

**Saracens and Franks: Perceptions of the Other in the Medieval Mediterranean**  
**Course modules and Select Bibliography**  
**Dr. Ellen Joyce**  
**Beloit College, Beloit, WI**

Abstract:

The following materials are designed for undergraduate history classes and could be of use in surveys of Mediterranean history, classes on the medieval crusades, or classes that engage with images of "the other" in the Middle Ages. The "object study" and mapping exercises could also be useful in medieval literature or art history courses. Taken together, these topics raise issues of identity, ethnicity, and the emergence of racial vocabularies; the final unit therefore contains more theoretical readings for discussion of how to think about identity in the context of the medieval Mediterranean, and as such may prove useful as a starting point for classes on the early modern period.

**I. Saracens as Pagans and Heretics**

*One way that Christians in the early Middle Ages sought to understand the followers of Islam, a new religion, was to use their existing religious categories. Muslim conquerors in Spain, for example, could be portrayed as heirs of the Roman pagans who had persecuted the early Christian church. As familiarity with Islam increased, some authors painted a distorted image of its beliefs and practices that made it seem like a perverted mirror image of Christianity that resembled known heresies.*

*Primary Sources:*

*The Song of Roland.* Edited and Translated by Glyn S. Burgess. Penguin Classics, Reprint Edition, 1990

*Medieval Latin Lives of Muhammad.* (Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library). Translated by Julian Yolles and Jessica Weiss. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2018.

*Bibliography:*

Akbari, Suzanne. "IMAGINING ISLAM: The Role of Images in Medieval Depictions of Muslims." *Scripta Mediterranea*, Vols XIX-XX 1998-1999, pp. 9-27

Kinoshita, Sharon. "'Pagans are wrong and Christians are right': Alterity, Gender, and Nation in the *Chanson de Roland*." *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, Volume 31, Number 1, Winter 2001, pp. 79-111.

Tolan, John. *Saracens: Islam in the Medieval Christian Imagination*. New York, Columbia UP: 2002. (Chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7 are especially relevant)

Wolf, Kenneth Baxter. "Christian Views of Islam in Early Medieval Spain." In *Medieval Christian Perspectives on Islam*, edited by John Victor Tolan. London and New York: Routledge, 2000.

## **II. Saracens as Enemies**

*While the anti-Muslim rhetoric of Crusade preachers like Urban II and Bernard of Clairvaux was intended to stir up hatred and violence, proximity led to more frequent contact between Christians and Muslims and to more accurate knowledge about each other's traditions. This unit includes a comparative element and introduces examples of Muslims' reactions to the Crusaders as well.*

### *Primary Sources:*

*The Chronicle of Fulcher of Chartres*, Book I, in: Edward Peters, ed., *The First Crusade: The Chronicle of Fulcher of Chartres and Other Source Materials*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 47-102

Jean of Joinville, *Life of St. Louis*, in Margaret Shaw, *Chronicles of the Crusades: Joinville and Villehardouin* (London: Penguin, 1998).

Hillenbrand, Carole. *The Crusades: Islamic Perspectives*, (New York: Routledge, 2000), Chapter Five: "How the Muslims saw the Franks: Ethnic and Religious Stereotypes," 257-327.

*Bibliography for this section can be drawn from either the preceding or following units—John V. Tolan's book includes sections on the images of Muslims that emerged during the Crusading period, and both Claster and Madden provide overviews of the Crusades themselves.*

### **ASSIGNMENT: Textual analysis**

Write a 3-5 page paper that identifies a theme related to identity, stereotypes, or ways of "othering" in the primary sources studied in the first two units (above). You may choose to trace that theme in one work or to compare and contrast how it plays out in two different sources. Your paper must have an argument (thesis) about the significance of that theme, the author's purpose in using it, and/or the effect of that theme on the prospective audience, etc. *Further instructions on writing a primary source analysis will be provided by the instructor in accordance with course goals.*

### **III. Three Faiths in Outremer (the Latin Kingdoms)**

*The establishment of Latin kingdoms in Jerusalem brought western Europeans into close contact with Muslims, Jews, and Eastern Christians, and created opportunities for trade and cultural exchange outside of the context of warfare. The Kingdom of Jerusalem in this period is a fine example of the kind of cultural "entanglement" that characterizes the Mediterranean throughout most of its history; attention to the manuscripts and other artifacts produced in that milieu allows students to explore the dynamics of that exchange with reference to physical objects.*

*Sources: Exhibit catalog and website for the exhibit on medieval Jerusalem held at the Metropolitan Museum in 2016. Students are assigned to read the overview and thematic gallery descriptions on the website and to browse through the featured objects. Students could be asked to select one or two objects that seem to identify an aspect of the exhibit, such as trade and commerce or ethnic diversity, for discussion in class. A longer assignment using these materials is described below. The exhibit catalog itself could be made available on reserve.*

Boehm, Barbara Drake and Melanie Holcomb. *Jerusalem, 1000-1400: Every People Under Heaven*. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2016

Exhibit website: <https://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2016/jerusalem>

*Background reading about the Kingdom of Jerusalem and the Crusades:*

Claster, Jill N.. *Sacred Violence: The European Crusades to the Middle East: 1095-1396*. (Chapter 1: "Jerusalem and the Middle East before the Crusades").

Madden, Thomas F.. *A Concise History of the Crusades*. London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2nd Edition, 2013. (Chapters 3 "The Rise of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem

and the Second Crusade," and 4 "The Decline of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem and the Third Crusade").

### **ASSIGNMENT: Object study**

Select an object from the list provided for your project. Research it by starting with what is written about it in the exhibit catalog (on reserve) and find at least three other sources (check the catalog's bibliography) about the object—What is it? Who made it? Where and when was it made? What was its purpose? How does your object reflect the encounter of two or more cultures?

[Digital History project, additional steps] Once you have written up your notes on the object, you will fill out a google form supplying the required "metadata" for your object, which we will upload to the class Omeka site [or another website platform like Wordpress] so we can create a digital exhibit based on your research.

## **IV. Maps and travel writing**

*Maps and travelogues give students an sense of distances, modes of transportation and travel times, and the ways that people of different cultures and religions encountered one another. Medieval maps and travel accounts, however, are often much less concerned with geographical accuracy than with symbolic representation: Jerusalem appears at the center of mappaemundi, for example, and many pilgrims are more interested in describing the sacred significance of a shrine than its contemporary surroundings. In this period we are fortunate to have a wealth of cartographic material and "ethnographic" travel writing from Muslim sources.*

### **Maps:**

1. *The Thirteenth-century Mappamundi in Hereford Cathedral.*

Students can explore the images of this map and other medieval maps in detail at the following website: Virtual Mappa, a featured project of the Digital Mappa site: <http://sims.digitalmappa.org/workspace/#965fe731> and the Hereford map in particular at the cathedral's website: <https://www.themappamundi.co.uk/>

*The History of Cartography*, ed. By J. B. Harvey and David Woodward (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), vol. 1 book 1: *Cartography in the Prehistoric, Ancient, and Medieval Europe and the Mediterranean* (section on medieval cartography). This is also available online at

[http://www.press.uchicago.edu/books/HOC/HOC\\_V1/Volume1.html](http://www.press.uchicago.edu/books/HOC/HOC_V1/Volume1.html)

Brotton, Jerry. *A History of the World in 12 Maps*. Penguin: reprint edition, 2014. (Chapter 3 on Hereford Mappamundi)

Kline, Naomi Reed. *Maps of Medieval Thought: The Hereford Paradigm*  
London: Boydell Press, 2001

## 2. Al-Idrisi's *Tabula Rogeriana*

Reproductions of this map (which does not survive in its original twelfth-century form) can be found in chapter 7 of *The History of Cartography* (see above), vol. 2, book 1: *Cartography in the Traditional Islamic and South Asian societies*. (Chapter 7 •

Cartography of al-SharIf al-IdrIsI s. MAQBUL AHMAD

[http://www.press.uchicago.edu/books/HOC/HOC\\_V2\\_B1/HOC\\_VOLUME2\\_Book1\\_chapter7.pdf](http://www.press.uchicago.edu/books/HOC/HOC_V2_B1/HOC_VOLUME2_Book1_chapter7.pdf))

Brotton, Jerry. *A History of the World in 12 Maps*. Penguin: reprint edition, 2014. (Chapter 2 on al-Idrisi's map).

On al-Idrisi's Sicilian world:

Catlos, Brian. *Infidel Kings and Unholy Warriors: Faith, Power, and Violence in the Age of Crusade and Jihad*. London:Farrar, Straus and Giroux. 2014.

### ***Travel Writing (A few examples):***

Accounts of travel in the medieval Mediterranean are numerous and there is a vast bibliography. Pilgrim accounts such as those by Saewulf and ibn-Jubayr in the twelfth century and more ethnographic narratives such as ibn-Battuta's would all be engaging for undergraduate readers.

### **ASSIGNMENT: Digital Mapping Exercise**

Pick one of the assigned travel accounts that we have read and, using the assigned software, plot at least five of the locations your author mentions on your map. Each point should be accompanied by a description what that location would have been like at the time (size, population, etc), a quotation from the primary source itself, and an account of why this location was significant in the traveler's account. You should include an image of the site that has some relevance to its history and appearance in the Middle Ages (i.e., not the first tourist photo that shows up in an image search). You will write an introduction

to your map that explains what making a map has taught you about the text that simply reading it would not have done.

#### V. Theorizing race, ethnicity, and orientalism: a few useful readings:

*The pedagogical units and exercises proposed above will inevitably lead to larger questions about how we talk about issues of race and identity in the pre-modern Mediterranean context. These issues have taken on particular urgency in an age where white supremacists can wax nostalgic about their fantasy of a "white" and "Christian" Middle Ages. The following are a few resources for selecting readings for class discussions on the topic; the question of whether "race" is even an appropriate term to use for medieval constructions of the Other remains unresolved, despite lively discussions in the field over the last twenty years.*

Akbari, Suzanne Conklin. *Idols in the East : European Representations of Islam and the Orient, 1100–1450*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2008.

Braude, Benjamin. 'The Sons of Noah and the Construction of Ethnic and Geographical Identities in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods,' in: *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Series, vol. 54: 1 (1997), 103-142.

Hahn, Thomas, ed. Special Issue on Race and Ethnicity in the Middle Ages. *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31(1) 2001.

Heng, Geraldine, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2018.

**Note:** *Heng has published articles about aspects of her argument in this book that may be more accessible to undergraduate readers. These include:*

"Did Race and Racism Exist in the Middle Ages?" at the *Public Medievalist* blog site: <https://notevenpast.org/did-race-and-racism-exist-in-the-middle-ages/>

"Reinventing Race, Colonization, and Globalisms across Deep Time: Lessons from the Longue Durée." *PMLA* 130.2 (2015): 358-366.

"Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages Parts I & II" in *Literature Compass*, Vol. 8, 2011, pp. 258-274 and 275-293.

Hsy, Jonathan and Julie Orlemanski. "Race and medieval studies: a partial bibliography." *postmedieval: a journal of medieval cultural studies* (2017). 8, 500–531. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41280-017-0072-0>

**Keywords/Tags:** Mediterranean, Medieval, Middle Ages, Bibliography, Assignments, Saracens, Maps, Mapping, Mappamundi, Travel, Race, Crusades, Identity, Al-Idrisi, Hereford Map, Song of Roland, Jerusalem

Teaching, Identities, Interactions, Modules, Syllabi, Resources, Bibliographies, Topic

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