

# PERCEPTIONS

READING PACK 3



*Perception of foreigners or outsiders in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries often blurred the lines between religious, ethnic, and national difference. When Queen Elizabeth's physician, Roderigo Lopez, appeared on trial for ostensibly poisoning the queen, for example, his loyalty was questioned on the grounds of his Jewishness but also his Portuguese heritage. In his letter to Elizabeth from a prison in Seville, the explorer Richard Hawkins evoked the transcultural Mediterranean world with its mixed ethnicities, where Islamic, Christian, Jewish, and African beliefs and peoples were collapsed into uncertain and fluid categories whose identifications could hardly be encapsulated in broad terms like 'Moor' and 'Turk'. This set of readings highlight the complexities and range of human experience that lay behind these descriptors, which often masked much more nuanced perceptions of different geographic spaces, peoples, and customs. Investigating the knowledge that Tudor and Stuart authors had of the geopolitics of global encounters does two things. First, these investigations prompt us to consider the willingness of English writers to perpetuate categories of difference, for matters of convenience, faith, or political shrewdness; but secondly, they invite us to consider the many cross-cultural encounters that occurred on individual, often highly personal levels, cutting across the language of difference or crude stereotype that these terms first seem to encapsulate.*

TIDE: Keyword(s): **Blackamoor, Jew, Mahometan, Turk**  
Additional Keywords: **Civil, Gypsy, Heathen, Pagan**

Please read the associated essays at <http://www.tideproject.uk/keywords-home/>

### **Historical documents:**

#### **Parish records offering glimpses of Africans living in Tudor and Stuart England**

*These records show a broad range of contexts in which Africans appear in England, from conversion testimonials to indentured servitude, arrests to deaths. While it is difficult to attain the voice of Africans themselves, whose words are always mediated by those who wrote these accounts down, these nonetheless give a poignant and varied picture of black lives in the archives. The cluster of terms around 'blackamoor', 'moor', 'Ethiophe' and 'Niger' speak to a confluence between geographical locations and complex histories of cross-cultural encounter between English, Spanish, Muslim, and African worlds.*

#### London, 13 February 1599

This day Alice Morise fishwife dwelling in Chicke Lane brought into this house by warrant for harbouring Robert Everett and Barbary Moore and Browne and suffered them to lie together in one bed, having but one room, and did sit up in the room all night having a candle lighted all night whilst the said Everett had the use of the body of the said Barbary as by their former examination appeareth, whereupon the said Alice Morise was punished.

#### Gravesend, Kent, 19 February 1603

Frances the Mullato was buried.

#### St Mildred, London, 1 January 1611

Baptism: Dederj Iaquoah about the age of 20 years, the sonne of Caddi-bian King of the river of Cetras or Cestus in the Country of Guinea, who was sent out of his country by his father in an English ship called the

Abigail of London belonging to Mr John Davies of this parish to be baptized.

#### Almondsbury, Gloucestershire, 1625

Burial inventory: probate inventory of Cattelena of the parish of Almondsbury single woman a negro. Her goods were worth £6.

#### St Mary, London, 14 May 1629

Baptism: Timothy, a heathen blackamoor.

#### Stepney, London, and Commissary Court, London, April 1632

Grace, a blackamoor, presented by churchwardens for living incontinently with Walter Church, Stepney.

#### Middlesex, London, 21 October 1658

Accusation of Martin Francis against Elizabeth Simpson. That Katherine Hutchins, and Elizabeth Simpson and Mary Biggins pretended to make a marriage between Martin Francis (a blackamoor) and the said Elizabeth, thereby defrauding him of seventeen pounds in money.

#### Church of Christ, Broadmead, Bristol, 1640

Obituary of Francis, a black servant: [it] is somewhat rare in our days and Nation to have an Ethiopian or blackamoor to be truly convinced of sin; and of their lost state without the Redeemer and to be truly convert

to the Lord Jesus Christ...she did beg every soul, to take heed that they did let the glory of God to be dear unto them...it being the dying words of a blackamoor, fit for a white heart to store.

London, 31 May 1647

Preacher's memoir: Henry Jessey's account of the spiritual distress of 'Dina the moor', as confessed to Sarah Wight.

Mrs. S: Do you see a want to faith?

Maid [Dina]: I am a filthy wretched sinner. Mrs.

S: Are you tempted against your life?

Maid: I am often tempted against my life.

Mrs. S: Why, what causeth it?

Maid: Sometimes this, because I am not as others are, I do not look so as others do.

Tyburn, London, 7 March 1663

On the 7th we saw at Tyburn eleven people being hanged, three of the King's bodyguard, two women, and one negress of coloured woman.

London, Samuel Pepys' diary, 7 September 1665

Theredoor-cases, a coach and of chimneys Mr Povy's of stoodall the ready house for are me, marble. and heHe at showed his house me ready a black to comeboy that in... heThe had, window-cases, that died of a consumption; and being dead, he caused him to be dried in an oven and lies there entire in a box.

The will of Sir William Batten, December 1667

[Batten's will requested that upon his death his black servant 'Mingoe' should become Lighthouse keeper, and be left the sum of £20/year, the equivalent of £40,000 today.] Sir William Batten of London, knight, being in good health of body & sound and perfect mynd and understanding (praised by Almighty God) do make, ordain, publish and declare through my will and testament...Ibe give paid and within bequeath twelve to months my servant next

Mingo a Negro that now dwelleth with me the sum of ten pounds to

after my decease. And I do also give unto him the said Mingo the custody and keeping of my lighthouse at Harwich, and the sum of twenty pounds a year of lawful money of England during the term of this natural life for his pains therein.

London-Lisbon, 5 October 1671

The middle of the month September last, the officers of the Inquisition seized a Negro boy named John Adué of about the age of seventeen years, belonging to Richard Borthwick of London; which Negro boy was carried prisoner to the Inquisition, under the pretence that if he remained with his master that he would make him a heretic...Notwithstanding all and my often pressing them to restore the Negro or the value of him.

Winwick, Northampton, 17 December 1674

Burial: a Guinean boy, servant of Sir William Craven, baptized the summer before and named Winwick, was buried 17 December.

St Clement Danes, London, 21 December 1675

Baptism: Charles, a black, his name Hercules.

**Edward Terry, *A Voyage to East India* (1655)**

*Description of 'Mahometans', or followers of Islam.* It cannot be denied, that there are some things in the precepts which Mahomet [Mohamed] hath prescribed to be received and observed by his followers that are good, laid down in eight commandments, which are these:

*First.* That God is a great God, and the only God, and Mahomet is the prophet of God.

*Second.* That children must obey their parents, and do nothing to displease them.

*Third.* That every one must do to another that, and only that, which he would have another to do him. *Fourth* . That every man, five times every day, must repair to the mosque, or church, to pray there; or wheresoever he is, he must pray every day so often; if not in the church, then elsewhere.

*Fifth.* That one whole moon in every year every man, come to years of discretion, must spend the whole day between the rising and setting of the sun, in fasting.

*Sixth.* That every one out of his store must give unto the poor liberally, freely, and voluntarily.

*Seventh.* That every one except those votaries which renounce marriage, must marry, to increase and multiply the sect and the religion of Mahomet. *Eighth.* That no man must kill or shed blood.

**Thomas Coryate, *Coryate's crudities hastily gobbled up in five months' travels* (1611)**

*According to the Oxford English Dictionary, Coryate's Crudities is the first English book to include the word 'ghetto'. Thomas Coryate's account of his travels from the English village of Odombe to Europe in the early seventeenth century was one of the most influential travelogues of the Jacobean period. Much of the popularity of this book derived from Coryate's humorous style and reputation as a jester. Encouraged by the success of his Crudities, Coryate decided to travel to India by foot, promising his friends that he would meet the Mughal emperor and ride an elephant; he died in India in 1617. Some of the letters he sent to friends and relatives, while he travelled across Greece, Turkey, Persia and India, were published in London in 1616. His description of the Venetian ghetto includes a detailed account of Jewish religious ceremonies, customs and dress. Coryate's observations reveal both curiosity and rejection. Jews had been expelled from England in 1290 and their social and religious practices were mostly unknown to seventeenth-century Englishmen like Coryate. At the same time, anti-Semitic prejudices were still very present. Coryate's description of the ghetto also echoed some passages of Shakespeare's The Merchant of Venice, such as the refusal of Jews to convert to Christianity, the rare beauty of Jewish women, and the reputation of Jews as money lenders.*

Optional additional reading: James Shapiro, 'How were the Jews regarded in 16th-century England?', <https://www.bl.uk/shakespeare/articles/how-were-the-jews-regarded-in-16th-century-england>

*Description of the Jewish Ghetto*

I was at a place where the whole fraternity of the Jews dwelled together, which is called the Ghetto, being an Island, for it is enclosed roundabout with water. It is thought there are of them in all between five and six thousand. They are distinguished and discerned from the Christians by their habits on their heads; for some of them do wear hats and those red, only those Jews that are borne in the Western parts of the world, as in Italy, etc; but the eastern Jews being otherwise called the Levantine Jews, which are borne in Jerusalem, Alexandria, Constantinople, etc. wear Turbans upon their heads as the Turks do. But the difference is this: the Turks wearer white, the Jews yellow. By that word Turban I understand a rowel of fine linen wrapped together upon their heads, which served them instead of hats, whereof many have been often worn by the Turks in London.

They have divers Synagogues Divine in their Ghetto, at the least seven, where men, women and children do meet together upon their Sabbath, which is Saturday, to the end to do their devotion, and serve God in

their kind, each company having several Synagogues. In the midst of the Synagogue they have a round seat made of Wainscot, having eight open spaces therein, at two whereof which are at the sides, they enter into the seat as by doors. The Levite that read the law to them, hath before him at the time of divine service an exceeding long piece of parchment, rolled up upon two wooden handles in which is written the whole sum and contents of Moses' law in Hebrew that doth he (being discerned from the lay people only by wearing of a red cap, whereas the others do wear red hats) pronounce before the congregation not by a sober, distinct, and orderly reading, but by an exceeding loud yelling, indecent roaring. And that reading, after such a confused and huddling manner, that I think the hearers can very hardly understand him. Sometimes he cries out alone, and sometimes again some others serving as it were his Clerks hard without his seat, and within, do roar with him, but so that his voice (which he strained so high as if he sung for a wager) drowned all the rest. Amongst others that are within the room with him, one is he that came purposely thither from his seat, to the end to read the law, and pronounce some part of it with him, who when he is gone, another rose from his seat, and came thither to supply his room.

This order they keep from the beginning of service to the end. One custom I observed amongst them very irreverent and profane, that none of them, either when they enter the Synagogue, or when they sit down in their places, or when they go forth again, doe any reverence or obeisance, answerable to such a place of the worship of God, either by uncovering their heads, kneeling, or any other external gesture, but boldly dash into the room with their Hebrew books in their hands, and presently sit in their places, without any more ado. Every one of them whatsoever he be, man or child, wear a kind of light yellowish veil made of linsey-woolsey (as I take it) over his shoulders, something worse than our coarser Holland [wool], which reached a little beneath the middle of their backs. They have a great company of candlesticks in each Synagogue made partly of glass, and partly of brass and pewter, which hang square about their Synagogue.

For in that form is their Synagogue built. Of their candlesticks I told above sixty in the same Synagogue.

I observed some few of those Jews especially some of the Levantines to be such goodly and proper men, that then I said to myself our English proverb: To look like a Jew (whereby is meant sometimes a weather beaten warp-faced fellow, sometimes a prentice and lunatic person, sometimes one discontented) is not true. For indeed I noted some of them to be most elegant and sweet featured persons, which gave me occasion the more to lament their religion.

In the room wherein they celebrate their divine service, no women sit, but have a loft or gallery proper to themselves only, where I saw many Jewish women, whereof some were as beautiful as ever I saw, and so gorgeous in their apparel, jewels, chains of gold, and rings adorned with precious stones, that some of our English Countesses do scarce exceed them, having marvellous long trains like Princesses that are borne up by waiting women serving for the same purpose. They are very religious in two things only, and no more, in that they worship no images, and that they keep their Sabbath so strictly, that upon that day they will neither buy nor sell, nor do any secular, profane, or irreligious exercise (I would to God our Christians would imitate the Jews herein) no not so much as dress their victuals, which is always done the day before, but dedicate and consecrate themselves only to the strict worship of God. Their circumcision they observe as duly as they did any time between Abraham (in whose time it was first instituted) and the incarnation of Christ. For they use to circumcise every male child when he is eight days old, with a stony knife. But I had not the opportunity to see it...

**Literary document:**

**William Shakespeare, *Othello* (1603), Act I, scene I**

*The scene below raises some of the issues around interracial relationships and the sexual politics of such relationships within the patriarchal framework of early modern England. Here, Desdemona's father, Brabantio, hears of Desdemona's relations with Othello, who is criticized through a series of stereotypes relating to geography and skin colour.*

RODERIGO [a gentleman of Venice]

What, ho, Brabantio! Signior Brabantio, ho!

LAGO [a villain]

Awake! what, ho, Brabantio! thieves! thieves! Thieves!

Look to your house, your daughter and your bags! Thieves!  
thieves!

*BRABANTIO appears above, at a window*

BRABANTIO [Desdemona's father]

What is the reason of this terrible summons?

What is the matter there?

RODERIGO

Signior, is all your family within?

LAGO

Are your doors lock'd?

BRABANTIO

Why, wherefore ask you this?

LAGO

'Zounds, sir, you're robb'd; for shame, put on  
Your gown;  
Your heart is burst, you have lost half your soul;  
Even now, now, very now, an old black ram  
Is topping your white ewe. Arise, arise;  
Awake the snorting citizens with the bell  
Or else the devil will make a grandsire of you: Arise,  
I say.

BRABANTIO

What, have you lost your wits?

RODERIGO

Most reverend signior, do you know my voice?

BRABANTIO

Not I what are you?

RODERIGO

My name is Roderigo.

BRABANTIO

The worser welcome:  
I have charged thee not to haunt about my doors:  
In honest plainness thou hast heard me say  
My daughter is not for thee; and now, in madness  
Being full of supper and distempering draughts  
Upon malicious bravery, dost thou come  
To start my quiet.

RODERIGO

Sir, sir, sir.

BRABANTIO

But thou must needs be sure  
My spirit and my place have in them power  
To make this bitter to thee.

RODERIGO

Patience, good sir.

BRABANTIO

What tell'st thou me of robbing? this is Venice;  
My house is not a grange.

RODERIGO

Most grave Brabantio  
In simple and pure soul I come to you.

IAGO

'Zounds, sir, you are one of those that will not  
Serve God, if the devil bid you. Because we come to  
Do you service and you think we are ruffians, you'll  
Have your daughter covered with a Barbary horse;  
You'll have your nephews neigh to you; you'll have  
Coursers for cousins and gennets for Germans.

BRABANTIO

What profane wretch art thou?

IAGO

I am one, sir, that comes to tell you your daughter  
And the Moor are now making the beast with two backs. BRABANTIO  
Thou art a villain.

IAGO

You are — a senator.

BRABANTIO

This thou shalt answer; I know thee, Roderigo.

RODERIGO

Sir, I will answer any thing. But, I beseech you If't  
be your pleasure and most wise consent  
As partly I find it is, that your fair daughter  
At this odd-even and dull watch o' the night  
Transported, with no worse nor better guard  
But with a knave of common hire, a gondolier  
To the gross clasps of a lascivious Moor –  
If this be known to you and your allowance  
We then have done you bold and saucy wrongs;  
But if you know not this, my manners tell me  
We have your wrong rebuke. Do not believe That,  
from the sense of all civility  
I thus would play and trifle with your reverence:  
Your daughter, if you have not given her leave  
I say again, hath made a gross revolt;  
Tying her duty, beauty, wit and fortunes  
In an extravagant and wheeling stranger  
Of here and everywhere. Straight satisfy yourself:  
If she be in her chamber or your house  
Let loose on me the justice of the state  
For thus deluding you.

BRABANTIO

Strike on the tinder, ho!  
Give me a taper! call up all my people!  
This accident is not unlike my dream:  
Belief of it oppresses me already  
Light, I say! light!

*Exit above*

IAGO

Farewell; for I must leave you:  
It seems not meet, nor wholesome to my place  
To be produced – as, if I stay, I shall –  
  
Against the Moor: for, I do know, the state  
However this may gall him with some cheque  
Cannot with safety cast him, for he's embark'd  
With such loud reason to the Cyprus wars  
Which even now stand in act, that, for their souls  
Another of his fathom they have none  
To lead their business: in which regard  
Though I do hate him as I do hell-pains  
Yet, for necessity of present life  
I must show out a flag and sign of love  
Which is indeed but sign. That you shall surely find him  
Lead to the Sagittary the raised search;  
And there will I be with him. So, farewell.

**Beyond text:**

First image: 'To wash an Ethiopian white' was a common adage in early modern England that expressed the impossibility of changing fundamental traits or properties. While dating to classical antiquity, the adage appeared frequently in literature and emblem books of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries – precisely at the time when the English were also encountering Africans through exploration and trade. For more on this adage, see <https://www.jobnblanke.com/nandini-das.html>



Abluis Aethiopem quid frustra? ah desine, noctis  
Illustrare nigrae nemo potest tenebras.  
[Why are you washing an Ethiopian in vain? Oh, do stop.  
No one can turn the shades of black night into light.]

Second image. This is the first known painting of a Muslim made in England. Abd el-Ouahed ben Messaoud was the principal secretary of the Sultan of Morocco, Mulay Ahmad al-Mansur. In 1600 he led a Moroccan embassy to England to negotiate an alliance between al-Mansur and Elizabeth I. The presence of ben Messaoud caused a stir at the Elizabethan court, and the Moroccan ambassador is supposed to have inspired Shakespeare to create the character of Othello. Linking the cultural production of images like portraits to diplomatic events and responses in literature might invite students to think about how representations of other peoples, cultures, and faiths depend on genre and voice, and that such representations can often be complicated by counter-examples and the personal element of encounter between individuals. For more information, see Jerry Brotton, *This Orient Isle: Elizabethan England and the Islamic World*.



Unknown artist, Abd el-Ouahed ben Messaoud ben Mohammed Anoun, Moorish Ambassador to Queen Elizabeth I (c. 1600)

*Third image. Rodrigo Lopez was a Portuguese-born Jewish physician who migrated to England in 1559 to escape the Portuguese Inquisition. Highly valued for his medical skill, Queen Elizabeth appointed Lopez as her personal physician in 1581. This privileged position put Lopez at the centre of an obscure diplomatic and political intrigue. At the height of the scandal, Lopez' foreign status and religion – despite the fact that he conformed publicly to the Protestant Church – became a flashpoint for ideas of cultural difference and treason. Lopez was executed as a traitor in 1594.*



*Roderigo Lopez (right) colluding with a Spanish spy, in George Carleton, A Thankful Remembrance of God's Mercy (1630.)*

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