



UNIVERSITY OF AMSTERDAM

## UvA-DARE (Digital Academic Repository)

### Images of ethnicity in later medieval Europe

Weeda, C.V.

**Publication date**  
2012

[Link to publication](#)

#### **Citation for published version (APA):**

Weeda, C. V. (2012). *Images of ethnicity in later medieval Europe*.

#### **General rights**

It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

#### **Disclaimer/Complaints regulations**

If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: <https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact>, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.

# Introduction

In the *Guide to Santiago de Compostela*, a twelfth-century French pilgrim, presumably from Poitou, writes a scathing report of the Navarrese encountered along the way. According to our guide, they have disgusting table manners, with servants, masters and maids all dipping their hands into the same dish, without using spoons. They wear shabby clothes, following the Scottish fashion, and their language resembles that of dogs barking. A dark people, barbaric in habits and way of being, they are full of all kinds of evil. 'This is a barbarous race unlike all other races in customs and in character, full of malice, swarthy in colour, evil of face, depraved, perverse, perfidious, empty of faith and corrupt, libidinous, drunken, experienced in all violence, ferocious and wild, dishonest and reprobate, impious and harsh, cruel and contentious, unversed in anything good, well-trained in all vices and iniquities', resembling Getae and Saracens, and full of hatred for the French. They copulate with animals; some Navarrese men even attach a lock to their mules' or horses' tails in order to secure sexual exclusivity, and kiss the private parts of both women and mules. The author subsequently intimates that such vileness is related to the Navarrese 'contaminated' origins: they are not 'true offspring', as they partly descend from the Scots, who had settled in the region and raped the indigenous female population in Julius Caesar's day, creating an illegitimate, corrupt stock. Hence their name Navarrus, which comes from '*non verus*', untrue. Nonetheless, they are dapper fighters, who dutifully pay their tithes and go to church on a daily basis, offering what little bread, wine or wheat they have. Upon leaving this territory the pilgrim enters the lands of Castile and Campos, which is full of riches, gold, silver, horses, bread, wine, fish, milk and honey, yet inhabited by wicked people.<sup>1</sup>

In the twelfth century, there developed, at least among intellectuals, a firm notion that people shared such ethnic characteristics, including an ethnic character, based upon common descent. Beliefs about foreign peoples and one's own group were encapsulated in a previously unrecorded outburst of ethnic stereotyping, in which human diversity was represented in mostly, though certainly not exclusively, negative images of the other. Clerics wrote of the arrogance of the French,

---

<sup>1</sup> *The Pilgrim's Guide to Santiago de Compostela: A Critical Edition* VII, eds and transl. Paula Gerson, Annie-Shaver-Crandell and Alison Stones, 2 volumes (London 1998), vol. 2, 28-31, quotation at 28-29: 'Hec est gens Barbara, omnibus gentibus dissimilis ritibus et essentia, omni malicia plena, colore atra, uisu iniqua, praua peruersa, perfida, fide uacua et corrupta, libidinosa, ebriosa, omni uiolentia docta, ferox et siluestris, improba et reprobata, impia et austera, dira et contentiosa, ullis bonis inculta, cunctis uiciis et iniquitatibus edocta.' The manuscript containing the guide is known as the Liber Sancti Jacobi or the Codex Calixtinus. It was compiled sometime between the years 1139 and 1173, when a monk from Ripoll copied the text. The name Getae, alluding to savagery and barbarity, was sometimes used to designate the Goths, for example in Jordanes' *Getica*. The Getae originally came from the region south of the Lower Danube.

the greed of the Romans, the barbarity of the Irish; monks beguiled the angry tempers of the Germans or the cowardice and drunkenness of the English. Using stereotypes was not restricted to prejudiced thinking about Muslims or Jews; as our guide to Santiago demonstrates, within North-West Europe the literate could write equally vitriolic reports on their co-religionists. At the same time, men of letters might emphasize the virtuous, brave, devout, civilized nature of those living in the cultured regions of North-West Europe. Our guide, thus, writes that the inhabitants of Poitou are vigorous, daring, well-dressed, noble, well-spoken and generous, living in a land ‘fertile, excellent and full of all sorts of good things’.<sup>2</sup>

The twelfth-century outburst of ethnic stereotyping, of expressions of prejudice, pride, and moral excoriation, are both testimony to and catalyst of an increase in ethnic consciousness among intellectuals in North-Western Europe, a core region bursting with new found confidence and ambition. This period, sometimes called the ‘twelfth-century renaissance’, as the term was first coined by Charles Homer Haskins, witnessed a remarkable economic, intellectual and political transformation.<sup>3</sup> Urban hubs were transforming into thriving centres, pulsating with the thudding sounds of building activities as vast Gothic cathedrals were raised from the ground, booming with entrepreneurship as merchants traded their wares. In this period the towns of the Hanseatic League (founded at the end of the 1150s) wove intricate commercial networks from Novgorod to Bruges and London. Intellectually, it was marked by the introduction of Aristotelian scholasticism, by the accruing influence of classical literature, of satirizing wit and notions of civility, and Roman law. The translation of Arabic texts into Latin in Spain and Sicily, and Greek texts in Byzantium, transmitting Greek and Arabic medical and mathematical knowledge, harkened a transformation of natural science and philosophy in the West. The belles-lettres witnessed a remarkable production of vernacular troubadour poetry and epic *chansons de geste* and romances.

This was also a period of bureaucratic and territorial expansion. The royal administrations of France and England tightened their grip on their subjects by erecting new courts of law and imposing new forms of taxation, and by extending the territorial boundaries of the region under direct royal control, in France slowly with the annexation of first Normandy, Maine, Anjou and then the Languedoc in the early thirteenth century; in England more forcefully with the invasion and

---

2 Idem, 22-23: ‘abilis et obtima, et omni felicitate plena tellus Pictauroium’.

3 Charles Homer Haskins, *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century* (Cambridge Mass 1927). The number of publications which have since used the concept of the twelfth-century renaissance in the cultural, artistic, and philosophical sphere, especially in relation to education and the emergence of universities, and regarding religious, economic and political developments, is vast. I refer to the collection commemorating Haskins’ contribution, Robert L. Benson and Giles Constable (eds), *Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century* (Cambridge Mass. 1982); three works bearing the same title: Charles R. Young (ed.), *The Twelfth-Century Renaissance* (New York etc. 1969); C. Warren Hollister (ed.), *The Twelfth-Century Renaissance* (New York etc. 1969); and R.N. Swanson, *The Twelfth-Century Renaissance* (Manchester, New York 1999). See further R.W. Southern, *Medieval Humanism and Other Studies* (reprint Oxford 1984); R.W. Southern, *The Making of the Middle Ages* (New Haven and London 1953); Charles Homer Haskins, *Studies in Medieval Culture* (reprint New York 1965) and further references below.

colonization of Ireland in 1169. The northern and eastern border regions of the German territories were similarly subject to colonization and missionary activities, attempting to bring the fringes of Europe within the Christian fold. As Robert Bartlett described in his influential *The Making of Europe*, Northern Europe was being Europeanized, defining itself and forcing its religious and cultural self-definition on those living, from its perspective, on the fringe.<sup>4</sup>

In the slipstream, contacts between various groups in North-West Europe (and beyond) increased. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Western Europe experienced a relatively high degree of mobility. Although most serfs and small landholders probably did not travel very far, perhaps only to the local market, still the roads were busy with merchants en route to the markets in Champagne, with crusaders marching to the Levant and pilgrims to famous shrines, with ecclesiastics regulating church and court affairs, and from the early thirteenth century with mendicant friars preaching in towns and villages.<sup>5</sup> Young clerics travelled far afield to the new educational centres, often leaving their home country to receive an education in the liberal arts, possibly supplemented by a degree in theology or law, in the towns and cities of Orleans, Chartres, Paris, Bologna, Salerno or Oxford.

Just like our pilgrim travelling to Santiago, these men (and a minority of women) would have encountered people speaking a different language, wearing different clothes, adopting various hairstyles, and eating different foods on their journeys and sojourns abroad. It is against the background of this heightened mobility, the ‘twelfth-century renaissance’, and increasing efforts to firmly ingrain Christian beliefs and values in the minds of Europe’s populations by an institutionalized Church that this study examines the employment of ethnic images in North-West Europe in the later Middle Ages.<sup>6</sup> Based on which assumptions of ethnicity did the pilgrim write the vitriolic depiction of the Navarrese character? Did he believe that their character was innate, passed down from generation to generation? Was this assumption based on any ‘scientific’ theory or structured knowledge that peoples shared an ethnic character? How relevant was this notion of an ethnic character to ideas about ethnicity? Or were his remarks no more than primitive, emotional expressions of hatred and xenophobia, as some medievalists such as Carlrichard Brühl have asserted?<sup>7</sup>

This study argues that from the twelfth century, images of ethnicity became ‘embodied’, as medical humoral and climate theory re-entered the West via translations of Arabic texts. In North-Western Europe – a new heartland of power and learning – clerics and monks incorporated and

4 Robert Bartlett, *The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization and Cultural Change 950-1350* (reprint London 1994); for Europe and the increase of geographical knowledge, see especially Seymour Phillips, *The Medieval Expansion of Europe* (Oxford and New York 1988).

5 For travelling and life on the road, see Norbert Ohler, *The Medieval Traveller* (Woodbridge 1989), translated by Caroline Hillier; original title *Reisen im Mittelalter* (Munich 1986).

6 See for the sharpening of boundaries resulting from the institutionalization of the Church R.I. Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society: Power and Deviance in Western Europe, 950-1250* (Oxford 1987).

7 Carlrichard Brühl, *Deutschland, Frankreich: Die Geburt zweier Völker* (Cologne 1990), 275.

adapted these theories in order to reposition the North as a region producing the measure of mankind: intelligent, brave, light-skinned Christians who could control their emotions. However, contrary to the past work of some scholars, this study emphasizes that within Christendom the elite, instead of displaying unity, might compete amongst themselves to be the ideal defenders of their religion. Equally, in medical theory, ethnic differences were accounted by some to sinful dispositions related to the Fall, after which certain ethnic characteristics became ‘hereditary’. Thus, instead of viewing ethnic stereotypes as mere utterances of primitive hatred, or as the direct product of state-building processes, this study endeavours to research the relevance of ethnic stereotypes in Western European communities from a socio-cultural aspect, examining their value as relevant images which might validate claims to social power within Christendom.

The topic of ethnic stereotyping, ethnic consciousness and identity is wrought with huge complexities and has been the subject of a confounding number of studies, approaching issues of identity from political, economic, socio-cultural and socio-psychological perspectives. In order to somewhat unravel the befuddling tangle of terms, concepts, and approaches tied up with questions of ethnic identity, I will first offer a general overview of the approaches which have dominated discussions about ethnic and national identity and the emergence of a national consciousness – which common opinion holds to have evolved in the nineteenth century. I will then discuss the literature about ethnic stereotyping and identity in the twelfth century, offering an overview of how, according to these studies, intellectuals in the twelfth century presumably defined an ‘ethnic group’, and on which premises. Thereafter, I will present my use of sources and the scope of this study. At the end of the introduction I offer a summary of the chapters in this study. First, I will discuss my points of departure in this study.

### **Points of departure**

In the past a number of historians have emphasized that ethnic consciousness had little relevance in the medieval period as it was incongruent with Christian universalism.<sup>8</sup> My first point of departure, however, throughout this study is that the coordinating Church and its forcibly articulated religious norms of behaviour could incite members of ethnic groups to attribute to themselves particular forms of prescribed conduct and mental characteristics. Especially in the twelfth century, inheritors of the Gregorian reform movement were displaying a preoccupation with ‘hypocritical Christians’, those

---

<sup>8</sup> Hans Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism: A Study in its Origins and Background* (New York 1946), accordingly spoke of national sentiment first arising in Germany in the sixteenth-century Peasant War; Paul Kirn, *Aus der Frühzeit des Nationalgefühls: Studien zur deutschen und französischen Geschichte sowie zu den Nationalitätenkämpfen auf den britischen Inseln* (Leipzig 1943), 15; Günter Cerwinka, ‘Völkercharakteristiken in historiographischen Quellen der Salier- und Stauferzeit’, in: H. Ebner (ed.), *Festschrift für Friedrich Hausmann* (Graz 1977), 59-79, here at 60; Richard Wallach, *Das abendländische Gemeinschaftsbewusstsein im Mittelalter* (Leipzig 1928), 24 ff.; Maurice de Wulf, ‘The Society of Nations in the Thirteenth Century’, in *International Journal of Ethics* 29/2 (1919), 210-229.

posing a threat to the Church's purity.<sup>9</sup> These hypocrites could include 'members' of heretical movements, but also ethnic groups purportedly wallowing in debauchery, arrogance, avarice or wrath. Besides individual sinful behaviour, ethnic stereotypes, inherited from tradition, were thus an important target of rebuke and subject of examination in the discourse on the destiny of peoples. As the battle with the forces of Satan raged there was a strong urge to achieve a 'purified Christian community' – purified of Muslims, Jews, heathens and heretics, but also of any evil dispositions brewing among Christian ethnic groups.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, the Church itself defined its members along territorial-ethnic lines. Thus, around 900, Benedictine abbot Regino of Prüm declared that 'just as different peoples differ between themselves in descent, manners, language, and laws, so the holy and universal church throughout the world, although joined in the unity of faith, nevertheless varies its ecclesiastical customs among them'.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, Guido Kisch has highlighted how the Church, organized in Church provinces, employed nomenclature such as Gallia, Anglia, Germania and Italy at councils and in papal penitential books at times when territorial unity did not exist as such in these regions.<sup>12</sup> Johan Huizinga, in the 1940s, also reflected upon the fact that although in the Christian West the ideal of universal government existed, in reality the power structures ran along ethnic lines.<sup>13</sup> This was already the case in the early Middle Ages. Despite the universalizing ideals of Christianity, ethnic ties thus remained identity markers; in fact, from the early Middle Ages, various ethnic groups, notably the Franks, Britons, Visigoths, and later the Normans, entertained the notion of chosenness, thus furrowing the Christian body with deeper ethnic fissures.<sup>14</sup> This development,

---

9 Bret E. Whalen's *Dominion of God: Christendom and Apocalypse in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge Mass. 2009), 77.

10 Whalen, *Dominion of God*, 74.

11 Regino of Prüm, 'Epistola Reginonis ad Hathonem Archiepiscopum missa', in *Reginonis abbatis Prumiensis Chronicon*, ed. Friedrich Kurze, MGH SS rerum Germanicarum 50 (Hannover 1890), XX: 'Nec non et illud sciendum, quod, sicut diversae nationes populorum inter se discrepant genere moribus lingua legibus, ita sancta universalis aeclesia toto orbe terrarum diffusa, quamvis in unitate fidei coniungatur, tamen consuetudinibus aeclesiasticis ab invicem differt.' Transl. Susan Reynolds, *Kingdoms and Communities in Western Europe 900-1300* (Oxford 1986), 257. In the tenth century King Stephen of Hungary was said to have maintained that a kingdom that was made up of one language and one *mos*, way of life or custom, would be weak and fragile. He was advocating that foreigners should be invited into the country to diversify the languages, customs and arms. Reynolds makes the important point that Stephen's remark itself was an indication that he was proposing something out of the ordinary. The hostility towards foreign advisors among his successors would underline this.

12 Guido Kisch, 'Nationalism and Race in Medieval Law', in Guido Kisch, *Ausgewählte Schriften*, 3 volumes (Sigmaringen 1980), vol. 3, 179-204, here at 182-184, 193, especially discussing German settlers and law in Slavic territory. Herfried Münkler, 'Nation als politische Idee im frühneuzeitlichen Europa', in Klaus Garber (ed.), *Nation und Literatur im Europa der Frühen Neuzeit: Akten des I. Internationalen Osnabrücker Kongresses zur Kulturgeschichte der Frühen Neuzeit* (Tübingen 1989), 56-86, here at 59-60. See also Hoppenbrouwers, 'Dynamics of national identity', 35-36, who says that a strengthening Roman Church strengthened national Churches and national integration.

13 Huizinga, 'Patriotisme en nationalisme', 503.

14 Mary Garrison, 'The Franks as the New Israel? Education for an Identity from Pippin to Charlemagne', in Yitzhak Hen and Matthew Innes (eds), *The Uses of the Past in the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge 2000), 114-161; Alexander Murray, 'Bede and the Unchosen Race', in Huw Pryce and John Watts (eds), *Power and Identity in the Middle Ages: Essays in Memory of Rees Davies* (Oxford 2007), 52-67, here at 56. Murray makes a distinction between three types of models of religious social

drawn from the Old Testament, was essentially contradictory to the Church's notion of a 'New Israel', whose members, reborn in baptism, should know no distinctions of ethnicity or class. However, the power of ethnic constructions of religious identity proved stronger; from the early Middle Ages, exegetes of Frankish, Visigoth, British or Anglo-Saxon extract termed their own people as the 'New Israelites' – who were obedient to God, contrary to the Jews.<sup>15</sup> Conversely, some ethnic images called into doubt the degree to which Christian peoples had entered into a 'new covenant' with God. The extensive genealogies tracing ethnic groups' descendants to the children of Shem, Japheth and Ham further underlined ethnic differentiation in Christian society. Also, the concept of chosenness infused 'hereditary' ethnic vices with a potent meaning, as they were viewed as agents incurring God's wrath upon a people.

Secondly, my approach is to view the ethnic group as a socio-cultural category, not a political unit. Ethnic groups existed as entities partially detached from political structures, although they might be subject to laws based on ethnicity. In general, ethnic consciousness was not imposed politically although it might increase as royal power tightened its fiscal and legal grip on its subjects. I take the same approach of mentalities put forward by Joep Leerssen, examining 'the way people view and describe the world', in a constant flux between a mental view and socio-political developments, intellectual thought and literary representation.<sup>16</sup> By presenting an extensive dossier of source material, I will demonstrate that ethnic stereotypes were far more widespread and 'stable' than some scholars such as John Breuilly have assumed, and not just a matter of occasional political manipulation.<sup>17</sup> They were widespread, and bore socio-cultural meaning as markers of identity representing religious, social and cultural values, which could be employed as a form of cultural capital.

This study addresses a number of key questions. First, where did these notions of ethnic character come from? Were they drawn from cultural practices or copied from traditional, early medieval or classical sources? Secondly, were these stereotypes viewed as 'innate' characteristics, acquired at

organization: the tribal (or ethnic) model; the territorial model, where the rulers of the territory decree that everybody living in their territory follows a certain religion; and the ecclesiastical model, where adherents to a certain faith form an autonomous society with their own rules, separate from ethnic or territorial organizations. Denise Buell has argued that the very language of conversion in the Pauline letters was clothed in terms of ethnicity, as difference instead of homogeneity was emphasized as a source of transformation. See Denise Kimber Buell, 'The Politics of Interpretation: The Rhetoric of Race and Ethnicity in Paul', in *Journal of Biblical Literature* 123/2 (2004), 235-251, here at 238.

<sup>15</sup> Murray, 'Bede and the Unchosen Race', 58-59. Gildas, *De excidio Britonum* 26 1, ed. and transl. M. Winterbottom (London and Chichester 1978), 98 for example, called the Britons *praesens Israel*.

<sup>16</sup> Leerssen, *National Thought*, 14.

<sup>17</sup> John Breuilly, 'Changes in the political uses of the nation: continuity or discontinuity', in Len Scales and Oliver Zimmer (eds), *Power and the Nation in European History* (Cambridge 2005), 67-101, here at 76-80. Breuilly writes that ethnographic distinctions barely played a role in for example Anglo-French or Anglo-Scottish relations. His main premise seems to be that ethnicity was a hollow concept for broad layers of medieval society. Cf. Leerssen, *National Thought*, 56, who writes that the 'Middle Ages had, to be sure, known many commonplaces, stereotypes and prejudices about certain sets of people, but these were generally speaking neither stable or systematic. Nobody was sure how the category "French" related to the category "Picardian", what was an Irishman and what a good subject of the King of England.'

birth as a person was ‘born into a nation’, or products of culture and society? Were they ‘biologically’ handed down through parental transmission, or subject to environmental influences? And if they so, to which extent was an individual able to overcome a sinful ethnic disposition, to overcome vice through virtue? Thirdly, was there any kind of concept that an ethnic group was an abstract entity? In Romanticism, the nation was viewed to possess a ‘will’ and was more or less personified and engendered, sometimes as a female entity. In the twelfth century, might a member of an ethnic group acknowledge any kind of relevance of an ‘authentic’ ethnic identity? Did character form a constituent part of a nation (as it did for Rousseau)?<sup>18</sup> I will argue that although such powerful concepts were absent in this period, the notion did exist that collective behaviour, based upon ethnic character inherited from the fall of mankind, determined the vicissitudes of a people as a community under the sway of royal power. However, specific to the medieval period is the notion that ethnic vices were to be overcome, as nurture and God’s grace prevailed over nature.

Beyond the scope of this study is the question to which extent ethnic character was in any sense viewed as an essential constituent of political organization, employed ideologically as a ruling body tightened its reins and steered the diverse social and ethnic groups within its range of power. There are examples of the employment of images of French and German character in a discourse set within a political context of aspirations to universalistic power; this rhetoric was notably sharpened in the second half of the thirteenth century, sometimes in pamphlets prophesizing the allotted role of kings in the course of history and God’s divine plan. Certainly, ethnic stereotypes in this period were employed as a validation of what John Gillingham termed the ‘imperial politics’ of the Anglo-Norman royal government and aristocracy in its attempts to subjugate the Irish and Welsh in the twelfth century.<sup>19</sup> In this study, however, the focus lies on how notions of degrees of civilization and socio-cultural values were appropriated by members of ethnic groups such as the French and Anglo-Normans, as a means to appropriate positions as paragons of civilization and defenders of Christendom.

An overriding question, which cannot be answered, is whether, in general, non-elite, illiterate members of a twelfth-century ethnic group: women, children, laymen, artisans and merchants living in urban centres or farmers working as peasants and serfs tilling the land, were aware of and identified with remarks such as ‘the Germans are stupid’ or the ‘English are drunks’. Were they familiar with these images and did they endorse them? This question immediately reveals overwhelming complexities on a number of levels. First, given the nature of the written sources – produced almost exclusively by secular clerics or monks – it is almost impossible to indicate whether any of these ethnic characterizations or images were acknowledged or even known among broader, illiterate layers of society. For this reason, as discussed further below, I speak of ethnic and not national character. How wide was the arena in which the intellectuals and poets were

---

18 Smith, *Antiquity of Nations*, 246-247.

19 John Gillingham, *The English in the Twelfth Century: Imperialism, National Identity and Political Values* (Woodbridge 2000), 3-18.

performing? Although some sources allow knights or students to engage in outbursts of stereotyping, we cannot be sure that this is not the fruit of poetic license or some moral purpose of the author. On the other hand, the direct silence of the illiterate certainly does not exclude the possibility that they did actually recognize and possibly employ such ethnic images. Also, the question must be raised how likely it is that the literate elite would produce ethnic images wholly detached from broader socio-cultural notions.

In addition, there is the complexity of the diversity of ethnic communities and regional identities. Regional diversity, on a lower level than royal government, and the presence of multi-ethnic communities resulting from migratory conquests or colonization continued to exist in the French, German and English territories. In England, ethnic images of the conquered native Anglo-Saxon population after 1066, who were often presented as reduced to the status of servility, were partially distinct from those of the Norman nobility; complimentary ethnic and class distinctions existed at least during the first decades after the conquest. In the French territories, regional communities of Picardians, men of Poitou, or Aquitaine, although nominally subjects of the royal government, in reality probably felt far greater ties to and were viewed as distinct members of the territorial principalities under which they fell, to which the regional characterizations seem to bear witness. Conversely, the characterizations of peoples in the German territories display a greater congruency from the viewpoint of outsiders, as the imagery remains in essence a classical representation of the barbaric North. Ironically, German territories remained loosely organized, where linguistic diversity was great; at the end of the period examined here, whereas the French and English royal governments succeeded in tightening their grip, the German political organization was increasingly losing power over its territories.

Furthermore, these societies were marked by strong internal social and cultural divisions. As Paul Freedman has shown us, the image of the medieval peasant was markedly derogatory, and any notion among the nobility of sharing peasant characteristics, preposterous.<sup>20</sup> Yet, was there no common mental ground whatsoever between the higher and lower echelons of society? Georges Duby, discussing the Christianization of Europe in mendicant propaganda in the – notably later – fourteenth century, noted how the ‘cultural patterns of the upper classes in society tend to become popularized, to spread and to move down, step by step, to the most deprived social groups’.<sup>21</sup> On the other hand, Duby discerns some forms of upward mobility within the elite from circa 1000, with fighters evolving to adopt elite values, whilst at the courts young men, both knights and clerics in the prince’s entourage, engaged in competition trying to copy and appropriate the ‘proper’ manners and values.<sup>22</sup>

---

20 Paul Freedman, *Images of the Medieval Peasant* (Chicago 1999).

21 Georges Duby, ‘The diffusion of cultural patterns in feudal society’, in *Past and Present* 39 (1968) 3-10, here at 3.

22 *Idem*, 9.

On a more general level, it must be remarked that people entertained many diverse ideas about who they were at different times. In *Communities of Violence*, David Nirenberg made the important point that we should be careful not to take a structuralist approach, assuming that medieval people are locked, as passive agents, in a continuous discourse of difference with a fixed origin.<sup>23</sup> Instead, he argues that we must bear in mind that such a discourse is relevant insofar as people find it meaningful, and that it is constantly reshaped depending on situations and context. However, as R.I. Moore has argued, the increasing articulation of a discourse of difference, especially by institutions such as the Church, might lead to a more universal acknowledgment by broader layers of the population of such ‘perceived’ differences, who might subsequently adapt their actions to such beliefs.<sup>24</sup> In regards to these questions, in this study the emphasis lies on two important factors: the reintroduction, in this period, of ‘scientific’ knowledge that mental and physical characteristics were influenced by environment, in humoral theory, and the ‘value’ of ethnic stereotypes, set off against negotiated socio-cultural values, as agents to make claims to social positions within society. Thus, although I would certainly not argue that the ethnic images discussed in this study were constantly actively determining thoughts and behaviour, they did contribute to shaping ideas about what ethnicity entailed, and might, at times, influence relations between peoples.

### **Debates on national and ethnic identity**

The vast amount of publications on national and ethnic identity, nationalism, and stereotypes has itself led to a wave of studies in an attempt to get some grip on these slippery concepts. Anthony Smith, in particular, has produced an array of publications discussing what national identity is, and its ethnic, cultural, or political origins.<sup>25</sup> Here, I can only briefly touch upon these discussions in order to place medieval conceptions of an ethnic group and the role of ethnic character within the broader framework of the modern debate on national identity and character.<sup>26</sup>

Smith has pinpointed three fundamental debates on and approaches to nationalism and nations. All these positions focus on three central issues: beliefs about the nature and origin of the nation and nationalism; the antiquity or modernity of nations; and the role of nations and nationalism in historical and contemporary social processes. The first discussion addressed by Smith is represented by primordialists versus instrumentalists (or voluntarists). This debate focuses on what ties a nation together culturally, ethnically, and politically. Is a nation a natural entity, or a political construct?

---

23 David Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages* (Princeton 1996), 5-7.

24 Moore, *Persecuting Society*, 100-102.

25 For example: Anthony D. Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation* (Oxford 1999); Anthony D. Smith, *The Nation in History: Historiographical Debates about Ethnicity and Nationalism* (Hanover 2000); Anthony D. Smith, *The Cultural Foundations of Nations: Hierarchy, Covenant, and Republic* (Malden and Oxford 2008); Anthony D. Smith, *Ethno-Symbolism and Nationalism: A Cultural Approach* (London and New York 2009).

26 This discussion is based heavily upon Peter C.M. Hoppenbrouwers, ‘The dynamics of national identity in the later Middle Ages’, in Robert Stein and Judith Pollmann (eds), *Networks, regions and nation: Shaping identities in the Low Countries, 1300-1650* (Leiden 2009), 19-42

Primordialists (divided in organist and cultural primordialists) are said to assume that ‘cultural givenness’ has a prior, overriding and determining influence on people’s lives, which is more important than rational intent or political calculation; they focus on the influence of attachments, of kinship, language, religion, customs, the possession of a historical territory, and a sense of belonging. Cultural givenness subsequently influences emerging or existing nations, which are viewed as more or less predestined entities. The organist primordialist – which I am not – believes that a person is born into a nation and bears its character for life; members are bound together by myths of common origins and a shared historic culture. This, it would seem, is related to the nationalist viewpoint according to which foreigners in multicultural societies are excluded on the basis of birth. Cultural primordialists, on the other hand, believe in the continuing influence of ethnic attachments, based upon myths of origin, communities of language, shared memories and customs, and an attachment to a homeland, which undergirds ‘the contractual rights and duties of a modern civic order’.<sup>27</sup> Clifford Geertz, for example, believes that ‘ethnic and national attachments spring from the cultural givens of social existence’, working however with the assumption that ethnic groups are constructions – a viewpoint held by most scholars today.<sup>28</sup>

The ‘voluntarist’ takes a radically different view from the primordialists, assuming that an individual can choose a nation at will, as the nation is a contract, a political, territorial association governed by *ratio* and laws. This is a large step from the idea held in eighteenth-century Enlightenment thought by philosophers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Johann Gottfried von Herder that the nation had both a contractual and a given nature. Rousseau, for example, believed in a dualism between nature on the one hand, and civilization, culture and political will on the other. This led to tensions between the collective will, the given culture, character and tradition and contractual law-making, which should be resolved by aligning national character with law-making – an idea already explored by Aristotle in antiquity, and re-examined by Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century, based on climate theory.<sup>29</sup> Rousseau claimed that the ‘first rule we must follow is that of national character. Every people has, or must have, a character’, which could be improved through education and laws. Herder, too, believed in the organic nature of culture, which could be transformed through education or self-improvement.

In the nineteenth century, philosophers laid more emphasis on the political aspect of nation-building. Max Weber stated that nations are cultural communities of prestige, with superior values, developed from the cultivation of the specific nature of the community; however, he emphasized the political aspect of a nation, its history and collective political memories, against the background of an ethnic past. For Ernest Renan, the nation was a political entity, although bound by historical ties.

---

27 Smith, *The Nation in History*, 5-6, 21.

28 Idem, 21; cf. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (London 1973), 259-260.

29 Clarence J. Glacken, *Traces on the Rhodian Shore: Nature and Culture in Western Thought from Ancient Times to the End of the Eighteenth Century* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1976), 273-274.

A second debate concerns the antiquity or modernity of nations, pinpointed by Anthony Smith as the perennialist (often primordialist) versus the modernist (often instrumentalist) viewpoint. Perennialists believe that members of kinship groups seek to preserve and strengthen the heritage of their ancestors. Conversely, modernists believe that nation-states and nationalist ideologies are modern, recent products of modernity and Enlightenment. The modernist position, which is still prevalent today, is represented among others by Ernest Gellner, who believed that nationalism – ‘primarily a principle that holds that the political and national unit should be congruent’ – invented new nations, especially in urban environments in a class-bound society, although some pre-existent cultural markers were necessary to aid the process.<sup>30</sup> Nationalism, as a political ideology, evolved from a modern need for a labour force sharing a common education and language, in a society moving from the agrarian to the industrial, from vertical to horizontal relations. Other adherents to the modernist school are Charles Tilly, who lays great emphasis on the role of capitalism and industrialization in nation-building, and John Breuilly, who focuses on the objective of gaining and retaining state power, using nationalist arguments and mobilizing sub-elites to reintegrate state and society.<sup>31</sup> Eric Hobsbawm also stated that nations are the product of nationalism, with the goal of creating sovereign territorial states. Although in the nineteenth century first a civic political movement, the movement adopted ethnic arguments at the close of the century.<sup>32</sup> Finally, I refer to Benedict Anderson’s highly influential *Imagined Communities*, which argued that national consciousness was the product of mass communication and education which developed with the introduction of a print media, notably in a bourgeois society.<sup>33</sup> In Anderson’s imagined communities, members of the nation could for example imagine that they were simultaneously sitting down to read the national newspaper at breakfast, thus sharing a national time and national values, and thus being a member of an ‘imagined community’, without knowing one another.

Such modernist approaches have been criticized by some scholars who have pointed out that nations did not emerge out of nothingness, nor that they were solely constructs of the elite, imposed upon an inert working class population. Some perennialists, in an attempt to argue that nations predate the nineteenth century, have emphasized the continuity of cultural communities and identities. Hugh Seton-Watson has argued that although nationalism is new phenomenon, nations are

---

30 Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford 1983), 1.

31 Charles Tilly, *Coercion, capital, and European states, AD 990-1992* (Cambridge 1992); John Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State* (Manchester 1993).

32 Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge 1990). See also Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge 1983), arguing how many national traditions were in fact invented in the nineteenth century. As Anthony Smith remarks, in the early twentieth century ethnic nationalism reappeared on the horizon. After the Second World War, modernists however once again stress the constructed nature of nations, which is often viewed as a politically driven process. Cf. Smith, *The Nation in History*, 5-6, 8-9, 10-13.

33 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (revised ed. London 2006). For criticism of Anderson’s belief that sacred (dead) languages prevailed in pre-modernity, which were farther removed from the world of speech, see Michel Bouchard, ‘A Critical Reappraisal of the Concept of the “Imagined Community” and the Presumed Sacred Languages of the Medieval Period’, in *National Identities* 6/1 (2004), 3-24.

older.<sup>34</sup> Adrian Hastings went so far as to view ethnicity as the basis of nationhood, stating that ethnicities, as oral communities, become nations when they produced a vernacular written literature and were affected by ‘pressures of the state’ (which he said occurred in fourteenth-century England); he states that the nation is a Christian phenomenon, based on the Old Testament model.<sup>35</sup>

Such criticisms led to a third approach to the debate known as ethnosymbolism, which recently has been championed by Anthony Smith. Ethnosymbolism ‘regards the central components of ethnic and national phenomena as both sociocultural and symbolic, i.e. language, dress, emblems, rituals, artefacts, consisting in memories, myths, values and traditions’.<sup>36</sup> It is based upon John Armstrong’s notion of myth-symbol complexes, which examines symbols, myths, memories (so-called mythomoteurs) and values in light of the role of ethnic groups in nation-building processes.<sup>37</sup> Distinctive clusters of these symbolic components delineate and guard the boundaries of *ethnies*; ancestry myths define the specific character of *ethnies*; memories of ancestral homelands, often related to battles and heroes, are resources for ethnic continuity. These are more powerful when tied to institutions such as the Church or state. Myth-symbol complexes are both constitutive, helping to structure an ethnic group’s social relations and cultural institutions, and subjective, appealing to members’ perceptions and beliefs.<sup>38</sup>

Smith advocates focusing on these process developments, wherein an ‘ethnic past’, encapsulated in myths, symbols, cultural traditions, values, might be appropriated in order to create new bonds of solidarity.<sup>39</sup> As he wrote, nations can arise from state formation, strategies of elites, but also from memories, symbols and cultural traditions, myths, and values.<sup>40</sup> This is a productive approach as it circumvents, to an extent, the pitfalls of teleological thinking. Instead of raising the question to which extent modern nations and forms of nationalism are products of a continuous evolution of pre-modern, medieval or ancient notions of ethnic identity, it advocates examining the continuous constitutive and subjective complexes in each period. Instead indeed of searching for the ethnic origins of nations in the past, the ethno-symbolic approach looks at how people defined and perceived themselves through their myths and symbols, and how these myths and symbols were employed throughout various periods, in relation to politics, ideologies, economic and social developments. This approach is relevant when examining the notion of ethnic character, as this too might be viewed as a concept of communal mental traits and values which is both constitutive and subjective, as notions of ethnic character may shape social relations – sharpening boundaries

---

34 Hugh Seton-Watson, *Nations and States: an Enquiry into the Origins of Nations and the Politics of Nationalism* (London 1982).

35 Hoppenbrouwers, ‘The dynamics of national identity’, 32-37.

36 Smith, *The Nation in History*, 63-65. See also especially Anthony D. Smith, *Ethno-Symbolism and Nationalism: A Cultural Approach* (London and New York 2009), 23-40.

37 John Armstrong, *Nations before Nationalism* (Chapel Hill 1982), 7-9; Smith, *Nation in History*, 50-52; 62-77.

38 Hoppenbrouwers, ‘The dynamics of national identity’, 24.

39 Smith, *The Nation in History*, 63-64.

40 Smith, *The Cultural Foundations of Nations*, 19.

between groups but also, for example, increasing pride in one's own group. This approach is also applicable to medieval ethnic categories, as a non-historizing concept. My general point of departure is thus that ethnic stereotypes, or using Joep Leerssen terminology: ethnotypes, form a relevant constituent of ethnic identity whose development might be examined over time.<sup>41</sup>

In discussions on ethnicity, the divide between medievalists and modernists is great; to date few attempts have been made to incorporate literature on ethnic identity in the Middle Ages in theoretical discussions of nationhood; a comprehensive overview of research on this subject has yet to be published.<sup>42</sup> Instead, medievalists have focused on various aspects of ethnic identity, often confused with 'national identity', such as the role of origin myths in shaping notions of a shared past, or specific studies of ethnic identity in for example twelfth-century England. Below, I focus on literature specifically, though not exclusively, related to ethnic character and consciousness.

### **Development of medieval ethnic groups**

Among medieval historians, there has been some debate as to whether national thinking existed in the Middle Ages, on what basis, and how it might have served as a precursor to the development of modern nations. There is still some confusion and disagreement about how to approach these questions. Anthony Smith's viewpoint is that nations have pre-modern antecedents, which he terms as ethnic communities or *ethnies* (and not nations, see below), based upon cultural attributes and classical concepts such as community and *respublica*. According to Smith, these *ethnies* precede political communities. This is based upon the position that whereas numerous ethnic communities did not evolve into politically organized entities, yet notions about an ethnic past may influence the present. The concurring opinion among medievalists seems to be that self-conscious ethno-political communities developed in Europe in the *longue durée*.<sup>43</sup>

In keeping with twentieth-century approaches to the formation of national identities, some medievalists have addressed the development of medieval 'nations' from a political viewpoint. Susan Reynolds focused especially on the role of politics and nation-building. According to Susan Reynolds, who takes a rather extreme position, political ties actually created ethnic groups.<sup>44</sup>

---

41 Leerssen, *National Thought*, 17.

42 A recent contribution is Len Scales and Oliver Zimmer (eds), *Power and the Nation in European History* (Cambridge 2005). For a very general discussion from a theoretical viewpoint discussing approaches to ethnic and national identity in the Middle Ages see Lesley Johnson, 'Imagining Communities: Medieval and Modern' in Simon Forde, Lesley Johnson and Alan V. Murray (eds), *Concepts of National Identity in the Middle Ages* (Leeds 1995), 1-20; Anthony D. Smith, 'National Identities: Modern and Medieval', in Idem, 21-46. Recent overviews are Hoppenbrouwers, 'The dynamics of national identity'; and Peter Hoppenbrouwers, 'Medieval peoples imagined', in Manfred Beller and Joep Leerssen (eds), *Imagology: The cultural construction and literary representation of national characters* (Amsterdam and New York 2007), 45-62.

43 Len Scales and Oliver Zimmer, 'Introduction', in Len Scales and Oliver Zimmer (eds), *Power and the Nation in European History* (Cambridge 2005), 1-29, here at 5.

44 Susan Reynolds, 'The Idea of the Nation as a Political Community', in Len Scales and Oliver Zimmer (eds), *Power and the Nation in European History* (Cambridge 2005), 54-66, here at 60-61. The same

Reynolds' viewpoint is that the nation (i.e. an ethnic group) – a 'natural, given, objectively existing human community' – is naturally also a political community in light of the collective nature of medieval government. Kingdoms, from her viewpoint, also belonged to communities of peoples, which viewed themselves as communities of descent, culture and politics.<sup>45</sup> Reynolds further argued that the existence of kingdoms, shared laws and governments promoted a sense of solidarity.<sup>46</sup> However, this is an overstated assumption given the social and legal divisions in most medieval communities. Moreover, it is necessary to distinguish carefully between political theories put forward by intellectuals and emotional attachments which might have been felt by broader layers of medieval populations. Nonetheless, as discussed further below, from the twelfth century concepts remerged such as the idea of fighting for one's *patria*, as abbot Suger called for King Louis the Fat's vassals to fight for France against the German emperor in 1124.<sup>47</sup>

In the early thirteenth century, calls for the expulsion of Poitevins as political advisors to Henry III in England were being made on the basis of their foreign, non-native status.<sup>48</sup> A fundamental change in thinking about ethnicity and power structures occurred when, as Joachim Ehlers wrote, from the end of the thirteenth century *natio* and *lingua* were viewed by learned men to form the basis of communities, from which loyalty to the *provincia* and the *regnum* flowed. Thus, at the end of the thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas articulated that polities were based on natural groups (*provinciae*) instead of emanating from the sinful state of humanity, as Augustine had held.<sup>49</sup> As the French historian Bernard Guenée has argued, whereas earlier followers of Augustine did not believe that political and 'racial' communities were related, the state was now, in theory, the consequence of the nation; there was no political community (*populus*) without a nation.<sup>50</sup> At the end of the thirteenth century, rulers also started to emphasize that their subjects formed a 'nation'.<sup>51</sup> However, this does not mean that subjects had a constitutional basis of power in politics, neither in practice nor theory.

---

opinion is expressed by Aart Noordzij, *Gelre. Dynastie, land en identiteit in de late middeleeuwen* (Hilversum 2009), 33.

45 Reynolds, 'The Idea of the Nation', 56-60.

46 Reynolds, *Kingdoms and Communities*, esp. chapter 8.

47 Cf. Jeremy duQuesnay Adams, 'The Patriotism of Abbot Suger', in *Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Western Society for French History* 15 (1988), 19-29. Whether Suger's call is however an example of patriotism, is highly debateable.

48 Michael T. Clanchy, *England and its Rulers, 1066-1272: Foreign Lordship and National Identity* (Oxford 1983), 241-244.

49 Joachim Ehlers, 'Elemente mittelalterlicher Nationsbildung in Frankreich (10.-13. Jahrhundert)', in *Historische Zeitschrift* 231 (1980), 565-587, here at 566; Zientara, 'Nationale Strukturen', 313.

50 Bernard Guenée, *States and Rulers in Later Medieval Europe*, translated by Juliet Vale (Oxford 1985). 53-54. Originally published in French under the title *L'Occident aux XIVe et XVe siècles. Les États* (Paris 1971).

51 Idem, 49, 64.

### Medieval categories of ethnicity

Besides state formation, many medievalists addressing the subject of ethnicity have focused on the question what constituted an ethnic group in medieval thinking, rather than whether it was culturally, ethnically or politically driven and whether there existed an ideology of nationhood. Three publications have argued extensively that in the later Middle Ages, notions of ethnic identity were based upon the belief that ethnic groups had a shared past, were of common descent, had shared customs, common laws, and in some cases a shared language. In a series of four articles, Rees Davies discussed ethnic identity in the British Isles in relation to ethnic names, boundaries, regnal solidarities, laws and customs, language and historical myths.<sup>52</sup> As he concluded, ‘the medieval world was a world of peoples’, whose boundaries did not necessarily coincide with political structures.<sup>53</sup> Bernard Guenée, writing about the late Middle Ages, also stated that late-medieval notions of ethnicity were based upon shared biological origins, the same ‘blood’, values, customs and language.<sup>54</sup> Similarly, Robert Bartlett has termed the medieval ethnic group as community of descent, language, law and customs, laying emphasis especially on the role of language and cultural attributes.<sup>55</sup> Groups also shared dress fashions, haircuts, cultural customs, social practices, and *mores*. An important ethnic badge was the weaponry carried and manners of warfare.<sup>56</sup>

Peoples, in the medieval period termed a *gens*, *natio*, or *populus*, thus viewed themselves as communities of descent or kinship, culture and language. The terms they used are generally interchangeable, although the word *gens* could in early medieval times refer specifically to pagans, and *populus* to the Christian community.<sup>57</sup> These terms might also refer to regional communities, or whole kingdoms.<sup>58</sup> In the early thirteenth century, there were thus still many *gentes* living in France.

---

52 Rees Davies, ‘The Peoples of Britain and Ireland 1100-1400 I. Identities’, in *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 6/4 (1994), 1-20; Rees Davies, ‘The Peoples of Britain and Ireland 1100-1400 II. Names, Boundaries and Regnal Solidarities’, in *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 6/5 (1995), 1-20; Rees Davies, ‘The Peoples of Britain and Ireland 1100-1400 III. Laws and Customs’, in *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 6/6 (1996), 1-23; Rees Davies, ‘The Peoples of Britain and Ireland 1100-1400 IV. Language and Historical Mythology’, in *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 6/4 (1994), 1-24.

53 Davies, ‘The Peoples of Britain and Ireland 1100-1400 I. Identities’, 13.

54 Guenée, *States and Rulers*. 49-65.

55 Robert Bartlett, ‘Medieval and Modern Concepts of Race and Ethnicity’, in *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31/1 (2001), 39-56, here at 48-49.

56 Robert Bartlett, *Gerald of Wales: A Voice of the Middle Ages*, Clarendon (new ed., Stroud 2006), 155.

57 For the often synonymous use of *populus*, *gens* and *natio*, see Benedykt Zientara, ‘*Populus – Gens – Natio*. Einige Probleme aus dem Bereich der ethnischen Terminologie des frühen Mittelalters’, in Otto Dann (ed.), *Nationalismus in vorindustrieller Zeit* (Munich 1986), 11-20. In some cases, *gentes* together were viewed to form a *natio*. Hastings, *Construction of Nationhood*, 38, notes that the same applies in Bede’s *Historia Ecclesiastica*. Nora Berend, *At the Gates of Christendom*, 192-193. Sometimes *gentes* could together make up a *natio*; see Bartlett, ‘Race and Ethnicity’, 48; Johan Huizinga, ‘Patriotisme en nationalisme in de Europeesche geschiedenis tot het einde der negentiende eeuw’, in Idem, *Verzamelde werken* (Haarlem 1949), volume 4, 497-554, here at 506-507; Walter Müller, ‘Zur Geschichte des Wortes und Begriffes “nation” im französischen Schrifttum des Mittelalters bis zur Mitte des 15. Jahrhunderts’, in *Romanische Forschungen* 58-59 (1947), 247-321.

58 For regional identities in the German territories see the contributions in Peter Moraw (ed.), *Regionale Identität und soziale Gruppen im deutschen Mittelalter* (Berlin 1992); for regional identities in Europe

Conversely, regional diversity need not eliminate loyalty to the kingdom – one might as a Poitevin be loyal to the Frankish kingdom. On the other hand, dynasties which managed to win political hegemony might do so on the basis of power politics, not simply because people considered ethnic identity to be analogous to rights to rulership. As Reynolds writes, the kingdoms were those which ‘best managed to harness the old solidarities of law and myth to themselves’.<sup>59</sup>

The medieval concept of ethnicity is highly congruent with Anthony Smith’s definition of the six main components of an ethnic group, consisting of: (1) a collective proper name; (2) myth of common ancestry; (3) shared historical memories; (4) one or more differentiating elements of common culture; (5) an association with a specific ‘homeland’; (6) sense of solidarity for significant sectors of the population.<sup>60</sup> In comparison, Smith defined a nation as ‘a named human population occupying a historic territory or homeland and sharing common myths and memories, a mass, public culture; a single economy; common rights and duties for all members’. By explicitly using Smith’s definition of an ethnic group when speaking of nations, I lay emphasis on the cultural ties and mental perspectives instead of the political, legal and economic bonds, as Smith’s definition of the nation entails an inclusive state-polity.<sup>61</sup> Secondly, reference to ethnic instead of national accentuates the gradations within the extent of allegiances. The more inclusive, abstract concept of a nation in the period of industrialization is thus set off against the looser ties of allegiance in medieval times. These six attributes of medieval ethnicity are discussed in further detail below.

### (1) Names

In medieval geography, ethnic names were related to both territory and myths of descent. As Bernard Guenée wrote, an ethnic name ‘translates, sustains or determines certain fundamental myths about the nation’.<sup>62</sup> Territories were often named after ethnic groups (i.e. Francia from the Franks), or were explained etymologically as named after some mythological founder (descending from Francus). Historians have pointed out that in evidence of the tightening grip of bureaucracy and increasing royal power from the twelfth century, kings in France, Germany and England increasingly

Antoni Czacharowski (ed.), *Nationale, ethnische Minderheiten und regionale Identitäten in Mittelalter und Neuzeit* (Toruń 1994).

<sup>59</sup> Reynolds, *Kingdoms and Communities*, 261.

<sup>60</sup> Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity* (London 1991), 21.

<sup>61</sup> Throughout this study I have thus tried to use the term ethnic group or people instead of nation; where I do use the word nation, it is meant in the sense of an ethnic group.

<sup>62</sup> Guenée, *States and Rulers*, 50-52. See especially Bernd Schneidmüller, *Nomen patriae: Die Entstehung Frankreichs in der politisch-geographischen Terminologie (10.-13. Jahrhundert)* (Sigmaringen 1987); Rudolf Schieffer, ‘Frankreich im Mittelalter’, in *Mittelalterliche nationes – neuzeitliche Nationen: Probleme der Nationenbildung in Europa* (Wiesbaden 1995), 43-59; Ehlers, ‘Elemente mittelalterlicher Nationsbildung’, 573-587 for growing loyalty to the French monarchy in the course of the twelfth century. For early medieval *regna* and continual application of ethnic names, see Eugen Ewig, ‘Volkstum und Volksbewußtsein im Frankenreich des 7. Jahrhunderts. Civitas, pagus, Ducatus and natio’, in Eugen Ewig, *Spätantikes und fränkisches Gallien: gesammelte Schriften (1952-1973)* (2 volumes, Munich 1976-1979), vol. 1, 231-273. According to Rees Davies, names were so important that deletion of an ethnic name was synonymous to genocide. Cf. Davies, ‘The Peoples of Britain and Ireland 1100–1400 II Names, Boundaries and Regnal Solidarities’, 2-5.

termed themselves as kings of territories instead of peoples. Thus, in the eighth-century German territories the word ‘Theodiscus’ referred to the Germanic language; from the mid-eleventh century ‘Teutonicus’ referred to the peoples living in German territories; in the twelfth century the name *Teutonia* was introduced for the territory.<sup>63</sup> Before the Crusades *Francia* designated either the territory north of the Loire or referred to the historic Carolingian empire. At the beginning of the thirteenth century, *Francia* came to designate the whole kingdom nominally governed by the French king. King Philip II thus called himself *rex Franciae* for this first time after the fall of Rouen in 1204. Anglia at this time took on the meaning of the whole of Britain, although who the *Angli* precisely were remains nebulous until the early parts of the thirteenth century, when the Anglo-Saxons and Normans seemed to have intermingled.<sup>64</sup> As discussed in chapter 1, ethnonyms were also viewed to reflect a people’s character; thus the guide to Santiago wrote of the Navarrese that they were ‘*non verus*’, of contaminated, untrue stock.

## (2) Myths of common ancestry

Medieval peoples were viewed as communities of blood. The very words *gens* and *natio* bear the connotations of birth and generation (*natus*, from the verb *nasci*, and *generatio*).<sup>65</sup> Blood ties were ensconced in early medieval descent myths, which remained popular in twelfth-century literary and historiographical sources. Origin myths were presented in genealogies of royal descent from Trojan founders (the Franks descending from Francus, the British from Brutus via his eldest son Loocrinus),<sup>66</sup> biblical figures (Asians, Europeans and Africans purportedly the descendants of Sem,

---

63 For the use of the name Teutonicus and the German Empire, see Bernd Schneidmüller, ‘Reich – Volk – Nation: Die Entstehung des deutschen Reiches und der deutschen Nation im Mittelalter’, in Bues and Rexheuser (eds), *Mittelalterliches nationes*, 73-101; Pierre Monnet, ‘La patria médiévale vue d’Allemagne, entre construction impériale et identités régionales’, in *Le Moyen Âge* 107 (2001), 71-90; Joachim Ehlers, *Die Entstehung des deutschen Reiches* (Munich 1994); Fritz Vigener, *Bezeichnungen für Volk und Land der Deutschen vom 10. bis zum 13. Jahrhundert* (Darmstadt 1976), 48-102; Heinz Thomas, ‘Sur l’histoire du mot “Deutsch” depuis le milieu du XIIe siècle jusqu’à la fin du XIIIe siècle’, in: Rainer Babel and Jean-Marie Moeglin (eds), *Identité régionale et conscience nationale en France et en Allemagne du Moyen Âge à l’époque moderne* (Sigmaringen 1997), 27-35; Heinz Thomas, ‘Die Deutschen und die Rezeption ihres Volksnamens’, in W. Paravicini (ed.), *Nord und Süd in der deutschen Geschichte des Mittelalters: Gedenkschrift für Karl Jordan* (Sigmaringen 1989); Heinz Thomas, ‘Das Identitätsproblem der Deutschen im Mittelalter’, in: *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 43 (1992), 138-139; Hannes Kästner, ‘Der großmächtige Riese und Recke Teuton: Etymologische Spurensuche nach dem Urvater der Deutschen am Ende des Mittelalters’, in *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie* 110 (1991), 68-97.

64 See Hugh Thomas, *The English and the Normans: Ethnic Hostility, Assimilation, and Identity, 1066-C. 1220* (Oxford 2003); prior to the Conquest, the inhabitants of the island called themselves Angli from at least the eighth century, and more rarely Anglo Saxones. Cf. Susan Reynolds, ‘What do we mean by “Anglo-Saxon” and “Anglo-Saxons”’, in *Journal of British Studies* 24 (1985), 395-414, here at 398. Richard Southern rather adamantly stressed the weak loyalty to the royal house in twelfth-century England, in comparison to twelfth-century France. His position seems somewhat overstated. See R.W. Southern, *Medieval Humanism and Other Studies* (Oxford 1970), chapter 8.

65 Davies, ‘The Peoples of Britain and Ireland 1100-1400 I. Identities’, 6-7.

66 Fredegar was the first to speak of the Trojan origin of the Franks. Notably, in the twelfth century the English (and not just the Britons) identified with Brutus. This belief might have been deliberately stimulated by King Henry II in the second part of the twelfth century; he commissioned Wace to translate

Japheth, and Ham respectively), or from Alexander the Great.<sup>67</sup> These early medieval genealogies point to close ties in perceived relations between a people and royal leadership, which, according to John Armstrong, were specifically relevant to nomadic groups.<sup>68</sup> Besides myths of the wanderings of mythological founders, there were also stories of the treks of kinship groups to a destined territory, such as in Germanic histories; the Bavarians, for instance, were said to have trekked from Armenia – where Noah was said to have built his arc – to southern Germany.<sup>69</sup> Some peoples constructed descent myths from their northern origins (Scandza), such as the Normans (descending from the Dacians but also purportedly migrating from the Maeotic Swamps), or the Goths.<sup>70</sup> Some mythological founders were viewed as the name-givers of both ethnic group and territory (for example Brutus-Britain).

Nonetheless, Robert Bartlett has questioned the relevance of biological thinking and belief in *fixed* descent groups, emphasizing the value of acculturation and environmental influences in medieval thinking about ethnicity.<sup>71</sup> On the other hand, Rees Davies believed that ethnic groups fundamentally rejected notions of ethnogenesis and acculturation, stating that ‘given that a people was identifiable by origin, blood, descent and character – in other words that it was an objective and “enduring reality” – any fudging of the boundaries between peoples should, at least theoretically, be construed as literally unnatural’, as it eroded the identity of a people, and was as such viewed as ‘reprehensible and pernicious’.<sup>72</sup> A relevant question is whether ethnic groups were perceived to retain their ‘original’ character and customs upon migration, intermarriage, and acculturation. For example, Wace (c. 1100-1171/83) wrote that the Saxons had brought their forebears’ customs and laws with them upon migrating from Germany to Britain, thereby retaining continuity with their

Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *History of the British Kings* into French; Wace also produced the *Roman de Rou*. See Penny Eley, ‘The Myth of Trojan Descent and Perceptions of National Identity: the Case of “Eneas” and the “Roman de Troie”’, in *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 35 (1991), 27-40, here at 29.

67 For the myth of descent of Sem, Japheth and Ham, see Denys Hay, *Europe: The Emergence of an Idea* (New York 1966), 1-15; Benjamin Braude, ‘The Sons of Noah and the Construction of Ethnic and Geographical Identities in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods’, in: *William and Mary Quarterly* 54 (1997), 103-142. For the curse of Ham and dark skinned peoples see further references in chapter 3.

68 Armstrong, *Nations before Nationalism*, chapter 2.

69 Hoppenbrouwers, ‘Medieval Peoples Imagined’, 47.

70 Idem, 45-49. Cf. Susan Reynolds, ‘Medieval *Origines Gentium* and the Community of the Realm’, in *History* 68 (1983), 375-390; Jörn Garber, ‘Trojaner-Römer-Franken-Deutsche. “Nationale” Abstammungstheorien im Vorfeld der Nationalstaatsbildung’, in Klaus Garber (ed.), *Nation und Literatur im Europa der Frühen Neuzeit* (Tübingen 1989), 108-63; Patrick Geary, *The Myth of Nations* (Princeton and Oxford 2002), 61; Claude Carozzi, ‘Des Daces aux Normands. Le mythe et l’identification d’un peuple chez Dudo de Saint-Quentin’, in C. Carozzi and H. Taviani-Carozzi (eds), *Peuples du Moyen Âge. Problèmes d’identification* (Aix-en-Provence 1996); R.H.C. Davis, *The Normans and their Myth* (London 1976), 49-69; Emily Albu, *The Normans in their histories. Propaganda, myth and subversion* (Woodbridge 2001); František Graus, ‘Troja und die trojanische Herkunftssage im Mittelalter’, in Willi Erzgräber (ed.), *Kontinuität und Transformation der Antike im Mittelalter* (Sigmaringen 1989), 25-43; František Graus, *Lebendige Vergangenheit: Überlieferung im Mittelalter und in den Vorstellungen vom Mittelalter* (Cologne 1975); Eley, ‘The Myth of Trojan Descent’, 27-40. Arno Borst, *Der Turmbau von Babel. Geschichte der Meinungen über Ursprung und Vielfalt der Sprachen und Völker* (6 volumes, Stuttgart 1957-1963), offers a wealth of sources with references to origin myths.

71 Bartlett, ‘Race and Ethnicity’, 45-46.

72 Davies, ‘The Peoples of Britain and Ireland 1100-1400 I. Identities’, 7-8.

past.<sup>73</sup> On the other hand, according to the guide to Santiago, the Scottish migration and violent rape of the indigenous inhabitants of Navarra had produced a degenerate people. The question of notions of fixed or mutable ethnicity is discussed further in chapter 3.

### (3) *Shared historical memories*

The importance of shared memories of the past, constructed both in textual and oral sources and also transmitted through traditions, images, symbols, is relevant to ethnic character insofar as notions existed that ethnic character was shaped in the past, or had determined historical events (as a myth-symbol complex). Some of these shared memories are founded on the mythical origins of peoples or ethnic ancestry of celebrated rulers, especially Charlemagne; others might refer to political events of the past such as defeat in battle.<sup>74</sup>

### (4) *Differentiating elements of common culture*

According to Robert Bartlett, cultural attributes were viewed as key ingredients in medieval thinking about ethnicity.<sup>75</sup> Common culture might include eating and drinking habits, dress styles, weaponry, music culture, festivities, and shared social values and customs. Bernard Guenée has emphasized the importance of saints in forging ethnic communities, such as St Denis (of whom Louis VI became patron and protector in 1120) in France, and St. Georges in England; in 1222 the Council of Oxford indeed introduced the St. Georges day as a national feast day.<sup>76</sup>

### (5) *Association with a 'homeland'*

Relevant to the existence of ethnic consciousness is the question to which degree peoples imagined that they inhabited a geographic space which formed an object of attachment, and to which they had a sense of entitlement. Before the twelfth century (as well as during and afterwards) the *patria* could refer to a person's region of birth (*patria natiuitatis*) or native land (as it could in biblical and classical texts), a person's roots. It might lack an abstract geopolitical or civic meaning, such as when referring to the ancient civic term of the *respublica*.<sup>77</sup> More importantly, it bore religious significance, as the *communis patria*, of which Rome was the head, incorporated the universal Christian community; for Augustine, thus, *patria* meant heaven. This continued in the twelfth century; for example crusaders left behind their own *patria* out of charitable love of God, striving

---

73 Davies, 'The Peoples of Britain and Ireland 1100-1400 III. Laws and Customs', 13.

74 Guenée, *States and Rulers*, 57-61.

75 Bartlett, 'Race and Ethnicity', 47.

76 Guenée, *States and Rulers*, 59.

77 Thomas Eichenberger, *Patria: Studien zur Bedeutung des Wortes im Mittelalter (6.-12. Jahrhundert)* (Sigmaringen, 1991), esp. 25-81; *Nomen patriae*; Halvdan Koht, 'A Specific Sense of the Word *patria* in Norse and Norman Latin' in *Archivum Latinitas Medii Aevi* 2 (Paris 1922), 93-96, supplements in *Ibid.* 3, 30-31, 87, 145; *Scottish Historical Review* 24 (Glasgow 1927), 240-243; Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies. A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton 1957), 232-272; G. Dupont-Ferrier, 'Le sens des mots "patria" et "patrie" en France au Moyen Age et jusqu'au début du XVIIe siècle', in *Revue historique* 188 (Paris 1940), 89-105.

instead for the heavenly fatherland.<sup>78</sup> Martyrs were the exemplars of civic self-sacrifice, offering themselves up for the *communis patria*.

However, from the twelfth century, under classicizing influences, the notion remerged among intellectuals of a *patria* as a worldly fatherland to which one owed loyalty.<sup>79</sup> Geoffrey of Monmouth, for example, equates the *patria* to the monarchy, using the imagery of brothers-in-arms. A general politicization of the concept occurs, adopting classical notions of *communis patria*.<sup>80</sup> In Germany, the *patria* might now refer to the stem duchies.<sup>81</sup> Especially emotive are the classical notions of fighting (*pugna pro patria*) and dying (*pro patria mori*) for the fatherland (according to Horace, a sweet death) which began to apply not only to heavenly but also earthly territories. Circa 1128, in the *Glossa ordinaria*, Accursius thus wrote that obedience to the fatherland was a *ius gentium*; dying for the *dulcissima patria*, the sweetest fatherland, was a glorious deed. Crucially, early thirteenth-century jurists such as Johannes Teutonicus, followed slightly later by Jean de Blanhot, wrote that the duty to defend the fatherland was greater than the duty to defend a lord. The loyalty of vassals should lie with their fatherland instead of being driven the bonds of fealty.<sup>82</sup> Odofredo, a mid-thirteenth-century legal commentator, thus wrote that a good citizen should defend his fatherland. By the mid-1200s, taxes were being imposed for the defence of the native fatherland. By the end of the thirteenth century, the virtue of *caritas* had turned political: love for the fatherland rooted in charity putting the common good before the private. By the end of the thirteenth century *communis patria* in France could mean the whole French realm. By now, French legists were writing that the French kingdom was independent from the German Empire; fighting for France was comparable to fighting for the Holy Land.<sup>83</sup>

As Johan Huizinga stated, patriotism (used in the broad sense of a subjective feeling and conviction of an obligation towards the superior *patria*), a desire to defend one's own, was a powerful notion.<sup>84</sup> Bernard Guenée wrote that 'throughout the medieval period everyone was constantly exhorted to love his country, to fight and, if necessary, die for it'.<sup>85</sup> However, we must realize that these were elitist concepts. In daily life, the *patria* remained close to the word *pays*, native region. Nonetheless, the concept of loyalty to the fatherland as a political concept could, amongst the elite, become a powerful motif which might have strengthened ethnocentric bonds,

---

78 Eichenberger, *Patria*, 58; Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, 241. See Jonathan Riley-Smith, 'Crusading as an Act of Love', in *History* 65 (1980), 177-192 for the idea of love for Christ voiced in kinship relations such as brotherly love in order to enthrone laymen during the Crusades to take the cross.

79 Xavier de Planhol and Paul Claval, *A Historical Geography of France*, transl. Janey Lloyd (Cambridge 1994), 105. Originally published as *Géographie historique de la France* (Paris 1988). Koht, 'Dawn of Nationalism', 266, says for example that abbot Suger termed King Louis the Fat 'pater patriae', although I have not been able to trace the reference in his *Vita Ludovici*.

80 Guenée, *States and Rulers*, 55.

81 Eichenberger, *Patria*, 66.

82 Gaines Post, 'Two Notes on Nationalism in the Middle Ages', in *Traditio* 9 (1953), 281-320, here at 288-291 for source references.

83 Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, 247.

84 Huizinga, 'Patriotisme en nationalisme', 497-498.

85 Guenée, *States and Rulers*, 54.

especially in France and England, among the fighting aristocracy. The lines in Lawrence of Durham's twelfth-century Latin 'Dialogues' may suffice to illustrate its potency:

Your tears for England's grief – that public loss  
 Should generate your private woe – I praise.  
 For reason tells us all to love our land.  
 No better love exists than for our land.  
 Sweet love of country fills the pious heart.<sup>86</sup>

(6) *Sense of solidarity for significant sectors of the population*

Loyalties could exist on the level of regional territories or royal principalities. According to Susan Reynolds, the 'loyalties of kingship came to coincide with the solidarities of supposed common descent and law' after 900.<sup>87</sup> However, as Robert Bartlett has argued, regional loyalties remained intact in the later Middle Ages, without necessarily undermining an overriding sense of solidarity to a royal dynasty.<sup>88</sup> In the absence of an ideology demanding self-determination for ethnic groups, political allegiance could also be organized along non-ethnic lines. Moreover, the social divisions between the aristocracy, urban groups and peasants, between men of the cloth and laymen, and the literate and illiterate, complicate any sense of solidarity among broader layers of the population, as it remains unclear to which extent the sources speak for the non-literate, and to which extent the non-literate were acquainted with any discussions of ethnicity.

*Language and law*

Besides these 'attributes' of ethnic groups, we may point to the role of language and law in ethnic thinking. In book IX of the *Etymologies*, on the 'Languages of Peoples', Isidore of Seville had stated that the diversity of peoples was born from one language.<sup>89</sup> Language could be identified with a people: the word *theodiscus*, 'the people', was used from late eighth century at the Carolingian court for the vernacular *lingua theodisca*, spoken by Teutons.<sup>90</sup> Foreigners might also be caricatured through language, and groups identified along linguistic lines. Before the twelfth century, derogatory utterances were especially made about Romance- and Germanic-speaking peoples, referring to the harshness of the German tongue. Nonetheless, some scholars have questioned the extent in which

---

86 Lawrence of Durham's twelfth-century *Dialogi* I vs. 77-81, ed. Raine, 3, transl. by A.G. Rigg, 'Lawrence of Durham: Dialogues and Easter Poem: A Verse Translation', in *The Journal of Medieval Latin* 7 (1997), 42-126, here at 47: 'Quod patriae fles damna tuae, quod publica fletum / Mors tibi privatum suggerit, ipse probo. / Dictat enim ratio patriae pietate teneri; / Et quis amor patriae major amore subit? Dulcis amor patriae pia pectora dulcius implet.'

87 Reynolds, *Kingdoms and Communities*, 258-260.

88 Bartlett, 'Race and Ethnicity', 50-54; Davies, 'The Peoples of Britain and Ireland 1100-1400 I. Identities', 11.

89 Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae* IX 1, 1 ed. M. Reydellet (Paris 1984), 30-31.

90 Kisch, 'Nationalism and Race', 190-191.

language played a decisive role in ethnic thinking.<sup>91</sup> Absence of linguistic factors in medieval sources may however have to do with the fact that most sources are composed in Latin before the vernacularization process set in from the thirteenth century.

In addition, legal status must have profoundly influenced ethnic consciousness. As Guido Kisch remarked, the rhetoric of an immemorial law of the people, sanctioned by the king, tapped into notions of its ancient character, strengthening a collective ethnic solidarity.<sup>92</sup> Indeed, all-embracing laws remained absent and the system of personality of law in some cases retained for minority populations.<sup>93</sup>

Having cursorily discussed what made up an 'ethnic group' and which elements might have been considered to constitute ethnicity in the later Middle Ages, I will now discuss a number of studies specifically examining the concept of ethnic stereotyping, character and consciousness, which in the past has sometimes been confused with national sentiment.

### **Ethnic stereotypes and character**

A number of specific monographs and articles are relevant to the study of ethnic stereotypes, consciousness and character in the later Middle Ages. Especially in the early twentieth century, some scholars actually discussed whether there was such a thing as 'nationalism' and 'national sentiment' in the Middle Ages.<sup>94</sup> Paul Kirn's *Aus der Frühzeit des Nationalgefühls*, published in Leipzig in the middle of the Second World War, is the most extensive publication in this field. In the prologue, Kirn, who was head of Medieval History Department at Frankfurt am Main, states that the idea for his book arose during the First World War, when he was wounded and captured by French troops. After the war, he began to amass literature about medieval France and collected examples of expressions of 'national sentiment' from the eighth to thirteenth centuries, focusing on the French, English and Germans, especially the works of the Frenchman Suger of St Denis, the Anglo-Norman-

---

91 Eley, 'The Myth of Trojan Descent', 31. Elisabeth Schulze-Busacker, 'French Conceptions of Foreigners and Foreign Languages in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries', in *Romance Philology* 49/1 (1987), 24-47; Ehlers, 'Nationes im mittelalterlichen Europa', 20-22. He notes that the German groups probably did not understand one another. Conversely, Marc Bloch, *Feudal Society*, transl. L.A. Manyon (2 volumes, Chicago 1964), vol. 2, 432-437, argues for the significance of linguistic differences as a constituent of 'national' identity in the Middle Ages, as does Bartlett, 'Race and Ethnicity', 48-49.

92 Davies, 'The Peoples of Britain and Ireland 1100-1400 III. Laws and Customs', 6-8 for further references.

93 Although this was in some cases related to linguistic distinctions. As soon as a Wend used German, he forfeited his right to use Wendish language in court. See further Bartlett, 'Race and Ethnicity', 52-53; Bartlett, *The Making of Europe*, 197-220.

94 Koht, 'The Dawn of Nationalism in Europe', 265-280 (especially on Scandinavian sources); G.G. Coulton, 'Nationalism in the Middle Ages', in *Cambridge Historical Journal* 5/1 (1935), 15-40 (including sources referring to differences between the north and south of England); Huizinga, 'Patriotisme en nationalisme', 497-554; C. Leon Tipton (ed.), *Nationalism in the Middle Ages* (New York 1972) for approaches to 'nationalism' from the perspectives of national consciousness, language, law, feudalism, the papacy and legal theory; Walter Mohr, 'Zur Frage des Nationalismus im Mittelalter', in *Annales Universitatis Saraviensis: Philosophie - Lettres* 2 (1953), 106-116.

Welshman Gerald of Wales and the Cologne canon Alexander of Roes.<sup>95</sup> Although Kirn had seemingly withdrawn from politics, his choice of subject (the historical boundaries of German territories and medieval national consciousness) was relevant to Nazi politics, as was his plea for a strong national community and state and a call to his readers to acknowledge their duties in ‘racial and colonization politics’, although without directly propagating anti-Semitic prosecution.<sup>96</sup> The underlying motif of *Frühzeit* is a call for leadership (referring to Hitler) and national unity. Notably, a copy of this book was used to send encoded messages (lightly tipping a letter on every other page from back to front) by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, member of the German resistance group of Abwehr officers who attempted to overthrow the Nazi regime in 1939, who was imprisoned and sentenced to death by the Germans in April 1945 after the failed attempt to assassinate Hitler in 1944.<sup>97</sup> Evidently the book was sufficiently *salonfähig* for officials to allow Bonhoeffer to borrow a copy in prison. Despite its nationalist perspective, speaking of a shared German consciousness in the Middle Ages, his study does offer a wealth of mostly historiographical, sources especially concerning German-French relations.

Medieval ‘nationalism’ was also examined in a number of articles. Halvdan Koht speaks of how the leaders of ethnic groups in early medieval times did not seek ‘national separatism’, as Roman traditions were too strong, yet dates the rise of ‘nationalism’ – meaning national consciousness – to the twelfth century.<sup>98</sup> Koht terms Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *History of the Kings of Britain* as the ‘most famous nationalistic historiography’, although its purpose and message have since been contested by many.<sup>99</sup> He speaks of a ‘juvenile pride’ in one’s own nation contrasted with others; the kingdom is the ‘country of everybody’, loyalty to the king ‘a national duty and a proof of virtue’, devotion not simply patriotism but a *real affection* for the native land, which affects the nation as a whole.<sup>100</sup> In his substantial article about ethnic consciousness, Johan Huizinga also spoke of medieval nationalism and patriotism in the broadest sense of the meaning.<sup>101</sup> Referring to the period before the fourteenth century, Robert Bartlett laid special emphasis on English ‘nationalism’ as ‘a longish history of political unity under one dynasty, a common language, and the territorial integrity aided by an island location all created a “match between people and polity” that gave English nationalism an earlier, more continuous, and more apparently self-evident history than the

---

95 Kirn, *Frühzeit des Nationalgefühls*.

96 Carsten Kretschmann, ‘Einsatz für Deutschland? Die Frankfurter Historiker Walter Platzhoff und Paul Kirn im “Dritten Reich”’, in Jörn Kobes, Jan Otmar Hesse (eds), *Frankfurter Wissenschaftler zwischen 1933 und 1945* (Göttingen 2008), 5-32, here at 26-28.

97 Renate Bethge, Christiaan Gremmels, Holger Sweers (eds), *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Zijn leven in beeld* (Kampen 2005), 142.

98 Koht, ‘Dawn of Nationalism’, 265-266, 268.

99 Idem, 270-271.

100 Idem, 279.

101 Huizinga, ‘Patriotisme en nationalisme’, 497-554.

nationalism of most other parts of Europe’,<sup>102</sup> despite the fact that England was a multilingual society which had been conquered by a foreign elite at the end of the eleventh century.

This use of the word nationalism partly seems to be based on the broader definition as a ‘patriotic feeling’, i.e. an emotional sentiment of attachment. However, in the past efforts to search for examples of pre-modern ‘nationalism’ also attempted to demonstrate the continuance or discontinuance of notions of the nation in earlier times. This teleological approach is often ensconced in the term ‘proto’: proto-nations, proto-nationalism and so forth. Especially in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century discourse of ‘self-historicization’ efforts were made to locate early examples of ‘proto-nationalism’ in the Middle Ages and even earlier. However, nationalism is usually defined as an ideology of national aspiration or a policy of national independence. It entails a doctrine providing a criterion for a population to enjoy an exclusive government, providing legitimate state power.<sup>103</sup> Any such notion or ‘national thought’, defined by Leerssen as including the notion of ‘an obvious right to exist and to command loyalty’, in which nations are set apart ‘unambiguously by its own separate identity and culture’, did not exist in the later Middle Ages.<sup>104</sup> The exceptional rhetoric of the Declaration of Arbroath (1320), which is evoked as a counter-argument by for example Susan Reynolds and Rees Davies (‘As long as only one hundred of us remain alive, we will never on any condition be brought under English rule (...) And we fight not for glory, nor riches, nor honours, but for freedom alone, which no good man gives up except with his life’), though powerful, offers insufficient grounds to speak of nationalist ideology.<sup>105</sup> Although the text speaks of a desire not to fall under foreign rule, it is unclear whether the barons are speaking on behalf of broader layers of the Scottish population, or whether they had entertained a clear ideology.

Most medievalists, although speaking of nations or nationalism, have however been careful to emphasize the difference between medieval and modern expressions of ethnic sentiment.<sup>106</sup> Jeno

102 Bartlett, ‘Race and Ethnicity’, 53.

103 Joep Leerssen states that this definition of nationalism as a political ideology is based on a combination of the following three assumptions: 1) the nation is a natural collective aggregate of humans, the most natural organic subdivision of humanity with the highest overriding claim to loyalty; 2) the state derives mandate and sovereignty from its inclusion of a constituent nation, civic loyalty is an extension of ‘national’ (cultural, linguistic, ethnic) solidarity; 3) the natural and organic division of humanity runs along ‘national’ lines territorially and socio-politically, wherefore nations and states seem to overlap seamlessly. See Leerssen, *National Thought*, 14. Smith writes that nationalism is the ‘ideological movement for the attainment and maintenance of autonomy, unity, and identity on behalf of a population deemed by some of its members to constitute an actual or potential “nation”’. John Breuilly also states that nationalism was a political doctrine based on similar assumptions, including the belief that a nation exists ‘with an explicit and peculiar character’. Breuilly, 1993, 2; cf. Leerssen, *National Thought*, 15.

104 Leerssen, *National Thought*, 15.

105 Idem, 25. Cf. Davies ‘The Peoples of Britain and Ireland 1100-1400 III. Laws and Customs’, 11; Reynolds, *Kingdoms and Communities*, 274-276. Another example given is the Welsh people of Snowdon in 1282, who stated that ‘even if their prince should give seisin of them to the king, they themselves would refuse to do homage to any foreigner, of whose language, customs and laws they were thoroughly ignorant’.

106 Cf. Karl Ferdinand Werner, ‘Les nations et le sentiment national dans l’Europe médiévale’, in *Revue historique* 244/2 (1970), 285-304 and especially B. Grevin, ‘De la rhétorique des nations à la théorie des

Szücs, although stressing the continuity of nations, emphasized that people may have thought in terms of social or religious groups and that nationality was irrelevant; he also distinguished between political nations and *ethnies*,<sup>107</sup> although Benedykt Zientara argued not to make too sharp a distinction between these concepts.<sup>108</sup>

Although erroneously attempting to demonstrate the longevity of nationalism, such articles thus present extremely valuable collections of relevant sources containing ethnotypes and some discussion of ethnic character in the Middle Ages.<sup>109</sup> In the later Middle Ages there did exist ideas about the specific characteristics and customs of peoples. Although twelfth-century ethnic groups might have lacked a politico-ideological concept of sovereignty, or a will or agency to demand self-governance, and although ethnicity was not synonymous to the boundaries of political rule, this does not contradict the existence of an ethnic consciousness, at least among the elite, of sharing a culture, customs, and values, fed by descent myths and notions of biological ties, as well as laws and, in some cases, language.

In this study, I will examine how ethnic stereotypes and notions of ethnic character might serve as expressions of and catalysers of ethnic identity from a socio-cultural perspective. In the final paragraphs of the introduction, it is thus necessary to determine what ethnic stereotypes are, how they might function within social contexts, as well as the meaning of the concept of ethnic character.

### Factors of ethnic stereotyping

Franz Stanzel has outlined a number of features of early modern characterizations of peoples: they occur in literary discourse based predominantly on fictional conventions; they are ethnocentric (markedly in the application of climate theory); and there is a strong tendency to schematization.<sup>110</sup>

A stereotype may be defined as ‘a generalization about a group of people in which incidental characteristics are assigned to virtually all members of the group, regardless of actual variation

racess’, available as pdf on the Internet at [gas.ehess.fr/docannexe.php?id=107](http://gas.ehess.fr/docannexe.php?id=107). See also Joseph Strayer, *On the Medieval Origins of the Modern State* (Princeton 1970), 45-56.

107 J. Szücs, ‘“Nationalität” und “Nationalbewußtsein” im Mittelalter: Versuch einer einheitlichen Begriffssprache’, in *Acta Historica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 18 (1972), 1-38, 245-266.

108 Benedykt Zientara, ‘Nationale Strukturen des Mittelalters. Ein Versuch zur Kritik der Terminologie des Nationalbewußtseins unter besonderer Berücksichtigung osteuropäischer Literatur’, in *Saeculum. Jahrbuch für Universalgeschichte* 32 (1981), 301-316, here at 312.

109 Especially useful is Bartlett’s article ‘Race and Ethnicity’, and idem, ‘Illustrating Ethnicity in the Middle Ages’, in Miriam Eliav-Feldon, Benjamin Isaac, and Joseph Ziegler, *The Origins of Racism in the West* (Cambridge 2009), 132-156, although Bartlett says relatively little about climate theory in his contribution; Paul Meyvaert, ‘“Rainaldus est malus scriptor Francigenus” – Voicing National Antipathy in the Middle Ages’, in *Speculum* 66/4 (1991), 743-763; Helmut Beumann, ‘Zur Nationenbildung im Mittelalter’, in Dann (ed.), *Nationalismus in vorindustrieller Zeit*, 21-33; Cerwinka, ‘Völkercharakteristiken’, 59-79 for an overview of stereotypes in twelfth-century German historiographical sources and Brühl, *Die Geburt zweier Völker*, esp. chapter 4; for English sources see Günther Blaicher, ‘Zur Entstehung und Verbreitung nationaler Stereotypen in und über England’, in *Deutsch Vierteljahrschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* 51 (1977), 549-574.

110 Franz Stanzel, *Europäer: Ein imagologischer Essay* (Heidelberg 1998), 85; Beller, ‘Stereotypes’, 430-431.

among the members. Once formed, stereotypes are resistant to change on the basis of new information.<sup>111</sup> The semantic origin of the word stereotype (and cliché) lies in the book printing industry, where it referred to a printing plate. From the early parts of the twentieth century, it also began to refer to ‘fixed images in our heads’.<sup>112</sup> Sets of stereotypes might form a composite image of a people.<sup>113</sup>

Socio-psychologists have identified various factors leading to stereotyping, and functions of stereotypes in social relations.<sup>114</sup> Influential is the ‘cognitive approach’, which assumes that stereotyping results from a limited capacity for information processing. Stereotypes might thus reduce complexities and schematize relations; as Seymour Phillips put it, people classify in order to see.<sup>115</sup> We must distinguish between prejudice and stereotypes; the former is a moral judgment or attitude, whereas the latter is a fixed expression of that attitude.<sup>116</sup> Stereotypes are often handed down by parents and through education, which causes their longevity (termed the ‘social learning theory’). As Manfred Beller notes, although stereotypes stem from mental and cognitive processes, yet they might be readily absorbed in literary creation processes.<sup>117</sup>

How do stereotypes relate to ethnic consciousness? Images of group behaviour might be viewed as expressions of awareness of ethnicity, which at the same sharpen consciousness of ethnicity. According to Willem Frijhoff, consciousness of identity is related to three elements: imagining; labeling; and recognition.<sup>118</sup> Identity is dynamic process which entails the adoption in the imagination of – possibly stereotypical – images based on internal perception of one’s own group, and external labelling by others. These images are labeled in the mind and appropriated; as such, imagination and reality constantly interact and relate to one another, as people – depending on the situation – adapt their behaviour to perceptions, which subsequently might reshape such perceptions.

Stereotypes are often pasted onto others (known as heterostereotypes); fixed images of one’s own group are known as autostereotypes. Often, heterostereotypes are negative, whereas autostereotypes are positive (ethnocentric), yet this is not always the case. More than simple categories of We-Them,

111 This is the definition given in Elliot Aronson, T.D. Wilson and R.M. Akert, *Social Psychology* (Upper Saddle River, New York 2005), 434, quoted by Beller, ‘Stereotypes’, 429.

112 Manfred Beller, ‘Stereotypes’, in Beller and Leerssen (eds), *Imagology*, 429-434, here at 429.

113 Beller, ‘Stereotypes’, 431.

114 Wolfgang Stroebe and Chester A. Insko, ‘Stereotype, Prejudice, and Discrimination: Changing Conceptions in Theory and Research’, in Daniel Bar-Tal, Carl F. Graumann, Arie W. Kruglanski and Wolfgang Stroebe (eds), *Stereotyping and Prejudice: Changing Conceptions* (New York etc. 1989), 3-34. See also Marco Cinnirella, ‘Ethnic and National Stereotypes: A Social Identity Perspective’, in Cedric C. Barfoot (ed.), *Beyond Pug’s tour: National and ethnic stereotyping in theory and literary practice* (Amsterdam 1997), 37-51.

115 Seymour Phillips, ‘The outer world of the European Middle Ages’, in Schwartz (ed.), *Implicit Understandings: observing, reporting, and reflecting on the encounters between Europeans and other peoples in the early modern era* (Cambridge 1994), 23-63, here at 43.

116 Manfred Beller, ‘Prejudice’, in Beller and Leerssen (eds), *Imagology*, 404-406, here at 404.

117 Beller, ‘Prejudice’, 404.

118 Willem Frijhoff, ‘Identiteit en identiteitsbesef. De historicus en de spanning tussen verbeelding, benoeming en herkenning’, in *Bijdragen en Mededelingen betreffende de Geschiedenis der Nederlanden* 197/4 (1992), 614-634, here at 629. Cf. Noordzij, *Gelre*, 15-17.

negative stereotypes used by outsiders might serve as positively evaluated tokens of identity by the 'in-group'. Stereotyping applied by the other can thus strengthen inner group coherence.<sup>119</sup> Given that stereotyping often occurs within a social context – performed intergroup behaviour – stereotypes might strengthen a person's perception of its own ethnic identity. Indeed, as Joep Leerssen remarked, 'a collective sense of identity derives not from a group's pre-existing cohesion, but from the perception and articulation of external differences.'<sup>120</sup>

Frijhoff's approach is thus related to what is known as the 'boundary maintenance theory'. In *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Anthropological Perspectives*, anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen has firmly stressed that ethnic identity – the notion of having a shared culture, common descent, a past history, and a link with a homeland, of a group's *self-perceived boundaries* – is often developed by contrasting the ethnic other to one's own group. According to Eriksen, ethnic groups or categories 'are in a sense *created* through that very contact. Group identities must always be defined in relation to that which they are not – in other words, in relation to non-members of the group.'<sup>121</sup> Furthermore, this definition of ethnicity is marked by the application of 'systematic distinctions between insiders and outsiders; between Us and Them'. This application of distinctions often results in ethnic stereotyping, which, again in Eriksen's words, can be defined as 'the creation and consistent application of standardised notions of the cultural distinctiveness of a group'. By extolling the virtues of one's own group, and denouncing the vices of others, members of an ethnic group subsequently justify their belief in belonging to group X instead of Y, and thus develop standard ways of behaviour towards one another.<sup>122</sup> This might lead to 'othering', or marginalization of external groups, which is an active process but one that is related problematically to historical circumstances and the different images of minorities or despised communities.<sup>123</sup>

From the above, it is clear that ethnic images can play an active role in the process of developing ethnic consciousness. As images in the mind, they might create awareness of the existence of boundaries. The relational aspect of stereotyping invited Ludwig Schmutge to assert that in the twelfth century stereotyping increased through heightened contacts during the Crusades, at the universities, and on pilgrimages.<sup>124</sup> In a situational context, stereotypical perceptions of for example

---

119 For example stated by Ehlers, 'Elemente mittelalterlicher Nationsbildung', 568-570.

120 Leerssen, *National Thought*, 17.

121 Thomas Hylland Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Anthropological Perspectives* (London 2002), 10. Eriksen's approach to ethnicity is socio-anthropological, stressing the relational aspects of ethnicity and the role that *boundary maintenance* plays in forging ethnic identity, a theory which was set out by Fredrick Barth and who Eriksen discusses in detail. Eriksen does not apply the theory of boundary maintenance within a historical framework. Nevertheless, it is my view that the application of the theory of boundary maintenance and its influence on ethnic identity is not limited to a specific historical period or place.

122 Idem, 19-25.

123 Freedman, 'The Medieval Other', 8.

124 See Ludwig Schmutge, 'Über "nationale" Vorurteile im Mittelalter' in *Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters* 38 (1982), 439-459 for the rise of ethnic stereotyping in the twelfth century among crusaders, students and pilgrims. See also Huizinga, 'Patriotisme en nationalisme', 598-510. Cf. also Claire Weeda, 'Ethnic Stereotyping in Twelfth-Century Paris', in Meredith Cohen and Justine

physical characteristics might be definitive for a person's well-being. Ethnic images might also, under certain circumstances, directly influence people's behaviour, with dire consequences. In an article about the destruction of ethnic communities in the Late Middle Ages, Len Scales describes how during the London uprising of 1381, those who could not say bread and cheese, saying 'case' and 'brode' – Flemings – were murdered.<sup>125</sup> Stereotypes might thus influence social relations, creating new realities – for example, a person may decide not to enter into a financial relationship with an 'other' based on an evaluation informed by stereotypes. In this sense, stereotypes and prejudice easily interflow; fixed expressions are often followed by a value judgment, possibly within a split second. In addition, through what is known as 'auto-exoticism', people might behave in accordance to the expectancies of outsiders, something which is often capitalized on in the tourism industry.<sup>126</sup>

People do not necessarily deliberately, or consciously, use stereotypes. Of course, they might be employed expressly in war propaganda – but often people are unaware that they are stereotyping, and unaware of their motives or reasons to do so. Especially relevant here is the 'social identity theory' developed by Henri Tajfel, which focuses on elevating group status by enjoying a positive social image.<sup>127</sup> Positive stereotypes might enhance the attractiveness of a group, strengthening its members' self-confidence and drawing outsiders in. From this viewpoint, stereotypes might be seen as 'bargaining chips'. However, this is not necessarily a deliberate process. In *White Nation*, a study on nationalism in present-day Australia, Ghassan Hage has taken this approach and developed it using, among others, the work of Pierre Bourdieu.<sup>128</sup> His starting point is that people feel a desire to be a member of, and to be embraced by the dominant culture group. Denigrating stereotypes rejecting foreigners and acclaiming one's own superiority are based upon the notion of a privileged relationship between ethnicity and the territorial space the group inhabits – a sense of having a *patria* – which the group has the right to manage, and which can come under threat.<sup>129</sup> As such, a national space is a prerequisite for nationalists to classify others as undesirable.<sup>130</sup> Discussing multicultural

Firnhaber-Baker (eds), *Difference and Identity in Francia and Medieval France* (Farnham 2010), 115-135 for the increase of stereotypes at the university of Paris in relation to the boundary maintenance theory.

125 Len Scales, 'Bread, Cheese and Genocide: Imagining the Destruction of Peoples in Medieval Western Europe', in *History* 92/307 (2007), 284-300, here at 284-285.

126 Hoppenbrouwers, 'Dynamics of national identity', 34.

127 See Henri Tajfel, *Human groups and social categories: Studies in social psychology* (Cambridge 1981).

128 Ghassan Hage, *White Nation: Fantasies of white supremacy in a multicultural society* (New York). Pierre Bourdieu, 'The forms of Capital', in J.G. Richardson (ed.), *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* (New York 1986), 241-258.

129 Hage, *White Nation*, 33-42.

130 Hage defines nationalism as influenced by the fantasy of a homely domesticated space. It not exist in Middle Ages. Whereas in modern times the nation might be visualized and conceptualized as a woman, personifying the collective, mothering the collective, needing protection. If she is attacked, so are we. Nationalists fantasize protecting the nation under threat – which gives them a purpose, a sense of meaning in life. They are domesticators, protectors, whose lives would otherwise be meaningless. The other is

society in Australia, Hage argues that people strive to accumulate whiteness (and its accompanying presumed psychological traits and moral positions), as nationality might be considered a form of ‘cultural capital’ – ‘the sum of valued knowledge, styles, social and physical (bodily) characteristics and practical behavioural dispositions within a given field’.<sup>131</sup> Whiteness and its presupposed traits are a form of naturalized capital – something which powerful groups such as an elite possess naturally (through birth, for example), and others can only strive to achieve through their behaviour.<sup>132</sup> Within society, besides physical attributes, ethnic characteristics reflecting social values might be valuable ‘assets’ (cultural capital), which can be employed in order to gain a higher social standing or amass power (symbolic capital). This is related to what Bourdieu termed the *habitus* – the cultural dispositions of the elite. These dispositions are naturalized by the aristocracy as innate, giving access to symbolic capital of power, and imposing order (in which it holds a dominant position).<sup>133</sup> Stereotypes can thus be an asset or be detrimental in attempts to gain access to the upper ranks, to gain influence, or attain a meaningful role in life. Stereotypes can, in other words, empower. Use of racist remarks can, from this viewpoint, also serve ‘practical’ goals (for example when competing for jobs) besides asserting the ‘superiority of a race’. Hage’s approach to use of stereotypes is useful as, in the twelfth century, it might be applied to the elites competing under the umbrella of Christendom (as a ‘field’) in a bid to appropriate Christian values, which could in turn offer members of ethnic groups the sense of having a meaningful life, or access to symbolic power. This might result in competition between various twelfth-century ethnic groups, striving to claim prevailing socio-cultural values – which, as will be discussed throughout this study – were also ‘embodied’ as a result of the reintroduction of climate theory.<sup>134</sup> Relevant, in this regard, is the increasing emphasis on a fixed or fluent ethnic character, which arose from the early stages of the twelfth century. Ethnic stereotypes overlap with notions of ethnic character where mental images carry seeds of physiological types, such as the angry German or cunning Saracen. Ethnic character is generally stereotypical as it is seen to pertain to all or most members of an ethnic group. Although some socio-psychologists state that stereotypes are overgeneralizations of the imagination based upon facts, my point of departure is that stereotypes concerning ethnic character are in reality figments of the imagination, although contemporaries might readily consider them to be based upon real-life experiences.<sup>135</sup>

---

necessary for the construction and maintenance of this fantasy of the ‘homely spcae’. This is why it is an emotional state. Cf. Hage, *White Nation*, 73-79.

131 Hage, *White Nation*, 53. Hage speaks of practical nationality: the sum of accumulated nationally sanctified and valued social physical cultural styles and dispositions as well as valued characteristics (such as character) within a given field. This capital is, according to Hage, transformed into the symbolic capital of national belonging.

132 Hage, *White Nation*, 20, 62-64.

133 Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, transl. Richard Nice (Cambridge Mass, 1984) 23-24; Hage, *White Nation*, 62.

134 Huizinga, ‘Patriotisme en nationalisme’, 510; see chapter 7 for further references.

135 See Beller, ‘Stereotypes’, 430 for further discussion.

Ethnic character takes in a prominent place within ethnic stereotyping.<sup>136</sup> Throughout this study, I will argue that ethnic character was a relevant concept in Western Europe from the twelfth century onwards which, as a constituent of ethnic stereotypes, might express notions of shared characteristics of an ethnic group, which in turn might, set off against socio-cultural values, create access to meaningful social reputations within in an international context, but also be the subject of internal ethical rumination. According to Joep Leerssen, from the seventeenth century onwards, cultural differences were classified by Linnaeus and Buffon following the criterion of character ‘as the organic whole of defining propria’.<sup>137</sup> This period was dominated by method, taxonomy and systematic comparison. Conversely, in late medieval times moral character referred to a person’s *reputation in society* rather than to part of somebody’s *personality which motivates behaviour*. As late as the eighteenth century the notion of character was ‘behavioural, social, referring to the various manners of our times; not a mode of being, but a mode of speaking, dressing, posturing’.<sup>138</sup> Prior to the increased interest in psychology in the seventeenth century under the influence of neo-Aristotelian poetics, character referred mainly to outward images, poses, and social impressions. Leerssen also argues that terms such as ethics and morals derive from ‘neutrally-descriptive, non-valorising Greek and Latin words for behaviour and manners, social conventions: mores, ethos’.<sup>139</sup>

Indeed, as Robert Bartlett and Rees Davies have stated, manners (*mores*) and customs (*consuetudines*) might refer to exterior badges of identity such as clothing, hair style, modes of warfare and use of weaponry, which were interrelated with notions of a (lack of) culture and civilization, external appearances, language, manners, economic organization (agriculturalists versus pastoralists or worse still, hunters, pirates, plunderers), and law.<sup>140</sup> Thus Robert Bartlett analysed the word *mos* as predominantly – although certainly not exclusively – meaning ‘manner’ or ‘way of life’. However, it is not always possible to draw a sharp line between *mores* as external behaviour and *mores* as a disposition, in the sense of morals, character, nature (nor was it regarding the classical meaning of the word). Behaviour and morals could be determined both by social and physical environment (more or less corresponding to nurture-nature); customs might evolve into nature, and natural dispositions could be modified by external climatological circumstances. These notions are hugely influenced by climate and humoural theory. In an important recent contribution, *The Origins of Racism in the West*, scholars have thus brought to our attention how classical climate

---

136 See Günther Blaicher (ed.), *Erstartetes Denken: Studien zu Klischee, Stereotyp und Vorurteil* (Tübingen 1987).

137 Leerssen, ‘Character’, 286.

138 Joep Leerssen, ‘Character (Moral)’, in Manfred Beller and Joep Leerssen (eds), *Imagology: The Cultural Construction and Literary Representation of National Characters* (Amsterdam, New York 2007), 284-290, here at 284-285.

139 Idem, 285-286.

140 Robert Bartlett, *Gerald of Wales: A Voice of the Middle Ages* (Stroud 2006), 147-171; Rees Davies, ‘The Peoples of Britain and Ireland 1100-1400 III. Laws and Customs’, 13-15: ‘The Statutes of Kilkenny of 1366, which reaffirmed the distinction between the English and the Irish in Ireland, addressed themselves in their prologue to mode of riding and dress as badges of ethnic identity.’ An Irish haircut, the *culdn*, could lead to loss of English legal status.

theory entered into the writings of learned men in the twelfth century, both in historiography, encyclopaedic and other learned texts.<sup>141</sup> In the twelfth century, medical humoral and climatic theories acknowledged a psychosomatic relationship between inner and outer self. As Robert Bartlett wrote, in the Middle Ages the view was held that ‘moral dispositions were shaped by non-moral conditions’ such as environment.<sup>142</sup> Although an expansive discourse was absent that character was part of one’s *personality*, in humoral theory the theory thus certainly existed that a person’s mental characteristics were the result of a complex interplay of external and internal processes. Ethnic groups were attributed shared characteristics as a result of ‘innate’ mental dispositions (for instance cowardice), physical qualities (such as weak bodies) and appearance (short lean bodied, dark-skinned). As will be discussed in chapters 2 and 3, these internal and external qualities were considered as intrinsically related. A group might thus be viewed to share a moral disposition, such as the tendency to deceive; or might be dominated by a tendency towards certain emotions (such as rage). The question thus might be posed to which extent emotions were associated with any knowledge of humoral theory in this period, beyond primal emotions of attachment to a *patria*.

In addition, although a discourse of the presence of a personality as motivating behaviour was lacking, this does not mean that people were empty shells. Moreover, as I argue throughout this study, ethnic character as a *vitium* – a vice inherited from the Fall or as result of humoral complexion – was not so much a ‘manner of life’ but could be the subject of moral introspection. As Rudi Künzel has argued, the absence of a guilt culture in the early Middle Ages (rather than an external shame culture) is contestable; rather, guilt was viewed to invoke God’s wrath, whereas shame was a worldly matter.<sup>143</sup> *Vitia*, vices caused by emotions such as anger, lust, or greed – which were related to ethnic groups –, arranged in a moral system, most certainly reflected standards of right or wrong behaviour, even if inspired by the devil, which were to be dealt with introspectively. Especially in a religious sphere, people were incited to recall their sins, to repent, invoking feelings of inner guilt. Throughout this study I will argue that the ethnic proclivity to succumb to certain vices – as an ‘ethnic character trait’ – was thus viewed as a hereditary stain which man was urged to overcome, as it was, according to some scholars, a factor determining the outcome of ethnic groups’ capacity to embrace Christendom, their fate in history, and the history of mankind itself.

### **Scope of research**

This study is subdivided in three sections. The first part examines how scientific theory (climate-humoral) contributed to ideas about ethnic character in North-West Europe. The second section discusses the development of lists with ethnic characteristics reflecting diversity, and their ethical, literary and social application. The third part discusses the employment of ethnic stereotypes from a

---

141 Miriam Eliav-Feldon, Benjamin Isaac and Joseph Ziegler (eds), *The Origins of Racism in the West* (Cambridge 2009).

142 Bartlett, *Gerald of Wales*, 153.

143 Rudi Künzel, *Beelden en zelfbeelden van middeleeuwse mensen* (Nijmegen 1997), 97-110.

socio-cultural perspective in the French, German and English territories. In the first section, Bartholomaeus' *On the Properties of Things* serves as a guide; this encyclopaedic text was composed at the end of the period under scrutiny when, according to influential scholars such as Friedrich Heer, Richard Southern and R.I. Moore, the creative, more 'open' twelfth century was transforming into a closed, intolerant society as a result of the Crusades and the rise of the papal monarchy.<sup>144</sup> Bartholomaeus' geography presents a patchwork quilt of territories, describing their topography, economic commodities, and their inhabitants' characteristics and mythological founders. The second section focuses on lists of ethnic virtues and vices in computistic manuscripts; lists in manuals of rhetoric and poetry; and in sources offering evidence of the actual employment of stereotypes by clerics at the schools, using sayings and proverbial images. The third section focuses on the use of stereotypes (recorded in poetry, historical works, letters, vernacular texts) by men in the French, German and English territories from a socio-cultural perspective.

Although the nexus of this study concentrates on the 'long twelfth century' (usually dated circa 1050-1225) in North-West Europe, I make occasional excursions to earlier and later medieval sources such as the late ninth-century lists of ethnic vices and virtues compiled in the mountainous monasteries of Asturias in northern Spain. Peregrinating to the period leading up to the long twelfth century reveals more starkly the gush of sources bespeaking awareness of ethnicity from the twelfth century. However, in this study the focus generally lays on sources drawn from between, on the one hand, the call for the First Crusade in 1095, preached by Pope Urban II before a conglomeration of higher ecclesiastics in Clermont, France; and on the other hand the first half of the thirteenth century, terminating with the appearance of the vast encyclopaedic work by Bartholomew the Englishman, *On the Properties of Things*, whose composition is dated between the 1220s and 1240s. I have thus pushed the confines of the term 'long twelfth century' – which usually terminates in 1215, the year of the Fourth Lateran Council – to circa 1250. Inclusion of these later sources is warranted, in my opinion, for two reasons. First, the knowledge reflected in such encyclopaedic works was by nature conservative, retrospectively amassing the learning and perspectives of intellectuals. And, secondly, Bartholomaeus' encyclopaedia should be seen as an outcome of the call for instruction of the laity in at the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, in which both the Dominican and Franciscan orders were involved.<sup>145</sup> Moreover, such learned compendiums enjoyed large audiences. At the end of this period, after an era in which the boundaries were pushed to the Levant, Baltic region and south, the conquered territories in the East were, for the most part, lost, and the politics of expansionism more

---

144 Discussed by Paul Freedman, 'The Medieval Other: the Middle Ages as Other', in Timothy S. Jones and David A. Sprunger (eds), *Marvels, Monsters and Miracles. Studies in the Medieval and Early Modern Imaginations* (Kalamazoo 2002) 1-26, here at 18-19; Friedrich Heer, *The Medieval World: Europe 1100-1350* (London 1962); Southern, *Making of the Middle Ages*; Moore, *Persecuting Society*.

145 See Johannes B. Voorbij, 'Purpose and Audience. Perspectives on the Thirteenth-Century Encyclopedias of Alexander Neckam, Bartholomaeus Anglicus, Thomas of Cantimpré and Vincent of Beavais', in Steven Harvey (ed.), *The Medieval Hebrew Encyclopedias of Science and Philosophy: Proceedings of the Bar-Ilan University Conference* (Dordrecht, Boston, London 2000), 31-45, here at 32-33.

or less abandoned.<sup>146</sup> However – beyond the scope of this study – from the second half of the thirteenth century learned discourse on the climate-humoural basis of ethnic character, in relation to political organization, becomes more pronounced.

I have endeavoured to cast out a large net in order to catch a wide range of written sources, both in Latin and the vernacular, covering many genres, written for as many different audiences as possible.<sup>147</sup> Indeed, remarks that the ‘Teutons are stupid’, the Normans ‘cruel’ or ‘well-mannered’, the French chivalrous or ‘arrogant’, and the English ‘drunken and perfidious’, to mention just a few, abound in a vast range of sources, both in Latin and the vernacular, produced in this period. These, often highly moral, characterizations usually do not stand by themselves, but instead are recounted in lists or catalogues of ethnic denunciations reflecting the diversity of peoples, whether in encyclopaedic texts, poetry, letters or sermons. From the twelfth century onwards, these lists and other recordings of ethnic characterizations are ubiquitous. As such I primarily aim to map out the extent to which ethnic stereotypes might have circulated among broader layers of society in North-West Europe, beyond the discourse of the learned elite, and the degree in which the content of stereotypes, employed by various layers of society, concurs or differs. The focus lies predominantly on sources produced by the Western European centres of learning, schools, but also courts and monasteries, containing references to stereotypes about North-Western European peoples.

### Summary

German rage, English drunkenness, French arrogance – such popular clichés today can be traced back to medieval times. In the ‘long’ twelfth century, there developed, at least among intellectuals, a firm notion that people shared such ethnic characteristics, including an ethnic character, based upon common descent. Beliefs about foreign peoples and one’s own group were encapsulated in a previously unrecorded outburst of ethnic stereotyping, in which human diversity was represented in mostly, though certainly not exclusively, negative images of the other. The twelfth-century outburst of ethnic stereotyping, of expressions of prejudice, pride, and moral excoriation, are both testimony to and catalyst of an increase in ethnic consciousness among intellectuals in North-Western Europe, a core region bursting with new found confidence and ambition. It is against the background of a heightened mobility, the ‘twelfth-century renaissance’, and increasing efforts to firmly ingrain Christian beliefs and values in the minds of Europe’s populations by an institutionalized Church that this study examines the employment of ethnic images in North-West Europe in the later Middle

---

146 For this period as a period of expansion, creating new frontiers, colonizing the ‘fringes’ of Europe, I refer first and foremost to Robert Bartlett’s *The Making of Europe*. For frontier societies, further Robert Bartlett and Angus MacKay (eds), *Medieval Frontiers Societies* (Oxford 1989); Muldoon and Fernández-Armesto (eds), *The Medieval Frontiers in Latin Christendom*.

147 Starting point for ethnic stereotypes is Hans Walther, ‘Scherz und Ernst in der Völker- und Stämme-Charakteristik mittellateinischer Verse’, in *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte* 41 (1959A), 163-301; W. Wackernagel, ‘Die Spottnamen der Völker’, in *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur* 6 (1848), 254-261; and the many references throughout this study.

Ages.<sup>148</sup> Based on which assumptions of ethnicity did clerics and monks ascribe mental and physical characteristics to peoples? Did they believe that their character was innate, passed down from generation to generation? Was this assumption based on any ‘scientific’ theory or structured knowledge that peoples shared an ethnic character? How relevant was this notion of an ethnic character to ideas about ethnicity? Or were their remarks no more than primitive, emotional expressions of hatred and xenophobia, as some medievalists such as Carlrichard Brühl have asserted?<sup>149</sup>

This study argues that from the twelfth century, images of ethnicity became ‘embodied’, as medical humoral and climate theory re-entered the West via translations of Arabic texts. In North-Western Europe – a new heartland of power and learning – clerics and monks incorporated and adapted these theories in order to reposition the North as a region producing the measure of mankind: intelligent, brave, light-skinned Christians who could control their emotions. However, contrary to the work of some scholars in the past, this study emphasizes that within Christendom the elite, instead of displaying unity, might compete amongst themselves to be the ideal defenders of Christendom. Equally, in medical theory, ethnic differences were accounted by some to sinful dispositions related to the Fall, after which certain ethnic characteristics became ‘hereditary’. Thus, instead of viewing ethnic stereotypes as mere utterances of primitive hatred, or as the direct product of state-building processes, this study endeavours to research the relevance of ethnic stereotypes in Western European communities from a socio-cultural aspect, examining their value as relevant images which might validate claims to social power within Christendom.

Throughout this study, I will argue that ethnic character was a relevant concept in Western Europe from the twelfth century onwards which, as a constituent of ethnic stereotypes, might express notions of shared characteristics of an ethnic group, which in turn might, set off against socio-cultural values, create access to meaningful social reputations within in an international context, but also be the subject of internal ethical rumination. Throughout this study I will argue that the ethnic proclivity to succumb to certain vices – as an ‘ethnic character trait’ – was thus viewed as a hereditary stain which man was urged to overcome, as it was, according to some scholars, a factor determining the outcome of ethnic groups’ capacity to embrace Christendom, their fate in history, and the history of mankind itself.

This study is subdivided in three sections. The first part examines how scientific theory (climate-humoral) contributed to ideas about ethnic character in North-West Europe. The second section discusses the development of lists with ethnic characteristics reflecting diversity, and their ethical, literary and social application. The third part discusses the employment of ethnic stereotypes from a socio-cultural perspective in the French, German and English territories.

---

148 See for the sharpening of boundaries resulting from the institutionalization of the Church Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society*.

149 Brühl, *Die Geburt zweier Völker*, 275.

In chapter 1 Franciscan friar Bartholomaeus Anglicus' representation of ethnic characters in his 'bestseller' *On the Properties of Things* serves as a starting point for the examination of the transmission of 'scientific' and religious intellectual thought explaining ethnic character. Mapping the degrees of Christianization, his textbook offers Franciscan friars a comprehensive reference tool in their preaching missions, describing the characteristics of the peoples they might encounter. In this chapter I have placed Bartholomaeus ethnic-religious imagery on an east-west axis, as this bore recognized meaning for intellectuals. The East, the cradle of humanity, and location of Paradise, represented the past and future – within the apocalyptic belief that a heavenly Jerusalem would be established at the end of time. Two other concepts also placed ethnic groups on the east-west axis: some intellectuals' belief that the end of time would dawn when Christendom had reached the farthest West; and the translation-concept, first articulated at Charlemagne's court but expanded in the twelfth century, that knowledge, power, and chivalry had translated from the East to West, from Athens to Rome to Paris, both in time and space. I argue that in this period Western Europe, in particular northern France, is presented as the new heartland of Christian civilization. Within the biblical tradition, the northern fringes are presented as promised lands of milk and honey, regions where proselytization is still underway, whose inhabitants are however semi-pagan barbarians who are squandering the benefits of their land. Adhering to tradition, Bartholomaeus often copies the ethnic images derived from early medieval sources such as Orosius and Isidore, acting as an influential conduit of classical stereotypes. In this tradition, ethnic names are explained etymologically, either from the group's mythological founder, geographical features or, often, the ethnic character (for example Thuringians from *durus*, hardness), in accordance with the belief that words reflected the 'essence' of things.

In chapter 2 North-West Europe, the new self-perceived heartland of power and knowledge, is placed on a north-south axis. From the end of the eleventh century the ancient Greek climate theory was reintroduced through translations of Arabic medical texts into Latin. According to traditional climate theory – which explains physical and mental characteristics as subject to environmental influences such as climate – the inhabitants of Northern Europe – a cold climate – were harsh and barbaric. Following the cultural and economic shift from the Mediterranean region to northern Europe, intellectuals, first clerics in twelfth-century Anglo-Norman England, and from the early thirteenth century mendicants on the Continent were anxious to present the North as a more temperate region, as a salubrious environment was believed to effect intelligence, and generally was a prerequisite for a civilized culture. In order to achieve milder temperatures, some intellectuals such as Bartholomaeus Anglicus dabbled in a little climatic engineering, effecting theoretical global warming. Paris, as a centre of learning, was specifically represented as environmentally beneficial, in accordance with the concept of the translation of learning from east to west. The extreme northern fringes were nonetheless termed extremely cold, and its inhabitants classified by Bartholomaeus Anglicus and Albertus Magnus as phlegmatic.

With the reintroduction of climate theory and ubiquity of treatises about the humours – which were viewed to determine a person's temperament and some physical aspects – ethnic differences were increasingly viewed as 'embodied', besides referring to cultural, linguistic or genealogical factors. In chapter 3, the final chapter of the first part, I address the ramifications of the reintroduction of climate theory in relation to the question whether ethnic character was viewed as fixed or fluent, innate or subject to change under the influence of environment. Although a humoral complexion potentially underwent changes if a person moved to a different climate, this was a protracted process, its interpretation subject to ethnocentric perspectives. At the end of the period studied here the notion appears that ethnic groups have a distinct humoral complexion. In addition, an individual's capacity to overcome his 'innate' ethnic character was infused with religious ideas. In the twelfth century, there was some discussion whether the original sin caused disease and a melancholy complexion, and Guibert of Nogent and Gerald of Wales believed that heresies arose as the devil cunningly abused groups' dispositions caused by climate. Ultimately, however, in medieval religious thinking ethnic groups were spurred to overcome their innate vices, and to embrace Christianity. In fact, Christianity prescribed compulsory mutability, and was steeped in embodied language of rebirth in Christ, obtaining a Christian 'essence'. However, at the same time the potentiality to change seems to be denied some groups (such as Jews).

The second part examines the purpose and production of lists cataloguing ethnic characteristics and human diversity, from a religious, literary and socio-cultural perspective. Chapter 4 discusses the earliest ethnic lists, first appearing in a ninth-century monastic milieu in northern Spain. These lists enumerating ethnic vices and in some cases virtues, served as ethical, contemplative tools in an eschatological context, inviting the monks to ruminate the sins and virtues of peoples in light of the fleeting nature of humanity. Instead of pointing the finger at others, these lists were meant for introspection. Progressing from East to West, the lists summing up stereotypical virtues and vices reflected the role of ethnic groups in the history of the humanity, as they might embrace or reject virtuous behaviour and ultimately Christianity.

From the twelfth century, with the growing bureaucracies in the West, the rise of the schools, and study of classical literature, lists with ethnic characteristics were incorporated in poetry. These lists began to include perceived cultural traits more attune to the contemporary world, such as eating and drinking habits. More references are made to contemporary territorial units and ethnic groups, such as Flanders. Chapter 5 discusses ethnic stereotypes and the rise of literary production from the early twelfth century. In the thriving educational centres, clerics dabbled in verse composition influenced by fresh manuals of rhetoric which expressly prescribed the use of stereotypes, employing common proverbs. Using commonplace images was a means to successfully describe and invent, as they might strike a chord in the audience's mind. These educational manuals were in themselves repositories of stereotypes, teaching the students to use commonplaces – testimony to the strong influence that education has on the longevity of *topoi*, which might, through educational texts, become 'official' knowledge. As such, the concept of ethnic character – which itself disregards the

complexities of individual behavioural and mental traits – served a practical function in literary composition. These stereotypes in literary production were more detached from monastic ethics, although they still loosely retained the east-west movement, and ultimately served a moral purpose.

Clerics following the *artes*-program in the international communities in Bologna, Paris and elsewhere, were exposed to ethnic stereotypes in lectures, in the manuals of rhetoric, and in literature. In the eleventh century, the genre of satire became popular among clerics influenced by study of classical satire; the clerics now targeted the avarice of Rome and the corruption of the Church. These students were also exposed to one another – as clerics flocked together from all over Europe, with different ethnic backgrounds. In a still predominantly oral society, in which verbal battles blaming and shaming the other publicly was more typical, students might engage in flytings ridiculing the ethnic vices of the other. Chapter 6 discusses the use of stereotypes in invective from a socio-cultural perspective. Attacks were made on the ‘essence’ of peoples, ridiculing ethnic names explained etymologically. Aggressive forms of humour – morally denigrating the other – were employed, jeering and pointing fingers. However, although these ethnic jokes might be viewed as aggressive verbal attacks, expressing and strengthening ethnic consciousness among community group members, the inclusivity of the stereotypes might also alleviate tensions in an international community, creating bonds of intimacy, as a form of disciplined aggression.

The final section of this study addresses the relevance that ethnic stereotypes might have as a means to appropriate desirable social values, as a form of cultural capital. Chapter 7 examines how the classical stereotypical image of the raging German was mirrored by the French appropriation of the image of the chivalrous knight, an ideal member of the *militia Dei* – defenders of the Church. Instead of presupposing that the ideals of a universalist Christendom led to unity among the Western nobility, within the crusader movement competition might arise between men of various ethnic backgrounds in a bid to appropriate the idealized characteristics of the nobility within Christendom. This appropriation is discussed against the backdrop of the rise of the *preudomme*, the noble man who is brave yet controls his emotions, using reason. Arguing that stereotypes might be viewed as a form of capital, the characteristics of the French *preudomme* might be juxtaposed to the classic stereotype of the *furor Teutonicus*, stripping the Germans of validated claims of protecting Christian community. Monks William of Malmesbury and Guibert of Nogent even explained these differences in characteristics using climate theory, stating that the French territory was equipped to produce the best crusading knights.

Likewise, chapter 8 discusses how Anglo-Norman clerics appropriated images of courtliness such as generosity and merriment, which were highly similar to the characteristics of the idealized sanguine type. This might be viewed as a reaction to the shame of the Norman Conquest and the subsequent intermingling of men of Anglo-Saxon and Norman backgrounds, who were redefining their reputation in the twelfth century – distinguishing themselves from their ‘backward’ Keltish neighbours – whose territory they were in the process of colonizing. Anglo-Norman clerics and monks represented themselves as appropriators of urbane characteristics, as part of a civilizing

process – rather than as ideal knights, which was harder to put forward in view of the recent conquest of the Anglo-Saxons and their reputation, in the eyes of the Normans, for being drunken, weak fighters. This new reputation was especially presented by Anglo-Normans of mixed social standing, as, after the Norman Conquest, the growth of royal bureaucracy opened the doors to clerics of modest background who could climb the social ladder. At the same time they distanced themselves from German stupidity. Again, the imagery of civilized courtliness was clothed in an environmental discourse.

Finally, chapter 9 addresses the relevance of the specific ethnic stereotype of English drinking in light of their notion of chosenness. This widespread cultural custom was adopted by successive ethnic groups settling on the island and incorporated in the myth of serving as God's elect. English drunkenness thus valorised the wave of conquests of the island as a catalyser of God's wrath incurred from sinful behaviour. The image of beer drinking, practiced in elaborate toasting rituals, labelled by some clerics as a vice inherited as a result of the original sin, could thus lay responsibility for the vicissitudes of the people on the shoulders of the English population. Although there was no ideology of inclusive power emanating from the inhabitants of England, the concept that the sins of a chosen people determined its historical destiny, thus meant that ethnic character was viewed as a constituent factor in the fate of chosen peoples.

A nationalist ideology – demanding loyalty first and foremost to the nation – did not exist in the twelfth century. In this period power was viewed to derive from above, with the king divinely appointed to rule over territories. Power did not flow from 'the people', in accordance with their ethnic character. Yet the concept of ethnic character was relevant. Ideas about character shaped encounters between people. It could strengthen ethnic consciousness and feelings of belonging. In the course of the thirteenth century it was also adopted by rulers in a discourse concerning the expansion of power. Most importantly was its religious meaning, as ethnic character was viewed to play a role in the destiny of humanity. As such, ethnic stereotypes were much more than 'primitive expressions of hatred'.