This presentation draws on one aspect of my ongoing book project investigating the representation of Muslims and Jews in Old Danish and Swedish manuscripts. Viking-Age runestones in Sweden attest to travellers' voyages east to Serkland (Land of the Saracens), and there were probably Jews resident in Danish Normandy as early as the 12th century. The Crusades would also have provided Scandinavians with the opportunity to experience Muslims and Jews at first hand, and in the Late Middle Ages, Jews may have travelled to Scandinavia as traders, although no official community existed there until 1622. On the whole, however, Denmark and Sweden demonstrate an interesting aspect of the complex relationship between Christian and non-Christian groups: there was little physical contact between them, so rather than being individuals who were actually encountered and experienced, Muslims and Jews were ‘imagined’ constructions that were both distinct in geography and religion. My project aims to answer questions such as: Just how were these ‘imagined’ groups understood by common folk? Were both groups always viewed in entirely negative terms? Are there any images specific to Scandinavia? How did the perception of Muslims and Jews in the Middle Ages mould Scandinavian political and religious identity and shape relations in the modern era?

In this seminar, I will examine how Jews were described in medieval Danish texts and art. We will first see how the central image of the Jews as Christ killers was used in different contexts before looking at the development of other mythological images of Jews and how these were created by a particular language. I will conclude by describing the change in how Jews were described, which began with the publication of Johannes Pfefferkorn's Confessions of the Jews in Danish in 1516.

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