

ANGLO-SAXON  
PERCEPTIONS OF THE  
ISLAMIC WORLD

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# 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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> '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.

<sup>2</sup> Kedar, *Crusade and Mission*, p. 30.

<sup>3</sup> D'Alverny, 'Deux traductions', p. 71, and Bobzin, 'Latin Translations', pp. 193–6.

the legend *Offa Rex* and also, surprisingly, somewhat bungled Arabic inscriptions on obverse and reverse in imitation of an Islamic dinar.<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup> 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

<sup>4</sup> Illustrated in North, *English Hammered Coinage*, I, pl. 3, item 37.

<sup>5</sup> See below, pp. 58–91.

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.<sup>6</sup>

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.<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup> Thus,

<sup>6</sup> 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'.

<sup>7</sup> Stubbe, *Mabometanism*, 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.

<sup>8</sup> 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

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.<sup>9</sup> 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.<sup>10</sup> 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 Vénéral 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.

<sup>9</sup> 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').

<sup>10</sup> 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).

discussed Bede's knowledge of contemporaneous Muslim activity in Europe around the turn of the seventh century.<sup>11</sup> 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.<sup>12</sup> 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.<sup>13</sup> 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.<sup>14</sup> 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.<sup>15</sup> If, as

<sup>11</sup> Wallace-Hadrill, 'Bede's Europe', p. 79.

<sup>12</sup> 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.

<sup>13</sup> '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).

<sup>14</sup> *Islam and the West*, pp. 24–5.

<sup>15</sup> '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



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.<sup>16</sup> Rotter notes that many early accounts of the Muslims drew upon writings which date from before the rise of Islam.<sup>17</sup>

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.<sup>18</sup>

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.

<sup>16</sup> See the review article by Daniel, *Al Masāq* 1 (1988), pp. 39–41.

<sup>17</sup> 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*<sup>2</sup>), *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.

<sup>18</sup> 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

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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.<sup>19</sup> 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.<sup>20</sup> 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*.

<sup>19</sup> 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.

<sup>20</sup> Kedar, *Crusade and Mission*, pp. 30–1; he cites the original passage by Paschasius Radbertus on p. 205. See Paschasius' *Expositio in Mattheum*, 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 Mattheum*, 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 Mattheum*, 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'.

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

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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.

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.<sup>21</sup>

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

<sup>21</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, pp. 222–3.

late eighteenth century onwards.<sup>22</sup> In the passage cited above, Said also distinguishes the categories 'latent Orientalism' and 'manifest Orientalism'. 'Latent Orientalism' is an inherent attitude and 'manifest Orientalism' a set of stated views and sometimes actions.<sup>23</sup> However, 'latent Orientalism', as used above, seems further to mean a conservative body of statements while 'manifest Orientalism' seems to signify statements about the immediate Orient in the here and now.

It is difficult to find a plausible alternative to the term 'Orientalism' when describing Anglo-Saxon perceptions of Saracens in relation to Said's thesis. This may be partly because it is difficult actually to point to a distinct corresponding phenomenon in Anglo-Saxon texts until the word itself, with its imperial freight, has been invoked, at which point it becomes difficult to see anything else. This problem is discussed in more detail in the concluding chapter below. In the meantime I have used the word quite vaguely, as Said does, glossing over the problem of whether 'Anglo-Saxon' can represent 'West' while 'Arabs, Ismaelites, Saracens' represent 'East'. Said's own bias is towards an 'Orient' represented by 'Islam'. It is more difficult to guess what might have constituted the East or the Orient to Anglo-Saxon readers. Said's 'basic distinction between East and West' may not be any more basic than other medieval divisions of the cosmos. This clearly circles back to the question of whether to see an omnipresent 'Orientalism' which then requires the construction of its corresponding 'Orient', or whether it is the appearance of an Orient in the literature which indicates that, a process of Orientalisation having taken place, Orientalism must be alive and well. At any rate, it seems that Said's ideas about medieval representations of an Orient must be clarified, if at all, by engaging with the texts themselves.

The problem of nomenclature arises again for less critically charged words. Not only have survivals such as *Arabs*, *Turks* and *Muslims* changed considerably in their usage, they also fail to overlap usefully with now-archaic terms such as *Saracens*, *Ismaelites*, *Hagarenes* or *Mahometans* which themselves are far from coterminous. A clear difference between *Arabes* and *Saraceni* emerges from surviving Anglo-Saxon literature – and it is doubtful whether 'Muslim' should ever automatically translate *Saracenus* in a text from this period, even when the text quite clearly refers to the (originally northern Arabian) adherents of Qur'ānic religion who assumed rule of Asia, Africa and Europe during the seventh and eighth centuries or later. Where

<sup>22</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, pp. 2–3.

<sup>23</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, p. 206.

a modern proper name seems to me too narrow to refer to people understood by Anglo-Saxon readers as *Saraceni*, for example, I have resorted to the modern English 'Saracen', intending to reflect medieval perceptions rather than my own and not expecting it to be thought equivalent with 'Arab', 'Muslim' or indeed any later brand of imagined Saracen such as those found in Sir Walter Scott's stories.

Reference to historical entities like 'the Arabs', 'the caliphate(s)' or 'the Muslim world' is also imprecise in the absence of any very clear contemporary agreement on the edges and gaps of the terms. Where I use 'Muslim' or 'Islam' in the course of discussion, it is for convenience and refers to our present-day identification of a religion and polity of Islam after the 630s. (The idea that there is one Muslim religion and one polity called Islam is of course itself untrue, although it was a single caliphate after Muhammad's death.) Other generalisations employed below, again for the sake of convenience, are 'Europe', 'Christendom', 'Christian thought', 'the West' and so forth. As suggested above, use of 'Muslim', 'Islam', etc. should not be taken to indicate that an Anglo-Saxon could conceive of a Saracen religion and government distinguished by any features which we would today recognise as characteristically Islamic.

In the passage cited above, Said is discussing 'latent' and 'manifest' Orientalism in the early nineteenth century. During the nineteenth century, according to Said, these two kinds of Orientalism coincided, for reasons intimately bound up with western territorial expansion in the Orient and the new role of the Orientalist as governmental policy advisor.<sup>24</sup> His description raises interesting questions about the medieval perceptions which are supposed to have nurtured the most broadly defined and longest-lived aspect of his 'Orientalism'. Might it be that during the late eleventh century there occurred in the literate European understanding a comparable convergence of traditional and contemporary conceptions of Saracens which was equally bound up with western territorial efforts against Islam and the political role of the church? Without necessarily identifying 'Islam' with 'Orient', it would be interesting to propose a 'proto-Orientalism' in literary representations of the Crusades, which Said does not deal with in any detail except to describe modern responses to them.<sup>25</sup> Daniel has raised

<sup>24</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, pp. 221–3.

<sup>25</sup> See Said, *Orientalism*, pp. 58, 75, 101 (Walter Scott on Crusaders), 168, 170, 172 (Chateaubriand on Crusades) and 192.

the question of what relationship obtained between western writings on Islam and western territorial expansion during the Crusades. Like Said on the later phenomenon of Orientalism, he seems doubtful as to the exact nature of their mutual influence at this point; he suggests that the military activity perhaps did not inspire the literature so much as arise from the same context.<sup>26</sup> On the other hand, Daniel quite clearly states a case elsewhere for a similarity between the medieval apprehension of Islam and nineteenth-century European empire-building, which he links explicitly with the idea of Crusade.<sup>27</sup>

It seems to be the case that in a number of literary exercises from the Crusades period, such as the translation of the Qur'ān by Robert of Chester in Toledo, Christian polemic or the *chansons de geste*, a new and perhaps more aggressive attitude towards Islam may be seen. Authors began to imagine the subjugation of the Orient, not in terms of apocalypse or God's punishment but as a present, active interference by the Christian West in Saracen territories. Both as a religion and an empire, Islam was to be corrected by means of the conversion of Muslims (hence the need for a Latin Qur'ān and an improved knowledge of Islamic belief) and forceful repossession of previously Christian territories (the act of which is celebrated in the *chansons de geste*, for example). Earlier representations of the Saracens, including those known in Anglo-Saxon England, tended to convey the idea of Christian superiority through examples of resistance and steadfastness rather than premeditated attack. Only at the end of the tenth century do we find examples in Old English literature of battles between Christian and Muslim armies.<sup>28</sup> Even in these cases, it is by chance that the Christian forces meet with Saracens who initiate hostilities. The early descriptions of Christian resistance may have been profoundly hostile towards the Saracens, but their authors apparently did not conceive of Christian armed forces wilfully entering Saracen territories *en masse* in order to seize control there.

This returns us to the question of literary constructs and the relationship between text and event, important considerations in Said's construction of *Orientalism* and his call for 'worldly' criticism engaged with real experience. Muslim armies never reached Anglo-Saxon England. Saracens, unlike

<sup>26</sup> 'I must stress that there is no proven causal relation between the Crusade and the literature . . . Without demonstration to the contrary, we should consider the mental and the physical expansion that took place in that age as concomitant phenomena' (Daniel, 'The Impact of Islam on the Laity', p. 108).

<sup>27</sup> Daniel, *The Arabs and Medieval Europe*, pp. 321–2.      <sup>28</sup> See below, pp. 181 and 185.



Vikings, did not impinge directly upon Anglo-Saxon daily life. However, they had a long history in Latin ecclesiastical literature and a special status in Christian thought as the conquerors of the Holy Land. Many perceptions were shaped by text before Islamic events of European significance were generally known to have occurred. Anglo-Saxon awareness of Arabs and Saracens was governed by statements in conservative Latin works which circulated in their own right, were collated and redeployed by scholars such as Bede and also interacted with vernacular and (presumably) oral culture.<sup>29</sup> The textual interactions took place in literate environments, which is to say church, monastery and court. Ideas about the Arabs, Ismaelites and Saracens subsequently entered Old English primarily through translations from the Latin. The early medieval church played a crucial part in disseminating information from the Latin. Scholars have noted that the church mediated between Latin literacy and Germanic orality in the codification of Anglo-Saxon laws, for example. Latin has been described as ‘the language of cultural and political power’ during the early medieval period.<sup>30</sup> Richard Fletcher offers many examples of European Christian conversion motivated by the promise of material gain and discusses the ‘top-down’ approach of missionaries who sought royal and aristocratic converts as a means of effectively disseminating the faith and gaining patronage for the church.<sup>31</sup> Alexander Murray summarises the appeal that literate Christianity must have had for many in proposing that it offered ‘the means for a better articulation of space and time . . . it could articulate higher human mental capacities’.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Brown, ‘Latin Writing’, p. 53. O’Brien O’Keeffe discusses examples of the interaction of Latin and vernacular orality and literacy in her influential study *Visible Song*; see especially pp. 1–14, 23 and 192.

<sup>30</sup> Rivers, ‘Adultery in Early Anglo-Saxon Society’, p. 21, and Brown, ‘The Dynamics of Literacy’, p. 110.

<sup>31</sup> See Fletcher, *The Conversion of Europe*, pp. 160–92 and 236–55.

<sup>32</sup> See Murray, ‘The Sword is Our Pope’ (review article discussing Fletcher’s *The Conversion of Europe*), p. 17, and Green, *Medieval Listening and Reading*, pp. 7–9 and 15–17. Graham, in *Beyond the Written Word*, examines the nature of the Qur’ān as a spoken book; the impact of writing on oral cultures is further analysed by Goody in *The Interface Between the Written and the Oral*, especially pp. 132–8, to which Green refers on altered perceptions of space and time in a literate society. For other recent discussions of literacy and orality in Anglo-Saxon England, see (generally) Olson, ‘Interpreting Texts’, pp. 123–4 and 136–7; Erzgräber, ‘The Beginnings of a Written Literature’; Meier, ‘Writing and Medieval Culture’; and Schaefer, ‘*Ceteris Imparibus*’. Stock’s *The Implications of Literacy*, an analysis of orality and literacy in the tenth and eleventh centuries, remains important; likewise

The technology of such improved articulation was the written word – initially, the Latin written word.<sup>33</sup> As Ælfric noted, learning Latin brought its students closer to God but a little Latin learning was a dangerous thing.<sup>34</sup> I use the term ‘literate’ to mean the ability, however minimal, of an individual to understand something from Latin or Old English writing, or from hearing spoken Latin. Thus one who could recite a handful of psalms and had a vague idea of their meaning was in some sense literate, even if unable to read.<sup>35</sup> ‘Literacy’ was a quality of Anglo-Saxon society in general in that many who did not or could not read had access to written information through those who did and who talked afterwards about what they had read, or read it out loud to an audience. This access too would have been Christianised to some extent. The notion that conversion, literacy and institutional power were inextricably linked in the early medieval period raises interesting questions about the role played by the church in propagating views of the Arabs and Islam. Since Saracens were a written phenomenon in Anglo-Saxon England, how did their representation sit with the general function of literate endeavours at the time, which was to serve the Christian cause by bringing people closer to God – and further away from those who were not deemed godly?

In *Orientalism*, Said does not take up such themes, but then his concern is to emphasise the general continuity of certain western modes of thought. He indicates that medieval perceptions of Islam have already

Clanchy’s *From Memory to Written Record*, a fundamental work on the shift from oral to literate mentality in England; see especially pp. 149–50, 177–8, 186–9, 232–3 and 263. On literacy and orality as evidenced in specific Old English texts, see, for example, Opland, ‘From Horseback to Monastic Cell’ (*Beowulf* and poems by Cynewulf); Near, ‘Anticipating Alienation’ (*Beowulf*); and Kelly, ‘Anglo-Saxon Lay Society and the Written Word’ (legal documents). Richter emphasises the continuing importance of oral culture in a newly literate society (*The Formation of the Medieval West*, pp. 45–77). Huisman, in ‘Subjectivity/Orality’, offers an alternative view; see especially pp. 313–14 and nn. 8 and 35.

<sup>33</sup> Brown, ‘Latin Writing’, pp. 36–7 and 39; Stock, *The Implications of Literacy*, p. 9; and Ong, ‘Writing is a Technology that Restructures Thought’, pp. 31–5. Medieval Christian literate and Latinate culture are also discussed by Irvine in *The Making of Textual Culture*, pp. 88–117.

<sup>34</sup> Ælfric, *Grammar*, pp. 2–3 (on the necessity of learning Latin), and *Old English Preface to Genesis*, p. 77 (on priests with little Latin who take the Old Testament literally).

<sup>35</sup> Brown, ‘Latin Writing’, pp. 40–1.

been described by such scholars as Daniel, Southern and Metlitzki.<sup>36</sup> Said takes his examples mostly from the eleventh century or later and his engagement with early medieval authors consists of portraying Bede (c. 673–735) and Luther (1483–1546) as joint representatives of a continuum of medieval European prejudice against Islam.<sup>37</sup> His exposition, though admirably clear, somewhat begs the question of how enlightening it is to compare western perceptions of Islam at the beginning of the eighth century, when Bede's literacy was exceptional and the Muslim armies were only just entering Spain, with those of the sixteenth, when Europe was dotted with universities and Turkish pirates raided the English coastline.

Not surprisingly, *Orientalism* has during its influential life prompted a variety of responses, including charges of inconsistency and neglect of significant areas of scholarship.<sup>38</sup> Of particular interest with regard to the medieval period is the publication by Nabil Matar of *Islam in Britain 1558–1685*. Matar discusses a variety of ideas about Islam that permeated western Renaissance society in complicated and influential ways before the development of the western colonial interests which occupy Said. As Matar points out, western engagements with Islam during this period reflected the

<sup>36</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, pp. 16 (on Metlitzki, *The Matter of Araby*) and 60–2 (on the work of Daniel and Southern). Said describes his methodology and choice of material on pp. 15–25.

<sup>37</sup> Said describes 'a general European attempt from Bede to Luther' to 'make it clear to Muslims that Islam was just a misguided version of Christianity' (*Orientalism*, p. 61). It is perhaps somewhat misleading to include Bede in this attempt, since he was, so far as can be determined from his surviving writings, ignorant of Muslim religious belief and not writing for a Muslim readership. Said is more persuasive when he writes that in the works of Bede, 'the Orient and Islam are always represented as outsiders having a special role to play *inside* Europe' (*Orientalism*, p. 71). Said comments more briefly elsewhere on the medieval period; see, for example, *Covering Islam*, p. 5. The question *quid Said cum Anglo-Saxonicis?* has already received one answer in the study of Orientalism and Anglo-Saxonism by Frantzen (*Desire for Origins*, pp. 27–61, 'Origins, Orientalism, and Anglo-Saxonism in the Sixteenth and Nineteenth Centuries') who does not, however, address Anglo-Saxon perceptions of Arabs, Ismaelites or Saracens.

<sup>38</sup> Many of the initial criticisms are usefully summarised by Mani and Frankenberg in 'The Challenge of *Orientalism*', a survey and critique of responses to Said's work to the mid-1980s. Said himself takes up some of the charges in his 'Afterword' to the 1995 edition of *Orientalism*. See also Daniel's careful analysis in 'Edward Said and the Orientalists'. 'Orientalism' as defined by Said has continued to provoke comment and reaction, the numerous instances of which are not listed here.

fact that the Islamic Ottoman empire was the great political power of the day. Western writings at this time were not characterised by ‘the authority of possessiveness or the security of domination which later gave rise to what Edward Said has termed “Orientalism”’; Matar notes as a consequence that it would be inappropriate to apply Said’s theory to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.<sup>39</sup> Said’s argument that certain kinds of prejudice have continued to characterise western literature about the Orient would appear to be only partly borne out by Matar’s comment that Renaissance English references to the Saracens and Islam were in places indebted to medieval writings and ideas.<sup>40</sup>

But – as Matar then points out later in his discussion – it is nevertheless possible, as Said had partly done, to identify certain long-standing characteristics in Christian European representations of the Orient. Matar’s example is the continuing use of the Bible.<sup>41</sup> On the one hand, then, Islamic success and resistance during the Renaissance period provoked responses which cannot happily be defined as ‘Orientalist’. On the other, because of that same success and resistance, Islam and Muslims ‘would always remain the implacable “Other”’,<sup>42</sup> a statement which draws close to Said’s that ‘Orientalism is never far from . . . a collective notion identifying “us” Europeans as against all “those” non-Europeans . . .’<sup>43</sup> Said’s brief, generalised model of Renaissance Orientalism is both expanded and corrected by Matar’s closer inspection. It is Said’s aggressive sweep across literary history that makes the thesis of *Orientalism* so provocative for other scholars, whether they agree or disagree with it. This suggests a methodological problem: how to do justice to the complexity of an individual period or theme (Islam in Renaissance England, Saracens in the *chansons de geste*, Saracens in Merovingian texts, etc.) whilst trying also to do justice to the entire history of some of the ideas found within that period or theme (Saracens are devoted to Venus, Muhammad is an Ismaelite, etc. – which Said does not take up)? Or, as Said asked concerning his own approach, ‘How then to recognize individuality

<sup>39</sup> Matar, *Islam in Britain*, pp. 11–12; on capture of Christians, western ineffectuality and the religious attractions of Islam, see, more generally, pp. 1–19.

<sup>40</sup> Matar, *Islam in Britain*, p. 157.

<sup>41</sup> ‘Indeed, as Edward Said has shown, Orientalism, which became the overarching venue for “representing” Islam and for justifying Western colonization of the Levant and North Africa in the modern period, had extensive roots in Biblical images and allusions’; Matar, *Islam in Britain*, pp. 186–7.

<sup>42</sup> Matar, *Islam in Britain*, p. 187.      <sup>43</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, p. 7.

and to reconcile it with its intelligent, and by no means passive or merely dictatorial, general and hegemonic context?<sup>44</sup>

Daniel and Said both generalise from selected evidence to propose that European authors have always striven to denigrate Islam and the Orient, as conceived in literature, in ways which somehow remain medieval (or even ancient Greek). Concerning Anglo-Saxon England, there are reasons why Said's approach especially might be thought anachronistic in some respects, and these reasons are outlined in more detail below.<sup>45</sup>

As noted above, Anglo-Saxons, Franks, Gauls and other western European peoples of the Middle Ages first encountered the Muslims and the Orient through the Christian Latin literature of late antiquity. Here is the Venerable Bede (c. 673–735), interpreting Gen. XVI.12 on an angel's prophecy regarding Ismael, the son of Abraham by the slave Hagar:

It means that [Ismael's] seed is to live in the wilderness – that is to say, the wandering Saracens of uncertain abode, who invade all those living beside the desert, and are resisted by all. But this is how things used to be. Now, however, to such an extent is '[Ismael's] hand against everyone and everyone's hand against him' that they oppress the whole length of Africa under their sway and, moreover, inimical and full of hate towards everybody, they hold most of Asia and a considerable part of Europe.<sup>46</sup>

Bede wrote this passage at a time when the Islamic armies were making great advances into previously Christian regions, and there is no doubt that the Saracens he refers to are these Muslim forces.<sup>47</sup> However, 'Saracen', as noted above, was not a new word. Bede and other erudite ecclesiastics had learned from pre-Islamic patristic writers that the name 'Saracen' had been adopted by the Ismaelites or Hagarenes of the Old Testament. The Ismaelites had taken their new name (according to western authors) in order to claim descent from Abraham's wife Sarah rather than from their real but

<sup>44</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, pp. 8–9. <sup>45</sup> See below, 'Conclusions', pp. 231–40.

<sup>46</sup> 'Significat semen eius habitaturum in eremo, id est Saracenos uagos, incertisque sedibus. Qui uniuersas gentes quibus desertum ex latere iungitur incursant, et expugnantur ab omnibus. Sed haec antiquitus. Nunc autem in tantum manus eius contra omnes, et manus sunt omnium contra eum, ut Africam totam in longitudine sua ditioe premant, sed et Asiae maximam partem, et Europae nonnullam omnibus exosi et contrarii teneant' (Bede, *Commentarius in Genesim* [CPL 1344], CCSL 118A, 201; he cites Gen. XVI.12).

<sup>47</sup> See below, pp. 32–3.

less reputable ancestor, the slave-woman Hagar, who was Ismael's mother.<sup>48</sup> The terms *Saraceni*, *Ismaelitae* and *Agareni* had been used by Jerome (*d.* 420), a Christian scholar, to refer to Arab peoples living in the Sinai peninsula and Syrian desert. By the time the Muslims of the seventh century inherited the label *Saraceni*, it had been in use for several hundred years, and in a learned Christian context it rendered the conquerors immediately familiar and explicable.

The identities and characteristics of Old Testament Ismaelites, pre-Islamic Arabs and Muslims congregated and eventually mingled within the singular embrace of the name *Saraceni*. The process was of considerable significance for the history of western perceptions of Islam. For centuries afterwards, western authors defined and characterised Muslims using negative imagery from biblical exegesis and apocalyptic literature. This kind of interpretation continued alongside (and sometimes in) learned scholarly works on Islam well into the period dealt with by Said in *Orientalism*.<sup>49</sup> For Said, this kind of familiarisation represents a means of controlling the disquieting novelty of the Orient by rendering it tame: 'known, and therefore less fearsome, to the Western reading public'.<sup>50</sup> Yet he does not provide evidence for such a process of familiarisation in early medieval Western perceptions of 'the Orient' nor note the distinct Christian scholastic influence in his notional background of 'Orientalist-inclined' thought.

Still, several examples of what at first reading appear to be 'characteristically Orientalist thought' may be teased out from the passage by Bede cited above. First, there is the idea that Orientalism consists largely in the implicit boundary which separates the necessarily different and very often

<sup>48</sup> As Daniel (among others) has noted, the terms *Agareni* or *Ismaelitae* were thus often included alongside *Saraceni* as a corrective (Daniel, *The Arabs and Mediaeval Europe*, p. 53).

<sup>49</sup> Josiah Conder, for example, whose substantial work *An Analytical and Comparative View of All Religions* was published in 1838, elsewhere drew on Rev. IX.1–10 to describe the Muslim conquerors of the seventh and eighth centuries as a plague of diabolic man-eating locusts led by the fallen angel Destroyer ('The Apocalypse', p. 77). See, generally, Matar, *Islam in Britain*, 153–83; Stubbe, *Mahometanism*, ed. Shairani, pp. 210, 245–6 and 252–3; and Porter Smith, *Islam in English Literature*, pp. 14, 27–8 and 150–3 (nineteenth century); and see chapter 9 below on the survival of two specific notions concerning Saracens.

<sup>50</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, p. 60, where he refers to such processes as 'domestications of the exotic'.

dangerous, threatening 'Orient' – the 'Other' – from the western writer who describes it. Bede's repetition of the words 'everybody', 'all' (*omnes, universus*) in opposition to the Saracens makes it clear that 'everybody' in this case excludes 'the Saracens', and that Bede belongs with 'everybody'. Related to this is his proprietorial attitude towards Africa, Asia and Europe. Bede knew of two churchmen who had travelled to England from Africa and Asia, but he himself never set foot abroad.<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless, implicit in his comment is the idea that the continents belong to 'everybody' (namely, 'us') who is put upon by 'them', the unrighteous Saracens. Despite his distance from these events Bede felt himself to be perfectly well-qualified to comment in sweeping terms upon the Orient, the Saracens and their activities: they are, he says, undifferentiatedly shiftless, hateful and aggressive (*uagos, incertisque sedibus; exosi et contrarii*), to the extent that they have irrupted from the desert where, according to scripture, they belong. His assumptions seem to correspond with Said's description of Orientalism as a textual activity by which the literary West 'possesses' the East by virtue of superior knowledge, the tacit assumption being that the West knows how to portray the East better than the East itself. Finally, Bede presents the Islamic conquests in such a way as to affirm that, far from being a new phenomenon, they demonstrate what has been known all along about the Saracens. The situation, he implies, is not so much different as even more the case – a 'domestication of the exotic' which Bede brings about simply by qualifying a verse from the book of Genesis with the words *nunc autem in tantum* ('now, however, to such an extent').

However, Bede's motives for describing the Saracens in this way lack the colonising urge and the desire for material gain which, according to Said, characterise many modern western accounts of Islam. Nor does Bede suggest in the passage cited above that organised Christian intervention is necessary to correct and control Islam. He expresses resentment of Saracen dominion in previously Christian territories but displays no overt political agenda. Even such 'latent' Orientalism, according to Said, is by no means disinterested; it remains intimately involved with western approaches to political and economic power.<sup>52</sup> The ideological role which the Saracens could fulfil

<sup>51</sup> The two churchmen were Theodore of Tarsus and his North African colleague Hadrian. They travelled from their homelands to Rome, possibly in flight from Islamic incursions, and Theodore was appointed archbishop of Canterbury; they arrived in England in AD 669 and 670 respectively. See below, pp. 116–17.

<sup>52</sup> See, for example, Said, *Orientalism*, pp. 300–1 and 308.

for medieval Christian authors is encapsulated in the premise upon which the whole of Bede's passage is based: the Saracens oppose Christianity and so, to the extent that they are shown to be wrong, they demonstrate that Christianity is right. As far as Empire is concerned, Bede's literary representation of the Saracens constituted an aggrandisement, however small, of the institution of the medieval church. This is not really 'Orientalism', though, since 'Occident–Orient' does not seem to be a meaningful opposition with reference to Christian superiority over Saracens in Bede's presentation.<sup>53</sup>

Similar processes of opposition and criticism may be seen at work not only in other comments by Bede but in a number of texts mentioning the Saracens that were known in Anglo-Saxon England. All have in common the fact that they present the Saracens in unfavourable contrast with representatives of Christian civilisation. The Saracens oppose or provoke the Christians to no avail. They act as a foil for the virtue and eventual success of the Christians and, at last, confirm their righteousness. In Jerome's *Vita Malchi* (later translated into Old English), an account of how a band of Saracens captured an erring monk, not only does the monk manage to escape with his chastity intact, but the pursuing Saracens are providentially slaughtered, enabling him to sell their camels for a good price.<sup>54</sup> Ælfric describes how the Christian emperor Theodosius II faced a Persian enemy employing Saracen mercenaries, all of whom were ignominiously defeated by the imperial army.<sup>55</sup> Similarly, according to a few brief lines in one version of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, the German emperor Otto II gained a hard-won victory in AD 982 against a band of Saracens who had invaded from the sea with the intention of attacking Christians.<sup>56</sup> Even the statement in the *Vita S. Hilarionis* by Jerome that a band of regrettably pagan Saracens beseeched Hilarion for a blessing suggests that they acknowledged some spiritual superiority in the saint.<sup>57</sup> The only ideological difference (it might be argued) between these examples and the vastly longer and more elaborate *chansons de geste* is the will expressed in the latter to argue the logical conviction by force of arms. To select these examples is to present a picture

<sup>53</sup> See below, pp. 234–7.

<sup>54</sup> Jerome, *Vita Malchi* [CPL 619]; the Old English translation [Cameron B3.3.35c] is edited by B. Assmann.

<sup>55</sup> Ælfric, *Old English Judges* [Cameron B8.1.6], p. 416.

<sup>56</sup> O'Brien O'Keeffe, ed., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: MS C* [Cameron B17.7], p. 85; trans. Swanton, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, p. 124.

<sup>57</sup> Jerome, *Vita S. Hilarionis* [CPL 618], PL 23, 41.



entirely in accordance with Said's argument that all western perceptions of the East are governed by the western desire for superiority. However, if the examples above were redissolved into their context, in which any number of hostile peoples are presented in opposition to an eventually triumphant Christianity, they would probably appear to make up one small corner of a much larger picture of 'anti-Christianism', not 'Orientalism'.

It has been recognised before now that Bede in particular played a crucial part in shaping medieval western ideas of the Muslims, and that he identified them with the Old Testament Ismaelites. It has also been recognised that several of his explanations are taken from the writings of Jerome, who was widely seen as a pre-Islamic authority on the Orient.<sup>58</sup> What is less often noted is the scale of such borrowings and the fact that the works of Jerome continued to be copied in their own right into the twelfth century and beyond.

It is, indeed, tempting to make a case for Jerome as the first great Orientalist. A fourth-century scholar who was well educated in the classics and identified himself with Roman culture, he moved to Syria in order to learn Oriental languages, translate the Bible from the Hebrew and Greek and pursue a life of ascetic study. At his home near Bethlehem he produced a large number of works, mainly aids to biblical study, which were to dominate medieval western perceptions of the Arabs and Arabia. His extensive commentaries on the text of the Bible can be regarded as the first writings to describe in detail, from an authoritative western Christian perspective, the geography, ethnology and culture of the Middle East to a European audience who would in nearly all cases never see the lands of the Arabs for themselves. It was the works of Jerome which initially disseminated the term *Saracenus* and its etymology to the medieval West. When Bede and other Anglo-Saxon writers used *Saraceni* to signify the Muslims of the eighth century, probably without knowing that they were referring to people in some way different from pre-Islamic Arabs, the name gained a new contemporary relevance but also set limitations upon what western observers could understand about Islam.

Jerome and Bede were not, of course, Orientalists in the sense of devoting their careers to the Orient *qua* Orient. They were exegetes whose primary literary task, as they saw it, was to expound the meaning of the Bible and

<sup>58</sup> See, for example, Rotter, *Abendland und Sarazenen*, pp. 72–3 and 247–51; Wallace-Hadrill, 'Bede's Europe', pp. 77–9; and Southern, *Western Views*, pp. 16–19.

promote a correct understanding of Christianity. To the extent that their exegesis consisted of learned expositions on ancient Middle Eastern history, culture and linguistics as they related to scripture, it might fairly be termed an Orientalist pursuit but not 'Orientalist' in Said's meaning of the word.<sup>59</sup> Still, the main thrust of Said's argument about modern Orientalism is precisely that it is not dedicated to knowledge in and for its own sake, though its avowed end may be the furtherance of scientific learning. Rather, it constitutes a scholarly apparatus by which the threatening Orient may be mastered through textual representations of Orientals as naturally subordinate and inferior to European observers. The traditional statements of this apparatus, backed up by matching contemporary accounts of the Orient, informed 'scientific' justifications for western colonialist activities. Arguably, this process had parallels in medieval north-western Europe. The study of the Bible throughout the early medieval period, the avowed end of which was the furtherance of Christian belief, also involved the transmission of a commentary on the threatening Saracens which showed them to be 'naturally' subordinate and inferior to Christians. Combined with increasing western awareness of Islam, this earlier apparatus of beliefs informed the context in which the Crusades were promoted and justified as an activity sanctioned by the Christian church.<sup>60</sup>

Yet however far and in whatever direction one manages to pursue the argument for medieval Orientalism, it does not quite ring true. Perhaps it is because it lacks the teleological thrust of Said's *Orientalism*. All western commentary on the lands of the East tended for Said towards the last confident act of imperial, colonial rule, the consequences of which we now face. Individual studies of earlier periods suggest that things were often more complicated than that. But while this may detract from the momentum of

<sup>59</sup> In the discussion below, it may generally be assumed unless otherwise indicated that where the word 'Orientalism' appears, whether or not enclosed in quotation marks, it refers to Said's use of the word in his *Orientalism*.

<sup>60</sup> Much has been written on the origins of the Crusades. For an overview of the development of a religious justification for crusading, see the fundamental study by Erdmann, *The Origin of the Idea of Crusade* (and Gilchrist's response, 'The Erdmann Thesis and the Canon Law'); Riley-Smith, *The First Crusade and the Idea of Crusading*; L. and J. Riley-Smith, *The Crusades: Idea and Reality*; Runciman, *The First Crusade*; and Peters, ed., *The First Crusade*. Recently, Maier has directed attention towards the role of the minor orders in promoting the later Crusades: see his *Preaching the Crusades and Crusade Propaganda and Ideology*. The latter provides an edition of a number of model sermons meant for address to contributors to the crusading effort.

Said's thesis, it does not touch the period in which he is secure, between the eighteenth century and the present day, where, indeed, his argument achieves most conviction by integrating the long-lived notions embodied in the literature of the day with the political motivations and material desires which also characterised this period. The Crusades, by contrast with nineteenth-century colonial expansion, achieved comparatively little in the way of material gain, and eventually their successes fizzled out while the power of the Ottoman Empire continued to increase. The earliest theories about Saracens do not appear to have discouraged the idea of warring against Islam or 'the East', but nor can they be shown to be very tightly bound up with it.<sup>61</sup> They set a point of view, perhaps; they provided authoritative prejudices and claimed to deliver the information that needed to be known; but they cannot be argued to be a form of justification for ongoing or planned material domination of Oriental peoples and cultures.

Said's model of western European thought presented an abstract continuum of hostility towards the Orient, according to which authors drew their attitudes from a similar traditionalist mindset. This model – useful, if not valid – has been considerably refined since the first publication of *Orientalism*; but there has been little or no mention of the *traditio* itself in which very specific hostile concepts concerning 'Orientals' (descent from Hagar, Venus-worship, etc.) derived traceably from earlier texts and in turn directly informed a subsequent generation of writings, whether transmitted verbatim, rephrased or translated. Even if the haul of such repetitions is restricted to works known in England, and even allowing for the same idea to have occurred to different authors at different times, their existence demands a substantial remodelling of 'Orientalism' as Said presents it.

<sup>61</sup> An exception to this is provided by William of Tyre (1130–86), who reported Pope Urban to have uttered the following words: 'Hec igitur nostre salutis incunabula, domini patriam, religionis matrem populus absque deo, ancille filius Egyptie possidet uiolenter . . . Sed quid scriptum est? Eice ancillam et filium eius! Sarracenorum enim gens impia et inmundarum sectatrix traditionum loca sancta, in quibus steterunt pedes domini, iam a multis retro temporibus uiolenta premit tyrannide . . .' ('A people without God, the son of the Egyptian handmaid, has violently seized these cradles of our salvation, fatherland of our lord, mother of religion . . . But what is written? Cast out the handmaid and her son! For the wicked Saracen people, follower of unclean traditions, has from a long time ago oppressed the holy places, in which the feet of the Lord rested, with violent despotism'; William of Tyre, *Chronicon*, CCCM 63, 132. Cf. Gen. XXI.10, Gal. IV.28–30 and (on Saracens as descendants of Hagar) see below, pp. 93–5.

Said himself, on another level, suggested a parallel between Orientalism and the literary tradition to which Jerome, Bede (the only Anglo-Saxon author he mentions) and others vigorously contributed. 'My analyses', he writes, 'try to show the field's shape and internal organization, its pioneers, patriarchal authorities, canonical texts, doxological ideas.'<sup>62</sup> His phrasing suggests that Orientalism has enjoyed the kind of cultural dominion more usually associated with an orthodox faith administered in the form of an organised body of texts. Specifically, the vocabulary that Said deploys brings to mind the writings of the early Christian church, which, at least in those parts of north-western Europe that would later become the quintessentially Orientalist powers of France and England, achieved their authority and influence through centuries of industrious copying and citation during the Middle Ages.

Indeed, negative conceptions of Arabs and Muslims were first engendered in England and on the Continent as an aspect of literate thought at a time when the technology of writing was chiefly employed in the service of the church and textual authority was founded upon quotation from previous authorities. Yet, at the same time, Said – by rhetorically invoking an assumed repertory among his readers of negative associations with the medieval period that his critique largely ignores (suggesting that it was repressive, rigidly hierarchical, superstitiously resistant to new truths, unenlightened, barbaric, inferior, religiously extremist) – has himself to some extent 'Orientalised' the Middle Ages in denigrating the practice of 'Orientalism'.

<sup>62</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, p. 22. Elsewhere, Said again employs vocabulary which suggests something of a religious authority for Orientalists. Concerning the survival of the medieval conceptual repertoire through the eighteenth century, he describes: 'a lay order of disciplined methodologists, whose brotherhood would be based . . . upon a common discourse, a praxis, a library, a set of received ideas, in short, a doxology' (*Orientalism*, p. 121). Of the language employed by Cromer to describe western influence upon eastern colonies: 'His metaphor for expressing this effect is almost theological' (*Orientalism*, p. 213); of a paragraph by von Grunebaum: 'In most other contexts such writing would politely be called polemical. For Orientalism, of course, it is relatively orthodox, and it passed for canonical wisdom in American study of the Middle East' (*Orientalism*, p. 297); the *Cambridge History of Islam* 'is a regular summa of Orientalist orthodoxy' (*Orientalism*, p. 302), and so on. Note also his comment: 'The idea that Islam is *medieval and dangerous* . . . has acquired a place both in the culture and in the polity that is very well defined' (*Covering Islam*, p. 157; my emphasis).

Said promotes instead a mode of scholarship that he calls 'secularism' or 'worldliness', according to which the scholar is engaged with the world. Whether or not it is deemed appropriate to 'politicise' medieval studies, it can be useful on many levels to question the relationship between ideas and action; and, given the present interest in western ideas about Islam or Muslims in various parts of the world, it is useful to examine the history of earlier Christian ideas about the peoples of the Near East.<sup>63</sup>

The influence of canonical texts upon Anglo-Saxon perceptions of Islam has until now not been analysed, and the argument below remedies this lack. It is also an appropriate time to consider aspects of early English thought which have as yet remained largely unexamined by Anglo-Saxonists. Most of all, however, it is in response to Said's and Daniel's provocative annexation of 'the Middle Ages' as a source for Orientalist or imperial attitudes that I have tried to trace English perceptions of the Arabs, Ismaelites and Saracens during the centuries in which England remained a small and very distant power compared with the flourishing empire of Islam.

<sup>63</sup> Among the most recent studies, Richard Fletcher's *The Cross and the Crescent: Christianity and Islam from Muhammad to the Reformation* (London, 2003) is a useful overview which I unfortunately did not see in time to include here. Fletcher discusses European views in general on pp. 1–66; most relevant to the present work are his references to Isidore on Ismael (p. 10), Bede on the Muslim conquests (p. 19), Willibald (pp. 22–3) and Arculf (p. 53). As he notes on p. 65, 'There were plenty of interactions but no interest in religion'.