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Color

Epidermal Race, Fantasmatic Race: Blackness and Africa in the Racial Sensorium

[T]he normal medieval standard [is that] black is the color of hell and blackness of skin an outward pointer to heathen blackness of soul, just as the physical beauty of [European] courtly characters reflects their inner qualities. This association of black men with the devil and blackness of skin with sin is firmly rooted in early Christian exegesis, which continues a tradition of classical antiquity.

D. A. Wells, "The Middle Dutch *Moriaen*, Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*, and Medieval Tradition" (263)

Augustine, in speaking of the universality of the Christian faith, says that even the Ethiopians . . . are capable of receiving God's grace. [He] echoes Homer, who calls the Ethiopians *Eschatoi andron*, the "most remote of men."

Kathleen Ann Kelly, "Blue' Indians, Ethiopians, and Saracens in Middle English Narrative Texts" (43)

"For black women are hotter [a reference to the classical and medieval theory of humors], and most of all dusky women, who are the sweetest to have sex with, so lechers say . . . because the mouth of their vulva is temperate and gently embraces the penis. . ."

Peter Biller, "Black Women in Medieval Scientific Thought" (486), quoting Albertus Magnus in his *Quaestiones super De animalibus* (c. 1258)

"Why does *the Ethiopian* come among us?"

Gay L. Byron, quoting from the *Apophthegmata partum*, relating the hagiography of Ethiopian Moses (sixth century CE), in *Symbolic Blackness and Ethnic Difference in Early Christian Literature* (129)

STUDIES ON premodern race have often focused on color as the paramount index of race – so that attitudes toward *blackness* are sought as the deciding factor adjudicating whether racial behavior and phenomena existed in antiquity and the Middle Ages.¹ To complicate our views on medieval race, I have thus far emphasized multiple locations of race over a singular epidermal focus: fanning out attention to how religion, the state, economic interests, colonization, war, and international contests for hegemony, among

other determinants, have materialized race and have configured racial attitudes, behavior, and phenomena across the centuries. But attention to color, and physiognomy characterized in tandem with color, are now the focus of this chapter.

At the heart of scholarly interest in color – I have argued in articles over the years, and in Chapter 1 above – has lurked a spectacular enigma in the field of vision: the ascension of *whiteness* to supremacy as a category of identity in the definition of the Christian European subject (see Heng, “Jews”; “Invention . . . 1”; “Invention . . . 2”). Classicist James Dee, puzzling the enigma of color, has a vignette that tellingly gets to the point of color-as-race:

In my classroom-teaching days, I used to hold up a blank sheet of paper and say, “Now *this* is undoubtedly white,” then put my other hand in front of it, and add, “But if you *also* want to call *this* white, there’s some serious semantic distortion going on that might be hard to explain to a visitor from outer space.”

(159)

The range of hues visible in Caucasian flesh tones – cream, pink, beige, and E. M. Forster’s famous compound, “pinko-grey” – is only the starting point for Dee’s question: “did the Greeks and Romans think of themselves as ‘white people’ or as part of a ‘white race?’” (158). Surveying a host of documents attesting that virile, admired heroes in the Greco-Roman world, like the Greek Odysseus, are depicted as dark-skinned while women, sickly people, “pasty-faced philosophers, and cowards” are deprecated as pale, Dee finds that “the concept of a distinct ‘white race’ was not present in the ancient world” (162, 163).

Greco-Roman antiquity – revered and embraced by the Middle Ages as its superior in civilization and knowledge, and possessed of supreme cultural authority – did not enshrine whiteness of skin as an admirable, let alone a defining characteristic central to the authority of group identity, Dee finds. In the Mediterranean, where races, peoples, and dermal pigments intermixed for millennia, this is not perhaps so startling a conclusion.

But Madeline Caviness takes up the puzzle of when humans in Western Europe began to see their own flesh tones as identical to whiteness. In a remarkable article with fifty-nine full-color images, Caviness stresses the significant departure from traditions of antiquity that innovation of this kind entailed, especially for the visual arts. The visual arts are especially important, she asserts, because they “do ideological work more powerfully than texts”: because we privilege sight over our other senses (Caviness 1), and also perhaps (though Caviness does not say this explicitly) because of visual art’s beguiling sense of immediacy and intimacy – the impression visuality imparts of being more readily and easily accessed, without mediation, than literary texts which have to be read, word-by-word, and then painstakingly interpreted.

A picture, it seems to people, not only conveys more than a thousand words, but also offers less hindrance to immediate absorption and understanding. Not least of all, in the Middle Ages, visual art can be seen by a thousand times more people: While literacy is confined to a tiny percentage of elites, statues, stained glass, and frescoes literally reach multitudes.

A shift in thinking about the skin color of Europeans, Caviness finds, occurred in the Latin West in the second half of the thirteenth century (in this, we should allow her the courtesy of recognizing the likelihood of uneven development, as innovations occurred earlier in some regions and later in others, or were ignored in yet other regions):

In a tradition that stemmed from antiquity, Byzantine and early medieval painters applied heavy layers of pigment to faces and bodies, working up the relief contours to pinkish highlights. Typically, only the whites of the eyes are pure white . . . Early twelfth-century European works that have little to do with Byzantine style – such as the great Catalan wall paintings or a famous service book from Limoges in France – also depict rich flesh tones, dramatically contrasted with white garments . . . European artists adhered to these traditions through the early thirteenth century. Even in the north, they usually built a face up from a bluish or greenish modeling wash, through varied tones of brown and pink, to highlights, and much brighter whites of the eyes. These effects can be seen in English works of the late twelfth century; the Great Psalter from Canterbury, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale MS lat. 8846, and the Bible in Winchester Cathedral Library provide good examples of this chromatic range in manuscript painting . . . Layered modeling is also seen in contemporary glass paintings in Canterbury Cathedral . . . The base color in this period was almost always a rosy-pink glass containing manganese.

(17)²

It thus seems that, for several centuries, in visual depictions the white of the human eye was seen as truly white, whereas European flesh was variously seen to range across rich tones of pink and pinkish brown, contrasting strongly with the whites of human eyes. Looking over an eleventh-century medical manuscript containing a commentary on Hippocrates, Caviness sees that “the nude figures are quite dark, and evidently still owe much to an ancient Greek or Roman prototype” (17). By contrast, in a fourteenth-century medical manuscript from France showing a sequence of physician–patient interactions, “all the faces and hands are opaque white, and the hair very light” (17):

Two south Italian medical works, from the 12th and the 13th centuries, also provide a contrast in the depiction of bare skin. The earlier artists still adhered to rich flesh tints giving ruddy complexions, and variously black or brown hair . . . By the second half of the thirteenth century this coloration had changed dramatically: In scenes of bathing in Peter of Eboli’s tract on the curative baths at Pozzuoli the artist exposes pure white bodies and gold or red hair . . . These examples in medical manuscripts are of particular interest because there is no reason for them to be impacted by theological ideas that elided the good with light and purity . . . in fact, to be pallid was long recognized as a sign of ill health, as now in the phrase “dead white.”

(17)

But by the late Middle Ages, Caviness shows us, “saints in paradise gleam as white as their garments, like [a] fourteenth-century Saint John from York Minster” (18). “A virginal saint might be celebrated. . .with a pearly complexion and ‘pure’ white garment . . . At some stage, Christians appropriated this sanctity by depicting their kind as truly ‘white’” (Caviness 18). Whiteness was also eventually equated with colorlessness: “By then it had become the norm for glass-painters to use colorless glass instead of flesh tints” (Caviness 18). That is to say, by the late Middle Ages, in their visual art, Latin Christian Europeans not only came to depict their skin color as white, but made whiteness literally transparent, invisible.

In order to “pinpoint the shift to a preference for ‘white people,’” Caviness moves from a broad survey of medieval visual art to a linked set of localized examples from France in the reign of Louis IX, the famed crusader king (18). She calls attention to the fact that the

artists of the psalter made for Ingeborg of Denmark, Louis's grandfather's queen, circa 1195, still "modeled flesh in tones of pink and brown" (Caviness 18):

Forty years later [Louis's] mother, Blanche of Castile who ruled during his minority, had much lighter colors painted in her Psalter . . . The glass Louis IX and Blanche had painted in the 1240s for the palace chapel in Paris, the famous Sainte Chapelle, used colorless or barely tinted glass for the faces, and this became the norm . . . Louis' own Psalter followed suit about 1255–70 . . . For an older generation of art historians the predominant new complexion and facial type appeared to be no more significant than other stylistic changes, in accord with their notions of a Gothic era. I view it as a dramatic change in representational code, with broad ramifications.

(Caviness 18)

The visual art made for one family across three generations thus compactly allows Caviness to localize to the second half of the thirteenth century Europeans' awareness of their skin tones as *white*, rather than pink, brown, cream, or a medley of tints, and then see that whiteness of skin as transparent – as no color at all.

For Caviness, the mid-thirteenth-century shift in artistic conventions – the "dramatic change in representational code" – that results in Latin Christian European flesh being imagined and visualized as *white*, and not flesh-colored, was an artistic response built up from accumulated encounters with palpably *non-white* peoples. Like many medievalists working in a variety of disciplines, Caviness sees the twelfth and thirteenth centuries as an expanded age of encounter:

One reason that European Christians had come to regard themselves as white by 1250 may be that they had been coming in contact in large numbers with brown infidels, and with . . . sub-Saharan Africans . . . There are records of black so-called Ethiopians even in the north.

(22)

Until the advent of that formidable period of prolonged, enforced mingling we know as the Crusades – the period of "the first European expansion," as Jean Devisse puts it (35) – Western Europe "no longer had any contact with blacks. All that was known about them was an abstraction – blackness itself" (Devisse 57).

If Caviness is correct, it seems such absence of substantive contact with black-skinned peoples did not lead Western Europeans to contemplate their own whiteness, nor to depict their own flesh tones as white. Scholars such as Devisse suggest that the relative absence of black-skinned peoples instead freed the European imagination to conjure with the meaning of *blackness*. Leaving aside for now the enigma of whiteness, we thus turn to the more traditional focus in discussions of epidermal race – blackness – in the centuries before the age of expanded encounter.

Out of Africa: The Good, the Bad, and the Piebald, or, Politics of the Epidermis, Part 2

Before the period of encounter that leads visual artists in Europe to meditate on whiteness, the relative absence of contact with black-skinned humans, Devisse and

others suggest, offered Europeans fertile ground to muse on the meaning of the color black as “an abstraction” in discourses driven largely by theological imperatives:

As human beings, the black and the African in general presented no direct problem, physical or metaphysical, to the Western European [in this time period]. Hence a total hostility to blackness could take root, apparently, without jeopardizing the fundamental idea of the vocation of all men to salvation. The fears and terrors of the Occidental were centered on blackness itself.

(Devisse 57)

Devisse’s insight that *blackness as a hermeneutic* was able to grow and thrive in Western Europe in the absence of substantial contact with living, black-skinned human beings – an absence that freed the hermeneutic development of blackness from being troubled by representatives in the flesh whose salvation would have to be considered – is supported by a parallel insight among scholars of medieval English Jews. After the expulsion of Jewish communities from England, in the absence of Jews of the flesh, there was a remarkable proliferation of imaginary and hermeneutic depictions of Jews, unbound by considerations of presence (see Heng, “Jews,” for a bibliography).

The growth of an accumulating discourse on blackness from the end of the Roman era through the eleventh century – a discourse that made possible ingenious, paradoxical play with color that granted the great theological minds of the Middle Ages the satisfaction of subtle and witty meditations on the nature of salvation, as I noted in Chapter 1 – thus flourished in that relative absence of the real which conduces to the exploitation of possibilities inherent in fantasmatic race. “In Western Europe, at least until the twelfth century,” Devisse flatly notes, “there were simply no black people except in some very limited areas” (51).

In contemplating epidermal race, it is thus useful to recognize a distinction between *hermeneutic blackness* in which exegetical considerations are paramount and often explicitly foregrounded, and *physiognomic blackness linked to the characterization of black Africans* in phenomena that extended beyond immediate theological exegesis. It is equally vital, of course, to recognize that distinct, and distinguishable, discourses on blackness might also at times converge and intertwine for ideological ends.

Devisse offers a prolonged meditation on how black became the theological color of sin and evil, tracing Biblical exegesis over the centuries to mark stages in discursive development of hermeneutic blackness (58–62).³ But while duly noting that blackness per se “as a *sign of evil*” was not identical with “conscious hostility to black people,” Devisse nonetheless observes that Ethiopians, as a symbolic construct personifying sin, invariably became indistinguishable from an African population whose blackness blazoned to all Christendom their innate sinfulness, and identified Ethiopia as the land of sin (59, 61, emphasis added).⁴

Dorothy Verkerk’s study of the Ashburnham Pentateuch, one of the oldest illuminated manuscripts of Western Europe, suggests that “a transitional moment in the emergence of the pejorative representation of blacks in medieval art” might be the late sixth to eighth centuries (60). In the Ashburnham Pentateuch’s illustrations of the tenth plague, the enemies of Moses and the Israelites are depicted as black, and Verkerk cites parallel examples in late antique and early medieval visual art, though, she cautions, artistic conventions “are not fully worked out” in this “intermediate stage” (60). Thanks to the authority of patristic exegesis, however, with its insistence on identifying blackness with sin

and spiritual corruption, “black skin now becomes a metonym for evil . . . the sinful non-Christian now has a face and it is black” (Verkerk 63).

In Chapter 1, I carefully distinguished between the epidermal politics of *sin* and the epidermal politics of *the infernal*. A blackness linked to sin registers a state of abjection vitally important to the salvational discourse that is a cornerstone of Christian doctrine: The blackness of sin and sinners can function as a sign of potential future redemption and ultimate glory. By contrast, since the infernal is not redeemable in Christian doctrine, a blackness associated with the Devil and hell is a more damning kind of blackness.

Debra Strickland, however, implicitly suggests that an easy hermeneutic slippage occurred between identifying Ethiopians with sin, and identifying them with the Devil, pointing out that “Didymus the Blind (c. 313–98) reports that Ethiopians belong to the cult of the Devil,” and “medieval exempla [narrate how] the Devil is fond of disguising himself as an Ethiopian in order to menace the faithful” (80).

An instructive example of how hermeneutic blackness performs in exegetical, allegorical, or symbolic ways in visual art might be Nicholas of Verdun’s 1181 enameled plaque of an ambo at Klosterneuburg depicting the Biblical Queen of Sheba’s visit to Solomon (Devisse 133 plate 103; see *Figure 10*). In the enamel, the Queen of Sheba’s *skin* is colored black, but the refined, elegant lines of her *face*, carefully limned in gold like the rest of her person, cannot be distinguished from the standard iconography for European faces (by contrast, one of her attendants bearing the Queen’s gifts to Solomon is shown with tightly kinked hair [Devisse 133]).⁵ Chronologically preceding the era of Christ, the story of the Queen of Sheba – a popular symbolic and allegorical personage in the Middle Ages – is the story of a *virtuous pagan*: Her soul’s as yet unredeemed nature, expressed by the Queen’s blackness, is thus neatly twinned visually with the Queen’s exalted Biblical status and potential for future redemption in eschatological time, expressed by her physiognomic indifference from Europeans.⁶

By contrast to Nicholas of Verdun’s black-skinned but Europeanized Queen of Sheba, the mid-thirteenth-century Black St. Maurice of Magdeburg Cathedral – a figure who bears important sociocultural and political meaning, as Jean Devisse and Paul Kaplan (“Introduction”) have separately argued – depicts a black knight-martyr of unmistakable African physiognomy. No less beautiful, and more vital, than the formal elegance of Nicholas’ Queen of Sheba, the physiognomic realism and naturalistic expressiveness of Maurice’s sensitive visage seem enigmatically to signal a panoply of interests not exhausted by theological exegesis (*Figure 9*).

In this, Maurice resembles, perhaps, the black African figures of thirteenth-century medieval literature – Moriaen, Belakane, Feirefiz – enigmatic others whose strikingly layered, thoughtful depictions seem to invite a range of reflections that extend beyond theological obsessions. I discuss these and other black Africans in medieval literature later in this chapter.

Exceptions like Maurice notwithstanding, *within* Christianity the color black accrued a slate of negative significations that yoked the “abstraction” of blackness (as Devisse puts it), to sin, ignorance, shame, error, and the state of unredeemption preceding forgiveness and salvation, as well as – more perniciously and unforgivingly – to the devil, the demonic, the infernal, and the damned.⁷ Color, of course, was also deployed to certify distinctions *between* religions and communities of faith. Just as the Queen of Sheba’s pre-Christian, pagan status can be visually signaled through blackness, Saracens in



Figure 9. Face (detail) of the Black St. Maurice of Magdeburg. Magdeburg Cathedral, Germany, 1220–1250. Reproduced with permission from the Menil Foundation, Houston; Hickey and Robertson, Houston; and Harvard University’s Image of the Black Project.

literature and in visual art are also sometimes depicted as black-skinned, as many scholars have noted.⁸

A more troubling development was the visualization of *black skin in tandem with a sub-Saharan phenotype*, in the portrayal of torturers and executioners, especially the killers and tormentors of revered people such as John the Baptist and Christ – a phenomenon Devisse meticulously surveys from the late twelfth century through the thirteenth century, a period of intense antiblack virulence in artistic thematics of this kind.⁹

“The executioner with ‘Negroid’ features survived for a long period” across the centuries, prompting Devisse to ask: “How many generations of Christians have been conditioned by looking at a grimacing black man torturing Christ or his saints?” (72, 80). Devisse and Caviness both intimate that such an artistic thematic may perhaps reverberate from close encounters of a local kind, and each points to a report by the Abbot of Nogent:

In his autobiography, Guibert of Nogent tells of the fear inspired in the community of Laon in 1112 by an immense baptized Ethiopian hangman in the service of Bishop Gaudri, and it became common to represent one or more of the flagellants of Christ as black.

(Caviness 22)

What is the origin of this iconography? One might hold Guibert of Nogent responsible by reason of his story about Baudry, bishop of Laon, and his “black” laboring man, who terrified those who saw him.

(Devisse 79)

In medieval European literature, black Saracens abound from the twelfth century on – in the shape of hideous giants, troops ranged in the battlefield against Christians, and enemies



Figure 10. Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. Nicholas of Verdun's enameled plaque of an ambo, Klosterneuburg, 1181. Museum des Chorherrenstiftes, Klosterneuburg.

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whose bodies may also bear nonhuman characteristics such as horns, tusks, bristly spines, or skin as hard as iron, or who may issue animal-sounding speech (for example, Saracens who bark like dogs).¹⁰ In the Middle English *Sultan of Babylon*, there is even a black giantess who is the mother of twin giant black babies, fourteen feet long – her infant sons of seven months. Saracen kings may be fully black, like the “loathly” Sultan of Damascus who turns spotless white without taint after his baptism in the *King of Tars*, or piebald, like Feirefiz,

the offspring of racial miscegenation between Gahmuret, a fair European Arthurian knight, and Belakane of Zazamanc, a black African queen, in Wolfram von Eschenbach's Middle High German *Parzival*.

So fond is Wolfram, in particular, of imagining black–white racial mixing being played out on the epidermis of offspring that in *Willehalm*, Wolfram jauntily makes Josweiz, another product of sexual mixing across the color line – this time between Matusales, the king of Amatiste who had completely white hair and skin, and a Moorish woman – also black-and-white, like Josweiz' more famous counterpart Feirefiz.¹¹ David Tinsley shows us that not only do black Saracens like the Sultan of Damascus turn white after being converted to Christianity by a Christian wife white as a swan, but a reverse circuit also runs through the European imaginary: In the Middle High German *King of Moorland*, *Christian European knights turn black* when they are seduced by black women and converted to heathenry (90–1).¹²

Despite their status as the international enemy *par excellence*, however, Saracens are not consistently nor inevitably depicted as black. Jacqueline de Weever has shown us that Saracen princesses in Old French epics of the thirteenth century tend to be offered to audiences as lily white, a strategic bleaching that portrays the women as desirable and appropriate sexual companions for French knights, and conduces, also, to the women's eventual baptism and assimilation into Christian European polities.

Nor are admired Saracen “knights” such as Fierabras/Ferumbras in the French and English romances that bear their names, or the gallant Magariz of Seville in the *Chanson de Roland*, ever depicted as black. In the *Roman de Saladin*, the esteemed Saladin is also not portrayed as black. Indeed, Saladin passes easily for a European knight when he makes a prolonged visit to France, and there champions maidens, triumphs in tournaments, distributes largesse, and becomes the secret *ami* of the French queen. Some of Saladin's *men*, however, in the Middle English *Richard Coer de Lyon*, are black Saracens eaten with relish by the cannibalistic Richard; their black skin, grinning white teeth, and devilish appearance flash prominently before our eyes as the English king gleefully tucks into his human repast (see *Empire of Magic*, chapter 2).

Like the variety of Saracen skin color in literature, a broad color palette exists for the portrayal of Saracen skin tones in visual art, alongside variation also in iconographic markers – swords, shields, headwear, physiognomic features – that identify human figures as Saracens. The secondary literature on the depiction of Saracens is voluminous. In the sections that follow, I sample a few of the more provocative, or relatively overlooked, literary characterizations of black Saracens for what they might tell us about medieval race.

Variation in the visual depiction of Saracens – who may look like black Africans, Jews or Arabs, Indians, Tartars, or Europeans – well expresses a Latin Christian understanding that perhaps two-thirds of the world or more, as Peter the Venerable feared, swarmed with Saracens. Saracens seem to be everywhere in the lands Marco Polo traverses as he travels the world. Though they might under certain conditions be thought of as a single infernal race defined by their religion, or by their shedding of corporate Christian blood – as we saw in Chapter 3 – Saracens can be understood, in their internationalism, to *look* like the variety of the world's peoples. Like the Fourth Lateran Council's Canon 68, which mandated a difference of dress for Jews *and* for Saracens living in Christendom in order to prevent inadvertent sexual mixing between infidels and Latin Christian Europeans, literature and

art can also acknowledge that it might sometimes be hard to tell apart the different populations of the Abrahamic faiths just by looking at them.

In the centuries after discourses on blackness-as-negativity had been established, more intriguing perhaps than the portrayal of Saracens as black is the portrayal of *black Christians* in medieval literature and art. Paul Kaplan's remarkable scholarship on the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century rise of the phenomenon of the Black Magus Baltazar (or, sometimes, Caspar) is a sustained study of how, in the context of extreme color virulence in medieval religious discourse, one of the Three Magi can be imagined as black in the visual art of the late Middle Ages (*Rise*). Kaplan and Devisse separately discuss at length the phenomenon also of the Black St. Maurice and briefly note the fashioning of another black African martyr, Gregory the Moor (whose cult, unlike Maurice's, was localized to Cologne).

I therefore end this chapter by taking up again a discussion begun in Chapter 1, on the thirteenth-century Black St. Maurice of Magdeburg. Before resuming the discussion of a black saint, however, I first consider the sudden, intriguing materialization of a Christian black knight in literature, a secular, literary companion to Maurice who, like Maurice, appears and is embraced in the heartlands of Western Europe. But the extraordinary thirteenth-century Middle Dutch romance known as the *Moriaen* is woven around a black knight who – unlike Maurice or the Magus – is not privileged as a sainted martyr or hallowed personage of nativity Christology, but merely arrives as a Christian knight from “Moorland” doggedly seeking social and economic justice.

With only two exceptions, I sample cultural exemplars from the thirteenth century – a period that, relatively early in the era of expanded encounter, posed key questions about epidermal race, and attempted creative and fertile responses in literature and art. By the time of the late Middle Ages, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries – as Jean Devisse and Michel Mollat amply demonstrate in their volume of *Image of the Black* that concentrates on the fourteenth through sixteenth centuries – a vast proliferation of exotica makes the depiction of blacks – especially in armorial bearings and heraldry – fashionable, and increasingly commonplace, so that the *topos* of blackness becomes in Europe a reflexive gesture denoting the exotic and foreign, like the late medieval enthusiasm for depictions of wild men and wild folk.¹³

By this time, courts, kings, and nobles played with blackness for purposes of spectacle in performances of masques, pageantry, processions, and balls; *morescas* were danced “as often as possible,” and actors recruited to play “black Moors” and “white Moors” (Piponnier and Mane 145). Such fashions presided not only in fashionable France, but even in the far northwest of the European continent. In her discussion of entertainment at the court of James IV of Scotland and in Dunbar's sixteenth-century *The Masque of Blackness*, Louise Fradenburg remarks that

Face-blackening was an important feature of early disguisings and dramas and of later folk-plays and processions: Chambers cites the Turkish knight, one of the combatants in the (late) Cheshire mummers' play, who is referred to as a “black Morocco dog.” A play put on at Roxburghshire is reported as including “Gysarts” dressed in shrouds with faces painted black or blue . . . In the courtly morisco or morris-dance, face-blackening was also employed.

(*City, Marriage, Tournament* 247)

With such proliferation and play, epidermal race is conscripted into the luxuriant vocabulary of court entertainments, and solicited for the sportive pleasures of masquerade by

Europeans donning blackface, even as black African heads and silhouettes became the domesticated familiars of heraldic and armorial signature. Late medieval and early modern epidermal race as masquerade and entertainment, and as collectible souvenirs for heraldic blazoning, makes for fascinating study, but my interest lies in the problems posed, and the responses delivered, when the enigma of epidermal race is fresh, and first rears its head in a culture where a negative discourse on blackness predominated.¹⁴

Black Knight/White Knight: Trajectories of Fear and Desire, or How Romance Figures Histories of the Outside/Inside

Medieval Europe had a long cultural memory of black Africans. Paul Edwards reminds us that there were black Africans in the auxiliary Roman legions dispersed across the Roman empire, and even in Britain, a small corner of the empire tucked away in the extreme northwest:

[W]e know from . . . evidence that there were . . . African troops on Hadrian's wall around AD 200 at the time of [the Roman emperor Septimus] Severus's visit. A few miles from Carlisle a *numerous Maurorum* or auxiliary unit of "moors" was stationed at Burgh-by-Sands (*Abavalla*), and its presence is recorded on a stone inscription . . . Another inscription, on a tombstone found on the Wall at South Shields, records the death of "Victor, aged 20, of the Moorish nation, freed by Numerianus."

(Paul Edwards 10)

Edwards repeats arguments arising from archeological analysis of the Roman Cemetery at Trentholme, York, said to furnish "evidence of an early Afro-Romano-British community" centuries before the arrival of "English invaders . . . from Europe" (10–11). If Africans were represented in the Roman imperial armies occupying territories in Europe, they were also in the armies and territories of the Islamic empire; and, after the eighth-century Islamic conquest of Spain, increased encounters with black Africans occurred.

Evidence of continuing contact between the British Isles and Africa, and of the presence of Africans in the British Isles, is to be found in the records of the Scandinavian settlements in Dublin and Orkney. One of the fragments of ancient annals in Irish . . . records the landing of Black slaves in Ireland in AD 862, after one of the Viking raids in Moorish Spain and North Africa.

(Paul Edwards 11)

Edwards wonders at the odd, anomalous passages in literature that sporadically hint at the scattered presence of Ethiopian-like peoples. A famed medieval Irish tale, *Mesca Ulad*, or "The Intoxication of the Ulster-men," set in the first century but probably composed in the ninth, describes King Conchobar's jester, Róimid, as a man with, "in literal translation, 'an Ethiop face, shiny blue-black' (Old Irish *ethiopaeda slemangorm*) and 'short sharp-edged (þbristly) black hair' (*súasmáel dubrintach*)" (Paul Edwards 11).

Icelandic sagas described encounters not only with "Saracens (O. Icelandic *Sarazin*), whom we call infidels of Mohammed" but also with "a good many black men (O. Icelandic *mart blámanna*, literally 'blue men')" (Paul Edwards 12). By the early twelfth century, Geoffrey of Monmouth's semi-legendary history of the kings of Britain, the *Historia Regum*

Britannie, announces that Stonehenge had come *from Africa*, via Spain; and Geoffrey's history even imagines an invasion of Britain by Africans under an African king, which leads to alarming conversions among the local populace away from Christianity (*Empire of Magic* 50–1).

In the decades preceding Geoffrey's writing of British history, Africans did indeed come to Western Europe to defend Islam, in regions relatively close to the British Isles. In what can easily be imagined as an Islamic (re)invasion, the Maghrebi Berber dynasty of the Almoravids under the leadership of Yusuf ibn Tashfin arrived in Iberia at the request of the Taifa kingdoms of Andalusia, who were struggling against the Reconquista forces of Christian León and Castile.

Having already amassed territorial conquests in Sudanic/sub-Saharan Africa, the Almoravids brought large numbers of black Africans in their armies, as they began a new chapter in the history of Islamic Spain that included annexing the Taifa kingdoms, and holding back the tides of Christian reconquest. Peter Mark, citing the scholarship of Umar al-Naqar (with Ibn Khallikan as the original source), notes "the presence of 4000 Sudanese troops with Yusuf ibn Tashfin in the battle of al-Zalaqa [the Battle of Sagradas] in Spain in 1087 A.D." (14 n.16).

Encounters with black Africans did not only take place in the peripheries of Europe: Europeans also made their way out of the Latin West, into the contact zones of Byzantium, the Maghreb, and Egypt. As we saw in Chapter 3, lively mercantile interests brought Latin Christian Europeans, along with cargoes and transshipments (that included, as we saw, cargoes of human slaves) to Byzantium and North Africa in the centuries before, during, and after that long period of encounter we know as the Crusades. There, Sudanic and Trans-Saharan African traders and caravaners were found alongside Arabs, Berbers, and miscellaneous ethnoraces in the markets, emporia, ports, funduqs, cities, towns, and hinterlands.

Ethiopia's conversion to Christianity in the fourth century and Nubia's in the sixth also meant that devout sub-Saharan Africans, just like devout Europeans, made pilgrimages to the Holy Land, and through their pilgrimages established "contact with the western world," as an Ethiopian scholar observes (Sellassie 254).¹⁵ Ethiopian monks were found in Jerusalem – that most visited of international pilgrimage destinations – from the fourth century, admired for their "moral standard" and "purity of life" (Sellassie 112).¹⁶

Ethiopian pilgrims founded a religious community in Jerusalem from the late Aksumite period of the ninth and tenth centuries (Henze 109; Sellassie 112, 254), and "When the Holy Land was re-occupied by the Muslims led by Salahad-Din in 1189, the Ethiopian community in Jerusalem . . . migrated to Cyprus," establishing the monastery of St. Anthony in Famagusta and eventually moving to Nicosia, where they founded the church of the Savior of the World (Sellassie 262).

Ethiopian monks were even said to be in charge of the flame that burned continuously in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem, so honored because an Ethiopian king, Caleb, during the brilliant Aksumite period, had "voluntarily abdicated the throne and entered monastic life in the hermitage of *Abba* Penteléwon, where he ended his days . . . [and had] sent his crown to Jerusalem to be hung on the Holy Sepulchre" (Sellassie 143).¹⁷

The impressive hagiography of Ethiopian Moses narrates scenes of dialogue that enshrine the holy man's humility precisely by playing movingly on his awareness of his skin color, and of how blackness is to be read in early Christian hermeneutics.

Most recently analyzed by Gay Byron, the hagiography of Ethiopian Moses soundly registers recognition of black African Christians as formative figures in early Christianity – just as, we might say, hadith about Bilal, the companion of the Prophet who performed the role of muezzin to the Companions, registers the importance of black African Muslims in early Islam.

A finer-grained view of contact between black Africans and Europeans thus refines our perspective of the half-millennium or so in which a discourse on blackness was accumulated before the expanded period of encounter we know as the Crusades. However, though sub-Saharan Africans could be found in the fringes of Western Europe, and though Latin Christian Europeans no doubt encountered Africans in commercial border zones and at Mediterranean pilgrimage sites in the centuries before the Crusades, from the twelfth century on, in the aftermath of the First Crusade, the documentary record registers significant recognition of expanded contact and encounter.

Guibert de Nogent's vignette of the enormous Ethiopian hangman working for Bishop Gaudri of Laon in the early twelfth century is a small example of Africans who appear in the historical record outside Italy, Sicily, Iberia, and Southern Europe – lands where the presence of black Africans is more usually attested, as we shall see later in this chapter. Africans are also markedly encountered in the battlefields, among the ranks of the enemy:

The blacks who appeared frequently in the Islamic armies faced by the first Crusaders are often described as Ethiopians. Most likely these blacks were actually natives of the northern areas of the Central African steppe (the Sudan), or of the East African coast, but the Western chroniclers preferred to use the term which in classical times had designated all black peoples.

(Kaplan, *Rise* 49)

Unsurprisingly, black Africans who appear in twelfth and thirteenth century European literature – especially the heroic epics and romances that are the staple narratives depicting martial encounter – are often rendered as Saracens or heathens, this formulation becoming something of a literary commonplace.

But the most discussed example of a text in which black African Saracens feature prominently is surely Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*, arguably the most famous German courtly romance of the European Middle Ages, and justly admired for its literary brilliance and imaginative verve. I now turn to this text, to refocus critical conversation anew in the context of issues of color raised by Madeline Caviness.

Parzival's first two and last two books – a remarkable addition to the rest of the narrative's creative refashioning of Chrétien de Troyes's *Perceval* – bookend most of the stories of epidermal-race-and-religion, and have been meticulously and ably analyzed.¹⁸ In discussing *Parzival's* cultural politics in this section and in the chapter sections that follow, my interest will center primarily on the checkered play between a white knight, a black queen, their piebald son, and a white queen, in the inside-out nature of the world carved out by the politics of color and religion. More precisely, my interest is to see what questions are raised in the politics of color and religion, and what investments are made, in this extraordinarily accomplished thirteenth-century literary artifact devised by one of the great authorial minds of the European Middle Ages.

Written in the first decade of the thirteenth century, Wolfram's *Parzival* inherits a color discourse sedimented across the centuries, so that the romance can issue standard moralizings on color – inconstancy's color is black, constancy's is white; sinful thoughts are black,

chastity is white; Hell's color and Hell's lord are black, etc. (Cyril Edwards 3, 193, 23, 51; Lachmann I: 10, I: 758, I: 92, I: 204) – yet also offer the satisfying paradox of noncongruence between an epidermal surface and the interior meaning of human character: as, for example, demonstrated by the courtly black queen of Zazamanc, Belakane, whose epidermal blackness and internal virtue are twinned and coexist seamlessly in one person.¹⁹

Play with color in the first two books of *Parzival* is witty, highly memorable, and incessant. When Gahmuret, the white Christian European knight, goes to Zazamanc, land of the blacks, we are told, the people of Zazamanc were all dark as night, and in their company time seemed to him to pass slowly (Cyril Edwards 9; Lachmann I: 36). Many dark ladies did Gahmuret see on both sides of him, with complexions of the raven's hue (Cyril Edwards 10; Lachmann I: 40). When the black wife of the black burgrave in the capital city of Patelamunt kisses Gahmuret, he took little pleasure in it (Cyril Edwards 11; Lachmann I: 42). On her part, the queen Belakane hopes the fact that Gahmuret is a different color from her and her people does not displease him (Cyril Edwards 11; Lachmann I: 44). She can tell Gahmuret is handsome, however, because she had seen many a fair-skinned Christian before and knew how to judge pale complexions (Cyril Edwards 14; Lachmann I: 54). But if anything is brighter than the day, Belakane bears it no resemblance (Cyril Edwards 12; Lachmann I: 46). Belakane's black hand personally removes Gahmuret's arms and armor (Cyril Edwards 20; Lachmann I: 80), and finally, when Gahmuret and Belakane consummate their intense desire for each other, the narrative still cannot leave well enough alone, but must tell us (in case it's escaped our notice) that in the act of love their skins were unlike (Cyril Edwards 20; Lachmann I: 80).

This list by no means exhausts the gimlet-eyed focus on color in the first two books. Color is the pivot for praising martial prowess. It is also staged in the tale of Gahmuret's furtive exit from Zazamanc without its subjects' or his wife's knowledge – the seaman from Seville who helps Gahmuret escape is not like a Moor in color, and he warns Gahmuret to conceal his departure from those who have black skins (Cyril Edwards 24; Lachmann I: 96). Feirefiz's birth, of course, presents a delightful comedic-poignant opportunity to proffer a black-and-white, magpie-colored baby whose mother, Belakane, kisses him on his white parts (which no doubt remind her of her dearly departed Gahmuret [Cyril Edwards 25; Lachmann I: 100, 102]).

Gahmuret's return to Europe, however, brings a sudden shift in specular attention to color, as light-radiating *fair skin* now takes center stage. Gahmuret seems to be shedding light, his mouth shining and ablaze like a ruby, his hair bright and curly, and his person radiant; and Herzloyde, the queen of Wales who will be his second wife, casts an equally bright sheen when she first appears (Cyril Edwards 28; Lachmann I: 112).

Since Gahmuret returns not only as an Angevin princeling who has finally come into his inheritance but also, we are told, as the King of Zazamanc, land of the blacks – and to make sure we are paying attention, the text calls him the King of Zazamanc nearly a dozen times – we may suppose an ironic comment to underpin the narrative description of the white knight's glorious brilliance here. His is a radiance, we notice, intensified by the gems, furs, and samite, the wealth and luxury, that he brings from the land of the blacks as its white king furtively gone AWOL – a wealth which festoons his radiant person (Cyril Edwards 28; Lachmann I: 112).

The shift of color attention when Gahmuret lands back in Europe suggests that *Parzival* is not only absorbed in the meaning of blackness and foreignness – an absorption the

romance amiably flags with congenial explicitness – but is also keenly absorbed in what fair skin and radiance might announce or conceal, in the moral-ethical ratio of surface to depth *in Europe and among Europeans*. If Madeline Caviness is correct, the early thirteenth century, when *Parzival* is written, should be a time of intense interest in what the fairness of Europeans portends in signaling identity.

One of the meanings of lightness, Caviness suggests, is sanctity: and in *Parzival*, we see that everyone associated with the Grail radiates light, and is radiantly light in color. Grail maidens have light-colored hair, and the complexion of the Grail knight Parzival, the son of Gahmuret and Herzeloide, vies in sheen with the radiance of candles. Ladies that Parzival encounters also have bright skin, very white in color, and luscious white breasts and bodies. The Grail itself imparts lightness of skin, so that the aged, sick Titurel has never lost his fair color but remains bright-skinned, because he sees the Grail so often (Cyril Edwards 98, 103, 108, 109, 211; Lachmann I: 386, I: 404, I: 428, I: 430, I: 828).²⁰

Parzival's mother, Herzeloide, is herself very, very white. Rhapsodized as resembling the sun in her brightness, Herzeloide sheds such effulgence that even if all the candles around her had been extinguished, her skin alone would have supplied enough light (Cyril Edwards 44, 37, 28; Lachmann I: 174, I: 144, I: 112). The text is agog at her bare skin, white body, white hands, and especially her soft, white, little breasts. After Parzival's birth, those white breasts are generously offered to our gaze as Herzeloide lyrically apostrophizes her breasts with their rosy nipples, presses her nipples to her red mouth, squeezes out their (white) milk, and finally, after rapt textual inspection of the red tips of those adorable breasts, pushes her breast tips into the infant Parzival's little mouth, in a *mise-en-scène* where the *virgo lactans* – Mary nursing the infant Jesus – is invoked to sanctify the avid gaze on erotic whiteness (Cyril Edwards 48–9; Lachmann I: 188, 190, 192).

With the invocation of the Virgin, voyeuristic excitement at the erotic white topography of a European woman's body is cleverly alibied as *hommâge* to nurturant maternity. But the slippage between sacred and secular that tends to occur – as Caviness has pointed out – is visible not only here. Whiteness may identify Grail-related sanctity, but it comes to characterize courtly elites in Europe too, so that even the secular young people at King Arthur's court, in this romance, have radiantly fair complexions (Cyril Edwards 320; Lachmann II: 306).

White thus appears to be a capacious, generous color. Offered as denoting sanctity, maternity, erotic female bodies, and secular aristocratic identity of the noblest (Arthurian) kind, the flexibility of whiteness in the text signals a keen textual interest in investigating what whiteness can accommodate, reveal, conceal, or mean.

White's flexibility as a signifying color returns us to Gahmuret: a white knight who is king of the blacks, and who fathers both the fair-skinned Grail knight Parzival and his half-brother the piebald heathen Feirefiz. However, Gahmuret's radiance and brightness presents something of a problem in the field of vision that ties whiteness to European identity. This is because in his actions, as well as in his loyalty and devotion, Gahmuret the fair-skinned, radiant Arthurian knight seems to act like a virtual Saracen.

Gahmuret's knightly deeds and prowess are plotted on a disturbing arc. We see him in action first as a mercenary serving the “baruc” (that is, Caliph) of Baldac (that is, Baghdad) against the Caliph's rivals, two brothers of Babylon (“Babilon”). This service wins the Angevin the prize in heathendom, where his courage and prowess garner him a dazzling

reputation in Morocco, Persia, Damascus, Aleppo, Arabia, and Alexandria (Cyril Edwards 8–9, 10; Lachmann I: 32, I: 38).

After stellar performance for a Saracen potentate, Gahmuret goes to yet another heathen land, this time populated by *black* heathens – Zazamanc – where he defends the black land’s heathen queen from the forces and allies of a deceased black knight who had been enamored with her, and that are now bent on exacting revenge for their dead lord, Isenhart of Azagouc, who had died endeavoring to prove worthy of her favor.

In this chessboard drama of race-and-religion, Black Queen fails Black Knight, and White Knight takes Black Queen and Black Knight’s lands. Once a landless younger son and an economic casualty of European primogeniture, the Christian Gahmuret becomes the White King of two heathen lands populated by dark Moors and Mooresses. Could any postmedieval colonial fantasy, written for the grand ages of European colonial empire, offer a more productive outcome?

Having impregnated and married the black queen of Zazamanc, the White Knight now conjures up oddly unconvincing reasons for why he must desert his beloved Black Queen (who is dearer to him than his own life) and return to Europe, where – lavishly wealthy – he is repeatedly named as the King of Zazamanc, land of black Saracen Moors (Cyril Edwards 29, 30, 32, 33, 35, 36, 41; Lachmann I: 114, I: 118, I: 120, I: 126, I: 130, I: 138, I: 142, I: 160).

From Belakane’s response to Gahmuret’s letter informing her that his desertion was caused by her heathenness, it is patently clear that her conversion to Christianity was never raised between them as his desire, since she instantly declares she will gladly be baptized and live as he wishes (Cyril Edwards 25; Lachmann I: 100).²¹ In fact, Gahmuret’s own life has shown little allegiance to a missionary Christianity, and his return to Christian Europe is merely an intermission between military escapades in Islamdom for the benefit of Saracens.

Briefly back in Europe, Gahmuret impregnates and marries a white queen of Wales, Herzeloide: White Knight, now King of the Blacks, takes White Queen. He then finds it urgent to leave again, once more in devotion to the Caliph of Baghdad, when that Saracen potentate is again menaced by his enemies from Babylon.²² On this second dedicated war service to his lord the Caliph, Gahmuret loses his life.

His young corpse is embalmed and buried in Baghdad at the Caliph’s expense, the tomb generously lavished with precious stones (Cyril Edwards 46; Lachmann I: 182). Though a cross is nominally erected, Gahmuret’s Christian corpse is very palpably and inexplicably not returned to Herzeloide and Christendom, but put instead into unconsecrated heathen ground in the heart of Saracendom (Cyril Edwards 46; Lachmann I: 182). Indeed, “His death grieved Saracens,” we are told; we are also told that the heathens worship Gahmuret as their honored God (Cyril Edwards 47, 46; Lachmann I: 184, I: 182).

Stripped to its plot outline, Gahmuret’s story is a strange tale in the Arthurian universe. If the symmetry of this bigamist-knight’s abandonment of two pregnant wife-queens – one black, one white – is remarkable, more astounding, surely, is the deep homosocial devotion this Christian European knight shows to his lord the Caliph and his wars.

For all his protestation of longing for one of the wives he abandons, and his additional declaration moreover that the woman he does *not* marry, Queen Ampflise of France, is his true lady (Cyril Edwards 41; Lachmann I: 162), Gahmuret’s real love and devotion – as seen by his *deeds*, not his words – belongs to the Caliph. This Christian knight’s career begins and ends with devoted service to his lord the Caliph: the titular head of Islamdom and successor to Islam’s Prophet (he is a Caliph, after all, and not merely a sultan).

Given the extraordinary brilliance of Wolfram's romance – with its elaborate patterning and symmetries, delectable humor, trenchant wit, and creative inventiveness – we are forced to conclude that Gahmuret's characterization is likely neither a chance accident nor an afterthought. Color and religion are staked in that characterization. A *white Christian European knight* in mercenary service to Islamdom, Gahmuret's nominal subscription to the Christian universe zigzags in directions Europeans should fear, while his fair skin color seems less to advertise European identity than to conceal allegiances disturbing to Europe. This White Knight's color, it turns out, is an opaque surface that covers over a disquieting interior of deeply ambiguous moral, ethical, military, and geopolitical subscriptions.

Parzival is a text written in the early thirteenth century, after the horrific loss of the Kingdom of Jerusalem, the heart of the crusader East, to Saladin (Salah ad-Din Yusuf ibn Ayyub) in 1187 and after the disappointing failure of the Third Crusade in 1189–92, Richard Lionheart's and Philippe Augustus' crusade, to restore the Holy City to Christian hands. The romance even seems to show knowledge of the debacle of the Fourth Crusade of 1204, detoured from its military target of Egypt and avariciously ransacking Constantinople instead (Cyril Edwards 237; Lachmann I: 928, I: 930).

In a text rife with *orientalia* and Near Eastern place names, and obsessively fascinated with luxurious eastern silks and Syrian cloth, mentioning spices like cardamom, cloves and nutmeg; Arab gold and African gems; Arab astronomy and Arabic names for the planets; olive trees, heathen queens; Turks, Turcoples, and templars (a name that appears nearly a dozen times), how should we judge a Christian knight who twice fights as a mercenary for the Caliph of Baghdad, a Caliph bearing affection for him and in whose service he dies (Cyril Edwards 8, 44, 46; Lachmann I: 30, I: 172, I: 180, I: 182)?

If this bright-sheened, dazzlingly fair European must leave Europe to adventure on the other side of the Mediterranean – *outramer* – why isn't he fighting on behalf of Christendom, in an honorable and holy cause, a cause as grand, noble, and just as it is urgent? That Wolfram was not unmindful of the imperative of holy war enjoined on Christian knights and rulers can be seen in his celebrated literary text featuring Saracens and Christians in combat, *Willehalm*: a text in which Christians and Saracens war over Gyburc, a once-Saracen queen liberated by her conversion to Christianity, and who possibly functions in *Willehalm* as an imagined figure for the lost city of Jerusalem.²³

Indeed, Wolfram's repeated conjuring of "templars" in *Parzival* who serve the Grail in its temple at Munsalvaesche may lightly indicate that the successful Grail quest in *Parzival* is meant to be seen as a kind of fantasied compensation for a failed quest by those other Templars – Knights of the Order of the Temple – who served and guarded lost Jerusalem.²⁴

Gahmuret's military service to Saracens not only deprives Christendom of a champion, but also means that he wars against Christians and Europeans. Defending the Moorish heathen queen, Belakane, Gahmuret wars against varied ethnic groups of Europeans led by Hiuteger, a Scottish duke in the retinue of Fridebant, the king of Scotland, and Gaschier of Normandy, avoiding only combat against Kaylet the Spaniard, because he was Gahmuret's kinsman (Cyril Edwards 17–18; Lachmann I: 68, I: 72).

This White Knight of ambiguous behavior is also habitually clothed in Saracen silk: His tabard, surcoat, and cloak are all made of prized green samite, "achmardi" – precious Arabian stuff that the narrative tells us is peerless, with no other clothing comparable to it. The boss of his shield is of Arabian gold, and a Saracen tent, and jewels and

gem-studded gold goblets from Azagouc travel with him (Cyril Edwards 17, 28, 31, 37; Lachmann I: 68, I: 112, I: 123–4, I: 146).

Compounding his cagey geopolitical and military ethics are Gahmuret's personal ethical failings. Unlike Lancelot – an Arthurian knight famed throughout medieval European literature for his steadfast loyalty to his first love, Queen Guenevere – Gahmuret sheds his first love, Queen Ampflise of France, who educated him, counseled him, and conferred knighthood on him, giving him his shield, and receiving in return Gahmuret's ring (Cyril Edwards 41, 42, 33; Lachmann I: 162, I: 166, I: 132). Despite an announced great affection for and strong fidelity to Ampflise – who is his true lady, Gahmuret says (though the narrative is likely being arch here) – Gahmuret agrees to marry the virginal and younger Herzeloide when the two white queens vie for him (Cyril Edwards 41, 42; Lachmann I: 164, I: 166, I: 168).

By this time, of course, he has also shed his pregnant black queen Belakane, whom he knew was pregnant when he left, a wife he says dearer to him than his life, and for whom he longs (Cyril Edwards 25, 41, 39; Lachmann I: 98, I: 160, I: 154). No Lancelot this, but twice married, with three women trailing in his wake and abandoning two while they are pregnant with his children, Gahmuret's confusedly mixed loyalties are dramatized in his personal life as sensationally as in his military career.

White on the surface of his skin and outwardly a Christian European, Gahmuret is morally and ethically *piebald* in his personal life, his military and geopolitical devotions, and his amassing of oriental wealth, kingdoms, and the impressive luxury wares that embellish his outward radiance. This White Knight's interior is as piebald as the exterior of his miscegenated son Feirefiz. In linking father and son, the text seems to say, skin reveals and conceals. Feirefiz's pied, parti-colored epidermis reveals his mixed genetic parentage. Gahmuret's whiteness and light-shedding radiance conceals a pied morality and ethics, mixed allegiances, and murkiness within.

For a nice contrast, Belakane's black surface – a sheen so unlike the dewy rose, the text laments – is pied with spotless virtue, chastity, a loyal disposition, outstanding courtliness, womanliness, sweetness, and a pure nature (Cyril Edwards 12, 14, 15–16, 39; Lachmann I: 46, I: 54, I: 62, I: 154). Inheriting a centuries-old discourse on color that the text shows it well understands, *Parzival* is a romance that plumbs surface and depth through the instrumentation of color and turns interiors inside out, to see if the inside of a human identity conforms to its outside.

Beyond a visual palette of color in this text, identity is what identity *does*: Therefore, actions and deeds are the other links between Gahmuret and Feirefiz. Like his father, Feirefiz faithlessly leaves three queens in his wake – Olimpia, Clauditte, and Secundille – one of whom, Secundille of Tribalibot, had instructed, inspired, and loved him, furnishing him with gifts in a role parallel to Ampflise's in Gahmuret's life (Cyril Edwards 316, 322–3; Lachmann II: 292, II: 310, II: 312, II: 316).²⁵ Father and son are also both exhibited to European eyes swathed in costly, showy magnificence – precious oriental gemstones blaze on their person, and the narrative is repeatedly agog at their wealth and their oriental treasures (Cyril Edwards 324, 307–8, 316, 318, 325, 328; Lachmann II: 318, II: 320, II: 258, II: 292, II: 300, II: 326, II: 338, *passim*).

Despite their dermal disparity, color indeed ties the one to the other, with skin acting as an interface – the father piebald on the inside, the son piebald without. Play with color also links Gahmuret and Belakane, but in a simple inversion that yokes each person's interior to

the other's exterior. The white Christian European acts like a virtual Saracen knight, but the black Saracen queen acts like a virtual European queen in her hospitality, courtesy, and regal courtliness, and also like a virtual Christian in her chastity and virtue – indeed, the text tells us that her chastity was a pure baptism unto itself (Cyril Edwards 14; Lachmann I: 54).

Keenly interested in plumbing European identity – in exploring what a white, Christian identity signals on the outside and within – *Parzival* is also interested in a world of collective identity beyond Europe, where *Zazamanc/Azagouc*, virtual stand-ins for Ethiopia/Abyssinia/Nubia, mark the far reaches of the civilized world. Stepping into the land of the blacks, Gahmuret finds a world not different from the Europe he has left behind, except for the dermal hue and heathenness of its inhabitants. There are cities, armies, and chivalric armorial devices in *Zazamanc*; familiar rituals of martial combat, courtly manners, values, and hospitality, a kiss of greeting for noble strangers, and extravagant feasts. Language poses no barrier, and love is as familiarly intense – *more* intense – than in Europe.²⁶ Blackness of skin, plus religion, is what prevents this foreign corner of the world from looking like Europe.

I consider the implications of this below, in sections on the Black Queen and on mixed-race offspring, but it is useful to note briefly that in the cultural imaginary on display in this celebrated early thirteenth-century romance, oriental Africa looks a lot like Western Europe, but is the source of rare treasure, precious gems, and vast, untold riches. This land is accessible to a moral hybrid like Gahmuret, a knightly bigamist and mercenary with flexible ethics who is willing to dedicate himself to the causes of non-Christians, rather than pursuing the highest military goals and missionary endeavors of Christianity – wresting back Jerusalem from the infidel, and converting the unconverted in the person of Belakane and her people.

We thus see that, true to its rich complexity, *Parzival* has multiple fascinations. Well attuned to asymmetries of skin color and interior identity, and what color conceals and reveals, the romance's obsessive cataloguing of the Orient's wealth suggests that it's also very interested in what an ambitious knight of high martial caliber can accomplish. Gahmuret's ambitions and prowess are rewarded with the wealth of the Orient, heathen lands, two queens, and the birth of a Grail knight.

Parzival's fascinations with the global non-Christian world take many forms. They include an avid interest in Saracen stories, knowledges, and lore: The story of the Grail itself is traced back to a Saracen called "Flegentis" who descends from the Israelite stock of Solomon, but is heathen through his father's line. Flegentis is an astronomer who read the future of the Grail in the stars and wrote it down in Arabic (*in heidenischer schrift*), where it was discovered and read by "Kyot" in Toledo, who then traveled through Europe's Arthurian lands amassing more scholarship, all of which forms the basis of Wolfram's own grail romance, which thus claims Saracen origins for itself (Cyril Edwards 191–2; Lachmann I: 750, I: 752, I: 754).

Tellingly, Wolfram's Grail messenger, Cundrie la Surziere, is not only a splendid loathly lady of the conventional romance kind, but also happens to speak Arabic and possess recondite astronomical knowledge that enables her to describe planetary bodies by their Arabic names (Cyril Edwards 132, 327; Lachmann I: 518, II: 334). Believe it or not, she is sent by Queen Secundille of Tribalibot, a land with the river Ganges, and with many rivers that carry precious gems rather than gravel, and that has mountains of gold (Cyril Edwards 218, 219; Lachmann I: 856, I: 858).

In this Grail romance, the global outside – all the far-flung lands of heathendom – leaches into Christian Europe, bringing knowledges, stories, gems, rare fabrics, sumptuous clothes, Arab gold, spices, aloe woods, and other exotic *orientalia* of incalculable worth. Saracen knowledge, Saracen lands, Saracen wealth, and at least one black Saracen queen are objects of intense absorption and desire. A White Knight of dubious morality, who ends his life in that global outside and never returns, has discovered that the rest of the world looks greatly like Europe, except for its extraordinary wealth, its lack of Christianity, and the presence of black-skinned peoples. This is how a celebrated and brilliant specimen of elite German cultural fantasy imagines the world of the early thirteenth century.

But later in the thirteenth century, literary culture in Europe fashions yet another response to foreign lands and black-skinned peoples, and envisions an alternate set of relations between Europe and them.²⁷ The Middle Dutch romance *Moriaen* reverses the trope of a White Knight adventuring in the lands of the Blacks, and offers instead a Black Knight from Moorland (“Moriane”) who arrives in Arthurian Europe to search for his father – the knight Acglavael (Agloval), elder brother of Perchevael (Perceval/Parzival) – a father who sired him on a black Moorish princess Acglavael promised to marry before he went missing twenty-four years ago.²⁸ D. A. Wells persuasively urges that *Moriaen* is likely written after 1250, and does not derive from *Parzival* but is most probably a Dutch original in its own right (“Source” 46–7, “Middle Dutch” 260, 275; Claassens and Johnson 9).

Less well known than the German *Parzival*, the Dutch *Moriaen* is a freestanding romance within an immense manuscript compilation of ten romances in a series referred to by scholars as the Middle Dutch *Lancelot Compilation*. Some component romances are based on the Old French *Prose Lancelot*, while others are original Middle Dutch compositions (Claassens and Johnson 5–6).²⁹ In the *Compilation*, *Moriaen* appears after the romance *Perchevael* and before the *Queeste vanden Grale* (Quest of the Grail), and scholars have argued that *Moriaen* circulated independently before its incorporation into the massive manuscript (Wells, “Source” 40). No source texts are known to exist for *Moriaen*, but the romance draws widely on the beloved conventions, stories, characters, and motifs of Arthurian romance, especially from the French tradition, and possibly also the British (Besamusca; Claassens and Johnson 9; Wells, “Source” 32, 44).

This second contemplation of color offered up by thirteenth-century Arthurian literature is extraordinary. Its focus on blackness is a sustained meditation that shows awareness of what black signifies in the cultural milieu of its time, but also decisively shows how color difference can, and should, be bridged. Like Feirefiz, the Black Knight *Moriaen* comes to Europe looking for his missing father, but *Moriaen* is not a Feirefiz clone purged of white bits of skin. Though black, and from the equivalent of Zazamanc, *Moriaen is a Christian, not a Saracen*.

Despite Wolfram’s portrayal of Zazamanc as a land of black heathens, by the end of the twelfth century and the beginning of the thirteenth, some knowledge existed of a Christian Africa:

Richard of Cluny, writing in 1172, speaks of Christians in the kingdom of Nubia. Burchard of Strasbourg claims Nubia is Christian in 1175. The pilgrim Theoderich apparently met Nubian Christians at the church of the Sepulcher in Jerusalem, but this may be a later insert

into his account of 1172 . . . Arnold of Lübeck refers to Nubia as Christian in 1209 . . . Thietmar's account of his pilgrimage to the Holy Land mentions the Christian "Yssini" [Abyssinians, i.e., Ethiopians] located beyond Egypt. . .

(Kaplan, *Rise* 49)

Paul Kaplan's summary of thirteenth-century knowledge of a Christian Africa suggests an uneven but reasonable dispersion of that knowledge in Western Europe. Robert de Clari's chronicle of the Fourth Crusade records the arrival of a black Christian king of Nubia in Constantinople in 1204 (*Rise* 47). Oliver of Paderborn, writing of the capture of Damietta in 1219, says that Ethiopia has a large Christian population ruled partly by a Christian king and partly by Muslims, while Jacques de Vitry's *Historia Orientalis* (c. 1220) describes Nubians and Ethiopians as independent nations of Jacobite Christians. Even Matthew Paris "implies that both Ethiopia and Nubia are peopled with Jacobite Christians" (*Rise* 49–50). By the late thirteenth century,

Burchard of Mount Sion, a native of either Strasbourg or Magdeburg, composed in 1283 an account of his trip to and residence in the Holy Land, a narrative in which Christian Nubia and Ethiopia receive a good deal of emphasis . . . The Christianity of these regions is also asserted on maps. The Hereford map of ca. 1285–1290 bears an inscription which refers to the "most Christian Ethiopians of Nubia"; the roughly contemporary Ebstorf map makes reference only to Nubian Christians.

(Kaplan, *Rise* 50–1)

It's thus possible that in the second half of the thirteenth century, the depiction of Moriaen as a Christian issues from cultural knowledge, or at least an intermittent cultural memory of Christian Ethiopia and Christian Nubia, but deliberately overlooks the eastern Christianity of these African lands which did not follow the Latin Rite. Whatever the case, *Moriaen* offers less historical specificity than *Parzival* with its panorama of references, place names, and *orientalia*: *Moriaen's* global outside focuses specifically on color.

To be sure we are in no doubt that Moriaen is a Christian, the text has him calling on God the first instance he appears, and he calls on God repeatedly each time we see him (l. 483ff). Moriaen is thus that rare character in medieval romance: a black man and foreign other who's not a heathen but religiously invokes the Christian God. This romance is clearly not interested in the theme of how the heathen, virtuous or otherwise, can be converted – and not at all interested in Saracens or their religion, or the vast riches, knowledge, and power of the Saracen world. *Color alone* is the locus of difference in the *Moriaen*, so that blackness can be considered in its own right, without distractions. The text's attitude to color, and its Black Knight, is forthrightly simple:

*Moors are as black as a burnt torch.
But in all things that one would praise in a knight,
he was fair, after his own fashion.
Though he was black, what harm was it?
Nothing about him was unbecoming.*

(l. 768–72)

We see that fair skin is still the default category of valorization, since Moriaen is praised as "fair" *in his own way*. But there's a touch of defiance here: So he's black – so what? He's a

fine knight in every way; nothing about him is unbecoming. Here is an unmistakable prompt: You should look past color, if color is the only difference.

In a romance of 4,716 lines, this explicit statement of the text's position on color difference occurs early, in the first sixth of the narrative. Thereafter, the romance shows how different people respond to Moriaen's blackness, attesting time and again that those who fear him, and believe him the devil on the basis of his color, are hopelessly wrong and clueless, while those who offer him respect are vindicated by his stellar martial performance, ethical behavior, and sterling personality. Having stated its view on color, the narrative proceeds to explicate and defend that view for the remainder of the romance.³⁰

To dramatize its point, the narrative purposefully depicts Moriaen, in his physical appearance, as a stock figure of medieval romance and *chanson de geste*. Moriaen is "black as pitch" "except for his teeth" and – recalling the demonic black giants who populate these genres – he is exceptionally large, though "still a youth" (l. 766, 424, 773–5). People flee from him, so that as he travels he can find no lodging or shelter anywhere, no food or drink, nor transportation when he needs it – sailors on ships and boatmen at a harbor scatter in terror (l. 2363–6, 2375–8, 2408–23). People are affrighted "because he was both black and large," and "it seemed to them that Moriaen/had come straight from hell" and "was none other than the devil" (l. 2415, 2418–9, 2428). Even Gariet (Gareth), an Arthurian knight and brother of the great Walewein (Gawain), is taken aback at meeting him – the text registers Gariet's apprehension over eleven lines – and must be reassured by the wiser Walewein, who quickly introduces Moriaen and explains his quest, assuaging Gariet's discomfort (l. 2934–6; l. 2937–44).

By contrast, superior Arthurian knights such as Walewein, Lancelot (Lancelot), and Perchevael, and the two hermits who shelter them, do not respond to Moriaen with dread, and Acglavael, on meeting his son and learning of Moriaen's mission, embraces him at once. Yet even the chief Arthurian knights are only human, and the narrative tells us when Walewein and Lancelot first encounter Moriaen, Walewein would have thought "that it was the devil rather than a man/whom they had come upon/had he not heard him call upon God" (l. 481–3). Superior knights are able to look past a fellow's color – if he's a Christian: an example for others to follow.

Moriaen's frequent, trusting invocation of God is thus part of a textual strategy to present him as a sympathetic character who, unlike Feirefiz, has no real shortcomings. Indeed, "apart from his colour, great stature, and Moorish homeland, there is nothing to distinguish him from the traditional champions of Arthurian chivalry" (Wells, "Middle Dutch" 250).

Moriaen's portrayal is a flattering one: He fights Lancelot (traditionally the best Arthurian knight) to a standstill, never giving way; he saves Walewein from torture and certain death; he's even half a foot taller than the tallest Arthurian knight (traditionally, again, Lancelot); and he leads the vanguard in the defense of King Artur's (Arthur's) queen and castle, so that "Never had anyone seen a mortal man/deal such terrible blows" and "it seemed that he would put to rout/an entire army" (l. 4430–1, 4339–40). Moriaen is Lancelot's equal in one-to-one combat, and Perchevael's equal in Artur's wars: As D. A. Wells notes, the man is a virtual Arthurian knight (l. 4541–2). Norris Lacy astutely adds that "failures by Artur's most indomitable knights, and Artur's own captivity, can only have been devised to point up Moriaen's precocious excellence: he is the only one . . . never to have been defeated or captured" (130 n.13).

When he first appears, however, Moriaen is a little hotheaded, and so passionately bent on his quest that he offers to fight anyone unless they give him news of his father's whereabouts, battling Lanceloet to the ground as a result of this overeager insistence on news-or-combat. Counseled by Lanceloet to listen to Walewein, who advises Moriaen to try a more dulcet approach first, in sourcing for news, Moriaen absorbs the advice in an instant, and never again repeats his impetuosity (l. 432–606).³¹ Thereafter, the Black Knight is a model of chivalry, courtesy, patience, and considerateness.

Though eager to be back on quest, after rescuing a badly wounded Walewein, Moriaen agrees to wait for his friend to recuperate before resuming his search for Acglavael (l. 2847–50). When he does find Acglavael and sees that his father also is badly wounded, and in no shape to travel to Moorland immediately, Moriaen in turn counsels his father to recover first; and, as he waits patiently for Acglavael to heal, he occupies himself with King Artur's cause, in which our Black Knight distinguishes himself (l. 3920–52).

The text's portrayal of Moriaen thus exhibits an empathy and warmth rare in medieval romance's portrayal of foreign others. Through the technique of *entrelacement* (the interlacing of plot trajectories), a narrative sequence directly contrasts the Black Knight's lonely journey, when he is shunned like a pariah, with the lavish hospitality Walewein receives at a castle where he has just killed the castellan's son but still must be feted according to chivalric hospitality's rules. Right after the depiction of Walewein's lavish reception, the narrative turns to the Black Knight, who, in stark contrast, finds no hospitality anywhere, though he has not committed a capital act like Walewein's.

Moriaen spends a lonely night with no sleep or rest, shorn of a civilized habitat where he can find comfort "beneath a roof." Yet, when the day breaks, with a clear, bright sky, he poignantly finds comfort in that simple fact of nature:

*He had neither rest nor sleep that night,
nor did he find any place where he might
have lodgings, where he thought he could
find some comfort for himself,
a place inside, beneath a roof.
Next morning, when daylight came,
he was comforted greatly
for the sky was clear and bright.*

(l. 2374–81)

The touching simplicity of how Moriaen's spirits lift at so small a comfort imparts a fleeting glimpse of an inner life. Textual empathy for him also grants us an internal view of what it is like to *be* Moriaen – not only to see what Moriaen looks like to the Europeans he meets, but also to recognize his pained response to their reactions: a double consciousness that is the gift of this unusual romance.

After boatmen flee from him, at a crucial point in his quest for his father, Moriaen despairs: Unable to get to the other side of the sea, where his father is, he is forced to turn back, "lamenting all the while" (l. 2437). Up to this juncture, our Black Knight has been unselfconsciously doffing his helm (he wears armor as black as his skin), politely enabling people to see the face and facial expression beneath. But in learning how to view himself through European eyes, he has absorbed a bitter lesson of the white man's gaze:

*They will not take me across
because I am a Moor,
and my countenance is different
than that of those who dwell here.
I have wasted this journey.*
(l. 2446–50)

The text is not content with merely making us recognize the cruelties of epidermal racism. On his second day without shelter, food, or drink, the narrative shows us the *effects* of racial shunning, as the once resilient and ebullient Moriaen reels from repeated rejection. Not only does he suffer physically from hunger, so that he is feverish and his head hurts, but, with his morale at its lowest, he also suffers dejectedly from grief (l. 2454–7).

Narrative sympathy for Moriaen builds outward from the justness and decency of his cause. This Christian Black Knight doesn't swagger into Arthurian Europe backed by mighty armies and vast wealth, like the proud heathen Feirefiz, but poignantly comes alone, with no help, to seek social and economic redress. Because Acglavael did not return to marry the black princess after each had plighted troth to the other, the son she births is illegitimate, and by the law of their country, Moriaen's mother is deprived of her land, feudal rights, and great wealth, and she and her son are subjected to social opprobrium and shame (l. 707–719).

Unlike his uncle, Perchevael – whose mother died heartbroken because Perchevael had abandoned her, with her death being the “sin” that causes the failure of Perchevael's Grail quest, and necessitating penance on Perchevael's part – Moriaen's protective concern over *his* mother's welfare and rights registers him as ethically superior even to Perchevael, Arthurian romance's would-be Grail Knight.³²

Moriaen's eloquent recitation of his backstory to Walewein and Lanceloet is scrupulously fair. He acknowledges that Acglavael did not know his beloved was pregnant, and details in stages mother and son's poignant suffering and shame and his own growing resolve. Economic disinheritance and social opprobrium are ample cause to move any knight, and Moriaen's quest – to restore his mother's dignity and his, and their rightful, legitimate place in their world – literally makes Walewein and Lanceloet weep.

*Then neither of
the two knights who stood there,
– neither Walewein nor Lanceloet –
could prevent great tears
from falling from his eyes
when they heard the story
of what had befallen this knight.*
(l. 745–51)

We see thus that this Black Knight is steadfast and ethical, and scholars have rightly insisted that the romance is fundamentally concerned with ethics.³³ Even Acglavael, that instigator of grief, exhibits none of the moral dubiousness of his counterpart in the land of the blacks, Gahmuret. Acglavael only left his beloved in order dutifully to resume his search for Lanceloet, whom he had been on a quest to find when he met the Moorish princess; he had not returned to Moriane afterward because a series of family obligations kept him away

(l. 3587–3611). No Gahmuret this, despite superficialities of plot resemblance: Acglavael was not in Moorland out of economic opportunism, and acquires no additional wives or sons afterward. The moment his son explains his mother's plight, Acglavael is instantly contrite, and swears to make amends:

*That I have thus betrayed her
and broken my vow
is a crime that I intend to
put right, with God's help.
I shall yet win her grace.*

(l. 3641–5)

The reunion of father and son is joyous, and we are invited to view the embrace of a white father and a black son without any narrative comment on the strangeness of the mixed-color pair. Unlike *Parzival*, which could not refrain from gleefully interjecting that the skins of Gahmuret and Belakane were unlike in their most intimate moment, *Moriaen* simply presents family happiness:

*It would have done anyone's heart good
who had heard them speak,
to see how Acglavael and Moriaen
embraced and kissed one another;
Any heart would have been the gladder
who had seen and heard
their speech and their words.*

(l. 3652–58)

This romance, you might say, has humbler ambitions than *Parzival*. If *Parzival* is eager to display knowledge of the wide world, *Moriaen* is content with a smaller canvas, which it paints with feeling and exactitude.³⁴ Indeed, the romance pins together all manner of telling details – especially psychological particulars – so that there is scarcely a loose thread in the warp and weave of narrative. For instance: At the castle where Walewein finds shelter, after having killed the castellan's son, the host's men plot Walewein's death once he is off their premises, but take care to feed well Gringalet, Walewein's horse, because they think the steed will soon be theirs (l. 2080–4). The psychological astuteness of this afterthought discloses how narrative attention alights on small, revealing particulars that add dimension, motive, and unexpected touches of realism.

This kind of psychological attentiveness leads the narrative to acknowledge a knight's dependence on his horse, and show us moments of warmth in human–animal relations. Walewein plunges his famed steed, Gringalet, into a wide, deep river where there is no bridge, and the animal gamely battles its way across “as best it could” against very strong currents, so that “it was a great miracle/that they were not both drowned” (l. 1268–74). When Gawain is ambushed and badly hurt by the castellan's men, the narrative movingly relates that on seeing Gringalet again “his heart soared so within him/that it seemed to him that he was completely healed” (l. 2636–7). We even have the horse's perspective. In a charming scene of animal–human attachment, Gringalet takes the injured Walewein by the sleeve in a delicate gesture of greeting and animal trust:

*[Gringalet] came forward to meet his lord.
That horse took him by the sleeve
with his mouth, for friendship.*

(l. 2641–3)

Quotidian details receive attention. When Gariet arrives at the hermitage where Walewein and Moriaen are recuperating, fortuitously bringing food and drink in the nick of time just as the hermit's small stores are depleted from feeding his knightly guests, the text troubles to account for why an Arthurian knight should be carrying victuals and wine on the road – when such explication is hardly standard procedure for a genre in which food and drink, magic devices and gifts, wealth, and nubile women routinely materialize with no bother of explanation.

Textual attention to detail is so scrupulous that even a ruse has to be explained: To hobble Walewein, the castellan's seneschal secretly makes “a deep gash” in Gringalet's stirrup leathers, so that they will break at a crucial moment when Walewein is riding. As to why Walewein doesn't notice this sly tampering, we are told that the cut is concealed “beneath the cover of the harness” – just in case we were wondering (l. 2066–9).³⁵

The romance also has a wicked sense of humor. A terrified boatman who had earlier fled from Moriaen is given a second encounter with him, this time after Gariet has secured the boatman's services first, without telling him he would have Moriaen as a travel companion on the boat to Ireland. The text gleefully draws out what happens next:

*[Gariet] put the money in the boatman's hand,
who then made ready his rigging,
the sail, and the tackle, too.
He would soon regret it!
When his [Gariet's] horse was on board
and he was ready for the voyage
Moriaen came riding up
blacker than any other soul
that a Christian man had ever seen;
and the boatman wanted to run away
as soon as he caught sight of Moriaen
and as he rode even closer to him
(He had seen him before)
he thought that he would die of fright.
He could hardly move a muscle.*

(l. 3421–35)

With poetic, ludic justice, the glee here is aimed at a poor boatman who's been tricked into ferrying across the Black Knight, after having fled from him before. The text genially prolongs the joke about color – not against the man of color, but against the ignorant yokel who gazes on him. Gariet exclaims in exasperation – “Sir boatman, what is the matter with you?” (l. 3437) – fortifies the man's nerve with a belligerent threat – “Now, do not make it difficult for us / or this day will be your last” (l. 3440–1) – and waggingly lessons him:

*By our Lord Almighty,
what is it you are afraid of?*

*This is not the devil;
 he has never seen the inside of Hell.
 I give you fair warning,
 Let him on board, he is my comrade.*

(l. 3442–47)

After Moriaen's earlier suffering, the joke is too good not to be plumbed for all its worth. When the Black Knight comes aboard, we are waggishly reminded that he is "so exceedingly large," and the boatman is "so very frightened," and "thought himself lost" (l. 3452, 3453, 3459). Worse yet, Moriaen decides to remove his helmet again:

*When Moriaen had taken his seat
 he removed his steel helmet:
 then the boatman thought that he would die.*

(l. 3460–2)

Luckily, the boatman gets a grip on himself and manages to relate much useful information on the whereabouts of Acglavael and Perchevael. Still, as a final jokey flourish, when Gariet and Moriaen go ashore, he "rejoiced greatly/that he was safely quit of them" (l. 3510–11).

When we consider how racial jokes can work in medieval romance – I have discussed at length the politics and psychology of the aggressive racial jokes in the Middle English *Richard Coer de Lyon*, where the English crusader-king Richard eats a black Saracen head with relish, then proceeds to host a feast for Saladin's ambassadors at which their captive sons and kinsmen are slain and served up as piping-hot platters of black Saracen heads to be consumed by king and guests – we see that the racial joke in this Dutch romance is amiably mild and *not* aimed at foreign communities of color (*Empire of Magic*, chapter 2).

Wolfram's *Parzival* also has its share of racial jokes, as we have seen, though the laughter elicited there can have a more uncertain timbre. Why do we smile at the thought of Gahmuret uneasily squirming at the hospitality kiss of the black wife of the black burgrave of Patelamunt, and who is the butt of the joke here? When the black queen Belakane kisses her piebald baby *only* on his white parts, is it funny, poignant, or mildly offensive? *Parzival's* winking racial jokes have a whiff of sly mischief about them that makes us hesitate to collude with their humor. By contrast, the Dutch romance's prolongation of the boatman's dismay seems mild and relatively innocuous.

Having noted the relatively good-natured circuit of this Dutch romance's racial joke, however, we should also note that courtly romance conventions direct the laughter here toward those who are *not* knights, but who are underclass folk in the courtly world, such as boatmen. Unlike lower-class yokels, a knight like Gariet can embrace Moriaen as "my comrade" despite the Black Knight's pitch-black skin, his white teeth, and his near-gigantic size, because chivalry is imagined as an international fraternity of men of like socioeconomic status. Everything that Moriaen does confirms him as an integral member of that privileged feudal class – his courtesy and prowess, and even the reason he is on quest in Arthurian Europe, searching for the restoral of feudal rights, lands, and position. The text imagines knighthood as a transnational institution that bonds a fraternity of elite men across borders, and across epidermal race.

Epidermal race and color difference can thus be bridged, if Europe shares in common with the lands of black-skinned peoples the *sine qua non* of Christianity and chivalry.

Christianity must needs be of a homogenous kind: Moriaen is devout, calling on God and His Mother with greater frequency than any Arthurian knight, and his faith is not marked in any way as different from the Latin Christianity of Arthurian Europe. If this thirteenth-century Dutch romance taps a deep cultural memory of Christian Ethiopia and Nubia (and Nubia, we note, became Islamized by the fourteenth century), it does not register any difference in the Christianity practiced by black Africans. To imagine relations between Europe and a global outside inhabited by people who are “much blacker . . . than any soot or pitch” (l. 3538–9), this thirteenth-century romance must theorize the strategic universalism of *Latin* Christianity.

The other strategic universalism is chivalry. Moriaen is welcomed into a circle of knights because he, too, is a knight, as he takes care to tell Walewein and Lanceloet from the outset: “I had myself dubbed a knight” (l. 720). The romance even emplots chivalric relations as a circle: *Lanceloet* advises *Moriaen* to listen to *Walewein’s* counsel, and *Walewein* counsels *Moriaen*; *Moriaen* then rescues *Walewein*, who in turn rescues *Lanceloet*, bringing the actions of these knights back full circle. Chivalric relations engirdle the world, and the institution of knighthood exists even in far-off Moorland, where Moriaen has had himself dubbed a knight. For *Moriaen* as for *Parzival*, chivalry is a transnational network – an international brotherhood of the elite – that crosses all borders, enabling global relations between Europe and the vast outside.

Global relations of this kind, between communities of men who understand one another, share identical values, and support one another’s rights, even across color and epidermal race, are cemented when kinship also unites races. The blood ties that link Moriaen to Aeglavael, and thence to Perchevael and a web of kinfolk in Europe, attest that kin relations with black otherness are possible under universal Christianity and transnational chivalry. Together, the partnership of chivalry and Christianity can imagine a globality of kinship with otherness when men share socioeconomic interests and religion across skin color.

These are the conditions under which the text argues that epidermal race, by itself, should not matter. Moriaen is outwardly black, but his conduct, allegiance, and values are identical to any European knight’s. Black outside, fair within: Or, as the text puts it, Moriaen is “fair, in his own fashion” (l. 770). The romance thus reverses the irony imbuing *Parzival*, where the White Knight, Gahmuret, is fair outside, murky within.

Textual accommodation does not go so far as to insist, of course, that blackness *per se* is beautiful, and should supplant or equal fair skin in our esteem. A creature of its time, the text says people think Moriaen ugly, but wise and brave: “Moriaen’s counsel seemed good to them,/. . . although he appeared to be so ugly” (l. 4336–7). Textual generosity lies in the *attitude* toward that assumption of ugliness – a “so what?” which asserts that what matters is within, and not on a skin’s surface.

Thus the narrative remarks that Moriaen “resembled his father/the noble knight Sir Aeglavael” – a resemblance vested not in physical appearance, since Aeglavael’s handsomeness and fairness are remarked upon early, but vested in nobility, courage, and prowess (l. 648, 655, 2558–9). D. A. Wells sees thematic manifestation of the words of the Bride in Canticles I: 4 – *nigra sum sed formosa, I am black but beautiful* – presented here as “the contrast between outer blackness of skin and inner worth” (“Middle Dutch” 262).

The world beyond, represented by the land of the blacks, is more sketchily rendered in *Moriaen* than in *Parzival*, but like *Parzival’s* *Zazamanc*, *Moriaen’s* Moorland also resembles Europe. With Artur’s return from Saxon captivity, and victory in the Irish war (thanks

to Moriaen and Artur's principal knights), convivial celebrations follow; Walewein, Lanceloet, and Perchevael thereafter accompany Moriaen and his father to Moorland so that Acglavael can fulfill his pledge, marry Moriaen's mother, and make right earlier wrongs.

In Moorland, an *Odyssey*-like skirmish occurs at Moriaen's return, when some Moorish lords "wanted to refuse them entry/in order to be able to keep [Moriaen's] heritage." But after the Black Knight slays fifteen of the nobles "who wished to deny him his inheritance," the others quickly "sought mercy"

*and yielded up to him all of his lands,
and gave them into the hands of his mother
and they became her men and from that time on
they received their lands in fief from her.*

(l. 4619–22)

We thus see a fully operational feudalism in Moorland, where Moriaen's mother is "proclaimed queen/of all the land" (l. 4624–5). The grand fourteen-day nuptial celebrations that follow are little different from great-occasion fêting and feasting in Europe's courts, with food aplenty; music, entertainment, and heralds; rich gifts of horses, clothing, and treasure; and "great largesse" (l. 4629–44).

At its end, after all the invited nobles have departed, Walewein, Lanceloet, and Perchevael make ready to return to King Artur's court, "for it was drawing nigh to Pentecost," when Lanceloet's son, Galaats (Galahad), the Grail Knight of the Old French *Prose Lancelot* cycle, would arrive at court and be knighted, signaling the start of the Grail Quest proper (l. 4661, 4665–7). Standing between the romance *Perchevael* and the *Queeste vanden Grale*, Moriaen's narrative obligingly prepares to segue into the next romance of the *Compilation*.³⁶

Acglavael, Moriaen, and the new Black Queen remain in the land of the Blacks, an intact family at last. Europe has thus lost Acglavael, an Arthurian knight, to the great outside. Like *Parzival*, where Feirefiz leaves Europe for a country of black folk – India – *Moriaen's* Europe is also evacuated of its sole black knight, as Moriaen returns home. Moriaen's home – what we see of it – looks a lot like Europe in chivalry, customs, values, feudalism, and even Christianity – almost an extension of Europe, but with black folk in it. The land of the Blacks and the land of European Arthurian knights are equal and alike, it seems, but separate.

The theorized universalism of chivalry, feudalism, and customs, in both *Parzival* and *Moriaen*, drives a hypothesis in which the world, for all its exoticism, wealth, and differently colored populations, mirrors Europe, and is in fact (might as well be) Europe. The identification with otherness on display here is thus a structure in which Europe identifies *itself* within the other – an Imaginary identification that is ultimately narcissistic, turning the circuit of attention away from otherness and back to Europe.³⁷

Moreover, the chivalry on display in *Moriaen* seems of an emphatically homosocial kind. In the course of the knights' adventures, a damsel in distress and a princess turn up, but are never named; Moriaen's mother is never named – she's just a "princess" or a "queen" – and even Guenevere, Artur's celebrated queen is never named in this text, which refers to her merely as "Artur's queen." Unlike Feirefiz, Moriaen is given no lady of his own, and Acglavael's attachment to Moriaen's mother seems almost a pro forma plot necessity, occurring offstage, and is never dramatized, even at their reunion, when "each gave the

other their promise in marriage” – an opportunity at last, surely, if ever there was one, for depicting the attachment between this White Knight and his Black Queen (l. 4628).³⁸

The narrative expends several lines expatiating on the queen’s feudal rights and Moriaen’s dispatch of the lords who are tardy to surrender their usurped privileges, but no lines at all on the reunion of two betrothed lovers who spent twenty-four years apart. Instead, joy of a generalized, communal kind is perfunctorily invoked – “There was great joy and celebration there” – before the narrative quickly switches its attention to the feasting. Women, it seems, even exotic black women who prove irresistible to Arthurian knights, are shunted to the wings. For a more realized literary portrayal of a Black Queen, we must return to Wolfram’s *Parzival*.

Black Queen/White Queen: The Geo-Erotics of Virtue, Flesh, and Epidermal Race

What difference does gender make to color? Or, to put it more precisely, if chivalry builds a bridge across epidermal race for elite men in literature, how do black women – who are palpably not knights – figure in the global chivalry theorized in romances like *Moriaen* and *Parzival*? In *Moriaen*, the black queen is presumably Christian, like her son – the text registers no religious difference for Moorland, nor are objections raised to the marriage between her and Acglavael – so Moriaen’s mother faces no barrier by virtue of alien religion. Indeed, the universality of chivalric values enables this princess to become a queen, and regain social legitimacy and her economic rights. There’s little to indicate, however, that Acglavael’s return is driven by longing of the kind, say, that Gahmuret professes to feel for Belakane after his abandonment of her. Acglavael aspires to remedy his wrongs, and win the grace of Moriaen’s mother, he says, but any suggestion that *fin’amor* is the driving force, rather than contrition at his chivalric inadequacies, must issue from readerly optimism.

Courtly love – a key animating fiction in chivalric culture and ideology – is not fleshed out in *Moriaen* in the way that it is in *Parzival*. The depiction of Moriaen’s mother is so sketchy that the focus of courtliness lies in the chivalric behavior of two men, Moriaen and Acglavael, which restores her rights, elevates her to queenship, and ensures that marriage to an Arthurian knight is the proper outcome.

What emotional current exists flows from the black princess to Acglavael. She is roused by Acglavael’s “great courtesy” and beauty (“he was so fair to look upon”): “attracted to his most handsome appearance,/a maiden fell in love with him:/that was my mother, by my faith,” as Moriaen tells it (l. 648–9). There’s a hint of Acglavael’s desire in that “she did *his* will” after what sounds like courtly flirtation (“So far went the matter . . . through their words”), so that she “gave herself to him” after the precautionary initiative of securing a mutual pledge of troth:

*So far went the matter
between them through their words
that she did his will
on account of his great courtesy,
and because he was so fair to look upon.*

*She was ill paid for this,
and she suffered grievously for it.
Each pledged the other his troth
before she gave herself to him.*

(l. 651–9)

In contrast to the chaste recitation of the facts by the son of this sexual union in *Moriaen* (we may sympathize, of course, with *Moriaen*'s reluctance to elaborate on the primal scene of his conception, but the text also forgoes subsequent opportunities to portray a strong reunion between *Acglavael* and the Black Queen), *Parzival* shows us that courtly love is alive and well between the races, when a White Knight decides to go native with the local lovelies in *Zazamanc*, in the person of its Black Queen.

Intriguingly, Wolfram never explicitly acknowledges *Belakane*'s beauty, though the narrative takes note of her body: Her black hand disarms and undresses *Gahmuret*; her black image is etched against white samite on her banners; and tears flow down from her eyes (Cyril Edwards 20, 15, 14; Lachmann I: 80, I: 58, I: 54). The romance seems almost afraid to *say* that she's beautiful, repeatedly turning instead to her color – if anything is brighter than the day, the queen does not resemble it; unlike the dewy rose, her splendor was black in hue – as if dutiful to the discourse on blackness it inherits in the thirteenth century. Or, as *Jerold Frakes* puts it, “*Belakane*'s beauty is described in terms of how it does *not* conform to the norm” (82).

And yet, mysteriously, *Gahmuret*'s desire for *Belakane* is powerful, rapid, and intense. It renders him sleepless at night, and causes him to swoon again and again, writhing and twisting like a bundle of willow twigs, his joints cracking, so that the night feels interminable, all the way till dawn breaks (Cyril Edwards 16–17; Lachmann I: 66). White is drawn to black, however taboo this attraction may be, and even if the discourse on blackness might judge it an inappropriate reaction. In the twelfth century, *Peter Abelard*'s letter to his wife *Heloise*, as we saw in Chapter 1, reminds us that where *black women* are concerned, a counterdiscourse on blackness existed which admitted the desirability of black female partners for erotic purposes. In female, sexed-and-bodied form, color can afford special pleasures to be enjoyed and relished in privacy by a man:

it often happens that the flesh of black women is all the softer to touch . . . and for this reason the pleasure they give is greater and more suitable for private than for public enjoyment, and their husbands take them into a bedroom to enjoy them rather than parade them before the world.

(*Radice* 140)³⁹

We see the narrative gaze in *Parzival* follow *Gahmuret* and *Belakane* all the way into their bedchamber and onto their well-adorned bed with its sable coverlet: There, *Gahmuret* “was disarmed by the queen's black hand . . . [and] intimate hospitality was granted him in increased measure. . . Then the queen practiced noble, sweet love, as did *Gahmuret*, her heart's beloved. Yet their skins were unlike” (Cyril Edwards 20; Lachmann I: 80). Fascination with the erotic contrast of skin, in this most intimate of encounters – black on white/white on black – may lend a certain piquancy to that noble, sweet love practiced by the queen and *Gahmuret* which readers are invited to imagine. With satisfaction, the text adds a little later that she who was a maiden before was now a woman (Cyril Edwards 21; Lachmann I: 82).

Albertus Magnus' *Quaestiones super De animalibus* helps to supply a physiognomic and humoral basis for the gravitational pull exerted by black women (like Belakane) on white men (like Gahmuret):

For black women are hotter [a reference to the classical and medieval theory of humors], and most of all dusky women, who are the sweetest to have sex with, so lechers say . . . because the mouth of their vulva is temperate and gently embraces the penis.

(quoted by Biller, "Black Women" 486)

Peter Biller ("Black Women") thoughtfully surveys the long trail of scientific texts from antiquity – translated, annotated, interpreted, modified, and taught in university lectures and curricula – though which black women arrive in the Middle Ages as sexually superior objects of desire. We may also note the power and appeal of taboo: If black is the color of sin, shame, sinful thoughts, and unchastity, as *Parzival's* narrator says it is, the blackness of Belakane's skin, so frequently pointed to by the text, is exciting by virtue of its embodying the forbidden. The excitement is intensified when the color of the forbidden, on female skin, is indivisible from a woman of such chastity, sweetness, and nobility as Belakane, a woman who is the very opposite of her enticing skin, inside her skin. Belakane literally embodies the most exciting contradictions.

Wolfram's *Parzival* carefully explains, however, that Belakane's allure is *internal*, not fleshly: It's her womanliness, great loyalty, womanly woman's ways, womanly and loyal disposition, chastity, good company, womanly bearing, true chastity, pure nature, sweetness, and nobility that draw Gahmuret like a magnet (Cyril Edwards 14, 24, 39; Lachmann I: 54, I: 96, I: 154). His attraction is swift and powerful, rendering him helpless, so we must concede great discernment to this White Knight's powers of interior inspection.

A victim of the lover's malady, Gahmuret is rendered sleepless and writhing, swooning and twisting, with his joints cracking all night long till morning all because of Belakane's *virtue*. Taking the text at its word, we see that color in female sexed-and-bodied form can also be bridged, if the black woman is virtuous, womanly, pure, sweet, and courtly, as Belakane unquestionably shows herself to be. This Black Queen's example attests that in matters of love, (feminine) *virtue* trumps (a woman's) *color*.

Sex, too, trumps *color*. Belakane's virtue would be more convincing as the sole factor in the White Knight's mesmerized passion if the text did not so often refer to her flesh and its sumptuous color, so vividly embodying all that good Christians must not touch or handle. Because the text *does* refer time and again to Belakane's dark flesh – always discreetly, without giving itself away, without disclosing the kind of voyeurism it allows itself in gazing on white women's flesh, like Herzeloide's – we may be forgiven the suspicion that the Black Queen's internal virtue alone is not the sole powerful lure for Gahmuret. Gahmuret, a white Christian European knight, gets to touch and handle the dark flesh of an exquisitely sweet, virginal queen of great virtue – and also become, in the process, fabulously wealthy, with treasures and land, as the King of Zazamanc.

Belakane too is powerfully drawn to the White Knight, so that the lovers' passion is exquisitely mutual. Black is also drawn to white, but here we are to understand that this is normal, since white is the default category of beauty, and Gahmuret is described, like Acglavael, as handsome, and Belakane is described as a *connoisseuse* of the beauty of white-skinned men, whom she had seen before (Cyril Edwards 14; Lachmann I: 54). True to the best conventions of courtly love, an intense, almost unbearable desire instantly pounces as

they gaze at each other, the woman gazing externally at male beauty, and the man gazing (ostensibly) at interior female goodness (Cyril Edwards 14; Lachmann I: 54).

Belakane's lack of Christianity is a barrier, of course, but the text devises an ad hoc solution when it tells us that her chastity was a pure baptism in and of itself, and so are the tears which flow from her eyes down her body, an effluvia likened to baptismal waters (Cyril Edwards 14; Lachmann I: 54). These makeshift modes of virtual baptism suffice for a sexual and marital union between the Black Queen and White Knight, but can conveniently be overlooked when Gahmuret needs a reason for abandoning his pregnant wife (whom he knows is pregnant, since his letter to her details an extensive genealogy for his unborn child). When Gahmuret needs a reason to be gone, Belakane is really still a heathen, despite her virtue and her 'baptismal' tears.⁴⁰

By contrast to Belakane, the two White Queens who vie for Gahmuret on his return to Europe are not characterized as particularly virtuous. Through her messengers, Ampflise, the Queen of France, vaunts her superior claims to Gahmuret as his earlier love and his lady, and boasts of her greater beauty, power, and skills as a lover compared with Herzeloide (Cyril Edwards 38, 34; Lachmann I: 134; I: 150).

Herzeloide, the Queen of Wales, is not especially virtuous either; she claims Gahmuret against Ampflise on the basis of a chivalric technicality, and dismisses Belakane on the basis that the Black Queen is not a Christian (Cyril Edwards 41; Lachmann I: 160). Though a virgin, Herzeloide woos Gahmuret aggressively, with "ruthless determination to secure him as a husband . . . ignoring the scruples he expresses and the claims of the other two women in his life" (Gibbs 17). She proffers a kiss (of welcome), has Gahmuret sit close by her, touches his bruises with her own white hands, and argues religion mightily as a weapon against Belakane (Cyril Edwards 36, 38, 41; Lachmann I: 142, I: 144, I: 152, I: 160).

Gahmuret, however, is shown to be far less quick to respond to Herzeloide than to the Black Queen. It is Herzeloide who finds him pleasing to look at, so that love oppressed her; she openly tells Gahmuret that she longs for his love (Cyril Edwards 36, 41; Lachmann I: 144, I: 160). In response, the knight tells Herzeloide he can only accept her hospitality kiss if she kisses all the other lords too, and she accedes to this condition, kissing those she finds worthy and of sufficient rank (Cyril Edwards 36; Lachmann I: 144). At Kanvoleis, Gahmuret is shown to be quietly dejected and depressed, his heart wounded, troubled by his longing for his black queen and his wish to return home, and also by his brother's death (Cyril Edwards 39; Lachmann I: 154).

When it is clear that Herzeloide has won him over Ampflise, we are told that grief still causes Gahmuret pain, and he takes the precaution of negotiating a prenuptial contract with Herzeloide, to be allowed to go tourneying once a month (this actually being the reason, he now says, that he left Belakane) – and threatening to run away again if he's not allowed to tourney – before he finally accepts the lands and the royal maiden (Cyril Edwards 42; Lachmann I: 166). We see that the "passion-driven twenty-four hour courtship of Gahmuret and Belakane may be contrasted . . . with Gahmuret's later marriage to Herzeloide, where there is no depiction of excessive passion, but rather an almost excessive rationality, such that they [must] take their case for and against marriage (Gahmuret opposes it) to an arbiter" (Frakes 85).

It is a delicious romance conceit, of course, that a handsome knight habituated to amassing lands and women (Ampflise also offers a crown, scepter, and land) must be persuaded by slow degrees and burdensome arguments to accept a radiantly fair, sexually

aggressive virgin queen and all her kingdom, and no doubt *Parzival's* readers enjoy the conceit (Cyril Edwards 33; Lachmann I: 132). We are told that Gahmuret's sadness and grief finally vanish when Herzeloide is bereft of her maidenhood, and we're treated to a lively description of their mouths kissing and the renewal of the knight's high spirits; we note that Gahmuret is now no longer referred to as the King of Zazamanc, but only as "the Angevin" and Herzeloide's beloved (Cyril Edwards 43; Lachmann I: 168).

Given Gahmuret's history of infidelity, readers may cynically take his avowal of deep attachment to Belakane with a barrel of salt. After all, this is a man whose heart still lifts at the mention of Ampflise, whom he says is his true lady: Only the verdict of knights, he avows, keeps him in Herzeloide's land (Cyril Edwards 42; Lachmann I: 166). Perhaps we are meant to imagine Gahmuret as a weak-willed, handsome, initially landless opportunist, who means what he says when he says it, yet whose behavior in the sphere of love shows that he moves on quickly.

In the sphere of war, as we have seen, his actions show a continuity of devotion to the Caliph of Baghdad, but his allegiance to women is shorter-lived. By way of excuse, the romance refers to Gahmuret's tacked-on, putative faery ancestry: His is a nature and lineage that compels him to love or desire love, the text says with sly charm (Cyril Edwards 42, 371 n.42; Lachmann I: 164).

Still, of the three queens in Gahmuret's short life, Belakane is the only beloved for whom Gahmuret declares longing, desire, and grief at being away from her (Cyril Edwards 39, 41; Lachmann I: 154, I: 160). Though he finds joy with Herzeloide and his sadness disappears, there are no equal declarations of powerful passion and overwhelming desire for his White Queen as there are for Belakane. Albrecht Classen exclaims at how "profound and entirely unorthodox" Gahmuret's remarkable erotic relationship with Belakane is (88).

To Gahmuret, therefore, should go the last word on black-white interracial marriage in thirteenth-century medieval literature: Many an ignorant man believes that it was Belakane's blackness that drove him away, Gahmuret says to Kaylet, his kinsman, when they are in Kanvoleis, but he would rather look on her dark flesh than on the sun (Cyril Edwards 39; Lachmann 156).⁴¹

Mixed Babes and Haunting Presences: A Lump of Flesh, Piebald Offspring, the Giants' Infants, and the Return of the Black Knight

Like *Parzival* in the early thirteenth century, the *King of Tars*, a fourteenth-century Middle English romance, also highlights a black-white, interracial-interreligious marriage – a fertile union that also produces offspring – but in the English text, the man is the black heathen Saracen, and the woman is the white Christian European.⁴² I've discussed at length the race and gender politics of this miscegenating pair (see *Empire of Magic*, chapter 4), and will confine myself here to noting primarily how much more conventional this romance's epidermal understanding is than *Parzival's* or *Moriaen's* in addressing the color line.

No special effort is expended to suggest the allure of dark flesh, or an alternative interior beauty paired with exterior blackness. Instead, the heroine, a nameless princess of Tars, is conventionally "white as the feather of a swan" (l. 12), with a complexion rosy as a "blossom

on a briar,” with the traditional grey eyes (l. 15, 941), sloping shoulders, and white neck (l. 16) of normative female beauty in medieval European literature – an image found in rhetorical treatises and repeated ad infinitum in manuscript illuminations.

It is thus no surprise that the Sultan of Damascus would demand this fair-skinned European beauty in connubial exchange for peace with her father, the King of Tars.⁴³ Nor does it surprise that the Sultan’s own color is conventionally registered as “foul” (l. 393), black and loathly (l. 928), and hideous. By the fourteenth century, as Madeline Caviness points out, white has become the normative, definitive color of Latin Christian European identity, and, as Devisse and others point out, black has become established as the color of torturers of Christ and the Baptist, and the color of hell and the devil.

The exploration of what whiteness can mean – an interest, we saw, in *Parzival*’s early thirteenth-century characterization of Gahmuret – is thus superfluous. Whiteness can be counted on to deliver its racial-religious referent/s dependably. We see this highlighted in a theatrical way when the princess of Tars, in an unnerving plot twist, acts out the rituals of her conversion to Islam. Her conversion is stagey and elaborate, spun out in detail: The princess is made to kneel down and disavow the Christian God and faith; she verbally requests religious instruction in the new confession, makes an avowal of faith, ceremoniously kisses all the “Saracen idols” in a row, learns heathen prayers, and “said them openly” (l. 484–506). Though the narrative tells us that her actions are deceptive and she continued to pray to Jesus in her heart, the princess’ simulated conversion has disturbed scholars, who have faulted her at the very least for hypocrisy.

This simulacrum of conversion is, indeed, deeply troubling on different levels. Heroines who bravely choose torture and death, over even pretend conversion, populate Christian hagiography, and Christian audiences are accustomed to admire the courage of honest martyrs. Furthermore, if we understand religion as an adherence to theological law, that is witnessed by conformity to a set of communal customs, gestures, and outward practices (an individual’s private intent being otherwise unverifiable, as we said in Chapter 2), there’s also little, visibly, to distinguish between the truth of an outward conversion to Islam and the truth of a supposed inner fidelity to Christianity.

Except, of course, for skin color. Because the princess’ skin stays white and fair from beginning to end, never vacillating at any time, the romance is able to signal the continuity and stability of her Christian religious identity. If the princess prays like a Muslim, follows Islamic customs and law, and openly professes to believe in “Mahoun” (l. 847), there is nothing else to distinguish her from faithful, practicing Muslims, *except her color*. In a narrative sequence where acts are disturbingly disjointed from their inner reality, and words are uttered in order *not* to be believed, the guarantee of meaning via the witness of color is deeply reassuring.

The reliability of color in signaling true identity is affirmed again later with the somatic transformation of the Sultan, who changes from “blac & lopy” to “Al white” without taint at *his* baptism, when he is granted a new epidermal race as part and parcel of a new Christian religious identity (l. 928–30). (Thereafter, the newly whitened Christian Sultan, at the behest of his pious wife, conducts crusading warfare against all Saracens who refuse conversion, behaving like a typical *chanson* leader, a veritable Charlemagne or Richard Lionheart.) For this fourteenth-century romance, whiteness as an index of piety, aesthetics, and Christian identity has become the *sine qua non* of how to tell the truth of someone’s interior being. We are now a long way from Gahmuret and *Parzival*.

Before the Sultan's christening, the fertile sexual union of this black–white couple also produces offspring: not a whimsically piebald baby like Feirefiz, who bears race-and-religion on his surface, or a single-color child like Moriaen, black without but white within (belying his skin, Moriaen is a Christian and virtually European knight), but instead an inanimate, insensate wad of flesh, without blood, bone, limbs, or face – a true monstrosity that is, mercifully, not alive (l. 579–82).

Causative attribution is uncertain. The fleshy lump is the physical embodiment of an obscene union in which a Christian woman has done the unthinkable, either by going through public acts of conversion to Islam, or by joining with a Muslim without first converting him to her religion, or both (l. 604–5). Is it the Muslim man's (de)generative seed that fashions the monster which is birthed? Or does the terrifying spectacle of a Christian princess's avowed conversion to an infernal religion issue, *par consequence*, a fleshly horror, whatever her denial of the validity of her acts? Or is it the intimate metaphysical mingling of the warring essences of Islam and Christianity in the conjugal bed that so misshapes the infant flesh?

Despite the ostensible undecidability of cause and effect, the explicit lesson in this representational script of hideous birth is that religion can instruct biology – the lesson, also, in the Sultan's transubstantiation from black to white. As we saw in Chapters 1 and 2, political theology can understand religion to predispose somatic race: Jews, after all, were said to have a unique stench, to bleed congenitally and require Christian blood, to have a distinctive phenotype, and even to sport horns and tails. Cultural fantasy obligingly appends epidermal transformation and monstrous birth also as vocabularies manifesting the power of religion – power implicit in religious essences that are able to manipulate and instruct ontology.

When the fleshy wad is baptized by a priest and given the name “John” (on the feast day of the Baptist), it instantly transforms into a little infant, “with life and limb and face” as well as “skin and flesh,” an infant who is now conventionally the fairest child ever born (l. 775–6, 778, 781). Not only does the sacrament of baptism possess a spiritual essence with the power to reshape ontology and fleshly matter but, we must assume, baptism also has the power to confer a divine soul in the process of making a human being.⁴⁴

The lesson of progeny, in this romance, is that in matters of religious race, a child figures as the ground of contestation: not only in how his fate is decided – will he be a boy martyr slaughtered by the Jews, or will he lead Christians ringingly into a new future? – but also in his very flesh, which itself can manifest the contest of religions.

But the most whimsical illustration of how biracial–interreligious sexual mingling manifests itself on the flesh of offspring is no doubt the piebald Feifefiz, a literary curiosity about whom much has been written. Having someone's skin be a canvas that manifests his birth history and inner nature is a playful authorial decision that proffers lots of cues to an audience. Literally a black-and-white foil to his white-skinned, Grail Knight half-brother Parzival, Feifefiz is ably recognized by critics as a character whose color is “a mark of difference against and through whom the image of an ideal knight, the Christian and white Parzival, is developed” (Lampert, “Race” 405).

To be an adequate counterpart for his brother, Feifefiz is allowed many strong character qualities. The piebald knight displays great martial prowess and chivalric magnanimity, and like a true cosmopolitan, *he speaks French* (Cyril Edwards 311; Lachmann II: 272). He has a line of successful female conquests: Like his father, queens are eager to give him lands, love,

treasure, and themselves. He is a king of lands in his own right, and arrives as the leader of twenty-five armies, assembled from such far-flung, diverse territories that none of these armies understood the others' speech; indeed, so many different lands served him that the constituent populations were not just Moors and blacks, but included Saracens of dissimilar aspect (Cyril Edwards 308; Lachmann II: 260).

This worldly, sophisticated romance knows Saracens come in all visages and guises, and speak many different tongues. Most of all, the text is just agog at Feirefiz's massive wealth: Narrative attention is glued to the display of dazzling gemstones and finery that accompany Feirefiz, his largesse in distributing treasure, and his unchallenged status as the wealthiest person who sat at the Round Table (Cyril Edwards 307, 308, 311, 316, 317, 318, 319, 324, 325, 328; Lachmann II: 258, II: 270, II: 292, II: 294, II: 300, II: 302, II: 320, II: 326, II: 338).

This parti-colored knight, true to his skin, is of mixed character. He is heathen, of course, and described as proud. Indeed, "wealthy" and "heathen" are the two choice epithets ubiquitously attached to him, raised by the narrative as often as his peculiar dermal coloration. Jerold Frakes additionally observes that Feirefiz's "lust" for the radiantly fair, lustrous Grail Maiden Repanse de Schoye makes him over into the male equivalent of the enamored Saracen princess who is a staple of European romance and *chanson de geste* – she who eagerly forsakes kith, kin, and creed, betraying all in a heartbeat, because she hopelessly loves a Christian European knight (who is sometimes a knight she has never met, and whom she can't tell apart from the other knights in the vicinity).⁴⁵

Feirefiz willingly undergoes baptism in order to attain Repanse. There is a comic scene in which he mistakenly thinks baptism involves martial combat (which fires his eagerness), and must have his misapprehension corrected. Critics like to pounce on this scene as a display of poor racial politics and bad taste. Frakes sums up the critical opinion on "Feirefiz's lewd shallowness":

In reviewing several scholars' evaluations of Feirefiz's baptism as shallow, external, flippant, and motivated strictly by lust, thinly disguised as (if) *Minne*, Henry Kratz comments: "When Feirefiz is baptized, he treats the whole thing as a joke." Hans-Joachim Koppitz also imputes humor to this construction of naïve and shallow blacks/Muslims: "[Wolfram] obviously has fun with the figure of Feirefiz."

(Frakes 86)

Additionally, Lisa Lampert points out that "Feirefiz's rapid conversion stands in stark contrast to the slow education in religion through which so many key characters guide Parzival" (405).

Without a doubt, a piebald knight allows a narrator significant rein for playful mischief. Feirefiz is so smitten with Repanse that his white parts blanch, and turn even paler (Cyril Edwards 339; Lachmann II: 380)! The text also refuses to say how Feirefiz's black-and-white dappling is patterned, so that some critics believe he is speckled; others imagine him with a white surface and black markings (like writing on parchment, an analogy the narrative supplies), or with a black surface and white markings; or, like Jerold Frakes, they believe him to be striped like a zebra.

The text's favorite image for Feirefiz's intermingled black-and-white is the magpie: and, indeed, it's likely that animals and animal husbandry supply Wolfram the idea of mixed coloration. Besides magpies, dappled horses, dogs, and cats are a common enough sight across the centuries – yet biogenetics has shown us that piebald humans are also attested, if

rare.⁴⁶ Feirefiz's piebaldism thus is not merely a fantasy invention shorn of all ties to reality – like pigs with wings – but textual reticence makes the bemusing fascination of Feirefiz's coloring a tease, playfully inviting speculation.

Whatever the impetus for Feirefiz' conversion to Christianity – often, medieval literature doesn't seem too particular about what the motivating reasons for conversion are, so long as conversion does in fact take place – Feirefiz turns into a paragon of Christian missionary zeal once he and Repanse move to India. With the plot closure of their removal overseas, Europe is thus emptied of its one black-and-white knight: Like Moriaen's departure and return to Moorland, Feirefiz's departure leaves Europe whole, and pristine once again in the European imagination.

In India, Feirefiz becomes the romance equivalent of the apostle Thomas, and cultural fantasy's stand-in for the historical Nestorian missionizing that took place on the subcontinent over centuries. Feirefiz's change at his baptism is thus *internal* – unlike the *King of Tars'* theatrically bleached Sultan of Damascus – but the change is equally effective and permanent, granting him entry into a new religious race, and transforming him into a missionary for Christianity. The converted Feirefiz's overseas actions thus fulfill what Gahmuret's pretext for leaving Belakane had *claimed* to want: conversion of the heathen. Like a latter-day Paul, Feirefiz begins an epistolary mission, sending letters all over India to tell people about the Christian way of life (Cyril Edwards 344–5; Lachmann II: 400).

Feirefiz and Repanse also become the genealogical birth parents of Prester John, the legendary Christian priest-king of India whose mid-twelfth century creation is thus ingeniously supplied with an early thirteenth-century prequel. I have written a good deal about Prester John in *Empire of Magic* (chapter 5) and also in Chapters 3 and 6 here, but it is worth noting for the moment how Feirefiz's trajectory of journeying – he starts in Africa, and ends in India – reverses the trajectory of the Prester John legend (John is found in India in the twelfth century, but by the fourteenth is relocated to Africa, where he begins to be sought).

This back-and-forth circuit that links Africa and India registers well the close associations of these lands, whose trade is documented in the archives of the Cairo Geniza, and in the Christian imaginary of missionary endeavor (see for example Goitein and Friedman). An icon created out of the “thought-world of the crusades” (Hamilton 256), Prester John of India will be eagerly awaited by the militants of the Fifth Crusade at Damietta in Egypt, later in the thirteenth century.

I've argued that Prester John is the moving figure of European desire in the Middle Ages, and where John goes, Europe is not far behind. Here, a brilliant thirteenth-century German romance represents John as really three-fourths European, so that the absorbing Western fantasy of a fabulously wealthy and powerful Oriental Christian potentate out there, beckoning Europe to come find him, is thoughtfully supplied a retroactive prequel that explains John's Christianity as *really originating in Europe after all*. John is not a Nestorian, nor any other heretical Eastern Christian, but the genuine article, a Latin Christian priest-king seeded by Europe out of Africa through the agnatic line.

The story that begins with Gahmuret thus seeds a fantasy of colonization that makes Indian lands really Europe's, through the paternal line. India – also known as Tribalibot, in this romance – is given to Feirefiz by his erstwhile (abandoned) lover and patroness, Queen Secundille, who conveniently dies, and is a land therefore legitimately ruled by Feirefiz and his radiant, lustrous European queen, the former Grail Maiden. Like the India of the

twelfth-century Prester John legend, Tribalbot-India's rivers are encrusted with precious gemstones instead of gravel – a prize indeed. And here, too, Prester John – who is three-fourths European and all Latin Christian – figures the peregrinatory power of European desire: a desire birthing the tale of a sojourning European who sires John's father out of pliant, cooperative mother Africa.

Rewriting history, cultural fantasy offers global Christianity as emanating from Europe, not the Nestorian East, routing that Christianity through African darkness and heathenism, to emerge into the shining future in India in the form of the Prester John legend, a legend with substantial power to invite European exploration, settlement, and conquest for more than half a millennium. Out of the marriage of a European knight-adventurer and an African queen come the wonders proffered by the (now Latin) patriarch of Asia.

My discussion of raced offspring in medieval literature would be sorely remiss if it did not consider the black giant infants who make an odd appearance in the Middle English *Sultan of Babylon* (and the Middle English *Sir Ferumbras*) in the early fifteenth century. While gigantic black Saracens are a familiar *topos* in romance and *chanson de geste*, the *Sultan of Babylon* (*Sowdane of Babylone*) – perhaps the liveliest constituent in a well-known cluster of Charlemagne romances in Middle English representing rewritten versions (freely adapted “translations”) of Old French *chansons de geste* – presents us with twin *babies*: the infants of a black giantess, Barrok (as the *Sultan* names her) or Amyote (as *Ferumbras* names her), and a black giant Saracen king of Ethiopia, Astrogotte, who has the head of a boar (l. 346–7, 352–3, 2939–44).⁴⁷

Astrogotte, the father of the twins, is a conventional black Saracen giant, complete with animal characteristics to suggest his quasihuman, subnormal, heathen, foreign, monstrous nature. Barrok, the mother of the twins, is a little more unusual, since heathen black giantesses do not abound in medieval literature. Most unusual, of course, are these extraordinary, enormous, black giant babes. Indeed, the remarkable presence of these black infants in a *family* of giants intimates that the giants which are so common in medieval European romances are perhaps not singular aberrations *contra naturam*, as we are wont to imagine, but may represent whole *races* of giants, races more fully attested in Arabic than in European romance (where giants usually materialize as singular émigrés).

The massive black newborns, seven months old and fourteen feet long, are found after their parents are killed, but they do not survive, since they are nurselings unable to eat solid food – “neither butter nor bread” – and lack a mother to nurse them (l. 3020–3, 3031–4). Before their death, however, Charlemagne has them christened, optimistically naming them “Roland” and “Oliver” after his most famous knights, so that they would be mighty men of hand (l. 3027–8).

But why would a late medieval English romance conjure up a pair of giant black infant siblings? A lively, engaging text, the *Sultan of Babylon* also energetically conjures up other inexplicable strangenesses.

For instance: Early on, the romance presents us with a scene of rapturous celebration among the bivouacked and encamped Saracen armies after they have captured, sacked, and despoiled the city of Rome. The Sultan, Laban, and his son, Ferumbras, propitiate and make offerings to their heathen gods, burning frankincense whose smoky fumes linger strongly and long (l. 679–82). The festivities are triumphant and raucous, filling the air, ear, and nostrils, and making for “a fearful fascination” (Lupack 3): The men boisterously blow horns of brass and drink the blood of beasts, along with milk and honey that was royal and

good; serpents are fried in oil and served to the Sultan (l. 683–8). In the midst of rowdy feasting, imbibing, and rejoicing; amid the brass horns, the din, and the smoky fumes, the men bellow out, “Antrarian, antrarian” (l. 689).

What is “Antrarian?” Why does the text pool attention around the Saracen army’s shout, by explicitly telling us in the next line that the word “signified ‘Joy generale’” (l. 690) – that it signified communal joy? “Antrarian,” Jeffrey Jerome Cohen responds, is “A nonsense word . . . introduced and glossed as if it were *Sarrazinois* – that is, as if the Saracens possessed a unifying, signifying language” (“Saracen Enjoyment” 130). Cohen’s suggestion is part of a lucid and persuasive article on medieval race and racism which cites Alain Grosrichard’s remark that “the West as a political system relies on a fantasy of a distant and despotic *subject supposed to enjoy*” (“Saracen Enjoyment” 130).

Cohen thus offers the *Sultan* as an example of how literature in the West dreams up Orientalist fantasies of Asiatic pleasures, complete with made-up nonsense words such as “Antrarian.” This is an unexceptionable and flawless reading, entirely legitimate and soundly grounded in a critical practice that remains of significant value: Cohen is absolutely correct.

Yet, what *else* might we find if we follow, offshore and out of England, the word *Antrarian*?

Antara ibn Shaddad, an African–Arab cultural hero equivalent in stature and fame to King Arthur or Charlemagne in the medieval Latin West, is the celebrated protagonist of one of the most famous, and largest, corpora of popular and literary Arabic cycles of heroic romances, accumulated through some eight or nine centuries of oral and literary narration. Stories of Antara, the “black knight,” are still recounted today, sometimes by an *Antari* specializing in the aggregated corpus of the *Antarabya*, and are cited by Africanists and African Americanists such as W. E. B. Du Bois (4, 33, 104, 108).

A pre-Islamic warrior-poet of the sixth century CE, about whom little is known originally beyond the tradition that he was supposedly born in slavery, his mother an Ethiopian slave and his father an Arab prince, and who rose to become a towering hero of gigantic chivalry, courage, and prowess, Antara became the hero of his people, the Banu Abs, and was affectionately dubbed the “Father of Knights” in the Islamic Near East and Africa. In final literary compilations of the *Sirat Antar* (more than 5,000 pages in printed volumes, with the earliest extant 1466 manuscript of 919 folios representing less than half the total narrative material), Antara is diversely the foe, ally, friend, or rival of Greeks, Africans, Arabs, Franks, and crusaders.

Featuring tournaments; single combats; service to women, widows, and the poor; chivalry; feasts; adventures; extraordinary, named horses; heroic vaunting; the presence of ladies; giants; magical devices; the conquest of cities (including Rome); warriors who are poets; and boisterous humor, the expansive narrative tree of the *Antarabya*, with variant plot endings and episodes, has certain consistent features. *Antara’s blackness of skin* is one focal point, for instance; another is his attribution of his prowess – his skill in the sword – to his lineage through his African mother (who is variously characterized as a slave or as a relative of the Ethiopian/Abyssinian *Negus*).

Worlds secreted inside the *Sultan of Babylon* delicately peel open when we see that its merrymaking Saracen armies are shouting out the name of their semilegendary hero, *Antara* – just as King Arthur’s men might call out “Arthur!” or Charlemagne’s men “Montjoie! Saint Denis!” – raucously and expectantly, calling for stories from the *Antarabya*, as they feast in communal triumph and joy.

The black knight himself in one of his vaunts encourages men to summon his great legend by name – “If you call aloud the name of Antar. . . /all will take you for a hero” (Norris 215) – a legend appositely recalled during feasting and celebration, social rituals at which stories are also retold with joy in the Latin West, whether in the Anglo-Saxon mead hall or called forth by Arthur’s demand for a tale or adventure before the king sits down to his meat. *Antrarian* – the text winks – signifies communal joy and delight, “Joy generale.”

Following the trace of a famous name out of Africa and Arabia, we also glimpse a discontinuous tracery of global stories whose vestiges alight on some of the *Sultan*’s characteristic and striking features. Like the Saracen Floripas in the *Sultan*, who chooses the Christian Guy of Burgundy as her lover and converts to Christianity, “Christian girls” in Arabic romances and heroic epics act “blatantly to seduce Muslims . . . [and] must be converted” (Lyons I: 40). The Hilali cycle (*Taghribat Bani Hilal*) denigrates “Christian dogs who worship stones” (Lyons I: 43), while the *Sultan*’s Laban, who worships graven idols, denigrates his foes as “Crystyn dogges” (l. 956). Magic devices abound in Arabic cycles, some furnishing food and wine and others simply removing hunger, like Floripas’ girdle which makes Charlemagne’s Peers feel full and revived (Lyons I: 51). In the *Sirat al-Amira Dhat al-Himma*, the Dailamis fight with clubs – so does the giant Alagolofur in the *Sultan*, who brandishes an oak log as his club (l. 2919) – and mountaineers wield sickles to mow down horses (Lyons I: 55); the giantess Barrok in the *Sultan* also wields a sickle to mow down all “like sheep in a fold” (l. 2940–1).

Beautiful, feisty Islamic princesses such as Ain al-Hayat in the *Qissat Firuz Shah b. al-Malik Darab* are larkily casual about killing their own – dispatching a slave and three of her father’s guards (Lyons I: 110) as nimbly as the *Sultan*’s feisty Islamic princess Floripas drowns her governess and dispatches her father’s jailor (l. 1578, 1605–6). Using extravagant diets to characterize a culture or personage, the cycle of Firuz Shah has a sorcerer eat reptiles and drink “noxious brews,” while the *Sultan* has serpents fried in oil served to Laban, who has his men drink the blood of wild beasts to fire them up for battle (l. 1007).

In matters of conversion, the Arab cycles “show a mirror image of the choice between conversion and death offered to Muslims in the Chanson de Geste” (Lyons I: 47), but there, of course, it is non-Muslim heathens, not Saracens, who break or strike their idols (cf. *Sultan* l. 2507). These homologies and echoes are not, of course, exact correspondences; nor are the sociocultural worlds, plots, themes, and characters featured in Arabic romances identical to those in European romance.

But in tracking a word – *Antrarian* – that unwinds back to other cultural networks, we are able to watch the *Sultan of Babylon* signal its participation in transnational circuits of exchange in which stories, traditions, goods, and motifs are globally traded. As a participant in such trading and exchange – and trading and goods, we note, are prime tropes dramatized by this narrative (l. 2863–4, 2885–8) – the romance signals itself as a globalized text marked by crisscrossing international traces, with the global tracery that accrues becoming an important part of the text’s own symbolic capital.⁴⁸

In summoning forth the black knight, Antara, through his name, called out by Saracens in celebratory feasting, we see a method of conjuring up a tracery of foreign worlds by intimating, through a small detail, the great beyond. In that context of evocation, those massive black twins christened “Roland” and “Oliver” by Charlemagne, so that, we are told, they shall become men who are mighty of hand (l. 3029), recall the famously black-skinned Antara and his brother Shaybub, both of gigantic prowess and stature, and who as the

Roland-and-Oliver of the *Sirat Antar* are indeed mighty of hand, amassing some nine volumes of adventures. Even Antara's daughter, the black-skinned Unaytira, is a giantess of sorts, "an exceptionally large baby" able to fight from the age of five and growing into a ferocious fighter as an adult woman, with the Prophet Muhammad himself being "astonished at her size" (Lyons I: III). It is well, perhaps, that the *Sultan's* black Roland and Oliver do not survive.

The Saracens in the *Sultan of Babylon* have their own hero – just as their European counterparts have Roland, Oliver, Charlemagne, and Arthur – and a late medieval English romance is able to materialize Antara as an absent presence, when it has its Saracen armies summon their black knight by name. No piebald Feirefiz this, Antara is an authentically African-Arabian black knight, not a creation of Christian Europe who performs as a human curiosity invented in order to bless the desires and the cultural legends of Europe. Antara, the black knight, is no conscript of Europe at all, but an authentic presence from the global outside that haunts this European text.

The Racial Saint: Transporting Africa to Europe, or, Blackness and the Enigma of Racial Sanctity

Thus far, we've seen varying degrees of conditional acceptance for black African figures who are imagined in literary fiction to possess virtue, courtliness, chivalry, prowess, wealth, and, more rarely, Christianity. As carefully hedged exceptions to the dominant medieval discourse on color, these exemplars grant insight into the conditions imagined as mitigating blackness in circumscribed contexts.

But there remains to discuss the most extraordinary cultural phenomenon of all: the sudden, seemingly inexplicable appearance, in the heartlands of medieval Europe, of a *racial saint* in whom blackness of skin, African physiognomy, and venerable sanctity coincide. Some time after 1220 and before 1250, amidst a virulent, centuries-old discourse on blackness that was still producing horrific images in visual art of vicious black African torturers of Christ, brutal black African executioners of John the Baptist, and grotesque black African devils and demons, a Christian saint who had been venerated for nearly a millennium in the Latin West was suddenly portrayed as a black African knight – in an extraordinary, lifelike statue in Magdeburg Cathedral in eastern Germany, a cathedral where he was the patron saint.

This manifestation of St. Maurice – a martyr who hailed from the third century CE – suddenly as a black African was followed by another image of him, also from the thirteenth century, in a stained glass window at Naumburg Cathedral.⁴⁹ Then, a century later, more images of a black African Maurice arrive in visual art; the images proliferate and diversify in Europe till the seventeenth century, and accrue all manner of iconographic features, in all manner of styles. Catalogued by Gude Suckale-Redlefsen, art objects depicting an African St. Maurice have been found to total nearly 300; they are spread over Germany, Scandinavia, the Czech Republic, Austria, and Poland, as the maps of their diffusion show (Devisse 270–1; Suckale-Redlefsen 16, 17, 158–285; Kaplan, *Rise* 75).

Each instance where a black St. Maurice appeared, of course, had its own matrix of enabling circumstances, but the conjuring up of a black African saint for the first time in Germany remains an astonishing phenomenon. This thirteenth-century black Maurice is a

saint and a *knight* – the most esteemed exemplars of the human in Latin Christian Europe, and the perfect marriage of Christian faith and warrior chivalry, seamlessly meshing secular and sacred prowess.

Unlike the fictitious Prester John, another medieval icon who conjoined military and evangelical goals, Maurice was not an elusive presence hovering somewhere in the great beyond, always anticipated but never materializing, and whose Christianity would likely have been a heretical kind, if he had existed. Nor was Maurice a black knight of the kind selectively depicted in European literary fantasy, like the black Christian knight Moriaen, or the piebald pagan knight Feirefiz – African sojourners who are ejected from Europe at the end of their fictional narratives.

We have seen the carefully hedged creation of such fictional characters: Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival* early in the thirteenth century presented audiences with a pagan black virtuous queen, Belakane, and her son Feirefiz, a pagan black-and-white knight of great wealth and prowess. Later in the century, Dutch literature introduced a sole Christian black knight, Moriaen, riding into Arthurian Europe to seek socioeconomic justice and the reunification of his family. Yet the Black St. Maurice of Magdeburg is uniquely different from such characters – and not only because he arises in the medium of stone, rather than words, which allows him to be encountered by *all* classes of people, illiterates and elites alike.

Maurice was not a pagan, even one of great virtue or virtuosity, and, though a Christian knight like Moriaen, he was more than just a Christian knight: He was a saint and martyr who died for his faith. When he is suddenly seen as a black African, Maurice's hagiography is already a thousand years old, and his solid presence in the heart of medieval Europe is supported by the tangible evidence of his body and relics at Magdeburg Cathedral.

Maurice's hallowed martyrdom in the third century CE is chronicled first by Eucherius, bishop of Lyon, between 443 and 450 in his *Passion of the Martyrs of Agaunum*, and recounted in a contemporary letter to Eucherius' friend, bishop Salvius (Devisse 149; Suckale-Redlefsen 28, 29). But at the time of Eucherius' chronicle, a pilgrimage to the graves of Maurice and his men was "already in full flourish" (Suckale-Redlefsen 28, 29).⁵⁰ The events of the martyrdom are roughly as follows: Maurice, leader of the Christian Theban legion of imperial Rome, and his legionaries were summoned from Thebes in Egypt to Gaul to assist the emperor Maximian in a revolt in the third century CE. Ordered to persecute Christians or to make sacrifices to pagan gods, the Christian legionaries refused and were executed, either in stages (through the Roman system of selective culling known as decimation) or at once.⁵¹ Maurice's fame spread from Agaunum to Tours to Auxerre and thence to the rest of Europe, where, over the centuries, he became the patron saint of various places, occupations, and kingdoms. His feast day in the Roman calendar is September 22.

Unlike fantasy characters in literature, the historical existence of saints is commonly attested by the presence of physical bodies and relics. Maurice's body was transported in 960 CE, at Christmas, from Saint-Maurice-d'Agaune (in Switzerland today), where his martyrdom is traditionally held to have taken place, to the Holy Roman Emperor Otto I at Regensburg, and sent on to Magdeburg (Suckale-Redlefsen 33). Maurice's skull, later found by crusaders in Constantinople and taken to Franconia, was subsequently purchased by Magdeburg in 1220 (Suckale-Redlefsen 41). The tangibility of a saint's presence, anchored by what is believed to be his actual body, places the power, and impact, of a saint in a different register from fictional characters in literature or art.

The lifelike statue in Magdeburg suddenly presented this sainted martyr, along with his body, as a physiognomic black African. The shocking boldness of the Magdeburg invention – a break with tradition lacking precedent – is justly admired by art historians and historians alike. Unlike Nicholas of Verdun's 1181 black Queen of Sheba enamel in an ambo at Klosterneuburg, the sandstone Black St. Maurice does not merely have the iconographic likeness of European physiognomy, accompanied by black skin, but is unmistakably *African* in his facial features. And unlike black Africans portrayed in European art before his appearance, Maurice is no mere African servant or attendant in the retinue of distinguished pagans from the East such as the Queen of Sheba or the Three Magi – he is not just an exotic servitor to mark the exotic provenance of Biblically important heathens.

To sum up the strangeness of this African saint: Maurice is not only black, but he is African; he is not a servant, but an important personage of high status, *a knight*; in fact, he's leader of the Egyptian Theban legion of imperial Rome. He is not a virtuous heathen, like the Black Magus who will appear later, after him, in fourteenth-century visual art: Maurice is a *Christian martyr*, movingly executed with his men for refusing the orders of Rome because of fidelity to Christ.

Maurice's uniqueness also stems from the *timing* of his appearance: A whole century before the Black Magus, and a half-century before St. Gregory the Moor, a black African martyr localized to Cologne, and possibly "modeled on the black Maurice though with a much lower profile" (Kaplan, "Introduction" 22).⁵² Maurice also materializes considerably earlier than the Black Madonnas of Europe – fascinating images not "securely datable to the period before 1500" and that do not display "the characteristic hair, nose, or lips that have long been part of the European stereotype of black African appearance" (Kaplan, "Introduction" 25).

The Black St. Maurice of Magdeburg is so complex and multilayered a puzzle that it attracts continuing, vital scholarship attempting explanations. Who commissioned the statue, and why, and was it that person or persons who decided on the saint's portrayal as a black African? Who sculpted it, and did the sculptor make the decision of an African model? Who was the model? Were there a number of Afro-Europeans (as Paul Kaplan calls them) in medieval Europe ("Introduction" 25)? Ladislav Bugner sums up the enigma succinctly: "A black saint for whites . . . What for?" ("Foreword" 12, 13).

Last of all, and impossible to answer, are the questions that are asked, not top-down, but from the ground up. How might devotees feel, standing or kneeling before a black African saint, in supplication or prayer, in the heart of the Latin West in the thirteenth century? Must we assume that a Black Maurice would have been resisted by the faithful, or might a black African saint have unsuspected kinds of appeal? I end this chapter on epidermal race and Africans by considering answers to the enigma of the Black St. Maurice, and will at the very least attempt to engage speculatively with such questions as cannot ever be properly answered or confirmed, but that we continue, of necessity and curiosity, to ask.

To begin with, the statue itself: Gude Suckale-Redlefsen helps us understand that Maurice's lifelike naturalism is part of a new artistic fashion at the time, with the leaders of the artistic movement being resident in France (a country in which, however, St. Maurice was not portrayed as a black African):

In the thirteenth century, the French were pioneers in the study of nature and its translation into artistic forms, setting an example to Europe. German stonemasons went to serve their

apprenticeship in France, or at least drew their inspiration from French models. Consequently, it is only natural that the first authentic figures of blacks are seen in the cathedral sculpture of France. [However,] all the African figures hitherto found there represent persons of subordinate position. In thirteenth-century France the age-old conventions of previous centuries are continued: the hangman's assistants in the Judgment of Solomon or the execution of John the Baptist are shown as Negroes. The cringing attitude of a figure with distinctly "Negroid" features below the white Queen of Sheba in the north transept portal of the cathedral of Chartres is symptomatic . . . no portrayal of an African in a positive sense exists in France in the thirteenth century.

(44, 47)

Maurice is not only lifelike, but sculpted with sensitivity: He's a finely rendered life-sized knight who is realistically dressed in the armorial style of the day, with a beautiful, expressive face. The knight's bearing, dress, and posture, Suckale-Redlefsen reflects, suggest his calm poise and readiness for battle, while polychromy skillfully hints at the saint's aura of sanctity by surrounding the knight's face with a *de facto* golden halo created by his encircling coif. The statue is

approximately 150 centimeters, correspond[ing] roughly to the actual height of a thirteenth-century knight. The armor, firmly encasing the body, faithfully reproduces the fashion of the period: a cloth undertunic hanging down in deep folds, a mail hauberk, and a sturdy leather surcoat shaped like an apron at both front and back. We see the seams, rivet heads, reinforcement straps, and buckles for fastening the garment and belt at the back . . . The mufflers covering the hands are of chain mail. Likewise the head covering, the coif, which terminates in broad flaps on the chest and back. In addition to the long sword in its sheath and the dagger belted above the right hip, the saint bore a lance in his right hand and a large shield reaching down to the ground in his left. Lance and shield and the lower part of the legs are now missing from the figure.⁵³ [See *Figure 8*.]

The African features are emphasized by the surviving remains of the old polychromy. The skin is colored bluish black, the lips are red, and the dark pupils stand out clearly against the white of the eyeballs. The golden chain mail of the coif serves, in turn, to form a sharp contrast with the dark face. Today the traces of color are no more than a mere shadow of their original intensity, so that the figure should be imagined as painted entirely in bright colors. [See *Figure 9*.]

A twofold function was fulfilled by painting the figure. The coloring of the face was faithful to nature and served to evoke the impression of a living presence. The choice of gold for the hauberk, on the other hand, did not correspond to reality, iron chain mail usually being represented in bluish grey tones. The precious gold framed the dark countenance with the radiance of a halo and heightened the religious connotations of the otherwise realistically depicted figure.

(Suckale-Redlefsen 18–19)

A millennium after St. Maurice of Agaunum's life and death, who suddenly decided the saint should be remembered as this vital, lively figure of a black African knight, "a sensational mutation in the field of iconography" (Devisse 158), and why? To address these questions, I begin by examining the evidence presented by art historians and historians who have studied the Black St. Maurice for decades. I then consider, step by step, the

implications of a racial saint in the heartlands of medieval Europe, with each section that follows examining a different aspect of those implications.

The phenomenon of the Black St. Maurice has attracted considerable interest, but scholarship has been shaped principally by three major voices: Jean Devisse, Gude Suckale-Redlefsen, and Paul Kaplan.⁵⁴ Tracing the saintly cult of Maurice in Europe over the long centuries before Maurice turned into a black African, Devisse shows how from the tenth to the twelfth centuries, Maurice came to be seen increasingly as a knight, “one of the military saints to whom those close to the [Holy Roman Emperor] and those engaged in the profession of arms addressed their prayers” (153).

A martyr who elected to be put to death as his form of resistance to imperial authority might seem, to modern sensibilities, an odd choice for a military saint, but Devisse notes how Otto I (Otto the Great) founded a Benedictine Abbey at Magdeburg in 937 dedicated to Maurice and the Theban martyrs, and, after Otto’s coronation as Holy Roman Emperor in 962, officially designated Maurice patron saint of Magdeburg, and of the Holy Roman Empire (153).⁵⁵ Otto began the construction of Magdeburg cathedral in 955, and later had the saint’s body translated there.

Magdeburg was charged with evangelizing the Slavic lands, and in the eleventh century, under the Emperor Henry II, Maurice, the patron saint of the Empire, “became the symbol of the Germanic offensive against the Slavs” (Devisse 153–4). From having been a martyr slaughtered for resisting a pagan empire because of his Christianity, Maurice thus became a military saint who blessed the slaughter of pagan Slavs resisting Christianity imposed by a Christian empire.

Having established that “Maurice . . . was not a people’s saint but a companion of those in power,” Devisse hazards that a later Holy Roman Emperor, the infamous Frederick II (r. 1220–50), was likely the initiator of a black St. Maurice (160). In this, Maurice’s traditionally attested geographic provenance proves important. Devisse (160) astutely notices the pull exercised by Egypt and North Africa in the thirteenth century.

Egypt was the original power base of Saladin, from which Saladin launched the counter-crusade that eventually wrested Jerusalem back from Latin Christendom in 1187, after nearly a century of occupation by crusaders. Egypt – not Jerusalem – had been the target of the Fourth Crusade in 1204 before its armies were misdirected to Constantinople. Egypt was also the target of the failed Fifth Crusade of 1217; it was the destination of both St. Louis’s crusades in 1248 and 1270, and the 1270 crusade of Edward I of England when he was yet a prince.⁵⁶ Significantly, Frederick II was keenly awaited by the armies of the Fifth Crusade in Egypt, where he failed to make an appearance.⁵⁷

The history of crusading in the thirteenth century thus bears out Devisse’s intuition that Egypt, from which Maurice issued, was on the minds of the military and imperial great in Europe. Given the abject failure of *all* the thirteenth-century crusades to Egypt, and Frederick II’s lack of interest in disrupting commercial and political relations with Egypt’s Ayyubid Sultan Al-Kamil (Saladin’s nephew) and his successors by waging holy war, we can suspect that a saint from Egypt might usefully serve a compensatory, face-saving function in this time.⁵⁸

Symbolism of this kind would say: While we cannot successfully capture and hold this Islamic land, we have proof, and an important visual reminder, that Christianity once triumphed here among its people. Maurice’s blackness and Africanness would thus

symbolically function as a trophy of a compensatory, apotropaic kind, warding off specters of military failure and the interminable postponement of Christianity's triumph. *The function of a racial saint can thus be to fill a vacuum imposed by military failure: art coming to the rescue of history.*

As to the choice of a saint for purposes of propitiatory symbolism, Devisse dismisses St. George, that most famous of eastern military saints in the Middle Ages, because he was "too compromised with Rome" (and no doubt also somewhat overused by this time), in favor of Maurice, "who was a Theban" (or at least led the Theban legion):

Egypt was the land that drew the attention of Western Christians, Crusaders and merchants alike in the thirteenth century. If he could not conquer the country, Frederick could at least demand that it furnish him the geographic, and then the ethnic, origin of St. Maurice.

(Devisse 16)

Black Africans might reasonably be expected among the populations of Egypt in the thirteenth century, as we have seen. And, given that the statue of Maurice had to appear in the standard accoutrements of medieval European knighthood, Maurice's far-off provenance would need to be signaled in some other way than through his dress.

Since he was a Christian, Maurice's foreignness could not be displayed through the iconographic vocabulary deployed visually to signify heathen foreignness, such as curved swords, insignia on shields, headdress, etc. One instantly intelligible way to announce Maurice's geographic provenance would thus be to specify this provenance with *racial* markings in the form of color and physiognomy. Here, then, a visible race serves as shorthand for geography, securing location and place.

Devisse and others emphasize Frederick II's attachment (like his imperial predecessors) to the cult of St. Maurice. Before the saint's transformation into an African, it was at Frederick's behest that Maurice's skull, a "costly relic" under the protection of the monastery of Langheim in Franconia, was sold in 1220 to Magdeburg. At Magdeburg, the relic was treated with great honor, set into a reliquary, and crowned with a crown belonging to Otto I; and "On the anniversary of Otto's death the crowned reliquary adorned the head-end of the dead emperor's tomb" (Suckale-Redlefsen 40, 41).

Devisse's hypothesis that Frederick was likely responsible for imagining the patron saint of the empire as a black African has been substantively improved by a new thesis expounded by Paul Kaplan, who persuasively demonstrates *why* the Hohenstaufen dynasty of emperors that begins with Frederick II's grandfather, Frederick Barbarossa (Frederick I, r. 1155–90), should particularly concern itself with Africans. Kaplan follows the trail of black Africans depicted in German and Italian art in the Hohenstaufen period, finding that the portrayal of these African figures was not necessarily negative, nor were the figures necessarily only low-status servants, but were sometimes images of an "egalitarian" kind ("Black Africans" 29).

Kaplan's decision to read visual art transregionally under the Hohenstaufen is a canny one: The 1186 marriage of Frederick II's father, Henry VI (r. 1191–7), to Constance, daughter of Roger II, the first Norman king of Sicily, and Henry VI's military successes in Sicily meant that the boundaries of the Holy Roman Empire in the thirteenth century had expanded from Germany and its adjacent northern territories, plus northern Italy, to subsume southern Italy and Sicily. The Empire now embraced a Mediterranean zone with

significant multiracial, multiconfessional populations knitted into relationship with more northerly imperial lands.

Aggressive in his ambitions, Frederick II, Kaplan argues, adapted and *secularized* the Christian Pentecostal theme that all peoples of the earth are called to salvation – the early theological idea that “all races are equal before God, and . . . the Christian mission is universal” (“Black Africans” 29). In visual art, the theme of universal salvation through converting the nations of the earth to Christianity was sometimes articulated by representing black Africans among the human populations of the saved. Suckale-Redlefsen notices that the one exception to her attestation that “no portrayal of an African in a positive sense exists in France in the thirteenth century” was “the idealized head of a black man in the throng of those risen from the dead in the Last Judgment tympanum in Paris” (44, 47). Devisse and Kaplan offer other examples of such art.

Under Frederick II, Kaplan argues, secular depictions of black Africans in Italian art and new roles for black Africans in sacred art in Germany and Italy arose in order to present a “more secular version of the evangelical universalism long promoted by both the Greek and the Roman Catholic Churches” (“Introduction” 12):

The driving force in this iconographic transformation was the project of imperial universalism . . . this ideological construct eventually asserted the Holy Roman Emperor’s right to rule nothing less than all the earth. The vast political ambitions of Frederick II, an especially sophisticated and cosmopolitan ruler . . . resulted not only in a number of evidently secular depictions of black Africans in Italian art but also in the introduction of important new roles for black Africans in sacred art in Germany and Italy as well.

(Kaplan, “Introduction” 12)

Just as Christianity’s dominion extended over all the earth, so too did (or should) the Holy Roman Empire, which had the right to encompass the entire world, whose farthest reaches are dramatically represented by black Africa. There, by tradition, lived the most remote of men. Visual art is then a means for articulating the Holy Roman Empire’s assertion of universal power and the Holy Roman Emperor’s right to rule the earth. *These depictions of black Africans are ideological statements in a visual medium: art in the service of empire.*⁵⁹

Among visual art of this kind, the jewel in the crown is the fresco at the tower of the Church of San Zeno Maggiore in Verona, which cleaning and conservation rendered more readily legible in the 1990s. In this fresco,

A seated figure with a crown accepts the homage of a line of twenty-nine men . . . The figure at the head of the line is partly destroyed but he kneels as he approaches a podium and may have been presenting a gift. Behind him stretch nine groups of men; many of these groups are distinguished by headgear and/or facial hair, or the absence thereof . . . The most distinctive group, and the only one made up of four rather than three men, are the figures with nearly black skin near the front of the line. Besides their complexion, the men are similar in their tightly curled hair.

(“Introduction” 13)

The enthroned figure receiving homage is likely Frederick II:

the most plausible and widely shared view about the fresco identifies it as Emperor Frederick II receiving the homage of his subjects. It is generally agreed that, from the

point of view of style, the work should be dated to the second quarter of the 1200s . . . Frederick . . . actually stopped over in this very building on several occasions: the Monastery of San Zeno [adjoining the Church] had long been used as a favored lodging by emperors traveling into Italy.

(Kaplan, "Introduction" 13)

Frederick lodged at San Zeno in 1236, 1237, 1238, and 1239; in 1237, his consort Isabella of England also lodged for some weeks at San Zeno, and in 1238, Frederick's natural daughter Selvaggia was wedded to his vassal Ezzelino da Romano before the doors of the San Zeno church on the feast of Pentecost – "that festival of universal evangelization often illustrated with black African figures in nearby Venice and farther east" – a wedding Frederick attended (Kaplan, "Introduction" 16):

It has been suggested that the fresco was made as part of the preparations of this marriage or that it commemorated the lengthy imperial visit after the fact. If Frederick himself did not commission the fresco, Ezzelino or even Selvaggia might have been the patron.

(Kaplan, "Introduction" 16)

Kaplan tells us that shortly after 1235, Nicholas of Bari addressed an elaborate encomium to Frederick II in which he flatteringly likened the emperor to Christ and the Magi, even quoting "a passage from Psalm 71 of the Latin Vulgate in which it is prophesied that 'Ethiopians shall fall down' before the Lord" – flattery, Kaplan wryly observes, that "must have fallen on fertile ground [since] Frederick once referred to his birthplace at Jesi in the Italian marches as 'our Bethlehem'" ("Introduction" 17). The San Zeno fresco, depicting an enthroned Frederick – "the heraldic imperial eagle [even] appears in one corner of the room" ("Introduction" 16) – receiving the homage of far-flung subjects who represent the diverse nations and races of the earth, allows for an assertion of secular dominion that is thus also remarkably redolent of sacred mythography.⁶⁰

The artist's positioning of the four black Africans grouped together near the head of the line manifests popular knowledge of Frederick's famed associations with black Africans. The son of Constance of Sicily and Henry VI, Frederick grew up in his mother's Sicilian domains, where he "absorbed the cosmopolitan pan-Mediterranean culture of the island, which had previously been ruled by Byzantine emperors and (more recently) Muslim emirs" (Kaplan, "Introduction" 14).⁶¹

Frederick's well-known admiration for Islamic culture, science, mathematics, and philosophy, his impressive grasp of Arabic epistolary and literary form, and his knowledge of Arabic made him unique among Holy Roman Emperors.⁶² Indeed, the Sixth Crusade of 1228–9 – Frederick's crusade, at last – was extraordinary, and something of an uncrusade. Arriving in Palestine under papal excommunication, having fought no Muslims or any holy war, Frederick was *handed* Jerusalem by the Ayyubid Sultan Al-Kamil, with no blood being shed.⁶³

Sojourning in the holy city, where he put the crown of the Kingdom of Jerusalem on his own head before the altar in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, the Emperor lightly jested at the expense of Christians; chided his host, the Muslim *qadi* of Nablus, when that notable had the muezzin refrain from issuing the call to prayer out of respect for the Emperor's presence; and distributed money to the custodians, muezzins, and pious men of the Haram, Arab chronicles reported (Gabrieli 275).⁶⁴ Resident in Jerusalem were some of the

traditional representatives of Christian sub-Saharan Africa: “among [Frederick’s] new subjects were black monks from the kingdom of Ethiopia” (Kaplan, “Black Africans” 33).

In 1224, Frederick began the process of relocating Muslims in Sicily to a colony at Lucera in Apulia, which grew into a population of some 15,000–20,000 people (Julie Anne Taylor 89):⁶⁵

Among these Sicilian Muslims, there were people of black African descent, whom Frederick apparently selected for particular purposes: several boys were trained in wind instruments, and one man, known as Johannes Maurus (d.1254), became Frederick’s chamberlain and the judge-administrator of Lucera. From his given name, it is possible that Johannes converted to Christianity. . . . By mid-century Johannes obtained considerable power in Lucera and the southern Italian kingdom in general, acting as chancellor after Frederick’s death.

(Kaplan, “Introduction” 14)⁶⁶

Frederick was fond of dramatic pageantry and processional spectacles with exotic elements as a mode of imperial display. The “conspicuous presence of black Africans in Frederick’s train as he traveled through his northern Italian and German lands in the 1230s” is much remarked on, and a 1235 chronicle showed how Frederick approached Wimpfen in Swabia,

“proceeding in great glory with numerous carriages laden with gold and silver, byssus and purple, gems and costly vessels, with camels, mules as well as dromedaries, with many Saracens, and with Ethiopians [that is, black Africans] having knowledge of rare skills accompanying apes and leopards and serving as guards bringing along money and treasure.”

(quoted by Kaplan, “Introduction” 15; see also Suckale-Redlefsen 22, 23)⁶⁷

The racial elements of Frederick’s imperial pomp – Africans with the knowledge and skill to care for fabulous animals like apes and leopards, and Africans who safeguarded money and treasure – and his black African chamberlain and governor, Johannes Maurus, are singled out and attached to Frederick’s memory in the cultural record. More than three decades after the emperor’s death, that memory of Africans is restaged in Europe, still attached to Frederick:

An imposter claiming to be Frederick II appeared near Cologne in 1283. He had little to buttress his assertion, except for three black servants who followed him; one was his chamberlain, whose duty was simply to dispense treasure. Reminiscences of Johannes Maurus and of the blacks of the imperial retinue of 1235 are here combined.

(Kaplan, “Black Africans” 34)

Africans were so distinctly identified with Frederick II that the “False Frederick” of 1283 paraded African retainers as proof to clinch his authenticity. To the question of who had the boldness and the motive to declare St. Maurice of Agaunum a black African, Devisse and Kaplan thus furnish a logical answer: that most unique of Holy Roman Emperors, Frederick II.

Devisse’s early working hypothesis that “a command from the emperor caused St. Maurice to be depicted as a black in Magdeburg, the city where his relics were enshrined” (164) stemmed from Frederick’s “Mediterranean policy,” which required Frederick “to uphold the theory of his sovereign rights over the distant lands around the eastern Mediterranean” (160).⁶⁸ That working hypothesis of the 1970s is transformed, in Paul Kaplan’s hands, into a thesis of how the Hohenstaufen used black Africans, and black

African visual images, to articulate his imperial claims to *universal*, not just Mediterranean, sovereignty – adapting the example of Christendom’s Pentecostal mission to evangelize the earth and oversee all of humanity, and supporting those imperial claims “with evidence that people from remote lands acknowledged Frederick as their lord” (Kaplan, “Black Africans” 33).

The puzzle, however, of who had the black Maurice created, and why, is not unanimously considered settled. Suckale-Redlefsen, whose 1987 study *Mauritius: Der heilige Mohr* (Maurice: The Holy Moor) was announced by Devisse but not yet completed when Devisse’s *L’Image du Noir* (The Image of the Black) appeared, disagrees with Devisse’s and Kaplan’s conclusions:

Doubtless the public appearance of Moors in the train of the emperor Frederick II . . . played a part in promoting the new Maurician iconography. Through his magnificent ceremonies which greatly impressed the people and at which Africans were present not as slaves but as advisors – a fact remarked upon again and again – the Hohenstaufen emperor contributed largely toward accustoming Europeans to the characteristic appearance of this foreign people. But it would be erroneous to attribute the new iconographic conception of the black St. Maurice to the emperor himself, as Kaplan has attempted.

(Suckale-Redlefsen 54, 55)

For an alternative to Frederick II, Suckale-Redlefsen proposes an archbishop of Magdeburg – either Albert II of Käfernburg, archbishop from 1205 to 1232, or his stepbrother Wilbrand, archbishop from 1235 to 1254 – as the person responsible for the “startling iconographic innovation” (52, 53). Devisse himself had raised this possibility, and had focused on Wilbrand, but ended up dismissing the idea because of what Devisse assumed would be negative psychological reactions on the part of the populace to the sudden arrival of a black African saint substituting for the old Maurice at an inopportune moment, and also because of the financial costs involved:

Wilbrand . . . wanted to foster popular devotion to St. Maurice: was he perhaps responsible for the abrupt transformation of the saint’s iconography. . . ? Yet ordinary good sense would not induce the prelates of Magdeburg to make so spectacular a change as the blackening of Maurice at the very time when an effort was afoot to enlarge the patron saint’s following in the province and to build up a pilgrimage that involved numbers of images connected with the relics. Public sensibility, as well as the cost of the necessary changes to be made in the familiar representation of the Magdeburg Maurice, argue against the idea that an archbishop of that city might have commissioned the splendid statue of a black.

(Devisse 159–60)

Magdeburg cathedral in the thirteenth century presumably had other images of Maurice that did not represent him as an African, but with the exception of a statue from *c.* 1220, none has survived. Devisse’s point – that all the statues of Maurice in the cathedral prior to his racial transformation would have had to be altered for consistency, at some cost – is driven home when we consider that surviving 1220 statue, which was sculpted in a style utterly unlike the artistic naturalism that allowed for the making of a lifelike black Maurice:

A figure of St. Maurice which now stands in the choir . . . originally formed part of a cycle from ca. 1220. The saint triumphs over the Roman emperor who is seen cowering in a

grotesque attitude below his feet. Despite his full armor and the drawn sword in his right hand, he arouses no sense of martial prowess or human animation. This figure with its lifeless rigidity has the appearance of a columnar jamb statue from the west portal of Chartres, remote from reality. The armor is so overladen with ponderous ornamental detail that its protective function is obliterated . . . Unlike the statue of St. Maurice . . . this figure in the choir of the cathedral has neither “Negroid” facial features nor any other indication of the African origins of the Christian warrior.

(Suckale-Redlefsen 42–4, 43)

Suckale-Redlefsen favors Archbishop Albert II as the alternative to Frederick, which would date the commissioning of the black Maurice to before Albert’s death in 1232 and presumably after the 1220 statue of a still European St. Maurice. She finds the prospect that Maurice was a black African raised for the first time in a chronicle of the third quarter of the twelfth century, noting that earlier chronicle references to Maurice, in Germany and elsewhere, had not raised his Africanness or blackness before.

But the *Kaiserchronik*, “a widely read book compiled by a cleric in Regensburg about 1160,” explicitly describes Maurice “as ‘the leader of the Moors’ (*herzoge der swarzen Mōren*) and his legionaries as ‘black Moors’” (52, 53). Albert II presumably took cognizance of this new idea of the saint as a black Moor, and commissioned a black St. Maurice in the context of a new building program after a fire devastated the old cathedral in 1207 (Suckale-Redlefsen 42, 43).⁶⁹

The 1220 statue of a pre-African Maurice was part of that sculptural program for the new cathedral, according to Suckale-Redlefsen; so also was the black St. Maurice, unlike as the two sculptures may be (42–4).⁷⁰ In the end, Suckale-Redlefsen’s consciousness of archbishop Albert’s shifting loyalties in the volatile politics of the Holy Roman Empire, where powerful rivals (Otto IV, Frederick II) contended to be emperor, and her consciousness that papal Rome’s support of a candidate for emperor was mutable, leads her to conclude that “Archbishop Albert was an independent territorial ruler. In matters of art he was not guided by the court of Frederick II, but by French models which reached Magdeburg by way of Bamberg” (54, 55).⁷¹

By contrast, Kaplan emphasizes the ties of archbishop Albert to Frederick II.⁷² Like Suckale-Redlefsen, Kaplan reads an artistic relationship between the statuary of Bamberg and Magdeburg, but comes to an alternate conclusion on their artistic connection:

since 1979 new information has appeared attesting to Magdeburg’s extensive political links to Frederick II. Albert II of Käfernberg, archbishop of Magdeburg from 1205 to 1232, was a relative of the Hohenstaufen, and Frederick II both donated money to the cathedral and helped Albert obtain the important relic of Maurice’s skull. Virginia Roehrig Kaufmann has explained how Apulian sculpture made during Frederick’s reign (and often for the emperor himself) had a potent influence on sculpture in Magdeburg and the other nearby imperial stronghold of Bamberg. There are two famous surviving equestrian statues in these cities, which may have commemorated imperial entries.

(“Introduction” 15)

Virginia Roehrig Kaufmann, one of Kaplan’s sources, points to documents in the Magdeburg archives analyzed by Berent Schweineköper to establish the working relationship between Frederick and Albert:

During the last ten years of his life, [the archbishop] was constantly in Italy in Frederick's service, a career that is first documented in 1221. In 1222 he was with the emperor in Naples and Capua, where he received the office of imperial legate for north Italy . . . the emperor then bestowed on him the countship of Romagnola, which yielded considerable revenue that could be put toward the archbishop's building projects in Magdeburg . . . He was in Pavia in 1226 as witness to a settlement of strife between the emperor and the citizens, which he had probably helped to negotiate. His association with the city was also strengthened by the troops from Pavia that the emperor supplied him and by the two imperial judges who helped him in his work. Of particular interest are Albrecht's [Albert's] activities at the very end of his life, when he was often with [archbishop] Eckbert [of Bamberg] and the emperor in Italy. In 1232 he was once again in north Italy, at Ravenna, Aquileia, Cividale, and Udine, where he and Eckbert, together with the German princes, worked out for the emperor the statute *in favorem principum*. After Albrecht's death in 1232, the building and decoration of Magdeburg cathedral proceeded only with great difficulty because of financial problems.

(Kaufmann 74)⁷³

Archbishop Albert, Devisse had stressed in the 1970s, was extending the cult of St. Maurice. Having acquired the skull of the saint in 1220 for Magdeburg through the good graces of Frederick II, Maurice's relics thereafter "were brought out once a year for public veneration" (Devisse 159). Pilgrimage to Maurice was encouraged. To foster pilgrimage, when the Collegiate Church of St. Maurice at Halle was dedicated, Pope Honorius III "granted an indulgence of thirty days to those who visited the church" (Devisse 159). Paderborn, Trier, and Freising all "introduced Maurice into their diocesan devotional patterns," and at Albert's death in 1232, Pope Gregory IX showered the deceased archbishop with high praise: "Thanks to him, the pope wrote, Magdeburg had become one of the pillars of Christianity" (Devisse 159). Albert's successor, archbishop Wilbrand, also fostered popular devotion to Maurice (Devisse 159).

Would archiepiscopal fostering of pilgrimage and ambitions to extend the geographic reach of Maurice's cult in Germany have been hurt by the saint's delivery as a black African, as Devisse supposed (159)? Perhaps the answer is not as obvious as Devisse assumed.

It is not difficult to see how an Africanized St. Maurice could serve an ambitious emperor using art to articulate his imperial right to rule the earth, and the ambitions of an archbishop promoting pilgrimage and cult, without having to select between them. Indeed, we may find it useful to shift the focus slightly, from *who* originated an African Maurice to *what* the statue's African-ness tells us by calling attention to itself. Iconography that remains stable and is replicated without change does not issue an invitation to consider its meaning anew. The racial transformation of a saint, however, from a white European to a black African, invites attention to how reconceptualization of an old template produces new functionalities, and points to the functionalities themselves.

Kaplan has shown us that for Frederick, an African St. Maurice is art in the service of empire, a synecdoche for empire. The importance of Egypt in the failed crusades of the earlier thirteenth century also suggests that Maurice's racialization is an efficient means of marking his geographic provenance and to issue a propitiatory symbolism in the face of crusading failure. The luminous early tale of the Theban legionaries' heroic courage and selfless commitment to Christ, summoned through Maurice's origins made visible,

retrieves Christianity's once and future presence in the heart of now-heathen North Africa – a recalling of the past, and future promise, that engages secular and church interests alike.

A signifier for an important crusade destination as well as the far-flung world, the visual medium of Maurice's racialized statue makes the saint's geographic origin readable instantly, and renders his body, relics, and cranium also readable as artifacts from Africa, lodged within Europe, where they are staged in a cathedral and displayed for all to see once a year.

Africa in Europe: Race here, in the person of an African saint, is a way of bringing a continent to Germany, the homeland of the Holy Roman Empire.

Maurice's Africanized statue is an exemplary model of how race can be used to make a place mobile, and transportable to the Latin West. The Africa the saintly Maurice issues is also the right Africa to have: not the medieval continent of sinful "Ethiopians" who are the torturers of Christ and the killers of the Baptist, but the hallowed ground of early Christianity.

Maurice's Africanization thus infuses his physical body and relics in the cathedral with a new aura and new meaning. Now understood as sacred artifacts from African shores, the relics collapse time and space: A deep Christian past in Africa, borne in these artifacts, is translocated into the European present, the immediate now, in the heartlands of Latin Christendom, where that Christian past is owned and displayed.

Race mobilizes and recruits Africa for Europe – an Africa of church fathers, desert ascetics, and the sainted martyrs of Latin Christianity in its formative, triumphant phase, the poignant early centuries of Christianity. This Africa, the matrix of Christianity, summons the faithful to prayer and pilgrimage through an African Maurice's physical and visualized body. A pilgrimage to Maurice's embodied remains in Germany is thus a journey through time and space: a way to travel to Christianity's luminous past and to African soil, collapsing geographies and temporalities. In the Africanization of Maurice, we thus glimpse a summary of the changing meanings of Africa for Europe, a mode of recruitment and ownership, and a process of selection that decides what Africa will give the West.

But Maurice was more than just an early martyr. Crusade historiography also depicted Maurice more recently as a *crusading* saint. During the First Crusade, Maurice is among the heavenly hosts inspiring crusaders in Antioch at a critical moment, when the ragged Christian army had captured the city but not the citadel. The crusaders were still fighting inside Antioch when they had to face the combined hosts of the Islamic East led by Karbuqa, the atabeg of Mosul, outside the city walls.

In the chronicle of Robert the Monk, Saints George, Maurice, Mercurius, and Demetrius materialize as the leaders of a heavenly army, lifting their standards, firing the spirits of the crusaders, and fighting alongside the Christians to dispel the might of the Saracen forces.⁷⁴ Crusade chronicles exult in how heavenly hosts garbed in white, led by Eastern saints, multiplied the ranks of the Christians, so that the crusaders seemed more numerous than they actually were. Is it any wonder that Karbuqa's military alliances fell apart in the field, that his allies retreated and his forces were routed, or that he himself fled, only to be found and beheaded while fleeing?

The First Crusade – that most militarily successful of the incursions into Syria, Palestine, and Egypt – wrested territory from the Islamic East, and established four crusader colonies: the County of Edessa, the Principality of Antioch, the Kingdom of

Jerusalem, and the County of Tripoli. At Antioch, during a debilitating siege of six and a half months, were found relics of Christ's passion, including the Holy Lance, when crusader morale was at its lowest. Thanks to confusions of tradition, statuary of Maurice, patron saint of the Holy Roman Empire, had the saint bear insignia that included a lance which tended to be conflated with the Holy Lance itself, a specimen of which had been found at Antioch.

Thus in his first life before his martyrdom, Maurice was from Africa. In his celestial afterlife, Maurice was also an Eastern crusader saint in the holy lands of the Littoral.

An Africanized Maurice by no means limits what is communicated to a single message, moreover. Signaling Egypt, Africa, and the Near East, Maurice's race is an aid to historical memory, but can also be a powerful instrument for eliciting more personal meanings in immediate context. For an archbishop promoting devotion and pilgrimage to the saint, Africanizing Maurice also furnishes the message that even the sinful Ethiopian, black from sin, and evoking a country of black humans that corporately personified sinfulness, could be saved – indeed, could be a saint.

To a Christian penitent undertaking pilgrimage to expiate sin, what more potent message could there be? Black, the color of sin, *on a saint*, elicits a powerful, tangible, *sensory* understanding of who can be saved. If Albert II and his successor churchmen were committed to promulgating pilgrimage to Maurice's relics, and extending devotion to Maurice's cult, a message of universal salvation carried in the very skin of a newly racialized saint, communicates hope in a powerful, tangible way to penitents and the faithful whose souls were most in need of intercession.

Blackness of skin and an African face can carry an emperor's message of his right to universal sovereignty, *and* an ecclesiastic's message of Christianity's sovereign promise of universal salvation. The vision delivered with an African saint is no less Pentecostal, evangelical, or universal than a Last Judgment painting in which Africans, too, are shown among the nations of the saved.

Secular and sacred functions thus dovetail readily in the genius that produces Maurice as a black African: *A racial saint is a gift to both Christian and secular empire*. Change away from the familiar – especially a radical change of this kind, when a saint is suddenly shown to be a black African – invites a dynamic relationship with the art object, and activates a process of response. A black African St. Maurice evokes, recalls, and summons.

Whoever imagined Maurice as a black African, Suckale-Redlefsen and Kaplan are in agreement on the likely sculptor of the black St. Maurice. Both art historians finger him as the “Master of the Magdeburg Rider,” the sobriquet bestowed on the sculptor of one of two famous “equestrian statues” that may have commemorated an imperial entry into Bamberg and Magdeburg (Suckale-Redlefsen 42, 43; Kaplan “Introduction” 15). For Suckale-Redlefsen, the mounted figure of the Magdeburg Rider, a statue that is the sculptor's “master-piece,” is Otto the Great (42, 43); for Kaplan, the mounted figure may be either Otto *or* Frederick II:

The Magdeburg rider was originally equipped with an enormous Gothic baldachin and located in the Old Market Square of the city. At the very top of the frame and canopy was a statue of St. Maurice that is now lost, and the only surviving visual record of it is too small to show anything of the saint's physiognomy. Nevertheless, it is apparent that Magdeburg was an active supporter of Frederick's (and vice versa) and that Maurice was associated with

a major public imperial image there in the 1230s. Indeed, it is likely that the sculptor of the Magdeburg rider and the cathedral's St. Maurice are one and the same.

(Kaplan, "Introduction" 15)⁷⁵

Virginia Roehrig Kaufmann reasons that Albert II had the Magdeburg Rider made and installed in a prominent, public space in the city of Magdeburg as an important reminder. The equestrian statue, which "depicts an imperial entry, an *adventus regis*, of a medieval emperor into Magdeburg," is a strategic visual confirmation of the archbishop's legal authority, issuing from the emperor, over the city populace, with whom the archbishop's relations had become tense because the citizenry of Magdeburg "wanted a greater share in legal and political matters and seem to have grown restive in the first half of the thirteenth century" (66, 67). The life-sized Magdeburg Rider, with a naturalistically carved face and wearing thirteenth-century clothing, has a "real-life appearance"; his "open mouth suggests, moreover, that he was in the process of speaking" (Kaufmann 66):

The archbishop would have had good reason to want to demonstrate his authority in the major public space of Magdeburg, the Old Market Square. The depiction of an imperial entry with the emperor uttering the grant of confirmation of privileges to the archbishop would have been a most effective way of demonstrating to Magdeburg's citizens his ultimate authority over them, and the source of that power. Schwineköper has demonstrated convincingly that the Rider monument served this function in Magdeburg, where it was situated before the archiepiscopal court of justice. There the archbishop himself, or his representative, sat facing the gesturing and "speaking" equestrian emperor, seemingly in the process of granting or reconfirming the archbishop's powers.

(Kaufmann 67)

The capacity of stone statuary for dynamic action is striking. The Magdeburg Rider brings the original grant of privileges and authority conferred by Otto I on Magdeburg's archbishop *out of* the tenth century and *into* the thirteenth century, where it visually confirms Albert II as the recipient and bearer of those archiepiscopal rights. If the imperial Rider is Otto I, the monument collapses time, transporting the past to the present, and creates a temporal mobility in the way an African Maurice makes Africa mobile and transportable.

If the Rider is Frederick II, Archbishop Albert's canny use of the monument's activity in the present context strikingly parallels Frederick's use of black African visual images to attest *his* authority and privileges. The extraordinary, lifelike naturalism of these stone figures – Maurice, the Magdeburg Rider – sustains, moreover, a "real-life appearance" that works to elicit human response. These lifelike faces and human forms beckon to audiences and issue a sense of immediacy, even intimacy. They "speak" to us through pathways more direct, perhaps, than narrative hagiography.

For the enigma of Maurice, this may be one of the few clues supporting our quest to imagine how a supplicant or pilgrim might feel before the image of a black African saint in the heart of German Europe: Stone statuary, it seems, in mimicking life and summoning the past or distant lands, has a dynamic ability to issue an invitation to transact with it, and initiate a living dialogue with its viewer.

These meticulous efforts of recovery, of course, tell us little about the sculptor himself. But Suckale-Redlefsen's admirable account of the stonemason's style tries to explain why French artists, the leaders in naturalistic portrayals, themselves did not portray Africans "in

a positive sense,” whereas in Germany, “especially in the eastern parts,” art patrons who commissioned work, and artists who executed their commissions, were allowed a freedom to create unusual forms. Because of

the comparatively consistent development and enormous density of sculptural productions in France . . . This led to an early fixing of the iconography and within it of social and hierarchical graduation. The sculptors certainly possessed the skill to portray non-Europeans precisely, but the representation of saints as black persons would have constituted an unthinkable affront to established norms. In Germany, especially in the eastern parts, the situation was entirely different. Here there were hardly any established traditions to which the sculptors could refer. The local art patrons who commissioned their works were also less conventional than elsewhere, and the specified tasks less strictly defined. This is doubtless the reason for the striking richness of invention.

(Suckale-Redlefsen 44, 47)

German stonemasons who were furnishing Magdeburg cathedral with new statuary in the first half of the thirteenth century were thus able to apply French “innovations with astonishing independence” (Suckale-Redlefsen 54, 55). In Germany, then, we may suppose, “the representation of saints as black persons” would *not* “have constituted an unthinkable affront to established norms” either to the patrons commissioning the art, who were “less conventional” than patrons elsewhere, or to the masters executing their commissions, who had “astonishing independence.” A black St. Maurice, we may gather, was made whose creation fell within a window of opportunity – an interval of time in cultural creation – that was opened. That window of opportunity thereafter closed:

Soon after the middle of the century artists turned away from the realistic approach of their predecessors and created stylized ideals of beauty which had little in common with the actuality which had seemed so desirable only a short time before.

(Suckale-Redlefsen 50, 51)

Paul Kaplan, citing Kaufmann, has an alternate view of the artistic models influencing Magdeburg’s black Maurice and the Magdeburg Rider. To Kaplan’s mind, southern Italy, rather than France, provided the examples and influence. From southern Italy came also “egalitarian” depictions of black Africans in visual art.⁷⁶ The evidence of masonry thus leads Kaplan to trace artistic influences from *within* Frederick’s empire, rather than without, linking two geographic extremities of the empire into cultural relationship. Kaufmann acknowledges that sculpture at Reims cathedral in France “has generally been considered the source for the German sculpture at Bamberg and Magdeburg” (81), but she too suggests – referring not specifically to Maurice, but to Magdeburg’s and Bamberg’s imperial monumental sculpture around the time of Maurice – that we consider “revising our idea of the direction of influence” (82):

We might consider the possibility that Italy, as well as France, was a major source of influence on sculpture in Bamberg and Magdeburg. We have found evidence of the presence of a German artist associated with Bamberg and Magdeburg working in Apulia.

(82)

Is it possible that sculptural forms in Magdeburg benefited richly from *both* France *and* Italy? Does artistic creation issue from singular sources of influence or multiple resources,

and can the question of influence be decided on the basis of relative emphasis and degree? Whatever we conclude from the thoughtful arguments of art historians on the enigma of Maurice's creation, Suckale-Redlefsen's summary of the shift in European visual art, after the mid-thirteenth century, toward idealized forms and away from naturalism is valuable for those of us interested in questions of epidermal race.

Suckale-Redlefsen's midcentury shift is borne out by one singularly crucial feature, also the result of a midcentury shift, which the art historian Madeline Caviness has detected in medieval visual art. As we have seen, Caviness argues that after the mid-thirteenth century, we find depictions in European visual art of European skin tones as *white* – white like the whites of the eye, like the whiteness of clothing – and no more the naturalistic flesh tones of the preceding centuries.

Like the shift toward physiognomic idealization and away from naturalism, stylizations of this kind, depicting European skin as white, also “had little in common” with “actuality.” As we saw at the beginning of this chapter, change in the depiction of European skin color, which Caviness localizes to the middle of the thirteenth century, *idealized* a medley of human flesh tones in a variety of tints (pink, cream, ruddy, light brown, greyish, and E. M. Forster's famous “pinko-grey”) as *pure white*.

The stylizations and idealizations of the later thirteenth century that closed the window on naturalistic depiction thus not only renovated earlier ideas of beauty, but also supported *the emergence of whiteness as a stylized, idealized representation of Western European human beings*. After all, white is the color of beauty and sanctity in the thirteenth century – except, of course, for Maurice. Maurice's African naturalism, and the stylized whiteness that followed, thus seem to stand as two moments of epidermal depiction that virtually touch in the racialized art of thirteenth-century Europe.

I have suggested gains to be had from racialized art in the form of an African St. Maurice for those who wielded power – emperor, archbishop – by considering functionalities that are gained with this particular racial saint, at this particular time. For the penitent, pilgrim, or devotee standing or kneeling before an Africanized Maurice, however, naturalizing explanations are less easily to be had. Ladislav Bugner states the case baldly: “How can one reconcile saintliness and blackness? Impossible. Maurice is white and handsome. Because a saint” (10, 11). A black St. Maurice is a contradiction in the very meaning of sanctity, a paradox incarnate.

Yet Bugner himself introduces a possibility that does not offend commonsense sensibility and everyday Christian thinking:

Compared to more familiar figures, Maurice's African features and black complexion express in a more blatant fashion the insignificance of a world of appearances and the preeminence of an ideal reality . . . It was the genius of the Magdeburg sculptor to give material expression to this veritable spiritual about-face in which, through holiness, blackness is changed into light.

(10, 11)

Maurice is black but a saint: someone who visually embodies the early Latin Christian theme that blackness sometimes coexists with beauty as a resounding paradox – *nigra sum sed formosa*, says the bride in Canticles, I am black but beautiful. We have detected a similar arc in Moriaen's depiction as a chivalrous Christian black knight: Look beyond his blackness, *Moriaen's* narrative urges; he is fair in his own way, and in all other ways except

surface visuality. Moriaen is black but chivalrous, and Maurice is black but a saint: A paradox of this kind directs attention to “the insignificance of a world of appearances” and points to the importance of attending to “an ideal reality” beyond.

For sinful laity, I’ve suggested, a penitent can see his own sin, hidden away within him, visually externalized in the skin of the saint, and can thus understand God’s generosity to embrace him, an ordinary sinner, since it embraces even those who are the very color of sin itself. Maurice’s is thus an apotropaic blackness that positions a consoling paradox: *representing sin and forgiveness, blackness on a saint wards off the prospect of infernal damnation.*⁷⁷

Intuition of this kind on the part of a penitent only requires a small leap of identificatory sympathy with Maurice, with little of a barrier to faith: It is amply helped by the fact that, as a martyr, Maurice’s sanctity is of the most hallowed and traditional kind, his martyrdom wholly orthodox and reassuringly familiar in its pedigree. Indeed, the absence of a racialized subjectivity attached to Maurice’s original hagiography has allowed a millennium of pious responses by devotees to be sedimented, on which the new iconography could draw. Maurice’s sanctity, attested by a thousand years of veneration, anchors and secures the invitation of identification.

But a less naturalizing way to think of Maurice’s blackness is to treat the possibility that *blackness itself holds a power to counter the dominant medieval discourse on its meaning.* In this, popular devotion to the Black Madonnas of Europe – a later phenomenon than Maurice, to be sure, but an equally persistent phenomenon over *la longue durée* – may supply a guide of sorts.

Explanations differ for the efflorescence of black images of the Virgin Mary at the close of the Middle Ages or in the Renaissance. Church explanations center on how candle smoke, accumulated over the centuries, inadvertently blackened the Virgin’s face, turning her images black in some instances (critics who resist this explanation point out that atmospheric blackening of this kind should be less selective in recoloring statues, or parts of a statue only).⁷⁸

Some scholars proffer a more anthropological perspective: that the images are in fact Christianized incarnations of ancient pagan goddesses such as Isis or Ceres, goddesses especially of fertility and abundance, whose aspect of black soils and dark mysteries sometimes found expression in their being colored black. Whatever the explanation/s, scholars remark on the deep attachment of devotees to their black Madonnas – their devotion not just to the Virgin, but to the Virgin *as black*.

A color that embraces all other colors, black’s appeal on the Madonna may indeed testify to a memory of ancient power associated with it. Equally, we note that contradictions in how color is bound to meaning appeal to the great minds of the church as exquisite ways to articulate subtleties of theology and afford erudite play, as we saw in Chapter 1. Common church teaching also thrived on contradiction and paradox. Mary, the mother of Jesus, *is* and *must be a virgin*, despite her conception of a child and her parturition. Original sin is borne by all humanity out of the disobedience of Adam and Eve, *except* for Mary, who, contradictorily, remains without original sin. Cannibalism is heinous and abhorrent, forbidden to all, *except* when the faithful consume the consecrated host that is the transubstantiated body of God, sacramentally eating God: Then, cannibalism is not only permissible, but highly recommended and salvific.

Acknowledging that contradiction and paradox are harnessed and used by the church, and disseminated in church teaching, does not, of course, clearly suggest how the faithful

actually responded to incarnated paradoxes – except when popular heretical movements were seen specifically to reject the contradictions and paradoxes of church teaching, such as the eating of a transubstantiated host-that-was-god.

For a black St. Maurice, the recognition that blackness may have an ancient allure that is not negated in its entirety by a rationalizing theological discourse on the meaning of blackness has implicit appeal. This is because *blackness on a saint or the Virgin can be safely embraced*, whereas in other contexts it is to be shunned, feared, and abhorred. Attraction and revulsion are affective responses that can exist as alternating – reversible – currents.

Laid upon a holy figure, blackness is imbued with a capacity for protective homeopathy, and doses of sacred blackness, embraced in protected contexts of safety and reassurance, such as the privacy and inwardness of devotional moments, can help to defend against larger, more frightening contexts in which the otherness of blackness is called into play.

To put it another way, as Ladislav Bugner has: “the representation of St. Maurice offers here a *space* where darkness, rather than threatening and swallowing up, is dissipated” (10, 11). For color to work apotropaically in *this* way, blackness must be coupled with safety and reassurance – conditions that are realized in a black St. Maurice and black Madonnas.

There’s an uncanny aura, then, possessed by a racial saint which marks him off from, say, a blind saint, an animal-loving saint, or a saint who blesses the crops. *Able intimately to mingle familiarity and alienness, the body of a racial saint offers up the power of a queer sanctity that can shock and shelter. The queerness of racialized sanctity lies in both the jolting unexpectedness and strangeness of its manifestations, and the ability of racialized sanctity to comfort and reassure.*

In medieval courtly literature, we have seen that an admixture of blackness, courtliness, and gendered virtue figured by the black queen Belakane allows the attraction of otherness to surface and to be enjoyed by the European Arthurian knight Gahmuret and by *Parzival’s* readers. Blackness that is coupled with chivalric prowess, as figured by the black knight Moriaen, similarly manifests otherness as familiar and welcome, affirming an international fraternity of knighthood, of courtly behavior, and of aristocratic kinship.

Might not the epidermal blackness of a saint or a Madonna offer a similar degree of protective sheltering, in which the lure of otherness can be embraced and welcomed, while the fear of otherness is disengaged and dissolved, within a proffered context of safety and reassurance?

Since it’s impossible to recover with any clarity or sureness the affective devotional response of pilgrims and penitents to Maurice, and equally impossible to prevent ourselves from wondering, with human curiosity and sympathy, what that response might be, the push to ask our questions, and the effort to think about the unanswerable, at least tenders some small measure of affective optimism in the readerly imaginary.

But the closing of the window of opportunity in which a sympathetic African naturalism was able to take hold in visual art of the thirteenth century, it turns out, coincides with the end of the Hohenstaufen dynasty in 1268 with the death of Conradin, Frederick II’s grandson. Suckale-Redlefsen appropriately cautions that “We will never know whether the ideas for these programs were dictated entirely by the patrons who commissioned them, or whether perhaps the artists themselves had a greater share in their conception” (46, 47).

Nonetheless, Kaplan finds links for nearly all the Hohenstaufen family – Henry VI (Frederick II’s father), Manfred (Frederick II’s natural son), Conradin (Frederick’s grandson) – with black Africans and/or black African depictions in visual art, and this

coincidence helps to provide a double accounting for why so large an interval yawns between the first appearance of a black Maurice and the subsequent late-medieval reappearance of black Maurician images only in the fourteenth through sixteenth centuries (“Introduction” 13–14, “Black Africans” 33).

In the remainder of the thirteenth century itself, Suckale-Redlefsen remarks,

It may at first seem surprising that the conception of the black St. Maurice which had evolved in the stone sculpture of Magdeburg did not meet with general acceptance, and that in later works the allusions to the saint’s African origins remained at most extremely discrete [i.e., discreet], indeed almost veiled, if present at all.

(50, 51)

If Maurice’s thirteenth-century transformation into a black African was at the behest of the emperor Frederick II, the archbishop Albert II, or archbishop Wilbrand, there is little incentive for us to suppose that the black St. Maurice “did not meet with general acceptance” by the laity, whose devotional responses are unknown and unknowable, and greater incentive for us to suspect that changes – of a political, theological, aesthetic, socioeconomic, or other kind – on the part of those commissioning statuary and those executing their commissions shifted the depiction of racialized sanctity.

Suckale-Redlefsen points, after all, to the midcentury turn away from naturalism in visual art, toward increasing idealization and “stylized ideals of beauty” (50, 51), while Caviness points to a midcentury shift that portrayed the flesh hues of sainted figures and Europeans as pure, pristine, idealized white. Not surprisingly then, in the second half of the thirteenth century, racial saints were ultra-whitened Europeans, and Maurice’s race is alluded to only discreetly in subsequent visual representations and “almost veiled, if present at all” (Suckale-Redlefsen 50, 51).

The stained-glass black Maurice *c.* 1250–60 in the west choir of Naumburg Cathedral is the only other surviving image from around the period of Magdeburg’s black Maurice, and Naumburg is a suffragan diocese subordinated to Magdeburg and under Magdeburg’s influence (Suckale-Redlefsen 48, 49). A black St. Maurice only reemerges a century later when another Holy Roman Emperor, Charles IV of Bohemia, resurrects the iconography of the saint as a black African in a series “of approximately one hundred thirty panel paintings executed by Master Theodorik and his workshop between 1359 and 1365” in the Chapel of the Holy Cross in Karlstejn castle in Bohemia (Suckale-Redlefsen 56, 57). This “deliberate reversion to the older Magdeburg iconography,” Kaplan and Suckale-Redlefsen agree, issues from imperial ideology:

The choice of saints reveals that careful attention was paid to representing all the nations of Europe and the various parts of the empire. Precedence is given to the saints of Bohemia and the German Empire. This program is not only religious, but also political, expressing very cogently the aspirations cherished by Charles IV. Although his claims had no basis in the actual balance of power, Charles IV regarded himself as a world sovereign whose domain encompassed East and West.

(Suckale-Redlefsen 56, 57)

Devisse and Kaplan emphasize how the Luxembourg emperor follows in the footsteps of the Hohenstaufen Frederick: “Once again those in power drew attention to Maurice: thereafter he was black” (Devisse 169). Devisse tells us that Magdeburg “welcomed [back]

the black saint in its episcopal sees, monasteries, and humble rural churches,” and he follows the trail of an African Maurice in Halle, Jüterbog, Stendal, Halberstadt, and across Germany and to the north and east (174).

Kaplan points to a salient difference, however, in this second, late-medieval efflorescence of an African Maurice:

Although many of these Bohemian images seem to reproduce or extend approaches first developed in the time of the Hohenstaufen, in one respect there is a substantial difference between these two eras: there is no evidence of the actual presence of people of black African descent at Charles IV's court or in Bohemia. Instead, part of the appeal for Charles, and for Bohemian artists and audiences, may have rested on the notion that the Czechs, like the Ethiopians, were a group at the edge of the Christian world. The fair skin and golden hair of the Czechs, emphasized by Giovanni dei Marignolli, one of Charles's court intellectuals, may have been seen as defining one extreme of human physical appearance, just as the black Ethiopians embodied the opposite extreme.

(“Introduction,” 19)

Kaplan's intuition of the symbolic potential of crossrace identification continues the trace of an affective logic that makes identification with a black African Maurice possible by the lay faithful, by the sculptors themselves, and by the great who commissioned an African Maurice with an eye to ideology. Instantiating Africa inside Bohemia of the fourteenth century, a black African Maurice allows all who feel themselves insecurely situated in some way – on the periphery, or set apart by their sin, by nature, or by geography – to identify with an extremity that so eloquently dramatizes how an insecure position can be thoroughly secured through sanctity, across the opposite ends of epidermal race.

Thereafter, on the heels of Bohemia arrives a wondrous diversity of art objects depicting a black Maurice that accrues over the centuries and across regions and countries. The marvelous color and monochromatic plates in Devisse's sumptuous volume (a volume now reissued by Harvard University Press, with a new introduction by Kaplan, in a multivolume reprinting of *The Image of the Black in Western Art*) show us a profusion of black Maurices, large and small, in two and three dimensions: displayed on a bishop's miter, covered in dazzling plate armor, with loop earrings, crowned with jewels and sporting jeweled collars, sprouting a goatee and mustache, even materializing as tiny statuettes atop a ciborium and a drinking horn (Devisse figures 142, 147, 150, 151, 160, 162, 163).

Kaplan contemplates Maurice's legacy in the emergence of the Black Magus in the fourteenth century and beyond, and scrutinizes the portrayal of *Afro-Europeans* all the way into Renaissance visual art, where vital, confident male and female Africans beckon, “lively and alluring,” manifesting “a part of the past that reads as modern” (“Introduction” 30). To Devisse, then, who first brought the attention of scholars to the extraordinary enigma of the Black St. Maurice of Magdeburg, belongs the final word:

There remains the masterpiece in Magdeburg . . . one would search in vain in medieval art and probably in Western art as a whole for a representation of the African as faithfully and powerfully rendered as this one. Beyond its realism and historicity this statue, in the plenitude of its expressiveness, embodies the ultimate vocation to offer a blackness through which the light of sanctity might shine.

(205)

Notes

- 1 For studies on antiquity, see, e.g., Snowden, Goldenberg; for studies on the Middle Ages concentrating on blackness, see, e.g., the special issue of the *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* edited by Hahn, and also Biller (“Black Women”), Epstein (*Speaking of Slavery*), and Hahn (“Difference”).
- 2 Caviness’ article and arguments are supported by numerous lavish, full-color images impossible to reproduce here, but that may be found at: <http://differentvisions.org/issuerePDFs/Caviness.pdf>
- 3 Verkerk, Byron, and Strickland are also among those who discuss the growth of a negative discourse on blackness in patristic and exegetical traditions. Buell discusses early Christian rhetoric on whiteness in the formation of Christian community in the Mediterranean.
- 4 A “few partisans” of an “optimistic exegesis see Ethiopia as a symbol of humanity in quest of salvation,” but St. Jerome dooms the Ethiopians by suggesting that their “barbarous, bloody ways” earn them their name, while their land “symbolizes all the earthly attachments that chain men to the blackness of sin” (Devisse 61). Jerome “admits in theory that [Ethiopians] are called to salvation through the gift of grace” but his comments are “generally harsh. His texts were repeated again and again and it is undeniable that they inspired the later interpretations that invariably identified blackness with sin, Ethiopia with the land of sin, and the Ethiopian with the collective sin of a people” (Devisse 61). Jerome, as we saw in Chapter 3, is also responsible for the lie that designates Arabs – who call themselves Saracens (*Saraceni*) he says, because they are ashamed to be descended from the bondwoman-concubine Hagar, and instead pretend to be descended from Sarah, Abraham’s legitimate wife – and, later, Muslims as a race of liars.
- 5 Devisse reads the queen’s hair as “blond” and her stance as significant: She has “a protective arm over a kneeling servitor who presents gifts” (129).
- 6 The queen has important allegorical significance for unredeemed humanity: “Isidore of Seville . . . saw the queen as symbolizing those who pass from paganism to Christianity by their own volition . . . [For] Rupert of Deutz . . . the queen symbolizes *the Gentiles* who desire to follow Christ – or, still more exactly, she stands as the symbol of the *nations of the whole world*, the Jews excepted” (Devisse 129).
- 7 Devisse points out that in the Book of Isaiah, “the color of sin is not black but red” and there is a “rivalry between red and black that runs through all Oriental, Jewish, Christian, and Muslim exegesis and symbology” as the color to designate evil (58). Devisse’s genealogy of how blackness accrued negative meanings fingers Jerome as key to the preference for black as the color of sin and death in the Latin tradition (59).
- 8 Just as Caviness muses on the colors used to convey European flesh tones in visual art, Strickland muses on the colors that convey black skin: “In pictorial works of art, the correspondence in color between demons and Ethiopians is more readily apparent if brown, dark blue, purple, and sometimes even dark green are read as substitutes for the color black . . . There are technical, aesthetic, and symbolic reasons for the choice of some other dark color over black in these cases. First, unmodulated blackness in portraits that seek to emphasize physiognomical difference is problematic because other important stereotyped facial features, such as large eyes, flat noses, and everted lips, would not be visible against a completely black background. Second, the color black is inappropriate in certain monumental contexts, such as stained glass. Third, if communicating the strangeness and exoticism of the imaginary Ethiopian was an artistic objective, the use of non-natural colors is a very effective way of achieving this goal” (83).
- 9 The “*Passion of Perpetua*” written by Tertullian in the second century constitutes our earliest witness of the presence of an ‘African’ headsman [but] it was not until the twelfth century that iconography began to portray the type. Thereafter we cannot dispel the thought that once contact

with areas where there were blacks was renewed, artists who chose the black as the type of the executioner knew exactly what they were doing. The date [of the twelfth and thirteenth century] explains why we find personages whose features are “Negroid” rather than simply dark in color. It was the time when . . . contacts of all kinds were reestablished between Western Europe and Africa and the Africans” (Devisse 72). Devisse’s twelfth-century examples of the African torturer-executioner motif are drawn from the *later* twelfth century; Debra Strickland points to a few *early* twelfth-century examples, including an illustration of the flagellation of Christ in the Winchester Psalter (c. 1150), where a phenotypic black African flagellator pulls tight Christ’s fetters with his left hand as his right hand is raised to strike with a multitailed whip (82).

- 10 In these sensational creations, cultural fantasy may well have been responding to historical encounters: “to medieval anthropology, Eastern ‘giants’ were verifiable phenomena, like black-skinned men, described by geographers, naturalists, and travelers, and realistically associated with tall Africans in Saracen armies” (Metlitzki 197).
- 11 Wolfram hints that Josweiz may be picturesque in a different way from Feirefiz, since Josweiz is likened to the swan – whose image is blazoned on the banners of Josweiz’ armies – which Wolfram says is white, with black beak and feet, perhaps suggesting that we should imagine Josweiz also with white skin, and with a black mouth and feet (190–1).
- 12 Interestingly, medieval Islamic writers discoursing on black Africans did not associate blackness with sin, the infernal, or a religion; however, as the fourteenth-century sociologist-historian Ibn Khaldun shows in his *Muqaddimah*, the depiction of black Africans by Islamic writers may be no friendlier: “Negroes are in general characterized by levity, excitability, and great emotionalism. They are found eager to dance, whenever they hear a melody. They are everywhere described as stupid” (63). A subscriber to climate theory, Ibn Khaldun attributes the character properties of black Africans to their residence in the hot zone, and believed that were they to settle in more temperate zones, they would “produce descendants whose colour gradually turns white in the course of time” (60).
- 13 Lorraine Stock’s work on representations of wild men and wild folk suggests that forms of alterity meeting with fear and loathing earlier in the Middle Ages – whether it is epidermal race, or the primitive uncanny associated with wildness – were by the late Middle Ages welcomed; incorporated for personal, family, and social use; and manipulated for public attestations of identity and group play: “In the early Middle Ages the Wild People were considered monstrous examples of otherness to be feared and loathed [but] in the late Middle Ages the attitude toward the Wild People exhibited by the cultural elite included both identification with and impersonation of them. Identification was revealed in the incorporation of the Wild People in heraldic shields, family crests, and other signifiers of personal identity . . . As exemplified in the Bal des Ardents [of 1393, in which Charles VI of France and his lords were dressed as wild folk], impersonation took the form of representation of wild people by civilized humans, such as a king, publicly enacted in ritual performance and pageantry” (138–9).

We noted in Chapter 3 how cultural processing over *la longue durée* has the capacity to domesticate the unspeakable, repackaging this into social utility and pleasurable recreation. Even appalling acts of crusader cannibalism committed on the cadavers of the infernal Saracen enemy in the late eleventh century – acts at which eyewitness Latin chronicles expressed horror and revulsion – can be transmogrified into cannibalistic jokes at the expense of the enemy two to four centuries later, as we saw in Chapter 3 (see also *Empire of Magic*, chapters 1 and 2).

- 14 Devisse and Mollat’s volume of the multivolume *Image of the Black in Western Art* offers a comprehensive selection of epidermal race in visual art of the late medieval period. The volume by David Bindman et al. in the recent reissue of the *Image of the Black* series spans the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. On blackness in early modern England in particular, with a focus on gender, see Kim Hall.

- 15 Sellassie suggests that Lalibela, the famous Zagwean king of Ethiopia, was inspired to build some of Ethiopia's famed churches after his own visit to Jerusalem (272), and that he might have ordered churches built at Roha because of the dangers faced by Ethiopian pilgrims "in the deserts of the Sudan and Egypt or in passing through Muslim countries on their way to the Holy Land" (273). "Roha then was intended to be a substitute for Jerusalem, a place of safety for pilgrims" (Sellassie 273).
- 16 Sellassie cites a letter of Jerome, who was in Bethlehem in 386, "to a certain lady, Marcella," in which Jerome mentions that "from Ethiopia we welcome crowds of monks every hour" (112).
- 17 "The Ethiopian monks long held a special privilege regarding the Holy Sepulchre which they no longer retain today. They were entrusted with the custody of the light which burns continuously on the tomb of the Lord, and, on the night before Easter, they offered the light to the Patriarch to celebrate the Feast of Resurrection" (Sellassie 143).
- 18 I cite Cyril Edwards' translation in English, and Karl Lachmann's edition for the Middle High German. The scholarship on *Parzival* is large, and, with apologies to the many scholars who have written on *Parzival*, I am only able to cite a sampling of the most recent scholarship focusing on epidermal race in this section. The scholars cited, however, furnish bibliographies that may be consulted by readers interested in literary criticism of this romance.
- 19 Jerold Frakes samples the negative discourse on blackness in medieval German literature: "In Reinmar von Zweter's poems, Johann von Würzburg's *Wilhelm von Osterreich*, and Konrad von Meigenberg's *Buch der Natur*, black skin signifies evil and the devil. In the *Millstätter Exodus*, Pharaoh and the Egyptian army are black . . . In Albrecht von Scharfenberg's *Jüngerer Titurel*, one of Parzival's relatives is attacked in the East by opponents who are black as Hell, as the battle-cry *kampf den weisen* [battle the whites] is raised" (*Vernacular* 65).
- 20 Frakes totals up references to color in Gahmuret's adventures in Zazamanc and in Europe and finds that when Gahmuret is with Belakane and her people, heathenism and blackness are mentioned "forty-five times in some twenty-five pages of text," while in Europe "there are thirty references to brightness, light, and whiteness in twenty-four pages. Likewise images of light are practically absent from the first *aventure*, as are images of darkness from the second" except when they refer to Belakane (*Vernacular* 83).
- 21 D. A. Wells dryly remarks "Gahmuret's cavalier desertion of Belakane after three months of marriage, knowing her to be pregnant . . . In the light of his other amorous adventures one can hardly take seriously his promise that she might be able to win him back if she is converted" ("Source" 34).
- 22 Gahmuret's dedication to the Caliph means, in effect, that in the internal politics of medieval Islamdom, Gahmuret sides with the Caliph of Baghdad against the Ayyubids of Cairo ("Babylon"), since *Parzival* was written before the rise of the Mamluks in Egypt. Given *Parzival*'s early thirteenth-century provenance, after the infamous loss of Jerusalem to Saladin at the end of the thirteenth century, the two brothers of "Babylon" here may well be fabricated stand-ins for Saladin and Sephadin (the transliterated name for Al-Adil – *Saif-ad-Din* – Saladin's brother who appears in a number of European chronicles).
- 23 In *Willehalm*, Christians "take the cross" when they go to war. The insight that Gyburc/Orable might figure the lost city of Jerusalem is Jason Escandell's.
- 24 The knights of Munsalvaesche are called "templars" several times, translated by Kühn in Lachmann's edition as "Templeritter" (see, e.g., Cyril Edwards 188, 197, 294, 332, 334, 336, 337, 342, 343, 344; Lachmann I: 736, I: 776, II: 204, II: 350, II: 352, II: 358, II: 366, II: 370, II: 388, II: 390, II: 392, II: 398). The Grail King Anfortas, released from his agony by Parzival, decides to serve his order and fight in the Grail's service (Cyril Edwards 343; Lachmann II: 394). The Grail, it thus appears, continues to need military service by "templars."
- 25 "[I]t is apparent from the narrator's comments and from subsequent events that [Feirefiz] takes after Gahmuret . . . and that his chief interest is the opposite sex" (Wells, "Source" 34).

- 26 Wolfram is conscious of multilingualism, however, as his characterization of Cundrie later makes plain: His Cundrie speaks three languages – Latin, “heathen” (i.e., Arabic), and French. She speaks *en franzoys* to the Arthurian court, but discourses knowledgeably on the planets and Arab astronomy in Arabic (Cyril Edwards 132, 326–7; Lachmann I: 518, II: 334).
- 27 While other thirteenth-century European literary texts exist that depict epidermal difference, my choice of *Parzival* and *Moriaen* for discussion in this section stems from the sustained, self-conscious, and thoughtful explorations of the meaning of color, and of the relationship between color and quintessential identity, in both texts. Both these texts are thus unusually fine exemplars of how questions on color can be raised, examined, turned on their head, and answered with some intricacy and nuance in a key modality of cultural creation. Later in the chapter, I examine statuary and visual art in the form of the Black St. Maurice of Magdeburg.
- 28 *Moriaen*’s narrator remarks in the prologue that some books actually identify *Moriaen*’s father as Perchevael, while others say his father is Acglavael, Perchevael’s brother. But since it is held as the truth that Perchevael and Galaet (Galahad, whose name is also spelled *Galaats* in this romance) both died virginal knights, the narrator therefore maintains that *Moriaen* could not have been Perchevael’s son, but was instead Acglavael’s. This intriguing disclaimer has led scholars to speculate that the original source may well have had Perchevael as *Moriaen*’s father. For a detailed examination of the arguments – including a discussion of Acglavael’s dream, the significance of which seems to relate more to Perchevael than to Acglavael – see Lacy.
- 29 “This immense manuscript [The Hague, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, 129 A 10], dating to ca. 1320, now comprises 241 folios written in three-column format. It contains the lion’s share of the surviving Middle Dutch Arthurian romances. Five scribes, under the leadership of one of them, the so-called scribe B, were responsible for transcribing no less than 10 texts into this codex” (Claassens and Johnson 5). Claassens and Johnson, the editors and translators of *Moriaen* and other texts in the *Lancelot Compilation*, believe that “the *Moriaen* is an original Middle Dutch romance” (9). All references are from their edition and translation in progress, and I am deeply indebted to them for their generosity in sharing their work.
- 30 Lacy observes that the narrator “comments incessantly” on *Moriaen*’s color, “a near obsession on the narrator’s part” (129, 130). Moreover, the “author of the *Moriaen* . . . shows his full awareness of the stock equation of physical and spiritual blackness” and “takes pains to make him appeal to the Christian God on every conceivable occasion. He is a civilised Christian knight *in spite of* his black skin – this is the true significance of the ‘nigra sum sed formosa’ theme” (Wells, “Middle Dutch” 263, 264).
- 31 *Moriaen*’s muscular impatience, which is channeled by Walewein into more dulcet chivalric ways, is thus a microcosm of the multistage instruction undergone by *Parzival* himself, who is a boisterous *rusticus* until he learns to be a proper knight. *Moriaen*, however, is already a knight when he appears, and D. A. Wells attributes *Moriaen*’s “impetuous oath . . . to fight any knight who refused to disclose whether he had knowledge of *Moriaen*’s father” to “shame at his illegitimacy and lost inheritance” rather than to hotheaded youth (“Middle Dutch” 250). Lacy, moreover, casts some doubt about who is being taught what here, by pointing out the irony of Walewein’s admonitions to *Moriaen* about chivalry, since later “it is the neophyte who must save the life of Artur’s greatest knight” (130).
- 32 Unlike *Parzival*, Perchevael’s failure in the Grail quest springs not from failing to ask the Grail King the right question, but “because of the sin/that he committed against his mother/by his own volition and in that place/where he left her in the forest/when he abandoned her/and no longer wished to remain with the woman;/it was then that she died of sorrow./Those sins prevented him/ from achieving the lance and the grail” (l. 3064–772). The boatman who ferries Perchevael and Acglavael across the sea later reports that “one of them [i.e., Perchevael] was weeping/so that the tears fell thick/down his face” (l. 3492–4). Percheval’s twelfth- and early-thirteenth-century role as

- Grail Knight is later displaced, of course, by Galahad in the Old French *Queste del Saint Graal* romance, a knight designed to be a more perfectly Christian and less secular chivalric quester for the Grail, now sacralized as a precious relic of Christology in the aftermath of the loss of Jerusalem.
- 33 D. A. Wells contrasts Acglavael with Gahmuret, pointing out that Acglavael is “ignorant of Moriaen’s conception,” “leaves his betrothed . . . apparently with reluctance,” and “can give a reasonably plausible excuse for his failure to return, and is willing to make amends through marriage. All this forms a sharp contrast to Gahmuret’s cavalier desertion of Belakane” (“Source” 33). Wells also contrasts how each son characterizes his errant father: Feirefiz’s “praise of Gahmuret’s positive qualities, and heartfelt sorrow on learning of his death” is a courtly attitude wholly unlike “Moriaen’s hope that, if dead, Acglavael may have his sins forgiven” (“Source” 34). Wells concludes: “the author imposes an ethical, as opposed to a purely thematic and formal, unity on his disparate material” (“Source” 48).
- 34 Scholarship has noted the remarkable intricacy, attentiveness, and care on display. Wells calls the *Moriaen* “one of the most lucid and readable of the Dutch romances” (“Source” 48), while Lacy observes that, “with its three heroes separating for adventures that are recounted sequentially, and with its multiple quests that diverge, reconverge, and cross, the romance . . . appears to be characterized by an usual density of texture and comparative tautness of structure” (126 n.4).
- 35 This seneschal also steals Walewein’s sword and substitutes a poor-quality replacement, cuts halfway through his reins, and damages the saddle girths (l. 2061–71). The torture to which the host’s men plan to subject Walewein – hewing off his limbs, spearing him, roasting him over a fire, and breaking him on the torture device of a wheel before finishing him off – seems queerly reminiscent of hagiographic features imported into a romance. In a delicate touch later, the text’s fidelity to psychological realism has Lanceloet, Walewein, Moriaen, and Gariet ride “gently forth” to rescue Arthur’s besieged queen, because Lanceloet is badly wounded and Walewein must tend to Lanceloet’s many wounds as they ride (l. 4162–3).
- 36 The three romances in series – *Perchevael*, *Moriaen*, and the *Queste vanden Grale* – thus move their chivalric protagonists incrementally toward knightly perfection. *Perchevael*’s grievous fault, in failing his mother, is viewed through the looking glass of the Black Knight *Moriaen*, who protects and restores his mother; and the successful culmination of Moriaen’s quest brings the start of the quest of the perfect, infallible knight of the Grail, Galaats.
- 37 In seminar discussion of this text, moreover, a graduate student – Rebecca Liu – pointed out that *Moriaen* is ultimately an assimilationist narrative, in which a protagonist who is an epidermal outcast gains respectability by being better than virtually everyone else in Arthurian Europe, because “if you’re black, you have to be better than anyone else.”
- 38 “The attitude to sex is noticeably different from that of works written in the dominant period of aristocratic culture; both Walewein and Lancelot are unrewarded by the ladies they serve, a contrast to traditional versions of the same episodes. The girl Walewein rescues disappears from the story” (Wells, “Source” 46–7). Wells also points out that the adulterous relationship of Lancelot and Guenevere is a motif “almost entirely suppressed” by the text, and adds that Acglavael’s marriage to Moriaen’s mother, which fully exonerates him for his earlier treatment of her, is “arguably a middle-class, as opposed to an aristocratic trait” (“Source” 47). Moriaen’s service to his mother seems to obviate the necessity of service to other courtly ladies; this Black Knight is his mother’s champion and no one else’s.
- 39 For a survey of fourteenth- through mid-sixteenth-century portrayals of sex with black women, see Groebner. Peter Abelard’s insights on the erotic appeal of black women are paralleled, William Phillips shows, by some Islamic writers who also enjoyed contemplating the pleasures afforded by black female bodies. Delighting in black African slave women, the Iberian Muslim writer Al-Sharishi “in the early thirteenth century praised the qualities of the slave women of Ghana. ‘God has endowed the slave girls there with laudable qualities, both physical and moral, more than

can be desired, their bodies are smooth, their black skins are lustrous, their eyes are beautiful, their noses well shaped, their teeth white, and they smell fragrant” (*Slavery in Medieval and Early Modern Iberia* 87).

- 40 Frakes is among the many who deprecate this convenient, flimsy fiction. He also observes that Dido and Aeneas are the template: “Obviously the first marriage was illegitimate for Wolfram (as also for the Catholic Church), for much the same reason as the Trojan and proto-Roman hero Aeneas’s marriage to the Semitic Dido in Virgil’s *Aeneid* was routinely deemed illegitimate (by both Virgil and, with few exceptions, two millennia of Virgil commentators) . . . it was a legitimate marriage only as long as it was convenient for Aeneas’s libido and his divinely appointed *fatum*, before his abandonment of his Asian African bride and his move on to Europe and his destined Italic bride” (*Vernacular* 85).
- 41 Critics, however, are not always convinced by this smooth-talking white knight: “Ebenbauer suggests that Gahmuret’s abandonment of Belakâne stems in large part from *rassistische Vorurteile* [racist prejudices] and *rassistisches Ressentiment* [racial resentment] and notes that in Gahmuret’s later excuses for abandoning her, where he claims that it was not because of her black skin, he reveals ‘the true motivation for his actions, in that he unnecessarily rejects it.’ Eva Parra Membrives similarly argues that ultimately, it is the foreignness (race, skin color, religion) of the Muslim queen Belakâne that makes it impossible to integrate her into the European courtly system despite her otherwise normative courtliness” (Frakes, *Vernacular* 84).
- 42 The fourteenth-century *King of Tars* is preserved in three compendia-manuscripts: the Auchinleck, Vernon, and Simeon. Judith Perryman’s fine edition, based on the Auchinleck, is used in all references to *King of Tars* here. Perryman has an excellent, detailed introduction on the tangled skeins of legend, folklore, hearsay, mythology, and literary motifs intertwined in the fabrication of this romance. *Tars*, in the romance, has been variously identified as *Tarsus* in Armenia, or *Tauris*, the modern Tabriz (Hornstein 405–6), or *Tharsis*, originally linked “to a region of the Levant” (Kaplan, *Rise* 64), *Tharsia*, or *Tartary* (Perryman, introduction, and *Empire of Magic* 418 n.72). Despite the exoticized foreign locale named as the homeland of the Christian princess, however, the text’s insistence that the princess is a classic Western European beauty whose whiteness of skin and thoroughly conventional Latin Christianity is constantly paraded makes the foreign locale hardly distinguishable from the Latin West, and suggests the place-name *Tars* functions merely as a proxy for Western Europe. Since the appearance of *Empire of Magic* a number of scholars have published on this romance, which has also become a popular Middle English text to analyze in PhD dissertations; there are now many talented discussions of the black–white epidermal politics of the romance. *The King of Tars* and *The Sultan of Babylon* are the only non-thirteenth-century examples I analyze in this section.
- 43 For historical analogues of how freedom from harassment by Muslim warlords in Andalusian Iberia could be purchased by proffering the tribute-bribe of a fair European (and Christian) maiden for a wife or a concubine, see Chapter 3, in the section “A Man for All Seasons.”
- 44 Though epidermal race is the vocabulary for this romance articulation of absolute and fundamental differences between two human groups, color in this text also functions as the visible manifestation of absolute and fundamental *religious* differences: color here being the dramatic *signum* of religious race, signaling the intractable war between Christianity of a palpably Western European kind and Islam, portrayed here as a pagan polytheism centering on idol worship. To that end, the conventional, dogmatic Christianity featured in this text concentrates the utmost significance on rites, sacraments, holy days, catechism, and priests. We saw in Chapter 3 that the *Roman de Saladin* has Saladin self-baptize on his deathbed, suggesting that the *fact* of conversion, for the French romance, was of paramount importance. By contrast, the Middle English *King of Tars* requires a *priest* to perform baptismal rites for the miscegenated lump of flesh that the princess of Tars births and for the Sultan of Damascus (a priest, of course, is conveniently found

among the Sultan's captives). The princess of Tars delivers a pious homily in the form of a catechism to instruct her husband before his baptism; the fleshy wad she births happens to be baptized and transformed into a child on a holy feast day; and Biblical numerology is conspicuously scattered throughout the text. The crusade-like war that the freshly converted and whitened Sultan visits on his own people is thus only the military counterpart of the ideological, cultural war waged by this romance, wielding all the weapons of Christianity – rites, sacraments, catechism, priests, feast days – to subdue the infidel foe.

- 45 On the whitening of the “enamored Muslim princess” – as this *topos* has been dubbed – to render her an appropriate mate for a European knight, see Jacqueline de Weever. Converted Saracen queens such as Bramimonde in the *Chanson de Roland* and Orable in the *Prise d'Orange* of the Guillaume cycle of *chansons* famously and early, but only typically, lead the cast. F. M. Warren's 1914 article on the fantasy of the treacherous (and libidinous) Eastern woman, always royal, is an oft-cited classic. For more recent examples see Weiss, de Weever, and Kinoshita (“Courtly Love,” “Pagans”). The Saracen princess Floripas in the *Sultan of Babylon* avers a passion for Guy of Burgundy, but cannot pick him out from a company of peers when she encounters him for the first time.
- 46 See, e.g., Fleischman's National Institutes of Health article on human piebaldism, and google “piebald humans” and “human piebaldism” for a variety of images. Human piebaldism results from depigmentation or hypopigmentation of the skin and hair, so that a black-and-white person would be a black-skinned human who has lost color, for genetic reasons, in patches across the body; a white forelock that stands out from the surrounding dark hair on the scalp is a striking characteristic. Piebald animals are far more common than humans, of course, as searching on Google Images attests.
- 47 References to the *Sultan of Babylon* in this section are from Alan Lupack's edition in *Three Middle English Charlemagne Romances*.
- 48 Norris, Lyons, and others emphasize the multidirectionality of such interchange. For other examples of global textual circulation, see Amer, *Empire of Magic*; Kinoshita (*Medieval Boundaries*); Lasater; Metlitzki; and Menocal.
- 49 The Naumburg black Maurice “does not appear as an armed knight, but as a duke clad in a long robe with a girdle, a cloak with fur collar, and the ceremonial headdress denoting ducal rank . . . The crisp curls and the bluish shade of the hands indicate the African origins of the saint. Unfortunately nothing can be ascertained concerning the physiognomy because the face has been destroyed . . . The Naumburg figure of St. Maurice as a duke is also without an iconographic precedent” (Suckale-Redlefsen 48, 49).
- 50 “On the basis of archeological findings the date of the first church dedicated to the Theban Legion could be fixed at approximately A.D. 380” (Suckale-Redlefsen 28–31). Between 470 and 500 CE, an anonymous author added a supplementary account of some length to the *Passion* (Suckale-Redlefsen 28, 29; Devisse 149). Marbod of Rennes wrote an eleventh-century verse account of the *Passion*; Sigebert of Gembloux wrote twelfth-century commentary; and anonymous authors at different times wrote poetry in honor of Maurice and his companions (Devisse 149). Devisse (chapter 3) and Suckale-Redlefsen (chapter 1) have lengthy accounts of the transmission of Maurician hagiography and the spread of the legend.
- 51 Suckale-Redlefsen supplies one of the more detailed versions: “At the time the emperor Diocletian (284–305) ruled the Roman empire in association with his coemperor Maximian. As supreme commander of the Roman army in Gaul, Maximian had crossed the Alps on a campaign against the insurgent Gauls. Having pitched his camp at Octodurum (now Martigny in Switzerland), he exhorted his subordinates to participate in a sacrifice to the Roman gods before the battle. Maurice and his legionaries, who were baptized Christians, attempted to avoid blasphemy by moving their camp to Aganaum (Saint-Maurice-en-Valais). On being ordered to return to the rest of the army

and perform the heathen sacrifice, Maurice refused. Maximian retaliated by having every tenth man of the Theban Legion executed. But even in the face of this signal example the faith of the Theban Legion remained unshaken. A second bloody punitive expedition met with just as little success. Maurice and his officers Exuperius, Candidus, and Innocent attested their willingness to submit to discipline in military affairs but continued to insist on their right to freedom of religion. Thereupon Maximian, who demanded unconditional obedience, had the rest of the Theban legion massacred together with their commander Maurice” (28, 29). Suckale-Redlefsen adds, “The authenticity of the martyrdom of the Theban Legion in this place is generally doubted today” (28, 29). Variant accounts exist of the events in the martyrdom.

- 52 Suckale-Redlefsen presents one version of Gregory’s legend: “According to a variant of the legend current in Cologne, part of the Theban Legion chanced to escape the massacre at Saint-Maurice-d’Agaune through being absent on military operations outside the camp. Upon hearing of the murder of the main body of the legion with its commander Maurice, this unit, which included Gereon, Candidus, Exuperius, Victor, Cassius, Florentius, and a group of Moors under the command of Gregory, fled to the Rhine. Ultimately these Thebans also suffered martyrdom in various parts of the lower Rhine region (Bonn, Cologne, Xanten). After the discovery of the relics of Gregory the Moor and his 360 companions in 1046, Archbishop Anno of Cologne declared the saint co-patron of the ancient Church of St. Gereon, which was dedicated to the Thebans” (124, 125). Gregory begins to appear as black in the fourteenth century, “in a repainted but physiognomically African reliquary bust of about 1300” and “a magnificent portrait in stained glass of about ca. 1320 . . . In the stained glass image, Gregory stands next to Gereon . . . An altarpiece of ca. 1400–1425, also from this church, again pairs a very black St. Gregory with a white Gereon” (Kaplan, *Rise* 74). “In the person of St. Gregory the Moor, Cologne now had a saint who appears to have been consistently depicted as a black from the fourteenth century on. The other Thebans always remained white” (Suckale-Redlefsen 124, 125). Devisse adds, “neither he nor the Holy Moors, whose leader he was, were prominent in the city’s devotions” (176).
- 53 Devisse, citing a PhD dissertation at the University of Paris as his source, says that Maurice’s right hand once held a banner (166).
- 54 Devisse’s chapter in *L’Image du Noir* appeared in 1979, Suckale-Redlefsen’s *Mauritius: Der heilige Mohr* was published in 1987, and Kaplan’s publications range from 1983 to 2010. Their work forms the context of critical summary and discussion and guides my thinking in this chapter.
- 55 “From the time of the Ottonian emperors the cult of St. Maurice in the German Empire was closely bound up with the coronation ritual. The king-elect kept his vigil in the chapel of St. Maurice in the cathedral of Aachen. Before the coronation he was invested with the spurs of the late saint, and the lance [of St. Maurice] was carried in front of him in the procession. After the coronation ceremony the new emperor laid aside the insignia in the chapel of St. Maurice before ascending the throne of Charlemagne. After the second half of the twelfth century the emperors were anointed by the pope in front of the altar of St. Maurice in St. Peter’s in Rome” (Suckale-Redlefsen 36, 37). Conrad II and Henry III followed their imperial predecessors in embracing the patron saint of the Empire, and Maurice’s cult spread throughout the entire imperial territory: “The many castle chapels dedicated to St. Maurice indicate that he was much favored by the high nobility. The title of *totius regni summus patronus* (‘highest patron saint of the whole realm’) [was] recorded by Abbot Hermann of Niederaltaich in the second half of the thirteenth century” (Suckale-Redlefsen 38, 39).
- 56 In 1270 the Eighth Crusade, led by Louis IX of France, intended Egypt again as destination, but made first for Tunis as a base from which to attack Egypt; St. Louis died in Tunis shortly before Edward of England arrived. Louis’s brother, Charles of Anjou, abandoned the siege of Tunis, and Edward proceeded to Acre, the last crusader colony in the Levant, arriving in 1271.

- 57 As we saw in Chapter 3, the other potentate awaited along with Frederick – the fabled Prester John of India – also did not materialize. For not joining the crusade to Egypt and his subsequent failures to honor his pledge to go on crusade, and for other misdeeds, Frederick was excommunicated by Pope Gregory IX in 1227. David Abulafia observes that Frederick “had set a date, and agreed to his own excommunication if he did not fulfill his pledge by then” (*Frederick II* 167), though Arab chronicles claimed that the Hohenstaufen dynasty was prone to excommunication largely because of their Islamophilia. The chronicler Ibn Wasil says of Frederick II, his son and successor Conrad, and Conrad’s successor Manfred (Frederick’s natural son), that “All three were hated by the Pope – the Frankish Caliph – because of their sympathy with the Muslims.” Ibn Wasil believed the Pope “excommunicated Manfred for his Muslim leanings and for having dishonored Christian religious law. His brother and his father the Emperor had also been excommunicated by the Pope of Rome for the same thing” (Gabrieli 277, 278).
- 58 Ibn Wasil reports that Frederick in fact tried to dissuade Louis IX from initiating a crusade to Egypt, and had sent “a secret embassy” to the Sultan “to put him on his guard and advise him to prepare to resist the attack, which [the Sultan] al-Malik as-Salih did . . . the Franks never realized that the Emperor was intriguing with the Muslims against them” (Gabrieli 276). When “the King of France met the fate he deserved – the defeat and destruction of his army by death and capture . . . the Emperor sent to remind him of the advice he had given him and of the sorrow he had brought upon himself by his obstinacy and disobedience and reproached him harshly for it” (Gabrieli 277). If the Arab chronicler is correct, Jean de Joinville’s account of Louis’s poignant grief at the loss of his brother at Mansurah, Louis’s genuine piety, his abstention from extravagance and self-indulgence, and his quiet dignity in captivity suggest that Frederick was remarkably harsh to his fellow Christian monarch.
- 59 Kaplan offers other art in which such “universalist objectives” are detectable: e.g., a striking Apulian capital sculpted in the first half of the thirteenth century, discovered in 1954 in the sacristy of the cathedral at Troia, which is “decorated with four heads of varied types, including a woman, an Asian, and, most remarkably, a black” (“Black Africans” 30; see also Devisse, figure 91). A second carved capital also bearing four human heads, from the same time period and now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, exhibits similar human variety, and also features a lifelike, naturalistic black African face – a face that even sports a mustache (Kaplan, “Introduction” 14; see also Devisse, figures 89 and 90).
- 60 Unlike the two capitals sculpted with African faces and the Black St. Maurice in Magdeburg, which have come down in “decontextualized settings,” the San Zeno fresco, Kaplan stresses, is an example of visual art that has valuably retained its original contextual markings (“Introduction” 16).
- 61 Frederick’s cosmopolitan worldview and mozarabic familiarity with Islamic culture and learning brought him the admiration and friendship of the sultans of Egypt. Ibn Wasil reports that the “Emperor was a sincere and affectionate friend of al-Malik al-Kamil, and they kept up a correspondence till al-Kamil died”; with Al-Kamil’s son and heir, too, “the Emperor was on sincerely affectionate terms and maintained a correspondence. When al-Adil died in his turn and his brother al-Malik as-Salih Najm ad-Din Ayyub [the last of the Ayyubid sultans of Egypt] succeeded him, relations were unchanged: al-Malik as-Salih sent to the Emperor the learned shaikh Siraj ad-Din Urmawi, now qadi of Asia Minor, and he spent some time as the Emperor’s honoured guest and wrote a book on Logic for him. The Emperor loaded him with honours” (Gabrieli 276). Frederick was especially fond of Fakhr ad-Din, one of Al-Kamil’s most trusted emirs. Runciman relates a traditional and doubtless apocryphal story in which Fakhr ad-Din, who was instrumental in Frederick’s bloodless regaining of Jerusalem, received a knighthood from Frederick (III: 185).

62 One scholar describes him like this: “He was attested as knowing Arabic; he drew directly on works of Arab science and learning; he patronised Muslim and Jewish scholars and translations from Arabic; he employed Muslims in his armies; he maintained an exotic menagerie whose leopard-breeders were Muslims; and even dispatched philosophical questions in Arabic . . . to Muslim thinkers in the hope of enlightenment from beyond the realm” (Metcalfe 280). A contemporary chronicler referred to him as the wonder of the world (*stupor mundi*); Pope Gregory IX, more belligerent a churchman than Honorius III, under whose protection Frederick had spent his minority in Sicily, referred to Frederick as the Antichrist. Muslim chronicles spoke admiringly of him, but wondered at his faith (Gabrieli 275).

For divergent views of this complex man, two of Frederick’s letters may be contrasted. One, in Arabic and addressed to his beloved friend Fakhr ad-Din, Al-Kamil’s emir, is recorded by the Arab chronicler Tarikh Mansuri; the other, addressed to his brother in Christ, Henry III of England, to inform the English king that Frederick had regained Jerusalem for Christendom, is recorded by the English chronicler Roger of Wendover.

The letter to Fakhr ad-Din shows Frederick’s command of Arab epistolary rhetoric and aureate literary form, and begins in Arabic verse alternating with rhymed prose: “In the name of God, the merciful, the forgiving/We departed and left behind us our heart, which stayed (with you) detached from our body, our race and our tribe./And it swore that its love for you would never change, eternally, and escaped, fleeing from its obedience to me./If we set ourselves to describe the great desire we feel and the sorrowful sensations of solitude and nostalgia we endure for the high excellency of Fakhr ad-Din – may God lengthen his days and extend his years, and make his feet firm in power, and keep the affection He has for him and do him honour, and give his desires fulfilment, and direct his actions and his words and heap him with abundant graces, and renew his safety night and morning – we should exceed by far the limit of an exordium and err from the path of reason. For we have been smitten, after a time of tranquility and ease, with a bitter anguish, and after pleasure and peace with the torment of separation; all comfort seems to have fled, the cord of strong-mindedness is cut, the hope of meeting again turned to despair, the fabric of patience slashed. At our parting/If I had been given the choice between life and death I should have said: ‘It is death that calls me.’/Death is tired of us, he has taken others in our place; he has chosen to leave us and seems to have forgotten our love” (Gabrieli 280–1).

The letter to Henry III is written *ex cathedra* in the persona of the Holy Roman Emperor, in Latin prose, and deploys the Christian rhetoric of divine miracle: “Frederick, by the grace of God, the august emperor of the Romans, king of Jerusalem and Sicily, to his well-beloved friend Henry, king of the English, health and sincere affection. Let all rejoice and exult in the Lord, and let those who are correct in heart glorify Him, who, to make known His power, does not make boast of horses and chariots, but has now gained glory for Himself, in the scarcity of His soldiers, that all may know and understand that He is glorious in His majesty, terrible in His magnificence, and wonderful in His plans on the sons of men, changing seasons at will, and bringing the hearts of different nations together; for in these few days, by a miracle rather than by strength, that business has been brought to a conclusion, which for a length of time past many chiefs and rulers of the world amongst the multitude of nations, have never been able till now to accomplish by force, however great, nor by fear” (Peters, *Christian Society* 162).

These two letters hint at Frederick’s mercurial capacity for alternate personas, and may impart a better idea of his talents and personality than even learned scholarly arguments. In a revisionary swing of the pendulum, after Kantorowicz’ 1927 account of Frederick’s life, historians are now more inclined to suggest Frederick’s similarities to his European counterparts, rather than his differences. David Abulafia’s 1988 account of Frederick (*Frederick II*) may be contrasted with Kantorowicz’.

63 In the 1229 treaty of Frederick and Al-Kamil, Frederick gained Jerusalem, the third most important city in Islam after Mecca and Medina (leaving only the Haram/Temple Mount, with the Dome of the Rock and Al-Aqsa mosque, in Muslim hands), Bethlehem, Nazareth, “and a strip of land running from Jerusalem to the coast, further Sidon and Caesarea, Jaffa and Acre, and some other places” (Kantorowicz 187). “The Christians had thus regained control of the three holiest shrines of their religion, the places of the Annunciation, Nativity, and Crucifixion” and Al-Kamil also agreed to the refortification of Sidon, Jaffa, and Caesarea (David Abulafia, *Frederick II* 183). On his part, Al-Kamil gained a ten-year truce “with no guarantees on either side save the personal good faith of Emperor and Sultan” (Kantorowicz 187). This lopsided bargain sometimes strikes historians as “most obviously colored by the personal desire to please on al Kamil’s side” (Kantorowicz 187). Frederick, who “did not even maintain the pretence of a war for the faith,” had “accomplished more than all the mighty Crusaders of recent times,” whereas the “Sultan’s advantage in this pact was slight” (Kantorowicz 191, 188).

Al-Kamil had begun discussions with Frederick as a move against his brother, Al-Muazzam; Al-Muazzam’s death subsequently rendered a pact with Frederick unnecessary, but Al-Kamil nonetheless kept faith with the Emperor, who asked for Jerusalem so that “he could ‘hold up his head among the [Christian] kings’” (David Abulafia, *Frederick II* 182). As outraged Muslims across Dar al-Islam learnt of Al-Kamil’s gift of Jerusalem to Frederick, dismay swelled: “The Khalif of Baghdad called him to account, the other Sultans were wroth with him, and mourning for the loss of the Holy City, which was felt to be a most bitter blow to Islam, rose to open demonstrations against al Kamil” (Kantorowicz 188). Registering the loss, the chronicler Ibn Wasil bitterly recalls Saladin: “The news spread swiftly throughout the Muslim world, which lamented the loss of Jerusalem and disapproved strongly of al-Malik al-Kamil’s action as a most dishonorable deed, for the reconquest of that noble city had been one of al-Malik an-Nasir Saladin’s most notable achievements” (Gabrieli 271).

Ibn Wasil shows how Al-Kamil’s deed was exploited by his enemies and rivals: “When news of the loss of Jerusalem reached Damascus al-Malik an-Nasir began to abuse his uncle al-Malik al-Kamil for alienating the people’s sympathies, and ordered the preacher, shaikh Shams ad-Din Yusuf . . . to preach a sermon in the Great Mosque in Damascus. He was to recall the history of Jerusalem, the holy traditions and legends associated with it, to make the people grieve for the loss of it, and to speak of the humiliation and disgrace that its loss brought upon the Muslims . . . It was a memorable day, one on which there rose up to heaven the cries, sobs and groans of the crowd” (Gabrieli 272).

There were negative consequences in Christendom as well. David Abulafia points out that since “the emperor’s objective was the winning of Jerusalem rather than the winning of glory on the battlefield,” and this was an expedition led by an excommunicate – shorn of the usual papal indulgences – and not a holy war, the Emperor’s Crusade was also seen “in the Christian world as a betrayal” (*Frederick II* 183–4). A day after Frederick’s crown-wearing in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, Jerusalem was placed under an interdict by the archbishop of Caesarea, which meant that “pilgrims were denied the opportunity to earn the remission of sin they would gain from visiting the Holy Places” (David Abulafia, *Frederick II* 189).

64 Al-Jauzi says that Al-Kamil had thoughtfully ordered the Qadi of Nablus, Shams ad-Din, “to tell the muezzins that during the Emperor’s stay in Jerusalem they were not to go up into their minarets and give the call to prayer in the sacred precinct” (Gabrieli 275). On the first day, the *qadi* forgot, and at the midday prayer, as the “muezzins’ cry rang out, all [Frederick’s] pages and valets arose, as well as his tutor, a Sicilian with whom he was reading (Aristotle’s) Logic in all its chapters, and offered the canonic prayer, for they were all Muslims” (Gabrieli 274–5). Not hearing the call to prayer on the second day, Frederick chided the *qadi* for silencing the muezzins, reportedly saying: “My chief aim in passing the night in Jerusalem was to hear the call to prayer by the muezzins, and their cries of praise to God during the night.” “He must have been very

familiar with the sound of the muezzin from Sicily and Lucera,” David Abulafia observes, adding that the story is probably apocryphal (*Frederick II* 185). Al-Jauzi cites a custodian of the sanctuary who reported that Frederick wrathfully knocked to the ground a Christian priest sitting disrespectfully by the Dome of the Rock, near the imprint of the Prophet’s foot; Abulafia’s account of this offense, by way of explanation, has the priest entering Al-Aqsa mosque carrying a Bible (*Frederick II* 185). Frederick’s jest at the expense of Christians involved punning in Arabic (Gabrieli 274). Al-Jauzi concludes, perhaps unfairly – Frederick II was a complex man – that Frederick’s “Christianity was simply a game to him” (Gabrieli 275).

- 65 “In the early 1220s, the Emperor Frederick II began transferring the Muslim population of Sicily to Lucera, creating an inland Muslim colony not far from Christian towns and cities in Apulia . . . A diverse economy was created . . . Muslims farmed lands at Lucera and elsewhere in Capitanata. The Muslim community provided Frederick’s armies with skilled archers, crossbowmen, and arms. The establishment of the colony created a controlled resource . . . [and] did not jeopardize his relations with Muslim rulers such as Sultan al-Kamil of Egypt” (Julie Anne Taylor xv). Historians sometimes find two phases of relocation to Lucera, one in 1223–5 “involving the Muslim population of AgriENTO and another taking place at Iato and Entella between the years 1243 and 1246” (Julie Anne Taylor 12); none of this jeopardized “the long established and friendly ties which existed between Frederick and al-Kamil” (Julie Anne Taylor 13).
- 66 Julie Anne Taylor cautions, however, that while “most Muslims used Arabic names,” there were “some signs of assimilation, such as the adoption of Christian names,” which did not necessarily indicate conversion (xix).
- 67 Frederick II’s propensity for exotic wild animals is well documented. Al-Kamil apparently once gave Frederick the gift of an elephant, resuscitating the cultural memory, perhaps, of Harun al-Rashid’s gift of the elephant Abu al-Abbas to that first Holy Roman Emperor, Charlemagne. Frederick arguably topped the Sultan by giving Al-Kamil a polar bear “which to the amazement of the Arabs eats nothing but fish” (Kantorowicz 196). Notably, “Lucera, along with the island of Malta, was chosen by Frederick II as a spot for the raising of wild animals, particularly leopards, by Muslim keepers” (Julie Anne Taylor 100). North Africa and Malta “were the centers of the animal trade” and proceeds “from grain sales in *Barbaria*’ were used by Frederick to purchase leopards in 1239” (Julie Anne Taylor 101). Frederick also introduced camels into Italy. “If the request made by Giovanni Moro [i.e., Johannus Maurus, or John the Moor, Frederick II’s black African chamberlain, and judge-administrator of Lucera] in 1240 that eighteen saddles for camels and 200 saddles for beasts of burden be made at Lucera is any indication, Frederick’s project for bringing camels to Capitanata was a success. Camel keepers were working in Melfi, Canosa, and Lucera that same year” (Julie Anne Taylor 102).
- 68 The theory “that the whole circuit of the world was by right under the tutelage of the Roman Emperor” was also held by Frederick’s father and grandfather (Kantorowicz 7). Frederick’s grandfather, “Barbarosa . . . had once commanded the Sultans to place their lands under his rule as heir of the Augusti, because these eastern territories had of old been conquered by the generals of his Caesar ancestors” (Kantorowicz 7). Frederick’s father, Henry VI, “had laid claim to Denmark and the Polish East; England had become a tributary vassal state” with the capture of Richard I upon that crusader king’s return after the Third Crusade (Kantorowicz 8). Henry’s pacification of Sicily extended Hohenstaufen hegemony: “Since the days of Roger II the Normans had styled themselves ‘Kings of Africa,’ and the Muslim princes, from Morocco to Tripoli, were now compelled to render to the German emperor – the new Lord of Sicily – the tribute heretofore paid to their Norman masters” (Kantorowicz 9). To David Abulafia, Frederick II’s crown-wearing ritual in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem was thus his declaration of “Roman imperial universalism,” “the idea that the monarch has been called by God to rule *all* mankind” (*Frederick II* 188, emphasis original).

- 69 Archbishop Albert also “brought back the finger of St. Catherine” acquired during “his journey to Rome to receive the pallium,” and nominated St. Catherine co-patron saint of Magdeburg cathedral (Suckale-Redlefsen 40, 41). Both Maurice and Catherine remain co-patron saints of the cathedral today. For an incisive argument on the cultural politics of their functions as co-patron saints, see Hammond.
- 70 Devisse, who dates the black Maurice to 1240–50, somewhat later than Suckale-Redlefsen’s dating (she dates it before 1232), does not intimate that both statues belong to a single sculptural program for the new cathedral.
- 71 Suckale-Redlefsen emphasizes that the archbishop shifted political positions a number of times, and was not always loyal to Frederick II. “Amidst the confusion of the rivalry between the Hohenstaufens and the Welfs for the German throne [Albert II] was chosen to fill the most eminent diplomatic posts by three emperors and the pope. He was in the service of the Hohenstaufen Philip of Swabia [the uncle of Frederick II] and endeavored to effect a reconciliation at the meeting of the rival emperors [i.e., the Welf Otto IV and the Hohenstaufen Frederick II] in Magdeburg in 1208. No agreement was reached at this meeting, and Philip of Swabia was assassinated immediately afterward. Now Albert gave his support to the Welf Otto IV, who had hitherto been antiemperor. But this change of allegiance did not last long. From 1211 on he again espoused the cause of the Hohenstaufens under the rule of Frederick II. In the same year, in his capacity as archbishop of Magdeburg, Albert promulgated the excommunication of Otto IV by Pope Innocent III, whereupon the deposed emperor invaded the Magdeburg territories in a series of campaigns which ended only with his death in 1218” (Suckale-Redlefsen 38–41). The archbishop’s shifts in loyalty between Otto IV and Frederick II thus suggest to Suckale-Redlefsen the unlikelihood of a close relationship between archbishop Albert and Frederick II.
- 72 Archbishop Albert II was among the archbishops and princes present to elect Frederick II Holy Roman Emperor at Nuremberg in 1211 (the election was subsequently reconfirmed in 1212, and Frederick was crowned in 1220). In 1220, as we saw, Frederick enabled Magdeburg to buy the important relic of Maurice’s skull; Frederick also made donations to the archbishop and cathedral “beginning at least in 1221” (Kaufmann 74). Kaufmann (85–6 n.56) points to the entries of payment in the *Regesta Archiepiscopatus Magdeburgensis*, 2: 291, no. 639 (September 17, 1221) and 2: 293, no. 641 (September 20, 1221).
- 73 “Albrecht’s successor eventually had to appeal to the pope to cover debts, and the pope in turn put the fiscal management of the cathedral chapter in the hands of others. Albrecht’s successors, including his half-brother Wilbrand, traveled less in Italy and had less contact with the emperor” (Kaufmann 74).
- 74 “As battle raged, and there was a risk of flagging in such a long fight with the number of enemies never growing less, an innumerable army of white soldiers was seen riding down from the mountains. Its standard bearers and leaders were said to be St. George, St. Maurice, St. Mercurius, and St. Demetrius. Once the Bishop of Le Puy saw them, he exclaimed loudly: ‘Soldiers, here comes the help God promised you!’ Our men would most certainly have been terrified had it not been for the hope they placed in God. The enemy began to tremble violently; they turned away, covered their backs with their shields and each one fled wherever he could” (Sweetenham 171–2). Robert the Monk’s chronicle – not an eyewitness account, but among the wave of secondary chronicles of the First Crusade written in Europe in the decade afterward – is based on the *Gesta Francorum*, an eyewitness account written while on crusade and completed by 1101, by an anonymous vassal of Bohemond of Taranto, the landless Norman baron of the First Crusade who became the first prince of Latin Antioch. In the *Gesta*, the saints in heavenly white are George, Mercurius, and Demetrius (Hill 69). Robert’s addition of Maurice suggests Maurice’s growing popularity and helps to build Maurice’s association with the crusader East. If Maurice once carried a banner in his right hand (as Devisse intimates) as well as a lance (as

Suckale-Redlefsen suggests), the statue shows him as a standard bearer, like Robert the Monk's crusading saint. For a comparison of eyewitness and secondary chronicles of the First Crusade, see *Empire of Magic*, chapter 1.

- 75 "The medieval baldachin is known from a late sixteenth-century drawing from Pomarius' *Chronika der Sachsen und Niedersachsen* (Wittenberg 1588) (*Figure 6*). It was composed of eight towerlike gables, four of which had female figures leaning from windows. It was crowned by a pointed metal roof, on the top of which a sculpted image of Saint Maurice was placed at some time. Maurice was the patron saint not only of Otto I, who founded Magdeburg, but also of the archbishop and Magdeburg cathedral" (Kaufmann 63). Kaufmann presents a meticulous and detailed argument on Frederick II's interest in reviving Roman imperial art forms, and his special interest in monumental equestrian statues of the *adventus regis* variety, marking the emperor's entry into a city. Her balanced survey of the likelihood that the Magdeburg Rider is a representation of Otto I, or of Frederick II, concludes that if the Magdeburg Rider represents Frederick II, the figure is "not meant to be a true-to-life portrait of the emperor but to show him in the way he wanted to be remembered for eternity" (80).
- 76 Kaplan argues that the stone capital found in Troia and the other now in New York, both of which display expressively lifelike and naturalistic black African faces, were fashioned in Lucera, Frederick II's Muslim colony. Since both capitals "display a range of human types" in the faces they depict, Kaplan considers them "briefer versions of the Verona fresco," and similarly designed to drive home the ideological point of the Emperor's universal dominion over the far reaches of the earth ("Introduction" 14). From Lucera comes yet another extraordinary sculpture – a beautiful, naturalistic African head, made in the 1240s, and now gracing the museum at Lucera. The stone face bears a prominent scar rising from below the lips to the upper left cheek, which suggests to Kaplan that this may be an image of Johannes Maurus himself, Frederick's chamberlain who was described as "deformatus" ("Introduction" 14–15).
- 77 In an early version of this section on the Black St. Maurice, that appeared as a contribution to the volume *Sainthood and Race: Marked Flesh, Holy Flesh*, edited by Vincent Lloyd and Molly Bassett, the volume's editors asked contributors to consider the question: How is a racial saint different from other saints – from a saint, say, who sustains the poor, loves animals, or blesses the crops? My understanding here (and below) of the apotropaic character of epidermal blackness on a racial saint is a partial answer to their question.
- 78 For an introduction to the Black Madonna, see Scheer; Begg; Cassagnes-Brouquet; and Oleszkiewicz-Perabala.