Article
# Are the 'monstrous races' races?

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**Abstract**   This essay considers the use of the modern term 'monstrous races' to describe the wondrous beings found in Herodotus, Pliny, *The Wonders of the East*, world maps and elsewhere. Considering the etymology and history of the word 'race,' a series of modern definitions are tested out on figures found in the images and texts of the British Library MS Harley 3954 *Book of John Mandeville*, the BL MS Tiberius B.v *Marvels of the East, The King of Tars, Cursor Mundi* and other medieval sources. The essay questions whether the term, often rooted in modern notions about the fixity of divisions of peoples, is helpful for describing medieval concepts. The essay further explores how the term 'monstrous races' reifies the culture of the medieval authors and illuminators – often in practice 'white' European Christians – as a 'race,' and implicitly, if unintentionally, elevates this group as normative.

## Introduction: *What or Who are They?*

Folio 42r of London, British Library Harley 3954 (East Anglia, ca. 1425–1450) presents three wobbly registers, separated by lines of text (Figure 1). Against the mottled green backgrounds, we see groups of beings familiar from maps, marvels manuscripts, travel narratives and so on. In the case of Harley 3954, containing the controversial *Book of John Mandeville* ('Defective' version), the images house, from top to bottom: three ruddy figures, each with one eye, one of whom is eating a severed foot that appears human; three dusky, generally anthropomorphic figures with eyes in their shoulders, one lurking in a cave and biting a snake, observed by a seated traveler with a staff, who is writing in a book;
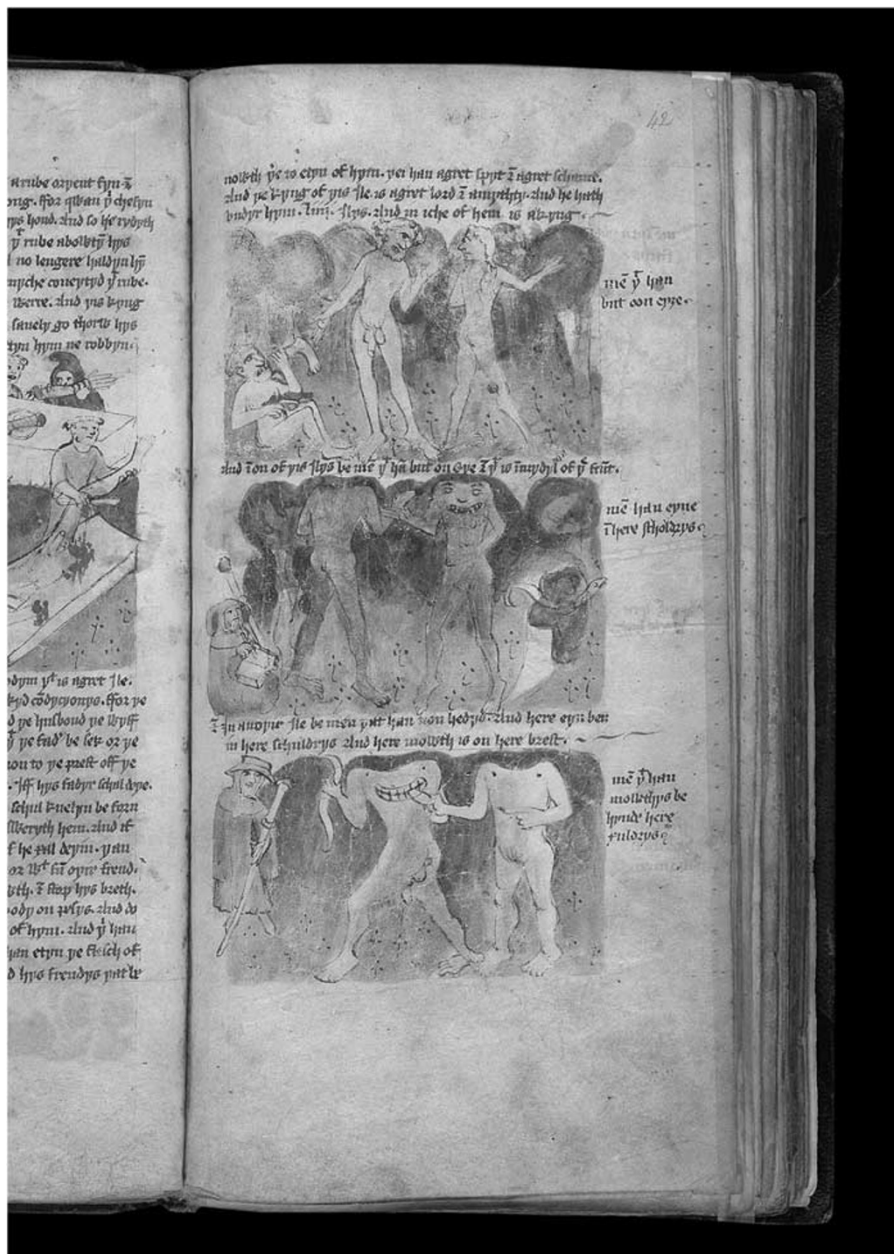
**Figure 1:** London, British Library, Harley 3954, f. 42r, Cyclopes, Epiphagi and Blemmyes. Courtesy of the British Library, available at www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMINBig.ASP?size=big&IllID=16707.

and two figures striding to the left, without heads, one of which has a mouth visible on his back and holds what may be a snake, and the other seemingly feeding something to the figure to the left, again observed by a traveler, now standing and holding his staff (Seymour, 2002, xx).

I have here consciously avoided conventional labels for these figures. With greater brevity, they are anthropophagic Cyclopes, Epiphagi and a variation on Blemmyes. The 'Defective' text of the *Book of Mandeville* describes them as follows:

> On one of these islands dwell people of large nature like giants, and they are hideous to see, and they have only one eye in the middle of the forehead and they eat nothing but fish and meat completely raw. On another island toward the south dwell people of ugly shape and evil nature who have no head and have their ears in their shoulders and their mouth twisted like a horseshoe in the middle of their chest. And on another island there are also headless people and they have their eyes and their mouth behind their shoulders. (Higgins, 2011, 124)

This manuscript has slight variations from this text, to be discussed below. Labeling these beings individually is not a great problem, since most have names – some have several. Still, they tend to appear in groups, in clusters of otherness, as they do on many medieval world maps, in the *Marvels of the East*, and in many other texts. This raises a question: what term or terms should we use to refer to *collections* of such beings?

The British Library's *Catalogue of Illuminated Manuscripts* follows academic convention by titling the folio 'Monstrous races,' but what does it mean to say that these are 'monstrous races'? I have elsewhere interrogated the appellation 'monster' (Mittman, 2012). Similarly, John Block Friedman opens *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought* with discussion of the 'monstrous,' but not of 'races' (Friedman, 1981, 1). I have often used the term without sufficient thought – a search reveals that I use 'monstrous races' nearly 30 times in my book *Maps and Monsters in Medieval England* (Mittman, 2006). But what does the term *mean*? And is it appropriate and helpful, or does it generate problems not endemic to medieval visual and textual representations, themselves? To sort this out, I will consider a few modern definitions of 'race' and will compare these to beings like those that appear in Harley 3954, as well as in the *Wonders of the East* and other sources. Based on my conclusions, I will then ask how our modern use of the term impacts our reading of the Middle Ages and our modern moment, and therefore will consider whether the term 'monstrous race' *ought* to be retained.

I generally wish to assert the humanity of at least some of these beings, and to inspire consideration of our relations with them. That the term 'race' makes us think of our very different context, though, is not an unadulterated good. It overlays a host of modern concepts onto medieval materials, and may cloud

our view of the sources and reinforce the very notions that some scholars are attempting to trouble, such as the normativity of European 'Christendom.' Despite having written extensively about such phenomena, I have so far only directly addressed the issue in a single paragraph in which I assert that the term

> is more helpful than harmful to our understanding of these beings because many of them were considered to be people – abnormal, sometimes dreadful, but nonetheless, people, distinct from other 'races' in their physical features and cultural practices …. Essentially, I retain the term 'race' because it makes us think of them as human, because it makes us think of our relations with them, and because it makes us think of our own world in a way 'group' or 'kind' would not. (Mittman, 2006, 72)

The term 'race' *does* make us think of our world, but in so doing, also flattens the essential differences between then and now, and places modern conceptions onto medieval texts and images, and onto their medieval creators and audiences. It also suggests that notions of race are somehow 'natural' or inevitable, rather than historically situated phenomena (Jordan, 2001, 168).

As Benjamin Isaac argues, '[t]he words "race," "racialism," and "racism" did not occur with their modern meanings in English until the first decades of the twentieth century' (Isaac, 2009, 44). Charles de Miramon excavates the earliest extant appearances of 'race' and its medieval cognates, and concludes it is a French neologism without Classical roots (de Miramon, 2009, 200). The earliest use is in a 'little-known [Norman] poem of Jacques de Brézé, *The Hunt*,' written at the end of the fifteenth century, where it is used to characterize the relationship between hunting dogs and deer: 'Your race is their enemy' (de Miramon, 2009, 201). Therefore, using the term 'race' to convey the humanity of a being in a medieval work is dubious. From this and other late fifteenth-century texts using the term to describe groups of animals, the term then comes to be used to distinguish between 'noble' and 'common' animals – between hunting greyhounds and ordinary watchdogs. Following this usage, 'race' is applied to noble people, especially those of 'royal blood' (de Miramon, 2009, 212). This use of 'race' is different in substantive ways from modern usage, as it was used to distinguish not only one type of dog from another, but also people of a certain estate from those of another estate, regardless of shared political space, equally European ancestry, similar phenotype and so on.

## Terminology

What words did medieval authors use, then, to describe the monstrous *some-things*? Authors of medieval Latin texts wrote of *gens, natio* and *gentes*, while

Anglo-Saxon authors used *moncyn* and related forms, and Middle English authors used *kynde* (Strickland, 2012, 366). Latin authors were following Classical precedent, relying on texts like Solinus' third-century *Collectanea Rerum Mirabilium*. Solinus writes, 'deinde in ultimis Orientis monstrosae gentium facies' ('Then, in the most distant East, you will make monstrous nations') (Solinus, 1958, 132). Each term bears a host of important implications: 'gentes' ['nation'å] implies civilization; animals have species, but do not live in nations. In contrast, the Middle English *kynde* seems to move toward our Present Day English 'race,' as in John Capgrave's use of the phrase 'cours of kynde' in his *Abbreviacioun of Cronicles* (ca. 1464). He connects this directly to monstrosity, writing of the inventor of witchcraft that 'Zorastes, whan he was bore, low as no child ded but he, and þis lawhing was no tokne of good, for it was monstrows, þat is to seyn ageyn cours of kynde' (Capgrave, 1858, 26). That is, Zoroaster was monstrous for being born 'against the course of kind,' a phrase implying some form of hereditary normality, and perhaps even suggesting that there are *other* courses of 'kynde,' perhaps monstrous. Regardless, that medieval people did not have a term that equates precisely with the modern English 'race' does not negate the presence of racial thinking, and indeed, as the images here suggest, some of the work of characterizing peoples into 'races' was done by artists rather than authors.

Still, the modern English phrase 'monstrous races' is not based on anything clearly autochthonous to medieval or Classical sources. 'Race of Monsters' appears in a few seventeenth- and eighteenth-century texts, though in quite different contexts (that is, Rosse, 1642, 100; Bèohme, 1691, 10; Dunton, 1715, 17). The earliest usage I have found relating to the 'Plinian races' (though others surely exist) appears in Henry Weber's summary of the metrical Romance of *Kyng Alisaunder* (1810). The phrase 'monstrous races' appears in seminal late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century works (for example, Benedicts, 1892, 340; Wittkower, 1942, 159) and continues in common use, often somewhat uncritically, as for example in Thomas Hahn's generally thoughtful essay on race (Hahn, 2001, 12).

The term 'monstrous race' recurs again and again, and is important in that it shapes our views of the beings, and of notions of difference more broadly. It also, though, impacts our understandings of the modern world and its people in meaningful ways, as will be discussed below. As Strickland notes, 'The appellation "monstrous races," after all, suggests the intersection of two sets of ideas, monstrosity and race – which, besides apportioning the world's monsters into discrete races, also invites contemplation of race as monstrosity' (Strickland, 2012, 367).

In what follows, I will test out three modern definitions of 'race,' provided by Daniel G. Blackburn, Geraldine Heng and Robert Bartlett, by attempting to apply them to medieval figures from the *Book of John Mandeville,* the *Marvels of the East*, the *Cursor Mundi* and other medieval accounts.

## Blackburn's Criteria for 'Race'

Blackburn provides a useful list of criteria that would be necessary, were we to accept 'race' as a valid *scientific* category of humanity (which he then emphatically rejects) (Blackburn, 2000, 7–8). It might be summed up as follows: *a race would have to be physically discrete in meaningful and functional ways that are inherited through evolution and genealogy* (Blackburn, 2000, 7–8). The three groups represented on the folio from *Mandeville* seem to meet all these conditions (see Figure 1 again). The Cyclopes, Epiphagi and Blemmyes present figures clearly identifiable by heritable physical features – they are described fairly consistently and in present tense over the course of two millennia, from Herodotus of Halicarnassus (fifth century BCE) to Columbus (fifteenth century CE) (Mittman and Kim, 2013, 225). Their differences would have functional impacts (a Cyclops, with one eye and therefore limited depth perception, would presumably be a bad shot). They are discrete, though the close resemblance of Epiphagi (eyes in their shoulders) and Blemmyes (eyes and mouths in their chests) allows these two groups to be conflated and confused. In *Mandeville's* text, one group is characterized as having 'ears in their shoulders and their mouth twisted like a horseshoe in the middle of their chest,' while the others have 'their eyes and their mouth behind their shoulders' (Higgins, 2011, 124) in most 'Defective' texts, though in Harley 3954, the group is described at the top of the verso of this folio as 'men þat hav non eyne ne hedys, and here mowth is be hynde in here schuldrys.' The scribe originally left off 'non,' but inserted it above the line. In the image, both groups have the same wide, curving mouths (though on front and back, respectively) and neither have visible ears. It is not clear if the Blemmye-like figures have eyes, since unlike most figures in this manuscript, they merely have small dots, rather than carefully rendered eyes. It is possible that these dots (on the right figure's front and the left figure's back) are a later addition, since those on the left figure are in a blacker ink similar to other additions in the manuscript. They also resemble the 'to smale holys i[n] stede of eyue' depicted on the 'men … [that] ha[v] plat facys' on the verso. Setting aside these ambiguities, the remaining point of difference between the second and third sets of figures on this folio is skin color – one is ruddy and the other dusky.

Although the notion of evolution was not present in the Middle Ages, these representations bear an insistent stress on genitalia, invoking genealogies, reproduction and replication. Indeed, Valentin Groebner argues that race is inherently connected to sex (Groebner, 2009, 218). A few scholars, including Dana Oswald and Sarah Alison Miller, have discussed representations of the genitals of the 'monstrous races,' though not in relation to race (Oswald, 2012; Miller, 2012). The central Cyclopes in the upper register has large and clearly represented male genitals, and the slightly smaller, possibly long-haired figure to his right appears to be female, though we only see the figure's back, so this is uncertain. The Blemmyes in the lower register are more emphatically represented

as a couple with mating potential. The left figure's male genitals are represented even though his hips and legs are turned in profile. The illuminator has also worked to represent the right figure as female; while, due to the nature of the Blemmye, she does not seem to possess breasts (facial features cover the place where breasts would normally appear), her pubic hair is indicated, and in the context of the male figure beside her, the fact that she does not have visible male genitals further suggests her sex. The stress on genitals is, in a sense, a stress on reproduction, which might press us toward an identification of these figures as 'races,' as replicating groups passing their traits to their offspring. This might indicate a sort of 'proto-racial thought,' as Peter Biller puts it (Biller, 2009). Their vigorous genitals imply their status as self-replicating groups and imply that the quality of Blemmye-ness is, in Andrew Solomon's terminology, a vertical identity, based on 'transmission of identity from one generation to the next' (Solomon, 2012, 2). That is, in comparison to prodigal births like two-headed calves (or human babies), born to parents unlike themselves, the Blemmyes here seem to be produced by parents like themselves (Davies, 2012).[1]

Still, these three sets are not representative of all 'monstrous races,' some of which would fail several of Blackburn's categories (physically discrete in inherited, meaningful, functional ways). Friedman's list of commonly represented 'Plinian Races' reveals several differing only in behavior (that is, Amazons, Anthropophagi, Bragmanni, Garamantes, Icthiophagi, Speechless Men and Wife-Givers) (Friedman, 1981, 9–21). I will focus on Friedman's Wife-Givers, who are the 'Generous People' contained in the *Marvels of the East*. They are described as follows in British Library, Cotton Tiberius B.v (second of three illustrated versions, ca. 1050) (Temple, 1976, 87; Foys, 2007, 113):

> Ðis mannkynn lifað fela geara 7 hi syndon fremfulfe men 7 gyfhwylc mann to him cymeð þonne gyfað hi him wif ær hi hine onweg lætan. Se macedonisca Alexander þa ða he him to com þa wæs he wundriende hyra menniscnysse ne wolde he hi cwellan ne him nawiht laðes don. (Tiberius B. v, f. 85v)

> [This kind of person lives for many years, and they are generous people. And if anyone comes to them then they give him a woman before they let him go away. The Macedonian Alexander, when he came to them, was wondering at their humanness, nor did he wish to kill them nor do them any harm.] (my translation)

This group is referred to as a *mannkynn*, essentially the same term used to describe the more clearly monstrous Donestre (here, *moncynn*), a figure represented in this manuscript as bearing a leonine head as it devours a human victim (Orchard, 1995, 196). *Mannkynn* is also used to characterize the Ethiopians (Orchard, 1995, 202). While the Donestre and Ethiopians might suit most of Blackburn's criteria, the 'Generous People' do not. They have no apparent

[1] On the right edge of the lintel of the central portal of the Benedictine abbey church of Sainte-Marie-Madeleine at Vézelay, we find what seems to be a family of Panotii, a 'monstrous race' characterized by very large ears. The image shows a male and a female Panotii, with a smaller Panotii between them, possibly representing a child. (See Andrew Tallon's gigapixel image here: faculty.vassar.edu/antallon/zoomify/Vezelay_Main_Portal.html.)

physiological points of difference from the putatively 'normal' or racially 'European' bodies of the Anglo-Saxons responsible for producing and initially using this manuscript. They differ only in 'acquired, cultural attributes like temperament, attire, and personality' (Blackburn, 2000, 7). Indeed, they differ in the sole behavior listed to characterize the group – the giving away of women to travelers (the Old English reads *wif*, hence 'Wife-Givers,' but OE *wif* indicates 'woman' more generally). Surely, this cannot be described as a 'racial' difference. They presumably pass their woman-giving behavior vertically to their offspring via *cultural* rather than *biological* transmission, and a male 'Generous Person' raised by Anglo-Saxons would likely not give women to passing strangers (though the use of women as commodity in the period erodes this difference to a degree).

The image of the 'Generous People' in Tiberius B.v likewise provides no suggestion of physical, 'racial' differentiation (Figure 2): to the left is the traveler, a surrogate for the Anglo-Saxon viewer, dressed in typical Anglo-Saxon fashion. The cluster of four figures to the right, though representing the 'foreign' people, the 'monstrous race,' are yet more archetypically Anglo-Saxon in appearance. Their physiognomy is indistinguishable from their visitor's, and their clothing is representative of the standard dress of secular Anglo-Saxons, with tunics like those of their visitor and leggings wrapped with *hose-bendas* or *winingas* – straps wound around the leggings (Owen-Crocker, 1986, 54–55). They even wear dark, pointed, soft leather shoes fashionable in the eleventh century. The woman wears a sleeved gown, headdress, and black, flat-soled ankle shoes – all absolutely typical of eleventh-century Anglo-Saxon women (Owen-Crocker, 1986, 214–219, 227). While *mannkynn* has been translated here as 'race' by Andy Orchard, me and others, *this mannkynn* fails even a fairly generous definition of the modern term. They might well be a tribe, group, or type of person, but they are not a 'race,' according to Blackburn's definition.

But what of the Ethiopians who appear beside them? Would this 'monstrous race' constitute a 'race'? The text is brief: 'Ðær mannkynn is syndan sweartes hiwes on ansyne þa man hateð silhearwan' ('There is a kind of person that is of black color in appearance, that people call Ethiopians') (Tiberius B.v, f., 86 r; translation mine). They would seem to be much more consistent with modern notions of 'race.' Indeed, the concision of the text essentially reduces this group to nothing *but* skin color. As David Goldenberg argues, climate theory was used to argue that 'it is the Blacks' physical being, and in particular their skin color, that is found objectionable, not their customs or what was believed to be their innate characteristics' (Goldenberg, 2009, 88). The image corresponds roughly, though the figures are hardly 'black,' as described in the text. Strickland similarly observes that '[i]t is especially intriguing … that while the Anglo-Saxon *Wonders* text specifies that Ethiopians are "completely black," the accompanying images barely hint at darkened complexions' (Strickland, 2012, 381). If they are a 'race' defined in text by difference from Europeans in skin color, in image they are unsettlingly undifferentiated.

The Tiberius text and image of the Ethiopians appear at first to be as essentializing as a racial depiction might be, but a closer look erodes this clarity. It is further
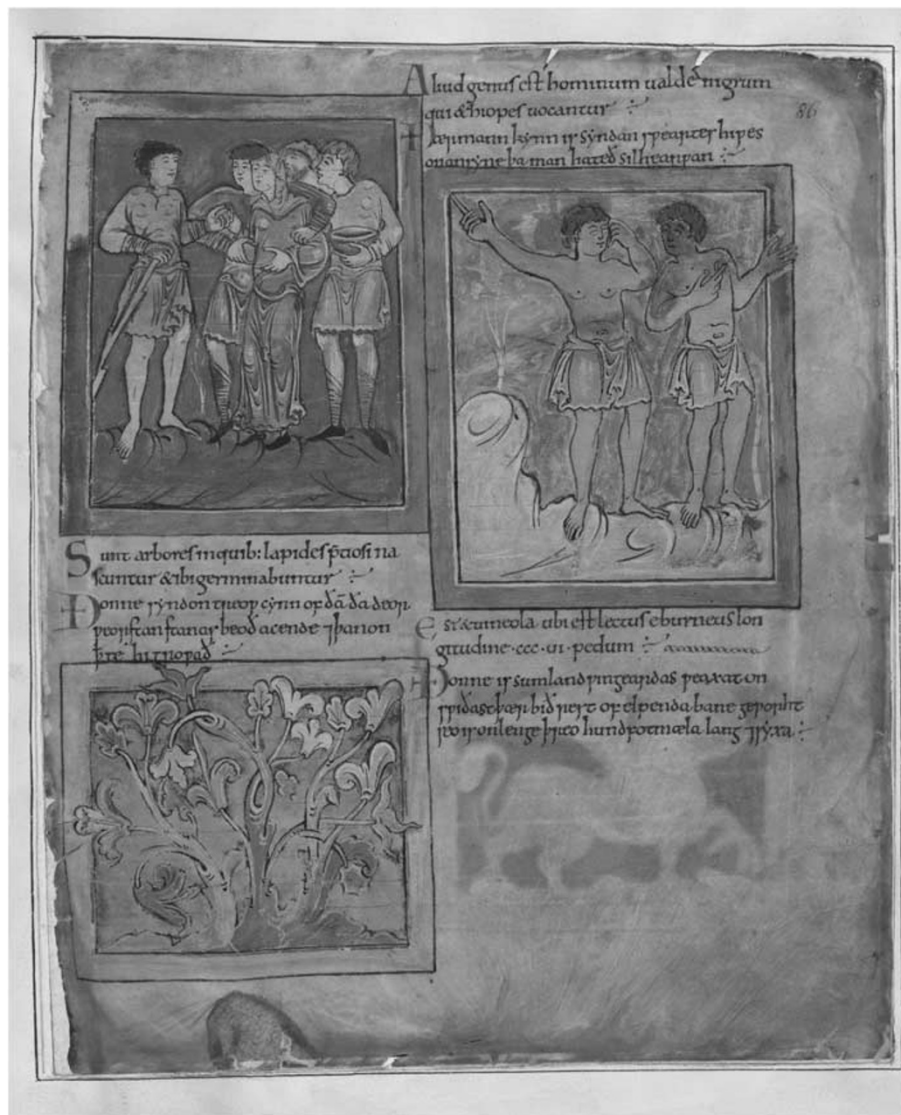
**Figure 2:** London, British Library, Cotton Tiberius B.v, f. 86r, 'Generous People' and Ethiopians. Courtesy of the British Library.

undercut by numerous medieval narratives that describe physical transformations undergone by converts to Christianity. The presence of such 'miracles' in the medieval context presses notions of fixity and race in ways that the modern definitions do not allow. Hahn lists several such texts, including the *King of Tars* romance, where, upon conversion of the sultan, 'His hide, that blac and lothely was, Al white bicom' ('His skin, that black and loathsome was, all white became') (Perryman, 1980, 928–929; my translation) (Hahn, 2001). The *Cursor Mundi*, an encyclopedia

of c. 1325, contains a more dramatic conversion narrative in a legend of the Holy Cross. Here, a blessing from King David, administered using rods blessed by Moses, works a complete transformation of figures that, at the outset, are not merely 'black and blue' skinned, but Blemmyes, as well:

> Four Sarzins wit the king can mete.
> Blac and bla als led thai war …
> That sagh man never forwit that hore,
> Sua fraward scapen [horribly shaped] creature.
> O thair blac heu it was selcuth [marvelous],
> And in thair breistes bar thair moth …
> Thair muthes wide, thair eien brade,
> Unfreli [repulsive] was thair face made.
> In thair forhed stod thair sight …
> He [David] heild tham [the rods] to thaim for to kys;
> Thai kneld and tham kyest; als tite [white]
> Als milk thair hide becom sa quite
> And o fre [high] blod thai had the heu,
> And al thair scapp was turned neu
> (Morris, 1875, 8072–8122; glossing from Hahn, 2001, 14)

These passages (also discussed in Heng, 2011, 260–261) trouble the notion of race as a stable category and, since heritability is a central property of race, they also trouble the basic notion of race itself.

In another example, Augustine in *City of God* argues that 'monstrosos partus' ('monstrous births') shall be rendered normal at the resurrection, just as those who died as infants shall be resurrected as they would have been as adults, with 'perfectio magnitudinis corporalis' ('perfection of bodily size') (Augustine, 1845, cols. 0776, 0777). These beings, then, remained 'deformed' and 'distorted' only so long as their interior state is so. When they turned toward God, 'all their appearance was made new.' Therefore, even those figures who seem most clearly suited to characterization under the modern rubric of 'race' can only be considered such if race is seen as a temporary attribute, in strong contradistinction to most standard modern 'models of race and racism that focus exclusively on fixity' (Buell, 2009, 113).

## Other Approaches: Heng's 'Structural Relationship' and Bartlett's 'Ethnicity'

Geraldine Heng offers a more flexible definition of 'race' than Blackburn: '[R]ace is a structural relationship for the articulation and management of human differences, rather than a substantive content' (Heng, 2011, 261). This is especially applicable to those 'monstrous races' with the least 'somatic difference,'

such as the 'Generous People.' Heng continues, 'Unlike many who stress nature-based determinants in racing, and race as body-centered phenomena, premodernists emphasizing socio-cultural determinants do not assume that race or racism requires human distinctions to be posited as permanent, stable, innate, fixed, or immutable' (Heng, 2011, 267). The transformation of 'black and blue' Blemmyes to 'normal' people with skin 'as white as milk' therefore would not shatter their status as a race for Heng, since she posits a premodern notion allowing for instability and mutability. Similarly, if race is less 'body-centered' and more socio-cultural, perhaps even the 'Generous People' fit the category of 'race.' In essence, whether the 'monstrous races' are races depends in large measure on how we might choose to define 'race,' either within a medieval context or enduringly.

We might try to avoid the trouble by replacing the term 'race' with 'ethnicity,' a term that seems more acceptable to some scholars who have rejected 'race' as problematic. Since 'ethnicity' incorporates cultural elements, it is arguably a more accurate way to categorize peoples. Robert Bartlett, for example, prefers to use 'ethnicity,' which can encompass acquired characteristics. He establishes three separate means of distinguishing ethnicity in medieval visual representation. The first is typical of 'racial' difference: 'physiological differentiation.' The second references purely cultural features: distinguishing hairstyles and/or clothes. Bartlett's third means to identify a representation of 'ethnicity' is purely denominative: in the absence of any visible markers, a description of a group as separate is sufficient to mark them as such (Bartlett, 2009, 132–137). Unlike Blackburn's criteria for 'race' (physically discrete, inherited, meaningful, functional), Bartlett's criteria are to be taken individually rather than cumulatively – that is, any *one* is, for Bartlett, sufficient to allow us to identify a figure as distinguished by ethnicity, so a figure without visual distinction but mentioned in the text as being of a different group meets his definition. Testing these categories on the 'monstrous races,' we find that, like the definitions of 'race' posed above, they also vary in applicability. The Cyclopes, Epiphagi and Blemmyes of the *Book of John Mandeville* folio (see Figure 1 again), for example, are characterized by the text around the images as different, named as such, and described ('me[n] þ[at] hav but oon eyʒe' appears in red ink beside the image of the Cyclopes). The bearing of a single eye or of no head at all surely also constitute noteworthy physiological differences. And while we reject medieval caricatures of Africans (Bartlett, 2009, 134–136) and Jews (as in Matthew Paris's characterization of the 'faciem Judaicam' ['Jewish face'] – see Paris, 1874, 562; Biller, 2009, 177) as reductive at best, and more often as wholly inaccurate and outright dehumanizing, we might still accept the consistent representation of Cyclopes as one-eyed, for, without this feature, they would cease to *be* Cyclopes; a Jew without a hooked nose is still a Jew, but a Cyclopes with two eyes is no Cyclopes.

The 'Generous People,' who failed Blackburn's definition of 'race' but met Heng's more expansive view, also meet Bartlett's criteria for identifying

'ethnicity' (see Figure 2 again). The text marks them as different, as does their inclusion in the *Marvels*, a text defined by its status as a catalog of difference (Roy, 1974, 76). They do not, though, bear different physiology, clothing, or hairstyles. Even the act depicted in the image does not really serve to distinguish these figures from their Anglo-Saxon audience. A man grabs a woman bodily, with much vigor, while another takes her hand. This might seem alarming to modern viewers, but the scene would have been quite familiar to Anglo-Saxons, used to daughters being given to men by their fathers as a routine part of the process of marriage, in addition to other transactions (Jamison, 2004). Only the text's note that Alexander wondered at these peoples allows us to read them as wondrous.

Ultimately, 'monstrous ethnicities' hardly seems up to the task. It might technically fit, but in some cases (for example, Cyclopes, Blemmyes), it seems inadequate to convey the fundamental difference at issue, while in others (for example, 'Generous People'), it seems perhaps to convey too strong a sense of difference, when in fact the gap between medieval viewer and represented being is so small we can barely find points of contrast (for example, Anglo-Saxons surely gave women to *known* rather than *unknown* men).

## What Term(s) *Should* We Use?

It is not helpful, though, to conclude that 'monstrous races' are races just because in any given case or moment we want them to be. I would therefore like to ask an ancillary question: *Should* we continue to describe these beings as 'races'? The central utility of the term lies not in its ability to characterize the group in question, but in its ability to cast the group that is *not* discussed as a race. Each time a rather disparate assemblage of groups ranging from dog-heads to no-heads, from the raw-fish-eating Homodubii to the woman-giving 'Generous People,' is framed by the rubric of the 'monstrous races,' it is, in actuality, the medieval author or illuminator's group – his tribe, nation, ethnicity, *gens, natio, gentes, moncyn, kynde* – often in practice 'white' European Christian culture, that is constructed as a race.

This 'race' is not only a fiction, but a highly problematic one. The 'monstrous races' were a central part of the larger effort, perhaps first undertaken in ancient Greece, to define the home culture as not normal but normative, not representative but defining the standard against which all other Others might be judged. This process of 'dependent differentiation' was of great importance in the Middle Ages, when 'Christendom' worked to call itself into being by pressing others out of the fold (Lees and Overing, 2001, 4). Whalen constructs an image of 'Christendom' riven with internal conflicts, animated by the Crusades, and in the perpetual process of formation through opposing efforts to simultaneously

incorporate all the peoples of the world into the Roman church, and to reject all those who represented aspects of difference within and outside of its putative and shifting borders (Whalen, 2009). At times, the consolidation of 'Christendom' was accomplished by casting others as non-human, or not *quite* human. At others, it was accomplished by characterizing these peoples as human, but still *different*, essentially and (often) permanently different. Matthew Paris, for example, provides an account of the 'Tartars' (that is, 'the people from Hell'; Whalen, 2009, 150) as 'genus hominum monstruosum et unhumanum' (Paris, 1876, 488), translated by J.A. Giles, Whalen, and others, as 'a monstrous and inhuman *race* of men' (Paris, 1889, 131; Whalen, 2009, 165, emphasis added). The Latin, though, toys with their humanity by opposing *hominum* and *unhumanum*. Matthew recounts a speech by Bishop Peter of Winchester, in response to reports that the 'Tartars' were slaughtering the 'Saracens,' in which he argues in dehumanizing language:

> Let us allow these dogs to devour each other, so that, consumed, they may die. We, though, will come down and cut to pieces those enemies of Christ who remain, and will cleanse the surface of the Earth, so that the whole world is subject to the one catholic Church, and there will be one fold, and one shepherd. (Paris, 1876, 489)

Here, we see the push and pull between the universal and the exclusive within 'Christendom,' such that there might be, following the Gospel of John (10:16), 'one fold, and one shepherd,' but only after the 'inhuman humans' – for modern translators a 'race of men' – have been massacred.

Having considered the issues raised here, I now believe that we should cease and desist the practice of referring to the wonders, marvels, 'monstra, ostenta, portenta, prodigia' ('monsters, signs, portents, prodigies') (as Augustine, 1845, col. 0722, called them), the one-footed folks and Cyclopes and centaurs – and, by extension, Jews and 'Saracens' and 'Tartars' – and so on as 'monstrous races.' We might substitute 'monstrous peoples' in its place, which would still emphasize their (potential) humanity, while jettisoning the problems associated with 'race.' Alternately, we might use modern translations of the most common medieval terms applied to these beings: 'wonders' or 'marvels.' Whatever we put in its place, we should reject the term 'race' in this context because it would have either carried no meaning for their creators, depicters and original audiences, or would have meant something radically different from what modern readers associate with the term. We should also reject the term because 'race' is as artificial a notion as 'the monster,' and has a history perhaps yet more pernicious. And finally, we should reject the term because its retention reifies the implicit reality of the 'white' or 'European' or 'Christian' 'race' at the core of medieval discourse. Whenever we write 'monstrous race,' we accept 'Christendom's' rhetoric of its own existence, and we imply the presence of a 'normal' or 'normative race' at the center, revealed by these 'monstrous races' at the periphery. The existence of a norm means that

all 'races' fall inevitably into a hierarchy whereby the 'normative' – often very narrowly defined – is deemed, even without our writing it, without our even thinking it, superior.

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