



Saracens, Demons & Jews: Making Monsters in Medieval Art

Debra H. Strickland

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During the crusades, Ethiopians, Jews, Muslims, and Mongols were branded enemies of the Christian majority. Illustrated with strikingly imaginative and still disturbing images, this book reveals the outrageously pejorative ways these rejected social groups were represented--often as monsters, demons, or freaks of nature. Such monstrous images of non-Christians were not rare displays but a routine aspect of medieval public and private life. These images, which reached a broad and socially varied audience across western Europe, appeared in virtually all artistic media, including illuminated manuscripts, stained glass, sculpture, metalwork, and tapestry.

Debra Higgs Strickland introduces and decodes images of the "monstrous races," from demonlike Jews and man-eating Tartars to Saracens with dog heads or animal bodies. Strickland traces the origins of the negative pictorial code used to portray monsters, demons, and non-Christian peoples to pseudoscientific theories of astrology, climate, and physiognomy, some dating back to classical times. She also considers the code in light of contemporary Christian eschatological beliefs and concepts of monstrosity and rejection.

This is the first study to situate representations of the enemies of medieval Christendom within the broader cultural context of literature, theology, and politics. It is also the first to explore the elements of that imagery as a code and to elucidate the artistic means by which boundaries were effectively blurred between imaginary monsters and rejected social groups.

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