Italian Narratives of Oppositional Identity

Hagiography and Affect in Distancing the Late Antique and Medieval Saracen, and the Modern Migrant

ABSTRACT  Drawing together scholarship on the late antique and medieval holy man, and modern theoretical work on affect and identity, this article seeks to analyze one method by which group identities in the Mediterranean region broadly, and in Italy specifically, have been defined trans-historically through rhetorical emphasis on the “invasion” of foreignized bodies. The discussion first focuses on late antique Near Eastern Passio texts commemorating Christians who faced persecution under Muslim Saracens, before then shifting to tenth- and eleventh-century southern Italy and Sicily, and to the corpus of Italo-Greek Vitae in which holy individuals regularly encountered the Saracen as a dangerous invader. Such discourses of opposition obscured the inter-reliance between populations, and reduced relations to inherited, primordial struggles, simultaneously shifting attention away from the heterogeneity of non-Muslim resident populations. A similar approach is pursued in modern Italian discourse on migrants, where a selective rhetoric of “invasion” forefront the risks posed by migrants in ways that create a sense of unity in an otherwise-fragmented nation. Urging academic dialogue that incorporates the pre-modern and modern, this article examines the construction of oppositional identity and explores how such narratives reveal collective fears amongst populations threatened by the destabilization of pre-established hierarchies.

KEYWORDS  Passiones, hagiography, Saracens, Christians, Muslims, saints, affective language, Italy, immigrant, identity

*The core argument of this article was first formulated as a paper I presented in Monastir, Tunisia at a conference on "Identity" organized by the Tunisian-Mediterranean Association for Historical, Social, and Economic Studies, and held in November 2016. It has also been shaped greatly by my Fulbright Grant research year in Rome in 2016–2017 and again over six months in 2018, during which time I volunteered with the medical organization Medici per i diritti umani (MEDU, or "Doctors for Human Rights") to provide medical care to irregular migrants in Rome, operating alongside and in conjunction with the Baobab Experience which offers legal assistance to migrants seeking asylum. I dedicate this article to the individuals with whom I worked—including my MEDU colleagues and the migrants themselves, a number of whom I came to know closely—for what was an incredibly eye-opening experience and which provided me insight into a situation I knew only intellectually before walking onto those streets to experience it unfiltered.
INTRODUCTION: CHALLENGING THE PRIMORDIAL NATION AND MAKING THE CASE FOR THE LATE ANTIQUE-MEDIEVAL-MODERN CONNECTION

Modern scholarship on identity and the nation-state increasingly seeks to problematize visions of “the nation” as a primordial and uncontested point of reference for the definition of group identity. Once authoritative, the works of nineteenth-century statesmen and state-sponsored historians accentuating a uniform ethnicity, language, territory, or religion have been supplanted by scholars following in the tradition of Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities.* Their revisionist studies have framed national histories as carefully-sculpted narratives of inclusion or exclusion based in an affective language of belonging, which capitalizes selectively on historical alliances or antagonisms between ethnic and religious groups and on ancestral claims to a homeland. In this critical reframing, that such histories were founded upon shared mythologies is now becoming common knowledge, as is the recognition that membership and participation in the national body is not evenly available to all.

Importantly, the process of creating narratives of belonging applies whether the collective entity be a nation, a tribe, a town, a clan, or a family, and can thus be studied in the pre-modern period as well as in the modern. Without reductively asserting a direct parallel between historical epochs, this article takes such a path. I offer ancient, medieval, and modern evidence from the Mediterranean region concerning the response of “native” or “indigenous” Western populations to immigrants, and specifically to Arab-Muslims and peoples with brown or black skin. Gaining currency in Europe with every passing day, this theme provides a leitmotif in the Mediterranean region since the rise of Islam in the seventh century, first treated by Near Eastern and Byzantine authors before

Since then, the argument has developed substantially through the insightful feedback I received from my mentors and friends Beth DePalma Digeser, James F. Brooks, and Matt King, to whom I am ever grateful for the encouragement to unfold such a comparative paper, and for the trust that, despite my medievalist training, I might offer some keys to understanding the troublesome but vital notion of “identity” in both historical and contemporary society.


2. Asserting such a parallel would overlook the momentous and complex transformations arising in the transition from religious and dynastic bases of pre-modern group identity to the secularized politics of the modern nation-state. On this, see Anderson, *Imagined Communities,* chapter 2 on “Cultural Roots.”
radiating into wider European discourse in the medieval period. Indeed, it is in late antique writing, particularly in Passio ["Passion"] texts memorializing heroic Christian martyrdoms, that the first depictions of the inimical, violent, immoral “Saracen” appear. While only one genre of late antique writing—and certainly neither unbiased nor unproblematic—the Passiones reveal the employment of thematic and linguistic representations of moral difference between Christian and Muslim that rendered religious text a tool of narrative self-defense.

The Passiones that document early Byzantine attitudes towards the spread of Islam date to the seventh, eighth, and sometimes ninth centuries, and thus fall at the tail end of what some scholars have characterized a “Long Late Antiquity” periodization. Nevertheless, they hold value as linking texts between chronological eras and representational motifs, for they borrowed from earlier discourses of difference, including Greek-barbarian and pagan-Christian “otherings,” and both directly and indirectly informed subsequent depictions of challengers to Christianity and of those who became popular Christian leaders and idols. Such facets of the transgenerational inheritance of ways of knowing, of ways of thinking, and of ways of representing Self and Other are fundamental components of the argument I pursue here. Indeed, I assert that a macro-historical inquiry into Mediterranean identity reveals that late antique models of writing informed later, medieval and modern, experiences of Near Eastern and North African populations moving into Europe and provided the vocabulary and ideological framework with which they were and continue to be addressed. Attention to such borrowings may not only reveal the ideological bases upon which notions of difference have historically been constructed, but also speak to the efficacy of drawing upon emotional responses, particularly those of fear or endangerment, in structuring transgenerational relations between ethnic or religious groups.

3. “Saracen” is a pejorative term pre-modern authors used to refer to Muslims, alongside “Ishmaelites” and “Hagarenes.” I employ it here because my argument is based specifically on the rhetorical tools engaged in the negative portrayal of Muslims by late antique and medieval authors.

4. This article uses the notion of a “Long Late Antiquity” that extended from the mid-third century to the eighth century. While criticized for reducing the momentousness of the collapse of the western Roman Empire in the late fifth century, a flexible periodization allows for thematic considerations extending beyond firmly fixed chronological boundaries. For more on this, see Arnaldo Marcone, “A Long Late Antiquity?: Considerations on a Controversial Periodization,” Journal of Late Antiquity, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Spring 2008): 4–19; and Late Antiquity in Contemporary Debate, ed. Rita Lizza Testa (Cambridge Scholars Publishing: 2017), particularly the section on “A Long or Short Late Antiquity?” (xxxiii-xxxviii) and the “Concluding Remarks” (especially 220–225).
The Byzantine Empire first confronted Muslim military and civic presence during the period of the Rashidun Caliphs (632–661), and increasingly so in the Umayyad (661–750) and Abbasid (750–1258) periods. And it was early in this sequence that the trope of the Christian martyr to the pagans of antiquity was replaced by the trope of the Christian martyr to Islam. Examples include the individual martyrdoms of Peter of Capitolias (d. 715) and Romanos the Neomartyr (d. 780), and the group executions of the Sixty Martyrs of Gaza (d. 638), of the Sixty Martyrs of Jerusalem (d. 724–5), and of the Forty-Two Martyrs of Amorion (d. 859). Their deaths were memorialized in *Passio* texts that portrayed the physical and spiritual struggles inherent to the Christian resistance before a quickly-spreading Islam. Central to these depictions was the motif of the devious and deceitful Muslim—or, to use the historical but pejorative term, the “Saracen”—who was positioned as a challenger to the pure and benevolent Christian holy figure and who sought to prove the superiority of Islam through intellectual debate or cunning dishonesty. While the implied animosity between Muslim and Christian that early authors documented was relatively mild, particularly when considered alongside similar sources from later centuries, these authors bestowed a vocabulary of Saracen moral inferiority and endangerment which came to be reproduced in subsequent retellings of Muslim-Christian encounters. Importantly, it was also in the late antique tradition that the risks posed by intimate contact between these groups were exposed, particularly the collective destabilization caused by conversion and the threat it posed to group boundaries.

By the ninth and tenth centuries, these themes were well-engrained in hagiographical writings from south Italy and Sicily, the context that encompasses the second and lengthiest portion of this study. A region fragmented between Lombard-Catholic, Byzantine-Orthodox, and Arab-Muslim influences and lacking a strongly centralized political or religious authority, this was a world in which local saints held prominence as public mediators much as their predecessors had in Late Antiquity. A corpus of roughly a dozen extant saints’ *Vitae*

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“Lives” commemorates some of these individuals and, notably, in all of them, the Saracen appears as a spiritual and physical rival to the saint and his or her community. Frequently, the Saracen raided vulnerable monasteries or towns, capturing locals to transport first to Sicily and then to Muslim North Africa as slaves and occupying the position of a demonic tempter and challenger to the Christian saint. The texts borrowed from late antique narrative sequences and vocabulary, but by this time the rhetoric of antagonism was better-structured and reinforced by a forceful and affective stress on violence and invasion, as well as by a new emphasis on the physical alterity of the Saracen including on the darkness of his skin. Notably, neither here nor in the late antique texts was there much evidence of familiarity with Islamic teaching, nor of the desire to represent the human dimension of the Muslim. This anonymity or detachment is critical to the foundation of what I term “oppositional identity,” for it mystifies an opponent to provide a focal point against which to define a broad, collective identity. Critically, the importance of such in-group harmonization is in its ability to subsume sources of fragmentation in the “us” for the sake of resistance to what appears a more looming threat.

Similar ideas are continually reproduced in current Italian public discourse on the racialized and foreignized migrant, not only by conservative political outlets but also within the wider popular imagination. Immigration into Italy has no longer as a peripheral figure, but rather as centrally involved as a mediatory force in social and political developments at a local and regional level, and his argument has been accepted into mainstream academic discourse. The holy man was also very much a mediator in southern Italy, which was highly fragmented: moving north to south, the territories of Capua, Benevento, Salerno, and northern Apulia were primarily Lombard; the seaside duchies of Gaeta, Naples, and Amalfi were largely Greek, as were southern Apulia and Calabria; Sicily was the main Muslim stronghold. The work on these regions is extensive. For the Lombard regions, see the work of Graham Loud, Amalia Galdi, Valerie Ramseyer, Joanna Drell, Paul Oldfield; for the southern Italian boot, see the works of Vera von Falkenhausen and Jean-Marie Martin; for Sicily see Alex Metcalfe and Jeremy Johns.

7. These include, in chronological fashion following the dates of their death, the *Vita* of Luke of Demenna (d. 993); Vitale of Castronuovo (d. 994); Saba of Collesano (d. 995); Fantino the Younger (d. 974); Gregory of Cerchiara (d. 1002); Nilo of Rossano (d. 1004); Nicodemo of Kellarana (d. 990 or 1020); Bartholomew the Younger (d. 1053); John Theristes (d. 1054); Marina of Scanio (d. 1062); Filareto of Seminara (d. 1070); and Luke of Isola Capo Rizzuto (d. 1114). This discussion does not consider Christopher or Macario of Collesano, father and brother of Saba of Collesano, because their *Vita* are much briefer than Saba’s and composed by the same author, thus providing no further analytical value.

8. Suzanne C. Akbari pursues a similar theme in *Idols in the East: European Representations of Islam and the Orient, 1100-1450* (Cornell University Press, 2009), where she sought the roots of modern Orientalist thought in medieval language spanning from the time of the Crusades to the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople. I seek, rather, to draw attention to the rhetoric of difference that pre-dates the Crusades.
been ongoing for roughly half of a century, with migrants initially arriving from Eastern Europe and, in recent years, increasingly from North and Sub-Saharan Africa. Yet their entry into a nation with a particularly weak national character—facing difficulties overcoming tendencies towards familism and regionalism in favor of the nation, alongside a distrust of government and political bodies—has meant that, in Italy, certain strands of prominent political speech have sought to define a sense of national belonging in opposition to the migrants rhetorically depicted as leading an “invasion” of Italy from the southern shores of the Mediterranean Sea. The potency of this rhetorical framing is apparent above all when one considers that, in the modern context, those arriving to Europe’s doorstep are not, in fact, leading an active military invasion as did their late antique and medieval precursors, but have fled political or economic volatility in their home countries. This essential distinction underlines further the importance of engaging carefully in macro-historical dialogue, for it simultaneously stresses the need to remain attentive to contextual differences and underscores the present argument regarding the inheritance of ideological frameworks that give little nuance to historical exigencies as they, rather, draw upon established linguistic or emotional triggers.

In modern Italy, far more than in the two pre-modern contexts considered, the argument for opposition to irregular migration is particularly effective because it is constantly reinforced by migrant visibility based in somatic and racial differences of body and skin tone. As I will argue, the emphasis on visual alterity was also a factor in medieval southern Italian attitudes to the Muslim or Saracen, although medieval “racial” distinction rested less upon notions of biological race and more upon the intersection of aesthetic, culture, and religion. The modern accent on the racial dimension of immigration into Italy has had two major implications for the definition of Italian national identity and inclusiveness, however. Most perceptibly, migrants from Africa and the Middle East have replaced southern Italians and Eastern Europeans as the foci of xenophobic sentiment,

9. I use the comprehensive term “migrant” to encompass wartime refugees as well as immigrants who depart their homelands due to economic, political, or environmental pressures. Upon their arrival in Italy little attention is allotted to the various reasons for their departure, and similarly here emphasis is purposefully placed less on why they come and more upon their reception. The most politically correct, encompassing term is “irregular migrants.”

10. See, for instance, Alessandro Cavalli, “Reflections on Political Culture and the ‘Italian National Character,’” *Daedalus*, Vol. 130, No. 3 (2001): 119–37. This is not to suggest that later invasions of the south by the French, Spanish, or Germans were any more welcome but, in this earlier medieval period, emphasis was on Muslim presence and it remains my focus here.
and whether one is Italian emerges less important than whether s/he could pass for Italian, in which case s/he may be granted the opportunity to try. Simultaneously, however, there has been a reaffirmed cohesion within the construct of what constitutes “the native Italian”—identified first by his or her whiteness, and only after by the place of birth and affiliation with traditional Catholicism—which allows for an accentuation of the alterity of the dark-skinned, and often Muslim, immigrant. The resulting narrative of an untainted Italian identity facing unprecedented invasion by dark-skinned outsiders is, again, a reductive one that capitalizes on a sense of instability. However, as argued here, this political project is hardly an artifact of purely modern dispositions.

At its root, oppositional framing plays upon feelings of ontological insecurity and destabilization, selectively emphasizing the dangers posed by those who appear different while ignoring the often fundamental social and economic roles they fill in the societies from which they are being ostracized. The presence of “other” groups is, however, constructive to the extent that it discloses the psychology of group belonging, and it should therefore be studied as such. Collective identities are socially constituted, yet this process does not begin anew each time; on the contrary, frameworks that hold a social currency due to their former usefulness in promoting dominant political or social ideologies are re-used and provide a nucleus of continuity even as they are recast in new forms corresponding to the historical movement that they then begin to serve. The Mediterranean region—with its extensive history of human migration and ongoing exchange, collaboration, and collision between East and West, Muslim and Christian—is a remarkably rich context for such considerations of historical inheritance and reutilization. Thus, while it is true that a discussion that puts into dialogue the ancient, medieval, and modern confronts serious methodological challenges, I maintain that much more is lost in artificially isolating human thought and action. It was not by random coincidence that medieval texts depicted the Muslim “Saracens” with an inflammatory rhetoric of invasion and impending danger so reminiscent of their late antique predecessors, nor is modern political rhetoric isolated, uniformed, or innocent. And given the present mutability of global political and social equilibria, now more than ever it emerges critical to draw attention to inherited structures of collective identity formation and to illuminate the foundational constructs underlying the myths of origins and belonging.

In this article, therefore, I seek to challenge traditional narratives of uniform group membership through attention to a particular persuasive mechanism both pre-modern authors and contemporary public figures in Italy have
employed to construct belonging: affective language which plays upon the contrastings emotions of fear and reassurance. The following discussion draws inspiration not only from considerations of human psychology and scholarship on the narrative constitution of identity, but also from the turn to the “history of emotions” across the social sciences, which reflects the recognition that human conduct often stretches beyond the boundaries of rational action and cognitive behavior to the far more elusive and irrational realm of the passions. A history that has for long failed to take into account the intersection of reasoning and intuitive inclination has risked reducing both past and present occurrences to human calculation, and it is now being redressed by the rather pivotal realization that emotion, too, is very much political. In the ensuing cross-temporal discussion, therefore, I draw attention to a rhetorical strategy of in-group opposition to challengers characterized as violent, different, and particularly invasive, terms which draw upon feelings of fear, evoking collective insecurities of contamination and a loss of identity in order to create a unified opposition among those confronting the shared threat, disparate and divided though the structured “in-group” might itself be. Whether this applies to the pre-modern Saracen or to the modern migrant in Italy, such language falsely suggests a pre-existing, pure collectivity experiencing a dangerous subversion. It is time to challenge this narrative of unsullied belonging and to acknowledge the hybridity so characteristic of Italy and of the larger Mediterranean world.

I. A LATE ANTIQUE BEQUEST: PASSIO TEXTS AND THE THIN LINE OF SEPARATION BETWEEN CHRISTIAN AND “SARACEN”

Originally a marker of ethnic identity, the term “Saracen”—along with the similarly pejorative labels of “Hagarenes” and “Ishmaelites”—acquired religious significance in the seventh century following the explosive military gains of Muslim armies after the death of the prophet Muhammad (d. 632) which were accompanied by high rates of conversion to Islam. Under pressure to defend a Christianity that appeared to have fallen into sin and to have lost divine favor, religious leaders responded diversely to their new religious rivals. John of


Damascus, Theodore Abū Qurrah, and Nicetas of Byzantium are among those who composed apologetic or polemical treatises depicting Saracens as pagan idolaters, as precursors of the Antichrist, and as allies of demonic forces, and who provided model dialogues between Christians and Muslims to arm their Christian audiences with refutations of Islamic doctrine. Others, taking less of an intellectual and literary approach, publicly attacked the Muslim Prophet or demonstratively refused conversion before Muslim authorities, thereby deliberately inviting their executions as martyrs, which were then recorded in Passio texts. One of the two branches of pre-modern hagiographical writing—the other being the Vita, which will be considered subsequently—Passio texts followed models of suffering and self-sacrifice dating to earlier, fourth- or fifth-century persecutions under Roman and Zoroastrian authorities. By recounting the heroic struggles of Christian holy men and women who surrendered their earthly lives for the truth of the Christian heavenly city, such accounts provided models of confessional fortitude in order “to boost the flagging Christian morale” of their congregations and to keep open the door of repentance to Christians who had walked astray.

The most striking element of these early texts is the measured tenor of the documented interactions between Muslim and Christian. The Passio of the sixty soldiers captured at Gaza registers their six-month imprisonment preceding their martyrdom in 638–640, yet it is an execution undertaken with little sense of urgency or gratuitous persecution. The Passio of a certain Peter reports that the martyr was friends with many prominent Muslims, who gathered around his sick-bed and even tolerated Peter as he declared Muhammad a “false prophet” and a “precursor of the Antichrist.” Elias of Damascus served at a

14. These martyrs followed a well-established tradition of martyrdom dating back to the third and fourth centuries under Decius and Diocletian, but also to the martyrdoms of the fourth and fifth centuries under the Zoroastrian Persian rulers Shapur II (309–379), Yazdgerd (399–420), and Vahram V (420–438). See Marina Detoraki, “Greek Passions of the Martyrs in Byzantium,” in The Adgate Research Companion to Byzantine Hagiography, 61–101, esp. 73–74.
15. Mark N. Swanson, “The Martyrdom of Abd al-Masih, Superior of Mount Sinai (Qays al-Ghassāni),” in Syrian Christians under Islam: The First Thousand Years, ed. David Thomas (Brill, 2001), 107–129: 121–125. Swanson comments that the texts could function to edify a character, mark off the community, hold open the door of repentance, or instill a correct sense of martyrdom.
17. Hoyland, Seeing Islam, 355–357. All translations in this section on late antique Passiones are those of Hoyland or Swanson, and I direct readers to their texts for complete citations of the original manuscripts.
birthday party for a Muslim where Muslim guests tricked him into removing the *zunnar* belt which marked him a Christian so that he could dance more freely. In the morning, as he prepared for his Christian prayers, a guest asked, “Did you not deny your faith last night?” insinuating Elias was an apostate. But Elias did not meet his death for several years and then only out of the jealousy of his former employer. Nevertheless, it is clear that these texts circulated in oral form apart from the written text and reached beyond monastic or elite contexts to popular audiences and even to former Christians who had converted to Islam. That these texts resonated with the monastic and popular groups for which they were composed makes them enlightening for a history of mentalities, for the martyrs’ commitment to perseverance in spite of ongoing imprisonment under Muslim authorities, their verbal self-distancing from Islam, and the dedicated resistance of virtuous Elias to the deceit and trickery of the Muslims who convinced him to remove his *zunnar*, should all be seen as narrative techniques that dissociated the Muslim and Christian on both a religious and moral plane. As edifying texts, there is little doubt as to their pro-Christian point of departure and, in a discussion of “belonging,” it is clear that these texts sought to define or protect the boundaries of the Christian community. Yet an alternative reading less ascribed to the notion of a historically entrenched Christian-Muslim rivalry might lead one to linger on the closeness between Peter and his Muslim friends, or on the intellectual curiosity of the caliph before his Christian prisoner, raising questions regarding the entangled nature of interconfessional relations in a period where passage from one identity group to another could be quite fluid.

Indeed, the complexity of Christian-Muslim interaction in late antique *Passio* texts is exemplified by the noteworthy account of Qays ibn Rabīʿ ibn Yazīd al-Ghassānī, also known as ‘Abd al-Masih.\(^{21}\) An Arab Christian from ninth-century Arabia, ‘Abd al-Masih departed on pilgrimage to Jerusalem at the age of twenty, but his Muslim traveling companions convinced him to join them in their expeditions against the Byzantines. He agreed and for a lengthy thirteen years ‘Abd al-Masih is reported to have “participated in the *jihād* with them. He fought, killed, plundered, burned, and trampled every taboo as they did. And he prayed with them. He surpassed them in the severity of his rage and in the hardness of his heart against the Byzantines.”\(^{22}\) It was not until ‘Abd al-Masih entered a church in Ba‘albek and heard a passage from the Gospel that he began to weep, realizing what he had lost in abandoning his original Christian faith. This was a turning point both in his life and in the *Passio*. ‘Abd al-Masih re-converted to Christianity in Jerusalem and spent five years as a monk at the monastery of Mar Saba before five years as a steward at Mt. Sinai. He then sought martyrdom by publicly declaring his re-conversion to Christianity in Ramla, but by divine intervention was made invisible to the Muslims seeking to capture him after which time he returned to Mt. Sinai as abbot for seven years. His death only came when he departed again for Ramla to negotiate the unjust taxes demanded by Muslim officials. On the road, a member of the raiding army with which he had fought years before recognized ‘Abd al-Masih, denounced him before the governor (wāli) of Ramla and, after his refusal to convert to Islam, he was beheaded.

Here more than anywhere else, the facility with which ‘Abd al-Masih found his place within the Muslim ranks relays a sense of the social proximity and cultural similarities between Christian and Muslim in this early period, as well as the pragmatic fluidity of confessional alignment. As such, in the wider discourse of oppositional identity, the image of the Saracens that emerged from depictions across the genre of late antique *Passiones* was rather moderate. This was a time where Christians served in Muslim households, fought in Muslim wars, and could debate freely with the caliph. Clothing marked devotional affiliation, but appearances seemed otherwise similar in the Near East where pagan, Jewish, Zoroastrian, and Christian groups had long lived side by side, with the rise of Islam being one stride in a long series of shifting power relationships that extended over centuries. Yet such signs of cohabitation, while so appealing to


modern eyes seeking to complicate the meta-narrative of perpetual Muslim-Christian hostility, were unintentional inclusions to those who composed these texts. On the contrary, late antique authors were beginning to shape a persuasive language of antagonism to the Saracen, who in many ways appeared too close for comfort, while concurrently assigning to Christians qualities of moral superiority. Thus, it is in the text of the “Sixty Martyrs of Gaza” that we read how the “impious” and “godless Saracens” besieged “the Christ-beloved city of Gaza,” and of how the “Christ-holy soldiers” were brought before the emir ‘Amr ibn al-As, who was a “devil,” “impious,” “most cruel,” and “hateful to God.” Although not a Passio, in this same period the anonymous author of the Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius characterized the Muslims as “barbarian rulers,” “sons of destruction,” “spoilers,” “sent for desolation,” “abominable people,” “insolent and murderous, shedders of blood and spoilers” while depicting Christians as humble, pure, and devout.

A term that originally marked an ethnic group had thus not only acquired religious significance with the rise of Islam but in the Passiones had also adopted a negative connotation of destructiveness and impiety, which functioned alongside broader understandings of Islam as a carnal religion that placed emphasis on sexuality and violence. These depictions evidenced little familiarity with Islamic doctrine or belief, but such detail was irrelevant in achieving the primary aims of the texts, namely, the promotion of the Christian protagonists and the halting of conversion to Islam, well under way. Within this scope, the mystification of the Saracen assisted in his demonization, and this, in turn, was

25. Pseudo-Methodius, Apocalypse, 144–5; Tolan, Saracens, 48. While earlier, in 614, the Patriarch Sophronius of Jerusalem composed a synodical letter with a list of heretics, addressed to “our Christ-loving and most gentle emperors” in which he characterized the Saracens as “barbarians” who “ravage all with cruel and feral design, with impious and godless audacity” and called them “vile creatures” (See Ep. Synodica, PG 87, 3197D-3200A [p. 69]).
26. Tolan, Saracens, 166. Naturally such characterizations were not unique to the Muslims, and texts written by medieval Muslim authors characterized the Europeans with similar terms of barbarism and violence as well.
27. Sidney Griffith, “‘Melkites’, ‘Jacobites’ and the Christological Controversies in Arabic in Third/Ninth-Century Syria,” in Syrian Christians Under Islam: The First Thousand Years, ed. David Thomas (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 9–55; 9–10. Christian communities under Islamic rule often “adopted the Arabic language for ecclesiastical use,” most notably the Melkites who professed to be Byzantine orthodox while in culture and language “they belonged to the world of Islam.” Hoyland comments that apostasy was of great concern by the later eighth century, with mention in the Coptic Synaxary from
fundamental to the justification of Christian superiority and, ultimately, to the delineation of a distinctive community of belonging. Nonetheless it is specifically the language situating Saracen destructiveness in contrast to Christian purity which recalls the notion that emotion and affect are not isolated in individualized bodies but, rather, deeply intertwined with social and political structures of knowledge; the rhetorical choices of these ancient authors designated the writing of text, too, as an “emotional practice” that sought connection with an emotive and impressionable audience in an act that was hardly a random or innocuous undertaking. As such, the authors of these Passio texts should be seen as implicated and invested in a political project that sought to shape collective memory, feeling, thought, and, more broadly, the social structure of a society in which Christian institutions were coming to be eroded by the growing influence of rival Muslim communities.

This is far from an innocent process for, as Jan Assmann noted, “the participation structure of cultural memory has an inherent tendency to elitism,” but it is sensitivity to this fact that can illuminate the hierarchies of power at play. In the case of the Passio texts, the oppositional framing between the persecuting Muslim and the Christian martyr best reveals the insecurities experienced by the destabilized late antique Christian leadership rather than relationships on a popular level. Indeed, the closeness of interaction between Christians and Muslims who lived together, fought together, and celebrated together, suggests that the authors of Passio texts, rather than observing a confessional separation already in place, were consciously attempting to define difference and to structure separation from Muslims to whom, in actuality, they and their Christian constituents were eerily similar. Seeking to forestall the eclipse of Christian...
dominance in the Near East, a vocabulary of difference became a powerful tool for narrative self-defense and would be adopted as a strategy of collective preservation to be replicated in Umayyad Iberia in the eighth and ninth centuries, as well as in southern Italy and Sicily from the ninth century onwards.31

II. MEDIEVAL ITALO-GREEK HAGIOGRAPHY AND THE TRAUMA OF THE “SARACEN”

The beginning of the Muslim conquest of Sicily is widely dated to the year 827 with the landing of North African forces at Mazara del Vallo in the southwest corner of the island. Driven largely by opportunism and a desire for riches and captives, the conquest proceeded for roughly eighty years until the fall of Taormina in 902, and resulted in the establishment of a Muslim polity in Sicily that endured one hundred and fifty years.32 Muslim political and cultural domination was, however, in no way total; the western half of the island, with the Muslim capital of Palermo, was Islamicized and Arabized under the Aghlabid and Kalbid dynasties, while the east retained Greek language and custom.33 Muslim presence on the mainland remained largely indirect; economic exchange between Muslim Sicily and the mainland took place, as did raids, but the Muslims were unable to establish a constant peninsular presence apart from short-lived emirates in the ninth and tenth centuries.34 The temporariness of their mainland presence upheld a tenuous divide between “barbarian” Sicily and

31. Tolan, Saracens, chapter 4 on “Western Christian Responses to Islam (Eighth-Ninth Centuries),” 71-104.
32. I date the conquest from 827 to 902, ending with the fall of Taormina as by this point the Muslims controlled nearly the entire island although Byzantine forces recaptured Taormina in 912/913 and held it until 962.
34. The most well-known mainland emirate is that at Bari which lasted from 847-871, and which has been studied by Giosuè Musca, L’emirato di Bari, 847-871 (Edizione Dedalo, 1992). More recently, scholars have designated other southern cities as mainland emirates as well, including Taranto, Amantea, and Santa Severina. Muslims raiding mainland monasteries often captured locals who they then transported back to Sicily as slaves. On the division between Calabria and Sicily, see Stefano Caruso, “Sicilia e Calabria nell’agiografia storica italo-greca,” in Calabria cristiana: Società, religione, cultura nel territorio della diocesi di Oppido Mamertina-Palmi, ed. Sandro Leanza (Rubbettino, 1999), 563-604: 564.
the “Christian” mainland which was only unified when the Normans conquered Sicily in the late eleventh century. In the two centuries before the Norman conquest of the South, however, the Saracen occupied the position of a civilizational opponent in religious writings, including in Italo-Greek Vitae, which recounted the lives (rather than the martyrdoms) of illustrious local holy men and women but which shared resonant themes with the Passio texts particularly in their attitudes towards Muslims.

The Sicilian Saracen, as seen through Italo-Greek eyes, held two major continuities with his late antique predecessor: his function as a punishment for the collective sins of the Christians, and the ongoing threat of conversion he posed for Christians living in close proximity with Muslims, or indeed of crypto-Muslim infiltration. Yet the medieval Vitae also departed from the Passio texts that preceded them, not only through the absence of martyr figures but, more importantly, in the strengthened emphasis on Saracen violence. While voiced in the late antique Passio, the vocabulary of antagonism had come to be expanded and better structured by the tenth century, leaving little room for intellectual maneuvering between Christianity and Islam. A major reason for this was the relative newness of the Muslim in the Italian South; the Italo-Greek Saracen was not an old neighbor who had recently acquired a new confessional adherence but, rather, an unfamiliar arrival in the region. His foreignness also fueled the medieval emphasis on Saracen physical alterity, largely absent in the late antique Christian-Muslim encounters. As will be seen, rare and precious references to the darkness of the Saracen, his clothing, and his demonic appearance revealed his incongruity to Italo-Greek eyes and, indeed, at times his monstrosity.

If a single quality or characteristic of the Italo-Greek Saracen emerges from the Vitae, it lies in his violence. He raided, he plundered, he threatened, he

35. The Norman conquest of Sicily endured from 1061 to 1091.
36. Non-hagiographical accounts of the conquest of Sicily do play upon themes of martyrdom, such as in the Letter of the Monk Theodosius to the Archdeacon Leon on the Capture of Syracuse after the city fell in 878. For a discussion of this text, see Cristina Rognoni, “Au pied de la lettre? Réflexions à propos du témoignage de Théodose, moine et grammaticos, sur la prise de Syracuse en 878,” in La Sicile de Byzance à l’Islam. De l’archéologie à l’histoire, eds. Annliese Nef and Vivien Prigent (Paris, 2010), 205–228.
37. Akbari argued for the “separate yet linked nature of religious and geographical alterity in the medieval discourse of Orientalism” and its ties to “bodily, ethnic” difference (12).
destroyed, he enslaved, he killed. These qualities were consistent with what was known to be the Muslim’s internal “fiery and irascible” disposition, as

39. I am intentionally employing a masculine pronoun here, as female Muslims or Saracens never appear in the *Vitae.*

Map 1: Southern Italy and Sicily, the former divided between Greek and Latin influences, while the latter under Arab-Muslim rule from forces that had arrived from North Africa. The majority of the saints discussed here resided in Calabria, the region circled in black. Image source: Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Southern_Italy_topographic_map-blank.png. Accessed 12/22/2018.
defined in medieval conceptualizations of climactic zones and human temperament, and they were incorporated in the Italo-Greek *Vitae* with dehumanizing words of anathema.40 Vitale of Castronuovo’s (d. 994) sanctity was articulated in a time when the “impure and very filthy Hagarenes [were] pillaging and devastating all of the land,” and spreading “dread and panic over the people of Italy.”41 Luke of Armento (d. 993) foresaw from his monastery in Armento that Calabria would be “devoured by the bites of dogs,” by “people of a most invertebrate race,” “a most corrupt people” following a “religion of excess,” and his hagiographer pleaded that those taken captive taken would be liberated from the “wild beasts and lions.”42 In the *Vita* of Saba of Collesano (d. 995) the Saracens appeared six times though always as peripheral figures, a distanced but ever-imposing threat. They were “impious and detestable Hagarenes” who “filled everything with fear,” a “Saracen infestation” of “calculating” raiders, “hostile and detestable,” who “intruded to prey on the inhabitants of Calabria.”43 In Filareto the Younger’s (d. 1070) *Vita* they were “African barbarians” ruled by a “tyrant” who was filled “by deceit” and “puffed up with pride” and who “exult[ed] in audacity and insolence.”44 The emotional charge underlying such descriptions needs hardly be stressed.

The monks, hermits, and saints, on the other hand, could fall victim, but they were primarily the spiritual and physical contestants to the invaders and the only force able to overcome Saracen treacheries. Vitale of Castronuovo

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41. Vitale of Castronuovo, BHL 8697; *AASS* Martii II, 26–34. This appears in ¶ 23: *veneunt immundi & spurcissimi Agareni totam terram depraedantes & devastantes*. . . *irruit super habitantes Italian formido & pauor*. The translations in this section are my own, directly from the Latin as preserved in the *Acta Sanctorum* or edited *Vitae* where available, and from the Italian in the edited and translated *Vitae* where the Latin was unavailable.

42. Luke of Armento, BHL 4978; *AASS* Octobris VI, 337–41. See ¶ 5: *humani generis hostis infestissimus tantae nimirum religionis formam nequaquam ferens, gentem in nos pravissimam excitavit*. . . *canum morsibus devorandum*. It is then in ¶ 10 that the hagiographer pleads that the captives be released from the *ferae silvestres leonesque*.


confronted the Saracens alone when they came to raid his monastery and, although they sought to kill him, the saint was protected from their attacks by miraculous intervention. In a compelling display of his numinous power, Vitale then calmly ordered the Saracens to cease the spilling of Christian blood, to which they, in awe, agreed, before calmly departing.45 When Nicodemo of Kellarana (d. 990 or 1020) was captured by the Saracens who came to devastate his region, he began to pray and was mocked by the Muslim leader who asked him, “What use comes to you from this prayer? You should have prayed this would not have happened to you before falling into our hands.” The saint’s prayer was answered, however, and he emerged from captivity in similar fashion to the Biblical figure of Daniel, “undamaged among the lions.”46 Such personal encounters between saint and Saracen, textured though they may be, are also unfortunately rare in the Italo-Greek Vitae. Even when Luke of Armento encountered the Saracens in battle, the encounter was described without verbal exchange between the sides and thus with no voice attributed to the Muslims; rather, Luke dressed in military attire, chose the best men from the fortress at Armento, and charged forth into apocalyptic battle. In the midst of the struggle against “the greatly infesting enemies of the Christians,” Luke could be seen glowing angelically and riding “the most brilliant and most candid horse” across the battlefield.47

The vitriolic language the hagiographers employed in reference to the Muslims, in sharp contrast to the terms of angelic purity they assigned to the demeanor of the saints, was essential to the affective framing that promoted Italo-Greek oppositional identity to the Muslim Saracen.48 And this was not just the case in the Italo-Greek Vitae; Salvatore Cosentino identified more than thirty derogatory terms hagiographers of the medieval Italian South employed to express their “displeasure” for the Muslims, ranging from the

47. Luke of Demenna, ¶ 11. This imagery, presumably, recalled saint George defeating the dragon.
48. Another moment that reaffirms this contrast appears in the Vita of Vitale, ¶ 23. After the saint was already dead, the bishop of a nearby town—described as vir utique magni meriti & multa honestate praefulgens (“a man shining with great merits and honesty”)—fearing that Vitale’s relics might be stolen by raiding Muslims, opened his sepulcher only to find Vitale’s bones habitu vestitum Angelico (dressed in “Angelic habit”) and ossa . . . splendenta sicut stellae (“resplendent like stars”).

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relatively mild “impure,” “cursed,” and “unbaptized,” to the more severe indictments of “blood-suckers,” “servers of Satan,” “wild” and “assassins.” A direct reverberation of ancient Roman and then Byzantine opposition to foreign tribes on its borders, the emphasis on the term “barbarian” points to a certain unintelligibility of the other, a statement of his inferiority in intellect and civilizational order. Most fundamentally, however, the acerbic language fortified the persuasive aims that drove the accounts, for there is no doubt that they meant to elicit sympathy for the victimized populations rather than for the “impious and detestable” Muslim “barbarians” and “invaders.” In this complex rhetorical process, informed both by preceding models of Christian-Muslim opposition and reinforced by an impersonal treatment of the Saracen in the Vitae, affect thus became “incarnate” in text as a witness to the alarm over moral and religious contamination.

Yet the emphasis on Saracen alterity and subsidiarity would also have gained viability from the rarely-mentioned but certainly normalized visual cues of difference between “the indigenous” and “the outsider,” manifest in skin complexion, mannerisms, and dress. An episode from the Vita of Nilo of Rossano (d. 1004) immediately comes to mind in which local children, calling him a Bulgarian, Armenian, or a Frank, chased the saint as he entered his hometown with an animal hide on his back; although unable to identify his provenance with certainty, in appearance Nilo was an interloper (but clearly not a Muslim). Sensitivity to the alterity of “the Saracen body,” on the other hand, rested upon the convergence of his religious difference that was externally manifest, for the Muslim both internally and externally embodied darkness and demonism.

50. Rognoni, “Au pied de la lettre?,” 217. For instance, in the Letter of Theodosius on the siege of Syracuse, the word “barbarian” is used for enemies, “showing the semantic field within which he operated,” while the Greeks were polemistai gigantes, “great combatants,” true aristoi, “courageous men,” who fight despite hunger and injury and suffering out of love for Christ, and are even given the title beatus or beatissimus, “blessed” or “holy.”
51. This is a reference to the article by Damien Boquet and Piroska Nagy, “Une histoire des émotions incarnées,” Médiévales, Vol. 61 (Fall 2011): 5–24.
of his monastery, “their faces were transformed into the aspect of demons.”54 And Nilo of Rossano encountered “a multitude of Saracens,” likely merchants resting in the shade on the side of the road, but he was terrified for they were black Ethiopians who, “gazing with their wild eyes, and with their fierce expressions, resembled many demons.”55 The foreign and dark external appearance of the Saracens—in this case conflated with the category “Ethiopian” without acknowledgement of difference between the two—was understood to mirror their implied allegiance to demonic forces even before they had acted, and indeed the historical irony regarding the inheritance of intellectual paradigms comes across in this scene more than in any other. Here, the fear-inspiring Ethiopian Saracens simply offered the saint bread and words of encouragement for his journey, but Nilo departed pouring forth tears of gratitude for his safe emergence from this near-death experience; by all regards, his hagiographer was intellectually unwilling or unable to admit the possibility of inter-religious understanding or the flexibility of social relations, whether due to the conventions of the genre, or to the impersonalized, marginalized, and mystified status of the Muslim in medieval southern Italy.

This was not the only mention in the Italo-Greek Vitae of individuals characterized as Ethiopians, presumably a general term for sub-Saharans of very dark skin who arrived with the Muslim armies, and who were equally distressing to the Italo-Greek populations as the Arab or Berber Saracens. In the Vita of Elias lo Speletta (“the Cave-dweller,” d. 960) residents of Seminara, in Calabria, encountered an Ethiopian “of great size” near the saint’s monastery, who complained that Elias had driven him away. As a result, the Ethiopian stated, he was journeying to a nearby town to join his companions and wage war and, hearing this, the residents of Seminara “understood that he was a demon, and that thus he spoke.”56 The soul of a brother in Luke of Armento’s

54. Vitale of Castronuovo, ¶ 14: Interrogantes autem de rebus & animalilibus monasterii, in daemonum facies transformatantur. . .
55. Nilo of Rossano, ¶ 5: Non longe profectis, en multitude Sarracenorum ad dextram sub nemore stratorum, nigrorum Aethiopum, feris intuentium oculis, truces rutilus habentium & omnino daemonibus consimilium.
monastery, Nicholas, stated that his soul had been led into hell and for three days his body had been “ravaged” day and night by three “Ethiopians by appearance, near the rugged cliffs of Armento.” He was saved when a mysterious “very candid old man, clad in priestly clothing, approached those black people,” and drove them away. Nicholas, stunned, remained silent for three days, “after which he narrated that they came out from hell.”57 There is the instance of Nilo of Rossano who, while meditating in his cave, was visited by the devil “in the form of an Ethiopian, armed with a mighty club,” who hit him unconscious.58 And there is, further, the episode of Marina of Scanio (d. 1062) who, in order to avoid her parents’ wishes for marriage so that she might follow her religious calling, recounted to them a fabricated dream in which “a multitude of Ethiopians” appeared to her, “each one dark in the face,” each inspiring “terror” as “some gnashed their teeth and dragged closer to [her]. Others, armed with weapons of war of all sorts, hit [her] and covered [her] with lashes.” Claiming insanity as a result of this nighttime terror, Marina thus evaded her parents’ desires for her marriage, though it remains unclear if she had ever personally encountered Ethiopians in her life.59

The dark and demonic nature of the Saracen, misleadingly conflated with that of the Ethiopian, touches upon the problematic notion of medieval or late ancient “race.”60 The understanding that a murky external complexion was not only linked to physical monstrosity but was also understood to symbolize the compromised moral state of the individual’s soul, was an idea inherited from antiquity, and for centuries justified the uneven distribution of power

57. Luke of Armento, ¶ 12: . . . e fratribus quidam Nicolaus nomine decederet, eiusque anima ad inferos duceret; sed corpus tres Ipsos dies, totidemque noxibus per aperas Armenti rapatas tres aspect Aethiopes raptaverunt. . . ece tibi senex candidissimus, sacerdotalibus indutus vestibus, quo appropinquante, fugere nigerrimi illi, horribili cum clamore mugituque coeperunt. . . Sed Nicolaus cum haec triduum siluisset, cuncta post, quae eis in inferis evenerant, enarravit.

58. Nilo of Rossano, ¶ 33: . . . apparuit illi visibilis aethiopis specie diabolus, clavam manu tenens, qua cum caput eius percussisset, stravit humi semimortuo.

59. Martirio di Santa Lucia. Vita di Santa Marina, ed. Giuseppe Rossi Taibbi (Palermo, 1959). The Vita of Marina is presented in both Greek and Italian, and I am citing the Italian here for ease of translation. See ¶ 6 where Marina claims that “una notte, mentre dormo nel mio lettino, mi appaiono una moltitudine di Etiopi. . . tutti l’uno dopo l’altro tenebrosi nei loro volti, suscitando in me terrore, alcuni digrignavano i denti e si trascinavano verso di me; altri, armati nelle mani di strumenti di guerra di ogni sorta, mi baravano e mi coprivano di lividure, me infelice. Da allora, sconvolta dal terrore, sono pazza e invasa. . .”

60. For a recent discussion of medieval race, see Geraldine Heng, The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages (Cambridge University Press, 2018), and particularly page 23 for the argument for why medievalists must use the term “race” in their analyses rather than solely terms of “othering.”
benefiting those at the ethnographic center. Yet, scholars have recently argued that pre-modern race extended beyond modern preoccupations with “body-centered phenomena” to intersect with categories of class, religion, and culture, rendering the darkness of one’s skin only one strand within a bundle of differentiating factors that propagated political and social hierarchies. Thus, while the dark Saracen body was inscribed with indications of Muslim religious and moral alterity, broader societal connotations rendered skin color political by evoking the greater threats it posed to the social or political status quo. Naturally, the saints embodied and perpetuated the ideological foundations that made such structures appear natural, for the saint, through his physical appearance as well as status and comportment, perpetuated the opposition between dark and light, danger and protection, and served as an anchor for the preservation of pre-established boundaries of belonging.

Of the Italo-Greek Vitae there is only one figure, John Theristes, that offers a glance into both the visual markers of Muslim-Christian difference, as well as the muted but existent anxiety regarding the crossing of communal boundaries. After Muslims raided his family home in Calabria and took his mother prisoner, John was born in Palermo to a Christian mother and Muslim father, and had a dual upbringing; his Vita states that he was raised according to Muslim tradition by his father and, in secret, as a Christian by his mother. At the age


62. Heng comments that race “can function as class...as ‘ethnicity’ and religion...or as sexuality” in addition to culture. See Heng, “Invention of Race, I,” 319.


65. The original version of the Vita has been lost, but two later versions survive from the thirteenth century, and they have some differences. In one, John is conceived in Palermo after his mother is captured by the Saracens, whereas in the other John’s mother was already pregnant with him at the time of her capture. For a discussion of these versions, see Mario Re and Cristina Rognoni, Cristiani e musulmani nella Sicilia islamica. La testimonianza delle fonti letterarie italogreche, in Les dynamiques de l’islamisation en Méditerranée centrale et en Sicile: Nouvelles propositions et découvertes récentes, eds. Annlise Nef and Fabiola Ardizzone (École Française de Rome, 2014): 119–128, especially 122–123. Re and Rognoni propose that the version in which John’s father was Christian was written later to conceal his Muslim paternity.
of fourteen, however, and with his mother’s encouragement, John departed for Calabria to be baptized but, as he landed upon the shore, “the men of that region, having seen him dressed in barbaric habit, believed him to be a barbarian and led him to the bishop [italics added].”  

After undergoing several trials to demonstrate his religious sincerity, John was baptized and began an illustrious religious career on the mainland. Nevertheless, his initial reception in Calabria bespeaks the anxieties surrounding the presence of crypto-Muslims who might further blur or confuse boundaries of authentic belief in an Italo-Greek religious community pressured by Muslim military advances in Sicily and on the mainland. Without providing specific details regarding John’s vestments, much less evidence of his “racial” alterity, the episode demonstrates how details of clothing or mannerism would have served as visual markers of ethnic and religious belonging, cueing the proper structures of social interaction. His eventual acceptance suggests movement between identity groups was possible under the appropriate conditions, while nevertheless recalling the challenges the Christian community faced after several generations of Christian-Muslim cohabitation, intermarriage, as well as practical conversion for economic benefits and political protection that had resulted in fluid ethnic and confessional alignments.

Indeed, the perpetuation of the oppositional framework outlined broadly in the Italo-Greek Vitae—between upright, devout, and angelic Christian, and impious, dark, demonic, and violent Saracen—undeniably concealed, simplified, and flattened what were otherwise rather complex relationships. It is worth remembering that, in the tenth and eleventh centuries, to which the main body of Italo-Greek Vitae date, Muslim presence in the Italian South was neither new nor absolute. Muslim families had long lived in Sicily, in some cases for up to two centuries, and they had also settled in southern Calabria. Across these regions naming patterns reflect intermarriage, in many cases giving rise to what Henri Bresc and Anniliese Nef termed the “mzarabs” of Sicily. Studies of


coinage, epigraphy, architecture, calendars, and liturgies further attest to the overlap of Greek and Arab-Muslim influences, all of which, while far from signs of peaceful *convivencia*, complicate the narrative of a long-enduring and primordial opposition to Muslim presence.\(^{69}\) The partiality of hagiographical narratives such as those explored here is a long-standing characteristic of the genre; as warned by late antique scholar David Frankfurter, “we must remember that these extremes of difference that the hagiographer imposes on the [in his case, pagan-Christian] narrative in fact masked a considerable fluidity in social and religious practice.”\(^{70}\) In both the late antique and medieval contexts the pragmatism of cohabitation and the unpredictability of affective ties could loosen boundaries of separation, and, in both cases, the demonization of the Muslim in the trope of the Saracen was a conscious authorial strategy to delineate religious, social, and political group boundaries that, evidently, risked becoming uncomfortably loose.\(^{71}\)

Notably, in the Italo-Greek hagiographies that date to the tenth and eleventh centuries the negative focus on the Saracen overshadows by far the instances in which conflicts between Orthodox Greeks and Catholics appear. On the contrary, the *Vitae* dating to the tenth and eleventh centuries depict the Greek monks seeking refuge in Latin lands during Muslim attacks, or intervening in disputes between Lombard princes, with rare emphasis on doctrinal disputes between the churches.\(^{72}\) When present, Greek-Latin resentment rested primarily

\(^{69}\) Evidence of peaceful interaction between Muslim and non-Muslim includes the sympathetic provisions of food or money across ethnic and religious lines, evidence of linguistic fluency between groups, and demonstrations of political support. These instances require further exploration.


\(^{71}\) Such dispraise was not, of course, the only possible way to react to the presence of unwanted opponents. When the Normans gained power in southern Italy, their chroniclers also composed anti-Muslim propaganda, some of which used the strategy of *damnatio silentii* to erase the Muslim legacy while others eclipsed Muslim presence by focusing on the Normans’ role as holy saviors of the South. See Luciano Catalioto, “*Nefanda impietas Sarraecorum:* la propaganda antimusulmana nella conquista normanna del Valdemone,” in *Comunicazione e propaganda nei secoli XII e XIII: atti del convegno internazionale*, eds. Rossano Castano, Fortunata Latella, Tania Sorrenti (Rome, 2007), 173–186. In both instances, this was a conscious authorial strategy.

\(^{72}\) Nilo of Rossano, for instance, went to Latin lands to be tonsured when officials in Rossano issued a ruling to Greek monasteries forbidding that he be tonsured (Nilo of Rossano, ¶ 5). Saints who fled to Latin territories because of Muslim invasions of Calabria include Nilo of Rossano and Saba of Collesano. Nilo also intervened in Capua over a succession dispute (¶ 79), and visited Montecassino as an honored guest, where he was invited to perform the Greek rite and stayed up through the night discussing with the monks of Montecassino the differences in doctrine.
upon the aggressiveness of local Latin Lombard lords seeking to benefit from the wealth of religious houses and monasteries, rather than from confessional difference or competition. The presence of Jews, too, is overall negligible in the *Vitae*, though Jewish communities are well documented throughout the medieval Italian South. This lack of emphasis on confessional alignment is in some ways rather striking, however, given that the dangers posed by internal, hidden “heretics” blurring the boundaries of belief often loomed greater in ancient and medieval minds than did those of non-believers or apostates. And in fact this was to be a short-lived peace; while they merit separate consideration, in the *Vitae* that date to Norman rule, alongside the diminishing Muslim threat, a “Greek versus Latin” delineation emphasizing orthodoxy and orthopraxy became increasingly common as Italo-Greek institutions struggled to retain their religious, social, and political standing in the face of Latin-Norman rule.

The overwhelming emphasis on the trope of the Saracen in the pre-Norman *Vitae* draws attention to the most fundamental and effectual function of oppositional identity: the ability to overlook fragmentation, difference, and competition in select resident populations for the sake of posing a unified resistance to what materializes as a more looming and pressing threat. While such structuring of identity group alliances is less visible in the context of the late antique *Passiones*, in which similarities and entanglements between Muslim and Christian extended deeper into a shared past and common culture, this idea gained a fuller expression in the medieval southern Italian context in which ethnic and confessional differences were more pronounced. It was strategy of response, then, that the Italo-Greek authors of the *Vitae* looked beyond local

75. Christian concern with heresy dated to the early centuries of Christianity, including to the writings of Origen. Heretics are more threatening or subversive than are non-believers or apostates because, as stated by Lewis Coser in *Functions of Social Conflict* (New York: Free Press, 1964), 70: “by upholding the group’s central values and goals...[but] proposing different means to the end or various interpretations of the official creed...the heretic proposes alternatives where the group wants no alternatives to exist.” This is cited by Jacques Berlinerbau, “Toward a Sociology of Heresy, Orthodoxy, and Doxa,” *History of Religions*, Vol. 40, No. 4 (May, 2001): 327–351, at 335. See also Lester R. Kurtz, “The Politics of Heresy,” *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 88, No. 6 (May, 1983): 1085–1115, or, for a broader discussion, John B. Henderson, *The Construction of Orthodoxy and Heresy: Neo-Confucian, Islamic, Jewish, and Early Christian Patterns* (New York, 1998).
76. The *Vitae* of Luke of Isola Capo Rizzuto (d. 1114) and Bartholomew of Simeri (d. 1150) express the growing tension between the Greek and Latin churches.
sources of doctrinal, social, or political competition in a landscape that was far from homogenous to posit a diversified Greek-Latin “us” against a broad Muslim “them.” Such delineation of a broadly inclusive “in-group” demonstrates the flexibility within the psychology of belonging, as well as the constructive role of oppositional identity in creating a sense of cohesion where none might otherwise exist. The process elucidated here is mirrored in Italian debates on the migrant Other today.

III. FROM PRE-MODERN TO MODERN: THE ITALIAN CRISIS OF IDENTITY AND THE “INVASION” OF THE MIGRANT

Twenty-first century Italy, while a long departure from the worlds of the late antique martyrs and medieval Italo-Greek saints, contains its own anxieties about group belonging and the identity of the, in this case national, community. Italy’s weak national identity dates to the period of Italian Unification (1861–1871) which introduced a formal political coherence to the peninsula that was otherwise highly fragmented by geographical region, linguistic dialect, and local tradition, and where antagonism between the industrialized, wealthier North and the agricultural, poorer South gave rise to the troublesome “Southern Question.” This regionalism and familism persist today and, rather than “leftovers from traditional localism,” are considered “expressions of the crisis of the nation state”; studies reflect a general distrust among Italians in the efficiency and justice of governmental institutions, political parties, and politicians—a cynicism rendered ever more acute by the sensation of living in a socially and environmentally unstable world. In this context, the

77. Non-hagiographical evidence of Greek-Latin alliance against Muslims also exists, but the discussion here does not allow for it.

78. The change of historical context here shifts the discussion from a regional emphasis on southern Italy and Sicily to a peninsular one, emphasizing “national” identity in Italy. While recognizing the complexity of considerations that arise in such a transition in temporal and geographical focus, I assert that the delineations of similarity/difference and the construction of notions of belonging studied here stand regardless of time and place.

79. Antonio Gramsci addressed the issue early on and can be read in translation in The Southern Question (Guernica Editions, 2005). Two more recent studies are Italy’s Southern Question: Orientalism in One Country, ed. Jane Schneider (New York: Berg, 1998) and Nelson Moe, The View from Vesuvius: Italian Culture and the Southern Question (Los Angeles: The View from Vesuvius, 2002).

80. Alessandro Cavalli, “Reflections on Political Culture and the ‘Italian National Character’,” Daedalus, Vol. 130, No. 3 (Summer, 2001): 119–37, at 127. Cavalli comments, “We cannot say that Italy has higher levels of familism and lower levels of civic spirit than other Western European countries. What separates Italy is a markedly higher level of distrust in institutions (especially the government, Parliament, political parties, and the trade unions) and a correlative skepticism about
presence of immigrants from Eastern Europe, Africa, and the Middle East, which has been increasing over the past thirty years and particularly over the last ten, has inspired a sense of “the Italian us” in reaction to the threats of the functioning of the democracy.” (122). Natale Ammaturo, La dimensione della solidarietà nella società globale (FrancoAngeli, 2005): 36, states that in Italy, “a culture of uncertainty and insecurity has become diffuse.”
destabilization migrants pose to Italian identity. This is a discourse replicated across much of Europe, most notably in France, Germany, the United Kingdom, in Hungary, and in Poland.81 While there is no single body of texts that adequately mirrors the portrayals in the Passiones or Vitae examined previously, a range of modern political and analytical sources confirm similar themes and tensions despite the differences in genre.

As reported in February 2017 by the Italian National Institute of Statistics, the migrant population in Italy numbers roughly 5 million in a country of 60 million, 44% of whom come from eastern Europe, 17% from Africa, and 17% from Asia.82 The shape of immigration into Europe changed markedly following the 2011 outburst of political uprisings across the Arab World but, for Italy, it was the ousting of Mu’ammarr Ghaddafi in Libya and the resurgence of armed militias and smuggling networks profiting from human trafficking that resulted in increased migrant landings on Lampedusan and Sicilian shores.83 Public discourse rarely addresses the reasons for their arrival—not least the residues of Italian colonial and neo-colonial practice in Somalia, Eritrea, Ethiopia, or Libya—but where modern discussions of the migrant find parallels with the pre-modern texts examined thus far is in the rhetoric of invasion that some Italian politicians and media outlets employ in describing immigration. The earliest such occurrence in this context can be dated to 1990/1, when Albanian migrants arrived on the eastern Italian shores and at which point “images of the overcrowded boat spread around the world, becoming icons of an unsustainable and unexpected ‘invasion’ that had shocked public opinion.”84

81 Anti-immigrant sentiment has become increasingly pronounced in all of these countries over 2017 and 2018.
82 The figure of five million was extracted in February 2017 from the website of the Italian National Institute of Statistics (Istituto nazionale di statistica, www.istat.it/it/immigrati). The more specific figures are drawn from a study by the Italian Ministry of the Interior extending from 2008 to 2013: Dati statistici sull’immigrazione in Italia dal 2008 al 2013 e aggiornamento 2014, Sistema Statistico Nazionale (SISTAN), Ministero dell’Interno. Immigrants from Eastern Europe come primarily from Romania, Albania, and Ukraine, those from Africa are largely Moroccan and Senegalese, and those from Asia are Chinese and Bangladeshi. Further concerns, however, center on children born to migrants in Italy, and marriages between Italians and foreigners.
83 For a very useful and comprehensive discussion of current migration patterns as well as national and supra-national policies relating to migration, see Maurizio Ambrosini, ed., Europe: No Migrant’s Land? (Italian Institute for International Political Studies, 2016).
84 Eva Garau, “Quale cittadinanza? La legislazione italiana sull’immigrazione attraverso le lenti della discourse analysis,” in Verso una cittadinanza universale?, ed. F. Marcelli (Naples: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 2013), 4. A study by Rossella Palomba and Alessandra Righi titled That Day When the Albanians Invaded Italy solidified the sentiment. In its original language, it can be found at Rossella Palomba, Alessandra Righi, Quel giorno che gli albanesi invasero l’Italia: gli atteggiamenti...
Although the number of Albanian immigrants was low at that time, “an invasion syndrome was cultivated” then, and has persisted as immigrant bodies have increased and diversified.85

Scholars of immigration have observed that, “indeed, politicians and journalists have commonly employed terms like ‘massive invasion’ and ‘plague’ to describe the phenomenon,” and that “the prevailing images used when talking about immigration have been that of a ‘threat’ or that of ‘an invading and besieging army.’”86 This is a theme most strongly reiterated by the Italian political Right, with its base in the north of Italy, where the majority of immigrants settle. Matteo Salvini, when he was Federal Secretary of the Right-Wing Lega Nord party, stated, “It is urgent to block the invasion,” and in a 2016 interview called the migrant inflow a “desired, financed, and organized invasion.”87 Since he became Italian Minister of the Interior in June of 2018, he has taken many steps to move in this very direction. Nicola Molteni, a depute of the Lega Nord, expressed outrage that, for former Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi and for the Italian political Left, “there is no alarm, no invasion, no emergency! . . . Switzerland is controlling its borders and pushing them back at the frontier. Our government? It accepts them without regulation opening the doors to invasion. Madness!”88 In October 2016, the conservative newsarticle Il giornale posted an article headlined “From Libya, the bomb on Italy: 360 thousand migrants departing,”89 and an article from July 2017 warned that “the immigrants are more numerous than the barbarians who destroyed Rome.”90 This sensationalized rhetoric affirms the sentiment stated explicitly in 2009 by former

85. This is part of a quote from Jean-Léonard Touadi from an interview by the Human Rights Watch on May 28, 2010. Touadi was a black parliamentarian in the House of Deputees in Italy. See Human Rights Watch, Everyday Intolerance: Racist and Xenophobic Violence in Italy (2011), 6.
Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi: “I am against a multi-ethnic society.”

While most strongly and explicitly advocated by the Italian political Right, such sentiments have been voiced by elected officials across the political spectrum, in the media, and by schoolchildren. To be certain, the question of immigration was also central to the recent Italian elections, held in March 2018, which saw the political re-emergence of Berlusconi and the ongoing rise in prominence of anti-immigration groups under current Minister of the Interior Salvini.

Emphasis on the immigrant “invasion” is an affective strategy that relies upon emotions of fear and collective insecurity to reproduce an oppositional discourse between what emerges as “the unified Italian” and the irregular migrant. The resultant implied and highly deceptive notion of a “pure” or “homogenous” Italy is a direct evocation of the central pillar underlying the nation-state project of the nineteenth century—that implied link “between a (ethnicised) ‘culture’ and its ‘natural habitat’”—in which belonging is determined primarily by geographical place of origin, and a human body which comes from elsewhere cannot but represent an uneasy source of infiltration.

An enlightening articulation of this reactionary sentiment was expressed by a

92. HRW, Everyday Intolerance, 7.
93. HRW, Everyday Intolerance, 11. A 2008 study by Rome’s “La Sapienza” University, for instance, found that media portrayals of migrants in Italy were overwhelmingly negative, predominantly emphasizing immigrants’ relation to crime or threats to security rather than the forces driving immigration, the contributions new arrivals present to Italian society, or the implications of the racism they experience. In fact, the study concluded that “only 26 out of 5,684 television news stories about immigrants did not relate to crime or security issues.” It is titled “Immigrati nei media congelati negli stereotipi di ‘criminale, maschio, e clandestine,’” Unimondo.org. Dec. 21, 2009. See John E. Richardson and Monica Colombo, “Continuity and Change in Anti-Immigrant Discourse in Italy: An Analysis of the Visual Propaganda of the Lega Nord,” Journal of Language and Politics, Vol. 12, No. 2 (2013): 180–202, for a study on Right-wing visual propaganda regarding immigration.
94. Flavia Cangià and Camilla Pagani, “National Borders and Emotions in Italian Youths’ Views on Immigration,” Etnofoor, Vol. 26, No. 1 (2014): 107–24, at 114. This survey of Italian students up to age 18 found that they “often used the image of an ‘invasion’ of immigrants landing on the coasts... [and] associated this image with social degradation, with the loss of cultural identity, of ‘peace’ or ‘stability.’” A Pew Research Center poll from July 11, 2016 reported that over half of Italians feel that “having an increased number of people of different races, ethnic groups and nationalities” in the country makes it a worse place to live.
sixteen-year old Italian student who commented, “In my opinion every country must exclusively have its own people like Italy has the Italian people, Africans have their own homeland that is called Africa and America has Americans.”

The terror of contamination is so strong in Italy, however, that throughout 2017 both Italian political leaders and sizeable portions of the public continued to reaffirm their commitment to *ius sanguinis* (“right of blood”) over *ius soli* (“right of soil”) citizenship. The evident dedication to principles of national purity and homogenization, and the resultant deployment of prescriptive formulations seeking to preclude children of immigrants born on Italian soil from claiming Italian citizenship, has shifted the discourse of belonging and invasion from a question of land quite literally to that of the blood running through one’s veins.

This propensity echoes what anthropologist Clifford Geertz identified in the 1970s as a politics of primordialisms in which the structure of the (in this case, Italian) nation-state rests not upon a widespread adherence to post-Enlightenment standards or ideals of civil society but is rooted within primordial sentiments of blood-allegiance, territoriality, language, and culture.

To Geertz, the modern aspiration to supersede tribalism and parochialism for higher ideals of collective existence comes to be hindered by the perseverance of disjointed foundations of group allegiances, in which ethnocentrism persists even while it is reframed and modernized. And, indeed, the complexities made evident in the paradox of a state’s self-representation as modern, enlightened, and progressive alongside its promulgation of social and legal frameworks encoded with primordialisms, while not unique to Italy, is very pronounced in this context. In fact, the contrast between anti-immigrant rhetoric and political action is rendered particularly poignant when one recalls that irregular migrants fleeing political and economic instability in their home nations arrive to Italy, and to Europe more broadly, only after passing through

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97. Cangià and Pagani, “National Borders and Emotions,” 115. This was a 16-year old female student. Cangià and Pagani comment that the more fundamental expression of destabilization felt by the student was that “crossing borders and especially ‘letting immigrants cross the border’ become synonymous of blurring boundaries between self and others...[and] losing one’s sense of belonging.”

98. This right for those born on Italian soil to take Italian citizenship has long been debated and would have huge implications for children of migrants.


intricate international and domestic trade networks that profit from the trafficking of human bodies.¹⁰¹

Indeed, the drafting of local and national exclusionary policies to ensure the civil, social, cultural, and economic marginalization of irregular migrants conceals the very significant points that immigration into Italy is neither a new phenomenon nor peripheral to the very functioning of the state. The reliance of the Italian government on flexible and low-wage underground migrant labor since the 1990s has been well documented, and it is of little surprise that irregular migrants are critical to manufacturing in the industrial sectors in the northern peninsula, to agricultural production in the south, as well as for domestic labor, often under exploitative and inhumane conditions.¹⁰² The contradiction inherent in the migrant condition in Italy has been perceptively studied by scholar of migrant labor in Italy and Spain, Kitty Calavita, who has observed that states simultaneously “construct, exploit, and denounce immigrant marginality,” leaving the migrant suspended in a state of “institutionalized exclusion” in which s/he has little voice.¹⁰³ A rhetoric of invasion which fails to account for these complexities can hardly be detached from its function as a strategy of affective persuasion centered on human bodies whose function within Italian national borders is far more composite and fundamental than such representations admit.


¹⁰³ Calavita, Immigrants at the Margins, 210 and 156.
Underlying the xenophobic discrimination and marginalization of irregular migrants within Italy is the racial dimension of migration, whereby skin color not only immediately signals difference but also implies the inability to adapt.\textsuperscript{104} Emblematic of this line of thought is the 1996 Italian beauty pageant in which Denny Mendez of Dominican origins became the first black Miss Italy.\textsuperscript{105} Her victory was contested, with one judge commenting, “I would like [the winner] . . . to be the mirror of this eternal Italy and not the copy of another country, another culture” and the host stating, “A black girl can’t be Miss Italy. It’s not in the rules.” The vote was subsequently opened to Italian home audiences, and while Mendez received over one-third of the votes, the judges’ statements resounded: it is preferable to maintain a status quo of identity and privilege. That two decades have transpired since Mendez’s rescinded title underscores the longevity of resistance to the adoption of any manner of revisionary stance regarding the convergence of race and Italian identity. Significantly, the theme was revived recently, in September of 2017, when Samira Lui, born in northern Italy to an Italian mother and Senegalese father, qualified for the top three in the Miss Italy pageant and finished in third, prospectively having lost a significant number of votes after a judge erroneously stated on national television that she was from Senegal.\textsuperscript{106} As observed by Michela Ardizzoni, who wrote on the withdrawal of Mendez’s title in 1996, beauty pageants “constitute a particular kind of symbolic embodiment of nationalism, where the aesthetic and external facets of identity occupy the most tangible and commodified level of


\textsuperscript{105} This case is discussed in Michela Ardizzoni, “Redrawing the Boundaries of Italianness: Televised Identities in the Age of Globalisation,” \textit{Social Identities}, Vol. 11, No. 5 (2005): 509–30. Denny Mendez was 18, and a naturalized Italian citizen.

\textsuperscript{106} Lui commented, “My mother is Italian, I was born in Italy, and I feel 100% Italian . . . that comment by Facchinetti [the judge] influenced the public home votes, particularly in the historical time in which we are living. Inevitably I feel anger and delusion: I was convinced that I could represent my region and Italy.” See Giuseppe Babbo, “Gaffe di Facchinetti con la miss di colore: <<Viene dal Senegal>>. Ma lei lo corregge: <<Veramente sono nata in Friuli>>,” \textit{Il Messaggero}, Sept. 11, 2017.
representation.” Although, in this case, the discourse revolves around the visual dimension of belonging rather than upon a language of inclusion or exclusion, the underlying premise remains the same: that of a pure Italian identity which risks becoming blemished by foreign blood.

The prioritization of whiteness in European national identities is part of what scholars have termed the “Europeanization of Europe,” wherein whiteness and Christianity have been defined stable and consistent characteristics of European identity extending to the medieval period; it is this framing that makes the presence of brown, often Muslim, bodies threatening to the established social order. But the focus on an external enemy has also been constructive, for the visibility and social pressures posed by the arrival of migrants from sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East has shifted attention—however temporarily—away from internal fragmentations in Italy, diminishing antagonistic discussion of dissimilarities between northerner and southerner. As a result, the celebration of unique local and regional histories, cuisines, dialects, and appearance are increasingly fashioned as diverse expressions of “Italianness,” expanding a sense of collective belonging that embraces peninsular diversity while making opposition to those from foreign lands ever more pronounced. Black and brown bodies, silenced, mystified, and veiled in a rhetoric of “invasion,” have become personifications of the fear of change and the loss of a clear sense of belonging in an uncomfortably unstable and fluctuating world. Overlooked in this context is the reality that, as a longue durée consideration of human movement in the Mediterranean broadly and on the Italian peninsula specifically makes clear, the possibility for a homogenous and untainted Italy has never existed.

110. One place in which they have been voiced, however, is in novels and literature by migrants, as well as scholarly studies of this literature. An example is Simone Brioni, The Somali Within: Language, Race, and Belonging in ‘Minor’ Italian Literature (Legenda, 2015). Brioni divides her study into three sections titled “Language,” “Race,” “Belonging,” and a conclusion on “Becoming” in all of which she admirably traces expressions of the Somali migrant experience in Italy.
CONCLUSION: DEFINING BELONGING BETWEEN PRE-MODERN AND MODERN

The themes raised in this article converge upon an epistemological query into how it is that human collectivities create a sense of belonging in relation to those marked Other, whether that other be an ancient neighbor, ally, rival, or a newly-arrived body. This is no easy subject to unravel in the contemporary twenty-first century context, and yet the complexities inherent to such questions of existence and self-preservation are hardly exclusive to modern structures of social and political sense-making. Whether one speaks abstractly of “ways of knowing,” or specifically about verbal or emotional structures of identification, an insensitivity to macro-historical processes of group identity construction, transmission, and inheritance deceptively isolates “the way things are now” from their cultural and intellectual predecessors and risks falsely reducing identity purely to modern ideology. As such, my foray into the affective rhetoric of difference employed by late antique and medieval religious authorities in opposition to the “violent,” “barbarian,” and “invading” Muslim Saracen, a discourse that I situate as an intellectual predecessor to the modern Italian focus on the “invasion” of irregular migrants, is my attempt to open a dialogue regarding the very human need, expressed across centuries, to define and preserve a sense of belonging.

Indeed, it is a mark of the modern western reverence for post-Enlightenment civil, social, political, intellectual progress that discussion of pre-modern modes of thought, and particularly those religious, are often restricted to isolated historical contexts and considered “epiphenomenal.” Only reluctantly do we admit how “premodern time speaks itself an active presence” in contemporary discourses of national identities, yet recognition of such cultural and intellectual inheritances and the desire to study human processes comparatively across historical epochs should neither imply universalism nor diminish the uniqueness and particularities of each individual period. In the late antique Near Eastern, medieval southern Italian, and modern Italian contexts unfolded here—each a rich world to be unfolded on its own terms—the resonant utilizations of an affective rhetoric of violence, danger, and invasion, whether directed at Muslim “Saracens” or modern migrants is, at its root and across these

111. Heng’s discussion on “The Invention of Race” very much pushes a line of analysis connecting premodern to modern. For the idea of the past “speaking itself into the present,” she draws on Dipesh Chakrabarty (Article I, 109).
centuries, a language of self-preservation employed by those who seek to protect traditional hierarchies of power and privilege.

The Mediterranean migrant crisis, far from simply a political movement of bodies, is deeply engrained in ideological structures of belief, for it has taken a central position in political discourses that promote the myth of homogenous and unified traditional European national identities threatened by outsiders encroaching upon its hallowed borders. The use of affective language and the re-use of a historical sense of European or Italian belonging (however true or false), are only some of the methodologies used towards this aim, and are an extension of the all-too-familiar “clash of civilizations” narrative that has opposed East and West, Muslim and Christian, for the past century. But, a sensitivity to historical patterns reveals that, in modern Italy as in the medieval Italian South, Christian and Muslim have long been intertwined in complex modalities of inter-reliance and competition that reveal them “frères ennemis” [“brother enemies”]. To be sure, the late antique Passio texts that sought to define a separation between Muslim and Christian inadvertently revealed the extent to which commonalities between groups persisted and, as John Tolan observed for the late antique context, these authors were “not ignorant of the similarities between the two faiths; [they were] painfully aware of them.”

The trope of the violent Saracen that was born through these encounters, and reproduced with a pronounced emphasis on Muslim aggression in the Italo-Greek Vitae, was thus a response between groups where alterity—visual and racial, though, by extension, moral and spiritual—became a tool to maintain distinct power categories, but none of which remained unchallenged.

Ultimately, driving the process in all three contexts is the sense that the security of “our collectivity,” “our community” or, in the modern day, “our national culture,” however imagined, is in peril, and that protecting the faith, the land, the blood, the nation, or the identity “that was and must continue to be ours” is ever more important. The Turkish-Cypriot psychoanalyst Vamik D. Volkan noted in his work on collective trauma and “bloodline” communities that “humans cannot accept change without mourning what has been lost,” and indeed, in a quickly-shifting world where little is guaranteed to last, the desire to

113. This is, of course, a reference to Samuel Huntington, The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order (New York: Touchstone, 1997).
114. Tolan, Saracens, 44. “Anastasius attempted to erect a wall of difference between Islam and Christianity [but] he [was] not ignorant of the similarities between the two faiths; he [was] painfully aware of them.”
define a self or a collectivity with a stable footing able to survive the quicksand of historical time, is a temptation with which any individual cognizant of his or her own mortality is able to empathize. Yet, if we listen carefully, every narrative that reduces collective identities to terms of primordial existence and belonging confronts a counter-narrative that embraces the bricolage of our lived experience.