miserable State of Cremation': the Restoration of the Cotton Library," in C.J. Wright, ed., *Sir Robert Cotton as Collector: Essays on an Early Stuart Courtier and His Legacy*. London: British Library Publications, 1997.
- Rashi, *Chumash with Targum Onkelos, Haphtaroth and Rashi's Commentary*. Trans. R. A.M. Silbermann and Rev. M. Rosenbaum. Jerusalem: Silbermann Family, 5745.
- Riesman, David. *The Lonely Crowd*. Garden City, NY: Double Day & Co., 1953.
- Robertson, Elizabeth. "The Elvyssh Power of Constance: Christian Feminism in Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Man of Law's Tale*." *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 23 (2001): 143-80.
- Robinson, Cedric. *Black Marxism: the Making of the Black Radical Tradition*. London and Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Zed Books, 1983; 3<sup>rd</sup> impression, 1991.
- Rubin, Miri. *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.
- . *Gentile Tales: The Narrative Assault on Late Medieval Jews*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004.
- Rypins, Stanley I. "The 'Beowulf' Codex." *Modern Philology* 17.9 (Jan 1920): 541-547.
- Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage, 1979.
- Schaer, Frank. *The Three Kings of Cologne, Edited from London, Lambeth Palace MS 491*. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 2000.
- Schibanoff, Susan. "Worlds Apart: Orientalism, Antifeminism, and Heresy in Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale*." *Exemplaria* 8.1 (1996): 59-96.
- Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1985.
- Silverblatt, Irene. *Modern Inquisitions: Peru and the Colonial Origins of the Civilized World*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004.
- Smalley, Beryl. *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952.



- Snowden, Frank M., Jr., *Blacks in Antiquity: Ethiopians in the Greco-Roman Experience*. Cambridge, MA: 1970.
- Southern, R.W. *The Making of the Middle Ages*. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1959.
- Spearing, A.C. *Readings in Medieval Poetry*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1987.
- Steele, Robert. *Three Prose Versions of the Secreta Secretorum*. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1898.
- . *Opera hactenus inedita Rogeri Baconi*. Vol. 5. London: Oxford University Press, 1920.
- Steiner, Arpad. "The Identity of the Italian 'Count' in Andreas Capellanus's *De Amore*." *Speculum* 13.3 (July 1938): 304-8.
- Tertullian. *De Baptismo*. Translated by the Reverend S. Thelwall, in Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, eds, *Anti-Nicene Fathers: the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*. Vol. 3. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1978-1981.
- Tertullian. *Adversus Judaeos*, in A Kroymann, ed., *Corpus Christianorum*. Series Latina. II.ii. Turnhout: Brepols, 1954.
- Tischendorf, Constantin von. *Evangelia Apocrypha*. Leipzig, 1876.
- Trevet, Nicholas. "Life of Constance," in W.F. Bryan and Germaine Dempster, eds., *Sources and Analogues of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1941.
- Tyerman, Christopher. *England and the Crusades*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1988.
- Urban, Sylvanus. "Casualties." *The Gentleman's Magazine: or, Trader's monthly intelligencer* 1 (Jan-Dec 1731): 1-12.
- Walker, Alexander, trans and ed. "The Avenging of the Saviour," in *Apocryphal Gospels, Acts, and Revelations*. Edinburgh, 1870.
- Walsh, Killian. *On the Song of Songs I*. The Works of Bernard of Clairvaux. Vol 2. Cistercian Fathers Series 4. Spencer, MA: Cistercian Publications, 1971

- . *On the Song of Songs II. The Works of Bernard of Clairvaux. Vol. 3. Cistercian Fathers Series 7.* Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1976.
- Warner, George F. and Julius P. Gilson, *Catalogue of Western Manuscripts in the Old Royal and King's Collections. Vol. 1.* London: Longmans, Green & Co.; Quaritch; Oxford University Press, 1921.
- William of Newburgh, *The History of William of Newburgh*, in Joseph Stephenson, ed., *The Church Historians of England. Vol. 4, Pt. 2.*
- Wilmart, A., *Analecta Reginiensia.* Vatican City, 1933, 73-4.
- World Christian Encyclopedia: a Comparative Study of Churches and Religions in the Modern World, AD 1900-2000.* Edited by David B. Barrett. Nairobi, Kenya: Oxford University Press, 1982.
- Yeager, Suzanne M. "The Siege of Jerusalem and Biblical Exegesis: Writing about Romans in Fourteenth-Century England." *The Chaucer Review* 39.1 (2004): 70-102.
- Ziegler, Joseph. "Skin and Character in Medieval and Early Renaissance Physiognomy" *Micrologus: Natura, Scienze e Societa Medievali; Nature, Sciences and Medieval Societies* 13 (2005): 511-35.
- . "'Text and Context: On the Rise of Physiognomic Thought in the Later Middle Ages'" in Yitzhak Hen, ed., *De Sion exhibit lex et verbum domini de Hierusalem: Essays on Medieval Law, Liturgy, and Literature in Honour of Amnon Linder.* Turnhout: Brepols, 2001.

**Biography**

Cord J. Whitaker was born in Philadelphia PA on August 22, 1979. In 2001, he earned his bachelor's degree from Yale University where he was a Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellow and a fellow of the Institute for the Recruitment of Teachers. During his graduate school career, Cord has been awarded a fellowship in the Duke University English Department, a Duke Endowment Fellowship, the Ford Foundation's Predoctoral Diversity Fellowship, and a predoctoral fellowship in the English Department at the University of New Hampshire.