CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
0521829402 - Anglo-Saxon Perceptions of the Islamic World
Katharine Scarfe Beckett
Excerpt
More information

# 1

# Introduction

In AD 786, Bishop Georgius of Ostia, papal legate to England, wrote a letter to Pope Hadrian recording the decrees of two synods he had just attended in Mercia and Northumbria. The list of decrees reads unremarkably until the ninth item:

> Item nine. That no ecclesiastic shall dare to consume foodstuffs in secret, unless on account of very great illness, since it is hypocrisy and a Saracen practice.[1]

Why does the author introduce the idea of Saracen eating habits? Benjamin Kedar suggests that Georgius or his colleague, Theophylact, had some notion of Muslim fasting practice during the month of Ramadan, when food and drink may only be consumed between dusk and dawn. In the course of the synod, one or the other conveyed this information to the assembly as an example of how not to fast as a Christian.[2] There is no evidence that any Muslim had travelled as far west as England by this time. Arabic was not studied in Christian Europe before the late eleventh century; the Qur'ān was not translated into Latin until the twelfth.[3] The assembled Anglo-Saxon clerics can hardly have had the tenets of Islam at their fingertips. Still, they were able from this synodal decree to understand *Saracenus* as a pejorative term three centuries before the Crusades.

Within a few years of the synod, Offa, king of Mercia, had a peculiar gold piece struck in his name. This coin, now held by the British Museum, bears

[1] 'Nono capite, ut nullus ex ecclesiasticis cibum in secreto sumere audeat, nisi pr[a]e nimia infirmitate, quia hypocrisis et Saracenorum est'; 'Georgii episcopi Ostiensis epistola', ed. Dümmler, MGH Ep.Car.aeu. II, 22. Unless otherwise indicated, translations into English are mine.

[2] Kedar, *Crusade and Mission*, p. 30.

[3] D'Alverny, 'Deux traductions', p. 71, and Bobzin, 'Latin Translations', pp. 193–6.



© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
0521829402 - Anglo-Saxon Perceptions of the Islamic World
Katharine Scarfe Beckett
Excerpt
More information



the legend *Offa Rex* and also, surprisingly, somewhat bungled Arabic inscriptions on obverse and reverse in imitation of an Islamic dinar.[4] That the script was not understood by the imitator is clear both from its miscopying and from the fact that it represents the Muslim declaration of faith in one God of whom Muhammad is the prophet. A number of explanations have been offered for this remarkable artefact: it may, perhaps, have been part of a gift to the pope, or an example of high-denomination coinage for international trade.[5] It is possible that the same Georgius and Theophylact who attended the synods of 786 brought the prototype of Offa's dinar to England.

These two curious survivals, the allusion by Georgius and Offa's dinar, present the observer with a number of questions. From what sources other than Rome might the Anglo-Saxons have learnt about Islam? If George means to denigrate Muslim fasting practice, why does he refer to *Saraceni* rather than to *Arabes* or some equivalent of the word 'Muslim'? Do other references to Saracens, Muslims or Arabs survive in Anglo-Saxon literature? Did any objects other than coins reach England from Islamic territories? Did Anglo-Saxons in the late eighth century, or later, perceive any connection between the Arabic inscription on the coin (which was thought worthy of imitation) and the Saracen fast (which was most emphatically not)? What – if anything – did they think about the newly instituted religion and empire of Islam? The aim of this book is to explore these questions and to attempt some answers with reference to texts and objects which have survived from Anglo-Saxon England. More broadly, the argument also draws upon Anglo-Saxon perceptions of Arabs, Ismaelites and Saracens to contextualise and, to some extent, dispute the theory of Orientalism as formulated in Edward Said's famous book *Orientalism*, first published in 1978.

Mutual perceptions and contacts between medieval Europe and the Islamic world are the subject of a number of specialised fields of study, including the history of trade across the Mediterranean, numismatics, society and culture in the Iberian peninsula, the Crusades, Muslim writings about Europe and western Christian manuscript culture. Even a select bibliography on so many topics is precluded by constraints of space; works particularly relevant to Anglo-Saxon perceptions of the Arabs and Saracens are cited below. Apparently no cross-Mediterranean trade records, visual representations of contemporary Muslims or transcripts of dialogue with Muslims

[4] Illustrated in North, *English Hammered Coinage*, I, pl. 3, item 37.
[5] See below, pp. 58–91.



© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
0521829402 - Anglo-Saxon Perceptions of the Islamic World
Katharine Scarfe Beckett
Excerpt
More information



survive in England, and archaeological evidence for direct contact is scant. Evidence for Anglo-Saxon awareness of the Islamic world survives mostly in the form of literary records, and so, with two exceptions, the chapters below are concerned with written accounts of the Arabs and Saracens.[6]

Many studies have already addressed medieval literature on Islam in a wider European context – more or less ambitiously. One of the earlier English writers to take a critical stance towards earlier authors on the subject was Henry Stubbe (1631–76), whose own engaging account of Islam and Muhammad sadly only circulated in manuscript form.[7] During the first half of the twentieth century, Byron Porter Smith composed a monograph describing the story of Muhammad in English thought from the Middle Ages to Carlyle. Stubbe's 1954 editor, Hafiz Shairani, provided an appendix 'Containing Early Christian Legends and Notions Concerning Islam' which mentions examples of imaginative Christian calumny of Islam from Matthew Paris to Alexander Ross. Richard Southern wrote his well-known account, *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages*, in 1962, and in it emphasised early medieval ignorance in contrast with later knowledge of Islam. The late Dorothee Metlitzki published *The Matter of Araby in Medieval England* in 1977 to investigate more deeply the literary use of Islamic and Oriental sources in medieval English literature.

More recently, interest has tended to focus on the swift and exciting developments in western perceptions of Islam which took place during the eleventh and early twelfth centuries, at a time when other European links with the Islamic world were also undergoing great change.[8] Thus,

[6] The exceptions are the first and second chapters, devoted respectively to a brief and basic history of Islam between the sixth and eleventh centuries, and to the travel of objects and people between Anglo-Saxon England and territories under Islamic rule. It should be noted here that this book does not address the subject of the monstrous races of the Orient. Useful works on the idea of an Oriental 'Other' as portrayed in early medieval accounts of the wondrous East have been undertaken by Campbell in *The Witness and the Other World* and Orchard in *Pride and Prodigies*. On pictures of Ismael in Anglo-Saxon England, see Ohlgren, *Insular and Anglo-Saxon Illuminated Manuscripts*, *s.v.* 'Ismael'; Schapiro, 'The Bowman and the Bird'; Farrell, 'The Archer and Associated Figures' (with the caveat that his treatment of Latin sources is occasionally unreliable); and Mellinkoff, 'The Round, Cap-Shaped Hats'.

[7] Stubbe, *Mahometanism*, ed. Shairani, pp. iv–xiii and 151–65; noted by Daniel, *Islam and the West*, pp. 309–10, and Porter Smith, *Islam in English Literature*, pp. 71–2.

[8] Many studies, therefore, address the image of Saracens (Muslims, Arabs, etc.) in the *chansons de geste*: for example, Meredith Jones, 'The Conventional Saracen'; Gregoire, 'Des dieux



© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
0521829402 - Anglo-Saxon Perceptions of the Islamic World
Katharine Scarfe Beckett
Excerpt
More information



following the ground-breaking work by Charles H. Haskins and Marie-Thérèse d'Alverny some decades ago, the activities of the first western Arabists and the introduction of Arabic learning into north-western Europe constitute a topic in themselves, and have been the subject of many studies.[9] Other western portrayals of Muhammad and the religion of Islam from this period have been described by a number of scholars including d'Alverny, Norman Daniel and Jean Flori.

Analyses of Islam and the Muslims as they appear in texts dating from the Anglo-Saxon period, between the seventh and eleventh centuries, are somewhat scarcer. They usually form prolegomena to more detailed examinations of the later literature.[10] However, they provide partial answers for some of the questions raised above. J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, for example,

Cahu, Baratron, Tervagant'; Y. and C. Pellat, 'L'idée de Dieu chez les Sarrasins'; Edmonds, 'Le portrait des Sarrasins'; Bancourt, *Les musulmans dans les chansons de geste*; White, 'Saracens and Crusaders'; Daniel, *Islam and the West*, pp. 338–43 (Appendix 1, 'The Imputation of Idolatry to Islam'); *idem*, 'Sarrasins, chevaliers et moines dans les chansons de geste'; *idem*, *Heroes and Saracens* (includes a useful bibliography); and Flori, 'La caricature de l'Islam (the notes of which cite further recent works). Other portrayals of Islam at this time have been tackled in, for example, d'Alverny, 'Pierre le Vénérable et la légende de Mahomet'; Munro, 'The Western Attitude toward Islam'; Hill, 'The Christian View of the Muslims'; Daniel, 'The Impact of Islam on the Laity' and 'The Critical Approach to Arab Society'; Kedar, '*De Iudeis et Sarracenis*'; and Kelly, '"Blue" Indians, Ethiopians and Saracens'. Still useful is the compendious article written in 1889 by d'Ancona, 'La leggenda di Maometto in Occidente'. The above list constitutes a brief selection of literature on the topic.

[9] Charles Burnett recently lectured on *The Introduction of Arabic Learning into England* (Panizzi Lectures, 1996); see also his editions of collected articles by d'Alverny: *La transmission des textes* and *Pensée médiévale en Occident*. A good overview is provided by the articles in *The Introduction of Arabic Philosophy into Europe*, ed. Butterworth and Kessel (including Burnett's 'The Introduction of Arabic Learning into British Schools', pp. 40–57). Useful earlier works in this field are Haskins, *Studies in the History of Medieval Science*, and d'Alverny, 'La connaissance de l'Islam en Occident' and 'Deux traductions'. Early astronomy in England is also discussed by McCluskey, 'Astronomies in the Latin West', and B. Eastwood, 'The Astronomies'. Makdisi suggests that the rise of scholasticism in twelfth-century western Europe was inspired by contemporary scholarly method in the Islamic world (see his 'Interaction', pp. 288 and 308–9 and, more particularly, 'The Scholastic Method').

[10] See, for example, Southern, *Western Views of Islam*, pp. 1–33; Daniel, *The Arabs and Mediaeval Europe*, pp. 49–79, and his *Islam and the West*, pp. 11–23. Daniel acknowledges the work of Kedar and Rotter on the early period of European understanding of the Arabs (*Islam and the West*, pp. 16 and 28–9). Wallace-Hadrill has discussed Bede's perceptions of the Saracens in some detail ('Bede's Europe', pp. 76–80).



© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
0521829402 - Anglo-Saxon Perceptions of the Islamic World
Katharine Scarfe Beckett
Excerpt
More information



discussed Bede's knowledge of contemporaneous Muslim activity in Europe around the turn of the seventh century.[11] Richard Southern and Norman Daniel have sketched some history and medieval usage of the terms *Saraceni*, *Ismaelitae* and *Agareni*, concerning which Daniel makes the significant point that, during the Middle Ages, *Arabes* – a word used comparatively rarely – indicated something quite different from *Saraceni* and the others.[12] It should be noted here too that ignorance of Islam was not necessarily the same as ignorance of Muslims. Daniel points out that until the twelfth century, the Muslims were generally portrayed by western authors as mere invaders without a religious aspect, which suggests that the early medieval imagination did not distinguish between (pre-Islamic) Arabs and Muslims.[13] To the important analyses by Southern and Daniel should be added the useful first chapter of *Crusade and Mission* by Benjamin Kedar, who further emphasises the key part played by early medieval writings in shaping later apprehensions of Islam.

These works focus on European writers who lived during or after the rise of Islam. The discussions by Daniel and Southern are furthermore chiefly concerned with 'attitudes and opinions of Latin Christians, and not primarily with the data available to them', and for the most part are also 'strictly confined to matters of religion'. So Daniel outlines his aims; so also a general emphasis in modern scholarship on new western perceptions of Islam as a religion during the eleventh and twelfth centuries.[14] However, K. B. Wolf, among others, has elsewhere argued succinctly for the importance of the monastic curriculum of scriptural and patristic writings in shaping western perceptions of the Muslims.[15] If, as

[11] Wallace-Hadrill, 'Bede's Europe', p. 79.

[12] Daniel, *The Arabs and Mediaeval Europe*, p. 53; Southern, *Western Views*, pp. 16–17. Sénac suggests that medieval authors used the terms *Saraceni*, *Ismaelitae* and *Agareni* in a state of confusion (*L'image de l'autre*, p. 14); I hope to demonstrate that this was usually not the case in Anglo-Saxon England.

[13] 'As in the early Carolingian period, so through the ninth, tenth, and eleventh centuries, and until armed aggression became rewarding in the new epoch of success, the impact of the Arabs, usually as invaders, was not the impact of Islam or of anything specifically Islamic. No one clearly differentiated Arabs from other invaders, even uncivilized Northmen and Hungarians . . . References to the religion of the Arabs in all this period are sparse and slight' (Daniel, 'The Impact of Islam on the Laity', pp. 107–8).

[14] *Islam and the West*, pp. 24–5.

[15] 'Christian Views of Islam in Early Medieval Spain', p. 86. Lamoreaux, too, points out that eastern Christian authors first viewed the Muslims in the context of previously conceived



© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
0521829402 - Anglo-Saxon Perceptions of the Islamic World
Katharine Scarfe Beckett
Excerpt
More information



Daniel suggests, medieval authors did not distinguish between pre-Islamic and Islamic Arabs, it follows that authoritative pre-Islamic statements about the Arabs may have influenced medieval conceptualisations of the Muslims.

In fact, the very use of the name *Saraceni* to refer to Muslims suggests this kind of influence. A people called *Saraceni* had already been described by Jerome in the fourth century. Medieval authors in the West applied the same name to the new conquerors in the seventh century, attributing pre-Islamic characteristics to 'Saracens' who by then had become Muslims. This is acknowledged by Ekkehart Rotter in *Abendland und Sarazenen*, a detailed and widely ranging analysis of western perceptions of the Muslims during the seventh and eighth centuries.[16] Rotter notes that many early accounts of the Muslims drew upon writings which date from before the rise of Islam.[17]

As far as Anglo-Saxon literature is concerned, however, Rotter does not sufficiently emphasise the continuing influence of pre-Islamic authorities, especially Jerome. The writings of such authorities were not merely cited but recopied and read in their own right throughout the Middle Ages. Works by influential figures such as Jerome, Cassian, Augustine and Isidore combined prestige with currency. These and other authors are discussed in chapters 4 and 5 below to show how Arabs, Ismaelites and Saracens were presented in the kind of literature that many Latinate Christians contemplated on a regular, perhaps daily basis.[18]

stereotypes of the Arabs ('Early Eastern Christian Responses to Islam', pp. 11 and 24). Ogle shows that even in the twelfth century, Petrus Comestor depended on the writings of Jerome for his description of the Muslims ('Petrus Comestor', pp. 323–4). See also below, n. 17, on examples given by Rotter of patristic influence on early medieval accounts of Islam.

[16] See the review article by Daniel, *Al Masāq* 1 (1988), pp. 39–41.

[17] Rotter, *Abendland und Sarazenen*, p. 12 (Jerome cited by Adomnán); p. 70 (Jerome drawn upon by a continental chronicler); p. 90, n. 92 (Isidore cited by Bede); pp. 141–3 (Jerome as a source for Aldhelm's prose *De uirginitate*); and pp. 235–6 (Jerome cited by Bede). See, too, the articles in both the first edition of the *Encyclopedia of Islam* (ed. Houtsma *et al.*) and the second (*EI*$^2$), *s.v.* 'Saracen', and Rotter, *Abendland und Sarazenen*, pp. 68–77 and 130–45. The topic is addressed in more detail in chapters 4–9 below.

[18] Lapidge, 'Anglo-Latin Literature', p. 4: 'meditation on the writings of Ambrose, Augustine, Jerome, and Gregory would have been the lifelong occupation of a monk'. See pp. 1–5 for an outline of the kind of literary curriculum which an Anglo-Saxon student of Latin might have addressed in a monastic school. On Latin learning in Anglo-Saxon



© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
0521829402 - Anglo-Saxon Perceptions of the Islamic World
Katharine Scarfe Beckett
Excerpt
More information



Such surviving influences from the past were complemented by various contemporary references to Islam. Rotter and Kedar argue that news of Islam both as a religious and a military entity was widely available before 1100 in even the extreme west of Europe.[19] Kedar mentions, for example, a reference by the mid-ninth-century biblical commentator Paschasius Radbertus which indicates that he knew Islam to be a monotheistic faith with similarities to Judaism and Christianity.[20] However, such an informed opinion seems to be exceptional. European commentary on Islam before the

England in general, see Lapidge's volumes of collected articles, *Anglo-Latin Literature 600–899* and *Anglo-Latin Literature 900–1066*.

[19] Kedar comments: '. . . it is evident that a considerable amount of information about the Saracens did reach Catholic Europe between the mid-seventh and early eleventh century, and therefore it is inaccurate to describe this period . . . as the age of ignorance', and 'lack of interest rather than ignorance characterized the Catholic European stance toward the religion of the Saracens in the period under discussion' (*Crusade and Mission*, p. 35; see also pp. 25–34 on early medieval knowledge of Islam). Rotter notes: 'England und Irland liegen zwar am Rand der Welt, aber sie sind – wie solche Beispiele verdeutlichen – keineswegs vom Informationsfluß abgeschlossen' (*Abendland und Sarazenen*, p. 144). On English perceptions of Islam, Rotter discusses pilgrimages to Jerusalem which were made by or known to Anglo-Saxons (pp. 31–65) and refers to the writings of Bede, Aldhelm and Alcuin on the Arabs and Saracens.

[20] Kedar, *Crusade and Mission*, pp. 30–1; he cites the original passage by Paschasius Radbertus on p. 205. See Paschasius' *Expositio in Matheum*, CCCM 56B, 1163; he describes Islam as a corrupt monotheistic faith which adopts material from both the Old and New Testaments but identifies itself with neither Judaism nor Christianity. This comment on Islam should be viewed alongside two others in the same work which together considerably strengthen Kedar's case for the availability of accurate information on Islam by the ninth century. In the first, discussing the description in the book of Daniel of the corruption of the Jewish faith and the desecration of the temple, *in templo abominatio desolationis*, Paschasius comments: 'In tantum ut in loco quo prius templum et religio fuit, Sarraceni phanum culturae suae habeant in modum sancti templi ad prophanationem sanctuarii quod sua lingua ut aiunt Myschydam uocant' (*Expositio in Matheum*, CCCM 56, 146). The second passage, in a similar vein, again connects the Saracens with the prophecies of Daniel: 'Unde idem propheta: "Consummatio, inquit, dabitur super desolationem Hierusalem". . . Sed in eodem ciuitatis loco nunc phanum Sarracenorum est in modum templi in quo nullus Iudeorum audet introire' (*Expositio in Matheum*, CCCM 56B, 1167). These remarks are of considerable interest both for the manner in which they describe the Saracen religion and places of worship as false copies of 'real' Christian faith (cf. Said, *Orientalism*, pp. 58–63, on perceptions of Islam as an imitation of Christianity) and for the fact that Paschasius Radbertus had encountered a genuine religious term from the Saracen language: *myschyda* is a fair Latinisation of the Arabic word *masjid* which also gives the modern English 'mosque'.



© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
0521829402 - Anglo-Saxon Perceptions of the Islamic World
Katharine Scarfe Beckett
Excerpt
More information



Crusades is striking to modern readers for its lack of curiosity. It suggests that western thinkers were the more disinclined to realise the novelty of Islam because they already knew about 'Saracens' from the numerous earlier authorities.

Clearly, it would be of considerable interest to draw together and correlate all known references to the Saracens which were available to European readers over the five centuries between the rise of Islam and the more frequently studied period of the Crusades. Such a collection would, ideally, include not only mentions of the Saracens from works contemporaneous with the Islamic conquests, but also comments written before the rise of Islam which were known to later authors. One might then address the question not only of what relationship obtained between inherited and contemporary accounts of the Saracens during this period, but also what conceptual context for Islam already existed by the time it was first noticed in the West, and what changes (if any) took place in western perceptions of Islam between the early seventh century and the Crusades. As yet, however, no such broadly based catalogue and analysis exists; and on a European scale the sheer quantity of relevant material would be impossible to treat within the bounds of a single study.

However, a more limited investigation based on a number of texts known in Anglo-Saxon England can succeed, for a variety of reasons. The period of Anglo-Saxon literacy coincides almost exactly with the centuries in question (from the beginning of the seventh century, when Augustine's mission began preaching Christianity in England and Islam was revealed to Muhammad, to roughly 1100, when the increasing dominance of Anglo-Norman culture and the success of initial crusading efforts provide a convenient *terminus ante quem*). Furthermore, information about Islam could only arrive from or via the Continent, while many works by Anglo-Saxons such as Bede and Aldhelm were also known abroad. To the degree that western Christian authors and audiences drew upon a common literary corpus, information about Islam that arrived in Anglo-Saxon England is representative of that which circulated on the Continent. At the same time, a particularly rich legacy of Old English writings raises the possibility of discovering peculiarly Anglo-Saxon literary responses to imported accounts of the Saracens. Thus, though conclusions about early English perceptions of Islam and the Saracens in general would not necessarily be applicable across medieval Europe, they would provide a useful



© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
0521829402 - Anglo-Saxon Perceptions of the Islamic World
Katharine Scarfe Beckett
Excerpt
More information



starting point for further studies. Chapters 3 to 8 explore the available material.

Bearing in mind the possibility of studies ranging further in time as well as in space, chapter 9 of this book then pursues two ideas about Saracens which were known to Anglo-Saxon readers and which persisted through subsequent centuries of textual production in England. For centuries, it remained possible for the authors of Christian texts to state that the Saracens had named themselves wrongfully and associated their religious practice with the planet or goddess Venus. Examples are given from the twelfth to the seventeenth century. In the light of the later examples it can be seen that Anglo-Saxon readings and writings about the Saracens contributed to a long history of transmission in which similar information, repeated over and over again, was altered only as necessary to fit comfortably into new contexts. This remained as true after the Conquest as it had been before. The later examples may cause us to reconsider our ideas about authority and authorial intentions during the Middle Ages and they certainly prompt a re-examination of the idea that significant western awareness of Muslims as Saracens began more or less with the Crusades.

Briefly, new information about the religion and empire of Islam did reach England before the Norman Conquest, but it arrived in a context dominated by older, inherited images of the Arabs, Saracens and Ismaelites. Examination of Old English texts leads to a refinement of this picture: Saracens in the vernacular were presented in simpler and more concrete terms than their counterparts in educated Latin. Western writers sometimes combined old information with new but their explanations of people we now term Muslims were formulated within a framework of received ideas and definitions which often bore little relation to the contemporary situation in Islam.

Rare exceptions, such as the comment on Saracen fasting cited above, or a description of Muslim bureaucracy in the Holy Land by the English pilgrim Willibald, underline the discrepancy between received opinion and new information. The relationship between contemporary references to Muslims in Anglo-Saxon England and earlier Latin writings is addressed especially in chapters 3, 6 and 8 below. As Kedar noted, conservatism prevailed in the bulk of learned references to the Saracens while a scattering of contemporary witnesses recorded aspects of the changing political and religious scene.



© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
0521829402 - Anglo-Saxon Perceptions of the Islamic World
Katharine Scarfe Beckett
Excerpt
More information



## ORIENTALISM IN ANGLO-SAXON ENGLAND

According to Edward Said, a comparable gap between inherited traditional concepts and new observations on Islam characterised Orientalist writings of the nineteenth century:

> As the commercial, political, and other existential encounters between East and West increased . . . a tension developed between the dogmas of latent Orientalism, with its support in studies of the 'classical' Orient, and the descriptions of a present, modern, manifest Orient articulated by travelers, pilgrims, statesmen, and the like. At some moment impossible to determine precisely, the tension caused a convergence of the two types.[21]

What place does postcolonial theory have in an examination of early views of Saracens? There are several reasons for looking more closely at the portions of Said's *Orientalism* which might apply to 'the Middle Ages'. Firstly and most simply, he characterises modern Orientalism in very general terms which invite comparisons with earlier periods. Secondly, his picture of Orientalism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries includes a supposed historical link with some kind of medieval Orientalism but – between the diffuseness of Said's definitions of 'Orientalism' itself and the selective evidence he provides in *Orientalism* for the medieval centuries – it has been hard to know whether or not he has a plausible case. Thirdly, an examination of Anglo-Saxon perceptions of people whom Said assumes to constitute 'Oriental' subject-matter shows that Crusade-dominated and Empire-centred versions of history may cause us to read early medieval *Arabes* and *Saraceni* in a particular and inappropriate way. Fourthly, in relation to the second and third points, Said's own discussion more than hints that it would like to construct a Christian Middle Ages as the bad source, to some extent, of modern evils, and this is provocative enough in itself to warrant further examination.

Nothing is clearer from *Orientalism* than that discourses construct what they purport to describe. Said initially divides 'Orientalism' into three types. A generally Orientalist attitude had pervaded European thought since the earliest records of 'the basic distinction between East and West'. Another kind of Orientalism consisting of expertise about an identifiable Orient might also relate to some authors read in Anglo-Saxon England. A third, corporate institution of Orientalism can be observed from the

[21] Said, *Orientalism*, pp. 222–3.



© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org