

Exchanges in Exoticism: Cross-Cultural Marriage and the Making of the Mediterranean in Old French Romance, by Megan Moore. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2014. Pp. 184. ISBN: 9781442644694.

Moore's compelling study demonstrates the importance of the Mediterranean in medieval romance and the ways in which cross-cultural exchanges—especially marriage—create and maintain noble identity in the tales. Moore focuses on Old French works from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, analyzing *Cligès*, *Floire et Blancheflor*, *Le Roman de la Manekine*, *La Belle Hélène de Constantinople*, and *Floriant et Florete*, along with the Medieval Greek *Digenis Akritas*. Characterizing the Mediterranean as a geo-cultural space “in between,” Moore argues that hybridity unifies Mediterranean romances, in which commerce, warfare, and cross-cultural marriage permit the exchange of goods, ideas, habits, and identities. Throughout, Moore places the romances in their historical and codicological contexts. She pays close attention to women's place in the creation and exchange of cultural knowledge and practices, with women's choices subsequently affecting the construction of male roles and masculinity. By looking at the cultural gap that results from cross-cultural marriages and the ways in which that gap may be negotiated, Moore offers a thought-provoking consideration of how identity is created and uncovers a shift in attitudes toward the Mediterranean over time.

Following an introduction in which she frames her project, Moore turns her attention to *Cligès* and *Digenis Akritas*. She contends that in both women critique alternative masculinities, underscoring an opposition between the west—in which bonds are established through oaths—and the east—which privileges gifts as a means of affirming relationships. Furthermore, women's personal interventions have political consequences. With a conception of honor based on western standards, Fénice's actions pose a threat to men by privileging feudal loyalty over spousal obligations and help to establish Cligès's (western) masculinity as preferable to Alis's (eastern) version. In the Medieval Greek *Digenis Akritas*, marriage gifts create bonds. As in *Cligès*, speech plays a role, this time in the form of action created by women's words in letters. Here, masculinity depends upon the exchange created through borderland love affairs rather than warfare between empires.

Moore's second chapter analyzes the representation of Mediterranean nobility in *Floire et Blancheflor*. Proposing that the romance portrays exoticism as empowering and desirable, she focuses on two multicultural objects: the golden goblet given to Floire's parents when they sell Blancheflor and the automata on

Blanchefflor's false tomb. The first is a Spanish object stolen from the Romans that narrates the Greek story of Troy and is finally exchanged in an Egyptian market. The second evokes Byzantine craftsmanship with a literary tradition dating to Homer's *Iliad*. In both cases, the taste for exotic goods unifies the nobility. Exotic objects also play an essential role in defining masculinity: mercantilism and gifts establish Floire as the hero and lead to his union with Blanchefflor. Considering two manuscripts—BnF Fr. 375 and BnF Fr. 1447—Moore uncovers the ways in which the romance explores difference and links narration, lineage, and maternity.

The third chapter centers on the thirteenth-century incest romances *La Manekine* and *La Belle Héléne de Constantinople*. Moore remarks a shift in the portrayal of the near east in the romances and links the change to historical events: fewer Crusade victories for the French-speaking world contributed to a less positive image of the Mediterranean. Writings on incest by Thomas Aquinas, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and Mary Douglas serve as the background for Moore's reading of the romances' promotion of (western) exogamy over (eastern) endogamy. In both tales, women's desire constructs eastern masculinity as deviant and western masculinity as superior. In Moore's view, as *La Manekine's* Joïe and *La Belle Héléne's* titular heroine create new identities during the migration from east to west, they transgress both the story of patriarchal order and a prohibition against social reintegration through marriage.

The metamorphosis of the Mediterranean's role continues in the fourth chapter. Moore asserts that *Floriant et Florete* rewrites the twelfth century, transforming King Arthur into an active warrior whose western court and values conquer the east. Arthur's triumph over the Byzantines offers a literary victory that stands in contrast to historical Frankish defeats. Imagining Arthur as a Mediterranean power figure means that western nobility stems from its own sources rather than from genealogical ties to the near east. The commissioning, production, and historical context of the tale's unique manuscript merit special attention, as Moore argues that they are crucial for understanding the image of Arthur and speculates that the work was perhaps composed for a Burgundian linked to the French rulers of Sicily. As in the other romances, cross-cultural relationships are key. The exchange of women resolves war, and abductions of women guarantee peace and harmony. Cross-cultural love promotes hybridized lineages and redefines political and familial alliances. It can also bring to the fore gender differences: Florete worries that her love for Floriant violates her father's sovereignty, but for Floriant social status is at issue. Nevertheless, Moore explains that the romance downplays the differences between the lovers,

underscoring instead the ways in which women's choices help to pacify and unify men and shift patterns of familial inheritance and dynastic order. She notes both women's power and its limits in all of the romances she analyzes, revealing that even as women redefine familial empires, they ensure their isolation from power in court when they move into new households.

The brief conclusion looks at the early fourteenth-century *Chronicle of Morea*, with versions in Medieval Greek, Old French, Italian, and Aragonese. All evince the complicated interactions between Byzantines and westerners, especially through cross-cultural marriages. Moore ends her study by emphasizing that cross-cultural marriage has an important impact on making and breaking empire, as women's cultural expectations play a role in their husbands' courts. Romance, she asserts, relies on the medieval Mediterranean and cross-cultural exchange.

There are several instances of inconsistent capitalization: "Medieval" or "medieval" (65) Greek, for example, and Roman "God" or "god" (55). In addition, in one case the original quote (32, from *Cligès*) does not quite correspond to the translated passage. Despite the volume's slenderness, Moore occasionally repeats herself rather than delving deeper into her arguments and teasing out nuances a bit more. For instance, she could have developed *Floriant et Florete's* transformation of Florete's love for Floriant from a betrayal of her father to a means of forging new bonds and dynasties. Those minor quibbles notwithstanding, Moore's book offers valuable insights into the role of the medieval Mediterranean and to the key role of cross-cultural marriage. Scholars interested in questions of gender in Old French romance will find *Exchanges in Exoticism* well worth their time.

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