Article

The grins of others: Figuring ethnic difference in medieval facial expressions

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Abstract This article considers facial expressions in the portrayal of peoples considered religiously or ethnically 'Other' in later medieval Christian cultures. It focuses on artistic representations of grins, grimaces, and gaping with open mouths, especially in relation to depictions of Jewish, Muslim, and Black African figures from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries, before examining some portrayals of Mongol peoples in greater detail. In medieval cultures, to 'grin' with bared teeth was widely viewed in pejorative terms, and was understood less as a sign of happiness or friendliness and more as an indication of anguish, base character, or evil. The grin's connection to grimacing and gaping was more overt than in present Western societies. I contend that depictions of the facial expressions of Mongol peoples do not consistently accord with the looks characteristically associated with enmity towards Christianity. Instead, shifts in portrayals accord with the Mongols' changing and complex associations for Latin Christians over the period from the early thirteenth to fifteenth centuries.

postmedieval: a journal of medieval cultural studies (2017) **8**, 83–101.
doi:10.1057/s41280-016-0039-6

In the lead essay to this special issue, Philippa Maddern casts doubt on psychological orthodoxies concerning universality of human facial expression. As she contends, expression of feeling through muscle contraction is merely one, and perhaps the least important, among medieval modes for facial show of emotion or disposition. Focusing on later medieval textual and visual exemplars,

she argues that observers might distrust overtly smiling, frowning, or downcast looks as inauthentic, too easy to 'put on,' compared with manifestations of humoral and astrological complexion, changes to facial color, facial, and head gestures, or involuntary fluid output. Attentiveness to broader ranges of facial affect thus unsettles any preconceptions about facial universals, and moreover leads to our greater awareness of expressions' historical particularity. Maddern's chief target is Paul Ekman's thesis of expression universality, shaped as it is by Darwinian evolutionary theory.[1] Historians are somewhat late to this debate, in which Ekman positioned himself against anthropologists who had argued that facial expressions differ substantially across cultures (Plamper, 2015, 75–146). Now, opposition to the Darwinian model is shaping some important work within the field of psychology itself. In one recent set of experiments involving participants from Western European and East Asian cultures, investigators found that, when reading facial expressions, Western Europeans tend to concentrate on eyebrow and mouth movement, indicated by broad muscle contractions, while East Asians focus on smaller muscular movements of the eyes. The six purportedly universal emotions – happiness, surprise, fear, disgust, anger, and sadness – therefore take quite different physiognomic manifestation from one culture to another, while others such as pride, shame, and guilt, which are more fundamental in East Asian societies, need also to be highlighted (Jack et al., 2012a, 2012b).

1 See Ekman and Friesen (1971), Ekman (1982), and Plamper (2015, 147–158).

While scholars of emotions presently seek some reconciliation, or mutual ground, between the poles of 'social constructivism' versus 'universalism' (Plamper, 2015, 251–265), there is plenty of unfurrowed terrain for the study of emotions and the medieval face. From my own, admittedly 'constructivist' perspective (although I also find the notion of 'trivially true' universals persuasive [Gross, 2006, 34]), the profoundly interesting result of existing ethnographic and recent psychological studies is the point that facial expressions are subject to cultural construction and culturally dependent interpretation. It stands to reason, then, that they also have a history. Maddern's article illustrates the importance of 'reading' medieval faces for far more than overt displays of emotion. Nonetheless, smiling, frowning, looking downcast, and so on remain of greater interest to us, and had greater import for medieval observers than her analysis would suggest. Facial expressions were not always interpreted as untrustworthy; indeed, they could provide crucial clues not only to affective but also moral states. Medieval artists often used overt expressions of joy, sorrow, somberness, or foolishness to convey a clear message of the subject's inner qualities. Medieval Christs are deliberately pictured as serene, stern, or anguished, while demons grin sadistically for a reason.

This article deals with one aspect of late medieval representations of facial expression. It addresses the question of how far expressions of emotion assisted with visual portrayals of the differences between peoples of varying religious and ethnic identities. Acknowledging the strong progress that has been made by

medievalists exploring facets of medieval ethnic and proto-racial constructions, it queries whether depictions of expression, too, had a role to play in conveying Otherness and associated moral states. Focusing on the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries, and representations by artists working in and for Latin Christian contexts, it briefly examines depictions of Jewish, Muslim, and Black African peoples, as well as some non-human beings, notably demons, before moving into a fuller discussion of some key visual images of Mongols. It argues that because the constructions of ethnic identities were situational – contingent upon specific needs and/or fears and therefore prone to change – it becomes difficult to claim that specific facial expressions were deemed typical of Mongol peoples. The article narrows our gaze still further in its concentration on expressions of the mouth, and poses the question, 'what's in a grin'?

Year by year, scholarship on medieval theories of human cultural, religious, and bodily differences grows in richness and complexity. Medieval societies were diverse and multi-ethnic to a degree not often acknowledged in our textbook histories, as shown recently, for example, by studies of Jewish, African, and Muslim communities within Latin Christendom and the 'England's Immigrants' project.[2] Moreover, preoccupation with cultural, religious, and bodily differences pervaded the medieval imaginary. Early medieval cultures seem to have differentiated between peoples more often on the grounds of distinctions in geographic origin and cultural practices or doctrines, from language use to legal systems, than on perceived inherent or physical differences.[3] By the later twelfth century, with translations of ancient Greek and Arabic texts outlining the humoral system and influences on that system from climatic, geographic, and other environmental factors, heightened attention was paid to somatic differences and their connections with character or ethical traits. From the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries, Jewish, Muslim, and other outsider groups were increasingly identified by alleged physiognomic traits, color, or by imagined shared qualities of 'blood.'[4] Thus, in the later medieval period, we witness heightened attentiveness to, and inventions of, physical differences among human populations. Late medieval poets, romance authors, hagiographers, travel writers, and visual artists seized upon the new interest in physical differences, often – though not always – employing them to heighten portrayals of moral or spiritual deficiencies. In their close explorations of literary and artistic physical representations, medievalists have made important contributions to critical race theory, exploring the specificities of constructions of human difference prior to the early modern invention of anthropological racial classification.[5] Skin color is prominent among the themes treated in current scholarship, as perhaps '[t]he most persistent of all the visible markers traditionally associated with race throughout the western world' (Patton, 2015, 8), though stereotypes concerning facial features, hair and body types, and humoral composition also receive scrutiny. Facial expressions, and their connection to an underlying emotional and moral state, may also play a part in our work on medieval perceptions of ethnicity.

2 See, for example, Baumgarten (2014), Earle and Lowe (2005), Catlos (2014), and 'England's Immigrants' (2015). Bibliographic referencing throughout the article is not meant to be comprehensive but to draw readers' attention to recent and relevant studies.

3 See Geary (1983), Poh (1991), Pohl and Reimitz (1998), Bartlett (2001), and Pohl and Heydemann (2013).

4 See Bartlett (1993, 236–242), Biller (2001, 2009), Lipton (2014, 171–199), Nirenberg (2009), and Weeda (2012, 2014, 2015).

5 For example, Eliav-Feldon, Isaac, and Ziegler (2009), Hahn (2001), Heng (2011), Whitaker (2015), and Erickson and Hall (2016). For early modern invention of racial classification, see Dawson (2009, 2013, 50–53), Stuurman (2000), and Tooley (1953).

Assuredly, there are clear differences in scholarly practice – perhaps even of philosophy – underlying the range of existing scholarship just cited. At the risk of making an overgeneralization, it seems that many historians are not so concerned with finding links between the medieval past and the present as with producing an account of a past context that focuses on particularity. Hence, for example, they tend to exercise more caution about using the term 'race,' though of course one can find points of similarity between pre-modern and 'modern' attitudes to ethnic difference.[6] Literary scholars are more often interested in long histories of race, finding connections or points of dialectic between medieval and modern cultures, and are not always so inspired by the themes of change, rupture, or gulf between past and present that many historians find of vital interest. As an historian, I am in the 'change' camp, although eager to learn from approaches that seek to find resonances between past and present contexts and thus, as the title of a 2015 *postmedieval* special issue has it, '[make] race matter in the Middle Ages' (Whitaker, 2015).

6 On 'race's' etymology and early use to designate nobility, see de Miramon (2009).

To smile broadly by opening the lips and showing the teeth, tending towards laughter, is the normative expression of friendliness, happiness, and openness in many cultures of the modern West. However, this is certainly not the case worldwide: studies have shown that in places including Japan, Kerala, Iran, Russia, and (perhaps unexpectedly) France, smiling with visible teeth is widely seen as a sign of low intelligence and dishonesty. Switzerland and Germany emerge as the most kindly disposed to toothed smiles (Krys et al., 2016).[7] In medieval cultures, too, the grin was a largely reviled expression. Smiling in general, even with closed lips, came late to medieval portrayals of Christians, and was largely confined to Northern Europe, that is France, Germany, and England (Svanberg, 1993; Binski, 1997, 352; Gertsman, 2010; Ferguson, 2014). In the thirteenth century, a strong humanistic turn in northern European art resulted in many famed examples of angels, martyred saints, and the Virgin Mary smiling with closed lips in church sculpture and painting. The 'Angel Choir' at Lincoln Cathedral, further angels at Reims and Bamberg, the Wise Virgins at Magdeburg, the Virgin Mary in countless images, and martyred saints such as Stephen in the Church of Saint Stephen in Mainz, model serene, imperturbable smiles, with curving mouths and joyful eyes. The message is of eternal joy. Exemplary of approved radiance are the faces of the 'Saved' standing to Christ's right in the Last Judgement of the Fürstenportal of Bamberg Cathedral. It is hard to imagine how glee could be more forcefully conveyed via closed-lip smiles than it does in this scene (Figure 1). How starkly the exultant looks of the saved contrast with the anguish of the damned who stand to Christ's left, some of whom bare teeth in anguish.

7 Although Krys et al. use the term 'smile', teeth are visible in all the 'smile' shots (Krys et al., 2016, fig. 1).

Contemporary languages make pejorative meanings plain. Old English *grennian* and Middle English *grennen* indicate a display of teeth not usually in pleasure but in pain or anger (*OED*, s.v. 'grin'). The Latin and Old French *rictus* similarly connoted oral fixity and strain, while Old and Middle High German

Figure 1: 'The Last Judgement'. Fürstenportal, Cathedral of St Peter and St George, Bamberg. Photography by Andreas Praefcke. Reproduction courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

grīnen indicates horror or anxiety, and, from the sixteenth century, *grinsen* signals a daft or mocking grin (*DWDS*, s.v. 'grinsen'). When we consider medieval grins, we are often not engaging with smiles at all but instead with expressions of horror, rage, or despair, or, alternatively, stupidity, mockery, or inappropriate levity. Bared teeth or open mouths feature in depictions of demons, the devil, the damned, Christ's tormentors, torturers of the saints, the dead, and Death, and they are ubiquitous in portrayals of fools. The standard portrayal of the entrance to hell itself was of an open mouth rimmed with fang-like teeth. Teeth are also seen on grotesques or gargoyles, green men, hybrids, and sheela-na-gigs.[8] It will be no accident that animals in bestiaries, including dogs, bears, foxes, lions, and panthers, are shown baring teeth.[9]

These figures and creatures, though diverse, share common associations. They are lowly, vile, or base in status, bestial or questionably human, and their characters and actions are to be abhorred or at best ridiculed. Unlike closed-mouth smilers, grinners, grimacers, and gapers are irrational and brutish. The difference, as Binski remarks, is a matter of self-control, as well as of expression of inward rectitude or chaos: 'A mouth which cracks wide open, exposing the teeth and lolling tongue, connects with the appetitive sphere of human behaviour, to the bestial and creaturely' (Binski, 1997, 354).

There are, of course, exceptions to this iconography. The sun-faced 'Mighty Angel' of the Douce Apocalypse (c. 1270) sports a wide toothy grin (Binski, 1997, 366, fig. 14). Some angels at Bamberg also laugh with visible teeth (Gertsman, 2010, 39–41; also Svanberg, 1993, 360). In the ruins of the 'Warming Room' at St Mary's Abbey, York, a carved head of a monk adorning

8 See the variety of examples reproduced in Jones (2002) and Eco (2007).

9 See, for example, the images in Strickland (1995).

10 Located *in situ* in the basement of the Yorkshire Museum.

the surviving corbel displays a wide beaming smile with clearly visible teeth.[10] This happy monk, disclosing the intense pleasure of visiting the *calefactory* after long hours at prayer in an icy church or study in a bitter cloister, conveys a bliss not normally associated with visible teeth. It is the prerogative of artists to break the 'rules' of visual vocabulary to heighten effect; such ruptures test but do not undermine general patterns. In Western art more generally, even in the seventeenth-century masterpieces of Caravaggio, Jan Steen, Franz Hals, Judith Leyster, and Gerrit van Honthorst, visible teeth were usually reserved for transgressive or low-status subjects. Apart from a brief flourish in eighteenth-century Paris, closed lips and solemnity were preferred in serious portraiture even into the twentieth century (Jones, 2014; Trumble, 2004).

Depictions of facial expressions and their associated affective states clearly play a strong role in conveying perceived inner qualities, such as those related to morality and intellect. It is therefore relevant to pose the question of their utility in portrayals of peoples perceived as ethnically, geographically, or religiously 'Other' – a term that will be here invoked in order to be problematized – compared with the dominant groups of Latin Christendom. How far did Western medieval representations of Jewish, Muslim, and Black African individuals, Mongols and other peoples of Asia, and imagined 'monstrous' peoples of far-flung lands and islands, adopt distinctive facial traits as part of their visual vocabulary? The remainder of my essay will first offer a summary account of visible teeth and/or open mouths in portrayals of non-Christians, drawing on images reproduced in two foundational studies, before finishing by considering depictions of Mongol peoples in key artistic productions of the late Middle Ages.

The most complete account of medieval artistic signs of Otherness is Debra Higgs Strickland's *Saracens, Demons, and Jews* (2003). Also important, though more focused on particular themes, is Ruth Mellinkoff's *Outcasts*, published a decade earlier (1993). Both books were part of the postcolonial 'turn' in medieval studies, although Mellinkoff's was influenced just as profoundly by longer-standing attention to disparaging constructions of Judaism in medieval Christian society and culture. Neither work, however, presents a comprehensive catalogue of the medieval outsider: they concentrate on figures displaying enmity to Christianity or exclusion from Christian society, and which, therefore, depict infamy. Both also deal primarily with later medieval northern European art, although Mellinkoff is much more heavily indebted to this period and to high-status oil paintings from German and Dutch contexts in particular. Strickland's organizing concept – also in keeping with a scholarly preoccupation of the era – is monstrosity: her work covers censorious visual portrayals of demons, 'Ethiopians' (Black African peoples), Jewish groups and individuals, 'Saracens' (Muslim peoples), and (more briefly) 'Tartars' (Mongol peoples), as well as phobic figures associated with the end of time. Mellinkoff's intentions were overtly broad, although the results are actually narrower than Strickland's.

Her emphasis on Passion iconography results in heavy attention to signs of Jewishness, although Saracens, Ethiopians, and demons receive some discussion, as do 'deviant insiders' (to borrow a term from Perry, 1985) of Christendom, including fools, peasants, and executioners.

Taking these works' necessary limitations into account, what grins, bared teeth, and open mouths do we see in their surveys of Christian society's reviled Others? Among the images reproduced in Strickland, I find demons the group most likely to be portrayed with visible teeth and open lips, with fifteen examples (some portraying several demons) across her book, a further two showing the Devil specifically and two of Gog and Magog.[11] This is unsurprising, as every element of demonic appearance conveys distortion, confusion, and deformation of idealized figure forms. Strickland quotes from the *Life of Saint Guthlac*, in which the saint reports his witness of the demons of hell:

> For they were ferocious in appearance, terrible in shape with great heads, long necks, thin faces, yellow complexions, filthy beards, shaggy ears, wild foreheads, fierce eyes, foul mouths, horses' teeth, throats vomiting flames, twisted jaws, thick lips, strident voices, singed hair, fat cheeks, pigeon breasts, scabby thighs, knotty knees, crooked legs, swollen ankles, splay feet, spreading mouths, raucous cries. (Strickland, 2003, 67)

Demons' wide mouths with horse-like teeth are thus in keeping with their altogether hideous and semi-bestial appearance, and expressive of their comprehensive evil. In Strickland's collection of demon images, their grins are viciously gleeful, sadistic, mocking, or else vacant, and seem to represent wickedness as much as their horns and hybrid bodies. Similarly, Mellinkoff's volume includes nine images of teeth-baring demons.[12]

However, not far behind in the count come depictions of Jewish peoples, with twelve images in Strickland's book showing at least one figure gaping, jeering, or smiling luridly, though scenes of Old Testament Jews are generally more benign, as are scenes of Christ among the doctors. There are also many examples of solemn, close-mouthed Jewish individuals, even in infamous situations, so the theme cannot be said to be as pronounced as it is for demons.[13] The typicality of the iconographic theme is more evident in Mellinkoff's volume, where around 110 images by my count show Jewish figures grinning, grimacing, and/or gaping. The overwhelming dominance of images of Jewish peoples in Mellinkoff's book is explained by her scholarly specialization, and the prevalence of Passion images among her examples. Moreover, depictions of cruel, gurning Jewish figures seem to become wilder by the late fifteenth century, the period from which more of Mellinkoff's examples derive. Christ's scourgers, flagellators and mockers are especially grotesque, and share the facial iconography of fools.[14]

Among other groups shown in these volumes, visual representations of Ethiopians frequently depict them grimacing with bared teeth (eleven images in

11 I have taken individual images as my items, but an image might contain several examples. For example, Strickland's figure 21 shows twelve devils, all but one showing teeth in a grimace or grin (Strickland, 2003, 65). Strickland's book focuses on demons on 61–77, though further examples are throughout.

12 My method of counting images in Mellinkoff's volume is as for Strickland's.

13 Pages 95–155 concentrate on representations of Jewish peoples, but other examples are throughout the book.

14 For examples of Jewish figures with pronounced teeth tormenting Christ, see Mellinkoff (1993, vol. 2, figs. iii.26, iii.37, and vi.1).

Strickland, twelve in Mellinkoff). Their gesture accords well with the tendency of African peoples to be literally demonized by artists – shown as 'associated with the demonic and the damned' (Strickland, 2003, 82), notably through the cultural connotations of their dark skin – but also their frequent associations with wild men and 'monstrous' peoples. Ethiopians are thus visually constructed as occupying a space in creation where the human overlaps with the bestial. Other ethnic or religious groups are inconsistently represented across Strickland and Mellinkoff's volumes, but it is worth noting that Strickland has eleven relevant images of hybrid or monstrous peoples, while she also includes two of teeth-baring fools (Mellinkoff includes nine such images). Strickland includes seven relevant representations of Saracens, including an oft-reproduced image from the Luttrell Psalter of a grinning, black-faced, hook-nosed Saladin (his grin mirrored by his horse's), though Mellinkoff, for whom Islam is not a key theme, has only four; and Strickland has two images showing at least one gaping Tartar (one of these will be discussed below). The reviled dead also frequently grimace, especially in Mellinkoff's selection of Crucifixion scenes, where the impenitent thief to Christ's left frequently bares his teeth while the penitent to Christ's right does not (from a total of sixteen images showing one or more deceased persons in Mellinkoff). Then there are odds and ends: persons anticipating death, Roman soldiers, shepherds, and peasants (two examples each in Mellinkoff); and mismatched lovers, pagans, and women fighting (one example each in Mellinkoff).

Apart from some attention to Tartars by Strickland (2003, 192–209), the peoples of Asia beyond the Middle East are relatively neglected in these iconographic studies. Yet by the end of the thirteenth century, the populations of Mongolia, China, Southeast Asia, and India were beginning to make an impression on the European Christian consciousness. Before the middle of the century, Western perspectives on Asian peoples were largely based on hearsay, often dominated by fearful reports of encroaching Mongol armies. Until at least the mid-1240s, rulers of Latin Christendom were justifiably afraid of Tartar invasion.[15] Many of the reports were collected by the English chronicler Matthew Paris in his *Chronica majora*, who also, as illuminator of his own autograph manuscript, provided medieval Christendom with its two earliest illustrations of imagined Mongol peoples. The first shows a mounted Tartar thrusting his spear down into the neck of an unfortunate victim while another naked corpse lies under his horse's hooves.[16] The Mongol's mouth (and that of his horse) is firmly shut; the only sign of physical alterity is his excessively large head, a feature that accords with the 1238 ambassadors' report quoted by Paris, to the effect that the Mongol peoples had 'very large heads, by no means proportionate to their bodies' (Paris, 1852–1854, 1.131). The second, more widely known image, depicts a lurid cannibalistic feast. Paris's illumination shows hunched, grotesque Tartars bending over their victims. One is decapitating a war captive, grimly smiling with closed lips, another devours human

15 See, for example, Morgan (2007, 136–141, 175–183).

16 Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 16, fol. 145r; reproduced in Lewis (1987, 285).

Figure 2: Mongols in Matthew Paris, *Chronica majora*, c. 1250. Cambridge, Corpus Christi College Library MS 16, fol. 167r. Reproduction courtesy of the Master and Fellows of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge.

legs which still gush blood, and a third gapes vacantly while roasting a corpse over red coals. Their faces are grim, scowling, rapacious, or show a ghoulish excitement; their dead victims express the doleful grief of the innocent, while a bound prisoner stares open-mouthed in terror at his imminent fate. A Tartar's horse, meanwhile, nonchalantly gnaws the tops of the tree to which the victim is tied, its teeth visible (Figure 2).

Textual descriptions of Mongol bodies, which detail stocky physique, large faces, and scowling countenances, also mention teeth, often described (whether literally or metaphorically) as 'bloody' (summarized in Phillips, 2014, 178–180). Thus, the Landgrave of Thuringia is quoted by Paris as saying, '[t]hey are terrible in person, furious in aspect, their eyes show anger, their hands are rapacious, their teeth are bloody, and their jaws are ever ready to eat the flesh of men, and to drink human blood' (Paris, 1852–1854, 3.451). Tartars, then, are not known for their grins, but their visual identity before the mid-thirteenth century is secured partly through open devouring mouths and blood-stained teeth.

Mongol mouths and teeth are an essential component of their earliest European imaging. Allegations of anthropophagy, such as those made by the Landgrave of Thuringia, pervade the earliest descriptions (summarized in Guzman, 1991). Noreen Giffney, exploring anti-Mongol propaganda of the 1230s and 40s, cites many medieval authors' identification of irrupting Tartars with the Jewish Ten Lost Tribes and the hosts of Gog and Magog who were expected to burst from their stronghold beyond the Caucasus Mountains with the coming of the Antichrist and the apocalypse. Like the consuming wolves and 'locusts' of endtimes, the latter with their teeth 'like lions' (Rev. 9:8), Mongols of the 1230s and 40s were perceived as devouring the peoples that lay in their way (Giffney, 2012, 239–242). Their open mouths and gory teeth connect them to ubiquitous imagery of death, demons, the Antichrist, apocalypse, and hell.

Later, in the early fourteenth century, once the travel reports of John of Plano Carpini, William of Rubruck, Riccold of Monte Croce, and Marco Polo became known, the physical descriptions of Mongol peoples were largely more dispassionate and authentic. The savagery that dominated imagery of the Tartars just a few decades earlier is dramatically reduced. At the same time, the details of facial expression recede out of view (Phillips, 2014, 180–183). Polo's was overwhelmingly the best-known of the travelogues,, and, although he described Mongol societies, he tended not to comment on facial or bodily characteristics. He made an exception, however, for his hero and mentor – Chinggis Khan's grandson Khubilai Khan, conqueror of China – whose idealized verbal portrait says nothing of the set of his mouth (Polo, 1982, 414; trans. Polo, 1938, 1.204). The stark difference in descriptions may be attributed to changing context and authorial perspective. Once the threat of Mongol invasion faded, European fears were largely replaced by hopes for Christian conversion of Asian peoples, possibilities for alliances against Muslim enemies, trading opportunities, and a potent curiosity about Eastern lands.[17]

17 For broad context, see Jackson (2005) and Morgan (2007).

When manuscript illuminators began to illustrate Polo's and other travel books concerning Asia, they were restrained in portrayals of faces and emotional states. *Le Livre des merveilles*, given by John the Fearless to his uncle, John, duke of Berry in 1413, must represent the fullest ensemble of depictions of Asian peoples in all of medieval art. It contains 265 miniatures, richly illustrating the travel books of Marco Polo, Odoric of Pordenone, William of Boldensele, *The Book of the Estate of the Great Khan*, Sir John Mandeville, Hetoum of Armenia, and Riccold of Monte Croce, all (except Marco Polo) in the French translations made c. 1350 by John le Long (*Le Livre*, 1413). Peoples of not only Mongolia but also China, Southeast Asia, India, and the Middle East, as well as some imagined populations, are given imaginative representation in a manner that often adapts or even distorts their portrayal in the accompanying texts. In particular, as Strickland has noted of this and other illuminated texts of Polo's *Divisament*, illustrators added monstrous peoples in places where the travel narrative mentions none (Strickland, 2005, 2008). What is curious, from the point of view of the present article, is the unruffled expressions of the painted people, no matter what their activities. The tranquility exuded by a banqueting Kublai Khan, his sons, wives, and courtiers (*Le Livre*, 1413, fol. 39r) is perhaps not too surprising, given Polo's and other European authors' powerfully positive portrayals of the rulers of the Yuan dynasty and their culturally advanced realms. Even the charming depiction of nomadic Mongol families, crossing rocky countryside with their herds and children, their pleasant faces marked by nothing stronger than a peaceful geniality (*Le Livre*, 1413, fol. 255r), is quite in keeping with the trend away from phobic Mongol imagery in travel literature from the late thirteenth century. Yet serenity is also the characteristic set even of faces of peoples more prone to pejorative description in such works, particularly inhabitants of Southeast Asia and southern India, who were regularly accused of

idolatry and anthropophagy. A typical example shows the inhabitants of Lamori (an area of northern Sumatra) purportedly worshipping idols and eating human remains (*Le Livre*, 1413, fol. 74v), while a number of similar images throughout the manuscript show equally relaxed scenes of idolatry and/or human butchery (*Le Livre*, 1413, fols. 107r, 108r, 184r). Note, in particular, depictions of such debauched actions as idol-worship combined with self-murder (*Le Livre*, 1413, fol. 163r) and selling children for food (*Le Livre*, 1413, fol. 188r). However, one exception to the placid expressions is an illustration of Sir John Mandeville's typically shameless addition to Odoric's account of 'Lombe' (the Malabar coast), where idolaters are said to kill their own children to sprinkle their blood upon their idols: here the sword-wielding executioner wears a cruel smirk (*Le Livre*, 1413, fol. 185r).

Among the most striking medieval portraits of Mongols is Ambrogio Lorenzetti's fresco *Martyrdom of the Franciscans* (1342), in the Basilica San Francesco in Siena, originally in the chapter house of the friary on the site (Figure 3). Once thought to portray the deaths of Franciscan missionaries at Ceuta or Tana, it now seems almost certain that the fresco shows Almaliq in the Chaghatai Khanate, now in the Xianjiang prefecture of northwest China. The deaths represent a well-known episode in which six Franciscans and a number of other Christians were killed by decapitation and stoning in 1339. As recent work has shown, the fresco is best understood if we take into account global networks formed through trade, religious, and cultural exchange, and recognize Siena as a location within Mongol Eurasia (Burke, 2002, 478–483; Prazniak, 2010, 201–213). Despite the horror of the episode, and some contemporary Christian textual accounts which characterized the killers as brutal and frenzied, the fresco depicts a measured judicial scene. The khan sits slumped with a somber expression, his mouth turned down beneath his moustache, while arrayed below witnesses of mixed ethnicity including Mongol, Persian, Mediterranean, and perhaps Indian, exhibit emotions ranging from serious to sorrowful or shocked. One gapes, but not apparently witlessly as is often the case in portrayals of Jewish figures, but in apparent dismay, while another looks up reproachfully at his ruler. In the lower register, one executioner to the left of the scene frowns with the effort of swinging his sword to strike a kneeling victim, while two more friars mournfully await their fate. To the right, three friars lie headless while two girls flinch as a youth half-heartedly stones the corpses and a dark-skinned executioner with wild black hair and beard grieves as he sheaths his sword. In Burke's words, 'these are not the facile characterizations that demonize all infidels as savages: . . . the spectrum of emotion expressed by the spectators and ruler is rendered with a profound humanity and naturalism' (Burke, 2002, 477).

The image must be read not merely as a portrayal of infidel barbarity. The Franciscan belief in the importance of taking the Christian message into Asia before the second coming of Christ is testament not only to the presumption of Christian truth, but also to the potential of Eastern peoples to convert and

Figure 3: Lorenzetti Ambrogio, 'Martyrdom of the Franciscans', c. 1330. Basilica San Francesco, Siena. Reproduction courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

achieve salvation (Richard, 1977, 129–130; Daniel, 1975). This fresco deserves close analysis as symbolic of the complex meanings attendant upon Mongol and other eastern peoples in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. As non-Christians they are perceived as capable of dreadful harm to men of the Faith – as Prazniak notes, every witness whose hands are visible is grasping a weapon (Prazniak, 2010, 212) – yet as Christians-in-waiting they nonetheless lament their actions and express their sorrow facially.

A final example of late medieval representation of Mongols has recently been brought to attention by Anne Dunlop (Dunlop, 2015, 1–10).[18] Almost

18 The text of the article is in Mandarin, but Dunlop supplies an English translation at https://www.academia.edu/19962820.

Figure 4: 'Gula' (Gluttony) from the *Cocarelli Codex*, Genoa, c. 1330–c.1340. Copyright British Library Board. London, British Library Additional MS 27695, fol. 13. Reproduced by Permission of the British Library.

contemporary with Lorenzetti's fresco, yet offering a quite different view of Mongol character, it is a depiction of a Mongol as a personification of the sin of *Gula* ['Gluttony'] (Figure 4). The full-page illumination, one of the codex's surviving miniatures of the Seven Deadly Sins, is among surviving fragments of the *Cocarelli Codex*, probably written in the 1320s for the Genoese Cocarelli

mercantile family and illuminated in Genoa in the following decade (*Cocarelli Codex*, c. 1320, fol. 13r.). Dunlop's chief interest in the image is its strongly Eastern visual elements and the glimpse it offers of cultural exchange between Ilkhanate Persia and Mediterranean Europe. Like Prazniak's placement of Lorenzetti's fresco within Mongol Eurasia, Dunlop's discussion emphasizes the interconnectedness of realms long kept separate in scholarship. But also of great interest is the central Mongol figure. Stylistic elements suggest that it may closely mirror a contemporary Persian image of a Mongol ruler that had found its way to Genoa via Eurasian trade routes but was adapted to Christian themes. Seated at a sumptuous feast with an ethnically diverse group of musicians in attendance, not to mention multiple dogs, the ruler sits cross-legged on a fine carpet, his personal space delimited by an intricate metal frame. Companions carve and chew upon joints of meat cooked rare. The ruler and his dining companion hold unusually shaped bowls with spouts. Whether the bowl was to hold food or drink, the implication of excessive consumption is clear. Most interesting for us is the ruler's expression: he smiles with closed lips, his face a picture of a gourmand's delight. His merriment is evident too in his wide-open, sideways glancing eyes. Side-glances, somewhat distinct from the sardonic 'side-eye' of present popular culture, could convey humor in Western medieval art, although if the visual model here is Eastern, its cultural connotations are less easily discerned (Hüsing, 2014).

Elsewhere in the *Codex*, a second miniature illustrating the theme of Gluttony (*Cocarelli Codex*, c. 1320, fol. 14) portrays a group of European men engaged in a heavy drinking session, their faces devoid of the pleasure of the jovial Mongol. One is even shown retching with open mouth, clutching his throat in nausea as his flask falls from his hand. The only smile is that of the innkeeper who passes up a filled glass from the cellar, perhaps thinking of the profits the men's drunkenness will bring him. 'Envy' (*Cocarelli Codex*, c. 1320, fol. 4), too, is a serious business, according to the depiction of three solemn figures. On the other hand, 'Avarice' is illustrated by bankers displaying heedless enjoyment in accumulating wealth (*Cocarelli Codex*, c. 1320, fol. 8). Inclusion of the smiling Mongol amid this catalogue of mainly European sinners suggests that ethnicity has little significance in this instance. A Mongol might take improper delight in his mortally sinful habits, yet so do men who could be the Cocarellis' neighbors. If Genoa, like Siena, may be reconceived as a node in the trading networks of Mongol Eurasia, then inclusion of figures from Central Asia amid portrayals of Europeans begins to seem less an opportunity for the depiction of Otherness and more a chance for the artist to convey something of the diversity of his patron's world.

Depictions of the Mongol face in general, and the expressive gestures of its mouth in particular, are widely varied in medieval art. It seems clear that representations of facial expressions did indeed contribute to late medieval ethnographic constructions, and that facial gesture and emotion have been

neglected in our scholarship compared with attention to skin color and physiognomic structure. As Jan Plamper asserts, the question 'who feels?' is primary to the production of Otherness, especially in drawing lines between humans and animals (Plamper, 2015, 26); we should add that questions about '*what* do they feel?' and 'how are their feelings expressed on the face?' are, moreover, vital in the production of Otherness between human groups. Expressions of rage, voraciousness, mockery, or vacuity will tend to be deplored in favor of prudence, moderation, cordiality, and intelligence. However, ethnic difference alone cannot account for the prevalence in Christian images of such widely disapproved gestures as grins, grimaces, and gapes. Mongol peoples and others of the Asian continent were not regularly portrayed with the mocking grins, bestial grimaces, and lolling mouths common in depictions of demons, Jews, and Ethiopians. Such facial expressions are indicative of their subjects' special role in the medieval Christian imaginary, especially in their perceived enmity to Christ and Christians and (in Ethiopians' case) their perceived connections with the bestial.

Sara Lipton's important study of the development of visual stereotypes of Jewish people in medieval art insists that caricatures including headwear, beards, and distorted physiognomies be comprehended within Christian theology rather than as reflecting a racialized anti-Judaism, even while acknowledging anti-Jewish imagery's longer life and deployment in the service of modern racisms (Lipton, 2014, esp. 3 and 279–281). Similarly, our interpretations of the imaging of Mongol figures, and indeed any group counted as Other to the Latin Christian, need to incorporate broader contexts and their susceptibility to change. Sometimes that change was slow, sometimes swift or dramatic. Early and mid-thirteenth-century associations of Mongol peoples with gnawing and bloody teeth receded by the end of that century, along with broader phobic imagery. They were replaced by a visual heterogeneity in keeping with their increasingly diverse connotations for Christian Europeans. Optimism concerning Mongol conversion to Christianity prevailed in an era when European leaders held out hopes for military alliance against Islam and when Mongols were prominent within the webs of trade and cultural exchange. Such changing contexts produced sharply altered graphic portraits. Mouths closed and teeth concealed, Mongols in the late medieval imaginary became peoples who, while remaining foreign, were no longer figures from Europe's darkest nightmares.

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