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DESIRING THE OTHER:
SUBJUGATION AND RESISTANCE OF THE FEMALE SARACEN IN THE *CHANSON DE GESTE*

Introduction

Subjugation of the female, in particular sexual subjugation, has always been a tool in the struggle for cultural dominance, whether in the rape of Boudicca's daughters, the 'comfort women' who served the Japanese imperial army during the Second World War, or the racial cleansing of the Rohingya Muslims. Elisabeth Schober has expressed it thus: 'in nationalist narratives across the globe, the boundary of the nation is frequently imagined to be equivalent to the actual female bodies of the said nation'.¹ In her introduction to the English translation of Malek Alloua's *The Colonial Harem*, Barbara Harlow, discussing the domination of colonialism, notes that 'Possession of Arab women came to serve as a surrogate for and means to the political and military conquest of the Arab world'.² Nor does the community concerned in the subjugation have to be that of nation: the stereotypical *belle sarrasine* of the medieval *chanson de geste* embodies the religious Other rather than a member of a nation state. In this case her subjugation is intensified by her complicity, as she actively desires and works for union with the Christian male. Although not national in the modern sense,

¹ Elisabeth Schober, '“The Colonized Bodies of our Women...”: Imaginative and Material terrains of US Military Entertainment on the Fringes of South Korea', in *Gender and Conflict: Embodiments, Discourses and Symbolic Practices*, ed. by Georg Frerks, Annelou Ypeij and Reinhilde Sotiria König (Ashgate: Farnham, 2014), pp. 133–50 (p. 133).

² Barbara Harlow, 'Introduction', in Malek Alloua, *The Colonial Harem*, trans. by Myrns Godzich and Wlad Godzich, p. xv; quoted in Sharon Kinoshita, 'The Politics of Courtly Love: *La Prise d'Orange* and the Conversion of the Saracen Queen', *Romanic Review*, 26 (1995), 265–87 (p. 265).

territorial interests were also served by this since the Saracen princess frequently brought with her the lands that had belonged to her father or husband, now defeated and killed by the Christian host. Not all Saracen women conform to the stereotype, as I shall explore in this article; those who resist conformity must be read in the context of the dominant stereotype as depicted in canonical texts of the genre, and with an awareness of the expectations of both contemporary and modern readers.

Postcolonial and orientalist discourse has provided scholars with a particular perspective on such relationships and has determined much of the vocabulary we now use to discuss the relationship between East and West. It can, however, also distort our responses to the medieval texts which are then read through a modern, post-colonial lens, reinforcing our own stereotypes of crusading literature as a locus for an overtly articulated sense of the Other as wrong and inferior.

Scholarship, long aware of the complexities of *convivencia* in Iberia, has also begun to contest the idea of this rigid binary opposition of Christian and non-Christian elsewhere, with an increased understanding of cultural encounters in the Mediterranean, particularly in Outremer, and even of Christian and non-Christian sharing sacred space.³ While literary

³Benjamin Z. Kedar, 'Convergences of Oriental Christian, Muslim and Frankish Worshippers: The Case of Saydnaya', in *De Sion exhibit lex et verbum domini de Hierusalem: Essays on Medieval Law, Liturgy and Literature in Honour of Amnon Linder*, ed. by Yitzhak Hen (Turnhout: Brepols, 2001), pp. 59–69; see also Ora Limor, 'Sharing Sacred Space: Holy Places in Jerusalem Between Christianity, Judaism and Islam' *In Laudem Hierosolymitani: Studies in Crusades and Medieval Culture in Honour of Benjamin Z. Kedar*, ed. by Iris Shagrir, Ronnie Ellenblum and Jonathan Riley-Smith (Farnham: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 219–231.

analysis has lagged behind historical study, there is growing awareness of the complexity of Christian-Saracen encounters and of the literary representation of the Other. Yet, as Simon Gaunt has noted, ‘many medievalists are loathe to accord the Middle Ages this kind of openness [to difference], so strong is the commitment to locating the pernicious ideological roots and preconditions of colonialism in medieval culture’.⁴ When it comes to any suggestion of accepted alterity in the *chansons de geste*, strongly linked as they are to a crusading ethos, the reluctance to move away from a binary and confrontational approach is even more marked. Catalina Girbea, in her monograph on *Le Bon Sarrasin dans le roman medieval*, contrasts the treatment of the good Saracen in romance with the intolerance of the *chanson de geste*.⁵ Sharon Kinoshita in her discussion of the earliest known *chanson de geste*, the *Chanson de Roland*, offers a more complex reading: she concludes, that the extant *Chanson de Roland* of the early twelfth century is creating the very binary opposition between Christian and Saracen that it has in the past been said to reflect, and that the ‘proto-Orientalist’ and crusading ethos ‘presumed to permeate the poem...is instead produced during the course of it’.⁶ The pre-eminence of the Oxford (assonanced) version of the

⁴ Simon Gaunt, ‘Coming Communities in Medieval Francophone Writing about the Orient’, in *Violence and the Writing of History in the Medieval Francophone World*, ed. by Noah D. Guynn and Zrinka Stahuljak (Boydell & Brewer, 2013), pp. 188–89.

⁵ Catalina Girbea, *Le Bon Sarrasin dans le roman medieval* (Paris: Garnier, 2014), pp. 28, 29.

⁶ Sharon Kinoshita, *Medieval Boundaries: Re-thinking Difference in Old French Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), pp. 15–45 (p. 15); this is discussed in C. Jewers, ‘Becoming Saracen: Seduction, Conquest and Exchange in *Rollan a Saragossa*’, *Romance Studies*, 27 (2009), 95–105 (pp. 96–97); see also Sharon Kinoshita, “‘Pagans are

Chanson de Roland in *chanson de geste* studies, though now being challenged, is another contributory factor in perceptions of the genre. Although *chanson de geste* specialists have long recognised the many ways in which the *Roland* is atypical of the genre, it has shaped the understanding of medievalists to a degree that readings of a whole body of literature remain dominated by binary opposition. Jane Gilbert has noted, however, that the binary opposition is much more stark in the less well-known later *Rhymed Roland* which ‘tallies much more closely with the *Song of Roland* of modern memory-myth than does the assonanced’.⁷ This dominant ‘memory-myth’ in which the ‘Saracens are uncomplicatedly demonized’,⁸ needs to be nuanced not only by a re-reading of the *Roland*, but also by broadening the corpus of epic poems discussed. In this study I will do so through an examination of Saracen women who do not fit the stereotypes, challenging both medieval and modern expectations.

The only book length study of the Saracen female, that by Jacqueline de Weever, considers the (physically and literally) white and black Saracen women as embodying these extremes.⁹ With the exception of de Weever’s influential study, discussion of the Saracen female has been largely focussed on those Saracen females who convert, sometimes with

Wrong and Christians are Right”: Alterity, Gender, and Nation in the *Chanson de Roland*, *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 31 (2001), 79–111.

⁷ Jane Gilbert, ‘The *Chanson de Roland*’, *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval French Literature*, ed, Simon Gaunt and Sarah Kay (Cambridge: CUP, 2009), pp. 21-34 (p. 24).

⁸ Gilbert, ‘The *Chanson de Roland*’, p. 24.

⁹ Jaqueline de Weever, *Sheba’s Daughters: Whitening and Demonizing the Saracen Woman in Medieval French Epic* (New York: Garland, 1998).

debate over the degree of assimilation.¹⁰ In many cases these beautiful Saracen princesses confess to a willingness to convert early in the narrative, but this is not realised through baptism until late in the text, making it possible for these feisty women to behave in ways that would be considered inappropriate for female Christians. The binary division between, on the one hand, the *belle sarrasine*, the good (if initially feisty) Saracen female whose alterity is first minimised by her physical description as an idealised Western beauty, sometimes explicitly *blanche*, and then erased by her conversion, and, on the other, the monstrous, often black, sometimes gigantic, female warrior, can be reinforced by the use of postcolonial and orientalist approaches, which continue to stress a ‘them and us’ structure. Sylvia Huot, in a study focussing more on romance than epic, writes of the ‘exotic foreign woman [who] might be either alluring or horrific’ and of alluring women who ‘acknowledge the universal appeal of Christian doctrine in their ready conversion’.¹¹ That many of the texts themselves do not recognise shades of skin colour, describing the women as fair or black, invites binarism, but this is an incomplete picture. Women who are not horrific monsters, but also do not acknowledge the superiority of Christianity or the Christian knight through conversion, and who do not conform to the dominant stereotype, are thus largely ignored. The reluctant female who must be forced or persuaded to convert, and the woman who resists the charms of the Christian knight to stay faithful to a Saracen lover, are the focus of this article.

¹⁰ See for example, Philip E. Bennett and Leslie Zarker Morgan, ‘The Avatars of Orable-Guibourc from French *chansons de geste* to Italian romanzo cavalleresco: A Persistent Multiple Atterity’, *Francigena*, 1 (2015), <https://www.francigena-unipd.com/index.php/francigena/article/view/7> [accessed 5 July 2019].

¹¹ Sylvia Huot, *Outsiders: The Humanity and Inhumanity of Giants in Medieval French Prose Romance* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2016), p. 6.

Subjugation and assimilation

From the *Chanson de Roland* onwards, in its earliest extant form dating from early in the twelfth century, the female Saracen is treated differently from the male. In the *Roland*, the Saracen queen, Bramimonde, alone is picked out to be converted *par amur* (l. 3674), a phrase which here does not seem to imply sexual love but rather conviction of the truth, as she is baptised having ‘heard so many sermons and parables [that] she wants to believe on God, [and] asks to become a Christian’.¹² Gérard Brault considers her treatment at Charlemagne’s hands to be a sign of Charlemagne’s generosity, but it is surely much more than this; though not worked out through sexual dominance, it is also religious subjugation.¹³ In Kinoshita’s

¹² *The Song of Roland: Translations of the Versions in Assonance and Rhyme of the Chanson de Roland*, trans. by Joseph J. Duggan and Annalee C. Rejhon (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012), ll. 3979-80; ‘tant ad oït e sermuns e essamples / creire volet Deu, chrestientét demandet’, ll. 3979-80, *La Chanson de Roland*, ed. by Ian Short in *La Chanson de Roland, The Song of Roland: The French Corpus*, 3 vols (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), vol 1, general editor J.J. Duggan. See also ‘“Truuet li unt le num de Juliane”: sur le rôle de Bramimonde dans la *Chanson de Roland*’, *Mélanges Pierre Le Gentil*, ed. by J. Dufournet and D. Poirion (Paris, 1973), pp. 134–49. On the conversion of Bramimonde see also Gerard Brault, *The Song of Roland: An Analytical Edition*, 2 vols (University Park & London: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1978), I, pp. 333–35; Hans Erich Keller, ‘La Conversion de Bramononde’, *Olifant*, 1 (1973), 3–22; John A. Stranges, ‘The Significance of Bramimonde’s Conversion in the *Song of Roland*’, *Romance Notes*, 16 (1974), 189–95.

¹³ Brault, ‘“Truuet li unt le num de Juliane”’, 142–49. See also Paul Bancourt, *Les Musulmans dans les chansons de geste du Cycle du Roi* (Aix-en-Provence: Université de Provence, 1982), p. 667, n. 1.

reading it is the Saracen queen, Bramimonde who ‘secures the boundary between pagans and Christians’,¹⁴ and the two female characters, Bramimonde and Aude, Roland’s fiancée, are ‘central to its construction of difference’.¹⁵ Conversion is gendered, and the removal of the boundary between pagan and Christian affirms the superiority and identity of the latter. The subjugation is all the more dramatic given what Hans Erich Keller has described as the ‘tempérament violent de cette femme remarquable’.¹⁶ The fact that Bramimonde does not marry a Christian could be considered to leave her assimilation incomplete, though some later versions of the *Roland* inform the reader that Bramimonde spends the rest of her days in an abbey thus assimilating her into Christian society through a different route.¹⁷ The poet is insistent on the voluntary nature of Bramimonde’s conversion, which contrasts with the forced baptism of many at the end of the *Roland*. In this voluntary assimilation of the female the obliteration of alterity is all the more complete.

By the end of the twelfth century, this topos of the beautiful Saracen female was established, with a narrative pattern which frequently ended with not just the conversion of the *belle sarrasine*, but also with her marriage to a Christian knight, the subjugation, and assimilation, of the female Other in exogamous marriage becoming emblematic of the complete destruction of another society. The emphasis is almost always on the willing conversion of the female Other and her marriage; her very agency and complicity in her own

¹⁴ Kinoshita, “Pagans are Wrong and Christians are Right”, p. 80.

¹⁵ Kinoshita, *Medieval Boundaries*, p. 16; see also Kinoshita, ‘“Pagans are Wrong and Christians are Right”’, pp. 90–103.

¹⁶ Keller, ‘La Conversion de Bramimonde’, p. 6.

¹⁷ MSS Chateauroux and Venice 7, l. 5994, ed. by Joseph J. Duggan in *The Song of Roland: The French Corpus*.

subjugation underline the superiority of the Christian. Kinoshita, in her analysis of the Saracen queen Orable in the *Prise d'Orange*, expresses this in terms of an erasure of the violence of military conquest in 'the Saracen women's willing embrace of the conqueror'.¹⁸ Yet it is also a justification of that violence and a re-assertion of superiority, particularly, as Kinoshita points out, in a historical context where the Other may have been seen as culturally superior, or where there was a fear that this was the case.¹⁹ The fulfilment of the Saracen female's wishes is, ironically, complete submission.

The most complete subjugation can be seen in the *chanson de geste*, *Fierabras*, dating from around 1200, one of the most widespread narratives of the whole medieval period.²⁰ Huot sees Floripas, the *belle sarrasine* of this poem, as at once 'vengeful and amorous' and encompassing 'extremes of ideal femininity and pagan ferocity'.²¹ The feisty and violent Floripas willingly converts for love of Gui de Bourgogne, bringing with her the lands her father has ruled over; she is then literally stripped for baptism, accessible to the gaze of the Christian male onlookers, in an overtly eroticised scene. Floripas' baptism embodies the Christian victory. On the one hand Floripas has real agency over the course of the narrative, engineering her marriage with Gui and aiding the peers against her father the Emir; on the other hand she offers herself at once to the Christian God and to the desiring gaze of Charlemagne and the peers.

¹⁸ Kinoshita, 'The Politics of Courtly Love...', p. 286.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 286.

²⁰ *Fierabras*, ed. by Marc Le Person (Paris: Champion, 2003); all references are to this edition. On the *Fierabras* tradition see *Le Rayonnement de Fierabras dans la littérature européenne*, ed. by Marc le Person, (Lyon: Université Jean Moulin, 2003).

²¹ Huot, *Outsiders*, pp. 102–3.

Prohibition of inter-faith sexual relations

The western prohibition of mixed-faith relationships, which became more explicit from the twelfth century on,²² was in keeping with biblical teaching and Christian tradition, and corresponds to what Julian Pitt-Rivers described as a ‘defensive’ marriage strategy which aims to keep women within the group.²³ In early medieval Muslim Spain, by contrast we find aggressive exogamy, with Christian women subjugated and becoming concubines at the Muslim courts.²⁴ In something of an inversion of this historical situation in Spain, the literary fantasy of the Saracen princess converting for love creates a similar but fictional ‘aggressive strategy [which] aims to deny its women to outsiders and take in their women’.²⁵ Such a strategy asserts the power of the dominant religion while at the same time, because the Muslim princess converts, does not contradict biblical injunction against miscegenation. This aggression can be presented as a liberation or, more specifically in medieval texts, as redemption. Harlow describes both the French in Algeria and the British in India and Africa as ‘collaborating with women under the pretext of liberating them from oppression by their

²² See among other studies, Simon Barton, *Conquerors, Brides and Concubines: Interfaith Relations and Social Power in Medieval Iberia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), pp. 62–67.

²³ Julian Pitt-Rivers, *Fate of Shechem or the Politics of Sex* (Cambridge: CUP, 1977).

²⁴ Barton, *Conquerors, Brides and Concubines*, pp. 33–44.

²⁵ Julian Pitt-Rivers, *Fate of Shechem*, p. 166 offers three models: the conciliatory, in which women are exchanged, the defensive, and the aggressive; see discussion in Simon Barton, ‘Marriage across Frontiers: Sexual Mixing, Power and Identity in Medieval Iberia’, *Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies*, 3 (2011), 1–25.

own men'.²⁶ For Harlow this was the aggressive gaze of the male colonial upon the subjugated female, and even today arguments rage over the competing claims of female liberation and concerns about cultural colonialism. In the context of the Middle Ages, freeing or redeeming the desirable female was seen as a good in itself, though it was one which in the *chansons de geste* often brought with it benefit for the Christian knight who desired her.

Many *chansons de geste* took the prohibition against inter-faith sexual relationships seriously. In *Fierabras* Gui de Bourgogne expresses reluctance to accept Floripas' offer of herself as bride though not explicitly because she is a Saracen; his reluctance comes from his feudal obligations to Charlemagne (ll. 2914-16). Even when Gui has been persuaded by Roland that he should be betrothed to Floripas, who holds in her hands the fate of all the peers (held captive by her father), they deliberately restrict their physical contact, not kissing on the mouth, because she is not yet baptised (ll. 2917-30). In the Anglo-Norman *chanson de geste* *Boeve de Haumtonne* it is similarly made clear that the reason Boeve initially rejects the advances of Josiane, the *belle sarrasine*, is because she is not a Christian.²⁷ The Occitan text *Daurel et Beton* offers further evidence of concern over miscegenation. In this text the young

²⁶ Harlow, in *The Colonial Harem*, p. xviii.

²⁷ *Der anglonormannische Boeve de Haumton*, ed. By Albert Stimming (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1899); Judith Weiss, 'The Wooing Woman in Anglo-Norman Romance', in *Romance in Medieval England*, ed. by Jennifer Fellows, Carol Meale and Maldwyn Mills (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1991), pp.149–61; see also Suzanne Conklin Akbari, 'Woman as Mediator in Medieval Depictions of Muslims: The Case of Floripas', in *Medieval Constructions in Gender and Identity: Essays in Honor of Joan M. Ferrante*, ed. by Teodolinda Barolini (Arizona: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2005), pp. 151–68.

Christian Beton has taken refuge from his stepfather at the court of the Emir of Babylonia. This is a *chanson de geste* in general relatively indifferent to religious alterity, yet even here when the Emir offers his daughter to Beton as a bride, the marriage can only go ahead if the girl is baptised. This caveat, however, is not uttered by Beton, but by his adoptive father Daurel. Beton will accept the girl if it is Daurel's wish (ll. 1856-57); Daurel sets the condition:

« Prendet la, senher, que ben n'es covinen,
Ab solamen que.us fassa .i. covinen -
Per vostr' amor prendra batiamen »
(ll. 1859-61)

[" Take her my lord, as this is most fitting
Just as long as she makes you a solemn promise
That for love of you she will take baptism"].²⁸

This is a twist on the *belle sarrasine* theme. The girl is expected to convert for love, but has no agency as she is a gift of her father. Neither the Emir nor the queen makes any comment; they seem just as indifferent to religious difference as the other protagonists in the text. Conversion is about assimilation to the expectations of her betrothed's family, but remains a condition for integration.

The resistant female forced into marriage

²⁸ *A Critical edition of the Old Provençal epic: Daurel et Beton*, ed. by Arthur S. Kimmel (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1971); transl. by Linda Paterson.

The Emir's daughter in *Daurel et Beton* has little choice. It is rare, outside the topos of the *belle sarrasine*, that women in the *chanson de geste* are able to choose their own husbands without being condemned by the narrator.²⁹ Agency in this area is regarded as a form of rebellion which, as Jean-Claude Vallecalle has pointed out, is usually safely restricted to Saracen women,³⁰ though in *Daurel et Beton*, as we have noted, even the *belle sarrasine* has limited control over her fate. In a few cases, however, the female does not desire the proposed alliance; she resists and there may be an element of force.

Sarah Kay discusses 'one of very few Saracen princesses not to get the man she wants':³¹ in *Aspremont*, dating from around the time of the Third Crusade (1189-92), the widow of the Saracen king Agolant, who is romantically interested in Charlemagne's peer, Naimon, is given by Girart de Fraite to his brother-in law instead, though Girart does set the

²⁹ This does happen in *Ami et Amile* where Charlemagne's own daughter manipulates the situation to get the man she loves, but she then turns into an exemplary wife and mother. In *Otinel* Charlemagne's daughter is very willing to marry Otinel – but she is not proactive in achieving this.

³⁰ Jean-Claude Vallecalle, 'Rupture et integration: l'héroïne révoltée dans les chansons de geste', in *Charlemagne in the North*, ed. by Philip E. Bennett, Anne Elizabeth Cobby, Graham A. Runnalls (Edinburgh : Société Rencesvals British Branch, 1993) pp. 449-61.

³¹ Sarah Kay, *The Chansons de geste in the Age of Romance: Political Fictions* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), pp. 40–42; F. M. Warren, 'The Enamoured Muslim Princess in Orderic Vital and the French Epic', *PMLA*, 29 (1914), 341–58 points out that in the oldest surviving Saracen princess narrative, that of Orderic Vitalis, the princess does not marry the man for whom she had converted (p. 343).

condition that she must be willing (ll. 10872-951).³² It is, as Bancourt points out, an ‘inspiration plus réaliste [qui] supplante visiblement la convention romanesque’; arranged marriage was the norm for noble Christian women so in this the captive Saracen was treated no worse than any other woman.³³ The Saracen female as an object of exchange is like Christian women, but doubly Other, as female and non-Christian. In *Aspremont*, where the willing female does not get what she has desired, there is no active resistance and the narrative voice makes no comment, suggesting that for the readers/audience of this text such treatment would be acceptable. Although by the end of the twelfth century the church, which was trying to exert more control over marriage practices, was articulating clearly the requirement that both parties should consent, it would often have been difficult for women to refuse the marriage arranged; many would accept that part of their role was to serve as an object of exchange between men.³⁴ Several *chansons de geste* indicate at least reservations about forced marriage, even where the benefits of the alliance would include the conversion of the female and/or the transfer of power to the eligible Christian male. In *La Destruction de Rome*, the post-written prequel to *Fierabras*, Floripas is initially betrothed to her father’s

³² *Aspremont*, ed. F. Suard (Paris: Champion, 2008).

³³ Bancourt, *Les Musulmans*, p. 672; Joan Williamson has pointed out that *Aspremont* at several points depicts woman as victim in time of war, ‘The Feminine Element in the *Chanson d’Aspremont*’, *Charlemagne in the North* pp. 387–98 (p. 392).

³⁴ On consent see Shulamith Shahar, *The Fourth Estate: A History of Women in the Middle Ages*, rev. ed. (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 82-84; see also Gabriel Le Bras, ‘Le mariage dans la théologie et le droit de l’église du XI^e au XIII^e siècle’, *Cahiers de Civilisation Médiévale*, 11 (1968), 191–201 (197-8), cited by Vallecalle in, ‘Rupture et integration...’, p. 454.

intimate, Lucafer; she resists, responding violently to the proposal, striking her intended fiancé;³⁵ this resistance to the marriage is even portrayed visually in one of the illuminations to the Hannover redaction of the *Destruction de Rome*: Hannover Landesbibliothek IV 578 f. 5r depicts Floripas slapping Lucafer. The only condition Floripas can set is that Lucafer must first defeat Charlemagne. That the practice of forcing marriage on a woman was unacceptable is evident as seen in those texts where we find a Christian knight defending a Saracen princess to prevent her being forced into an unwanted marriage.³⁶ The unacceptable practice of forcing the marriage belongs to the Saracen camp, as does the female resistance through violence, her deferred conversion giving the poet space to create a resistance that would otherwise be unacceptable.

Le Bâtard de Bouillon, a text belonging to the Second Crusade Cycle, presents a very different scenario, developing the topos of the *belle sarrasine* in two different directions with both a forced marriage and accompanying forced conversion, and sexual intimacy outside marriage. It appears to avoid the normal horror of miscegenation, but neither situation is dealt with in a straightforward way. This is an extraordinary text, apparently composite in its origins, and difficult to date, surviving only in a single fourteenth-century manuscript.³⁷ Such

³⁵ Ailes, ‘Otinél...’; in *Fierabras* itself she is offered to Oliver by Fierabras as a gift should he convert to the Saracen religion.

³⁶ Examples include Herpin in *Lion de Bourges* and Roland in the *Entrée d’Espagne*; in *La Chevalerie Ogier* it is more that Ogier is defending the rights of the Saracen knight Karaheu whose fiancée Goriande is being offered by her father to another.

³⁷ *Le Bâtard de Bouillon*, ed. by Robert Francis Cook (Geneva: Droz, 1972); on the manuscript see ed. Cook, pp. xc–xcv; on the development of the Second Crusade Cycle see Robert F. Cook and Larry S. Crist, *Le Deuxième Cycle de la croisade. Deux études sur son*

late *chansons de geste* have often in the past been dismissed as representing a decadent stage of the genre, or as a kind of rag-bag of commonplaces drawn from the tradition.³⁸ This particular poem, with an episode in the land of Féerie where king Arthur rules, clearly draws some of its material from outside the genre, but the *belle sarrasine* motif belongs entirely to the *chanson de geste* and undergoes considerable transformation. Despite the expected agency of the Saracen female neither of the *belles sarrasines* in this text gets entirely what she wishes: although the mother of the Bâtard does manage to seduce her desired lover, she does not marry him but bears his child, thus putting her beyond the pale in terms of acceptable female behaviour.³⁹ The other Saracen female, Ludie, daughter of the amulainne d'Orbie, wants to be faithful to her Saracen lover. Like so many aristocratic women of the Middle Ages, Ludie is the object of exchange between men and is forced into marriage with the eponymous Bâtard: she is offered to him by her father as part of the peace terms after he has been defeated by the Christian forces (ll. 5155-61). During the battle the Bâtard has been challenged by Ludie's former (Saracen) fiancé whose motivation in fighting the Christian is as much love (or at least a desire not to be deprived of his fiancée) as religion. He searches out the Bâtard :

“Va me dire au Bastart, out tant a fellonie,

développement. Les textes en vers. Saladin (Genève : Droz, 1972) ; on the dating see pp. LVI–LXII of the edition.

³⁸ Cook, *Le Bâtard de Bouillon*, p. VII.

³⁹ Victoria Turner includes the Bâtard's mother, Synamonde, in her forthcoming study 'Diabolical Damsels? Contextualising the Saracen Temptress and Crusader Sinfulness in Second Crusade Cycle Narratives'; I am grateful to Dr Turner for allowing me access to a pre-publication copy of this book chapter and for reading a draft of this article.

Qu'il viegne a moi joster, car mes corps le deffie.

Je li voeil calengier le pucelle Ludie ;

Sans cause et sans rayson l'a piece a convoitie,

Car je veu a Mahon qu'il ne l'avera mie".

(ll. 4972-76)

[“Go and say on my behalf to the Bastard, who is so full of wickedness, that he should come and fight with me, for I defy him with my body. I wish to challenge him over the maid Ludie. Without rhyme or reason he has desired her; I vow to Mahon that he will never have her”].⁴⁰

The discourse of the poem at this point is entirely within the traditions of the *chanson de geste*, with opposing Christian and Saracen, while still pointing out the (potential) worth of the heathen opponent - if only they believed in the Christian God. Thus when the Bâtard first meets the Saracen leader Corsabrin he urges him to convert:

“Mout estes biaux et dous, ains ne vi vostre per.

Che sera grans dommages, ch'il vous convient finer ;

Mais voeilliés nostre loy et croire et aourer

Et vos voeilliés en fons baptisier et lever :

Tres loyal compaignie porrés en moi trouver”.

(ll. 5012-16)

⁴⁰ Translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

[“You are handsome and charming; I never saw your equal, It will be a great pity if you have to be killed; but if you wish to believe our faith and worship, and if you wish to be baptised in the font, you could find me a very loyal companion”].

But he adds the condition that he, the Bâtard, should get Ludie as wife:

“Ludie la pucelle me lairés espouser,
Et nous irons ailleurs vo moullier conquerer”.

(ll. 5019-20)

[“Let me marry the maid Ludie, and we will go and win a wife for you elsewhere”].

In some ways this is similar to the offers frequently made to their counterparts in battle by warriors on both sides: both offer and demand are predicated on an assumption that the woman may be an object of male exchange for both Christian and Saracen, but the Bâtard expresses his will in stronger terms, with neither the woman nor her guardian being given much choice. When the Saracens have been defeated and Corsabrin has had to flee, the amulainne sends a false message of conciliation to the Bâtard offering him Ludie, his daughter (ll. 5155-60). He says that he will give his body ‘a le loy crestienne’ [to the Christian faith, l. 5206] and Ludie is explicitly part of the peace accord: the Bâtard is to have Ludie if she pleases him (l. 5208: ‘Se Ludie vous plaist’) and ‘par ce mariage le pais venir porra’ [and through this marriage peace may come about, l. 5209]. The amulainne is, however, not to be trusted. The condition for the Bâtard to get the girl is that he should deny Christianity:

L’amulainne s’escrie; “frans crestiens menbrus,
Veschi ma belle fille, a cui vous serés drus,

A fin que renoiés le vostre dieu Jhesus.

S'en Mahon ne creés, mal estes embatus”.

(ll. 5247-50)

[The amulaine cries out: “Frank, strong-limbed Christian, here is my beautiful daughter; you will be her beloved, as long as you deny your god Jesus. If you do not believe in Mahon, you will be hunted down”].

Not unprepared for this, the Christians enter the city/citadel with armour under their clothing, fight their way out, and, joined by the forces they had left outside, defeat the Saracens, taking the castle. Ludie is forcibly baptised and taken by the Bâtard. The poem comments on this, apparently criticising his protagonist: *Moult par est fox li hons emprent (une) toute privee*.

[Foolish is the man who engages in suc an undertaking l.5445]. The line is obscure and probably corrupt,⁴¹ but it is clear that it is the Bâtard who is foolish.⁴² This is entirely in agreement with official disapproval of forced marriage, a view which had been growing since the twelfth century,⁴³ and with what appears to be a dominant ethos in the genre. Ludie defies convention and ‘behaves neither like the usual literary Frankish heroine nor like the

⁴¹ See note *Le Bâtard de Bouillon*, ed. by Cook, p. 259: ‘je suis d’accord avec S pour voir dans *toute* le substantif provenant de *tolir*...’.

⁴² The Bâtard’s behaviour throughout is far from exemplary. His status as ‘hero’ is entirely related to his martial prowess; for a brief analysis see *Le Bâtard de Bouillon*, ed. by Cook, pp. xxxi-xxxii.

⁴³ See note 32.

enamoured Muslim princess'.⁴⁴ She resists the Christian protagonist, who had killed her father, declaring she would rather be killed herself:

“Sire j’aing miex assés que je soie tuee
Que je soie a vo corps ne drue ne privee.
Mon père avés ochis a vo trenchant espe ;
Comment vous seroit dont l’amour de moy donnee ? ”

(ll. 5436-39)

[“My lord, I would rather be killed than be your beloved or intimate. You killed my father with your sharp sword. How can you be given love by me?”]

At this point in the *Bâtard de Bouillon* the modern reader would have some sympathy with the young woman, and the narrator’s comment invites all readers, contemporary as well as modern, to be critical of the Bâtard. Ludie is like Floripas in the *Destruction de Rome* in rejecting a marriage; the significant difference is that Ludie rejects a Christian suitor.

Ludie, having been forced to marry the Bâtard, runs away when her husband is at war, an action which might find approval in the mind of modern readers. Any ambivalence a medieval reader might have felt for the much tried, indeed abused, Ludie is, however, silenced when she goes on to entrap her husband, betraying him to her Saracen lover; the

⁴⁴ De Weever, *Sheba’s Daughters*, pp. 130–31; Vallecalle discusses the female heroine of so many *chansons de geste* as ‘l’héroïne révoltée’, in ‘Rupture et integration...’, pp. 449–61; Vallecalle cites the opinion of Girart in *Girart de Vienne* ll. 1356-58 against women deciding their own husbands (p. 451).

ultimate humiliation is that he is taken naked. Ludie faces the punishment awarded to traitors and is burned at the stake (l.6244). Any sympathy generated by her forced marriage is lost; in betraying her husband Ludie has contravened all the accepted norms of behaviour and in the end is neither tolerated nor assimilated. While her resistance is brought to nought, the forced subjugation is also not approved. Despite the fact that Ludie's conversion was forced, it is her behaviour afterwards, not her initial resistance, which condemns her,.

Women who successfully resist

Whereas Ludie wishes to remain faithful to her Saracen lover but is forced into marriage with the Christian conqueror, there are exceptional Saracen princesses who remain loyal to their Saracen lover, but who are not subjected to force, and who are not condemned for their loyalty. Both Affamie in *Otinél* and Gloriande in *La Chevalerie Ogier* can be read as a response to Floripas in *Fierabras*.⁴⁵ Both these texts date from the early thirteenth century, a little later than the extant *Fierabras*. Floripas betrays her own kin in order to get the man she wants, a lack of loyalty implicit in female conversion. There are other *chansons de geste* which show awareness that conversion brings with it betrayal, or at least breaking faith in human terms.⁴⁶ This is dramatized in *Fierabras* through Floripas' behaviour when her

⁴⁵ Another critical response to Floripas is the depiction of Licorinde in *Simon de Puille*; she converts along with her Saracen lover, but her reluctance to hurt her father stands in sharp contrast to Floripas: see *Simon de Puille*, ed. Denis J. Conlon (Frankfurt: Lang, 1987); see also Jeanne Baoin, 'Un couple de Sarrasins hors du commun', in *Mélanges de Langue et Littérature françaises du moyen Âge offerts à Pierre Jonin*, Senefiance 7 (Aix-en-Provence, Université de Provence, 1979), pp. 89–101.

⁴⁶ Galice Pascault, 'Les sarrasines chrétiennes, des traîtresses héroïques', in *La Faute dans l'Épopée médiévale : Ambiguïté du jugement*, ed. by Bernard Ribémont (Rennes : Presses

defeated father is refusing to convert: Floripas urges Charlemagne to get on with it and kill him, differing markedly from her brother, who pleads with his father to concede and convert; the juxtaposition of their responses invites the reader to compare and contrast the siblings and be critical of Floripas. Both *Otinél* and *La Chevalerie Ogier* demonstrate other evidence of drawing on *Fierabras*; this is especially clear for *Otinél* which has been described as a calque of *Fierabras*, or, more positively, a response to it.⁴⁷ It is, therefore, reasonable to read the Saracen princesses of these two texts in the context of the depiction of Floripas.

Otinél begins as a conversion narrative, with the conversion of the Saracen messenger Otinel, but it is also the narrative of a noble Saracen (Clarel) who resists conversion and of the woman who remains faithful to him (Affamie). This poem demonstrates a sense that conversion, theoretically desirable, was not unproblematic. One of the most important virtues in medieval society was faithfulness. Clarel, who serves as a foil to Otinel in that he behaves nobly but does not convert, charges the converted Otinel with his betrayal of his lord:

“Mar i passastes, renoiez perjurez,
Anqui serez à grant honte livrez
Et detrenchiez, honiz et vergondez ;
Ne te porra aidier ton parentez.

universitaires de Rennes, 2012), pp. 63–73 examines four *belles sarrasines* (Malatrie in *Huon de Bordeaux*, Maugalie in *Floovant*, Bramimonde in *Roland à Saragosse* and Malatrie in *Le Siège de Barbastre*, and notes that : ‘Trahison pour les uns, acte héroïque pour les autres, la conversion de ces sarrasines peut être perçue de multiples façons...’ (p. 64).

⁴⁷ *Otinél*, ed. F. Guessard (Paris: Vieweg, 1859); M. J. Ailes, ‘*Otinél*: An Epic in Dialogue with the Tradition’, *Olifant*, 27 (2015), 9-39.

Diva, es tu encor reporpensez
Que Mahom doie estre tes avoez,
De tot le mot sires et rois clamez ?
Qui en lui croit sages est et senez,
Et celui Dieu à qui tu es tornez
Ne vaut vers lui .II. deners monéez”.

(ll. 1434–43)

[“It was an evil hour when you crossed over [to the other side], you renegade perjurer; today you will be handed over to great shame, cut into pieces, shamed and ashamed; your family will not be able to help you. Have you reconsidered, that Mahom should be your avowed lord, lord of all the world and called king? He who believes in him is wise and sage, and the god to which you have turned is not worth tuppence compared to him”].

This accusation is factually true: Otinel is a ‘renoiez perjurez’; he has reneged his gods and disavowed his lord. The text thus highlights the tension at the heart of medieval conversion narratives: for the noble Saracen to convert he must first behave in a way which is ignoble and betray his lord. If the text were to conform to the standard narrative then we might expect Clarel’s alterity to be dealt with by his death or by defeat followed by conversion, and Afamie’s Otherness to be erased by conversion followed by marriage to a Christian, confirming the assimilation of the Saracen princess; in such a marriage she would also take her father’s land into Christendom. But this is not what happens. Clarel is indeed killed, but when Afamie hears of his death she is distraught, fainting four times (l. 1534). She remains faithful to her deceased lover. Moreover, the immediate result of Clarel’s death is that she has the imprisoned Ogier, who is in her custody, chained up tightly, so that the “li François de nos n’iront moquant” [“the French do not go about mocking us”, l. 1541]. This is very

different from Floripas who also has charge of the Christian prisoners in *Fierabras* but, when she is supposed to be holding them strictly, is actually plotting with them to overthrow the Saracens. On the other hand, while Floripas displays extreme violence, killing the gaoler who originally has charge of the prisoners and defenestrating her own governess to ensure the safety of the peers, Afamie only orders the harsh treatment of Ogier and is not herself directly involved. She is not one of the ‘repulsive’ females among whom the British scholar Jessie Crosland once placed Floripas.⁴⁸ The ultimate fate of Affamie is unknown. She disappears from the narrative after the Saracens are defeated, having served her two-fold purpose: within the text to add to Clarel’s prestige as a knight, and reading the text intertextually, as a response to the *Fierabras* narrative, to present a *belle sarrasine* who does not choose conversion. Unlike the typical *belle sarrasine* her Otherness is not erased and she is not criticised for her faithfulness to her Saracen lover.

Gloriande in *La Chevalerie Ogier* may also be read as a response to Floripas, or at least to the conventional depiction of the *belle sarrasine*.⁴⁹ She is initially presented as a potential object of exchange between men:⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Jessie Crosland, *The Old French Epic* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1951), p. 165.

⁴⁹ The date of *La Chevalerie Ogier* has never been satisfactorily established. If Gloriande is read as a response to Floripas, an anti-Floripas, then *Ogier* must post date 1200. Judith Belam, ‘*La Chevalerie Ogier de Danemarche*: A Critical edition’ (University of Reading PhD, 1994), considers that ‘it seems more probable that the *Enfances* was composed later than the *Chevalerie*, depending for its popularity on the fame of the story of Ogier’s rebellion’, p. 40.

⁵⁰ Kay points out that there is considerable ambiguity in the genre in the way in which women as gifts are treated, *Chansons de geste in the Age of Romance*, pp. 31–48.

“Ahi! Ogier, se veïnses m’amie,
Con ele est bele e gente et escavie,
Pus ne feroies por nient coardie !
Je la menrai avoc moi dedens l’ille ;
Se me pueus vaintre par ta chevalerie,
Pren la pucele”.

(ll. 1352-57)⁵¹

[“Ah Ogier, if you were to see my beloved, how beauthful and comely and shapely she is, you would never again show any cowardice for anything! I will bring her to the island with me. If you can defeat me with your knightly skill, take the girl”].

The depiction of Gloriande is made less clear by issues of textual coherence regarding *La Chevalerie Ogier*. It seems likely that the *Enfances*, that is the first 3000 lines or so of the poem, had an independent existence before it was attached to the narrative of Ogier’s rebellion found in the *Chevalerie*;⁵² it is in this first section that the events involving Gloriande are found. Judith Belam, in the introduction to her unpublished edition of the text, contrasts the two sections of the poem as it stands with reference to ‘the detailed treatment of the role of Gloriande, working slyly behind a pose of submissiveness to achieve her own objectives’ compared to ‘the complete absence of any romantic interest in the *Chevalerie*, and to the blunt and forthright behaviour of the English princess who appears at the end [of the

⁵¹ Muriel Ott, *La Chevalerie Ogier Tome I : Enfances* (Paris : Champion, 2013); all quotations are from this edition.

⁵² This does not imply that the *Enfances* were composed before the *Chevalerie*; for a summary and appraisal of the different theories regarding the development of the narrative see Belam, ‘*La Chevalerie Ogier de Danemarche*’, pp. 14–40.

Chevalerie].⁵³ De Weever mentions Gloriande only in passing, along with Ludie, from the *Bâtard de Bouillon*, commenting that ‘these two women compel the question the other portraits avoid because their descriptions as French heroines are not concomitant with treachery to father and country that the other descriptions affirm’.⁵⁴ But the two women, though both resisting the male Christian, are not similar: Ludie is utterly treacherous, all sympathy for her eroded by her behaviour, while Gloriande, in the *Enfances* at least, is largely presented in a positive light. Despite Belam’s accusation of a ‘pose of submissiveness’ she is a woman who, like Ludie, initially seems to have little agency. Karaheu, her Saracen lover, even offers her as a prize to Ogier when Karaheu and Ogier participate in a combat *à quatre* with two other champions, a combat which is supposed to decide the fate of Rome which has been taken by the Saracens. While Karaheu describes her in courtly terms he is prepared to use her as a bargaining counter. Gloriande herself certainly greets Ogier courteously when offered to him by her lover, presenting him with ‘une verge florée’ (l. 1772) but I see no false submissiveness here; she simply accepts her role as an object of exchange. The combat is, in fact, inconclusive as Gloriande’s father breaks the terms of the fight, sending in more warriors and taking Ogier captive.

Although Ogier is not tempted by Karaheu’s offer he is later prepared to fight for Gloriande when her father tries to marry her off to someone else. Ultimately the Saracens are defeated and both Karaheu and Gloriande survive; when Karaheu refuses conversion she remains with him and in the end both are permitted to survive unconverted after the defeat of the Saracens. Manuscripts vary in their description of what follows. In all manuscripts Karaheu refuses to convert:

⁵³ Belam, “*La Chevalerie Ogier de Danemarche...*”, p. 40.

⁵⁴ De Weever, *Sheba’s Daughters*, p. 5.

Païen sunt mort et en fuies torné;
 E li rois a Karraeus apelé :
 “Amis, dist il, queroies tu en Dé ?
 Je te feroie batiser et laver”.
 Dist Karraeus : “Em pardon en parlés !
 Ains me laroie tos lé menbres coper
 Que ja Mahon soit par moi desfiés”.

(ll. 3029 - 3035)

[Pagans are dead or have flown; and the king addressed Karraeus, “My friend”, he said, “do you believe in God? I will have you baptised”. Karraeus said, “You speak in vain! I would rather have my limbs cut off then that Mahon should be denied by me”].

In only one manuscript (MS P) does Charlemagne initially respond angrily, ordering that Karaheu be killed for his refusal, at which point Ogier intervenes on his behalf (ed. Ott ll. 3035a-f); in all other manuscripts the text moves straight to commendation to him for his loyalty. In all the manuscripts Karaheu is then allowed to go free, and Gloriande with him ‘lue s’amie’ (l. 3040). Ships are brought and filled with provisions. The couple depart with joy (ll. 3046-48), the only regret from Charlemagne being their refusal to convert.

In the adaptation by Adenet le Roi from the later thirteenth century many of the features which suggest admiration for Karaheus (Carahues in Adenet) are not only retained but developed. This is equally true of the treatment of Gloriande. In his study of Adenet’s text Peter Noble commented of Gloriande that: ‘There is no sign in the *Enfances* [of Adenet] of any love for Ogier, which there was in the *Chevalerie*. She does not give Ogier flowers before the battle; she does not speak to him at all. She seems to bear him affection because he is a friend of Carahues, but the thought of being carried off by him to live among the

Christians does not attract her at all.’⁵⁵ I am not convinced that there is anything more than respect for Ogier in the older *Chevalerie*, along with acquiescence to Karaheü’s wishes, but if there is any coquetry in the older *chanson de geste* it has gone from Adenet’s version. For Noble, Adenet displays a ‘lack of interest in the religious nature of the conflict’.⁵⁶ Adenet certainly displays more sensitivity to romance characterisation than does the older source text, but this remains a text embedded in crusading and one in which a desire to convert the religious Other is evident. Gloriande, in refusing conversion and assimilation to Christian society, subverts the expected behaviour, challenging the assumption that the inherent superiority of the Christian cause will lead to all noble Saracens converting.

Conclusion

Historically there is more evidence of aggressive exogamy among the Muslim rulers of Spain than among Christian potentates. The *chanson de geste* reverses this situation with the Christian male asserting his dominance over the Saracen female, who is often herself a ‘wooing woman’, her very willingness evidence of the superiority of the Christian warrior. The control of the female body in both lived experience and the literary representation is thus not just an expression of the power of the dominant Christian ideology, but also a reinforcement of it. We find willing subjugation of the female Saracen in many of the better-known *chansons de geste* which have determined modern, as much as medieval, horizons of expectation. A broadening of the canon to include *chansons de geste* which have been less

⁵⁵ Peter S. Noble, ‘Saracen Heroes in Adenet le Roi’, in *Romance Epic: Essays On A Medieval Literary Genre*, ed. by Hans-Erich Keller (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1987), p. 194.

⁵⁶ Noble, ‘Saracen Heroes in Adenet le Roi’, p. 195.

studied reveals a genre which is capable of renewing itself with variations on a theme, with some resistance to the dominant discourse of subjugation of the female Saracen. In the case of the *Ogier* tradition and *Otinél*, these are texts knew considerable success in the Middle Ages,⁵⁷ though the *Bâtard* seems to have been both later and less widely disseminated; one can only speculate but the depiction of a Christian who behaved so badly, and of a woman driven to betrayal, may have limited its appeal.

Forcing the female to submit is presented as both less successful and less ethical than her willing subjugation. Kinoshita notes that the function of the Saracen princess is to ‘abandon religion, family and culture to embrace Frankish Christianity’.⁵⁸ Yet Ludie, Afamie and Gloriande present the reader with women who resist that embrace. Those few desirable Saracen women who successfully resist and remain faithful to their unconverted lovers offer the greatest challenge to the accepted model, with both Afamie and Gloriande remaining admirable, despite their resistance to the male Christian gaze. The resistant female, even when forcibly subjugated as in the case of Ludie, refuses the easy assimilation and willing conversion of her predecessors. There is not a simple chronological order in this; though none of these texts predate the early thirteenth century, the stereotype persists alongside the resistant female. Such resistance on the part of these exceptional characters would challenge contemporary expectations of the genre, as well as modern binarist readings. These women, though they are exceptional rather than numerous, open a new perspective on the *chansons de geste*. The genre is normally considered ideologically conservative and associated with a

⁵⁷ For a study of the *Otinél* tradition see Jean-Baptiste Camps, ‘La Chanson d’*Otinél*’, in *Perspectives Médiévales* 38 (2017), <https://journals.openedition.org/peme/13004> (last accessed 11 June 2019); the latest manuscript dates from the early fourteenth century.

⁵⁸ Kinoshita, *Medieval Boundaries*, p.36.

crusading ethos. Crusading and conversion are indeed elements in the very texts which also tolerate resistance: that any Saracen should remain unconverted is only ever tolerated, never presented as the ideal. The very existence of women who refuse to convert, in texts from the early thirteenth century on, suggests that there was room within the genre for an alternative ideology that did not accept the validity of the perspective of the religious Other but was prepared to permit its existence.