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The Travelogues of Marco Polo and Sir John Mandeville: The Muslim Other and Islam in Medieval Literature

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Introduction

> *When a piece of writing explicitly announces itself as an ethnographic account, must we as readers simply take that text at its word and recognize it as a reliable description of cultural others, or should we instead contemplate the ways in which ethnographies tend to produce the very "others" that they also purport to describe?*[1]

Travel writing is deemed a preeminent genre that provides the reader with the possibility of having the world at their feet without the need to physically move or travel. It is a unique way of learning about different countries, other cultures, traditions, and religions that transcend one's own scope of knowledge. According to Kim M. Phillips and Joan-Pau Rubiés, "medieval travel writing, or 'travel literature' . . . is a reasonably extended narrative or report that attempts to describe journeys and/or regions at some distance," not necessarily written by the travelers themselves, and "takes travel as an essential condition for its production."[2] However, the second prerequisite is not always fulfilled as there are travel books that are written by "armchair writers" or travelers who "ultimately [rely] on the materials and authority of first-hand travellers" in the compilation of their work without embarking on the physical journey itself.[3] The incentive for traveling often stems from mere curiosity, but in the medieval period, it was mostly pertaining to "expeditions that were primarily expansionist, diplomatic . . . or mercantile,"[4] as well as pilgrimages to visit "the greatest holy sites of Christendom," and possibly "seek new converts" through missionary work.[5] The latter is particularly relevant in the context of the medieval Christian world as the themes of reacquiring the Holy Land and uniting the Christian nation to fight the enemy (i.e., mainly Islam at the time) were part and parcel of

[1] Linda Lomperis, "Medieval Travel Writing and the Question of Race," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, vol. 31, no. 1 (2001): 147-148.
[2] Kim M. Phillips, "Travel, Writing, and the Global Middle Ages," *History Compass*, vol. 14, no. 3 (2016): 82; Joan-Pau Rubiés and Francis Bacon, "Travel Writing as a Genre: Facts, Fictions and the Invention of a Scientific Discourse in Early Modern Europe," *Journeys*, vol. 1, no. 1 (2000): 6.
[3] Rubiés and Bacon, "Travel Writing as a Genre," 6.
[4] Phillips, "Travel, Writing, and the Global Middle Ages," 84.
[5] Ibid, 83.

travel literature then.[6] This, in turn, led to the propagation of a negative, false image of the Islamic religion, along with a distorted portrayal of its theology and its respective believers; a notion that I will thoroughly discuss in the coming chapters.

The 'Saracen' Other played an important role in medieval literature as a racially different body that represents an inferior, deviant group that does not conform and live up to the expectations of the Christian West.[7] The etymology of the term 'Saracen' remains ambiguous and inconsistent; it was initially assumed to be a derivative term for the descendants of Sarah, the wife of Abraham, based on the Old Testament.[8] However, in the context of the medieval Christian world, it was widely used as a derogatory term to refer to Muslims -sometimes Muslim Arabs as well- as a marker of a "religiously different (not a follower of Christ, but of Muhammad), and ethnically or racially different" group of people.[9] In addition, "for many western Europeans throughout the Middle Ages, Saracens were pagans, and pagans were Saracens: the two words [became] interchangeable."[10] The word "pagan" was sometimes replaced with "heretic" to describe 'Saracens' since Islam was perceived as "a heretical deviation from Christianity" rather than a true religion by Christian polemicists.[11] Taking into consideration the fact that the word "pagan" was used by medieval Christians to refer to those who believe in a false

[6] Rubiés and Bacon, "Travel Writing as a Genre," 12; Lomperis, "Medieval Travel Writing," 161.
[7] Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, "On Saracen Enjoyment: Some Fantasies of Race in Late Medieval France and England," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, vol. 31, no. 1 (2001): 114-115.
[8] Katharine Scarfe Beckett, *Anglo-Saxon Perceptions of the Islamic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 94. See also John V. Tolan, *Saracens: Islam in the Medieval European Imagination* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 128. For a detailed, linguistic explanation of the etymology of 'Saracen,' see Irfan Shahid, *Rome and the Arabs: A Prolegomenon to the Study of Byzantium and the Arabs* (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1984), 125-137.
[9] Suzanne Conklin Akbari, *Idols in the East* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012), 155; Beckett, *Anglo-Saxon Perceptions*, 94. On a side note, Akbari makes an interesting observation about how "the term "Saracen" is never used to identify Christian Arabs," and Beckett notes that "there is no evidence that Arabs ever referred to themselves as Saracens," which all serve as further proof of the deliberate, negative use of the term as a reference to Muslims exclusively.
[10] Tolan, *Saracens*, 128.
[11] Ibid, 148.

religion or god, it is obvious that replacing it or using it alongside the term 'Saracen' proves the iconoclastic nature of the medieval West, with regard to the treatment of the Islamic religion.[12] Accordingly, I will be using the term 'Saracen' -for academic purposes- with single quotation marks because I do not intend to encourage the use of another term that negatively and stereotypically refers to Muslims.

The medieval scholarly attack on Islam may have influentially begun with the works of Peter the Venerable (c. 1092 – 1156), the abbot of Cluny, who launched a special project to have the Qur'an translated into its Latin version for the first time, with the help of Robert of Ketton, Herman of Dalmatta, and Peter of Toledo.[13] The two major works that were produced by Peter the Venerable, *Liber contra sectam Saracenorum* and *Summa totius Heresis Saracenorum*, aimed at providing a theological refutation of Islam to prove that it is merely a heretical, schismatic version of Christianity,[14] and presenting a distorted image of Prophet Muhammad "as a scoundrel and trickster."[15] It seems that from thereon most medieval works contributed to the propagation of the Christian mythologies of the fabricated image of Islam and its Prophet, with the intention of showing the superiority of the Christian faith and destroying the credibility of the Islamic religion.[16] Such works include those of John of Damascus, Petrus Alfonsi, John Mandeville, Ranulf Higden, Jacobus de Voragine, Alexander Ross, Thomas Aquinas, to mention just a

[12] In his analysis of the image of Islam in the medieval West, Tolan states that paganism was also used as another term that meant idolatry and heresy; two of the common descriptions that were used by medieval writers to describe the nature of the Islamic religion. For reference, see Tolan, *Saracens*, 12.
[13] Abdur Raheem Kidwai, *Images of the Prophet Muhammad in English Literature* (New York: Peter Lang Verlag, 2018), 16; Matthew Dimmock, *Mythologies of the Prophet Muhammad in Early Modern English Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 8; Tolan, *Saracens*, Introduction (XXI); Frederick Quinn, *The Sum of All Heresies: The Image of Islam in Western Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 39-40.
[14] Kidwai, *Images of the Prophet Muhammad*, 16; Quinn, *The Sum of All Heresies*, 40; Tolan, *Saracens*, 155-156. For more information on Peter the Venerable, see James Kritzeck, *Peter the Venerable and Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964).
[15] Tolan, *Saracens*, Introduction (XXI). See also Quinn, *The Sum of All Heresies*, 40.
[16] Dimmock, *Mythologies of the Prophet Muhammad*, 8.

few.[17] On the bright side, recent works and contemporary scholars have started to address the problematic image of Islam that was propagated throughout most of the works produced in the Middle Ages, hoping to replace that with a more positive, authentic portrayal of the Islamic religion and Prophet Muhammad, as presented in the works of Norman Daniel, Suzanne Conklin Akbari, John V. Tolan, Frederick Quinn, Matthew Dimmock whose texts I will make quite an extensive use of in the coming chapters, among others.[18]

In this mémoire, I will focus on two of the most popular and acclaimed travelogues in medieval travel literature,[19] which are Marco Polo's *The Travels* and Sir John Mandeville's *The Book of Marvels and Travels*, considering their portrayal of Muslims and the general attitude toward the Islamic religion in their books.[20] Polo's *The Travels* has gained considerable attention upon its production for being "the first detailed engagement by a European with the ethnographic and natural features of the 'Indies', including India, China and south-east Asia."[21] The main element of fascination for the medieval reader lies in the text's "[obsession] with difference and the desire to represent it,"[22] which is why it has become "such a crucial cultural text for the West."[23] However, Polo's desire for being

[17] For more detailed information on the works of the aforementioned authors and others, see Kidwai, *Images of the Prophet Muhammad*, Chapter One (13-32); Tolan, *Saracens*, Part Two & Three; Quinn, *The Sum of All Heresies*, Chapter One.
[18] See Kidwai, *Images of the Prophet Muhammad*, Chapter Three (120-138) for a brief summary of the most recent works that offer a positive representation of Islam.
[19] Phillips, "Travel, Writing, and the Global Middle Ages," 85; Rubiés and Bacon, "Travel Writing as a Genre," 12.
[20] There are numerous English translations of Polo and Mandeville's books, but I have chosen two somewhat recent versions that I am already familiar with and have studied before. Thus, I will be using Nigel Cliff's translation of Marco Polo's book and Anthony Bale's translation of John Mandeville's book. For reference, see Marco Polo, *The Travels*, Translated by Nigel Cliff (London: Penguin Books, 2016); John Mandeville, *The Book of Marvels and Travels*, Translated by Anthony Bale (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).
[21] Phillips, "Travel, Writing, and the Global Middle Ages," 85.
[22] Syed M. Islam, "Marco Polo: Order/Disorder in the Discourse of the Other," *Literature and History*, vol. 2, no. 1 (1993): 2.
[23] Ibid, 1.

diverse and exploring differences, whether cultural or individual, is not necessarily authentic, inclusive, or tolerant, as Lomperis contends:

> Polo's *Travels*, moreover, frequently alludes to the interest other travelers will find in all that the narrator himself sees and does, thereby highlighting the fact that the intended audience of the *Travels* is none other than a group of non-others, individuals who, like Polo himself, are "at home" in the West, and hence share the same values and interests as the narrator-traveler.[24]

Thus, Polo's representation of Islamic alterity often comes off as an endeavor to accommodate the Western audience's perspective on Islam. Similarly, Mandeville's *The Book* is considered a peculiar, interdisciplinary text as it combines pilgrimage and travel writing together, although the author's vocation has been in question, due to the speculation that he was probably just a meticulous compiler and an 'armchair' traveler.[25] While I cannot deny the possibility that Mandeville might have actually visited some of the places he describes in his book, I am still inclined to believe that he was a clever scholar and compiler rather than a mere traveler.[26] Moreover, in the Prologue of his book, Mandeville has demonstrated his religious fervor of the Christian faith and expressed his views with regard to the wishful Crusade-inspired goal of reacquiring the Holy Land.[27] Accordingly, Mandeville offers a distorted account of the Islamic religion and reiterates the medieval, negative images of Prophet Muhammad, considering that his book was written during the time in which the "Christian Jerusalem fell under [Muslim] control in 1291."[28] That is why Mandeville's approach is ultimately a special calling through which

[24] Lomperis, "Medieval Travel Writing," 150.
[25] Rubiés and Bacon, "Travel Writing as a Genre," 12.
[26] In Section 2.2.2, I will provide some evidence as to why I believe Mandeville was indeed an 'armchair' traveler.
[27] Mandeville, *The Book*, trans. by Bale, 5-6.
[28] Lomperis, "Medieval Travel Writing," 161.

he subtly preaches the veracity of the Christian faith and asserts the inevitability of the non-Christians' conversion. In other words,

> The text of Mandeville's *Travels*. . . with the sense that it conveys of a world entirely filled with Christians and others wishing to be Christian, can be understood as a significant testament to the power and longevity of this fantasy within the imagination of Latin Christendom.[29]

Regardless of whether Mandeville's persona is real or fictional, the popularity of his book requires us as readers to reflect on the interpretations of his treatment of Islam, especially "in the particular cultural and social context in which [his book] was written and circulated," which was heavily influenced by the antagonism between Muslims and Christians owing to the Crusade propaganda.[30]

Both works have been praised for their literary excellence and scholastic achievement in the genre of travel writing; however, their portrayal of the Other with regard to the question of race and religion has rarely been considered. In fact, most scholars believe that Polo and Mandeville's discourse on the different cultures and religions they encountered is tolerant and progressive.[31] In that case, we should reflect on what tolerance really meant in the medieval Christian world, because the lack of it is highly plausible considering "the influence of a powerful Church that was able and willing to suppress all major deviations from the exclusive truth it was convinced it possessed."[32] According to Bejczy, "In medieval scholarly writing *tolerantia* came to denote . . . the forbearance of bad people (the immoral, the heterodox, the infidel) by those who had the

[29] Ibid, 161-162.
[30] Rubiés and Bacon, "Travel Writing as a Genre," 13.
[31] For reference, see Benjamin Braude, "Mandeville's Jews among Others," In: *Pilgrims and Travelers to the Holy Land* (Omaha: Creighton University Press, 1996), 133-158; Sebastian I. Sobecki, "Mandeville's Thought of the Limit: The Discourse of Similarity and Difference in 'The Travels of Sir John Mandeville,'" *The Review of English Studies*, vol. 53, no. 211 (2002): 329–343.
[32] István Bejczy, "Tolerantia: A Medieval Concept," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 58, no. 3 (1997): 365.

power to dispose of them."[33] Nevertheless, the purport of such tolerance is apparently neither authentic nor sincere because non-Christians (i.e., Muslims) were treated as heretics who would eventually convert to Christianity through free -sometimes forced- conversion or by evangelistic preachers.[34] In other words, the façade of tolerance "was a purely pragmatic [act]" to maintain the status quo and ensure "a social order,"[35] as long as the non-believers "did not present a serious threat to Christianity."[36] That is why it is important to reassess the impact of such works and the interpretations they entail in our contemporary time when it comes to the image of Islam from the viewpoint of the West.

Methodology & Chapter Plan

The methodology of research in this mémoire follows an interdisciplinary approach as it combines medieval works in travel literature and analytical texts that aim to unravel the hidden meanings behind the discussion and inclusion of other cultures and religions (i.e., Islam vis-à-vis Christianity). The main focus will be on the impact of such works on the treatment of, and attitude toward, marginalized groups, in this case, Muslims. The approach will be further contextualized through close readings as well as comparative and linguistic analysis of several passages in Polo and Mandeville's books that focus on highlighting their bias toward the Christian faith and denigration of Islam as a second-best religion. This is accomplished with the assistance of other scholarly works which support my argument that Western authors, including Polo and Mandeville, provided a distorted account of the Islamic religion and contributed to the misrepresentation of Prophet Muhammad; a phenomenon that was widely prevalent during the Middle Ages

[33] Ibid, 368.
[34] See Section 1.2 for more information.
[35] Patrick Loobuyck, "Tolerance Versus Freedom of Religion," *International Journal in Philosophy and Theology*, vol. 71, no. 4 (2010): 360.
[36] Bejczy, "Tolerantia: A Medieval Concept," 369.

and in most medieval works, some of which I will mention in the coming chapters. Considering the wide popularity of Polo and Mandeville's accounts in the genre of travel literature, my purpose is to draw the reader's attention to the implications inferred from their presentation of the Islamic religion, as well as the correlation between their works and the stance of Christendom on Islam during a time of severe political and religious conflict triggered by the Crusades.[37] Also, I intend to express my dissent from the critics who perceive the works of Polo as neutral or those of Mandeville, Geoffrey Chaucer, and the authors of the *Chansons de Geste* as tolerant and accepting of Islam, by demonstrating that their works ultimately serve as an affirmation of the validity of the Christian faith and the falsity of the Islamic religion.

The limitations of the present work reside in my dependence on modern English translations of the works I will be analyzing, due to my unfamiliarity with the intricacies of Middle English and lack of fluency in Franco-Venetian, the language in which Rustichello da Pisa is believed to have written the accounts narrated by Marco Polo,[38] and Old French, the language of most of the known *Chansons de Geste*.[39] As a compensation for such limitation, I have consulted several translated versions of the same work to make sure there is not much discrepancy between my primary sources and others, especially when I resort to a semantic and linguistic-based analysis of certain texts. My decision to use translations is purely pragmatic, because it was outside the scope of my research to learn the original languages of every work, due to time-sensitivity and relevance, and to maintain the authenticity of my project by not providing modern translations that I do

[37] See Benjamin Z. Kedar, *Crusade and Mission: European Approaches toward the Muslims* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984) as one of the many references on the status of the Islamic religion during the medieval period of the Crusades.
[38] Simon Gaunt, *Marco Polo's Le Devisement Du Monde: Narrative Voice, Language and Diversity* (Cambridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2013), 2.
[39] Norman Daniel, *Heroes and Saracens: An Interpretation of the Chansons de Geste* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1984), 2-3.

not fully understand or would not be able to revise properly. Also, I am aspiring to make my work more reachable and available to all the anglophone readers who are looking to bridge the gap between medieval literature -being restricted to old, linguistic variations- and contemporary issues that could be traced to and connected with similar topics in previous timeframes.

Following this brief introduction, the mémoire is divided into two chapters and an epilogue. The structure of the mémoire is not primarily chronological; as I intend to concentrate more on the interconnection between and concurrence of certain events/themes in different works, in close proximity to the medieval Christian stance on the expansion of the Islamic religion rather than their time of publication. Accordingly, in the first chapter, I will tackle the negative, misrepresentative depiction of Muslims as violent, intolerant, and despicable believers who follow a heretical religion in Polo and Mandeville's texts. The notion of the inevitability of conversion from Islam to Christianity is also thoroughly discussed as "Christianizing the Saracen became an obvious goal of the crusade for many a [Christian] European of the mid-twelfth century,"[40] which was especially bolstered with preaching and missionary work on the part of evangelists and other Christian scholars, such as Ramon Llull, Robert Holcot, etc.[41] Then, I will draw a connection between the idea of miracles and its enormous potency as a tool that guarantees the conversion of non-Christians, as exemplified in Polo and Mandeville's books, as well as Chaucer's "The Man of Law's Tale." It is important to note that medieval Christendom firmly believed in the power of miracles and perceived them as "one way of authenticating the authority of individual figures [i.e., Saints and Apostles],"[42] and a

[40] Kedar, *Crusade and Mission*, 67.
[41] See Section 1.2 for more details.
[42] Graham H. Twelftree (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Miracles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 135.

"defence of an element of Christianity, especially its theology."[43] That is why such tool of persuasion was used as the primary defense mechanism for the typical "medieval Christian used to miracle-performing saints" to discredit Prophet Muhammad for being "incapable of miracles" which, in turn, led to the conclusion that "he lacked divine grace."[44]

In the second chapter, I will expand more on the notion of conversion through a literary analysis of the representation of Muslims in the *Chansons de Geste*, with particular focus on *Fierabras* and the *Chanson de Roland*. I will make use of the themes of Islam as a schism of Christianity and Muhammad as a pseudo-prophet to segue into the next section of the chapter that deals with the deformed images of the Prophet and the distortion of his law in medieval works generally, as well as in Polo and Mandeville's travelogues specifically. Finally, I will bring the mémoire to a close with an epilogue in which I briefly examine the episode of "The Old Man of the Mountain" as narrated in Polo and Mandeville's accounts, its origin, which extends to a sub-sect of Islam -the Nizari Isma'ilis,- and its relation to the eschatological concept of the Islamic Paradise, and possibly the discourse on terrorism. Consequently, the aim of the present research is to analyze the representation of Islam and ultimately Prophet Muhammad in Marco Polo's *The Travels* and John Mandeville's *The Book of Marvels and Travels* to prove that the medieval Western perspective offers a distorted portrayal of the Islamic religion and its theology, which is often done behind the masquerade of tolerance and acceptance.

[43] Ibid, 136.
[44] Stefano Mula, "Muhammad and the Saints: The History of the Prophet in the Golden Legend," *Modern Philology*, vol. 101, no. 2 (2003): 185.

1. Chapter One: The Misrepresentation of Muslims and the Islamic Religion

1. 1. The Negative Portrayal of Muslims

1. 1. 1. In Marco Polo's *The Travels*

Marco Polo's book *The Travels* (c. 1300) is considered an exhaustive narration of his 24-year journey from Venice to the Middle East, Asia, and China, as well as other regions all over the world, exploring different cultures and forming a harmonious cohabitation with people of various ethnicities and religions. Through his description, one can discern that his attitude toward the backgrounds and beliefs of certain groups of people (i.e., the Mongols and idolaters, including Buddhists and Hindus) could be perceived as somewhat tolerant or blatantly neutral.[1] However, it has become obvious on several occasions that Polo is biased toward the Christian faith and "his only prejudice seems to be against the Muslims."[2] Such prejudice is displayed in the derogatory language that Polo sometimes uses when he describes Muslims by using adjectives like "wicked" and "murderous,"[3] in addition to the devaluation of the Islamic doctrine and practice by showing their exaggerated indulgence in sin (i.e., drinking alcohol, killing others) and distorting the law of Prophet Muhammad.[4] In fact, in the Introduction of the translated version of Polo's book by Nigel Cliff, it is explicitly declared that:

> He [Polo] is admittedly not free of the usual late medieval Christian's abhorrence of Islam, which he caricatures as a licence to sin against people of other faiths while claiming every Muslim victim as a martyr; perhaps a few such denunciations were politically expedient in a book written for Western readers, because for every crude denunciation of Muslim

[1] Michael Frassetto and David R. Blanks, *Western Views of Islam in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Perception of Other* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 67.
[2] Ibid, 67.
[3] Marco Polo, *The Travels*, Translated by Nigel Cliff (London: Penguin Books, 2016), 47.
[4] This is found in Polo's description of the 'Saracens' in the Kingdoms of Persia (Part One, 33).

'dogs' there is an individual Muslim, like his 'learned' companion in Fuzhou, whom he speaks of with respect.[5]

Taking into consideration the time during which Polo's account was written down, it seems to be synchronically in parallel with the type of texts that subtly show the medieval Western views of Islam, "which are sometimes viewed as uniformly hostile"[6] and often tend to highlight the antagonism toward Muslims, as well as spread false information about the Islamic religion. During the Middle Ages, it was common to portray Muslims as hostile and intolerant to people of other faiths (i.e., Christians) to discredit the morals and values of Islam as a religion.[7] Accordingly, "learned and popular writers developed the image of the Saracen as enemy to justify the crusades and express their own religious fervor."[8] In addition to the depiction of Muslims as the enemy, the endorsement of the use of violence against them was palpably being normalized and the act of killing as many 'Saracens' as possible, on the hands of Christians, was outrageously celebrated without much condemnation from society.[9] It is undeniable that Muslims might have done some horrific acts on their part as well at the time, whether in defense or not, but it is important to revise the essence of the Islamic religion which does not condone violence. However, what I intend to draw the attention to is how Western writers manipulated the facts to propagate the idea that violence is the foundation of the Islamic religion, and vilified Muslims for committing the same acts as those of some Christians, but in their case, it was

[5] Polo, *The Travels*, trans. by Cliff, xxxiii.
[6] Frassetto and Blanks, *Western Views of Islam,* 55.
[7] Frederick Quinn, *The Sum of All Heresies: The Image of Islam in Western Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 22-23. In this section, Quinn tackles how the image of Islam is manipulated by Western societies; portraying the Islamic religion as evil and threatening in order to serve "one's own ideological agenda" during a time when people were under the influence of the hostility triggered by the Crusades.
[8] C. Meredith Jones, "The Conventional Saracen of the Songs of Geste," *Speculum*, vol. 17, no. 2 (1942): 201–225, quoted in Frassetto and Blanks, *Western Views of Islam,* 84.
[9] Frassetto and Blanks, *Western Views of Islam,* 66. This notion is clearly observed in Polo's story of the King of Abyssinia and his bishop who went to Jerusalem on his behalf (Part Eight, 293-295) which I will tackle in the following page. This is also demonstrated in the *Chansons de Geste* which I will analyze in Chapter 2.

acceptable and religiously justifiable. Hence, "we can only conclude that the use of violence against Islam was seen as inherently or axiomatically just."[10] In other words, as Jones puts it:

> Everything that the Christian holds to be perverse, wicked, detestable, is presented as an integral part of Saracen doctrine, belief, or practice. [It] is offered as the natural enemy of Christendom. But [this] was not thrown together accidentally, nor can it be the reflection of ignorance. It is a monument to an intense religious fervour.[11]

During his time in the Arabian Sea, Polo narrates a story about the Christian King of Abyssinia (Ethiopia nowadays) who wanted to embark on pilgrimage to Jerusalem but was advised to send his bishop instead for security reasons.[12] As there was an ongoing war between the King's province and that of Aden (now the temporary capital city of Yemen) among others, which were occupied by Muslims and, in turn, posed a threat to the King's life.[13] The language used by Polo to describe Muslims in this text exhibits the characteristics of what is contemporarily known as hate speech and microaggression.[14] It is arguably the first time Polo explicitly voices his opinion on the 'Saracens' of that kingdom by portraying them as bigoted individuals who "detest Christians . . . and loathe them as their mortal enemies,"[15] which is a serious generalization based on one encounter with the Sultan of Aden whom Polo claims that he wanted to coerce the bishop into converting to Islam. It is unclear whether Polo had heard such story from someone

[10] Norman Daniel, *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1993), 135.
[11] Jones, "The Conventional Saracen", quoted in Abdur Raheem Kidwai, *Images of the Prophet Muhammad in English Literature* (New York: Peter Lang Verlag, 2018), 5.
[12] Polo, *The Travels*, trans. by Cliff, 293.
[13] Ibid, 292.
[14] These two terms are now being used in several contexts to describe the kind of discourse some people resort to when they refer to or talk about Muslims; a pattern of stereotypical assumptions that are often offensive or subtle remarks that tend to contribute to the stigmatization of the Muslim nation and Arabs in general. For scholarly definitions of "hate speech" and "microaggression," see Ferihan Polat et al., "Hate Speech in Turkish Media: The Example of Charlie Hebdo Attack's," *Journal of Advanced Research in Social Sciences and Humanities*, vol. 3, no. 2 (2018): 69; Altaf Husain and Stephenie Howard, "Religious Microaggressions: A Case Study of Muslim Americans," *Journal of Ethnic & Cultural Diversity in Social Work,* vol. 26, no. 1-2 (2017): 140-141.
[15] Polo, *The Travels*, trans. by Cliff, 293.

else or witnessed it himself which, in turn, makes his credibility questionable when it comes to making such overboard generalizations. On a relevant note, in his article, Classen offers the possibility that Polo's insistence on being detailed, as well as his boastfulness about having witnessed more things than anybody else and his book being "the truth and nothing but the truth," is due to his awareness "that his audience might question some [aspects] of his text due to its exotic nature."[16] That is why Polo employs the use of generalizations and exaggerated statements to guarantee that his audience is convinced and his credibility is maintained.[17] Moreover, Polo seems to be in support of the killing of Muslims during the battle that emerged between the kingdoms of Abyssinia and Aden; a support which possibly stems from the common medieval belief that Christianity is bound for victory against those who are deemed false believers (i.e., Muslims and Jews).[18] In the following text, Polo displays his religious fervor by celebrating the mass killing of Muslims whom he refers to as "Saracen dogs," which is highly offensive and shows his true feelings toward this specific religious group:

> Now you have heard how the bishop well and truly avenged himself on these Saracen dogs; for the number of the dead was almost beyond counting, and large swathes of land were also ravaged and laid waste. And no wonder; for it is not fitting that Saracen dogs should lord it over Christians.[19]

In addition, Polo's description of the 'Saracens' in his travel account is consistently associated with the epithets "wicked", "treacherous", "murderous,"[20] and he even goes on to say that "the Turkmens, who worship Muhammad and observe his law, are an

[16] Albrecht Classen, "Marco Polo and John Mandeville: The Traveler as Authority Figure, the Real and the Imaginary," In: *Authorities in the Middle Ages* (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2013), 231.
[17] Ibid, 230-238. These pages include the first section of Classen's article concerned with "Marco Polo's *Il Milione*."
[18] Suzanne Conklin Akbari, *Idols in the East* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012), 113.
[19] Polo, *The Travels*, trans. by Cliff, 295. This idea goes hand-in-hand with the justification of using violence against Muslims as a way of defending the Christian faith (Section 1.1.1).
[20] Ibid, 22 & 28 ("wicked"), 28 ("treacherous"), 47 ("murderous").

uneducated people who speak a barbarous language."[21] Therefore, it is safe to say that Polo might not have been as accepting of and tolerant toward Muslims when one looks closely at the kind of language he uses to describe them.

1. 1. 2. In John Mandeville's *The Book of Marvels and Travels*

Similar to Polo's travelogue in which his negative portrayal of Muslims and bias toward Christianity have been established, there is another travel book, *The Book of Marvels and Travels* (1350s – 1470), which is written by Sir John Mandeville and considered "one of the bestsellers and most popular texts of the entire Middle Ages."[22] Mandeville, the British knight, narrates his travel accounts starting from England to Jerusalem, Asia, and many countries across the world. Throughout his book, Mandeville has shown his bias toward Christianity and its righteousness as the only true religion. He seems to be under the influence of the political and religious conflict triggered by the Crusades, making sure to point out that Jerusalem rightfully belongs to the Christians, as he says in his Prologue, "I really believe that within just a little time our rightful inheritance should be regained and placed into the hands of Jesus Christ's rightful heirs."[23] Some critics believe that Mandeville treats Islam and the Other with tolerance and acceptance in his book,[24] but I disagree with such claim as I will show that Mandeville, like other Western writers, perceived Islam as a false religion or a Christian schism.

> In the Middle Ages it was widely held that Islam was a heretical form of Christianity and that Mahomet was a perverse instrument of schism operating by diabolical inspiration. The conception of Christianity as the one universal religion, opposed only by barbarous

[21] Ibid, 22.
[22] Classen, "Marco Polo and John Mandeville: The Traveler as Authority Figure," 238.
[23] John Mandeville, *The Book of Marvels and Travels*, Translated by Anthony Bale (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 6.
[24] Benjamin Braude, "Mandeville's Jews among Others," In: *Pilgrims and Travelers to the Holy Land* (Omaha: Creighton University Press, 1996), 133-158. See also Sebastian I. Sobecki, "Mandeville's Thought of the Limit: The Discourse of Similarity and Difference in 'The Travels of Sir John Mandeville,'" *The Review of English Studies*, vol. 53, no. 211 (2002): 329–343.

> paganism destined soon to be converted or destroyed, carried with it the conviction that any self-styled religion that had arisen since the founding of Christianity must necessarily be nothing other than a bastard and treacherous offshoot from the true faith.[25]

This idea is prevalent in most medieval texts in which writers distort the image of the Prophet and present Islam as a false or second-best religion that is bound to vanish. Mandeville displays the same way of thinking in several parts in his book in which he categorizes 'Saracens' among people he considers sinners and unbelievers. In his account of Jerusalem, he says, "Yet the sinful ones have held that land in their hands for more than a hundred and fifty years, but they shall not hold it for much longer, if God so wills it."[26] Braude writes, "Despite his claims to the Holy Land and his advocacy of a Crusade to free it from the Saracens, Mandeville treats his enemy with respect and a degree of understanding."[27] I find this statement contradicting because it corroborates the recurrent image of portraying 'Saracens' as the enemy as I stated earlier, and Mandeville's use of words like "sinners" and "traitors"[28] in the same text does not show respect; because if Mandeville was really tolerant as critics describe him, he would not consider those who follow a different religion sinners or misbelievers.

Moreover, on one hand, Mandeville shows that Muslims respect the holiness of "the Temple" and they enter barefoot as one should in such a holy place.[29] Yet when

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[25] Samuel C. Chew, *The Crescent and the Rose: Islam and England during the Renaissance* (New York: Octagon Books, 1974), quoted in Kidwai*, Images of the Prophet Muhammad*, 9-10.
[26] Mandeville, *The Book*, trans. by Bale, 40.
[27] Braude, "Mandeville's Jews among Others," 138.
[28] Mandeville, *The Book*, trans. by Bale, 40. In this text, Mandeville puts together a list of all the people who occupied Jerusalem, among them are Christians and 'Saracens.' However, this seems paradoxical because he explicitly says that Christians will regain the Holy Land, which shows that Christians are excluded from those he calls "traitors" and "sinners", among which 'Saracens' are listed. Perhaps he meant other sects of Christianity, such as the Christians of Prester John's Land (see Jamal S. Buresly and Khaled M. Shuqair, "Religious Hegemony and the Antichrist Rhetoric in John Mandeville's Travels," *Annuals of the Faculty of Arts, Ain Shams University*, vol. 39 (2011): 450). This proves that Mandeville was biased against anyone who did not follow his same beliefs whether that is another form of Christianity or another religion.
[29] Mandeville, *The Book*, trans. by Bale, 44. This point shows another contradiction in Mandeville's book as he narrates several stories in which Muslims desecrate holy places that belong to Christians, yet here, it is evident that they know how to pay their respects in a holy place.

Mandeville compares himself to the 'Saracens', he refers to them as "unbelievers," as he says, "When my friends and I went in there, we took off our shoes and entered barefoot, and aimed to worship in an equal or superior way to the unbelievers."[30] The linguistic placement of the word "unbelievers" is vague, because one cannot understand whether Mandeville is using it as an antecedent to refer to 'Saracens', which is highly plausible as he mentions their way of worship in the Temple, then proceeds to report that he wants to do the same in an "equal" way by entering barefoot as well. As for the word "superior", I believe it is misplaced because it makes Mandeville sound condescending toward other people who visit the Temple, and it shows that he is speaking from a moral high-ground as if other people's worship would not be right or accepted just because they are not Christians.[31] "In terms of cultural Otherness, [Mandeville] divides the world into the Western Christian world as the "us" and the rest of the world as the "them,""[32] which is evident in the categorization of people in his book. On the other hand, Mandeville narrates several stories in his book in which he consistently portrays Muslims as the primary operators in the destruction and desecration of Christian churches and holy places. Also, in this context, he puts "pagans" -a term used in the Middle Ages by Christians to describe those who follow other religions and believe in a presumably false god-[33] and "Saracens" in the same sentence together, which represents his views on Islam as a

[30] Ibid, 44. This quotation in the Middle English version of Mandeville's text goes as follows: "We dide of our shone and come barefoot, in tacknynge that we sholde do also moche worship, other more, as they that were in mysbyleve." Although the word "superior" carries a stronger connotation, "moche" and "more" still convey the same meaning of showing superiority over the misbelievers from Mandeville's perspective.

[31] There is some ambiguity in this part of Mandeville's book as one cannot distinguish whether he is referring to the Muslims' worship in a mosque (possibly Al-Aqsa Mosque) or the act of paying their respects to a Church in the Temple (possibly the Holy Sepulchre). In his explanatory notes, Bale states that "the Temple of Our Lord" in Mandeville's book refers to "the Dome of the Rock and Al-Aqsa complex on Jerusalem's Temple Mount, the most holy site in the city for Jews and Muslims, regarded as the site of the location of Abraham's binding of Isaac, and the First and Second Temples, and the location of Muhammad's ascent to heaven. In the period in which Mandeville was writing, following the Crusaders' defeat, the Dome of the Rock had been re-consecrated according to the Islamic rite" (Mandeville, *The Book*, trans. by Bale, 141).

[32] Buresly and Shuqair, "Religious Hegemony and the Antichrist Rhetoric," 450.

[33] Owen Davies*, Paganism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

pseudo-religion that deviated from the true Christian faith.[34] Here are some texts in which Mandeville points out the profanation of the 'Saracens':

> A beautiful Christian city once stood here, but the Saracens have destroyed a large part of it . . . The city of Damietta was once exceptionally formidable, but it was captured twice by Christians and then the Saracens destroyed its walls and all the castles in the region . . . At Alexandria there is still a pretty church entirely whitewashed, and this is like all the other Christians churches there, as the pagans and the Saracens had them whitewashed to remove the paintings and the images that were portrayed on the walls.[35]

As Polo's credibility might have been questioned, "scholars have [also] long debated who this Mandeville might have been, and how much of his account can be trusted, if any of it at all."[36] Classen assumes that Mandeville "was most probably nothing but an armchair traveller,"[37] which really makes one think about whether his accounts are about real events that occurred at that time, or he was merely following in other Western writers' footsteps who participated in the collective wave of denunciation of Muslims.

One cannot completely disregard Mandeville's accounts or deny that Muslims might have committed such acts at the time, but it is important to underline the fact that both sides (i.e., Muslims and Christians) have caused each other harm during such a conflicting time. However, in medieval literature, Muslims are mentioned as an example of despotism and brutality, while Christians are justifiably exempted from any sort of condemnation. In other words,

> If we suppose that there were an equal number of similar offences committed by Christians and by Muslims in any given time, in the former case they would be seen as

[34] Mandeville, *The Book*, trans. by Bale, 31 & 42.
[35] Ibid, 17, 25-26, & 31, respectively.
[36] Classen, "Marco Polo and John Mandeville: The Traveler as Authority Figure," 238.
[37] Ibid, 238.

> having occurred in spite of doctrine, so that each individual case would be an exception, and in the latter it would be assumed that doctrine was the cause of whatever happened.[38]

Furthermore, on the topic of profanation during the time of the Crusades, Norman Daniel exposes the other side and presents a controversial polemic showcasing the sadistic acts of Christians who sought solace in the desecration of mosques as a way of revolting the loss of "The Temple of the Lord" and their churches:[39]

> Christians would always feel a pleasure if not a duty in the desecration of mosques: 'synagogues of Satan,' as one not especially immoderate commentator called them . . . In 'the other mosques of Muhammad, there where the Muslims worshipped' the Prince [the Prince of Antioch] had chargers and donkeys brought in, the walls splashed with wine and anointed with fresh and salted pork fat, and he also ordered his men to make heaps of waste, and 'they made ten'.[40]

The previous excerpt indicates how the Islamic religion was treated with such degradation and contempt, to the extent that some of the taboos in the religion (drinking alcohol and eating pork) were used as a tool to whitewash the walls of mosques. Yet medieval writers only focused on pointing out that Muslims confiscated churches and violated their sanctity, as writers like Mandeville and many others made sure to propagate during the Middle Ages, in an attempt to overlook and cover up the same acts committed by Christians.

> It is not that such negative images of Muslims did not already exist; they were easily available in the writings of earlier Western theologians . . . But backed by the power of the papacy and a generation of Europe's leaders who had tasted warfare in the East, the crusaders and the image of demonic Islam they held entered the collective consciousness of Europe, where it stayed to work its destructive effects through subsequent centuries.[41]

[38] Daniel, *Islam and The West*, 270.
[39] Ibid, 133.
[40] Ibid, 134.
[41] Quinn, *The Sum of All Heresies*, 33.

On the subject of Europe, the Spanish epic poems often mentioned Muslims either to make remarks about their part in the Crusades, praise the chivalry of Salah al-Din as an example, or to demonize them and the Islamic religion.[42] One of the most famous figures in medieval Spain is Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar (known as El Cid), a knight who fought with Christians and offered his aid to Muslim armies -as a strategy to get out of exile and become familiar with their culture in order to defeat them- during a time of conflict between the Kingdom of Castile and several provinces of Al-Andalus.[43] Although this epic poem is considered among the works "in which Muslims are neither so peripheral nor so harshly treated," we eventually notice that "in the end El Cid is perfectly willing to slaughter them without much provocation, deceive them, destroy their mosques, force them into exile, and turn Valencia into a Christian city."[44] Here, it is clear that there was neither honor nor a sense of tolerance toward Muslims, even those you supposedly fought next to and considered your allies, and the destruction of mosques was also not seen as morally wrong or transgressive if the end goal was to spread Christianity. Therefore, the aphorism "Pagans are wrong and Christians are right"[45] stated in the *Chanson de Roland,* which was widely spread in the medieval era as an indisputable fact, is further disproved considering the Christians' hostile acts toward the Muslim nation and the medieval West's grave opposition to the Islamic religion.

[42] See Frassetto and Blanks, *Western Views of Islam,* 60.
[43] See Rita Hamilton, Janet Hunter Perry, and Ian Michael, *The Poem of the Cid: [a Bilingual Edition with Parallel Text]* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1984) for reference.
[44] Frassetto and Blanks, *Western Views of Islam,* 60.
[45] Akbari, *Idols in the East*, 208. The term "pagans" here refers to Muslims specifically. More details will be given in Chapter 2.

1. 2. The Inevitable Conversion from Islam to Christianity

Since Islam was considered a Christian schism or heresy in the Middle Ages,[46] it is no wonder that many people held the belief that all Muslims would eventually convert to Christianity. It was such a common trope in medieval literature as well to show the victory of Christians at the end of a battle either by "killing or converting the Saracen."[47] There were ongoing experiments to methodically convert Muslims to Christianity; fueled by the conviction that it is destined to happen anyway, considering the fact that people believed the Christian faith would prevail in the world as the only true religion to exist. Roger Bacon (c. 1220 – c. 1292), "an exact contemporary of Marco Polo" and a medieval philosopher and empiricist, "promoted preaching" and "the learning of languages and of philosophy [as a way] to convert the infidels."[48] In addition, he also "supported the prophecy that, "the Greeks will return to the obedience of the Roman Church, the Tartars for the most part will be converted to the Faith and the Saracens will be destroyed.""[49] This proves that there were widespread conjectures about the inevitability of converting from Islam to Christianity, propagating the idea that Islam was a false religion and refusing to accept that it was here to stay. Also, this makes one reflect on how the West regarded the Muslim nation as docile and the Islamic religion as frail and schismatic that they believed people would instantly abandon their faith and successfully yield to the possibility of conversion.

Similarly, in his account of the Great Khan, Marco Polo expresses his opinion on the notion of preaching as an effective method that ensures the conversion to Christianity:

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[46] Kidwai*, Images of the Prophet Muhammad*, 10.
[47] Quinn, *The Sum of All Heresies*, 49. Such trope is prevalent in the narrative of the *Chansons de Geste* which I will tackle in Chapter 2.
[48] Frassetto and Blanks, *Western Views of Islam,* 69.
[49] Stewart C. Easton, *Roger Bacon and His Search for a Universal Science* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952), 135-36, quoted in Frassetto and Blanks, *Western Views of Islam*, 67.

> And as we said at the beginning, if men qualified to preach our faith to him had actually been sent by the pope, the Great Khan would undoubtedly have become a Christian, because it is a known fact that he had an ardent desire to be converted.[50]

Polo even speaks on behalf of the Great Khan and claims that "he [the Great Khan] holds the Christian faith to be the truest and best,"[51] which makes one ponder the question of whether this is really what the Great Khan believed, or it is actually Polo's bias toward Christendom and his own views presented in disguise, which also concur with those of his predecessors during the medieval period. Likewise, John Mandeville reiterates the same idea with regard to the power of preaching when it comes to the conversion of non-Christians. As he says, "there are many barons and others in his [the Great Khan] court who are Christian, converted to the Christian faith through the preaching of Christians who lived there."[52] Also, Mandeville claims that "He's got [the Great Khan] many physicians, of whom two hundred are Christians and two hundred are Saracens, but he trusts the Christians most."[53] This seems like a presumption provided under the pretext of a general valorization of the Christians to present Muslims as incompetent and inferior, which shows Mandeville's adherence to a certain agenda of negatively portraying Muslims.[54] In fact, Mandeville's disregard for the role of Arab/Muslim physicians in transmitting medical knowledge to the medieval West during a time when their contributions were widely being acknowledged serves as further proof for his bias against Islamic alterity in general.[55]

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[50] Polo, *The Travels*, trans. by Cliff, 94-95.
[51] Ibid, 93.
[52] Mandeville, *The Book*, trans. by Bale, 97.
[53] Ibid, 97.
[54] This point is further elaborated in Section 1.1.2.
[55] It is important to note that Muslim physicians, such as: Ibn-Sina, Ibn-Rushd, Ibn al-Nafis, Al-Razi, among many others, were starting to gain more recognition in the medieval period for their achievements in the field of medicine. Hence, Mandeville's insinuation, on behalf of the Great Khan, that the Muslim physicians were not as trustworthy as the Christian ones seems unfounded and only confirms his prejudice against

Another medieval theologian and missionary who is known to have dedicated almost his whole life trying to convert Muslims -as well as Jews- to Christianity is Ramon Llull (c. 1232 – c. 1316).[56] "At [an] Ecumenical Council in 1311, [Llull] suggested a bold proposal to create schools for the study of Oriental languages, history, and beliefs,"[57] because he believed that intellectuality could be a useful tool that would guarantee success in the missionary work of converting others to Christianity. Frassetto and Blanks claim that Llull "believed in free, not forced, conversions,"[58] but Quinn writes, "Once the dialogue was established, Llull believed, coercion was a perfectly acceptable next step."[59] The latter's claim is also supported by another scholar, Ryan D. Giles, who says that Llull indeed supported "coercive tactics and evangelistic plans" in a military context.[60] Since Llull is believed to have been a supporter of the Crusades,[61] and at times advocated "the use of force . . . in his quest to convert Muslims,"[62] it is not unlikely that he would preach the coercive conversion of non-Christians. Llull's insistence on converting everyone to Christianity does not stem from a lack of information on the validity of other religions; on the contrary, Llull "understood Islam well, read works of Islamic theology,"[63] and "was probably the most knowledgeable missionary figure of his times about Islam."[64] Nevertheless, Llull's conviction, like that of most of his contemporaries in the medieval

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the 'Saracens' as people in general. See Muhammad Obaidullah, "Medical Science and Islam: An Analysis of the Contributions of the Medieval Muslim Scholars," At the International Conference on "*Islamic Science and Technology (InSIST),"* (2008): 1-20 for more information on this topic.

[56] See Frassetto and Blanks, *Western Views of Islam*, 69-70.

[57] Quinn, *The Sum of All Heresies*, 42.

[58] Frassetto and Blanks, *Western Views of Islam*, 70.

[59] Quinn, *The Sum of All Heresies*, 42.

[60] Ryan D. Giles, "The Problem of Interreligious Peacemaking in the Works of Ramon Llull," *Religions*, vol. 11, no .4 (2020): 5.

[61] Frassetto and Blanks, *Western Views of Islam*, 70.

[62] Giles, "The Problem of Interreligious Peacemaking," 5.

[63] Frassetto and Blanks, *Western Views of Islam*, 70.

[64] Quinn, *The Sum of All Heresies*, 42.

period, originates from and is driven by the urge to prove "the truth of Christianity,"[65] whilst reinforcing the falsity of the Islamic religion.

Furthermore, during the time of the Crusades, even clergymen were willing to use religion as a means of negotiation if it meant having more people convert to Christianity. As Munro writes, "a stronger counter-tradition of antipathy to Islam exists throughout the Middle Ages: the majority of Christian clergy remained hostile, especially during the high propaganda periods preceding new Crusades."[66] There is the example of Pope Pius II (1405 – 1464) who wrote a letter to Mehmed the Conqueror (also known as Mehmed II), the Ottoman Sultan (1432 – 1481), asking him "to convert to Christianity in exchange for papal legitimation and support."[67] In the letter,

> Pius is condescending with regard to Islam and full of invective when speaking of Muhammad. His major argument is that Islam raises false expectations of salvation while allowing vice, and that Muhammad was a fraud and possibly a heretic. He believed that Islam lacked miracles and was justified only by its willingness to resort to force. Although reasonable in many respects, the letter offers no tolerance or understanding of the person of the Prophet or his revelation. The underlying assumption is that the debate, once joined, would clearly show the truth of Christianity and the falsity of Islam.[68]

As Frassetto and Blanks outline in the previous quotation, Pius II tried to persuade a Muslim emperor to convert to Christianity by discrediting the Islamic doctrine, emphasizing the distorted views of the medieval period of Islam, being a religion that condones violence, and deforming the image of Prophet Muhammad. Like Llull, Pius II

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[65] Frassetto and Blanks, *Western Views of Islam*, 70.
[66] Dana Carleton Munro, "The Western Attitude toward Islam during the Period of the Crusades," *Speculum,* vol. 6, no. 3 (1931): 329–43, quoted in Susan Schibanoff, "Worlds Apart: Orientalism, Antifeminism, and Heresy in Chaucer's 'Man of Law's Tale'*," Exemplaria,* vol. 8, no. 1 (1996): 71.
[67] Nancy Bisaha, "Pope Pius II and the Crusade," In: *Crusading in the Fifteenth Century* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 47. See Pius II, *Epistola ad Mahomatem II (Epistle to Mehmed II),* ed. and trans. by A. R. Baca (New York, 1990) for a translated copy of the letter. Before Pius II, there was another theologian, Robert Holcot (c. 1290 – 1349), who supported the forced conversion of Muslims and encouraged "the right to kill Muslims who refused to convert," as cited in Schibanoff, "Worlds Apart," 75.
[68] Frassetto and Blanks, *Western Views of Islam*, 71.

was also a huge advocate of a crusade that "he [urged] his audience in traditional crusade rhetoric, to 'brandish weapons not among [themselves] but to defend the Church, religion, and the Christian faith from the incursions of barbarians and infidels.'"[69] This reminds us again of the discrepancy between the medieval West's criticism of Islam for allegedly allowing the use of violence and their advocacy of the same against the enemies.[70] In other words, as Daniel concludes, "there was little recognition that Christians were inconsistent to advocate the use of force against Islam, while condemning Islam for its theoretic approval of the use of force."[71] Thus, Westerners obviously did not give much importance to the tolerance of others or their acceptance at that time, except for those who would serve their personal interests. For instance, "Muslims already subject to Christendom were tolerated because they were not in a position to do harm, because they were useful and because they might be converted."[72] So, once again, it seems like conversion was the end goal in the medieval society rather than the co-existence with and acceptance of Muslims.

1. 2. 1. The Performance of Miracles and Conversion

1. 2. 1. 1. In Marco Polo's *The Travels*

Having investigated the medieval West's set of tactics to ensure the conversion of Muslims and the spread of Christianity, one ought to trace the impact of these notions on the perception of medieval travel writers with regard to their encounters with those who follow the Islamic religion. Starting with Polo, in his book, he narrates a story about the caliph of Baghdad who asked the Christians to prove their faith by performing a miracle of moving mountains to verify the biblical text in the Gospels (Matthew 17:20) that says

[69] Bisaha, "Pope Pius II and the Crusade," 43.
[70] This point is tackled in Section 1.1.1.
[71] Daniel, *Islam and The West*, 156.
[72] Ibid, 135.

so, otherwise he would kill them all if they did not convert to Islam.[73] Polo then writes that "it is a plain fact that all the Saracens in the world wish great ill to all the Christians in the world,"[74] which is a prejudiced overstatement that shows that Polo's views go hand-in-hand with those of the medieval Western society at that time. To start with the accuracy of this story and as far as research is concerned, it appears that the mountains mentioned in Polo's account actually refer to the Muqattam Mountain in Cairo, Egypt.[75] Medieval documents report that such miracle has taken place in the tenth century during the Fatimid Caliphate which was centered in Egypt at the time.[76] However, there are several versions of the tale that differ in dating as some say, "it occurred under the caliph Al-Mu'izz (r. 932 – 75), and [others state that] it occurred under the caliph al-Aziz (r. 955 – 96)."[77] Polo's story includes most of the details that correspond to the two versions that exist in *the History of the Holy Church* and *The Churches and Monasteries of Egypt and Some Neighbouring Countries* as analyzed by Pruitt.[78] In the end, Polo reaches the conclusion that "when the caliph and the Saracens saw this [miracle] they were awestruck; and many turned Christian as a result. And the caliph himself secretly became a Christian."[79] Now, the latter statement is disputable because there is not any historical

[73] Polo, *The Travels*, trans. by Cliff, 24-28. It is debatable whether Polo heard this story while he was in Baghdad and interpreted it in his own way by attributing this occurrence to the caliph there, or his book actually lacks precision and geographical accuracy, because there is not any correlation between Baghdad and the Muqattam Mountain in Egypt. On another note, the identity of the shoemaker in Polo's story is presumably that of a saint called Saint Simon The Tanner.
[74] Ibid, 24.
[75] See Jennifer Pruitt, "The Miracle of Muqattam: Moving a Mountain to Build a Church in Fatimid Egypt," In: *Sacred Precincts: The Religious Architecture of Non-Muslim Communities Across the Islamic World* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2015), 277-290 for more details.
[76] Ibid, 277.
[77] Ibid, 277.
[78] Ibid, 277.
[79] Polo, *The Travels*, trans. by Cliff, 28.

evidence that proves whether the caliph at the time actually converted to Christianity or not.[80] Pruitt disproves the facts that Polo presented by confirming that:

> Once again, it is difficult to unravel fact from fiction in the Coptic accounts. Certainly, Al-Muʿizz never converted to Christianity. Likewise, for all but the most orthodox of believers, the mountain never lifted as described. However, we can deduce from these tales that the rebuilding of churches was not easily accomplished in early Islamic Egypt, even under the tolerant reigns of the Fatimid caliphs.[81]

In addition, Pruitt claims that the end goal from performing such miracle was for the Christians to gain more access during the Fatimid Caliphate "to restore two dilapidated churches in Cairo" and rebuild some of the destroyed holy sites.[82] Moreover, "scholars often distinguish the Fatimid era by the tolerance it exhibited toward the multi-confessional populations of Egypt" and other religious groups (i.e., Christians and Jews) "were granted the freedom to practice their faith openly."[83] As far as medieval versions of this miraculous tale are concerned, there is not any information that supports the claims in Polo's version regarding the threat of killing or coercing Christians to convert to Islam.

On that account, one can observe the pattern in Polo's accounts that subtly hint at the common views that medieval Westerners held with regard to Muslims and the Islamic religion. In this context, that is the inevitability and easiness of converting from Islam to Christianity, and the fundamentalism of the Islamic religion that is often exhibited in the use of threat and violence to convert Christians in the Middle Ages. From another perspective, the element of performing miracles in Polo's story might also be a

[80] The conversion story of the caliph is refuted by "Muslim historians, such as Ahmed Zaki Pasha and Muhammad Abdullah Enan," as stated in Aziz Suryal Atiya*, A Htistory of Eastern Christianity* (London: Methuen, 1968).
[81] Pruitt, "The Miracle of Muqattam," 289.
[82] Ibid, 277.
[83] Ibid, 278.

commentary on the medieval West's refutation of the Islamic religion for its lack of miracles which, in turn, discredits the Prophet's message.

> Since Islam is Allah-centred faith and all actions, including miracles are ascribed only to Allah, the Western polemicists gave a mischievous twist to this Islamic article of faith with the express objective of degrading and discrediting the Prophet. Their convoluted argument ran thus: Since the Quran itself denies that Prophet cannot work any miracles on his own, and since the Quran reports several miracles done by Prophet Jesus (peace be upon him), it proves the former's inferiority to the latter. As these writers took the Quran as the Prophet's own work, they claimed that Prophet himself had admitted his inability to work any miracle. So doing, they conveniently ignored the facts about the Islamic concept of prophethood and the divine origin of the Quran.[84]

This shows that this era witnessed a deliberate misinterpretation of the Islamic doctrine and belief; in an attempt to accommodate to the medieval West's preconceived ideas and the Crusade propaganda. All in all, while I cannot deny that Muslims might have resorted to coercion and violence as a first mechanism to convert Christians in the past, I think it is crucial to highlight that the essence of the Islamic doctrine should not be held accountable for the acts of those who have deviated from its teachings. That is because the Qur'an explicitly declares that "There is no compulsion in religion (2:256)."[85] Nevertheless, I am aware that Muslims do not always follow the Holy Qur'an word by word, but it is important to make a distinction between what Islam essentially says and what Muslims do or did in the past. Also, this brings us back to the examples of Ramon

[84] Kidwai*, Images of the Prophet Muhammad,* 15. On the topic of the Prophet's inability to perform miracles, it is worthy of mention that the unbelievers questioned Muhammad's prophethood after his announcement of the Qur'anic revelations bestowed upon him by God. They were not convinced that the Qur'an resembles a great miracle in itself as they demanded to see visual signs or witness supernatural miracles that would convince them of Muhammad's prophethood and claims. Consequently, the Prophet replied with the Qur'anic verses that reaffirm that the performance of miracles requires God's permission first, and that Muhammad is simply a messenger and a warner. Such verses were taken out of context and twisted by Christian polemicists as an argument of the invalidity of Muhammad's prophethood. See Jonathan E. Brockopp (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Muhammad* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 45 for more information. For the verses from the Qur'an, see *The Qur'an: A New Translation by M. A. S. Abdel Haleem* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 156 (13:38) and 255 (29:50).
[85] *The Qur'an*, trans. by Haleem, 29.

Llull and Pius II that I have mentioned above, who were advocates of the Crusade and encouraged the use of violence and force in their appeal for the conversion of the enemy in their missionary work and argumentative pleas to Muslim emperors, respectively.[86] In turn, Christians seem to have employed the same methods in their attempts of spreading Christianity and converting others, but in their case, their actions were deemed exceptionally justifiable.[87] However, one is specifically concerned with the susceptibility of those who lack the knowledge about Islam which leads them to uncritically follow negative accounts about it, as shown in the selected excerpts. This attitude that plays on the vilification and distortion of the Islamic religion is not limited to the medieval period only as it continues to persist today in the West.

1. 2. 1. 2. In John Mandeville's *The Book*

On the topic of miracles and conversion, these notions are supported by Mandeville and mentioned more than once in his book as well. Mandeville claims almost with certainty that all Muslims would eventually convert to Christianity and his reason for that is the similarities between the Christian faith and the Islamic religion.[88] In Chapter 13 which is solely dedicated to his account on "The Saracens' Faith," he says:

[86] See Section 1.2.

[87] Daniel, *Islam and the West*, 135. It is important to highlight that medieval Christians believed that the Qur'an was a mirror scripture that deviated from the teachings of the Bible; however, Quinn claims that "the Bible was the great anti-Islamic text," due to the Christians' misinterpretation of some of "its apocalyptical passages [that] would soon be used against Islam." He mentions that Daniel "(9:27, 11:31, and 12:11)" and Matthew "(24:15–31)" are among the passages that medieval Christians were quick to associate with the defeat of Islam, the falsity of Muhammad's prophethood, and the inevitable triumph of Christendom, even though these passages might be a reference to completely different things. See Quinn, *The Sum of All Heresies*, 26-27. Thus, what I aim to point out is while the Qur'an does not condone compulsion in joining the Islamic religion, Christians might have adopted the end-justifies-the-means concept for using violence as a tool for conversion, inspired by the Biblical texts that foretold the victory of Christianity.

[88] See Schibanoff, "Worlds Apart," 74. The author cites Mandeville's book as one of the works that suggested "evangelizing" as an easy solution to convert Muslims to Christianity.

> Because their beliefs are close to our faith, they are easily converted to our religion when people preach our law to them and reveal the prophecies to them . . . and all those who comprehend the prophecies and scriptures are easily converted.[89]

Sobecki, another scholar that seems to perceive Mandeville as tolerant and open-minded, thinks that "Mandeville shows no such interest in converting the peoples he 'encounters'. He observes, compares, and, unlike so many travellers, listens."[90] I tend to disagree because one does not have to actively approach people with the intention of converting them to make a statement or express their views of other religions. Yet Mandeville's words in his book clearly show that he had a firm belief that all non-Christians would have to convert to Christianity one way or another, so he thought that there was no need for him to do something about it. Regardless of whether Mandeville was an 'armchair' traveler or a real one, his religious fervor is discernible in his persistent attempts to prove the superiority of Christianity over any other religion.[91] Also, Mandeville does not merely observe and compare as Sobecki claims, because some texts in his book come off as highly judgmental. One of those is a text in which he expresses his views on Christians who convert to Islam by saying: "It happens sometimes that Christians become Saracens either because of poverty, or out of stupidity, or out of their own wickedness."[92] This quote clearly shows Mandeville's prejudice against Islam and sums up his standpoint as one who believes that the Islamic religion was a second-best one, to the extent that if people wanted to convert to it, they would do so out of foolishness or for irrational reasons, in his opinion. Hence, I do not think that we ought to consider Mandeville tolerant, as he is unable to accept the fact that people from his faith can willingly choose to convert to

[89] Mandeville, *The Book*, trans. by Bale, 64-65. I believe this chapter clearly shows the distorted views of Islam displayed in the accounts of Mandeville and his bias toward the Christian faith.
[90] Sobecki, "Mandeville's Thought of the Limit," 342.
[91] See Braude, "Mandeville's Jews among Others" for more details; Akbari, *Idols in the East*, 56.
[92] Mandeville, *The Book*, trans. by Bale, 68.

Islam, to the degree that he cannot help but be disrespectful about it. Moreover, Mandeville shares Polo's belief that miracles performed by Christians guarantee the conversion of Muslims and he reaffirms that the Holy Land would return again to its rightful heirs:

> Some prophecies say that a leader, a prince from the western side of the world, shall gain the Promised Land (that is, the Holy Land) with the assistance of Christians, and he will perform a sung mass under the Dry Tree and then the tree will turn green, bear fruit, and grow leaves. So many Saracens and Jews will be converted to the Christian faith through that miracle.[93]

Since Mandeville does not indicate where such prophecies stem from, one cannot help but notice the juxtaposition in prophesying that someone from the "West" would regain the Holy Land with the help of "Christians," showing the systematic way of thinking through which medieval Westerners perceived the world around them. Once more, Mandeville reiterates the same idea that Christianity is destined to conquer, ensuring the conversion of those who believe in anything other than the Christian faith.

1. 2. 1. 3. In Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*

Another significant work in medieval literature that makes a feature of the negative portrayal of Muslims as well as the themes of conversion and miracles is Geoffrey Chaucer's "The Man of Law's Tale." [94] Chaucer (c. 1340s – 1400) is considered one of the most prominent literary figures in the Middle Ages and he is famously known for *The Canterbury Tales* (c. 1400), which is a collection of 24 tales written in Middle English and told by a group of people who were on a pilgrimage to visit the shrine of St. Thomas

[93] Ibid, 37.

[94] Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, Translated by Nevill Coghill (London; New York: Penguin Books, 2003). See Appendix A for the full quotations that correspond to the points discussed in the following pages. On another note, there are other similar medieval romances that tackle the themes of conversion, miracles, and 'Saracens' versus Christians, such as: *King of Tars*, *King Horn*, *Octavian*, *Otuel a Knight*, etc. For reference, consult the web source: www.middleenglishromance.org.uk.

Becket at Canterbury Cathedral in Canterbury, Kent. "The Man of Law's Tale" is the fifth tale in the collection which I intend to tackle here due to its relevance to this chapter. It is generally about the matrimonial chronicles of Constance, the Roman emperor's daughter, and subtly about the veracity of the Christian faith as shown in Constance's ability of converting others to Christianity. "Some critics [perceive] the tale as misogynistic and anti-Muslim,"[95] while the former claim is completely valid and could be seen in the objectification of Constance and the portrayal of the Sultan's mother as the "monstrous Other,"[96] I am more concerned with the latter notion of the tale being anti-Muslim. First, there is the recurrent idea of converting non-Christians (i.e., the Muslim Syrians and the pagan Northumbrians) to the Christian faith through marrying Constance. It starts with the Muslim Sultan of Syria who expresses his desire to marry Constance as soon as his merchants tell him about her beauty. "Her father [the Roman emperor] consented, but only if the sultan would convert to Christianity. In many stories, the exchange might have ended there, but for the sultan the agonizing choice presented no problem—he feigned conversion to gain a wife and a lucrative trading relationship."[97] Once again, religion is used as a trade-off and negotiation in order to fulfill the Sultan's needs, but his propensity to instantly abandon his religion seems to be an implication by Chaucer that "the sultan's religious faith [is] a variation of Christianity, and his conversion requires little effort."[98] This verifies the medieval belief that Islam is a schism of

[95] Danielle Sottosanti, "'We shul first feyne us cristendom to take': Conversion and Deceit in Chaucer's 'Man of Law's Tale,'" *Studies in Philology*, vol. 117, no. 2 (2020): 241.
[96] Ibid, 241. The author also analyzes Chaucer's negative description of the Sultaness as the Muslim antagonist by calling her a "serpent" and a "feyned woman," which is considered discriminatory on the basis of gender and religion.
[97] Quinn, *The Sum of All Heresies*, 51. The notion of using religion as a means of negotiation is mentioned above in the example of Pope Pius II in Section 1.2.
[98] Schibanoff, "Worlds Apart," 80. The author provides an interesting footnote, saying: "The sultan's sudden and intense passion for Custance, a woman he has never seen is an orientalist motif in that it analogizes the sultan to the lovesick knight of western romance whose beloved remains afar, although it might also be seen to stereotype the sultan as the sensualist eastern potentate," 79.

Christianity and Muslims are easy to convert due to the similarities between the two religions, as was previously expressed by Mandeville as well.[99] There is also the insinuation that the Sultan neither respects nor values his religion that he is willing "to convert out of his desire to marry [Constance] rather than out of religious epiphany."[100] Hence, Chaucer presents this as a commentary on the ethics of Muslim believers with the intention of highlighting that:

> That the [Sultan's] desire is rooted in secular gain, even lust, widens the divide between Muslim and Christian in the tale, and even Syrian and Northumbrian, for that matter. Whereas Northumbrians have the potential to change their faith to what the tale deems the one true religion, the [Sultan] trades his religion for fulfillment of sexual desire.[101]

It is noteworthy that Muslims, or in this case the Orient in general, are often characterized as individuals who are merely defined by their sexual debauchery through Western eyes. In other words, the Christian West often "portrayed Muslims as "foolish and unreasonable" in their faith and, at worst, as a horde of monsters that fed off cruelty and sexual perversion."[102]

Moreover, Chaucer creates a binary characterization between Constance who represents the peaceful Christian West, and the Sultaness who symbolizes the regressive, malevolent East.[103] This is shown in the inability of the Sultaness to accept her son's conversion that she plots to murder him along with all the converted Christians in his court. "In response, the Roman Emperor takes "heigh vengeance" by sending forces to Syria to "brennen, sleen, and brynge [the Syrians] to meschance" (II.963–64)."[104] This is

[99] This point is tackled in Section 1.2.1.2. See also Schibanoff, "Worlds Apart," 70.
[100] Sottosanti, "Conversion and Deceit," 254.
[101] Ibid, 254.
[102] Frassetto and Blanks, *Western Views of Islam*, 128.
[103] Mourad Fahli, "The Construction of Space(s) and Identity(s) in Medieval Literature: Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* as a Case Study," *Mirabilia*, vol. 27, no. 2 (2018): 262-263.
[104] Sottosanti, "Conversion and Deceit," 250.

where the contradiction lies because, on one hand, Chaucer portrays Muslims as the evil enemy and propagates the same medieval idea that Muslims are defined by their religious extremism, and Islam is basically a fundamentalist religion that is based on violence and force.[105]

> Indeed, for the Sultaness, loyalty to Islamic law defines her culture. The Sultaness's plot to murder the Romans in order to prevent the Christianization of Syria can be seen as correlative to Western discourse about the Orient. In particular, this scene suggests the violent, irrational, and murderous caricature of Islam that is so often included in Western discourse about the East.[106]

Yet on the other hand, the Emperor resorts to violence and murder in his plan to exterminate the Syrians, but the Christian faith is not held accountable for it in his case, because violence is deemed acceptable if it is used against the enemy.[107] "This response to Muslims who refused to convert was sanctioned by Robert Holcot, who argues . . . that it is lawful to kill rebels of the Church as long as there is prior Church approval," which confirms that "Chaucer was familiar with Holcot's work and that the cleric's influence can be seen in the *Canterbury Tales.*"[108] Therefore, one can discern that the narrative in Chaucer's tale is meticulously devised in a way that accords with the medieval West's views and stance on the expansion of Islam influenced by the aftermath of the Crusades.[109]

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[105] This idea is discussed in Section 1.1.1.

[106] Marjorie Elizabeth Wood, "The Sultaness, Donegild, and Fourteenth-Century Female Merchants: Intersecting Discourses of Gender, Economy, and Orientalism in Chaucer's 'Man of Law's Tale'," *Comitatus: A Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, vol. 37 (2006): 78.

[107] Daniel*, Islam and the West*, 135-136.

[108] Sottosanti, "Conversion and Deceit," 250. Robert Holcot is mentioned as one of the examples of clergymen who advocated the use of force against Muslims in general and those who refused to convert to Christianity (Section 1.2).

[109] To support this claim, Fahli, "The Construction of Space(s) and Identity(s)," 262, writes, "Chaucer and other medieval writers who lived during the age of the Crusades contributed to the circulation and perpetuation of such discourse through their crusading literature, which represented Muslims as the eternal enemy and the war on Islam as the eternal and ultimate war." This proves that Chaucer's prejudice against Muslims might be intentional after all, as he might have been influenced by the antagonism between Christians and Muslims triggered by the Crusades.

In the second part of "The Man of Law's Tale," Chaucer draws another comparison between the pagan Northumbrians and the Muslim Syrians, with regard to the response of each group to Constance's attempt at converting them to the Christian faith. He portrays Muslims as superficial believers who "are ready to renounce [their faith] for worldly pleasures; a case in point is the sultan's renunciation of Islam and conversion to Christianity for the sake of Constance."[110] However, the pagans are resistant at first and demand "acts of divine intervention" before they decide to "accept the truth of Custance's faith."[111] Chaucer even makes use of the theme of miracles performed by Constance as a way of persuading the pagans to convert to Christianity and making them witness the divinity of Christ's religion.[112] In this way, Chaucer corroborates the medieval West's views on Islam being a second-best religion for its lack of miracles and doctrinal banality. Hence, it seems like Chaucer's end goal in his tale was to eradicate the existence of Muslims altogether, "enabling the tale to proceed to its joyous conclusion of reuniting Custance with her *western* family, her Saxon husband, Aella, and her Roman father, and to end on a note of dynastic succession in the observation that Custance and Aella's son, Maurice, became a model Christian emperor."[113]

Furthermore, Chaucer employs the Orientalist trope in his tale whenever he describes the East in comparison to the West.[114] As Quinn illustrates, "[Chaucer's] Syria was an uncivilized, barbarous place, peopled by treacherous, deceitful rulers who belonged to a false religion. In contrast, Rome represented the world's true center, a place of law, right

[110] Fahli, "The Construction of Space(s) and Identity(s)," 261.
[111] Schibanoff, "Worlds Apart," 81-82.
[112] Ibid, 81-82. The first miracle performed by Constance is restoring sight to a blind man and the second one is a divine hand that strikes a man who accused her of murder followed by a "disembodied voice" that declares her innocence. The notion of using miracles as a way of verifying the truth of Christianity is exemplified in the works of Polo and Mandeville as well in Section 1.2.1.
[113] Schibanoff, "Worlds Apart," 83.
[114] See Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978) for more information on this topic.

religion, and virtuous people."[115] Kathryn L. Lynch suggests that "Chaucer might have been familiar" with the works of Marco Polo and John Mandeville,[116] which would explain the recurrence of some of the ideas and views expressed in both texts, such as: the easy conversion of Muslims, the similarities between Islam and Christianity, the power of miracles, and the uncivilization of the East. The latter point also proves that "Chaucer was familiar with this widely disseminated late medieval "Orientalism" and that he had given some thought to the attitudes that underlay it."[117] Like other medieval writers, Chaucer seems to play on the preconceptions that the Western audience had already acquired about the Islamic religion and the East, by negatively portraying Muslims and idolizing Christendom at the expense of distorting the image of Islam. In my opinion, "The Man of Law's Tale" is considered an archetype of cultural Otherness and religious apartheid in modern terms. Like Schibanoff, I strongly disagree with the critics, namely Morton W. Bloomfield and Roger Ellis, who "judged the tale to be tolerant of cultural and religious diversity . . . and argues that the tale offers a "sympathetic presentation of Islam,"" respectively.[118]

> The Man of Law is not sympathetic but hostile to Islam . . . [It] renders Islam threatening not by depicting it as different from Christianity -as idolatrous- but by revealing its dangerous closeness to his [the lawyer in the tale] own religion. He employs what I shall call the "rhetoric of proximity" to figure Islam as an insidious heresy that mimics Christianity.[119]

Western critics and scholars label such works as tolerant and diverse based on the sole inclusion of other religions (i.e., Islam), but they do not recognize how problematic the

[115] Quinn, *The Sum of All Heresies*, 52.
[116] Kathryn L. Lynch, "Storytelling, Exchange, and Constancy: East and West in Chaucer's 'Man of Law's Tale'," *The Chaucer Review*, vol. 33, no. 4 (1999): 410.
[117] Ibid, 411.
[118] Schibanoff, "Worlds Apart," 61.
[119] Ibid, 62.

frequent pattern of showing the victory of Christianity over the defeat of Islam is. Also, they are oblivious to how often Muslims are portrayed as inherently bad in comparison to Christians, because this was the common depiction that the Western audience had become accustomed to during the Middle Ages. That is why the more one revisits the texts that were written in the medieval period -which were highly influenced by the Crusades,- the more it becomes crystal clear that writers were merely conforming to an agenda that aimed at distorting the image of Islam.

2. Chapter Two: The Distorted Image of the Muslim Other and Prophet Muhammad

2. 1. The Literary Depiction of Muslims and the Prophet in the *Chansons de Geste*

In this chapter, I will shift my attention to the West's recurrent negative images of Muslims, the distorted portrayal of the Prophet, and the false information with which the Prophet's law and the Islamic religion are associated in medieval literature. In this framework, one ought to take into consideration the *Chansons de Geste* (also known as the Songs of Action), which are epic poems written in Old French that gained huge recognition during the twelfth century.[1] During that medieval epoch, the Western opposition to the emergence of the Islamic religion was often reserved to be expressed by the Church, and Christian theologians were responsible for establishing their own false, preconceived ideas about Islam which were ultimately meant to be adopted by Christian societies.[2] There was limited information about what Islam was, but it was a known fact that there was a certain "war between Christians and Saracens,"[3] which inspired the poets of the songs to make use of that theme and compose religiously affiliated Christian narratives "for the benefit of laymen, primarily soldiers, but at all social levels of society interested to hear about courtly adventures."[4] Consequently, the influence of these songs is demonstrated in "what they say about the Saracens and their gods [which] is the obvious place to look for an unofficial, unchurchmanlike, medieval view of Islam," of which the first feature is "the idolatry imputed to the Saracens by these songs of action," which I will specifically tackle in the *Chanson de Roland*.[5]

[1] Norman Daniel, *Heroes and Saracens: An Interpretation of the Chansons de Geste* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1984), 2-3.
[2] Ibid, 1.
[3] Ibid, 4.
[4] Ibid, 2.
[5] Ibid, 3.

Moreover, the *Chansons de Geste* "had a European influence throughout the Middle Ages, especially on Italian, but also on English and German literature, as well as in Spain, and of course on Provencal."[6] There are surviving manuscripts of approximately 80 songs, their structure and form mainly follow a distinct composition of "assonanced or rhymed *laisses* of ten- or twelve-syllable lines, with a structure characterized by the episodic unfolding of narrative," making the songs' length extend to thousands of lines.[7] The songs are medieval narratives concerned with the political events in France, in relation to the Crusades, and extend to the feudal opposition between Muslims and Christians displayed in several themes, such as: the heroic Christian knight, the traitor and converted 'Saracen', the 'Saracen' princess, etc.[8] The more one analyzes the "treatment of the Saracens, and of religious themes connected with them"[9] in these songs, the more it becomes clear that the authors "must have [had] some reason which led them deliberately to misrepresent the followers of the Prophet."[10]

> The surprising thing is that, despite the almost meticulous accuracy with which the poets describe mediaeval Christian practices, they have adopted for everything that pertains to the customs of their adversaries a series of conventions so palpably false that we find difficulty in believing that they ever could have been accepted as truthful representations of the people of Islam.[11]

[6] Ibid, 3.
[7] Marianne Ailes and Jade Bailey, "*Chanson de Geste*," In: *The Encyclopedia of Medieval Literature in Britain* (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2017), 1. Some of the most influential songs in medieval literature are the *Chanson de Roland*, *Chanson d'Antioche*, *Chanson de Jérusalem*, *Chanson de Guillaume*, *Fierabras*, and *Anseïs de Cartage.* For a brief discussion of these songs, see Marianne Ailes, "Tolerated Otherness: The 'Unconverted' Saracen in the *Chansons de geste*," In: *Languages of Love and Hate: Conflict, Communication, and Identity in the Medieval Mediterranean* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012), 3-19; John V. Tolan, *Faces of Muhammad: Western Perceptions of the Prophet of Islam from the Middle Ages to Today* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 26-35 (these pages include a discussion of the *Chanson d'Antioche* and *Chanson de Roland*).
[8] See Akbari, *Idols in the East*, Chapter Four (155-199) for more details.
[9] Daniel, *Heroes and Saracens*, 3.
[10] C. Meredith Jones, "The Conventional Saracen of the Songs of Geste," *Speculum*, vol. 17, no. 2 (1942): 202.
[11] Ibid, 201.

That is why the propagation of these texts is a contributing factor in the persistence of the intrinsic hatred toward Muslims and the circulation of false information about the Islamic religion during the Middle Ages. Thus, I decided to begin the second chapter with a discussion of the *Chansons de Geste* as a way of connecting the dots between the misrepresentation of Muslims in Polo and Mandeville's works, and the general, negative attitude toward Muhammad's prophethood and the expansion of the Islamic religion during the time of the *Chansons*, which might have influenced and set the tone for the forthcoming works. It is not within the scope of my work to carry out an exhaustive analysis of all the *Chansons de Geste*, so I will particularly focus on two songs, *Fierabras* and the *Chanson de Roland*, that serve my purpose of tracing the timeline of medieval texts that set the scene for a distorted portrayal of Muslims and ultimately Prophet Muhammad. I will begin with a discussion of *Fierabras* as a continuation of the themes of conversion and miracles, which I tackled in Section 1.2.1, in addition to other important points that support my argument regarding the depiction of Muslims in medieval literature. Then, I will turn to the *Chanson de Roland* as an example of one of the earliest works that offers a false, misleading representation of the Prophet and the Islamic doctrine, which complements the same as presented in Polo and Mandeville's works.

2. 1. 1. In *Fierabras*

Fierabras (c. 1170), "one of the earliest surviving *chansons de geste* that survives in numerous versions in a range of vernacular languages,"[12] revolves around the conversion of the Muslim king of Spain, Balan, and his two children, Fierabras and Floripas, after their defeat against Charlemagne (or Charles the Great) and his Roman army.[13] After his defeat

[12] Akbari, *Idols in the East*, 158.
[13] See *Fierabras and Floripas: A French Epic Allegory First Modern English Translation*, Translated by Michael A. Newth (New York: Italica Press, 2010) for reference. I will be using this translated version of the

in combat with Charlemagne's knight, Olivier de Vienne, Fierabras asks to be baptized and "goes on to join the Christian community out of a heart-felt devotion to their God."[14] However, Floripas, Fierabras' sister, wishes to convert "out of a desire to be united with one of Charlemagne's knights, Guy of Boulogne," and not for the sake of religious piety.[15] As for King Balan, he is forced to convert to Christianity, but he firmly refuses and stands his ground which leads to his death in the end.

> "If you believe in Him, your soul will be restored,
> And here on earth you'll keep whatever once was yours." [says Charlemagne]
> "I never will agree!" the angry pagan [King Balan] roared:
> "While mortal breath remains Mahomet is my lord!
> No promises or threats will ever change my choice!"[16]

Hence, "this text shows no acceptance of the 'Other.' Saracens are either converted or killed," says Ailes.[17] This brings us back to the idea of using coercion as a tool to convert Muslims, proving that Christians were not as tolerant and accepting of the Other's freedom and right to keep their faith.[18] From another perspective, "in medieval texts conversion was the sign of the acceptance of defeat, and it was only logical that such a belief should be attributed to the Saracens also."[19] Interestingly, Ailes provides a table in which she outlines the pattern of the conversion of Muslims in every song, and it appears

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original text when I cite quotations from the original song. On a side note, the author of the original poem is anonymous, and it is probable that the *Chansons de Geste* were written by more than one poet, so I will be referring to them using the plural form.

[14] Akbari, *Idols in the East*, 158.

[15] Ibid, 158. This notion is also exemplified in Chaucer's "The Man of Law's Tale" in the character of the Sultan who converted to Christianity out of his desire to marry the Roman princess, Constance. See Section 1.2.1.3.

[16] *Fierabras and Floripas*, trans. by Newth, 211 (Line 7366-7370).

[17] Ailes, "Tolerated Otherness," 9.

[18] This point is thoroughly discussed in Chapter One (Section 1.2).

[19] Jones, "The Conventional Saracen," 223. The author presents a fair argument where she also notes that Muslims might have been guilty of the same thing; concerning the choice -conversion or death- they gave to Christian captives at some point in history. While I am in no place to deny this, my aim is simply to highlight the frequency of this notion on the part of Christians in most medieval texts, and the justified celebration of converting as many 'Saracens' as possible or killing those who refuse, which is a troubling idea that is worthy of attention.

that whenever Muslims refuse to convert, they are instantly killed one way or another, with the exception of two characters or so that survive after their refusal to convert.[20] Thus, the poets convey the same feelings as their receiving audience with regard to the idea of coexisting with the Muslims; exhibiting such an intolerant attitude that is shown in the reiterated predestination of the 'Saracens' in every story, which is either their assimilation through conversion or their ultimate extermination.[21] In other words, "the 'Other' cannot be allowed to live if he continues to present a threat."[22]

Furthermore, there is the recurrent theme of showing Muslims as individuals who are so eager to renounce their religion at the expense of their own values and even family members, in an attempt to prove that "loyalty to the true [Christian] God is more important than loyalty to one's kin and lord."[23] While Fierabras begs his father to convert knowing what his fate will be if he refuses, Floripas manifests such an apathetic and ruthless attitude that she asks Charlemagne to execute her father without hesitation.[24]

> When Fierabras cried out, and clasping him [Charlemagne], implored
> His mercy and his leave to plead with him [his father, King Balan] once more.[25]
> But Floripas exclaimed, "Why waste the present time?
> My father is a fiend! What use is he alive?
> His death is naught to me, as long as Gui is mine!
> My heart will never grieve, achieving its desire."[26]

By juxtaposing the response of the two siblings, the poets are inviting the reader to reflect on the lack of compassion and loyalty displayed by Floripas; making it seem like her

[20] Ailes, "Tolerated Otherness," 4. See Appendix B for a reprinted copy of the table.
[21] Ibid, 6.
[22] Ibid, 10.
[23] Ibid, 11.
[24] Akbari, *Idols in the East*, 168. See also Ailes, "Tolerated Otherness," 8-9; Marianne Ailes, "Desiring the Other: Subjugation and Resistance of the Female Saracen in the *chanson de geste*," *French Studies: A Quarterly Review*, vol. 74, no. 2 (2020): 183.
[25] *Fierabras and Floripas*, trans. by Newth, 211 (Line 7375-7376).
[26] Ibid, 212 (Line 7415-7418).

religion is the sole cause of such negative traits and converting to Christianity is her only path for salvation.[27] This is also shown in the characterization of Fierabras and Floripas as aggressive and terrorizing individuals; as "Fierabras is, precisely, distinguished by the ferocity with which he wages war," and "Floripas behaves with extreme aggression" and resorts to violence that "she even kills with her own hands twice."[28] It is clear that the poets were trying to corroborate the medieval beliefs about Islam being a religion that instigates violence and terror; a notion that still persists today in the discourse on terrorism.[29] However, after his baptism, Fierabras displays a drastic change in character by becoming a philanthropist who dedicates his life to "holy devotion" and adopts a new identity under the name "Florien."[30] Similarly, Floripas turns into a more feminine version of herself after her baptism and becomes known solely for her outstanding beauty and sexual appeal.[31] To sum up this idea, Akbari says,

> The violent, impulsive behavior shown by Floripas throughout the poem is a manifestation of her Saracen identity, the irascibility natural to Saracen bodies. The warlike nature of Fierabras is similarly founded on that Saracen identity; consequently, after conversion, he does not appear as a warrior on the Christian side of the conflict. As long he belongs to the Saracen religion, he exhibits Saracen behavior: he is violent and aggressive. Once he becomes a Christian, his acts are governed by compassion rather than aggression, and his body is shown bowed in supplication, his face covered with tears.[32]

Therefore, one can recognize the subtlety in the poets' endeavor to demonstrate that it does not matter if the 'Saracens' display such negative characteristics, inspired by their

[27] Ailes, "Desiring the Other," 183.
[28] Akbari, *Idols in the East*, 165-166.
[29] See Epilogue for more details.
[30] Akbari, *Idols in the East*, 166. On the change that occurs after baptism, Akbari mentions another example from the Middle English romance *King of Tars* in which the flesh of the 'Saracen' Sultan "changes from "black and loathly" to shining white once he is immersed in the baptismal font," 158.
[31] Ibid, 179.
[32] Ibid, 168.

religion (i.e., Islam), because their assimilation into Christendom is guaranteed to change their religious identity as well as their individual personality for the better anyway.

Before proceeding to examine the portrayal of the Muslim Other, it is important to highlight the literary representation of 'Saracen' women in the *Chansons de Geste* in particular, and the image of women in medieval literature in general. There is a common archetype in most medieval texts when it comes to the portrayal of 'Saracen' women which is "the beautiful *belle sarrasine* who converts for love of a Christian,"[33] and one can see this exemplified in the character of Floripas "who is explicitly motivated to convert only [because of] her love for the Christian knight Guy."[34] The conversion of the female 'Saracen' is also a lucrative transaction, because on one side, it guarantees her integration into the Christian community. And on the other side, it is prompted by "territorial interests . . . since the Saracen princess frequently brought with her the lands that had belonged to her father or husband, now defeated and killed by the Christian host."[35] In these songs, women's role in life is defined by the men they will marry, and they are shown to have such weak determination and low moral values that they do not think twice before abandoning their religion for the sake of a Christian warrior.[36] In other words, as Jones describes the same notion in the context of medieval Orientalism:

> Fabulous stories of Oriental beauties as lovely as women could be, and the known intermarriages between Christian and Saracen, combined to produce a conventionalized and traditional type of beauty. She seems to have no other object in life than to fall in love at first sight, or even at the mention of his reputation, with a Christian knight whom she will eventually marry, and for whom she is eager to relinquish her religion.[37]

[33] Ailes, "Tolerated Otherness," 8. See also Ailes, "Desiring the Other," 173-188 for an in-depth discussion of the "*belle sarrasine*."
[34] Akbari, *Idols in the East*, 168.
[35] Ailes, "Desiring the Other," 173.
[36] Jones, "The Conventional Saracen," 221.
[37] Ibid, 220.

In addition, 'Saracen' women are presented as sexual objects who are imprisoned by their religion and awaiting liberation in the form of a domestic life with a Christian husband.[38] Not only does "the Saracen woman [declare] her love, and her willingness to be baptized long before she is even asked," but she also "becomes a model wife, eager to convert others to her new religion."[39] Hence, once again, we are faced with the medieval idea that the Christian faith was believed to be the truest and ultimate religion, and conversion was a preordained condition, but this time, it was supposed to happen on the hands of converted 'Saracen' women instead. On the topic of sexual objectification of the female 'Saracen', the baptism of Floripas features "an overtly eroticized" scene in which she strips naked in front of Charlemagne and his Christian knights, emphasizing the Christian victory through the accessibility and assimilation of both her body and identity.[40]

> So then she was undressed, in everybody's sight,
> Revealing skin as fair as summer flowers are white!
> Her little breasts were round, her body tall and lithe,
> Her hair as fair as gold, in color and in shine.
> The Frenchmen, looking on, were filled with fierce desire.
> The emperor himself could not subdue a smile,
> And could have lost his heart to Floripas, despite
> His beard of grizzled gray and hair of hoary white!
> And so they led the maid and let her be baptised
> Inside the very vat her father had reviled,
> To earn through Jesus Christ a new and blessed life.[41]

[38] Ibid, 221.
[39] Ibid, 221.
[40] Ailes, "The Desiring Other," 177.
[41] *Fierabras and Floripas*, trans. by Newth, 214 (Line 7459-7469).

It is as if "Floripas is a beautiful prize that—in keeping with the ideology of crusade—is rightfully reclaimed from the dirty hands of the Saracens,"[42] which brings to mind the Orientalist motif of the East being the desirable Other that awaits subjugation by the West.[43]

Another archetype that identifies 'Saracen' women in the songs is their skills "in sorceries, in magic, and in the healing arts."[44] For instance, "ointments, or occasionally potions, are made from them, which are generally used . . . to heal rapidly the wounds of Christian knights with whom they have fallen in love."[45] On one hand, this idea reveals how the poets perceived 'Saracen' women as deeply shallow and wicked for being involved in sorcery and using it as a means to help their Christian lovers only. On the other hand, the attribution of magic to Muslims in this context seems to be in parallel with the common medieval "association of Saracens with treachery, sorcery, magic,"[46] and the false image of Prophet Muhammad having been an imposter who tricked people into following him and used magic as a source for his divine revelations.[47] Thus, it is plain to see that there was a certain agenda behind exclusively attributing such archetypes to 'Saracen' women, because their religious identity was a target for the public to openly express their criticism and reinforce their views of the Islamic religion in its entirety, but here it is done with a misogynistic and sexist twist as well. On the contrary, the Christian woman is assigned the position of the obedient, loyal wife who lives for the sole purpose of pleasing her husband; an image that resembles how the Church perceived the value of women during the Middle Ages.[48] Yet "the Saracen woman in our poems is for the most

[42] Akbari, *Idols in the East*, 185.
[43] See Said, *Orientalism* for more details on this idea in the context of Western colonialism and imperialism.
[44] Jones, "The Conventional Saracen," 218.
[45] Ibid, 218.
[46] Frassetto and Blanks, *Western Views of Islam*, 175.
[47] Ibid, 217; Kidwai, *Images of the Prophet Muhammad*, 13.
[48] Jones, "The Conventional Saracen," 220. See also Ailes, "The Desiring Other," 179.

part an imaginative extension of her Christian sister. She must have been the dream woman, the Christian ideal of loveliness and sensual attraction."[49] As far as medieval sources are concerned, the tales are mostly reserved for the idealization of the sensual beauty of 'Saracen' women and their readiness to convert to Christianity for their lovers. On another note, there are very few stories that recount the conversion of the Christian counterpart to Islam, as Jones states that:

> [There is only] one episode in which the conversion of a Christian to Islam is narrated. The details of the Saracen equivalent to baptism are so odious and so crudely described that it is immediately obvious that they can have had no foundation in fact.[50]

Therefore, the dichotomy between religious identity and female agency points out the poets' religious fervor to Christianity through the marginalization and vilification of 'Saracen' women.

Another significant aspect of the representation of Muslims in the *Chansons de Geste* is the relation between the medieval depiction of 'Saracens' and images of physical deformity, monstrosity, and dark skin color, which is a controversial polemic against bodily diversity as well as modern discourse on race and color.[51] In other words, "the descriptions in the *chansons de geste* are instrumental in promoting the notion of physically striking Saracens. Most are dark-skinned, some are ugly, and nearly all possess extraordinary size and strength."[52] The latter description refers to the common medieval

[49] Jones, "The Conventional Saracen," 220.
[50] Ibid, 224.
[51] See Akbari, *Idols in the East*, 159-164 for more details on the medieval concept of race in relation to the white/black dichotomy and bodily diversity in the representation of 'Saracens.' See also Jones, "The Conventional Saracen," 205; Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, "On Saracen Enjoyment: Some Fantasies of Race in Late Medieval France and England," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, vol. 31, no. 1 (2001): 113-146.
[52] Debra Higgs Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, & Jews: Making Monsters in Medieval Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 173. In the section titled "Physical Descriptions," the author investigates in more detail the attribution of dark skin to the 'Saracens' in the descriptions of the medieval Christian West and provides caricatures that show the distinction between Christian and Muslim warriors in battle, by using blackface in the depiction of the latter. See Figure 1 in Appendix C for an illustrative image.

portrayal of 'Saracens' as giants in these songs, such as: Agolafre ["the bridge's giant porter"][53] . . . in *Fierabras*, and Baligant in the *Chanson de Roland*.[54] In fact, "some versions . . . depict the Saracen knight Fierabras as a giant,"[55] while others portray him as merely "a Saracen prince."[56] This shows how the medieval West regarded Muslims with such alienation to the extent that writers characterized them as abnormal, foreign beings rather than normal people. Similarly, as McCambridge points out,

> The opening lines of the medieval romance "Otuel a knight," which tells "Of bolde batilles…Þat was sumtime bitwene / Cristine men and Sarazins kene" . . . The distinction between Christian *men* and Saracen *kind* is important because the word implies a type of being that is somehow other than a *man*, that is, a human. The poem begins by associating Christianity with humanity and the Saracenic faith with *kinds*.[57]

Moreover, medieval writers have proven to be at fault through portraying 'Saracens' as black and creating a distinction between white and black 'Saracens', using the latter as a denotation of the inferiority of the East and "its strangeness and horror," and the former as a sign of its "wealth and beauty."[58] As de Weever says, "when skin color is linked to ideas of inferiority . . . racism is born."[59] Such distinction represents the paradigm of Europeans being the superior race in the racial hierarchy and 'Saracens' being the Other who belongs to "the monstrous race."[60] As manifested in *Fierabras*, the poets draw a binary comparison between female 'Saracens' through "the beautiful, fair-skinned, blonde pagan princess [Floripas] . . . [and] her counterpart, the hideous, black-skinned

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[53] *Fierabras and Floripas*, trans. by Newth, 169 (Line 5859).
[54] Akbari, *Idols in the East*, 166-167. See also Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, & Jews*, 159.
[55] Akbari, *Idols in the East*, 164.
[56] Ibid, 166.
[57] ""Of bold battles…That were sometimes between / Christian men and Saracen kind."" Jeffrey McCambridge, "Recognizable Patterns of Evil in Muslim Characters in Late Medieval and Early Modern Literature," In: *Performativity of Villainy and Evil in Anglophone Literature and Media* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 39.
[58] Akbari, *Idols in the East*, 160.
[59] Jacqueline de Weever, *Sheba's Daughters: Whitening and Demonizing the Saracen Woman in Medieval French Epic* (New York: Garland Pub, 1998), quoted in Akbari, *Idols in the East*, 159.
[60] Akbari, *Idols in the East*, 160.

giantess Barac."[61] This is accompanied by foreshadowing that Floripas' beauty could be used as an asset to ensure her assimilation into the Christian community, while "the unassimilable nature of . . . Barac is expressed in her physical form . . . [and her] fate can only be a violent death in battle."[62] This proves that the poets selectively set forth the destiny of the 'Saracen' characters based on their physical appearance as well as their susceptibility to be assimilated. Likewise, in the *Chanson de Roland*, the poets make the same remarks on the skin color of the Muslims of Ethiopia, where the Muslim King Marsile fled to his uncle and which they also called "an accursed land."[63] Roland, the Christian epic hero, goes on to describe them as people who are "blacker than ink,"[64] which is highly offensive and blatantly racist. "Such baleful images . . . impressionistically imply "a European fear of dark skin color, associated with evil and social worthlessness.""[65] This notion accentuates the foreignization of people from the East on the basis of their bodily diversity and religious identity, as well as the paradigm of the white/black dichotomy that corresponds to the ""naïve but dangerous" discourse of modern racism."[66]

Additionally, Frassetto and Blanks trace the origin of the Christian dogma of race and color in relation to other religious sects:

> White Europeans interpreted the blackness of the Moors as a sign of inborn evil. The Christian myth that explains the origins of the dark-skinned races, including the Moorish Muslims of Africa, is derived from the Old Testament story of Ham (or Cham), son of Noah,

[61] Ibid, 166. In the original song, the poets explicitly describe the giantess Barac by saying, "This giantess, I tell you, had skin as black as peppers." *Fierabras and Floripas*, trans. by Newth, 187 (Line 6511). See also Ailes, "Desiring the Other," 175.
[62] Akbari, *Idols in the East*, 166.
[63] *The Song of Roland: An Analytical Edition*, Translated by Gerard J. Brault (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1978), 119 (Line 1916). See also Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, & Jews* for more details on the portrayal of Ethiopians in medieval texts; Cohen, "On Saracen Enjoyment," 119-120.
[64] *The Song of Roland*, trans. by Brault, 119 (Line 1933).
[65] Sharon Kinoshita, "'Pagans are wrong and Christians are right': Alterity, Gender, and Nation in the *Chanson de Roland*," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies,* vol. 31, no. 1 (2001): 82.
[66] Ibid, 82.

> who was cursed for beholding the nakedness of his father. Ham was said to be the original progenitor of the black races, whose skin color was the outward sign of an inherited curse, visited upon Ham and his offspring by God. Furthermore, the black or dark skin of Moors and other Muslim people of color was compared by fair-skinned Europeans with the color of the devils, burnt black by the flames of hell.[67]

It does not come off as a surprise to find that medieval writers used to make an analogy between dark-skinned Muslims and the devil, presenting them as "black as devils."[68] This also stems from one of the prevalent accounts that were narrated about the Prophet, describing him as a "devil incarnate,"[69] and the Islamic religion as "a devilish apostasy of Christianity."[70] Subsequently, we are faced with a case of ethnocentrism -using one's own culture or ethnicity as a superior reference in the judgement of others- and a fear of the Other that "the poets invent for them [the 'Saracens'] a host of insulting epithets and periphrases" as a way of commenting on their personal and religious identity.[71] That is why Muslims are considered "the embodiment of all foul practices, simply because they lack the one thing necessary in Christian eyes for perfection — belief in Christianity."[72] From another perspective, the notion of attributing dark skin color to 'Saracens' might also originate from the Orientalist trope of viewing the East as the exotic, climatically torrid part of the world.[73] "Dark skin was attributable to the effect of the sun, but . . . it carries primarily negative symbolic value in images of virtually all of the Church's enemies . . . [among them are the] Muslims."[74] Consequently, one can clearly observe the cultural Otherness and racial prejudice in the West's representation and categorization

[67] Frassetto and Blanks, *Western Views of Islam*, 224. The term "Moor" was used in the Middle Ages to refer to people of Arab descent who were possibly Muslims as well.
[68] Jones, "The Conventional Saracen," 205.
[69] Kidwai, *Images of the Prophet Muhammad*, 4.
[70] Frassetto and Blanks, *Western Views of Islam*, 66.
[71] Jones, "The Conventional Saracen," 205.
[72] Ibid, 205.
[73] See Akbari, *Idols in the East*, Chapter 3 (140-154) in which she makes a connection between the climate theory and bodily diversity. See also Said, *Orientalism*, 71-72.
[74] Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, & Jews*, 179.

of the Muslim nation. Such prejudice is observable in the medieval writers' fixation on racializing the 'Saracens' as if they were the only people who had a dark skin tone during the Middle Ages.

> The dichotomy of darker skinned Saracens and lighter skinned Christians was not absolute, and while the blackness of a Saracen bore witness to the evil within his soul, his ideology, and his actions, there were dark skinned Christians who did not suffer the same associations within the popular narratives.[75]

That being so, it seems like the poets' overall narrative in *Fierabras* implies that Islamic alterity is merely an amalgamation of all the negative and odious characteristics that the medieval West deemed to be the essence of the 'Saracenic' identity.

2. 1. 2. In the *Chanson de Roland*

Having analyzed the depiction of Muslims in *Fierabras*, one should also examine the same in the *Chanson de Roland* (c. 1100), which is one of the highly recognized *Chansons de Geste* in medieval literature. It is one of the renowned French epic poems that constitute the quintessence of the medieval Christian West's distorted views of Islamic theology and the starting point from which the defamation of the Prophet originated and spread throughout medieval literature.[76] The text is believed to have been orally propagated in the eleventh century until the appearance of the actual manuscript in the twelfth century, which is still preserved in Oxford till today's time, grabbing the public's attention by portraying the 'Saracen' enemy as a pagan who believes in a polytheistic religion.[77] The 'Saracens' in the *Chanson de Roland* are shown as idolaters who worship three deities: Mahumet, Apollin, and Tervagant, "a sort of anti-Christian Trinity," which

[75] McCambridge, "Recognizable Patterns," 44.
[76] See *The Song of Roland: An Analytical Edition*, Translated by Gerard J. Brault (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1978) for reference. I will be using this translated version of the original text when I cite quotations from the original song; Kidwai, *Images of the Prophet Muhammad*, 9.
[77] Tolan, *Faces of* Muhammad, 30.

are also the idols associated with the religion of the 'Saracens' in other *Chansons de Geste*.[78] One can clearly observe that the poets of the songs were hardly familiar with the Islamic doctrine and were deliberately reiterating the medieval practice of propagating misleading information about the Islamic religion to the public. As the basic pillar of the Prophet's message was to invite people to follow a "monotheistic [religion] in which God was the creator of the world and [Muhammad], who always emphasized the fact that he was only a man, was his Prophet."[79] However, "this parallelism [of making up a counterfeit image of a pseudo-Trinity] suggests the extent to which medieval Christians used their own theology to imagine Islam."[80] This might have resulted from the medieval West's conviction that there were overt similarities between the two religions.[81] But, in the *Chanson de Roland*, it is also a subtle insinuation that is intended to prove the song's aphorism which is, despite the closeness of Islam to the Christian faith, "Pagans are in the wrong and Christians are in the right."[82]

To give a brief synopsis of the song's plot, the story revolves around Charlemagne's intention to take over the Spanish city, Saragossa (Zaragoza in Spanish), which is under the control of the Muslim king named Marsile, leading to a battle between the Frankish army led by "Roland, the epic hero and Charlemagne's nephew"[83] and the Saracen army with the aid of Baligant, the admiral of Babylon, and his troops.[84] Although the Franks are

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[78] Ibid, 30. See also Akbari*, Idols in the East*, 206. For a linguistic analysis of the origin of the idols' names, see James A. Bellamy, "Arabic Names in the Chanson De Roland: Saracen Gods, Frankish Swords, Roland's Horse, and the Olifant," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 107, no. 2 (1987): 267–277.
[79] Kidwai, *Images of the Prophet Muhammad*, 5.
[80] Akbari*, Idols in the East*, 207.
[81] Ibid, 57; John V. Tolan, *Saracens: Islam in the Medieval European Imagination* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 204.
[82] *The Song of Roland*, trans. by Brault*,* 65 (Line 1015). This was expressed by Roland during the battle between Charlemagne's army and that of Marsile, and the word "pagan" here specifically refers to the Muslims.
[83] Abdul-Settar Abdul-Latif Mal-Allah, "The Image of Islam and Muslims in Medieval Writings with Reference to Chaucer's 'Man of Law's Tale'," *Journal of Basrah Research,* vol. 34, no. 1 (2010): 59–62, quoted in Kidwai, *Images of the Prophet Muhammad*, 4.
[84] Tolan, *Faces of Muhammad*, 30-31.

outnumbered and Charlemagne is almost defeated by Baligant, the battle still ends with an overdramatized, biblical victory in which Charlemagne defeats Baligant with the help of the Archangel Gabriel "because God does not wish him to be killed or vanquished."[85] As a result, the 'Saracens' in the song express their outrage and disappointment at their gods for not coming to their aid during the battle by destroying their idols and breaking them to pieces, which is the culmination of the song's buildup to reveal the idols' incompetence and "the futility of [the Muslims'] wrongly directed worship,"[86] and to reaffirm the righteousness of the Christian faith.

> They run to an idol of Apollo in a crypt,
> They rail at it, they abuse it in vile fashion:
> "Oh, evil god, why do you cover us with such shame?
> Why have you allowed this King of ours to be brought to ruin?
> You pay out poor wages to anyone who serves you well!"
> Then they tear away the idol's scepter and its crown.
> They tie it by the hands to a column,
> They topple it to the ground at their feet,
> They beat it and smash it to pieces with big sticks.
> They snatch Tervagant's carbuncle.[87]

This scene is replicated in the *Chanson d'Antioche* as well showing the "defeated Saracen general, Sansadoine, [as he] strikes the idol [of Mahumet], knocking it down and breaking it after it has shown itself powerless to secure victory for its devotees."[88] As for the 'Saracens' in the *Chanson de Roland*, in their fit of anger, they also "throw the idol of Mohammad into a ditch, And pigs and dogs bite and trample it."[89] Tolan hints at the possible connection between this imagery and "contemporary stories of the false prophet

[85] *The Song of Roland*, trans. by Brault, 221 (Line 3609); Tolan, *Faces of Muhammad*, 31.
[86] Akbari, *Idols in the East*, 207.
[87] *The Song of Roland*, trans. by Brault, 157 & 159 (Line 2580-2589).
[88] Tolan, *Faces of Muhammad*, 26. See Figure 2 in Appendix C for an illustrative image.
[89] *The Song of Roland*, trans. by Brault, 159 (Line 2590-2591).

Mahumet whose corpse is allegedly attacked by dogs or pigs in hostile legends."[90] This also echoes other versions of the stories that portray the Prophet as a reckless drunkard who fell in a pit or as a feeble man who had an epileptic seizure and then his body was attacked to death by pigs and/or dogs.[91]

> Norman Daniel has observed that this story had an important polemical purpose: since a good death is the mark of a saint, Muhammed had to have an appropriately horrible one in order to make apparent his unholiness. It is also true that wine is forbidden to Muslims and that pigs, like dogs and snakes, are considered impure, which means that the image also functions as a general mockery of Islamic beliefs.[92]

Also, in an anonymously-written Latin biography of the Prophet called *Storia de Mahometh*, the author narrates a fanciful story about the Prophet's death in which his body was left unattended while he was awaiting resurrection, which is "a blatant parody of Jesus's resurrection," but then "dogs followed his stench and devoured his flank."[93] Consequently, it is not surprising to find such concocted stories about the Prophet propagated in the Middle Ages when primary sources did not obviously contain any real knowledge about Islam or its history.[94] "These stories were, of course, quite unknown among the [Muslims], but in mediaeval Christian Europe they became a matter of popular history. Their origin, once again, must be ascribed to a combination of ignorance and wilful misrepresentation."[95]

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[90] Tolan, *Faces of Muhammad*, 34. See also Tolan, *Saracens* for more information on the several hostile legends about the Prophet and his death.
[91] Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, & Jews*, 190; Akbari, *Idols in the East,* 225.
[92] Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, & Jews*, 190-191.
[93] K. B. Wolf, "Falsifying the Prophet: Muhammad at the Hands of His Earliest Christian Biographers in the West," In: *Character Assassination throughout the Ages* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 108. The *Storia de Mahometh* is considered one of the earliest biographies that were written about Prophet Muhammad's life "sometime between the mid-eighth and the mid-ninth centuries," 107. Even though the author displays his familiarity with some true facts about the Prophet's life, he deliberately twists others in an attempt to disparage Muhammad in a way that the audience would have found appealing during the Middle Ages. See also Jones, "The Conventional Saracen," 209.
[94] Frassetto and Blanks, *Western Views of Islam*, 139.
[95] Jones, "The Conventional Saracen," 209.

Moreover, Muslims were frequently referred to as dogs, which reminds us of Marco Polo's words when he expressed his disdain toward the possibility of "Saracen dogs" ruling over the Christians.[96] Also, in the *Chanson de Roland*, the Muslim warriors in Baligant's army are said to "yelp like dogs" during battle.[97] The Prophet as well was visualized to have a doghead in several medieval texts, which might be a symbol of inferiority by linking his image to that of an animal, or an insulting commentary with consideration to the medieval knowledge of the impurity of dogs in Islam.[98] Similarly, in his account of "the land of India," John Mandeville claims that the people who occupied the Natumeran island (the Nicobar Islands) "have dogs' heads."[99] While he does not mention that those people were particularly Muslims, Strickland states that, "the Mandeville author's location of Dogheads in "Tartary" recalls the general tendency to equate the uncivilized peoples of the East with dogs."[100] The idea of using the characteristic of cynocephaly, which means a creature who has the head of a dog, to refer to people from the East makes one reflect on the West's treatment of the Other as an alien body that belongs to a monstrous race.[101] Taking into consideration the fact that Muslims were an integral part and parcel of the East for medieval travelers, one can argue that such derogatory description tends to injure the Muslims' reputation as well.[102] Ultimately, it is evident that medieval writers greatly contributed to the continuum of the

[96] Polo, *The Travels*, trans. by Cliff, 295. See Section 1.1.1.
[97] *The Song of Roland*, trans. by Brault, 215 (Line 3527); Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, & Jews*, 160.
[98] Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, & Jews*, 159 & 223. See Figure 3 in Appendix C for an illustrative image. On a side note, Muslim scholars have long debated the (im)purity of dogs, and while such notion may have changed today, it is possible that Muslims in the Middle Ages considered dogs to be impure. Hence, this fact was misused by medieval authors as a way of mocking Muslims and the Prophet.
[99] Mandeville, *The Book*, trans. by Bale, 85.
[100] Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, & Jews,* 204.
[101] See Section 2.1.1 for other examples about the alienation of the Other. See also Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, & Jews,* 204.
[102] Frassetto and Blanks, *Western Views of Islam*, 67.

ill-treatment and misrepresentation of Muslims in literature which was a standard practice that lasted until late medieval centuries.[103]

After Charlemagne takes over Saragossa, he exhibits an intolerant and hostile behavior toward the Muslims and their places of worship. He starts by ordering his men to baptize every remaining Muslim in the city and those who refuse are either held captive or killed. Bramimonde, Marsile's wife, is the only person exempted from such forced conversion; as Charlemagne takes her captive in an attempt to make her convert to Christianity "*par amur,*" which is through love but not for Charlemagne himself like the typical *belle sarrasine*, but out of conviction and love for the Christian faith.[104]

> Now if there is anyone who opposes Charles,
> He orders him to be taken prisoner, burned, or put to death.
> Well over a hundred thousand are baptized
> True Christians, with the sole exception of the Queen:
> She will be led captive to fair France,
> The King wishes her to become a convert out of devotion. [105]

Charlemagne's behavior is a manifestation of the intolerance of Otherness and Christian supremacy exhibited in the systematic missionary work of converting all non-Christians to the Christian faith.[106] The conversion of the Muslim people in Saragossa along with their queen warrants "the Christian success in eradicating the false practice of image-worship" and "the extermination of the rival religion."[107] To make sure the Islamic

[103] Ibid, 208.
[104] Akbari, *Idols in the East*, 209. See also Kinoshita, "'Pagans are wrong and Christians are right,'" 79-111. The author offers an interesting analysis of the role of female 'Saracens' in the *Chanson de Roland* manifested in the characters of the disloyal 'Saracen' queen, Bramimonde, and the faithful Christian *belle*, Aude, Roland's fiancée.
[105] *The Song of Roland*, trans. by Brault, 225 (Line 3669-3674).
[106] See Section 1.2 for more details on the topic of (forced) conversion.
[107] Akbari, *Idols in the East*, 210.

identity is completely wiped out, Charlemagne then prompts a city-wide destruction of all the mosques and places of worship that belonged to the Muslims:

> Orders are given for a thousand Frenchmen to search the city,
> The synagogues, and the mosques.
> Holding iron hammers and axes,
> They smash the statues and all the idols,
> No sorcery or false cult will remain there. [108]

First, one can draw a connection between the poets' reference to Islam as a kind of "sorcery" or "cult" and the misrepresentative and distorted medieval image of the Prophet as a trickster and a renegade "who had set up his heretical religion in Arabia in a fit of pique after having failed to be elected pope."[109] This is one among the many other false stories propagated about Prophet Muhammad by religious scholars like Peter the Venerable, who is considered a "key figure in the production of polemical and fabricated material against Islam/the Prophet."[110] Thus, it does not come off as striking to see medieval texts like the *Chansons de Geste* and travelogues, such as that of Polo and Mandeville, contain a completely distorted view of Islam and its Prophet, when authors like Peter and his contemporaries at the time had already paved the way for the inculcation of such false, preconceived ideas about the Islamic religion.

Second, "the Saracen places of worship are variously called 'mahomeries' [in the *Chanson d'Antioche*] or 'synagogues,'"[111] which are imprecise and unfounded terms, and the construction of mosques in the songs resembles that of Christian churches and

[108] *The Song of Roland*, trans. by Brault, 223 (Line 3661-3665). See also Section 1.1.2 for other examples on the topic of desecration of mosques and holy places.
[109] James Kritzeck, *Peter the Venerable and Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), 17–19, quoted in Kidwai, *Images of the Prophet Muhammad*, 16.
[110] Kidwai, *Images of the Prophet Muhammad*, 16. See also Chapter One & Two in *Images of the Prophet Muhammad* for other examples of (medieval) writers who portrayed the Prophet in a distorted and negative way.
[111] Jones, "The Conventional Saracen," 209.

chapels as "they are reputed to be full of paintings, statues and carvings of the supposed deities Mahomet, Tervagant and Apollin."[112] This demonstrates the poets' utter ignorance of what a real-life Islamic institution looks like that their visualization is one that only comes from imagination and the incapability to acknowledge cultural and religious differences. In other words, "the poets cannot conceive of any religious system differing from their own, and their inventions are always an imitation of their own forms and practices."[113] Also, it is worth highlighting that, in any period of history, paintings or images of Muslim figures like Prophets or the Sahabah (Prophet Muhammad's companions) are not likely to be found in a mosque as it is considered unfavorable and theoretically prohibited.[114] While the Qur'an does not explicitly forbid the use of images, one Hadith (a record of all that Prophet Muhammad said, did, or approved of) bans such act, and another permits it but without much encouragement.[115] The reasoning for that is the use of images may lead to idolatry, which is a grave sin in Islam and goes against its principal code of belief.[116] However, since "idolatrous worship is made the very core of Saracen religion as it is painted in the poems," the poets openly make use of idols and images providing an unreal, false representation of mosques and Islamic practices.[117] All in all, the *Chanson de Roland* is another representative case of the medieval West's

[112] Ibid, 210.
[113] Ibid, 210.
[114] See Omer Spahic, "Mosque Decoration between Acceptance and Rejection," *Islamic Studies*, vol. 54, no. 1/2 (2015): 5–38 for more information on the Islamic stance with regard to the decoration of mosques.
[115] Ibn al-Ḥajjāj Muslim, *Sahih Muslim: Being Traditions of the Sayings and Doings of the Prophet Muhammad As Narrated by His Companions and Compiled Under the Title Al Jami-Us-Sahih*, Translated by Abdul H. Siddiqui (New Dehli: Kitabbhavan, 2000), The Book of Clothes and Adornment (Chapter 26).
[116] Charles Le Gai Eaton, *Islam And The Destiny of Man* (Albany, N.Y: State University of New York Press, 1985), 229. It is important to highlight that polytheism and idolatry are among the most serious of sins against which the Qur'an made sure to warn and strictly forbid in several surahs and verses. In fact, polytheism and the worship of idols are mentioned in 16 surahs and 9 surahs, respectively, some of which point out their prohibition and religious transgression. For reference, see *The Qur'an: A New Translation by M. A. S. Abdel Haleem* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 81 (6:19), 156 (15:95-97), 204 (21:29), 341 (50: 25-26) for some of the verses on polytheism, and 76 (5:90), 160 (14:35), 253 (29:17 & 29:25) for some of the verses on the worship of idols.
[117] Jones, "The Conventional Saracen," 210.

vituperation against Muslims in conjunction with the falsification of records about the Prophet's life and his character.

2. 2. The Disparagement of Prophet Muhammad and His Law

2. 2. 1. In Marco Polo's *The Travels*

Having outlined the portrayal of the Muslim Other in the *Chansons de Geste*, observing the prevalence of negative images of Muslims and false facts about the Prophet throughout such era, I will reexamine once more the travelogues of Polo and Mandeville to elucidate that their distortion of the Islamic religion stems from the widespread animosity and hate propaganda that circulated during their time as well. While Polo's account of the Prophet and his law is not as blatantly abhorrent as in Mandeville's book, as we will see in the following section, he still manages to display his prejudice by showing the Islamic identity as the epitome of evil and impiety. This is evident in Polo's description of the 'Saracens' in Iraq:

> The Saracens of Tabriz are wicked and treacherous. For the law that the Prophet Muhammad gave them lays down that they can do as much harm as they like to anyone who does not share their faith, and steal as much as they can from them, without falling into sin. And if they are killed or harmed in any way by Christians, they are considered by their fellow Saracens to be martyrs. For this reason they would be great wrongdoers if it were not for the government. And all the other Saracens in the world comport themselves in the same manner. For when they are on the point of death their priest comes to them asking whether they believe that Muhammad was the true messenger of God, and they say they believe it, and so they are saved. This is why they are converting the Tartars and many other nations to their law, because they are given great licence to sin and according to their law no sin is forbidden.[118]

Adding on the previous quotation, Polo narrates that Muslims in the kingdoms of Persia used to "kill and mistreat" all the merchants who were unarmed, then says, "I can assure

[118] Polo, *The Travels*, trans. by Cliff, 28-29.

you that they all observe the law of Muhammad their prophet."[119] It seems like Polo is trying to draw a parallel between the Prophet's religion being one that allows transgression and crime, and the Muslims being "prone to great sinfulness."[120] Also, it is unclear whether Polo has personally encountered a 'Saracen' who committed the acts of murder and stealing, or such allegation is made as a reference to the Crusade rhetoric that calumniates the Muslims who were believed to have stolen the Holy Land and killed Christians along the way.[121] Polo's bias against the Islamic religion and his apparent lack of knowledge about its doctrine is crystal clear in the overt statement he makes about the Prophet's law, claiming that there are not any forbidden sins in Islam and Muslims are not punished for their acts.[122] It is needless to say that murder and theft are among the most serious of sins mentioned in the Qur'an and their punishment is inevitable.[123] However, Polo is holding the Islamic religion responsible for the acts of Muslim wrongdoers and he goes so far as to mislead the readers by distorting the truth about the status of sins and their punishment in Islam. On a related note, William of Tripoli, who plays an important role in the accounts of Mandeville's travelogue as I will show in the following section, allegedly accompanied Marco Polo as a Dominican representative on his journey to China but left midway to seek refuge in Acre after hearing about Sultan Baybars' attack on Armenia.[124]

> William, friar at the Dominican convent of Tripoli, [wrote] for the future Pope a treatise, *Notitia de Machometo* [1271], describing the life of Muhammad, the rise of Islam, the contents of the Koran, and the main rituals of Islam. He ridicules the Koran as a

[119] Ibid, 33.
[120] Frassetto and Blanks, *Western Views of Islam*, 67.
[121] Ibid, 99.
[122] Polo, *The Travels*, trans. by Cliff, 29.
[123] *The Qur'an*, trans. by Haleem, 71 (5:32 for the verse on the punishment of murder and 5:38 for that on theft).
[124] Thomas F. O'Meara, "The Theology and Times of William of Tripoli, O.P.: A Different View of Islam," *Theological Studies*, vol. 69, no. 1 (2008): 86.

> hodgepodge, calling it a little black crow dressed up in absurd multicolored feathers; it permits its followers to do whatever they want.[125]

Taking into consideration the chronology of William's inscription of his treatise and Polo's narration of his travel journeys, and after reviewing the last sentence in the previous quotation, it is highly plausible that Polo's claim about the Islamic religion's laxity with regard to the punishment of sins is, in fact, a replication of the information provided in William's book about the Islamic religion.[126]

Moreover, the usage of the word "priest" by Polo to refer to the person who asks Muslims to repeat the Shahadah (testimony of faith) before dying, who should in fact be called "Shaikh" instead if he is a clergyman, reiterates the same behavior of medieval Christians who cannot perceive the difference between other religions and their own.[127] Jones points out a similar notion in the *Chansons de Geste* in which the poets "organized clergy, with a pope at its head, canons and clerks" in their description of what amounts to the Imam who leads the prayers in a mosque.[128] She infers that the poets of the songs reflected "not what was true, but . . . what passed as truth among the people" which is Christianity in this case.[129] Hence, this shows that Polo, like other medieval writers, reproduced the idea that Islam was a derivation of the Christian faith and accordingly, any religious aspect from the latter can be applied to the Islamic religion by default. In addition, the contradiction in Polo's accounts comes to light when he acknowledges that

[125] Tolan, *Saracens*, 203.
[126] William of Tripoli presumably wrote *Notitia de Machometo* in 1271 and Marco Polo narrated his travel accounts to Rustichello of Pisa in a Genoan prison in 1298, according to the chronology offered by Nigel Cliff, so it is probable that Polo would have been familiar with the information provided in William's treatise which would explain the parallelism between their accounts of Islam.
[127] I have reviewed two other translated versions of Polo's book by Ronald Latham and Manuel Komroff to verify if they translated it as "priest" and both texts indeed have the word "priest" in this context.
[128] Jones, "The Conventional Saracen," 210.
[129] Ibid, 210.

drinking alcohol is forbidden in the Islamic religion which would make it a sin and, in turn, invalidate his previous claim that there are not any forbidden sins in Islam:

> Someone may object that Saracens do not drink wine because their law forbids it. My answer to this is that they gloss the text of their law to the effect that, if the wine is simmered over a fire until it is partly reduced and turns sweet, they are free to drink it without breaking their commandments or laws; for then they no longer call it wine, but rather change its name along with its taste.[130]

Polo's use of the verb "gloss" carries a negative connotation which comes off as an accusation of blasphemy and distortion of the scripture on the part of Muslims. In fact, Manuel Komroff, another scholar who has translated Polo's book, replaces the verb with the phrase "quiet their consciences" which proves that Polo is explicitly implying that Muslims are manipulative and hypocritical in their religious practice and belief.[131] It is also important to note that the main reason for the prohibition of alcohol in Islam is its intoxication, so if a beverage is devoid of any intoxicating chemicals (i.e., simmered wine), drinking or using it in cooking would not be wrong, according to Muslim jurists.[132] So, Muslims are merely following what the Islamic doctrine dictates, but Polo's insufficient knowledge about Islam tends to convey a distorted account of Muslims and the interpretation of their own faith.

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[130] Polo, *The Travels*, trans. by Cliff, 33.

[131] Marco Polo, *The Travels of Marco Polo (the Venetian)*, Translated by William Marsden and Manuel Komroff (New York: Boni & Liveright, 1926). Ronald Latham uses the verb "gloss" in this context as well.

[132] *The Qur'an*, trans. by Haleem, 76 (5:90 one of the verses that mention the prohibition of alcohol under the word "intoxicants"). To add, in one of the hadiths, it is mentioned that the Prophet used to drink "Nabidh" which is a sweet, non-alcoholic drink made from grapes or dates. It is only permissible to drink it as long as it has not been left until its fermentation, in which case it would turn into "Khamr" (alcohol), which is forbidden in Islam. However, some people use the word "Nabidh" and wine interchangeably as if they carry the same meaning and this is what might lead to the misinterpretation of facts. For reference, see Muslim, *Sahih Muslim,* trans. by Siddiqui, The Book of Drinks (Chapter 5).

2. 2. 2. In John Mandeville's *The Book*

Having reviewed Polo's views and negative representation of the Prophet and his law in his travel book, one ought to give more attention to Mandeville's account of the Islamic faith through which he delivers inaccurate and distorted information about the Prophet's biography and the Islamic doctrine. To start with, Mandeville displays the false medieval belief that Prophet Muhammad was God himself,[133] although he acknowledges that Muslims consider the Prophet to be God's messenger.[134] This is manifested in Mandeville's understanding of the Qur'an as he seems to believe that the Prophet "wrote" and "entreated" the revelations bestowed upon him when, in fact, the Qur'an is God's revelations to the Prophet and his mission was simply to deliver them to the people.[135] This is emphasized in several surahs in the Qur'an to make sure people can recognize the distinction between God's words and their delivery through the Prophet's message. To mention an example from the 47th surah titled "Muhammad" after the Prophet's name:

> But He will overlook the bad deeds of those who have faith, do good deeds, and believe in what has been sent down to Muhammad–the truth from their Lord–and He will put them into a good state.[136]

Hence, one can argue that Mandeville's misrepresentation of the Islamic religion might come off as intentional in an attempt to discredit the Prophet and the status of Islam in comparison to the Christian faith. As Norman Daniel states,

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[133] Kidwai, *Images of the Prophet Muhammad*, 16.
[134] Mandeville, *The Book*, trans. by Bale, 68. Mandeville cites the Shahadah which is "There is no God but one alone and Muhammad is his messenger." So, it is clear that Mandeville was aware of the Prophet's status in Islam and how Muslims perceived his message.
[135] Ibid, 62 ("he [the Prophet] wrote") & 64 ("Muhammad entreated in his al-Koran"). In the Middle English version of Mandeville's book, the verb "wrote" is also used, but "entreated" is replaced with "bade" which still delivers the same meaning and by using the pronoun "his", Mandeville is implying that the words dictated in the Qur'an are the Prophet's and not God's.
[136] *The Qur'an*, trans. by Haleem, 331 (47:2).

> The chief object of Christian polemic would be to show that he was the author of his religion, and to discredit his revelation by showing it to have arisen out of the social and political circumstances of a particular place and age.[137]

As I have previously shown in the *Chanson de Roland*, the medieval strategy was to portray Muhammad as a false prophet, if not a God in the form of an idol, whose religion has proven to fail through the defeat of Muslims in the past or their conversion to the Christian faith, as Mandeville implies in his book.[138]

Moreover, Mandeville's religious fervor is clear-cut in the statements he makes and the kind of language he uses in the description of aspects related to the Islamic religion. As a manifestation, the use of the determiner "this" to speak about the Qur'an or Prophet Muhammad comes off as demeaning with regard to the sanctity of such topics. In his account of the 'Saracens'' faith, Mandeville resorts to such format in his narrative by occasionally using the phrases "This al-Koran book of theirs/ This book/ This al-Koran book/ This Muhammad" which transmits the feeling that Mandeville did not believe in the legitimacy of the Islamic religion.[139] In contrast, Mandeville has consistently used the words "The Bible/ Our Lord Jesus Christ/ Jesus Christ/ Virgin Mary/ Our Lady" in his reference to the Christian counterpart without using any determiners in this case.[140] Thus, Mandeville's meticulous choice of words when it comes to the description of the two religions unveils his antagonistic attitude and personal stance toward the Islamic

[137] Daniel, *Islam and the West*, 88, quoted in Kidwai, *Images of the Prophet Muhammad*, 14.
[138] See Kidwai, *Images of the Prophet Muhammad*, 9.
[139] Mandeville, *The Book*, trans. by Bale, 63 & 67. The determiner "that" is used in the Middle English version to refer to the Qur'an and "this" is used in the same context when referring to Muhammad. In Gong-Dae Kim, "A Comparative Study of Endophoric Demonstratives in English and French," *University of Ulsan Research Fund*, (2002): 79, the author indicates that "there is a disparaging use of the determiner *that* in expressions like *that Pierre* (or *those Pierres*)." Since Mandeville's use of the determiners This/That in his reference to Muhammad and the Qur'an is not intended for spatial proximity, the other explanation would be his emotional proximity with regard to those notions, which, in this case, conveys his negatively distant and exclusive tone toward the addressee.
[140] Mandeville, *The Book*, trans. by Bale, 8-11. This reference is an example from Chapter 2, but Mandeville's use of those phrases is prevalent throughout his book and the same could be found in the Middle English version as well.

religion. In addition, to corroborate the falsity of Islam on the basis of the similarities between its doctrine and that of the Christian faith, Mandeville professes, "they [Muslims] are well aware that according to their prophecies, Muhammad's law will fail just as the Jews' law has proved a failure, and the Christian law will endure until the end of the world."[141] There is not any rationale behind the previous statement or proof that it is true, but it appears that Mandeville is merely recapitulating the medieval polemic about the defeat of Islam which would be rewarded with "Christian ascendancy."[142] This notion is mentioned in William of Tripoli's *Notitia de Machometo* in which he asserts that "the age *[status]* of the Saracens must quickly end, while that of the Christians will last until the end of the world," which resonates with Mandeville's words mentioned above.[143] Similarly, in *De statu Saracenorum*, the other treatise attributed to William of Tripoli but is now believed to be an anonymous text based on *Notitia de Machometo*,[144] he alludes to the similarities between Islam and Christianity, which pave the way for the easy conversion of Muslims, and the acknowledgement of Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary in the Qur'an.[145] Also, "he makes a series of predictions of Islam's imminent demise, claiming that Muhammad himself had predicted the end of Islam when the caliphate was destroyed [the Abbasid caliphate after its defeat through the Mongol invasion]."[146] On that account, one can notice the uncanny resemblance between William's description of Islam and Mandeville's account of the "Saracens' faith" in Chapter 13 of his book, which posits the possible argument that Mandeville was indeed "an armchair traveller" who

[141] Ibid, 64. See also Braude, "Mandeville's Jews among Others," 133-158 for more details on the negative portrayal of the Jews in Mandeville's book.
[142] Tolan, *Saracens*, 204.
[143] William of Tripoli, *Notitia de Machometo,* 260, quoted in Tolan, *Saracens*, 204 .
[144] See Rita George-Tvrtković, "Bridge or Barrier? Mary and Islam in William of Tripoli and Nicholas of Cusa," *Medieval Encounters,* vol. 22, no. 4 (2016): 307-325.
[145] Tolan, *Saracens*, 204.
[146] Ibid, 204.

borrowed information from relevant works at the time.[147] In other words, by putting the aforementioned two texts together with Mandeville's travel book, one can observe the exactitude in the transmission of the same details and views that echo the medieval West's negative attitude and hostility toward the Islamic religion.

Furthermore, in his attempt to discredit the Prophet, Mandeville makes sure to mention that Prophet Muhammad suffered from epilepsy, insinuating that such condition made him less of a man in the eyes of his wife, Khadija.

> Muhammad had epilepsy and often collapsed, and the princess really began to regret that she had taken him as her husband. But he made her aware that each time he collapsed like this the angel Gabriel spoke to him, and it was because of the great radiance of the angel Gabriel that he collapsed.[148]

The first statement in the previous quotation proves that Mandeville provided inaccurate information about the Prophet's life in his book, as it is commonly known that Khadija was the first person to follow Prophet Muhammad and believe in his message.[149] However, Mandeville's words go hand-in-hand with the medieval West's twisted versions regarding the truth behind the Prophet's revelations, which exploited his epileptic fits as proof of his false prophethood and inadequacy to be considered a holy man.[150] Norman Daniel mentions one of the "commonest fairytales [that] had immense popularity," which corresponds to Mandeville's portrayal of the Prophet, as it states that "he [the Prophet] began to fall down often in epileptic fits. Khadijah perceived this and grew exceedingly sad at having married a very impure epileptic."[151] Other twisted versions include the portrayal of Khadija as a woman who doubted the Prophet's message and "became

[147] Classen, "Marco Polo and John Mandeville: The Traveler as Authority Figure," 239.
[148] Mandeville, *The Book*, trans. by Bale, 67.
[149] Reşit Haylamaz, *Khadija: The First Muslim and the Wife of the Prophet Muhammad* (Somerset, N.J.: Tughra Books, 2007), 67.
[150] Kidwai, *Images of the Prophet Muhammad*, 13.
[151] Daniel, *Islam and the West*, 47.

distressed" upon hearing about his revelations, then "sought the advice of "a certain monk living there, a friend of hers (who had been exiled for his depraved doctrine)"" to confirm her husband's claim.[152] These stories are derived from common misconceptions and the premeditated strategy that aimed at deforming the image of the Prophet.[153] As the truth is Khadija's initial reaction was telling the Prophet to "rejoice and be of good heart" without questioning him.[154] Also, the monk in this story is Khadija's Christian cousin Waraqah ibn Nawfal, who confirmed Muhammad's prophethood, and to whom Khadija went for advice as a way of comforting the Prophet who was "still uncertain of his mission" and not out of disbelief.[155] From another perspective, some tales completely discard Khadija's role and are centered on the fabricated stories of the Prophet's horrific death by using epilepsy as the sole cause of his downfall. As I mentioned earlier in the *Chanson de Roland*, hostile legends recount the Prophet's death through "this threefold agency [of] drunkenness, poison and epilepsy" and the devouring of his body by dogs and/or pigs.[156] Other similar tales add on this notion by perceiving epilepsy as a punishment from God for the Prophet's heresy,[157] and "for instigating this new law [i.e., Islam],"[158] as well as those who considered his epileptic fits to be a result of demonic possession and said that the Prophet tricked people into believing they were "the

[152] Tolan, *Saracens*, 64. This is based on the chronicles of Theophanes the Confessor who provided a distorted version of the Prophet's biography. For more details, see Theophanes, *The Chronicle of Theophanes the Confessor*, Translated by Cyril A. Mango, Roger Scott, and Geoffrey Greatrex (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997); John V. Tolan, "European Accounts of Muhammad's Life," In: *The Cambridge Companion to Muhammad* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 227.
[153] See Daniel, *Islam and the West*, 36-66 for more details on the made-up tales about the Prophet.
[154] Tolan, Saracens, 24.
[155] Ibid, 24.
[156] Daniel, *Islam and the West*, 126-127. See Section 2.1.2.
[157] John V. Tolan, *Sons of Ishmael: Muslims Through European Eyes in the Middle Ages* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2008), 27.
[158] Ibid, 15.

consequence of his divine revelations."[159] Therefore, one can safely say that Mandeville's portrayal of the Prophet conforms to the concocted stories about the invalidity of Muhammad's prophethood that were prevalent during the Middle Ages.

On a similar note, there is a story mentioned two times in Mandeville's book in which he underlines the distorted medieval image of the Prophet as a drunkard who "was associated with a monk or hermit."[160]

> Some people have said that in his drunkenness Muhammad murdered a good hermit, whom he loved very much, and therefore he cursed the wine and those who drink wine.[161] [Chapter 6]
>
> Anyway, Muhammad truly loved one good man, a hermit . . . So one evening it happened that Muhammad had plenty of fine wine to drink so he was drunk and fell asleep. While he was sleeping, his men drew a sword from his own sheath and with that sword they killed this hermit . . . The next day . . . in total agreement and in unison, they said that he himself [the Prophet] had killed the sleeping hermit when he was drunk . . . and so he believed that they had told him the truth. Then he cursed wine and all those who drink it.[162] [Chapter 13]

Firstly, Mandeville employs the vocation of a distant narrator who delivers the story as someone who had heard it from other people, then he gives the full details of the tale as an omniscient author who is speaking with certainty and using his own words, which really brings to light the inconsistency and contradicting narrative in his travelogue. What is more is that it turns out that this tale is "lifted almost word for word [from] William of

[159] Ibid, 145. See also Kidwai, *Images of the Prophet Muhammad*, 13; Tolan, "European Accounts of Muhammad's Life," 228. Tolan states that "In Medieval Europe, epilepsy was often considered a symptom of demonic possession," which explains why people were quick to attribute the Prophet's epileptic fits to satanic acts.

[160] Matthew Dimmock, *Mythologies of the Prophet Muhammad in Early Modern English Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 46, quoted in Kidwai, *Images of the Prophet Muhammad*, 20.

[161] Mandeville, *The Book*, trans. by Bale, 38.

[162] Ibid, 67.

Tripoli's *De statu Saracenorum*,"[163] except for Mandeville's omission of some details to fit in with the distorted version that is provided in the medieval Christian sources. Secondly, the identity of the hermit is actually the Christian monk named Bahira who is believed to have been the first person to predict Muhammad's future prophethood when he was twelve years old while he was on a "trade journey along with his uncle, Abu Talib."[164] "No sooner had the Bahira legend entered into the Islamic mainstream than Christian apologists in the East began to exploit its obvious counterhistorical potential."[165] Accordingly, the medieval Christian versions of the story turned into this made-up tale about the association of Prophet Muhammad with "Sergius [another name for Bahira], the heretic monk," who is believed to have been the Prophet's mentor who provided him with the teachings of Islam, "inspired [him] to set himself up as a prophet, and wrote his Quran in whole or part."[166] This eventually led to the medieval belief that Islam was "merely a Christian heresy"[167] and that "the Prophet concocted the Quran . . . with the help from the Christian monk" which served as enough proof to damage the credibility of the Islamic religion.[168] While the story of Bahira along with its various versions is not mentioned in the Qur'an, the verse "We know very well that they say, 'It is a man who teaches him,' but the language of the person they allude to is foreign, while this revelation is in clear Arabic (16:103)"[169] is believed to be a refutation of the allegation that the

[163] Dimmock, *Mythologies of the Prophet Muhammad*, 43. See Tolan, *Saracens*, 204-205 for the same version of Mandeville's story in William of Tripoli's treatise.
[164] Kidwai, *Images of the Prophet Muhammad*, 103. See also Tolan, *Saracens*, 23; Wolf, "Falsifying the Prophet," 110-111.
[165] Wolf, "Falsifying the Prophet," 111.
[166] Kidwai, *Images of the Prophet Muhammad*, 47. See also Daniel, *Islam and the West*, 109-110; Tolan, *Saracens*, 62.
[167] Kidwai, *Images of the Prophet Muhammad*, 103.
[168] Ibid, 50.
[169] *The Qur'an*, trans. by Haleem, 173.

Qur'an was written by Bahira or any other man which, in turn, renders the argument of Christian polemicists invalid.

It is unclear why Mandeville "[decided] to remove any reference to the Christianity of the monk Bahira, who is no more than an anonymous hermit from near Mount [Sinai], although a 'good man,'" but it seems like his main motive was to reinforce this negative, "deeply disturbing and unseemly image of an inebriated raging prophet."[170] In addition, Mandeville's assertion that drinking wine/alcohol was prohibited as an outcome of this fabricated story further proves that he lacked proper knowledge about the Islamic doctrine. It also demonstrates that Mandeville misunderstood the difference between God's revelations to the Prophet and his deliverance of them to the people, as he distorts the facts by showing that alcohol prohibition came after and as a result of the Prophet's engagement in such sin.[171] Having established that Mandeville's book is probably a compilation of other works, one can argue that his accounts of Islam and the Prophet's life clearly act as the voice of the medieval Christian West that strived to vilify the Islamic religion and its followers. C. W. R. D. Moseley, another scholar who translated Mandeville's book, sums up his approach by observing that:

> He [Mandeville] deliberately integrates material of very different kinds not readily to be found elsewhere; but unlike the compendium writer . . . he does not just compile. One of his most remarkable and interesting achievements is to have synthesized so many sources so that the joins do not show. He adapts and shapes to fit his plan, unifying all with the stamp of valuing subjectivity.[172]

[170] Dimmock, *Mythologies of the Prophet Muhammad*, 45.
[171] There are several surahs in the Qur'an that mention the prohibition of alcohol and the reasons for it. See *The Qur'an*, trans. by Haleem, 24 (2:219), 76 (5:90-94), 55 (4:43), 170 (16:67) for some examples.
[172] John Mandeville, *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville*, Translated by C. W. R. D. Moseley (London: Penguin, 2005), quoted in Classen, "Marco Polo and John Mandeville: The Traveler as Authority Figure," 239.

Considering the myriad of works that were written about the Prophet's life and his religion during Mandeville's time, it is true that one can hardly distinguish between Mandeville's authorship and his cleverness in compiling all the medieval texts that helped in shaping the public's bias against the Islamic religion.[173] Also, it is crucial to point out that Mandeville's inaccurate account of Islam cannot be excused by assuming that he did not have access to the Qur'an, because when it comes to the Qur'anic acknowledgement of Christianity, Jesus Christ, and the Virgin Mary, Mandeville displays quite a sufficient knowledge about Islamic theology in this particular context.[174]

> They also frequently describe and discuss the Virgin Mary, and they describe the Incarnation which Mary was informed of by angels and was announced to her by Gabriel, that she was chosen since the world began before all others, and this is fully witnessed in their book *al-Koran*; and that Gabriel announced to her the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, and that she would conceive and bear a child and still remain a virgin; and they say that Jesus Christ spoke as soon as He was born, and that He was a true and holy prophet in word and deed, meek, righteous to all, and without vice.[175]

To give an explanation for this kind of discrepancy, Daniel says:

> In treating the life of Muhammad and . . . all aspects of that religion [Islam], facts were exaggerated, sometimes out of little or nothing, and were often distorted almost beyond recognition; sound information was regularly discarded for unsound. Only in matters apparently favourable to Christianity was a very high degree of accuracy achieved, as, for example, in treating the Qur'anic beliefs about Christ and His mother. This draws attention to the motives underlying inaccuracies on themes where there was conflict. Accuracy in the one case, inaccuracy in the other, were equally useful in support of Christian belief.[176]

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[173] The Prophet's biography provided in Mandeville's book "broadly concurs with the lives presented" by Ranulf Higden's *Polychronicon*, Jacobus de Voragine's *The Golden Legend*, and John Lydgate's *The Fall of Princes* (Dimmock, *Mythologies of the Prophet Muhammad*, 46 (see also Chapter One in this book for more details on the works of these three authors); Kidwai, *Images of the Prophet Muhammad*, 19-20 & 43). Also, the Prophet's genealogy presented by Mandeville, being a descendant of Ishmael, is in accordance with the "biblical genealogy" outlined in John of Damascus' *Fount of Knowledge* (Tolan, *Saracens*, 51-52).
[174] Mandeville, *The Book*, trans. by Bale, 62-68.
[175] Mandeville, *The Book*, trans. by Bale, 62-63.
[176] Daniel, *Islam and the West*, 270-271.

Thus, it is obvious that Mandeville's account of the Islamic faith is composed on the basis of selectivity, as his account of the Islamic religion is a combination of all the medieval narratives that conform to the West's preconceived notions about Islam and the popularized myths about the Prophet.

3. Epilogue: Islam Then and Now

3. 1. The Legend of the Old Man of the Mountain and His Assassins

In this concluding part, I will finalize my mémoire by reflecting on the current status of Islam and its treatment in the modern world, which still deserves some attention due to the biased behaviors and views that resonate strongly with those in the medieval period. Before that, there is one final episode narrated in Marco Polo and John Mandeville's books that is worthy of mention, owing to its significance in the Christian polemic against a certain sect of Islam, the Nizari Isma'ilis, which is mostly based on fabricated material and misinformation.[1] "The Isma'ilis represent an important minority community of Shi'i Muslims" and the Nizari branch is considered the largest one in their movement, which "[accounts] for the bulk of the Isma'ili population of the world."[2] They had two states; the first one was founded in Persia and led by Hassan Sabbah, "the first leader of the Nizari Isma'ilis,"[3] and the second one in Syria which was initially controlled by Rashid al-Din Sinan, who was also "known to the Crusaders [there] as the [original] 'Old Man of the Mountain.'"[4]

The main objective behind the states of the Nizari Isma'ilis was to overthrow and revolt against the regime of the Seljuk Turks, who held the greatest Sunni Muslim empire during the Middle Ages and, in turn, did not approve of Shi'ism as a branch of Islam and perceived

[1] See Farhad Daftary, *The Assassin Legends: Myths of the Isma'ilis* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1995) for more details on the history of the Isma'ilis and the origin of the Western versions of the Assassins' tales. Other secondary literature that investigates the same topic includes: Charles E. Nowell, "The Old Man of the Mountain," *Speculum*, vol. 22, no. 4 (1947): 497–519; Juliette Wood, "The Old Man of the Mountain in Medieval Folklore," *Folklore*, vol. 99, no. 1 (1988): 78–87; Bruce Lincoln, "An Early Moment in the Discourse of "Terrorism:" Reflections on a Tale from Marco Polo," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 48, no. 2 (2006): 242–259; Geraldine Heng, "Sex, Lies, and Paradise: The Assassins, Prester John, and the Fabulation of Civilizational Identities," *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, vol. 23, no. 1 (2012): 1–31; Shafique N. Virani, "An Old Man, a Garden, and an Assembly of Assassins: Legends and Realities of the Nizari Ismaili Muslims," *Iran: Journal of the British Institute of Persian Studies* (2021): 1–13.

[2] Daftary, *The Assassin Legends*, 2.

[3] Ibid, 31.

[4] Ibid, 41.

it as heresy.[5] "To do this, [Sabbah] employed organized murder for removing and intimidating his enemies"[6] and hence, "the Nizari assassinations were carried out by their fida'is . . . the young self-sacrificing devotees who offered themselves for such suicidal missions."[7] Subsequently, the Nizari Isma'ilis were given the designation of 'Assassins' by Western chroniclers and travel writers who lacked proper knowledge about the Islamic religion and were merely captivated by the peculiarity of self-sacrifice and blind obedience, which drove them to propagate imaginary, mythical tales about such sect.[8] The misnomer 'Assassin' is believed to have stemmed from different variants of the word 'hashish' -the Arabic name of a drug that was allegedly used by the Nizari fida'is; thus, they were sometimes called Hashishiyya which means drug users- and it was most likely transmitted by the Crusaders and reinforced through the Western accounts that recorded the Assassin legends thereafter.[9] Later on, the word 'assassin' entered European languages with its new meaning which is 'murderer' and it was being used as a noun as if "it had become common occidental property" rather than a misused reference to an authentic religious sect.[10]

Early Western accounts of the Old Man of the Mountain and the myth of the Assassins started with the works of Burchard of Strassburg, William of Tyre, Benjamin of Tudela,

[5] Ibid, 5.
[6] Nowell, "The Old Man of the Mountain," 498.
[7] Daftary, *The Assassin Legends*, 34.
[8] Ibid, 62-63.
[9] Ibid, 90-93. Daftary provides the first English translation of Silvestre de Sacy's *Memoir on the Dynasty of the Assassins* in his book. Sacy is considered one of the important orientalists of the nineteenth century who offers a recent study of the history of the Isma'ilis and in his *Memoir*, he offers the etymology of the name 'Assassins' and its connection with the drug 'hashish' (See Appendix in Daftary, *The Assassin Legends*, 136-182). See also Nowell, "The Old Man of the Mountain," 499-501; Heng, "Sex, Lies, and Paradise," 8.
[10] Nowell, "The Old Man of the Mountain," 515. See also Daftary, *The Assassin Legends,* 121; Wood, "The Old Man of the Mountain in Medieval Folklore," 83. The most commonly cited example in the literature is Dante's use of the word 'assassin' "in the 19th canto of the *Inferno* in his *La Divina Commedia* . . . (le perfido assassin)" and there is also the example of "the Florentine historian Giovanni Villani [who] relates how the lord of Lucca sent 'his assassins' (i suoi assassini) to Pisa to kill an enemy" (quoted from Daftary, *The Assassin Legends,* 121).

Arnold of Lübeck, James of Vitry, who reported the same story with slight modifications and some fictitious details based on rumors and oral transmissions of the tale at that time.[11] They all spoke of an Old Man who recruited young people and manipulated them into avenging his enemies by promising them the eternal delights of paradise. Indeed, there were some fabrications done to the original story which include the use of drugs -hashish- by the fida'is themselves or by the Old Man to sedate them,[12] and the garden of paradise that has been distorted by Polo and Mandeville through its explicit, uncanny resemblance to the Islamic Paradise that was described by Prophet Muhammad and mentioned in the Qur'an.[13] In fact, Marco Polo was the first European writer to offer a detailed description of this 'secret garden of paradise' and introduce the Old Man as a Prophet impersonator who created an earthly replica of the Islamic Paradise to lure the young fida'is into joining his terrorist organization.[14] Consequently, "Polo's version of the Assassin legends came to be adopted, to various extents, by successive generations of European writers as the standard description of the 'Assassins'," paving the way for a twisted, imaginary version of the original story which completely "overshadows the earlier accounts."[15] About half a century later, Friar Odoric of Pordenone narrated a version of the Old Man tale that is almost identical to the one in Polo's account, reiterating the use of drugs and the existence of a false paradise as the two main components of the Assassins' world.[16] It is also believed that Odoric's account is the main source for the

[11] See Daftary, *The Assassin Legends,* 95-108 for more details on the unique versions of each author.
[12] Nowell, "The Old Man of the Mountain," 500; Wood, "The Old Man of the Mountain in Medieval Folklore," 82; Daftary, *The Assassin Legends*, 105.
[13] Daftary, *The Assassin Legends*, 113; Heng, "Sex, Lies, and Paradise," 11-12; Lincoln, "An Early Moment in the Discourse of "Terrorism,"" 248-250.
[14] Daftary, *The Assassin Legends*, 113-116.
[15] Ibid, 117.
[16] Daftary, *The Assassin Legends*, 117-118; Nowell, "The Old Man of the Mountain," 517; Wood, "The Old Man of the Mountain in Medieval Folklore," 81.

borrowed story in Mandeville's book about "a rich man, called Catolonabes,"[17] which narrates the same tale of the Old Man of the Mountain with slight differences.[18]

First, Polo's version of the Old Man legend is evidently a mixed combination of his predecessors' accounts; "an admixture of some details heard in Persia and the Assassin legends then circulating in Europe, to which he added his own imaginative component in the form of the Old Man's secret garden of paradise" that is not found in any of the earlier medieval European accounts.[19] However, Polo claims with such authority that his version of the story is based on what he had heard from the people he encountered without acknowledging the previous authors who might have written about it during his time or the original version of this widely propagated tale.[20] After further investigation, it appears that Polo's version is written with such an equivocal and discrepant language, which comes off as a deliberate act of diversion that gradually extends to the distortion of the Islamic religion. To elaborate, Polo's narrative insists on the connection between the Old Man's made-up secret garden of paradise and the Paradise that Prophet Muhammad described to the 'Saracens' as their afterlife reward. "To be sure we understand this, the Prophet's name and word are thrice summoned to underscore the replicative exactness with which the Assassin garden delivers the promises of Islam."[21]

> And the Old Man gave his men to understand that this garden was Paradise. He had it made in this fashion because Muhammad assured the Saracens that those who go to Paradise will have as many beautiful women as they could desire at their beck and call,

[17] John Mandeville, *The Book of Marvels and Travels*, Translated by Anthony Bale (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 110.
[18] Iain Macleod Higgins, *Writing East: The "Travels" of Sir John Mandeville* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 193; Mandeville, *The Book*, trans. by Bale, 165; Heng, "Sex, Lies, and Paradise," 25. In Heng's article, the author states that the unique element in Mandeville's version of the tale lies in the etymology of the name "Catolonabes" which is a Latinization of the Arabic term "*qatil an-nafs*" meaning "murderer" (Heng, "Sex, Lies, and Paradise," 14, quoted from Dorothee Metlitzki, *The Matter of Araby in Medieval England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977)).
[19] Daftary, *The Assassin Legends*, 116.
[20] Ibid, 114.
[21] Heng, "Sex, Lies, and Paradise," 12.

> and that they will find there rivers of wine and milk and honey and water. So the Old Man had had the garden laid out after the Paradise of which Muhammad had spoken to the Saracens . . . The Old Man kept with him at his court all the young men of the country from twelve years old to twenty who seemed fit to be men-at-arms. These youths had often heard that their prophet Muhammad had spoken of Paradise as taking the form I have told you, and so they believed it to be true.[22]

There are two points that should be taken into consideration here which bring to light the inconsistency and ambiguity in Polo's account. First, in the beginning of his story, Polo mentions that the Old Man's name is Alauddin, who turns out to be "Ala al-Din Muhammad III (1221 – 1255), the penultimate ruler of the Nizari state in Persia," even though the term 'Old Man of the Mountain' was used to refer to the Nizari Isma'ilis of Syria by the Crusaders.[23] Second, it has been established that the Assassin legends' origin is traced back to the Nizari Isma'ilis, whose founding leader was Hassan Sabbah, and who belong to the Shi'i sect of Islam that has different beliefs from Sunni Islam.[24] However, "Polo's account subtly closes a divide between Nizaris and Islam [as a whole], making it easier to forget that this breakaway sect did not represent Islam, but only its own particular communities."[25] In addition, Polo presents a superficial, false image of Paradise that merely revolves around the sensual enjoyment of women, "a favored Orientalist trope of Muslim concupiscence [by medieval Western writers],"[26] and mentions the same rivers that run with wine and milk like Mandeville, as I will point out in the following

[22] Marco Polo, *The Travels*, Translated by Nigel Cliff (London: Penguin Books, 2016), 42-43.
[23] Daftary, *The Assassin Legends*, 114.
[24] The major difference between Sunnism and Shi'ism is the belief in the rightful successor who should have led the Muslim nation after the death of Prophet Muhammad; the former accepts "the historical caliphate" that began with Abu Bakr, a member of the Prophet's companions, while the latter believes that the Prophet's successor should have been one from his descendancy, which would make Ali b. Abi Talib the legitimate Imam (leader). See Daftary, *The Assassin Legends*, Chapter 2 (8-48) for a thorough investigation of the history and formation of Shi'ism.
[25] Heng, "Sex, Lies, and Paradise," 11.
[26] Lincoln, "An Early Moment in the Discourse of "Terrorism," 252.

pages. Contrastingly, the Islamic Paradise that serves as an eternal reward for the pious Muslims is described in the Qur'an as follows:

> Here is a picture of the Garden promised to the pious: rivers of water forever pure, rivers of milk forever fresh, rivers of wine, a delight for those who drink, rivers of honey clarified and pure, [all] flow in it; there they will find fruit of every kind; and they will find forgiveness from their Lord.[27]

Thus, apart from the fact that Polo's version further proves to be a mixture of information that does not add up, it is important to highlight that his insistence on the resemblance between the Assassins' false heaven and the Islamic Paradise contributes to the medieval, as well as the contemporary misrepresentation of Islam as a religion that not only condones but also rewards acts of terrorism, violence, and murder.

Second, Christian writers have long been intrigued by the idea of the Islamic Paradise, but their denunciation of Islam led to the demotion of the place to one that is merely reserved for sensual pleasures and sexual freedom.[28] It was a more convenient way for medieval Christian polemicists to use this distorted image of Paradise to prove that the Islamic religion was a false one for being more concerned with bodily pleasures rather than spirituality.[29] In other words, as Akbari puts it,

> The Islamic paradise was thus a focal point for a whole range of Western perspectives on Islam. It was the very heart of the irrationality of Islam, for philosophers such as [Roger] Bacon; and it epitomized the essential emptiness of the "law of Muhammad," its dedication to the pleasures of the flesh and the superficiality of the letter.[30]

This idea was expressed by Mandeville as well in an attempt to discredit the Islamic religion by saying that: "But they [the 'Saracens'] only understand it according to the

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[27] *The Qur'an: A New Translation by M. A. S. Abdel Haleem* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 332 (47:15).
[28] See Akbari, *Idols in the East*, Chapter 6 (248-279); Frassetto and Blanks, *Western Views of Islam*, 223.
[29] Daniel, *Islam and the West*, 172-176; Frassetto and Blanks, *Western Views of Islam*, 223.
[30] Akbari, *Idols in the East*, 278-279.

letter, just like the Jews, who do not understand the spiritual meaning."[31] Thus, the idea of Paradise as a reward in the afterlife for the virtuous believers promised by Prophet Muhammad has turned into a refutation of Islam as a religion that is governed by sexual license, in addition to the distortion of the Prophet's biography by portraying him as a man who was "driven by lust" and an obsession with polygamy by several medieval authors.[32]

Furthermore, Anthony Bale claims that "Mandeville does not associate [the story of] Catolonabes with Islam;"[33] however, I tend to disagree because one cannot help but notice the exact resemblance in the description of the Assassins' paradise to the Islamic Paradise that is mentioned in the Qur'an.[34] This is easily discernible when one compares between Mandeville's description of Paradise according to the 'Saracens'' faith and that of the same paradise offered by Catolonabes to his Assassins.

> If one enquires about what kind of Paradise they envisage, they say that it's a place of sensuous pleasures, where one can find all kinds of fruit at all times and rivers flowing with wine, milk, honey, and fresh water . . . Every man shall have ten wives, all virgins, and he'll have sex with them each day and they'll still remain virgins.[35] [Chapter 13]
>
> Now, when any local young bachelor, some knight or squire, came to see him, Catolonabes took him into his Paradise . . . Then he said that this was a Paradise that God granted to those that he loved, citing . . . 'I will give you . . . a land flowing with milk and honey.' Then he told them . . . once they were dead they should enter into his Paradise and should be

[31] Mandeville, *The Book*, trans. by Bale, 65. See also Akbari, *Idols in the East*, 262.
[32] Tolan, *Saracens*, 29. The author mentions the Christian monk who is presumably the author of *Risalat al-Kindi*, an apologetic letter in which the writer highlights the righteousness of Christianity and reveals the flaws of Islam as a religion, and Saint Eulogius of Córdoba as two examples of medieval polemicists, who make use of the twisted, sexual depiction of Paradise and the Prophet's marriages as an argument to refute the Islamic religion and distort Muhammad's image along with his law.
[33] Mandeville, *The Book*, trans. by Bale, 165.
[34] Heng, "Sex, Lies, and Paradise," 13; Akbari, *Idols in the East*, 261. See also *The Qur'an*, trans. by Haleem, 156 (13:35) and 332 (47:15) for verses that describe the Islamic Paradise.
[35] Mandeville, *The Book*, trans. by Bale, 62.

> the same age as these virgins; they should be able to live forever with them and have their way with them, and they would forever remain virgins.[36] [Chapter 23]

Firstly, Mandeville puts words into the Muslims' mouths by stating that Paradise only means "sensuous pleasures" to them, when in fact, this is the preconceived image with which medieval Christians had associated the Islamic Paradise in their imagination. Secondly, the fact that Mandeville draws a parallel between the Assassins' false heaven, which is the end destination after an expedition that revolves around murder and terrorism, and the Qur'anic Paradise brings to mind the medieval condemnation of Islam, being a religion of violence, in conjunction with the current discourse on terrorism through which Western media distorts facts and information to vilify the Islamic religion.

> Hardly a day goes by that a news article on Islamist terrorism does not allude to the "seventy-two virgins" that await the successful suicide bomber upon his arrival in the heaven of the Muslims . . . Such examples in the current media . . . remind us that the Islamic paradise, in the Western imagination, has a long genealogy. Conceived both as fantastically alluring and repellently fleshly, it was at once a focus for Western desire and a summation of all that was thought to be disturbing and deviant in Islam.[37]

Hence, Mandeville's version of the Old Man tale "shows how attentive [he was] to the template of the Qur'anic paradise" that he subtly offers a description of it in a different context without drawing an explicit connection to Islam.[38] This, in turn, posits the idea that Mandeville might have had a certain agenda when it comes to the portrayal of the Islamic religion.

In contrast, Mandeville juxtaposes Prester John's land in which there is a perfect balance between wealth, devotion, and spirituality with the Assassins' paradise that is defined by its "empty materiality" and sexual excess to show the difference between a

[36] Ibid, 111.
[37] Akbari, *Idols in the East*, 248.
[38] Heng, "Sex, Lies, and Paradise," 16.

Christian society and one that is most probably Islamic-like.[39] Prester John's empire "represented, to the medieval Western Christian, the last great hope for a military victory in the Holy Land,"[40] which fits perfectly in Mandeville's narrative considering his book is influenced by the antagonism between Christians and Muslims, due to the political and religious conflict over Jerusalem during the time of the Crusades, and beyond, up to this day and age. To manifest the difference between the two worlds, Mandeville shows how the Assassins are indulged in sensual pleasures and infatuated by the beautiful damsels offered by the Old Man, who also has fountains of "wine, milk, and honey" that are "all decorated with the precious gems, jasper, and crystal, and fretted with gold and pearls and other kinds of gemstones."[41] However, Prester John is depicted as a simple man who does not give much importance to material things. For instance, "he goes into battle . . . [holding] three crosses, made of fine gold, large and long and decorated with precious gems, carried before him," but he goes home with only one that is made of wood "as a sign that Our Lord [Jesus Christ] suffered death on a wooden cross," says Mandeville.[42] Also, when it comes to abstinence, he is the perfect example as:

> His bed is fashioned out of sapphires neatly fixed with gold, so that he may sleep well and refrain from debauchery, for he does not like to sleep with his wives except at four times each year according to the four seasons, and then that is only to conceive children.[43]

[39] Ibid, 15. Prester John is presumably a Nestorian Christian patriarch who had a great reputation in medieval Europe due to his wealthy empire and religious stance, with regard to the ongoing conflict between Christians and Muslims at the time of the Crusades, even though it is still debatable whether he was a real man or simply a myth. See Charles E. Nowell, "The Historical Prester John," *Speculum*, vol. 28, no. 3 (1953): 435–445 for more details.
[40] Akbari, *Idols in the East*, 62.
[41] Mandeville, *The Book*, trans. by Bale, 109-110.
[42] Ibid, 108.
[43] Ibid, 109. See also Akbari, *Idols in the East*, 61-62; Heng, "Sex, Lies, and Paradise," 15. On a relevant note, there was a medieval association of sapphire with clergymen, as it was believed that sapphire had the "ability to promote its bearer's chastity and piety" which might explain its inclusion in Mandeville's description of Prester John's bed. See Pia Bengtsson Melin, "For Love, Healing and Protection: Notes on Medieval Finger Rings with Sapphires and Other Gemstones in Swedish Collections," *Fornvännen*, vol. 109, no. 4 (2014): 263 for more information.

Thus, Mandeville draws an analogy between the pious, Christian example presented in the character of Prester John and the deceptive, murderous Old Man along with his licentious Assassins. To sum up this idea, as Heng concludes,

> And so we have it: Christian society, pictured at its best by Prester John, is aimed at life and moral and spiritual living. Islamic society, pictured at its worst by the false paradise of the Assassins and the father-of-those-who-kill [Catolonabes], is aimed at homicide, suicide, and destruction. We see that embedded in the episodic narrative of *Mandeville's Travels* is *a project of distinguishing Christian and Islamic civilizational identities as absolutely different from each other, shorn of commonality, and denying the trace of any resemblance*.[44]

Once again, reflecting on the last statement in the previous quotation, this reminds us of the contradiction in Mandeville's narrative because, on one hand, he has been trying to accentuate the similarities between the Christian faith and Islam, which would facilitate the conversion of Muslims, throughout his book. Yet here, on the other hand, he is clearly exhibiting his disapproval with regard to the existence of any connection between the two faiths, by showing the difference between Prester John's utopian, perfect Christian land and Catolonabes' appalling, transgressive, and fake, Qur'anic-based Paradise. So, it seems like Mandeville preached the similarity between Christianity and Islam only when it would serve his narrative or support his argument against the validity of the Islamic religion. All in all,

> Hasan Sabbah was an austere and highly pious Muslim . . . [but] it was on the basis of a Shi'i ideology and such harsh principles that he founded and directed an independent movement and a cohesive territorial state in the midst of a highly hostile ambience.[45]

However, medieval authors and Western chroniclers, who did not exert any effort to educate themselves on the uprising Islamic religion at the time, played a key role in the

[44] Heng, "Sex, Lies, and Paradise," 17.
[45] Daftary, *The Assassin Legends*, 124. See also Nowell, "The Old Man of the Mountain," 519.

propagation of false information and distorted truths about the Nizari Isma'ilis, the Muslim nation as a whole, and the eschatological notion of the Islamic Paradise. This resulted in the spread of several fabricated versions of what came to be known as the legend of the Old Man of the Mountain and his Assassins in Western lore. Such legend caught the attention of several medieval Christian polemicists as well as travel writers, including Marco Polo and John Mandeville, whose versions of this tale serve as digressive accounts from the original story that tend to deform the image of the Islamic religion and happen to coincide with the modern discourse on terrorism, which wrongfully links Islam with violence and an extremist misinterpretation of the concept of jihad.

This remains a controversial, sensitive topic in the modern world as Islam continues to suffer from the stigmatization of being labelled a religion of terror and oppression. The aftermath of the 9/11 attacks has broadened the parameters within which the Islamic religion is legitimately seen as a problem that demands intervention by the West to minimize, if not eliminate, its existence. Considering that Islam "was once a rival religion" in medieval Europe,[46] it is no surprise that some countries still perceive it as the enemy or a threat that should be contained since they now have the political power and parliamentary rights that they might have lacked during the Middle Ages to do so. For instance, several European countries such as, France, Austria, Denmark, and Switzerland, have banned face veils -niqab or burqa- because it prevents identity recognizability, presents a threat in the wake of terrorist attacks, and does not comply with secular laws and social integration.[47] Ironically, we are now living through a pandemic that requires people to wear face masks for their safety which, in turn, hide their identity, so it seems

[46] Satvinder Juss, "Burqa-bashing and the *Charlie Hebdo* Cartoons," *King's Law Journal*, vol. 26, no. 1 (2015): 32.
[47] See Katherine Bullock, "Turbans, Veils, and Villainy on Television: *Stargate SG1* and *Merlin*," *ReOrient*, vol. 6, no. 2 (2021): 169; Juss, "Burqa-bashing," 27-43.

like banning Islamic face veils for that reason is intrinsically a form of discrimination and a fear of the Other.[48] Such discrimination is intertwined with hate speech and stereotypes of Muslims as well as Prophet Muhammad, which were overtly displayed in the Danish cartoons and *Charlie Hebdo* caricatures that contributed to the vilification of the Muslims' and the Prophet's image, along with the propagation of Islamophobic speech behind the façade of freedom of expression.[49] "Due to Islamophobia, caricatures of Muslims too often slip into stereotypes of Islam,"[50] which gives Muslims the right to feel offended when they see a picture of the Prophet wearing a turban with a bomb, as depicted in the Danish cartoons by Kurt Westergaard.[51] It is not freedom of expression when it starts targeting a certain minority and reinforcing negative stereotypes that the Muslim community are constantly being subject to. There are countless other examples in literature and all forms of media that demonstrate the reiterated stereotypes and misrepresentation of Muslims that transcend the scope of my thesis. However, what I aim to establish is a connection between the medieval period and the modern world, in an attempt to show that certain views of, and attitudes toward Islam still manage to collide, despite the protracted timeframe that separates both worlds.

In this mémoire, I have analyzed two of the most famous texts in medieval travel literature, Marco Polo's *The Travels* and John Mandeville's *The Book of Marvels and*

[48] Bullock, "Turbans, Veils, and Villainy," 166-169.
[49] See Andre Oboler, "After the Charlie Hebdo Attack: The Line between Freedom of Expression and Hate Speech," In: *Antisemitism Today and Tomorrow: Global Perspectives on the Many Faces of Contemporary Antisemitism* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2018), 171-183; Juss, "Burqa-bashing," 27-43; Peter Gottschalk, and Gabriel Greenberg, "From Muhammad to Obama: Caricatures, Cartoons, and Stereotypes of Muslims," In: *Islamophobia: The Challenge of Pluralism in the 21st Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 191-209; Anfal Y. Nyhan, "Danish Cartoon Controversy," *Trinity Publications* (2010): 1-6.
[50] Gottschalk and Greenberg, "From Muhammad to Obama," 195. This idea brings to mind the medieval caricatures of Muslims that depicted them as black or creatures that have dogheads, which shows that despite the difference in time and method, the image of Islam and Muslims is still being negatively portrayed. See Appendix C for illustrative images.
[51] Ibid, 193. See Figure 4 in Appendix C for a reprinted copy of this image (the face of Muhammad wearing a turban with a bomb) and other examples of the Danish cartoons.

Travels, examining their treatment of the Islamic religion as a marker of religious difference and arguing that their accounts -like many other Western ones- offer a distorted image of Islam and its Prophet, owing to the negative, prevalent discourse on Muslims during the Middle Ages. The main focus was placed on showing how medieval Christian writers were under the influence of their own religious fervor toward the Christian faith, which led them to use their writings as a defense mechanism against the expansion of Islam by undermining its status and providing misleading, false information abouts its theology. The works of Polo, Mandeville, Chaucer, the authors of the *Chansons de Geste*, namely *Fierabras* and the *Chanson de Roland*, among many others, were analyzed with regard to their portrayal of, and attitude toward the Islamic religion as presented in their texts. Some of the key points that I explored throughout the previous chapters are: First, the medieval West's perception of Islam as Christianity's main enemy, which resulted in the normalization of using violence against Muslims whether to defeat or convert them; a notion that was considered exceptionally moral in the case of Christians, yet intrinsically wrong and terroristic if it was done by Muslims. Second, the idealization of the power of miracle performance and missionary work that aimed at proving the righteousness of Christianity and disparaging the moral values of Islam. Third, the misrepresentation of Islam as either a second-best religion or a heretical, schismatic version of Christianity, in addition to the distortion of Prophet Muhammad's image as a trickster, drunkard, pseudo-prophet, etc. It is important to note that most of the works that I analyzed are often celebrated for their tolerance and acceptance of difference, but as I mentioned in my introduction, the definition of tolerance could only be perceived in a positive way when the targeted party is not a minority that is constantly being stereotyped as a racially and ethnically different Other.

Moreover, this mémoire contributed to the recent investigation of medieval accounts of Islam by challenging the Christian West's ideas about religious difference, tolerance, and diversity in light of the historical epoch during which the aforementioned works were produced. By following in the footsteps of contemporary scholars, I have revised the ways in which such works could be analyzed and interpreted with a view to replacing the tarnished reputation and image of Islam in the Middle Ages with a fair, objective representation. The relevance of my work lies in the importance of sustaining the ongoing conversation about racism and Islamophobia in our world today, in hopes of informing those who are misinformed and eradicating the inequality that minority groups are being subject to because of their color, race, or religious background. It is about time we acknowledged the discrimination that Muslims are treated with till this day; from racial profiling at airports to being stigmatized as terrorists, among many other unfortunate situations. This results from the Western media's vilification of Islam as a violent, dangerous religion and it most likely extends to the preconceived ideas that were formed around the Islamic religion during the time of the Crusades in the medieval era. Last but not least, I have only been able to offer my analysis on a limited selection of works, but I am certain that future studies would find this thesis applicable on and relevant to a myriad number of other medieval texts that could be analyzed with regard to their portrayal of Islam vis-à-vis Christianity. This topic is not restrictively limited to travel literature only; for instance, it would be worthwhile to consider medieval romances, Christian hagiographies, or similar religious scriptures -that exclusively navigate the world through the lens of Christendom- and examine their stance on the Islamic religion. After all, if we intend to bring about real change in the current world, we should pay more attention to what was said and done in the previous ones.

"Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." —— George Santayana

Appendix A:

"The Man of Law's Tale"

The Sultan expresses his desire to marry Constance even if it means he would have to convert to Christianity:

"And he replied, 'Rather than that I lose
The Lady Constance, I will be baptized;
I must be hers, in this I cannot choose.
O leave your arguments and be advised,
Can you not see my life is jeopardized?
I have a sickness she alone can cure
It is a grief I cannot long endure.'"[1]

The Roman Emperor negotiates his daughter's marriage with the Sultan:

"The Sultan with his Peers in all their pride
And all his lieges were to undergo
Their christening; Constance was to be his bride,
And certain gold – how much I do not know –
Determined for the party to bestow
In surety; oaths were sworn on either side.
Fair Constance, God Almighty be your guide!"[2]

The Sultaness voices her anger upon learning about her son's conversion and plots for his murder along with his advisors who converted to Christianity as well:

"'My lords,' she said, 'you know it to a man
How that my son is purposed to abjure
The holy teaching of our Alkoran
And all Mahomet had from God the Pure.
And to that God I here make promise sure
Rather to die the death than to depart
From what that Faith has written in my heart."[3]

"'We first must make pretence to be baptized
– Cold water cannot hurt us very much –
And I shall have a banquet organized
To pay the Sultan out, if he should touch.
Though christened white, his wife and many such
Shall find there's blood to wash away! She'll want
More water than it takes to fill a font.'"[4]

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[1] Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, Translated by Nevill Coghill (London; New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 145.
[2] Ibid, 146.
[3] Ibid, 148.
[4] Ibid, 149.

The Roman Emperor prepares a vengeance plan to exterminate the Syrians:

"To take his vengeance then the Emperor chose
A Senator and many another lord
All royally appointed, and God knows
They took revenge upon that Syrian horde;
They smote and burnt and put them to the sword
For many a day, then, to be brief, turned home
– That was the end of it – and made for Rome."[5]

Constance tries to convince the pagan Northumbrians to convert to Christianity by showing them the power of Christ's religion through two miracles:

"The old, blind Briton cried, 'For Jesus' sake,
My Lady Hermengild, restore my sight!'
Now she on hearing him began to quake
For fear her husband, should it come to light
She was of Christ, would have her slain outright.
But Constance made her bold, bidding her search
And do Christ's will, as daughter of His Church."[6]

"The Constable, abashed at what he saw,
Said, 'What's all this about?' and stopped to stare.
And Constance answered, 'Sir, the power and law
Of Christ can save us from the devil's snare.'
Then she began so fully to declare
Our faith, that what she said to him sufficed
Ere evening fell to turn his heart to Christ."[7]

"They brought a British book in which were written
The Gospels, and the knight stood forth alone
And swore her guilt. And lo, the knight was smitten:
A hand appeared and struck him to the bone
Behind the neck and down he went like stone,
His eyed burst from their sockets in his face
In sight of all assembled in the place."[8]

"And as he fell a voice was heard to ring:
'Thou hast defamed the innocent and meek,
A daughter of the Church, before the King;
Thus hast thou done, and yet I did not speak.'
Aghast at such a marvel, faces seek
Each other in amaze at the unknown,
Dreading a judgement, all but hers alone."[9]

[5] Ibid, 167.
[6] Ibid, 155.
[7] Ibid, 155.
[8] Ibid, 158.
[9] Ibid, 158.

“Great was their fear and great their penitence
For having made a wrongful accusation
And felt suspicion of her innocence.
And in the end the heavenly visitation,
With all that Constance spoke in mediation,
Converted Alla; many in that place
Were also turned to Christ, O blessed grace!”[10]

[10] Ibid, 159.

Appendix B:

Table 1. *Chansons de geste* which include the conversion of Muslims

Text (approximate date of composition)	Saracen(s)	Fate
Chanson de Roland (1100)	Baligant Bramimonde Mass of pagans	Killed Converted 'par amur' Converted or killed
Fierabras (1200)	Fierabras Floripas Balan	Converted after combat Converted for love Refuses; killed
Huon de Bordeaux (first half 13th *c.*)	Esclarmonde Gaudisse Mass of pagans	Converted for love Refuses; killed Converted or killed
Simon de Puille (before 1250)	Sinadas Sabarrez (Simon le converti) 2 seamen Licorinde Jonas de Babilone 2 seamen	Converted Converted Converted Converted for love Escapes Refuse conversion
Prise de Cordes (early 13th *c.*)	Judas	Refuses; accidentally kills himself
Chanson de Jerusalem (12th *c.*)	Garsïen Ysabart Malcolon Cornumarant Marbrin	Converted Both refuse; imprisoned; released in prisoner exchange; later killed Refuses; released in prisoner exchange; later killed Taken prisoner; killed in single combat
Aliscans (late 12th *c.*)	Valegrape Bauduc Desrame	Refuses; killed Converted after combat Refuses; survives
Bataille Loquifer: Vulgate Arsenal/Boulogne (post-*Aliscans*)	Loquifer Desrame Desrame	Refuses; killed Killed Survives
Anseïs de Cartage (1250)	Marsile Bramimonde	Refuses for good reason; killed Converted
Aspremont (late 12th *c.*)	Agoland Balan Florence	Refuses for good reason Converted Converted, then married to a Christian
Entrée en Espagne (early 14th *c.*)	Ysoré	Does not convert
Prise de Pampelune (post 1350)	Ysoré Maozéris Altmajour	Converted Refuses; escapes Converted reneges
Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle (1140, earliest O.Fr text 1159–1205)	Aigolandus Fernagu Marsile	Nearly converts Nearly converts Killed
La Chevalerie Ogier (early 13th *c.*)	Karaheus	Refuses; spared

Source: Ailes, Marianne. "Tolerated Otherness: The 'Unconverted' Saracen in the *Chansons de geste*." In: *Languages of Love and Hate: Conflict, Communication, and Identity in the Medieval Mediterranean,* edited by Sarah Lambert and Helen Nicholson, International Medieval Research, 15, 2012, pp. 4.

Appendix C:

Figure 1. Battle of Roncevaux. *Grandes Chroniques de France*. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France. Source: Strickland, Debra H. *Saracens, Demons, & Jews: Making Monsters in Medieval Art*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003, pp. 180. See also Cohen, Jeffrey Jerome. "On Saracen Enjoyment: Some Fantasies of Race in Late Medieval France and England." *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, vol. 31, no. 1, 2001, pp. 121-123 for more details on this illustration.

Figure 2. Sansadoine destroys the idol of Mahomet. *Chanson d'Antioche*, 1275–1300, Ms. fr. 786, fol. 187v, Paris, Bibliotheque Nationale de France. Source: Tolan, John V. *Faces of Muhammad: Western Perceptions of the Prophet of Islam from the Middle Ages to Today.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019, pp. 27.

Figure 3. The Muslim ruler, Saladin, and Prophet Muhammad are depicted with dogheads in Alexander of Bremen's *Expositio in Apocalypsim.* Saxony, c. 1249-1250, University of Cambridge, MS Mm.V.31, fol. 85, University of Cambridge Digital Library. Source: Strickland, Debra H. *Saracens, Demons, & Jews: Making Monsters in Medieval Art*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003, pp. 180. See also Cohen, Jeffrey Jerome. "On Saracen Enjoyment: Some Fantasies of Race in Late Medieval France and England." *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, vol. 31, no. 1, 2001, pp. 223.

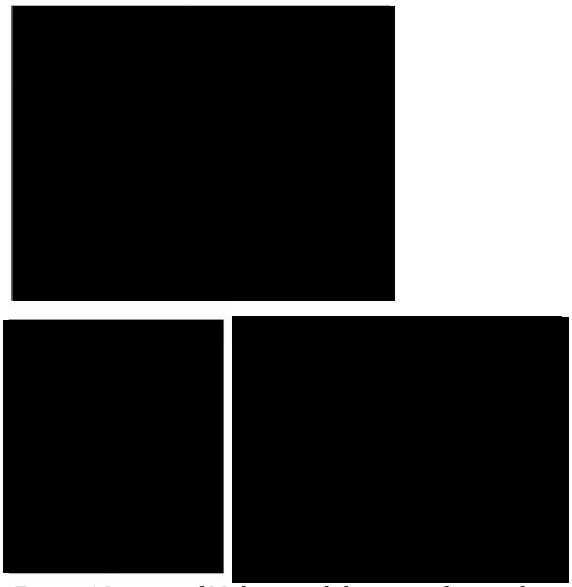

Figure 4. Images of Muhammad that were featured in the Danish cartoons published by *Jyllands-Posten* in 2005. Source: zombietime.com/mohammed_image_archive/jyllands-posten_cartoons/.

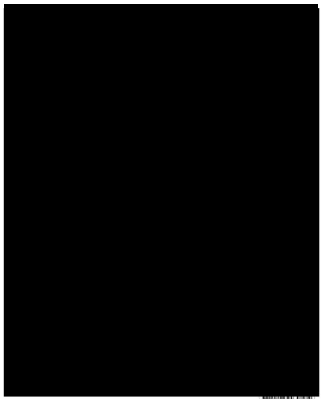

Figure 5. The controversial *Charlie Hebdo* caricature of Muhammad that was published in 2011. Source: zombietime.com/mohammed_image_archive/charlie_hebdo/.

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