'The wickede secte of Saracenys' – Lexico-semantic means of strengthening the English Christian Self in texts from the Middle English period

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This paper focuses on the conceptual category of the Saracen as portrayed in medieval English texts, and the semantic potentials of lexical units used to refer to this ethnic and religious out-group. On the basis of references gathered from broader contexts provided by the *Corpus of Middle English Prose and Verse*, both the frequency of usage of relevant referring expressions will be looked into. From a historio-pragmatic perspective, it shall be shown that the selected samples present one of many strategies used to strengthen the image of the Christian self by systematically decomposing the image of the 'misbelieving' other by means of lexical choice.

Keywords: Christians; historical semantics; historio-pragmatics; identity; Middle English; misbelievers; Saracens; stereotypes

1. Introduction

The contents of this paper shall provide some insights into how the medieval English Christian was linguistically dealing with the epitome or prototype of both ethnic and religious otherness of their days: the Saracen, or —as put in words by the anonymous Harley 2261 scribe who translated Higden's *Polychronicon* into Middle English sometime in the 15th century— "the wickede secte of Saracenys" (I, xv, in Babington 1865 [vol. 1]: 129).

Section 2 of this paper offers a brief historical framing of the investigative object, presenting and discussing the major socio-historical factors that were influencing the stereotypical shape of the Saracen from a Christian perspective. Section 3 focuses on the medieval English conceptual makeup of the Saracen

and on how this category of the 'other' would be referred to linguistically in texts from the Middle English period (*c.* 1100–1500). The latter question is further deepened in Section 4, when frequent and infrequent lexico-semantic modifications used to refer to the Saracen are carved out from the data gathered from the *Corpus of Middle English Prose and Verse* (CMEPV, URL1). The diachronic presentation of lexico-semantic material reflecting the changes in the conceptual makeup of the Saracen in medieval England will climax in looking at its semantically broadened status it had reached by the end of the 15th century (see Section 5). Section 6 will sum up the findings and conclude with a discussion and reassessment of what the lexico-conceptual material on the Saracen and its linguistic modifications actually may reveal about the conceptual category of the Saracen as perceived and stereotyped by Middle English society.

2. The English and the Saracen – A brief historical framing of a curious long-distance relationship

One certainly does have to set out by pointing out that the matter of Saracens and Mahomet(ans) as seen from a medieval Christian perspective has been a much-disputed one, first and foremost by historians in relation to the Crusades (e.g. Lock 2006), as well as literary scholars (e.g. Tolan 2002). The matter of Saracens from a medieval *English* Christian viewpoint, however, has been passed over mostly in scientific studies so far. Only a small number of monographs and papers have put their focus on the specifically English role during the crusading period and England's special relationship with the Saracen: amongst these are Paull's (1969, 1972) literary studies on the Saracen in Middle English texts, Metlitzki's (1977) work discussing the significance of Arabic material in medieval English reception, and Tyerman's (1988) extensive compilation of historical as well as political and social aspects of the crusades for England. It is particularly the latter that must be included into any paper dealing with the factors decisive for the shaping of the stereotypical makeup of the Saracen in medieval England.

More recent are the works by Scarfe Beckett and Calkin, who have both approached the English-Saracen matter from their expert stances as literary scholars. Scarfe Beckett's work on *Anglo-Saxon Perceptions of the Islamic World* (2003) offers intriguing observations into how the Saracen was being conceptualized and treated in literature produced during the Old English period, while Calkin focuses on the Saracen in Middle English Arthurian texts (2004,

2005, 2011, 2012) and, like this paper, reflects on the many correlations between the Saracen and the strengthening of English identity (esp. 2004). However, none of these studies have put their focus on linguistic aspects surrounding and concerning the Saracen (cf. Kirner-Ludwig 2015).

The fact that so few works have dealt with the English stance and perspective during the Crusades at all may be due to England's part being generally deemed extremely small and hardly relevant. In fact, one cannot even entirely fight the impression that there was a general lack of interest concerning the Crusades on the English side —possibly partly due to England's geographical remoteness. The commitment of English or Anglo-Norman kings participating actively was more than reserved. Mostly lower nobles were sent off to the Holy Land and, when they went, they did so as representatives rather of France than of England: Robert II 'Curthose' of Normandy for instance took part in the First Crusade against the Turks from 1096 to 1099, but had to do without being financially sustained by his brother King William II of England. Towards the last decades of the Crusading Period, around the middle of the 13th century, also King Henry III preferred to send off his brother Richard I of Cornwall in his place, instead of fighting himself, which he had pledged or even pretended to do on several different occasions.[1]

One must thus infer that England was mostly acting as a passive observer throughout most of the Crusading Period. In consequence, also England's attitude towards the Saracen misbeliever, who remained out of grasp and sight,

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[1] It has been suggested that Henry never sincerely intended to take the cross in the first place (Tyerman 1988). While this suspicion will most likely never be settled or securely confirmed, it can certainly not be denied that Henry and his royal advisors did strategically use the circumstantial frame the Crusades provided rather than get actually involved. It was clearly a strategical move that Henry, upon his coronation (then only nine years old), declared himself a crusader in order to be entitled to special protection from Rome (Carpenter 1990: 13). Claiming then that his proceedings against the rebels during the First Barons' War (1215–1217) was merely a religious crusade facilitated his victory over them in 1217 (Carpenter 1990: 28ff.). After the Seventh Crusade (1248–1254), led by Louis IX of France, Henry declared that he would launch his own crusade to the Levant, but never went, being prevented from doing so, amongst other issues, by rebellions in Gascony. Ironically, fighting down the latter eventually used up all the money initially intended to spend on Henry's planned crusade (Carpenter 1990: 123). If Henry was at all having any further intents of departing on a crusade, these were surely deadened by his interior and exterior political troubles and his constant money problems throughout the 1250s and 1260s.

must have differed from the one felt by continental countries being in direct face-to-face contact, such as Spain or France. The more paradox it is then — and this serves as the actual springboard for this paper— that the Saracen was nonetheless one of the most talked-about issues occurring in Middle English sources.

I shall argue that, despite their geographical and socio-political remoteness from the Saracen, the narrative and generally linguistic material of the Middle English period display an immense emotional dismay and agitation on the English part. As has been shown by Tyerman, this may for one thing be due to the Crusading centuries being consistently taken as a good reason for raising taxes and mortgaging lands and properties all over England (1988: 17).[2] This atmosphere was certainly complemented by the many stories one was hearing (and that were systematically being spread) about the cruelness and blasphemies of the Saracens —mostly via French narratives.[3]

All this provided a fertile soil for stereotyping and demonizing the Saracen. The creative and frequent use of the lexico-semantic item *Saracen* and its manifold derivations reflects upon this concept's high topicality. This paper will look into the pragmatic use of *Saracen* with the intention of distancing oneself as an English Christian from the pagan other. It shall be argued that, by systematically construing the Saracen as the evil other of those days, the self of England's people, united in their faith, was (supposed to be) strengthened.

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[2] As Evans states, the first 'crusade tax' was raised in 1166 and remained a permanent feature of taxation thenceforth (Murray 2006: 398). Later kings, e.g. Henry III, also took the crusades as a legitimate reason for raising taxes.

[3] It is more than likely that supposed facts and stereotypical facets about the ethnic category SARACEN in fact had been entering the awareness of the English from as early as the Old English period onwards, mainly via (post)classical sources, for example through translations of Pliny the Elder's *Naturalis Historia* and Isidore's *Etymologies* (e.g. Kirner-Ludwig 2015: 390). Among the most influential French sources transmitting stereotypical features of the SARACEN to England are the many English Charlemagne romances, many of which continued to be popular until and beyond the 15th century, being amongst those texts which William Caxton printed, e.g. his *Lyf of the Noble and Crysten Prynce, Charles the Grete*).

3. Sounding out the medieval English concept of the Saracen

Before we tackle the complex makeup of the Saracen as a conceptual category in medieval English Christian minds, there is still some notional scaffolding to do, which must, for one thing, include the concept of 'identity' adhered to in this paper. Its complex frame of reference shall be narrowed down to a socio-linguistic one, following Riehl, who understands it as a construct built of four major factors, i.e. a common set of basically physical features, a shared geographical allocation, a common religious affiliation, and mutual linguistic intelligibility (2009: 164).[4]

The conceptual construal of the self versus the other on the basis of these four broad criteria is variously reflected in medieval English sources, with geographical in- and exclusion being the most transparent one; the dichotomy between 'us' and 'them' boils down to what 'we' perceive as [+familiar] and [+known] versus what is [+unfamiliar] (i.e. [-familiar]) to 'us'. It goes without saying that a given geographical distance or an actual distancing from another people will result in (and at the same time will be due to) the fact that 'we' do not know 'them' well or at all, on the one hand, and of course that 'we' do not comprehend 'their' language, as it is different from 'ours', i.e. the one 'we' know. These basic deliberations —which I am giving in the form of intensional semantic features for reasons of simplification, aspiring to provide selective semantic and conceptual cues— have to be taken into account when looking at causes for the English (following the rest of Europe in) categorizing the Saracen as the 'other': their geographical and ethnic otherness (see Figure 1, adapted from Kirner-Ludwig 2015: 493 [Figure 5.3a]).

The second ground component entailed in the medieval concept of the Saracen was their religious 'misbelief'. It was this characteristic that became the primary feature decisive for the Saracen being perceived as irreconcilably different from the English Christian. While the mere factors of unfamiliarity and linguistic incomprehensibility (Figure 1) on their own would have been enough to glance over to the East with unkind suspicion, it was the issue of

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[4] Similar checklists were made as early as in the 1st and 2nd century AD, for instance by the Roman historian P. Cornelius Tacitus, who studied the Germanic tribes in his *De Origine et Situ Germanorum Liber* (aka *Germania*), for example in Chapters 27 ("instituta ritusque" ['facilities and customs']) and 43 ("sermo cultusque" ['speech and way of life']), quoted from Pohl 1998: 18).

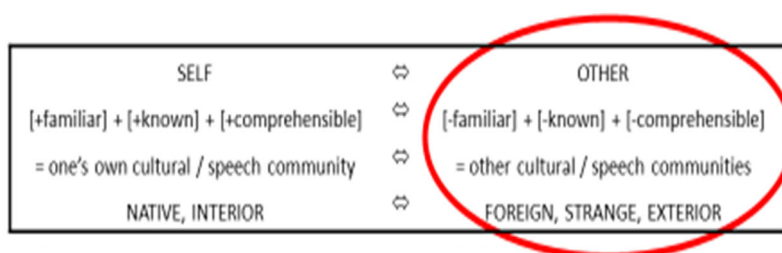| SELF	⇔	OTHER
[+familiar] + [+known] + [+comprehensible]	⇔	[-familiar] + [-known] + [-comprehensible]
= one's own cultural / speech community	⇔	= other cultural / speech communities
NATIVE, INTERIOR	⇔	FOREIGN, STRANGE, EXTERIOR

Figure 1. Conceptual prime features underlying the ethnic distinction between the English self and the Saracen other

false, i.e. non-Christian beliefs they fought for, that made them being perceived as a threat to the Christian world —albeit a soothingly remote one, at least from an English point of view.

What, however, must have made even the English quail was the idea that this false belief had originally sprung from the Christian midst: one popular version included in Langland's *Piers Plowman* narrates that it was the 'heretic' prophet Mahomet, once a Christian himself, whose presumptuous[5] lust for power and persuasive eloquence led his ignorant followers astray (see (1); also *Polychronicon* V, xiv, in Lumby 1876 [vol. 6]: 34–37; *The Buke of John Mandeville*, Egerton Version, in Warner 1889: 68).

(1)   Þis Makometh was a crystene man and for he moste nouȝte be a pope, / In-to Surre he souȝte
('Mahomet was a Christian man; when he could not become pope, he proceeded to Syria'; *B*-text, in Skeat 1869 [vol. 2]: 276, quoted from CMEPV, ll. 391ff.; also ibid. ll. 392, 401 for Mahomet's stealth and slyness)

(2)   Ista videntur impleri sub ultimis temporibus Heraclii Imperatoris, quando Machometus pseudo-propheta Persas occupavit, Ægyptum et Africam subjugavit, nefariamque sectam saracenorum commentavit [...]

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[5] Note that wordings such as these do in no instance reflect my own assessment, but my interpretation of the primary texts underlying my study.

('These things seem to have happened during the lifetime of Heraclius the Emperor, when Mahomet, the false prophet, occupied Persia and Egypt and also made Africa his subject, contriving the wicked sect of Saracens [...]'; I, xv, in Lumby 1865 [vol. 1]: 128)

(3)   Þis doynge semeþ fulfilde in þe laste tyme of Heraclius þe emperour, whan þat false prophete Machometys occupied Persida and made Egipte and Affrica sogett, and [...] brouȝt yn þe false lawe and secte of Saracins [...] ('these events culminated during the late time of the Emperor Heraclius: this was when that false prophet Mahomet occupied Persia and subjugated Egypt and Africa and [...] infiltrated them with the false law and sect of Saracens [...]'; translation by Trevisa, in Lumby 1865 [vol. 1]: 129)

The Saracens thus were an issue immediately associated with feelings of mistrust and suspicion, being epitomes of betrayal and heresy. This emotional trigger point must be kept in mind as we approach the conceptual sphere surrounding the Saracen, and ultimately also the stereotypical associations related to this 'enemy of the Christian faith' (see Figure 2, adapted from Kirner-Ludwig 2015: 493 [Figure 5.3b]).
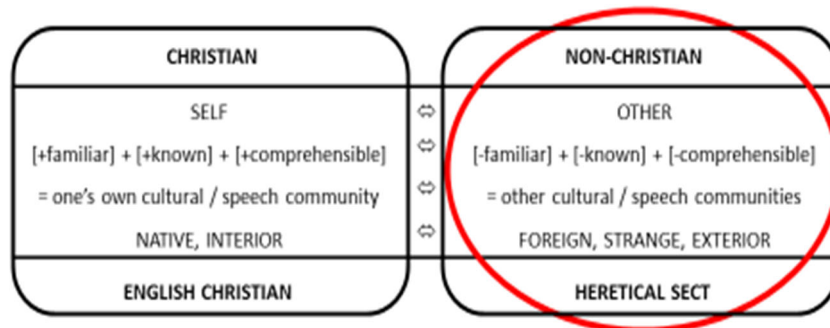

Figure 2. Conceptually prime features underlying the religious distinction between the English self and the Saracen other

With respect to 'stereotypes', this paper will employ an appropriately broad understanding of this notion, taking stereotypes as resulting from over-simplified conceptual categorizations and classifications that emerge from

constantly reflecting between what distinguishes the self from the other (e.g. van den Heuvel 1992). Stereotypical characteristics of the Saracen, as they appear in the text corpus underlying my analyses, will be encoded as prime semantic features that are recurrently referred to as linguistic representations of cognitive, i.e. conceptual, makeups.

In lockstep with classifying the Saracen as inherently different on all cultural, linguistic, and particularly religious levels, inevitably came the Western understanding that the Saracen not only had literally made the wrong choice in following Mahomet,[6] but was in fact siding with the Devil and was thus [+evil] and, just like their wrongly chosen beliefs, [+false] (see Figure 3, adapted from Kirner-Ludwig 2015: 495 [Figure 5.3c]).

This conception was being expressed and spread widely and consistently by the many voices commissioned by and faithful to the Christian Church, herself well-established as the epitome of the one [+right] belief and the referee of all that she herself had classified as morally [+good]. Numerous texts provide evidence of how creatively these fruitful grounds were salvaged when it came to establishing, strengthening, and further pushing the stereotypical makeup of the Saracen, entailing all kinds of ethically BAD behavior. Examples mostly revolve around the Saracens' physical and mental monstrosity and their abnormal taste for violence and sexual practices condemned as despicable and indisputably intolerable by the Church, such as polygyny, homosexuality, and sodomy (Cadden 1993, Kruger 1993, Schibanoff 1993).

While Figures 1, 2, and 3, in a simplified manner of course, display the layers entailed in the Saracen being classified as the prototype of both the ethnic and religious other, the concept of the Saracen at the same time has to be seen as one component within the conceptual field of religious misbelievers and other groups of heretics the English were facing and labelling as such in the (late) Middle Ages. Particularly the idea of heresy needs to be rementioned, as it is historio-conceptually and causally linked to the Saracens, who were, as already mentioned, regarded as a Christian breakaway fraction in the first place.[7]

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[6] See Isidore's definition of *haeresis* 'heresy': "Haeresis Graece ab electione vocatur, quod scilicet unusquisque id sibi eligat quod melius illi esse videtur" ('Heresy is so called in Greek from "choice", doubtless because each person chooses for himself that which seems best to him'; *Etymologies* VIII, iii, 1, in Lindsay 1911 [vol. 1]; transl. quoted from Barney et al. 2008: 174).

[7] As such the Saracens were even preceding those heretic groupings that began emerging in the early 14th century such as the Lollards (Howland/Lea 1939: 1306–1325), and
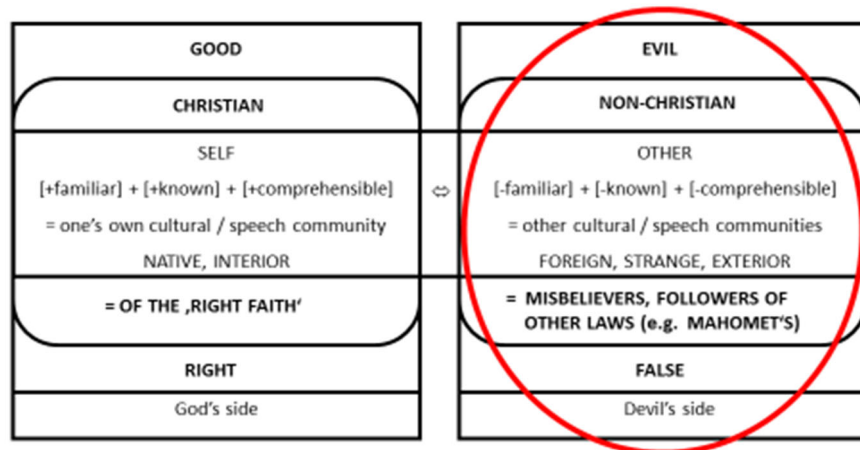
Figure 3. The distinction between the conceptually good Christian and the conceptually evil followers of Mahomet's law

Whereas the array of heretical dissenters, amongst them the Saracens, were (perceived as) highly heterogeneous throughout the centuries and thus called and referred to by a vast number and variants of names (Kirner-Ludwig 2015), another very distinct group of non-Christians deserves a mention when putting the Saracens into their socio-historical context, i.e. the Jews. In England they were being persecuted, massacred, and driven out of England since the late 12th century, e.g. under the reigns of Richard I and John 'Lackland' and thus during the Crusades against the Saracen enemy of the faith. Even when the 'official' expulsion of Jews from England was announced in 1290 (Bauer 2003: 56–62) and respective measures were being taken, antisemitism in England did not cease (e.g. Bale 2006). The Jew remained the prime enemy and ally of the Devil in Christian collective memory.

15th-century individuals going down for heresy such as John Wyclif, John Oldcastle, and Reginald Pecock. Heretic groupings specifically born out of the actual confrontations between Christianity and Islam, e.g. are the Mozarabs (Metlitzki 1977: 6).

The role allocation only changed when one's awareness of the Saracen threat grew, and the latter were more and more perceived as just another trial sent to afflict the Christians and reunite them in faith.[8] As texts from the English Middle Ages show, the conceptual makeup of the Saracen and the Jew in fact became assimilated to a high extent, reaching "an equally cohyponymic level of disdain" (Kirner-Ludwig 2015: ch. 5.4.4). But while it is true that Jews were occasionally being referred to as Saracens, even invoking Mahomet as their god in e.g. medieval Mystery Plays (Chemers 2007), we do not find this appellation the other way round, one reason for which is that Saracen had, by the late Middle Ages, semantically broadened to the extent that it was not only used in reference to people following Mahomet, but to anyone [+evil] and [+cruel] (Kirner-Ludwig 2015: 243). We thus find that the two conceptual categories of the Jews and of the Saracens were closely associated, but at the same time it was the Saracen that conceptually and, in lockstep, semantically emerged to be the prototype of the evil other of his days.

4. Means of referring to and modifying the Saracen misbeliever in Middle English days

As already stated, the Saracen turns out to have been one of the most frequently addressed topics in Middle English literature altogether. I am basing this claim upon numbers from the CMEPV gathering all in all 146 texts from throughout the Middle English period.[9] When browsing the CMEPV for *Saracen*s via the open cluster Sara*, one is faced with 1,353 matches in fifty-eight records;[10] when then additionally taking into account the number of relevant matches to Sars*, which are much rarer but still appear 156 times in twenty-three records, the number of tokens of *Saracen* containing the clusters Sara* or Sars* add up to

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[8] This had been the belief also related to the Viking invasions in Anglo-Saxon England.
[9] Note that all upcoming token numbers are based on the text editions collected and digitized by the CMEPV. Despite the fact that most of these are rather aged and that younger and revised editions of these text are available, it is the classic editions I stick to in this paper for retaining coherence with quantitative data retrieved from the corpus.
[10] This number is, of course, hardly expressive unless looked at in contrast and relation to other terms of insinuated, Christian every-day-relevance. I have picked *love* and *evil* as two possible yardsticks: the love* gets 2,758 matches in seventy-five records, evil* counts 152 matches in forty-seven records.

1,509 in sixty-five records all in all (after the elimination of identical sources coming up for both clusters; see Table 1, adapted from Kirner-Ludwig 2015: 421 [Table 5.17]).[11]

Table 1. Tokens responding to Sara* and Sars* in the CMEPV data

Sara*	1,353 matches	in 58 records
Sars*	156 matches	in 23 records
total	1,509 matches	in 65 records

Table 2. Tokens responding to Turk* and Arab* in the CMEPV data

Turk*	467 matches	in 18 records
Arab*	65 matches	in 11 records

It is worth mentioning that the number of word forms containing the cluster Crist* in contrast add up to 25,638 matches in 134 records, which makes the numbers of *Saracens* and *heathens* in the corpus look rather meagre at first glance. What these numbers suggest, however, is that the use of semantically positive terms in order to strengthen one's own English Christian self may have been much more common than the use of semantically negative terms referring to and cutting off the other in order to sustain one's self. Nevertheless, if we include the numbers of mentioning of *Turks* and *Arabs* (see Table 2, adapted from Kirner-Ludwig 2015: 421 [Table 5.17]) and particularly take into account that at least another eighteen Middle English morphemes forming adjectives and nouns were commonly used to refer to religious misbelievers or non-Christians, amongst them *gentile*, *infidel*, *heathen*, and *pagan*, the high relevance of the Saracen misbeliever is again indisputable.[12]

When looking at other lexical units within the conceptual and lexico-semantic field of misbelievers and within the CMEPV, tokens in {Saracen}

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[11] The number of sixty-five records being referred to here are due to sixteen records containing both Sars* and Sara* with both numbers counted.

[12] These eighteen morphemes or clusters are: {barbar}, {ethn}, {faithless}, {heretic}, {idol}, {misbelief}, {mescreant}, {paien}, {painim}, {profan}, {reprob}, {unbelief}, and {unfaith}. See Kirner-Ludwig (2015) for more detail.

occur as frequently as formations in {heathen},[13] the latter of which had been the vernacularly prototypical choice in referring to non-Christians since the Old English period and long into the Middle English period (Kirner-Ludwig 2015: ch. 4.1.1, ch. 4.5; also compare G *Heide* 'heathen') —rendering these two bases the most frequent morphemes in the overall misbelievers' picture. By the end of the 13th century, nominal and adjectival formations in {Saracen} even gradually challenged and superseded formations in {heathen} and others, so that by the 14th century the Saracen had already shifted to the prototype center of misbelievers, and so that forms in {Saracen} became hyperonymous in the sense that they could either be used to refer specifically to followers of Mahomet's law, or to all other kinds of religious misbelievers (with the exception of Jews).

Based on these figures as well as on my arguing and socio-historical framing in Sections 2 and 3 above, the next step is to tackle the extent and the ways text producers would express their concern with or even strong feelings of hatred regarding the Saracen. In fact, from the Early Middle English period we find rather harsh instances of verbal abuse against the Saracens, which suggest a rather high extent of emotional involvement. I have chosen examples compiled in Horstmann's edition of *Altenglische Legenden* (1881; cf. (4) and (5), both quoted from CMEPV) for respectively strong references:

(4)   The quene seyde Maxent vn-too: / 'Thou false, cursyde sarasyne, / Thou schalt haue an euyll synne [...]'
('The queen said to Maxentius: "You false, cursed Saracen! You shall suffer evil harm [an evil end]"'; *c.* 1420 *Seynte Kateryne* [Ms. Cbr. Ff. II, 38, N. 24], ll. 228–230, in Horstmann 1881: 262)

(5)   [maiden Mergrete:] 'ȝif it be ȝour wille, ȝour angel ȝe me sende! / Fram þis foule Saraȝins y may me nouȝt defende'
('"If it is your will, send me an angel! I cannot defend myself [alone] against those foul Saracens"'; *c.* 1310 *Seynt Mergrete* [MS Auchinl. f. 16b], ll. 71ff., in ibid. 227)

Since the Saracen is generally treated as the villain and complementary evil counterpart to the Christian self in Middle English texts, one could assume for

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[13] The CMEPV is not even exhaustive so that it would indeed have made a difference in the census in favor of *Saracen*-tokens, if works such as the 14th-century *King of Tars*, *Of Arthour and of Merlin* (e.g. Calkin 2004), or the late 14th-/early 15th-century romances *Sir Ferumbras* and *The Sowdone of Babylone* had been incorporated.

most references to Saracens to be negatively modified, such as the ones in (4) and (5), or even as the reference used in the title to this paper, i.e. "the wickede secte of Saracenys" (Harley 2261 scribe, translation of Higden's *Polychronicon*, I, xv, in Babington 1865 [vol. 1]: 129). As it turns out, however, these extracts are the actual exception to the rule in medieval English texts.[14] Much more often than not, *Saracen* occurs without any semantic modifications at all in Middle English texts. When we again refer back to the contents provided by the CMEPV, only eighty-seven cases out of 1,353 hits in fifty-eight records responding to a browse for *Sara** (see Table 1 above) actually display *Saracen* as being further modified. All others, i.e. 1,266 tokens, present *Saracen* standing on its own.

This is particularly striking as binomial phrasings are fairly frequent with other terms referring to and making up the lexico-semantic field of religious misbelievers in the 14th and 15th centuries (Kirner-Ludwig 2015).[15] Common combinations, for instance, contain the French-borrowed {mescreant} as a modifier or modifiee with e.g. {paiem}, {misbelief}, {paynym}, {gentil}, or {heresy}, as shown in Table 3.

The binomial material provided by the OEDo, the MEDo, and the CMEPV is rich in both numbers and creativity,[16] also revealing a good many phrasings with again other components, such as "al the Paganesse and mysbelewynge men",[17] "curste, vnhappy and prophane",[18] "unfeithfully and untruly",[19] and "an vnfeithful or hethen wyf".[20]

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[14] Among the very few exceptions also are the following phrasings: "the myscredaunte Sarasyns" (*c.* 1500 *Robert Deuyll* in W. J. Thoms *Coll. Early Prose Romances* (1828) I. 49; quoted from OEDo); "Barbaryn ys a Sarazyn straunge" (*a.* 1450(*a.* 1338) Mannyng Chron.Pt.1 (Lamb 131) 16060; quoted from MEDo); "among sarasyns & oþere vnbelef-ful" (*c.* 1380 Wyclif *Wks.* (1880) 45; quoted from OEDo); see Kirner-Ludwig (2015: 282).

[15] On the concept of binomials and various historio-linguistic perspectives, see e.g. Kopaczyk & Sauer (forthc.).

[16] See Kirner-Ludwig (2015: ch. 4.5.4) for further examples.

[17] Stencil: *a.* 1500(1422) Yonge *SSecr.* (Rwl B.490) 199/22 (MEDo).

[18] Stencil: *c.* 1450 *Three Kings Cologne* (BL Add.) 767 in Archiv f. das Studium der Neueren Sprachen (1912) 129 67 (OEDo).

[19] Stencil: 1491 *Act 7 Hen. VII* c. 22 Preamble (OEDo).

[20] Stencil: *c.* 1384 *WBible(1)* (Dc 369(2)) 1 Cor.7.12; 2 Cor.6.15 (MEDo).

Table 3. Binomial phrasings containing {mescreant} as either a modifier or modifiee

binomial phrase	approximate date of creation	citation stencil	retrieved from
"mani paiem miscreaunt"	*c.* 1330(*?a.* 1300)	*Arthour & Merlin* (Auch.) (1973) 5227	OEDo
"Misbeleve and Miscreaunce"	*a.* 1450(*c.* 1410)	Lovel. *Grail* (Corp-C 80) 49.357	MEDo
"paynemes Mescreauns"	*a.* 1450(*c.* 1410)	Lovel. Grail (Corp-C 80) 50.197	MEDo
"misscreauntis gentiles"	*c.* 1465	*3 KCol.(1)* (Hrl 1704) 266	MEDo
"heresyes and in myscreaunce"	?1488	CAXTON tr. Laurent *Ryal Bk.* sig. Cviii	OEDo

Apart from the fact that medieval text producers were well aware of the rhetorically persuasive and thus pragmatic power of binomials (or the *hendiadyoin*), there must have been good reasons for them to create such multifarious and, at first glance, tautological components. This is why there must have been equally good reasons to not deploy this stylistic device with *Saracen*. I strongly believe that, opposed to other lexical units, Saracen simply was a lexical cue powerful on its own, bearing semantic contents and triggering common associations strong enough to speak for themselves (Kirner-Ludwig 2015: 464). This argument will be further deepened in the upcoming section.

5. The *Saracen* carried to their semantic and conceptual extremes in 15th-century Middle English Arthurian literature

With the Saracen being conceptualized as inherently strange, ungraspable, and thus monstrous and dangerous, there basically must have been unlimited room for fantastic ideas about their practices and looks. As the stereotypical makeup of the Saracen was expanding, the semantic and conceptual shape of *Saracen* and its derivational forms shifted remarkably as well. As forestalled above, *Saracen* broadened its extensional range so immensely that text producers of the 15th century would use the term in reference even to such non-Christians that were

not followers of Mahomet's law. Text samples (4) and (5) above display this anachronistic usage and shall be given here again for the sake of reader-friendliness:

(4)   The quene seyde Maxent vn-too: / 'Thou false, cursyde sarasyne, / Thou schalt haue an euyll synne [...]'
('The queen said to Maxentius: "You false, cursed Saracen! You shall suffer evil harm [an evil end]"'; *c.* 1420 *Seynte Kateryne* [Ms. Cbr. Ff. II, 38, N. 24], ll. 228–230, in Horstmann 1881: 262)

(5)   [maiden Mergrete:] 'ʒif it be ʒour wille, ʒour angel ʒe me sende! / Fram þis foule Saraʒins y may me nouʒt defende'
('"If it is your will, send me an angel! I cannot defend myself [alone] against those foul Saracens"'; *c.* 1310 *Seynt Mergrete* [MS Auchinl. fol. 16b], ll. 71ff., in ibid.: 227)

Both samples put the *Saracen* into the historical frame of the late Roman Empire and into the anachronistic position of having both Saints Catherine and Margarete beheaded for refusing their Christian faith. These two cases are amongst the 1,509 tokens of {Saracen} in sixty-five records contained in the CMEPV (also cf. Table 1 above). Amongst these sixty-five records are eighteenth texts that display fifteen or more tokens of Sara* and Sars* (cf. Table 3), again including those pieces from Horstmann's edition of *Altenglische Legenden* (1881) that contain samples (4) and (5).

Of these eighteen texts, six (in the following labelled as B, F, H, K, O, and Q) particularly stand out in not only displaying the anachronistic use of *Saracen* in reference to Germanic heathens instead of actual Saracens, which I am going to focus on in the course of this last section, but also in sharing a contentual cohesiveness: they all address the Arthurian story frame. *The Metrical Chronicle of Robert of Gloucester* (H) and *The Chronicles of England* (O) fall under the category of so-called *Brut*-chronicles, generally reconstructing Britain's history by giving accounts of the earliest to the most recent kings. The other four texts, i.e. *Jean d'Arras* (B), *Merlin or the Early History of King Arthur* (F), *Le Morte Darthur* by Thomas Malory (K), and *The Alliterative Morte Arthure* (Q), can be classified as Arthurian romances, zeroing in on King Arthur and his knights.

Table 4. Eighteen primary texts contained in the CMEPV, all containing fifteen or more tokens of Sara*, Sare* and Sars* (adapted from Kirner-Ludwig 2015: 422 [Table 5.18])

text refs.	title of text	date of composition	matches in full text (CMEPV)		matches total relevant†
A	William Caxton. *Lyf of the Noble and Crysten Prynce, Charles the Grete* (ed. Herrtage 1880–1881)	1485	Sara*: Sare*: Sars*:	184 2 0	184 <u>2</u> **186**
B	Jean, d'Arras, trans. *Melusine. Part I.* (ed. Donald 1895)	1382–1394	Sara*: Sare*: Sars*:	134 0 0	**134**
C	*Polychronicon Ranulphi Higden Maona-chi Cestrensis; together with the English Translations of John Trevisa and of an Unknown Writer of the Fifteenth Century* (eds. Babington/Lumby 1865–1886)	15th cent.	Sara*: Sare*: Sars*:	105 5 24	105-18 = 87 5-1 = 4 <u>24</u> **115**
D	*Peter Langtoft's Chronicle* (ed. Hearne 1725)	Langtoft †1307	Sara*: Sare*: Sars*:	70 2 0	70 2-1 = <u>1</u> **71**
E	*The Romance of Sir Beues of Hamtoun* (ed. Kölbing 1885–1894)	*c.* 1330 (*?c.* 1300)	Sara*: Sare*: Sars*:	38 9 20	38 9-2 = 7 <u>20</u> **65**
F	*Merlin or the Early History of King Arthur: A Prose Romance* (ed. Wheatley 1899)	*a.* 1500 (*?c.* 1450)	Sara*: Sare*: Sars*:	64 0 0	**64**

G	*Cursor Mundi* (ed. Morris 1874–1893)	*a.* 1400 (1325)	Sara*: 69 Sare*: 430 Sars*: 12	69-23 = 46 430-426‡ = 4 <u>12</u> **62**
H	*The Metrical Chronicle of* *Robert of Gloucester* (ed. Wright 1887)	*c.* 1325 (*c.* 1300)	Sara*: 47 Sare*: 7 Sars*: 0	47 <u>7</u> **54**
I	*The Romance of Guy of* *Warwick. The Second or 15ᵗʰ-* *century Version* (ed. Zupitza 1875–1876)	15ᵗʰ cent.	Sara*: 16 Sare*: 12 Sars*: 40	16-14= 2 12-12= 0 <u>40</u> **42**
J	*The Romance of Guy of* *Warwick. The First or 14ᵗʰ-* *century Version* (ed. Zupitza 1883–1891)	14ᵗʰ cent.	Sara*: 40 Sare*: 21 Sars*: 1	40 21-20†‡ = 1 <u>1</u> **42**
K	Thomas Malory. *Le Morte* *Darthur* (ed. Sommer 1889)	1485	Sara*: 32 Sare* 2 Sars*: 0	32 <u>2</u> **34**
L	William Langland. *The Vision* *of William concerning Piers the* *Plowman, together with Vita* *de Dowel, Dobet, et Dobest,* *secundum Wit et Resoun. A-,* *B-, and C-texts* (ed. Skeat 1867–1885)	*c.* 1400 (1378)	Sara*: 29 Sare*: 2 Sars*: 3	29 2 <u>3</u> **34**
M	*Altenglische Legenden* (ed. Horstmann 1881)	*a.* 1425 (?*c.* 1375)	Sara*: 18 Sare*: 62 Sars*: 3	18-1‡‡ = 17 62-49†‡‡ = 13 3-1‡‡‡ = <u>2</u> **32**
N	*The Right Plesaunt and* *Goodly Historie of the Foure* *Sonnes of Aymon* (ed. Richardson 1884–1885)	1489	Sara*: 24 Sare*: 0 Sars*: 0	**24**

O	*The Brut, or The Chronicles of England* (ed. Brie 1906–1908)	*?a.* 1425 (*a.* 1400)	Sara*: Sare*: Sars*:	22 3 0	22 3-2 = 1 **23**
P	*King Horn* (ed. Hall 1901)	*c.* 1300 (*?c.* 1225)	Sara*: Sare*: Sars*:	21 2 0	21 2-2 = 0 **21**
Q	*The Alliterative Morte Arthure* (ed. Krishna 1976)	early 15th cent.	Sara*: Sare*: Sars*:	17 4 0	17 4-2†‡‡ = 2 **19**
R	William Langland. *The Vision of Piers Plowman. B-text* (ed. Schmidt 1978)	*c.* 1400 (1378)	Sara*: Sare*: Sars*:	0 0 15	**15**

†	Irrelevant matches are subtracted. The net effects are printed in bold.
‡	Of all 430 matches, 426 respond to "sare".
†‡	20 matches to "sare" are subtracted.
‡‡	One match responds to the personal name "saraphyne".
†‡‡	Mostly matches to "sare" are subtracted.
‡‡‡	The passage "Among sarseynes he pleied the lioun" (p. 403/II, l. 381) from Lydgate's *Lives of Ss Edmund and Fremund* is quoted twice.
†‡‡‡	"sare" occurs twice.

I want to argue that this anachronistic use of *Saracen* allows for an interpretation on a pragmatic level, i.e. the strategic construction of the positive self versus the wicked other. For reasons of space constraints, my discussion shall focus on texts F (*Merlin*) and K (*Le Morte Darthur*), which provide varied and intriguing insights into how *Saracen* was deployed a lexico-semantic tool in the late 15th century.[21]

The Middle English prose romance *Merlin* (*a.* 1500(*?c.* 1450)) is generally considered "the earliest piece of Arthurian literature written in English prose" (URL2). In contrast to Malory's *Morte Darthur*, which is a compilation of numerous sources and influences, the Middle English *Merlin* seems to follow

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[21] See Kirner-Ludwig (2015) for discussions of the other texts. Also see e.g. Calkin (2004), Roland (2006), and Keita (2006) for literary approaches to Saracens in Arthurian literature of the English Middle Ages.

one single source, i.e. the Merlin section of the Old French Vulgate Cycle (early 13th century). The Middle English version, whose creator is unknown to us, contains sixty-four matches in Sara* as part of *Saracen* or respective word forms. As the narrative is situated in the 5th and 6th centuries AD, it is not in fact surprising that no single one of these tokens is used in reference to an actual Saracen; all sixty-four instances display an anachronistic reference to the Saxon invaders of Britain.

In Section 4, I hint to the phenomenon that *Saracen* generally tends to occur without any semantic modifications. This is affirmed in *Merlin*, as no more than three tokens within the sixty-four counts of *Saracen* (<sarazin>) fulfill the syntactic criterion of <head + modification>. Thus, sixty-one tokens are unmodified uses of *Saracen*. Samples (6), (7), and (8) display the three modified ones (all quoted from CMEPV, in Wheatley 1899):

(6)   [King Brangore to lordinges:] 'these vn-trewe and misbelevynge sarazins'
       ('"Those faithless and misbelieving Saracens"'; XII, in vol. 1, p. 174)

(7)   Gawein slowgh many a sarazin of the saxouns
       ('Gawein killed many Saracens of the Saxons'; XIII, in vol. 2, p. 193)

(8)   [children to Seigramor:] 'these false sarazins'
       ('"those false Saracens"'; XVI, p. 260)

Whereas unmodified uses of *Saracen* do not give away much regarding the conceptual makeup and associative spheres of both term and concept, the few modified references are therefore immensely valuable for deepening the understanding of how the Saracen was decked out with stereotypical features.

Samples (6) and (8) are part of direct speech, which allows for the text producer taking the liberty of adding an extra pinch of emotionality and thus modification. *Saracen* would certainly have conveyed the features [-true] ("vn-trewe"), [+misbelieving] ("misbelevynge"), and [+false] ("false") all on its own, but explicitly providing these semantic modifiers certainly was the more expressive and emotionally loaded choice.

Sample (7) clearly is special: it displays *Saracen* as meronym to *Saxon*, most likely meaning it in the sense of 'villain', which attests not only the broad extensional scope *Saracen* had been assigned by the 15th century, but also how cognitively rich and effective the concept and mentioning of the Saracen must have been deemed —even when explicitly establishing the anachronistic relation to the Saxon of the 5th century.

A comparison to the not much younger *Morte Darthur*, written by Thomas Malory and printed by William Caxton in 1485, both sustains and exceeds these findings. The *Morte Darthur* contains thirty-two tokens responding to Sara* in the CMEPV. Of these, thirteen are used as modifiers or modifiees, which presents an intriguing lexical range that sets Malory's uses of *Saracen* off even against other works. Samples (9) to (12) were selected to give a respectively varied display:

(9)   two honderd sarasyns or Infydeles
       ('two hundred Saracens or infidels'; *Le Morte Darthure*, V, ii, in Sommer 1889: 163, quoted from CMEPV)

(10)   these sarasyns and mysbyleuyng men
       ('these Saracens and misbelievers'; ibid. V, x, p. 178, quoted from CMEPV)

(11)   there ben many other knyghtes as sir Palamydes the sarasyn
       ('there were many knights just like Sir Palomides the Saracen'; VII, xiii, in Sommer 1889: 232, quoted from CMEPV)

(12)   the mescreaunts Sarasyns
       ('the misbelieving Saracens'; ibid. X, xxxii, p. 465, quoted from CMEPV)

All in all, we find the extensional potential of *Saracen* in reference to all kinds of misbelievers: both to the actual Saracen Palomides (cf. (11)), whom Malory inserted as an anachronistic character, and to the non-Saracen in samples (9), (10), and (12). Malory's application of *Sarasyn* is so broad and unspecific in fact that only the semantic feature [-Christian] may be presupposed for sure. Still, Malory deemed it semantically necessary to insert additional modifiers bearing the sense 'unbelieving, infidel', which may speak for the suggestion that *Saracen* had been semantically broadened so much by then that a religious delimitation or the emphasis of this particular feature of otherness was considered relevant (also cf. (7) above).

Considering my argument above, i.e. that the Saracen was being perceived and construed as the prototypical other in texts from the Middle English period, it is particularly interesting to briefly attend the character Palomides. Opposed to the Middle English *Merlin*, Malory does not only give his readers any misbeliever, but in addition an actual Saracen on top. Palomides, a Saracen knight, can be seen as a strategically implemented, anachronistic character in

Malory's version: apparently, the Mahometan Saracen, embedded in the all-time-favorite Arthurian frame, was believed to be making a popular topic in the eyes of both Malory and Caxton (cf. samples (11), (13), (14), (15)).

> (13) there ben many other knyghtes as sir Palamydes the sarasyn
> ('there were many knights just like Sir Palomides the Saracen'; VII, xiii, in Sommer 1889: 232, quoted from CMEPV)

> (14) this vnhappy sarasyn Palamydes
> ('Palomides, this unhappy Saracen'; VIII, xxxi, in Sommer 1889: 320, quoted from CMEPV)

> (15) my name is Palomydes the sarasyn
> ('I am Palomides the Saracen'; X, liii, in Sommer 1889: 504, quoted from CMEPV)

From his first mentioning onwards, Palomides keeps being referred to either by the title *Sir*, which modifies his (and any other knight's) status as a member of the honorable social category of knights (cf. (13)), or by the ethnic and religious modification *Saracen*. In most instances, the referring noun phrase contains both specifications and reads "syr Palamydes the sarasyn" (quoted from Book 7, xxvii; cf. also Book 8, ix, p. 285; Book 10, lxiii, p. 523; ibid. lxx, p. 537).

Not only is Palomides, despite his representing the 'other', granted access to the Arthurian circle, but he also is given a fair amount of empathy and clemency by the narrator (cf. (14)). Twistedly, Palomides even uses his own voice to set himself apart as the other: in (15) he gets the label *Saracen* put into his very own mouth to use it against or at least in reference to himself.

It is likely not only that a publisher at the turn of the 15th century, without agitation of rejection, could present his readership with a semi-positive Saracen he himself considered an asset to his work, but also that the majority of potential recipients would accept or even appreciate this semi-other as a new addition to a cycle of well-known tales and characters embedded in their shared cultural pool of knowledge. Still, in comparison to other contemporary handlings of the Palomides-issue, Malory still seems a bit more reluctant to see the unrestricted 'good' in him, but at least does not entirely deny his capability of it either. Nevertheless, even this partly appreciative approach towards a Saracen would certainly not have affected or changed the clear statement of the text that all non-Christians were consistently called Saracens and therefore were to be allocated to the 'other' side, where also a non-Christian knight was to be put,

regardless of his accomplishments —all according to the motto: Saracens will be Saracens.

Through the literal and conceptual replacement of the *Saxons* for the sake of *Saracens* and the latter's anachronistic situating into (mostly fictional) events that happened about a thousand years before Caxton decided to print his compilation of stories, the impression is conveyed that the Saracens had been fighting the Christians forever, even when the "once and future king" ruled in those golden days of Britain. And this is right where the pragmatic argument can be picked up once more: by paralleling, reflecting, and highlighting the basic stereotypical features of all misbelievers and specifically the Saracen, viz. [-Christian], [+cruel], [+enemy (to both faith and life)], [-friendly], [+threatening], etc., and by additionally using the term *Saracen* in several spots throughout the text, the reader was surely meant and persuaded to strengthen their perception of the Mahometan Saracen as the 'other' as well as the 'villain' and 'enemy' to Christian faith.

6. A brief summary

As I have demonstrated, the concept of the Saracen grew intricately complex during the English Middle Ages, and so did the lexical unit *Saracen*. This is despite the fact that the extent of emotional involvement and dismay on the English side towards the Saracen certainly did not emerge from one's own socio-historical experiences with them. The geographical distance from and the hearsay about the Saracen must have been what immensely enhanced the semantic broadening *Saracen* had experienced by the 15th century —and thus its potential of extensionally referring to any non-Christian regardless of their ethnic or even temporal affiliation. It is well possible that this process is connected to the fact that England's emotional attitude towards this topic grew more and more, while, on the other hand, the ungraspability of the Saracen provided a fruitful soil for its semantic and conceptual malleability.

With this being said, linguistic labelling and stereotyping the Saracen enemy of the faith came to be an efficient weapon for the English to spread both word and quasi-knowledge about them amongst all members of the Christian in-group. Shifting the *Saracen* up to the hyperonymous level of misbelievers was one powerful cognitive-pragmatic move to establish diversity.

By further blending the heathen Saxons of the 5th century AD in Arthurian romances on the one hand and the Saracens unwilling to convert on the other,

or by labelling the old misbelieving Germanic tribes with a term representing the epitome of the 'other' in Malory's days and earlier, one could linguistically distance the English-Christian identity from all that was not Christian. The labelling of the 'villains' as *Saracens* thereby must have been considered a more than apt and handy device to avoid having to admit that the actual villain in the Arthurian stories were the forefathers of the English themselves. Having said that, it cannot be stated with certainty whether the Celtic heritage of Arthur was consciously neglected in the 15th-century *Brut*-chronicles and romances and assigned to the English tradition for both pro-Christian as well as common English identity strengthening purposes, but it is highly unlikely that this seizing of quasi-historical tradition happened in fact simply out of ignorance. Much more probable is the assumption that text compilers and narrators of the Arthurian stuff in the 15th century not only were the ones permanently implementing the villain of their own days into a story frame that every reader would conventionally know, but at the same time also were to satisfy their contemporary readers' demand for this prototypical villain they all could picture. The Saracen was functionalized as exactly that prototype in the High Middle Ages, representing the non-Christian and devilish misbeliever. And with this prototype, the term *Saracen* had been made a highly effective lexico-semantic instrument, used in order to distinguish the 'bad' from the 'good'.

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