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Color, Culture, and the Making of Difference in the *Vidal Mayor*

PAMELA A. PATTON

The *Fueros de Aragón* (Feudal Customs of Aragón), also referred to as the *Vidal Mayor* (Los Angeles, The J. Paul Getty Museum, Ms. Ludwig XIV 6), hardly announces itself as a global manuscript.[1] Produced ca. 1300 in a northeastern Spanish center, probably Pamplona, it contains a unique Navarro-Aragonese translation of local laws (*fueros*) originally compiled in Latin by a local bishop, Vidal de Canellas of Huesca (active ca. 1236–52), for the Aragonese count-king Jaume I (r. 1213–76) in the mid-thirteenth century.[2] Although the code was never promulgated fully throughout historical Aragon, much less in the rest of the Crown formed by that kingdom's union with Catalunya in 1137,[3] a half century later it was translated into the local vernacular and recorded in the Getty codex by a certain Miguel López de Zandio (active ca. 1297–1305). Surnamed for a village thirteen kilometers to the north of Pamplona, López is known to have worked as a notary in the latter city between 1297 and 1305. The colophon names him as having written the manuscript ("iste liber scripsit Michael Lupi de Çandiu"; fol. 277).[4]

The work's patron is unrecorded, but its costly decoration, which includes 156 miniatures, gold leaf applied so lavishly that it even extends to pilcrows (paragraph marks), and two instances of the Aragonese coat of arms, suggests a royal commission, perhaps by Jaume II (1291–1327), with whose reign its production likely coincided.[5] It hews to local convention in combining French-derived stylistic elements with Aragonese costume details: an open-armed *pellote* (a sideless surcoat or overgown), a distinctively pointed Jew's hat, and a towering feminine headdress memorably compared by C. M. Kauffmann to an inverted breadbasket.[6] Despite its material luxury, these homely details, combined with the vernacular text and parochial subject matter, lend the manuscript such a provincial air as to inspire one legal commentator to pronounce it "about as cosmopolitan as the manual of Supreme Court trial practice of Wisconsin."[7]

Yet *Vidal Mayor* possesses international dimensions. As a systematic law code regulating nearly all aspects of Aragonese society, it shares features with legal manuscripts produced throughout the later medieval West. Its division into nine books was modeled on the Justinianic Code and Digest of the *Corpus Iuris Civilis*, the legal compilation that became the basis for European canon law after its eleventh-century revival at the University of Bologna, the center where Vidal de Canellas himself would study.[8] Its decorative program, featuring large illuminated initials opening each book and smaller ones introducing each *fuero*, is typical of Western juridical illustration from the mid-thirteenth century onward.[9]

These illustrations also engage with the transformed world into which the *Vidal Mayor* emerged some fifty years after the creation of its Latin model. In 1238, the Crown of Aragon had expanded southward, capturing Muslim-held lands in Valencia and parts of Murcia before halting at the borders of Castile and Granada. Reorienting its political appetites toward the Mediterranean, the Crown initiated a shrewd combination of conquest and alliance to create a far-flung empire, which by ca. 1300 included the Balearic Islands, Sicily, parts of Greece, and tributary zones in North Africa and West Asia. This dynamic outward turn, intensified by the development of the Catalan merchant marine, facilitated the formation of commercial networks that reliably linked the Crown to trade centers across the Western and Eastern Mediterranean.[10] In medieval terms, the Crown of Aragón had become a global player.

This characterization draws on Janet Abu-Lughod's description of a late medieval "world system" in which interconnected zones of commercial exchange formed a global network that by ca. 1300 linked Asia, Northern Africa, and Europe.[11] Abu-Lughod's model minimizes the participation of the Iberian Peninsula, but the direct engagement of the Aragonese Crown in at least three of the schema's subsystems justifies its inclusion.[12] Moreover, although scholarship on medieval globalism tends to privilege instances of interaction and exchange where such subsystems overlap, I would argue that these instances also occur in their centers and hinterlands, including those of Aragon.

It is this internal global impact—perhaps best envisioned as a cultural ripple washing back from the margins of the Aragonese empire at the turn of the fourteenth century—that the present essay investigates. It examines several initials in the *Vidal Mayor* that reveal this impact clearly: those introducing *fueros* regulating Jews and Muslims, the Crown's two official religious minorities. The two groups' status as religiously and socially other automatically placed them at the conceptual margins of Aragonese society, while their membership in faith communities that were recognized as global linked them implicitly with cultural and geographic spaces that lay beyond those borders. As will be shown, the *Vidal Mayor* illuminator demonstrated this not merely in choosing to articulate Jewish and Muslim difference visually but in drawing on internationally known stereotypes that emphasized the two groups' perceived potential to disrupt the local social order and conveyed the aspirations and anxieties of an increasingly global Aragonese society.

Jews and Money

Aragonese Jews were an internalized other, having lived among both Christians and Muslims there since the early Middle Ages.[13] Although they had been, and to some extent still were, much freer in their choice of occupation than were Jews in many other parts of Europe, during the thirteenth century many Jews in the Crown of Aragon had gravitated toward moneylending, encouraged by restrictions on lending between Christians, the obstruction of Jews from overseas trade, a booming national economy, and the support of the king, who reaped a percentage of Jewish interest.[14] Jewish lending benefited the growing economy but, especially toward the end of the thirteenth century, also raised anxieties among the nobles, clerics, and merchants whose growing dependence on it led to repeated disputation of the terms, honesty, and even validity of such loans.[15] This is reflected in the four *Vidal Mayor* initials depicting Jews, which despite introducing *fueros* concerning diverse aspects of Jewish life, including inheritance rules and livestock management as well as commercial activity, focus unwaveringly on tropes of Jewish financial control, cupidity, and dishonesty.

14.1. Initial *E: A Jewish Notary Recording a Loan between Jews and Christians* in the *Fueros de Aragón* (Feudal Customs of Aragón), or *Vidal Mayor*, Vidal de Canellas (translator), Huesca, northern Spain, 1290–1310. Los Angeles, The J. Paul Getty Museum, Ms. Ludwig XIV 6 (83.MQ.165), fol. 114

14.2. Initial *A: A Jew and a Christian Making a Loan* in the *Fueros de Aragón* (Feudal Customs of Aragón) or *Vidal Mayor*, Vidal de Canellas (translator), Huesca, northern Spain, 1290–1310. Los Angeles, The J. Paul Getty Museum, Ms. Ludwig XIV 6 (83.MQ.165), fol. 180

The first such initial, an *E* on folio 114r (fig. 14.1), prefaces a *fuero* with the rubric "De fide instrumentorum, es a saber, de la creyença de los instrumentos" (On faith in instruments).[16] It requires that contracts and loans between parties of different faith communities be recorded by a notary of the same group as the obligated party, reflecting the reality that Iberian Christians, Muslims, and Jews, all prohibited by their own laws from lending at interest within their communities, continued to lend across faith lines.[17] The miniature hews to conventions of juridical illustration in its straightforward visualization of the passage: it depicts two Jewish lenders, identifiable by their pointed hats, counting out money to two Christians, one possibly wearing a monk's habit. The Christians proffer a chalice as collateral for the loan, while a third Jew records the transaction.

Since the *fuero* text successively addresses all possible combinations of interfaith exchange, including those in which Christians and Muslims serve as lenders, the illuminator's choice to depict Jews as lenders here is notable. It dovetails well with the stereotype of the duplicitous Jewish moneylender, a topos already well known in Northern Europe.[18] Disseminated in miracle tales and preaching *exempla* that cast Jews as predatory deceivers eager to ensnare innocent Christians through unfair or misleading transactions, the moneylender stereotype had slipped into Aragon over the course of the thirteenth century, coinciding with the growth of Jewish economic activity there. The artist's adoption of it here implies an active response to this.[19]

A similar choice appears in an oft-represented initial *N* on fol. 175v, which prefaces a *fuero* with the rubric, "De usuris, es a saber: de logro" (On usury).[20] The *fuero* states simply that no man may demand usury from another. It makes no reference to Jews, nor to cross-cultural lending, yet the disputed loan brought before the king in the initial's left half clearly was made by a Jew to a Christian, whose transaction is illustrated at right. The decision to preface this generic passage with a depiction of Jewish usury is reinforced by the *fuero*'s next section, which adds specific restrictions on loans made by Jewish moneylenders, whose "avarice and cupidity" it decries.[21]

The deceptiveness imputed to Jews constitutes the theme of an *exemplum* on fol. 180r, which is introduced by the rubric "De dolo, es a saber, De engaynno" (On trickery).[22] One of several short didactic tales interspersed among the *fueros*, it recounts how a Jewish borrower tried and failed to deceive a Christian moneylender by offering a fake silver chalice as collateral. Alert to the scheme, the Christian hid his inventory and pretended to have been robbed. The Jew repaid the loan immediately, expecting the lost chalice to be replaced by one of good silver, but to his shock, he received the same false goods. The tale admonishes, "There is no law against deceiving the deceiver."[23]

In the left half of the initial *E* that opens the *exemplum* (see fig. 14.2), the Jew is shown receiving a bag of money as he hands his chalice to the Christian lender; at right he gestures in surprise as the Christian returns his collateral and gathers up the repayment. While this illustration too could be described as literal, its interreligious tensions are amplified by marginalia on the same page. Beside the left text column, a bearded half figure wearing a Jew's hood points reproachfully at the words, "era de falsa plata" (it was made of fake silver), while in the upper margin a crowned hybrid battles a gryllus whose full-bearded profile may be meant to represent a Jew.

The characterization of Jews in an initial on fol. 243v, transcribed by some as an *E* but clearly an *A*, represents a variation on the theme of Jewish greed (see fig. 13.3).[24] The *fuero*'s rubric is generic—"De iudeis et sarracenis, es a saber: De los judios y de los moros" (On Jews and Muslims)—and its four sections address a variety of issues related to both faith groups, including fines for assault, regulations for the sale of property, and rules for managing livestock.[25] The scene chosen for the initial, however, again focuses on Jews, depicting a pair of Jewish merchants seated within small, arched structures: one holds up a garment as additional clothing hangs behind him, and the other hammers at a chalice. They may relate to the *fuero*'s first section, which warns Jewish merchants not to sell goods in the street (presumably to evade royal taxes) but to rent a store in the king's market. Beyond its promotion of a financial scheme beneficial to the royal coffers, the passage suggests both fear of Jewish trickery and awareness of Jewish economic potential.

The *Vidal Mayor*'s emphasis on abstract "Jewish" features such as deceptiveness and greed is the more striking for its lack of the physiognomic caricature—typically an enlarged nose, staring eyes, and wild beard and hair—often assigned to Jews in Northern European art at this time.[26] Apart from their pointed headgear and slightly longer beards, Jews in the *Vidal Mayor* so closely resemble their Christian counterparts that it is their financial activity, not their appearance, that identifies them. This reversal of common practice underscores the intensity of Aragonese concern about the economic role of Jews in the newly internationalized Crown, in which Jewish moneylending and commerce predominated in ways perhaps not envisioned by Vidal de Canellas when he wrote his law code fifty years earlier.

Muslims, Sin, and Slavery

If the *Vidal Mayor* signals Jewish difference through stereotyped behavior, it presents Muslim alterity through stereotyped faces and bodies, a contrast distinctively reflective of the Muslim position in thirteenth-century Aragon. Unlike the Jews, whose incorporation into the Crown was long-standing and firmly if anxiously controlled, Muslims represented inveterate outsiders. Whether military antagonists doggedly holding on in Granada or uncertainly repressed subalterns living within the Crown, Muslims remained foreigners set apart

14.3. Initial *S: The Baptism of a Moor (Muslim)* in the *Fueros de Aragón* (Feudal Customs of Aragón), or *Vidal Mayor*, Vidal de Canellas (translator), Huesca, northern Spain, 1290–1310. Los Angeles, The J. Paul Getty Museum, Ms. Ludwig XIV 6 (83.MQ.165), fol. 242

by language, religious practice, and cultural ties to far-flung lands.[27] Their portrayal in the *Vidal Mayor* reflects this vividly.

The first of two initials to depict Muslim figures is an *S* on fol. 242v (fig. 14.3), opening a *fuero* with the rubric "De judeis et sarracenis baptizandis, es saber: de los judios y de los moros que vienen a baptismo" (On baptized Jews and Saracens, that is, on Jews and Muslims who come to baptism).[28] This mandates the protection of rights and property for Jews and Muslims who are baptized as Christians, and also stipulates that both faith groups must comply peacefully when summoned by Christian clerics to hear conversionary preaching. The initial portrays a nude male figure with deep brown skin and curly hair, flanked by a pale-skinned priest and two white godparents as he awaits baptism in the font. The figure's rich skin color, derived from a blend of red, black, and yellow pigments, is unique to Muslim figures in the manuscript. Heightened by tiny dabs of white for teeth, eyes, and nails, a delicate stroke of red for the lip, and snail-like curls, the stereotype draws clearly on classical depictions of sub-Saharan Africans.[29]

The distinctiveness of these features alone might explain the artist's decision to employ them in the baptism initial, where a light-skinned Muslim or Jew, unclothed, might have been unidentifiable. Yet the choice raises a second question: Why make a Muslim look like a black African at all? Most Muslims in Iberia at the end of the thirteenth century were of Arab or North African, not sub-Saharan, descent and thus light or medium complexioned, a fact reflected in the diversity of skin colors assigned to Muslim figures in other Iberian works of the era, such as the frescoes of the Palau d'Aguilar in Barcelona or the manuscript commissions of Alfonso X of Castile.[30] The dark-skinned figure here draws on a more generalized stereotype known in medieval terms as an "Ethiopian." Originating in the ancient Mediterranean world, where it had served as a semi-geographic referent for the peoples inhabiting Ethiopia proper but also Western and Central Africa, the Ethiopian gradually lost its specificity over the course of the Middle Ages, hardening into an abstract stereotype whose black, brown, or occasionally blue skin and formulaic physiognomic features could represent all manner of foreign peoples, real or imagined, from sub-Saharan Africa, Egypt, or India.[31]

14.4. *Black and White Wrestlers*, painting from the Cappella Palatina, Palermo, Italy, ca. 1143. Grube and Johns 2005, plate VII

As Debra Strickland and others have shown, the Ethiopian's distant origins and perceived extremes of color, shape, and habits facilitated its association with multiple moral deficiencies, from lethargy and cowardice to barbarity, violence, and sinfulness.[32] These correlated easily with perceptions of Muslims in late thirteenth-century Aragon, whose Christian inhabitants were well aware of the Muslim-led forces that waited beyond their frontiers, as well as of the thousands of *mudejars*, or unconverted Muslim subjects, who lived throughout the Crown. In recently conquered zones such as Valencia, Mallorca, and Sicily, Muslim populations far outnumbered their Christian counterparts and were scarcely integrated into their new setting. The phantasm of the barbaric black African embodied the foreignness and violent potential ascribed to these subgroups by nervous Christian overlords and neighbors, a potential also found in thirteenth-century literary narratives ascribing black skin and uncanny features to Muslim characters.[33] Like such texts, the black figure in the *Vidal Mayor* feeds the fantasy of Christian social control over a perceived aggressor by presenting the baptizand as a dangerous black man subordinated, stripped, and surrounded by authoritative white Christians.

The Ethiopian stereotype also offered a shorthand for low social status, as illustrated by the *Q* on fol. 244r (see fig. 13.3), introducing a *fuero* with the rubric "De sarracenis fugitivis, es saber, de los moros fuidiços" (On fugitive Muslims).[34] The *fuero* forbids Jews or Christians from secretly employing or transporting Muslim slaves and threatens to confiscate the goods of anyone hiring a "moro" or taking him to the "tierra de los moros" (land of the Muslims) without the owner's knowledge. The initial depicts two figures with the same brown skin, curly hair, and distinctive physiognomy as the Muslim of folio 242v (see fig. 14.3). Clad in simple white robes, they are presented to the king by two white-skinned soldiers.

The Ethiopianized appearance of these figures had minimal basis in the social realities of thirteenth-century Aragon, where slaves of sub-Saharan African descent were substantially outnumbered by locally enslaved war captives.[35] Instead, their dark skin drew on long-standing stereotypes of slaves and servants as black. Building on Roman visual traditions, the stereotype of the black retainer was revived in Europe in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, especially in Mediterranean zones.[36] In Iberia from the late twelfth century onward, black figures served as slaves, servants, and soldiers in a wide variety of media and contexts.[37] This practice might have been strengthened by an awareness of painting traditions in western Islamic lands, in which slaves and servants often were shown with dark skin. The painted *muqarnas* ceiling of the Cappella Palatina in Palermo, produced circa 1143, preserves two such figures: one, apparently a servant, wears a simple waist wrap and gold ornaments on his upper arms, and the other, a nude wrestler, struggles with his white opponent (fig. 14.4).[38]

The participation of the *Vidal Mayor* in this visual equation of blackness and servitude offers a curiously syllogistic extension of the *fuero* itself, in which the word *moro*, already suggestive of blackness, also serves as the functional equivalent for "slave." To be Muslim, in this context, was to be both enslaved and black. While this logical circularity hardly reflected the range of ethnicities or social roles characteristic of actual *mudejars* in thirteenth-century Aragon, it roots the social inferiority of the *Vidal Mayor* figures within an international cultural tradition.

The depiction of Jews and Muslims in the *Vidal Mayor* offers subtle but telling evidence of the changes wrought by globalism in the Crown of Aragon—a globalism more complex, and with far greater artistic ramifications, than this brief essay can address. The manuscript's deployment of internationally meaningful stereotypes reveals a heightened perception of both groups' foreignness to Aragon's dominant culture, while their adaptation to local concerns addresses the preoccupations of a population freshly awakened to the social and economic changes that accompanied Mediterranean expansion. The images also highlight the iconographic pliancy of such figures, attesting that, to adapt once more Claude Lévi-Strauss's oft-adapted dictum, Aragon's Christians found Muslim and Jewish stereotypes "good to think with," offering flexible visual-conceptual targets for the anxieties and appetites sparked by their changing world.[39]

The broad purview of these images opens space for the *Vidal Mayor* in a volume examining medieval manuscripts within a global context. The stolid, vernacular, quaintly dressed figures (the legalese notwithstanding) in the book's fine-tuned portrayals of Muslims and Jews show that the mid-thirteenth-century world for which Vidal de Canellas had composed his text was now considerably wider. When a patron of substantial means—perhaps indeed the imperially oriented King Jaume II, whose fluctuating relationships with religious minorities at the turn of the fourteenth century merit closer consideration—commissioned that text's preservation in a new luxury manuscript, these miniatures helped adapt the law code to a changing world. In preserving the past while embracing newly broadened horizons, the *Vidal Mayor* miniatures demonstrate that even the most local medieval artist might surprise us by thinking globally.

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1 "Fuero de Aragon," Getty Ms. Ludwig XIV 6. Critical editions: Tilander 1956; Cabanes Pecour, Blasco Martínez, and Pueyo Colemino 1996. See also Kauffmann 1963–64, 299–325; García-Granero Fernández 1980, 243–64; Ubierto Arteta 1989; Lacarra Ducay 2012, 7–44; Fatás Cabeza 2014.

2 Cabanes Pecour, Blasco Martínez, and Pueyo Colemino 1996, 9–16.

3 Bisson 2000, 31.

4 "Laus tibi sit, Christe, quoniam liber explicit iste. Iste liber scripsit Michael Lupi de Çandiu"; see García-Granero Fernández 1980, 248–54.

5 The royal arms appear on fols. 84 and 232v. Lacarra Ducay (2012, 27–34) associates the manuscript with either Pere III (r. 1276–85) or Alfonso III (r. 1285–91), based mainly on questionably dated stylistic comparanda. This study adheres to the date range suggested by the scribe's recorded activity.

6 Kauffmann 1963–64, 323; on the Jew's hood, see Patton 2012, 25–27.

7 Weiner 2013.

8 Gout Grautoff 2000, 67–79, at 70. On Canellas in Bologna, see Delgado Echevarría 2009.

9 Gout Grautoff 2000, 67–71.

10 Bisson 2000, 86–103; Hillgarth 1975.

11 Abu-Lughod 1989, esp. 3–20, 32–40; see also A. Walker 2012, 183–96.

12 Subsystems I, II, and V; Abu-Lughod 1989, 34.

13 Assis 1997a.

14 Assis 1997b, 15–27.

15 Assis 1997b, 49–63.

16 Book III, 39. Cabanes Pecour, Blasco Martínez, and Pueyo Colemino 1996, 125.

17 "... si el cristiano vende al judío or al moro, o da o aloga o empriesta or se premete de fazer o de dar, el escrivano cristiano deve ser" (... if the Christian sells to the Jew or the Muslim, or gives or rents or lends or promises to do or to give [to one], the Scribe must be Christian). Cabanes Pecour, Blasco Martínez, and Pueyo Colemino 1996, 126. On interfaith lending in the Crown, see Milton 2006, 301–18.

18 Strickland 2003, 140–43; Lipton 1999, 300–322.

19 Patton 2012, 54–62.

20 Book V, 17. Cabanes Pecour, Blasco Martínez, and Pueyo Colemino 1996, 188. For the initial, see Patton 2012, 58, fig. 32.

21 Cabanes Pecour, Blasco Martínez, and Pueyo Colemino 1996, 188–89; Patton 2012, 58–59.

22 Book V, 21. Cabanes Pecour, Blasco Martínez, and Pueyo Colemino 1996, 192.

23 "Ninguna ley no vieda de engaynnar al qui engaynna, et así el art est engaynnado por art" (There is no law against deceiving the deceiver, and as such the art of deception is itself an art). Cabanes Pecour, Blasco Martínez, and Pueyo Colemino 1996, 192.

24 Transcribed as an *E* by Tilander (1956, 474) and Pecour et al. (1996, 188), but its form is consistent with *A* initials in the manuscript. The resulting "al" would then identify "el judio" (the Jew) as the object of "será constreynnido de responder" (will be constrained to respond).

25 Book VIII, 12. Cabanes Pecour, Blasco Martínez, and Pueyo Colemino 1996, 254.

26 See for example Strickland 2003, 105–7; Lipton 2014, 171–99. For Iberia, see Patton 2012, 67–96.

27 Tolan 2002, esp. 174–80.

28 Book VIII, 11. Cabanes Pecour, Blasco Martínez, and Pueyo Colemino 1996, 253.

29 I thank Getty manuscripts conservator Nancy Turner for information about the pigments. On classical depictions of Africans, see esp. Tanner 2010, 1–39; Verkerk 2001, 57–77.

30 For Palau d'Aguilar, see Patton 2012, fig. 28. On Muslims in the *Cantigas de Santa María*, see esp. García-Arenal 1985, 133–51; Klein 2008, 67–86.

31 See Block Friedman 1981, 8, 54–55, and 64–65; Strickland 2003, 79–93; Devisse 2010b, 31–72, esp. 46–55.

32 Strickland 2003, 79–83; Devisse 2010b, 46–55; Byron 2002, 55–76.

33 Patton 2012, 114–17.

34 Book VIII, 16. Cabanes Pecour, Blasco Martínez, and Pueyo Colemino 1996, 255.

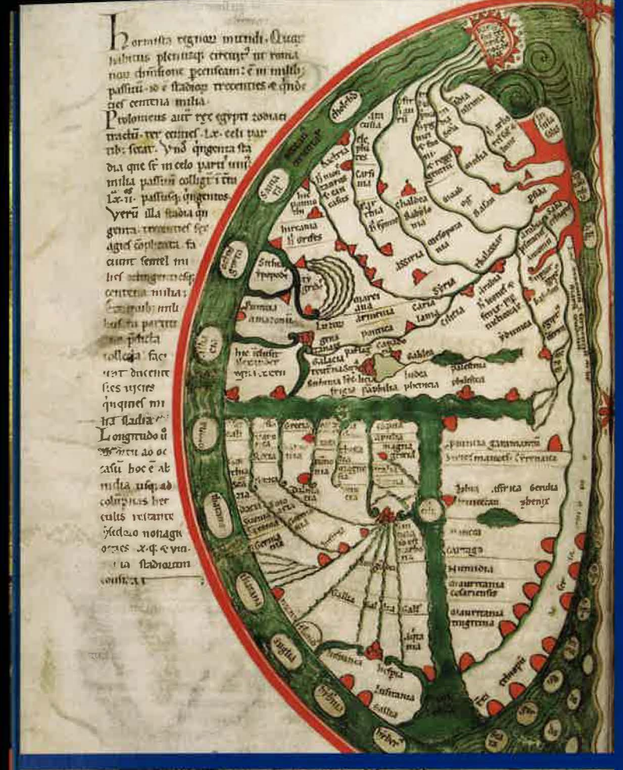
35 W. Phillips 2013, 10–27, 57–61; Constable 1996, 264–84.

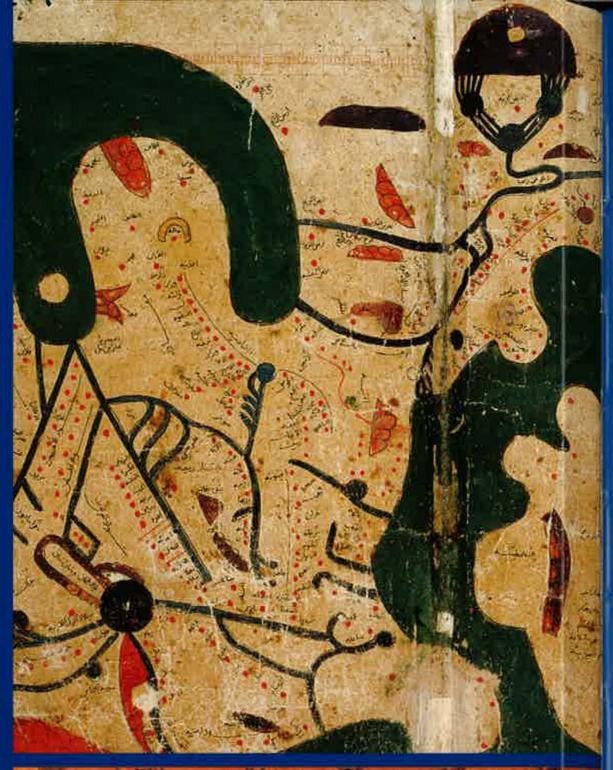
36 Verkerk 2001, 60–61; Devisse 2010b, 64–72; Kaplan 1987, 29–36.

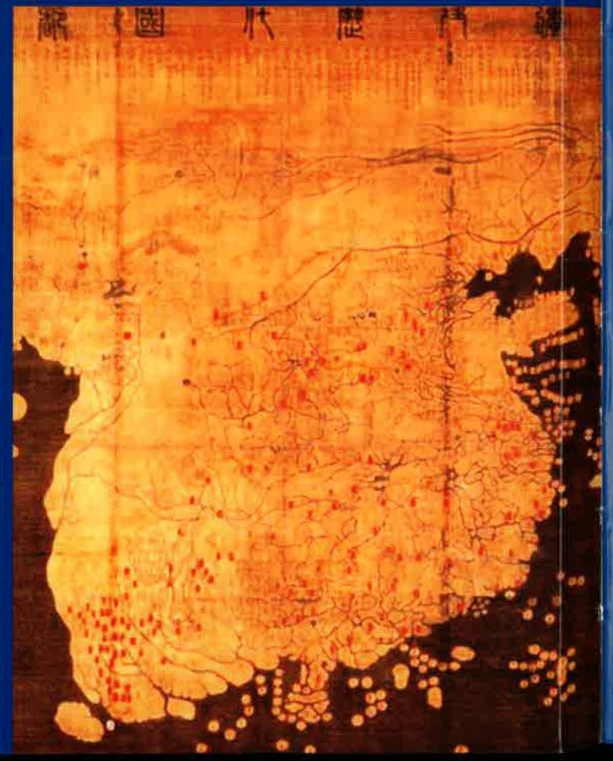
37 See Monteira Arias 2012, 479–88; García-Arenal 1985, 137–38; Constable 2007, 341–42, fig. 20.

38 Grube and Johns 2005, pl. VII; Brenk and Settis 2010, 560–62 (cat. 510), 571–72 (cat. 550), and IV: figs. 406–7, 435.

39 Lévi-Strauss 1963, 89.







Toward a Global Middle Ages

ENCOUNTERING THE WORLD THROUGH ILLUMINATED MANUSCRIPTS

Edited by **BRYAN C. KEENE**

THE J. PAUL GETTY MUSEUM LOS ANGELES

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