

A Mediterranean Other

Images of Turks in Southern Europe and Beyond
(15th – 18th Centuries)

Edited by Borja Franco Llopis and Laura Stagno



Arti visive e patrimonio culturale

11

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1. Reckoning with the Illuminated Dreams of a Burgundian Crusade: The Audacious Virtues of a Restless Christian Hero

Maria Vittoria Spissu, University of Bologna

The *Roman de Gillion de Trazegnies* is a manuscript that was produced in 1464 by David Aubert¹, with illuminations by Lieven van Lathem². Its patron was the nobleman and book collector Louis de Gruuthuse, also known as Louis de Bruges, an adviser to Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy. The volume – originating in the southern Netherlands and now held at The J. Paul Getty Museum (Ms. 111, 2013.46) – tells a tale of high adventure in *Outremer* against the backdrop of the campaign against the infidel and the project to convert Muslims to Christianity.

The work features the protagonist Gillion de Trazegnies, a fictional *alter ego* of Louis de Gruuthuse. Both patron and protagonist are devoted to the same chivalrous ideals and committed to the same religious faith. The *Roman de Gillion* can be seen as a reflection of the culture and ambitions of its illustrious patron. Thus, an analysis of the miniatures and of the text that accompanies them and a comparison with other similarly themed works will shed new light on the political outlook of the Duchy of Burgundy – where Gruuthuse played an extremely prominent role – and on its expansionist aspirations in the Mediterranean.

¹ David Aubert is the French calligrapher who transcribed the *Roman de Gillion*. He compiled and adapted courtly romances and chronicles for the court of Philip the Good, Charles the Bold, and Duchess Margaret of York. He also completed manuscripts for Antoine de Bourgogne, Philippe de Croy, as well as for our Louis de Gruuthuse.

² Lieven van Lathem was an early Dutch painter and manuscript illuminator. He created the eight dramatic and detailed miniatures and the 44 historiated initials that we find in the *Roman de Gillion*. The illuminated scenes with their dazzling battles and the lyrical naturalism of the landscape settings provide insight into how the Flemish imagination visualized overseas adventure and the idea of a crusade in the land of the infidels.



Fig. 1.1 Master of the Princely Portraits, *Portrait of Louis de Gruuthuse*, Bruges, Groeningemuseum, c. 1480-1490.

For a glimpse at the personality of the patron, we can consider his portrait, now held at the Groeningemuseum in Bruges³ (fig. 1.1). In it, the Flemish nobleman is shown in all his devotion and determination, combining political loyalty with religious faith. Both the rosary and the Collar of the Order of the Golden Fleece are emblematically present. He personifies the ideal knight-general, serving his lord and eager to do battle with the enemies of the Church, but he was also a patron of the arts and a collector who amassed one of the largest and most distinguished libraries in Europe⁴.

The *Roman de Gillion*⁵ is one of the most significant works that Gruuthuse commissioned. The manuscript reveals values and goals that reflect the culture of the time, particularly the perception of otherness, conversion, virtue, and faith. The work lends itself to multiple readings, insofar as it contains invaluable clues for reconstructing the history of emotions relating to chivalric codes, the crusades, the war against the infidel, and even marriage. In the book we are presented with emotions elicited by questions and dilemmas both moral and spiritual. The work follows the adventures of the noble knight and Christian paladin Gillion, and the miniatures contain multiple references to the East and to the Muslim world.

Gillion has sworn an oath to undertake a pilgrimage to the Holy Land if his wife becomes pregnant, so when God grants his heart's desire, he sets off on his journey. He plans on returning home soon to his wife, but events during his sea voyage conspire to subvert his intentions. He is captured by pirates and imprisoned in Egypt. The sultan wants to execute him, but his hand is stayed by his daughter, who has fallen in love with Gillion. She frees him so that he can save her father, who in turn has fallen into the hands of a rival emir. He saves her Muslim father, but, as he has promised her to return to prison (fol. 41v), he goes back to Cairo.

³ On this celebrated figure from Flemish political history, Stadtholder of Holland and Zeeland in 1462-1477, who was appointed Earl of Winchester by King Edward IV of England in 1472 and who was a great lover of art, see Martens and De Gryse (eds.) 1992.

⁴ On the collection of Louis de Gruuthuse, commissioner of illuminated works, see also Hans-Collas and Schandel (eds.) 2009.

⁵ On Los Angeles, The J. Paul Getty Museum, Ms. 111 (2013.46), see Morrison and Stahuljak 2015.

Despite his continued presence in the land of the infidels, and much flattery and coaxing (fol. 48), he never converts to Islam. Instead, Gillion actually inspires the Muslim princess, whose name is Gracienne, to convert to Christianity. Having received false news that his first wife, Marie, is dead, he decides to marry Gracienne. When he returns home to the Netherlands, he finds that his wife has been alive all along and has been waiting for him to return. His second wife, now a convert to Christianity, decides at this point to withdraw to a convent, as does the Marie.

For the entire book, Gillion remains torn between two worlds, the Christian European world and the Muslim Arab world. He embarks on his own personal crusade, fighting against the infidels for many years, and makes an inner pilgrimage in which he suffers physical and moral trials and confronts questions about faith, betrayal, and redemption. The original impetus behind Gillion's departure from Flanders, and his prolonged sojourn in Egypt, both derive from his commitment to keeping his word, if necessary by taking the most arduous path, and his desire to win honor, salvation, and balance between the two worlds in which he finds himself.

In French and Flemish illuminated texts, foreign and exotic figures, and of course tales of voyages and military exploits, especially in the Holy Land, were valued both because they were a way to exhibit their sponsors' wealth and because they promoted the European monarchs' expansionist ambitions and hostility toward Islam. In the mid-fifteenth century, in an atmosphere of growing enthusiasm for a new crusade, the Duke of Burgundy and Alfonso the Magnanimous of Aragon reached an important understanding. Given their trade agreements, their shared artistic taste, and above all their common political vision for the Mediterranean, it is hardly surprising that an alliance was formed between the two leaders.

The aspirations of Philip the Good and the political climate of the Duchy of Burgundy must have permeated Gruuthuse's outlook. The patron who commissioned the *Roman de Gillion* was also a member of the Order of the Golden Fleece and had volunteered himself to fight against the infidel enemies of Christianity and of the duchy. For these reasons, it is useful to take a closer look at the Mediterranean contacts of Philip the Good and at his movements in Europe and beyond, in order to better understand the context in which the idea for the *Roman de Gillion* emerged. It is no coincidence that some of the books with which our illuminated volume can be profitably compared were commissioned by none other than the Duke of Burgundy.

In the miniatures in the *Roman de Gillion*, the protagonist is depicted at different times as a devoted husband, pilgrim, knight, crusader, ally, and sinner. These roles overlap and alternate, but it is clear from the start that Gillion represents for all intents and purposes the Christian hero, with whom the reader is meant to identify, and with whom Louis de Gruuthuse certainly longed to identify. At this point it is useful to reflect on the images used to construct the figure of the pious hero, in the Burgundian context but also in Iberia, which was, among all European regions, the one most strained by its proximity to the “infidel”.

As a visual embodiment of the struggle against the Muslim enemy, adopted as a personal mission, the king of Aragon, Valencia, and Naples proceeds impetuously on horseback in a particular illuminated scene in the *Libro de Horas de Alfonso V el Magnánimo*⁶ (Valencia 1436-1443, now at the British Museum in London, Ms. add. 28962, fol. 78r). The king (fig. 1.2) is shown commanding an army, fighting the Saracens, as a *miles Christi* and Christian hero⁷. He is reminiscent of St George, who, in the *Retablo del Centenar de la Ploma* (London, Victoria and Albert Museum)⁸ defeats an army of enemies of the Christian faith (fig. 1.3), foreshadowing an iconography that would become so quickly established in the Iberian Peninsula that we might describe it as “going viral”⁹: the *Santiago Matamoros*, with which Charles V himself would later identify¹⁰.

The details of the illuminated scene in the *Libro de Horas* mentioned above suggest that it may have been inspired by Miquel Alcañiz’s *Battle of Constantine against Maxentius* (fig. 1.4), in the *Retablo de la Santa Cruz* (1410, Museo de Bellas Artes, Valencia), which also depicts a clash between a crusading army and an enemy whose dark skins, turbans, and *gineta* style of riding suggest that it is an Islamic force¹¹. Alfonso the Magnanimous is also shown repeatedly (fols. 14v, 38r, 44v, 67v, 106v, 281v, 312r), in the *Libro de Horas*, kneeling in devout communion with the Eternal Father, who blesses him, or before the vision of Christ, the Virgin Mary, and the saints.

⁶ Español 2003, 91-114.

⁷ Ramon Marqués 2007, 98-109; Planas Badenas 2015, 211-237.

⁸ Miquel Juan 2011, 191-213.

⁹ I have borrowed this very fitting expression from Stephanie Porras (2016, 54-79).

¹⁰ Van Herwaarden 2012, 83-106.

¹¹ Echevarria 1999; Irigoyen-García 2017.



Fig. 1.2 *King Alfonso V leading his army against the Saracens*, in *Psalter and Hours, Prayerbook of Alfonso V of Aragon*, 1436-1443, London, The British Museum, Ms. Add. 28962, fol. 78r.

This is an attempt to legitimize his push for economic control¹² of the Mediterranean, by linking it to the struggle against the infidel and presenting it as having been divinely inspired.

¹² The long-standing connection between travel, crusade, and commercial interests has recently been reexamined by Menache, Kedar and Balard (eds.) 2019. On the political strategies and the visual and literary translation of the ideologies of the Aragonese monarchical Renaissance, promoted by Alfonso the Magnanimous, see Delle Donne and Iacono 2018.



Fig. 1.3 Master of the Centenar de la Ploma (attributed to Marçal de Sax and Miquel Alcanyís), *Altarpiece of St George or Retablo del Centenar de la Ploma*, detail, London, Victoria and Albert Museum, first quarter of the 15th century.



Fig. 1.4 Miquel Ancanyis, *Battle of Constantine against Maxentius*, in the *Altarpiece of the Holy Cross*, Valencia, Museo de Bellas Artes, c. 1410.

In Northern Europe, Flemish illumination included similar visual transpositions arising from an analogous political agenda, in which veiled apologies for the Crusades, chivalric propaganda, and visions of virtue are all found in the same narratives. In them, the attentive reader can recognize the shared ideas about otherness and identity race and nation in Burgundy and King Alfonso's Spain. In the illuminated volumes of Jean Froissant's *Chronicles* that Gruuthuse commissioned¹³, adventures, wars, voyages, and in particular the cruel and macabre scene of the killing of Christian soldiers by Ottoman Sultan Bayezid I in the 1396 Battle of Nicopolis take center stage¹⁴. Bayezid I is depicted in a turban, seated before his royal field tent, while his soldiers are haphazardly placed around him; one of the more sadistic ones has just cut off

¹³ Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF), Ms. Français 2643-2646. The Battle of Nicopolis is depicted on f. 255v of Ms. fr. 2646. On the reception of the *Chronicles* in the Flemish world, see Le Guay, 1998.

¹⁴ The crusade ended in a crushing defeat. The allied crusader army was made up of Hungarian, Croatian, Bulgarian, Wallachian, French, English, Burgundian, German, and Venetian forces.

the head of a soldier/martyr, while the prisoners themselves are depicted as sacrificial victims, stripped naked or dressed in white tunics.

Narratives, both textual and pictorial, about voyages to *Outremer* functioned as a sort of recruitment literature for war and crusade¹⁵. They mirrored the aspirations, expectations, and mindset of privileged art and manuscript patrons and readers like Gruuthuse. In 1454 he, along with other knights, had taken part in the Feast of the Pheasant,¹⁶ a banquet given by Philip the Good to promote a crusade against the Turks, who had taken Constantinople the year before; those who attended, including the members of the Order of the Golden Fleece, pledged their loyalty to the Duke and their support for his crusade. Gruuthuse commissioned the *Roman de Gillion*, with its themes of a voyage to the East and the conflict with the infidel, to demonstrate that he shared Philip's eagerness to undertake the crusade.

In the library of the Court of Burgundy, it was not unusual to find manuscripts and letters concerning knights and pilgrims who had journeyed to the Holy Land, such as Bertrandon de la Broquière¹⁷, an adviser to Philip the Good. He set out for Jerusalem in 1432, bringing back crucial information about the military tactics used by the Turks¹⁸, the political situation in those regions, and the local customs he encountered.

An important image of Bertrandon's iconic voyage is the illuminated scene depicting the 1453 siege of Constantinople by Mehmed II the Conqueror, found in the manuscript *Le Voyage d'Outre-Mer* (Lille 1455)¹⁹, with miniatures by Jean Le Tavernier. Bertrandon was a spy sent on a reconnaissance mission and had to bargain and negotiate, disguising himself in Eastern costumes and learning the local language; he even made friends with a Mameluke. Bertrandon's itinerary included many of the same stops as Gillion's: Ghent, Rome, Venice, Jaffa, Jerusalem, Gaza, Mount Zion, Beirut, Damascus, Mecca, Antioch, the Gulf of Alexandretta, Constantinople, the Balkans, Vienna, Basel, and Burgundy, where he presented Philip the Good with a copy of the Koran and a Life of Mohammed translated into Latin.

¹⁵ Ellena 2002, 78-89.

¹⁶ Caron and Clauzel (eds.) 1997.

¹⁷ Broquière 2010; Classen 2013, 49-57.

¹⁸ Haarmann 2001, 1-24.

¹⁹ BnF, Ms. fr. 9087, fol. 207v.



Fig. 1.5 *Bertrandon presenting his work to Philip the Good*, in Bertrandon de la Broquière, *Overseas travel (Voyage d'outremer)*, Jean Le Tavernier (illuminator), Lille, third quarter of the 15th century, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Department of Manuscripts, Ms. Français 9087, fol. 152v.

These accounts helped to bring exoticizing views of the East and tactical information to Europe, molding the perception of the Muslim Other. The texts and images allowed a sort of visual and virtual colonization of those places, a cultural appropriation and imaginary colonization that foreshadowed the real conquest (or assimilation) planned in the crusades. Bertrandon (fig. 1.5) is still dressed in the Eastern fashion when he presents his work to Philip the Good²⁰, and the misleading disguise becomes a means by which to explore and culturally appropriate the Other.

Contacts between the two worlds were sometimes represented as literary disputes, such as *Le Débat du Chrétien et du Sarrazin*,²¹ by Jean Germain, which presented a refutation of the false beliefs of Islam in a dialogue between two knights at the court of a Moorish emperor. The volume is dedicated to Philip

²⁰ BnF, Ms. fr. 9087, fol. 152v.

²¹ Wrisley 2013, 177-205.

the Good, who is identified as the ideal reader: he appears in the first illuminated scene, and his commitment against the “cult of Muhammad” is praised²².

Thus images of expeditions to *Outremer* were often included in texts whose plots wove together elements of chronicle and make-believe: in Jean Froissart’s *Chronicles* historical facts are interpreted in such a way as to legitimize a new crusade, just as in the *Roman de Gillion* the fictional adventures complement the foreign policies of the time. Both of the works reflect the Mediterranean ambitions of the Court of Burgundy²³. The hero, in our case Gillion, therefore becomes a propagandistic projection and, at the same time, a kind of avatar of his commissioner and reader, Louis de Gruuthuse, and, by extension, of Philip the Good.

The behaviors and emotions that arise from the contacts between the European Christian hero and the infidel enemy (“Saracen” in the text, understood to be Muslim Arab) form the crux of this voyage to the Eastern world. Gillion seems torn between his original love for his first wife, Marie, a Western noblewoman, and Gracienne, the Muslim princess. The whole story is infused by vacillating dichotomies: blame and shame that are transformed into reparation and solace, through baptism, conversion, vows of obedience, kept promises, and miraculous acts of courage, including the killing of a huge number of infidels. Also lurking in the story of Gillion is suspicion about renegades and converts, as well as fear of stigma, betrayal, and calumny.

So, on the one hand, we have the chronicles about *Outremer*²⁴, which explore all the facets of an organized journey and military campaign to redeem occupied territories²⁵, and on the other hand, we have our Gillion romance, in which the journey comes after a promise made to God and is transformed from pilgrimage into the stirring tale of a very personal crusade. The *Roman de Gillion*²⁶ contains plot twists, betrayal, presumed miracles, and contrasting emotions: Gillion meets a Muslim girl, the daughter of the sultan of Egypt, falls in love with her, and uses his powers of persuasion to convince her to

²² BnF, Ms. fr. 948, fol. 1.

²³ On politics and the arts in the Court of Burgundy, see Blockmans and Borchert (eds.) 2013.

²⁴ Delcourt, Queruel, and Masanè (eds.) 2016; completed around 1474, Sebastien Mamerot’s manuscript *Les Passages d’Outremer* is the only contemporary document to describe the French crusades to capture the Holy Land; with miniatures by Jean Colombe.

²⁵ Jacob 2013, 185-197.

²⁶ See also Kren and McKendrick (eds.) 2003, 4, 223-224, 239-242, 245, 255, 315.

convert. In order to keep his word, Gillion becomes the commander of the sultan's troops; he stays at the sultan's court for a full 24 years, valiantly clashing in bloody battle against the sultan's Muslim enemies.

So this is an imaginary pilgrimage and crusade, which functions as a substitute for the promise Louis de Gruuthuse made to Philip the Good at the Feast of the Pheasant. Philip was also a great commissioner of illuminated books on the subject²⁷ and had his own ambitions in that regard²⁸. However, both men were mere "armchair soldiers," since in actual fact neither of them ever actually set out on a crusade. Furthermore, the court of Burgundy was already well accustomed to identifying with idealized heroes²⁹ and to envisaging political ambitions through illuminated renditions of valiant deeds³⁰.

Why was the story of Gillion so well loved, and why did Louis de Gruuthuse – the owner of this manuscript – and Philip spend considerable sums on the production of such sumptuous manuscripts? They reflected the ideals and ambitions of the lord and of his family. They also belonged to a tradition of adventure narratives beginning with editions of the adventures of Marco Polo³¹ and the *Travels of Sir John Mandeville*, a work that, like the later *Roman de Gillion*, was about an imaginary journey; indeed, the curiosity about exotic animals exhibited in Gillion's tale can be attributed to the influence of the *Travels of Sir John Mandeville*.

Although the narration is sometimes more folkloric than epic in tone, the *Roman de Gillion* was not unlike the *Libro de Horas* that was discussed above. This work was commissioned by the Dominican cardinal Joan de Casanova in 1431 for Alfonso the Magnanimous (whose confessor he was). The works are similar in that the techniques of the *captatio benevolentiae* and the goal of self-promotion are the same in both cases. Both works are attempts by their patrons to gain favor with their lord. Casanova does this by making a gift of the manuscript to Alfonso. Likewise, Gruuthuse commissions a manuscript that reaffirms Philip's interests in order to cast himself in a good light in the eyes of the duke.

²⁷ Moodey 2012, 70-72, 79-123.

²⁸ Blair Moore 2017, 169-182.

²⁹ Blondeau 2006, 27-42.

³⁰ Cockshaw and Van Den Bergen-Pantens (eds.) 2000.

³¹ Yeager 2008, 156-181.

But the *Roman de Gillion* is unique in that the driving force behind the action is a set of moral tensions, spiritual doubts, and above all emotions³², which inspire the protagonists to sacrifice and conversion. These emotions are engendered and shaped by chivalric and social values, such as honor and loyalty, and by religious and moral imperatives, such as demonstrating one's faith in God and the promise of marital faithfulness. Conversion³³, along with repentance and the forgiveness of sins, is one of the main themes in the *Roman de Gillion*. And in the case of Gracienne's conversion and her joining forces with Gillion's legitimate wife in Europe, we see how this is presented as an "ultimate good", or, if you like, a happy ending, because it not only washed away but more than compensated for the accidental sin of bigamy.

Gillion's inner conflict is resolved through his assimilation of the East, thanks to the conversion of Gracienne by Gillion himself. If we look specifically at the geographic aspect of the plot, we notice that the volume begins and ends in the West, in the region of Hainaut (today divided between Belgium and northern France), and over the course of the action it creates a dense network of links between the most important centers of the Mediterranean: the Adriatic, the Maghreb, Tripoli (Libya), Fez (Morocco), Cairo (Egypt), Jerusalem, Damascus (Syria), Cyprus, Rhodes, Rome, and Venice. The itinerary includes cities that are pilgrimage destinations or popular transit points to the Holy Land, and also locales that Philip the Good considered as potential battlegrounds for his crusade³⁴. Thus, Gillion travels through, lives, and fights in what were the imaginary battlefields of Burgundy's politics.

The author models the account of the voyages over land through Syria and Egypt, following established trade routes³⁵, from Jerusalem to Gaza and Cairo, describing the necessary precautions (fol. 66v), such as having to hire a local guide to cross the desert. The story narrates an experience that becomes aspirational and collective, heroic and exemplary. Gillion's two sons follow in their father's footsteps, from Hainaut to Rome and Jerusalem, and are themselves captured in the Mediterranean by two bands of Muslim pirates. One is taken to the prisons

³² On the link between emotions and conversion in manuscripts and books dedicated to voyages in *Outremer*, see Roumier 2017.

³³ Szpiech 2013.

³⁴ Paviot 2003, 213-214.

³⁵ Viltart 2015, 331-349.

of Tripoli, where his father was previously imprisoned, and the other is taken to Dubrovnik and offhanded over to a king described as a Slavonic Muslim. It is the younger son who will come to the father's aid and battle the infidels in Egypt.

Having already supported the Portuguese crusade against the Kingdom of Morocco, Philip the Good began building a fleet worthy of the new objectives. Later, he also deployed his ships from the North Sea to the eastern Mediterranean in response to papal encouragement to defend the Knights Hospitaller in Rhodes, a European bulwark in the Aegean Sea against the Muslim advance. It is worth noting that both Philip and Alfonso the Magnanimous hoped to lead the new crusade³⁶. In order to further his own plans, Philip held the Feast of the Pheasant³⁷. This was organized as a celebration of chivalric values and crusader aspirations, and it included not only references to courtly culture and ancient times but also allusions to the East. During the festivities an actor dressed as a nun in white, representing the Church of Constantinople, made his entrance on an elephant led by a Saracen giant³⁸, who according to the chronicles was dressed as a Moor from Granada. We can picture the Saracen giant as similar to Ferragut, in the *Chroniques et conquêtes de Charlemagne* (Brussels, Royal Library of Belgium, Ms. 9067, fol. 227r), and to the one depicted (fig. 1.6) in another illuminated volume, the *Regnault de Montauban* (Paris, Bibliothèque de l' Arsenal, Ms. 5072 réserve, fols. 319v and 323v), in which the Moorish characters and turbaned (Turkish) figures are often shown engaged in intrigues and battles and are depicted for the most part as coarse and loutish, through caricature of their physical appearance, and reckless, vain, or disingenuous.

The love theme here serves as a pretext for bringing about the conversion of the Muslim princess. Gillion's amorous words and pleasing appearance inspire a change for the better in Gracienne. Courtly love becomes an instrument of cultural assimilation and religious conversion. In the illustration on folio 9, the crusade is depicted as tantamount to high virtue, as linked to tradition and deserving of remembrance and praise. The king of Cyprus himself adds his voice to the propaganda campaign, promising to make the fields, mountains, and valleys around the city of Cairo crawl with Christians

³⁶ King of Aragon, Valencia, Majorca, Sardinia and Corsica, Sicily, count of Barcelona from 1416, and king of Naples from 1442 until 1458. Toscano 2007, 347-363.

³⁷ Cockshaw, P. *et al.* (eds.) 1996, 67-83.

³⁸ Boyer 2016.



Fig. 1.6 *Roman de Regnault de Montauban*, David Aubert (scribe) and Loyset de Liédet (illuminator), Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, Ms. 5072, réserve, tome 1, fol. 323v.

(fol. 56v). And for future noblemen, the chivalric apprenticeship is linked to achieving honor and fame in Saracen (Arab, Muslim) lands.

This correlation between nobility and crusade can be read as a reference to John of Burgundy, Philip's father. Known as John the Fearless, he led the French Burgundian forces at the Battle of Nicopolis³⁹ and was captured by the Ottomans. More than three hundred noblemen and knights died, between the battle and the ensuing massacre ordered by the Sultan. John's father, Philip the Bold, paid a staggering 200,000 florins to ransom him. This traumatic Christian defeat left a lasting impression on Philip the Good. It may also account for the desire for revenge in Burgundy's Eastern policy.

The duke's plans to actually take action against the Turks were hindered by the reticence of the new French king, Louis XI, the death of Pope Pius II,

³⁹ Kaçar and Dumolyn 2013, 905-934.

and the death of Philip himself (1467). In any case, the *Roman de Gillion* was created in the crucible of those years (1451-1464). Only one other copy is known to exist, in a private collection in Dülmen; it belonged to Anthony of Burgundy, the illegitimate son of Philip the Good.

In the work, the abilities of Gillion de Trazegnies, alias Louis de Gruuthuse, are depicted as almost supernatural and magical (fol. 225v). Particular attention is given to his incorruptible morals and his prodigious strength, wielded in the service of the Catholic faith; he is compared to “an enraged tiger” and “a maddened lion”. With his devotion and bravery, Gillion expresses a positive ideal that has its antithesis in the characterization of Easterners in Burgundy and in the West⁴⁰. His integration in Muslim lands also offers a romanticized version of real-life figures who were known at the time, like Bertrandon de la Broquière, who, like Gillion, never tarnished his soul with apostasy.

The manuscript presents its protagonist, Gillion, in a series of events that continually move him back and forth between two poles, the two women he loves: Marie and Gracienne, who in turn evoke and represent the Christian West and the Muslim East. Through the alliances he forges and the deeds he performs, Gillion connects the two worlds⁴¹, wavering between his loyalties to one and the other. Gracienne’s charm leads Gillion to overcome the initial religious otherness of the woman he loves. On the first folio of the manuscript, Gillion’s funeral statue shows him lying between his two widows, embodying his role as a bridge between two worlds. This balancing act is not automatic: it requires a voluntary attitude of mediation, a temporary metamorphosis, at least outwardly, i.e., a disguise⁴². However, Gillion is never ambivalent about his religion: his unshakeable faith in Christianity contrasts with the conversion of the sultan’s daughter, and this is presented as a sign of the superiority of the Western faith.

The infatuation with the East begins in the prologue and continues throughout the work. All the action and emotional experience associated with knowledge of the Other and with proving one’s value ensue in the relationship with Gracienne and in the resulting plot twists that take place in the land

⁴⁰ Akbari 2012; Tolan 2002.

⁴¹ Stahuljak 2015.

⁴² Jolly 2002, 195-208.



Fig. 1.7 *The Sultan Kneeling before Gillion*, Lieven van Lathem (illuminator) and David Aubert (scribe), *Roman de Gillion de Trazegnies*, Antwerp, 1464, Los Angeles, The J. Paul Getty Museum, Ms. 111 (2013.46), fol. 45v.

of the Saracens. When she sees Gillion, Gracienne not only falls in love with him but is also struck by the desire to convert. Despite this, Gillion is seized by remorse for having stayed for so long in the land of the Saracens and for having gone as far as consorting with infidels.

For Gillion, having fallen under the spell of the East exacts a rather high price: bigamy, the suspicion of having converted to Islam, and shame. He seeks to justify himself, to find an alibi, declaring that “the power of Egypt, pillar and refuge of the Eastern nations, is now subject to us”. The *Roman de Gillion* contains repeated renegotiations of Gillion’s status between East and West. The sultan offers his daughter to Gillion as a reward for his services but also to keep him at the court, even deciding to honor him by naming him his heir. On folio 159 the sultan says: “Upon my death you shall have all my lands and my domains”. These are crucial moments, when Gillion’s complicity with the Muslim Other borders on betrayal and corruption. Yet this is instrumental to giving prominence to his faith, which, despite everything, is not negotiable.

Nonetheless, he is tainted by the suspicion that clings to anyone who crosses the Mediterranean. The suspicion that Gillion has converted to Islam

is heightened by the fact that in the first battle he saves the sultan's life while wearing the latter's armor. This causes anyone who sees him to think they are in the presence of the sultan himself, while others consider it a miracle from Muhammad. When Gracienne presents the sultan with his savior (Gillion) dressed in this armor (fig. 1.9), the sultan actually believes it is Muhammad in person, returned to grant him the honors he deserves. The sultan even falls to his knees in veneration at the disguised Gillion's feet.

This scene is intended to ridicule the Muslim tendency to believe in illusions, such as a miracle like the epiphany of Muhammad, for the benefit of the Christian reader. This parody alludes to one of the most widespread accusations against Saracens, Turks/Ottomans, and Muslims in general: their mistaken belief that they are monotheists when in fact, according to Christians, they are idolaters. The fact that Gillion wears gold-plated armor and is admired as if he himself were a golden idol underlines the theme of idolatry; he is like the golden calf that the Israelites, blinded by error and greed, worshipped in Exodus. The scene also alludes to the bizarre and opulent display of Muslim wealth. The parody of Muslim idolatry, served up to a European readership, becomes an apology for the Crusades, which are justified as preserving the Holy Land from corruption, i.e., the practice of worshipping ridiculous and false idols⁴³.

The *Roman de Gillion* dispels any doubts about Gillion's faith when it has him declare that, despite his prolonged stay in those lands, he has never stopped believing, and in fact it is his intention to convert Gracienne. Gillion informs the sultan of his intent, and the sovereign still offers him the hand of his daughter (fig. 1.8), convinced that she will never renounce her religion. When the sultan frees Gillion, he is repeatedly entreated to renounce the Christian religion and to believe in Muhammad, but over and over again Gillion refuses.

However, Gillion's position in what was Mameluke Egypt hardly seems historically credible. The transformation of a Christian knight from a prisoner (or slave) into an official of the Muslim state and then the husband of a Saracen princess would have been improbable unless it were accompanied by a conversion to Islam, which however is repeatedly denied.

⁴³ Bancourt 1982; Tolan 2002, 105-135; Akbari 2012, 213-260; Kinoshita and Bly Calkin 2012, 29-40; see also Cole (ed.) 2009.



Fig. 1.8 *Gracienne Taking Leave of Her Father the Sultan*, Lieven van Lathem (illuminator) and David Aubert (scribe), *Roman de Gillion de Trazegnies*, Antwerp, 1464, Los Angeles, The J. Paul Getty Museum, Ms. 111 (2013.46), fol. 188v.

The *Roman de Gillion* allows the institution of marriage and faithfulness to one's bride to be compromised, but not the faith in one's religion. It is possible for a Christian knight to become an unintentional bigamist, but it is impossible for him to be convinced to convert. Indeed, quite the opposite happens: Gillion succeeds in converting a Muslim. The Muslim world in all this comes across as being more permeable and tolerant, insofar as it allows a non-convert to prosper. The European world, on the other hand, is clearly resistant to accepting even someone who has converted to Christianity. Gillion's companion Hertan dies an hour after being baptized. Gracienne survives but her seclusion in a convent suggests a less-than-complete acceptance by European society.

The *Roman de Gillion* goes beyond merely reflecting Europe's infatuation with the East; it presents all the different aspects of contact with the other culture and religion: attraction, blame, shame, and suspicion. The resolution of Gillion's moral dilemma also brings assimilation and separation: Gillion dies in Cairo, still in the service of the Sultan; his wives, who had voluntarily decided to separate from Gillion and enter a convent, also die, far away from the knight.

Of no less significance is the fact that the journey, despite the climate and context – both amenable to crusade – begins as a pilgrimage and not as a

military expedition. Yet even Gillion's pilgrimage is soon transformed into a crusade, through a series of battles instigated by a Muslim sultan. From this we are left with the impression of a region – part Arab, part African-Mediterranean – riven by internal conflict, in a constant state of mobilization and war where the Christian European Gillion seems to be the only faithful paladin, at least in the religious sense.

By contrast, in the medieval *chansons de geste* we often meet a fictional Saracen knight, *Fierabras*, who is just as valiant, but who instead converts to Christianity and goes on to fight for Charlemagne. The *Chroniques et conquêtes de Charlemagne*⁴⁴ were compiled and copied, with illuminated scenes by Jean Le Tavernier (Audenarde, 1458-1460; Brussels, Royal Library of Belgium, Mss. 9066, 9067, and 9068) for the library of Philip the Good by none other than David Aubert, the same calligrapher who transcribed the *Roman de Gillion*.

It is significant that the *Roman de Gillion* makes mention of renegades who secretly still believe in Christianity. Both Gracienne and Hertan, Gillion's companion, conceal their new faith, and outwardly still appear Muslim. Gracienne's sincere adoption of the Christian faith legitimizes the love story between a Western Christian nobleman and a Muslim princess. The question of Gillion's probable conversion to Islam is evaded and bypassed, shifting the attention to the conversion of Gracienne and Hertan to Christianity. It is the words of the Muslim Gracienne who seeks conversion that give us the clearest condemnation of her mother religion. On folio 25 Gracienne says that "The religion of Muhammad is false, hateful, repugnant, cursed, and leads to damnation for everyone who dies in it". What better way to remove any ambiguity resulting from Gillion's sojourn of no less than 24 years in a Muslim country? His prolonged stay in the lands of the infidel is instrumental in the conversion of the Muslim princess.

Another way that the text refutes the possibility of Gillion's conversion to Islam is by casting Gillion's service to the sultan in terms of crusade. Gillion, after all, is fighting against Muslims, even though he is doing so in the service of another Muslim. As head of the sultan's army, Gillion agrees to fight against Muslim and Saracen enemies (fig. 1.9), but not for example against the king of Cyprus. The paradox inherent in fighting against the infidels, but still for and on behalf of a Muslim sultan, is resolved in the ultimate goal of the salvation/redemption of Gracienne,

⁴⁴ Johan 2004, 2-93; Moodey 2012, 209-240.



Fig. 1.9 *Gillion Defeating King Fabur during the Siege of Cairo*, Lieven van Lathem (illuminator) and David Aubert (scribe), *Roman de Gillion de Trazegnies*, Antwerp, 1464, Los Angeles, The J. Paul Getty Museum, Ms. 111 (2013.46), fol. 177r.

who, unlike Muslim women in other Christian romances, is not depicted as scheming, flirtatious, given to using magic love potions, or artfully aware of her powers seduction⁴⁵.

On the contrary, she has wanted to convert since the moment she first laid eyes Gillion, and her conversion is presented as a true spiritual inspiration and a genuine vocation. In addition, her light skin and her ready willingness to help the crusader-pilgrim Gillion, her courageous temperament, and her choice to enter the convent, all help her assimilation into the Christian and Western world; through baptism, she is incorporated into a new religious identity and into a new social community, into a new “nation”.

Young Saracen women also frequently figure in the *romances fronterizos* (frontier ballads) that were composed in the Iberian world, to endorse and recall the completion of the *Reconquista*. Muslim princesses are often given as gifts, and through their submission they become the emblem of the superiority of the Christians⁴⁶. Just as Bramimonde’s decision to convert for the sake of love in the *Chanson de Roland*⁴⁷ can be seen as Charlemagne’s greatest victory, so too does

⁴⁵ De Weever 2015.

⁴⁶ Mirrer 1996, 17-30.

⁴⁷ Ailes 2019, 25-38.

Gillion's pilgrimage to the Holy Land find its greatest success in Gracienne's conversion. Just as Bramimonde, through her baptism, counterbalances the betrayal of the Christian knight Ganelon⁴⁸, in the *Roman de Gillion* Gracienne is depicted as a person who is noble and worthy of respect, so much so that she decides to convert and to enter a convent, thus remedying Gillion's inadvertent bigamy.

Gracienne's conversion also evokes that of Floripas⁴⁹ in *The Sowdone of Babylone*⁵⁰. Floripas is also the daughter of a sultan, and she falls in love with Guy of Burgundy, one of the knights who accompanies Charlemagne. In the poem she plays an active role, thinks up ploys, helps save Christian knights, is baptized, and marries Guy, who had been a prisoner of the sultan. She kills several Muslims, demonstrates her ingenuity, and finally she delivers to Charlemagne the holy relics in the Saracens' possession, even surrendering – as if it were a kind of war booty or a dowry – gold and silver from her father's treasure.

These originally Muslim feminine characters⁵¹ are an important part of creating an emotional involvement with the Christian hero: they save him from certain death or forced conversion; they play a part in his liberation and/or military success, and in so doing renounce the religion of their fathers.

Clothing (be it a costume, a religious habit, or a suit of armor), or the absence thereof, is also an important aspect of the story. When Gracienne falls in love with Gillion and has a premonition that she wants to convert, Gillion is naked, pierced by arrows like St Sebastian. Gillion performs prodigious deeds, including when he wears the sultan's armor. To survive among the Saracens and the Moors, Gillion needs to adopt a disguise and he assumes the outward appearance of the sultan. His companion Hertan does likewise, dressing up as a Moor in order to break Gillion out of prison in Tripoli. South of the Mediterranean, mimicry and dissemblance appear to be the order of the day.

Gillion's own wives voluntarily choose a different kind of disguise, the habit (fig. 1.10), so that Gillion's bigamy can in some way be expiated. Graci-

⁴⁸ Stranges 1974, 190-196; Ailes 2019, 73-86.

⁴⁹ “Through the fulfillment of Floripas' desire for the Christian knight Guy, the Saracen world is at once conquered (through military defeat) and assimilated (through the new lineage). She is both the frontier of cultural conflict and the fertile ground that gives rise to a Christian Self that incorporates the Muslim Other”. See Akbari 2012, 173-189.

⁵⁰ Manion 2017, 132-145.

⁵¹ Kahf 2002.



Fig. 1.10 *Gillion's Wives Marie and Gracienne during Mass at the Abbey of Olive*, Lieven van Lathem (illuminator) and David Aubert (scribe), *Roman de Gillion de Trazegnies*, Antwerp, 1464, Los Angeles, The J. Paul Getty Museum, Ms. 111 (2013.46), fol. 200v.

enne's sincere spiritual conversion is reflected in her outward transformation: we see her on folio 200v no longer dressed as an elegant princess but in the chaste habit of the convent. Gillion's shame over his bigamy weighs so heavily on him that he seeks martyrdom; but in the eyes of the Western reader this fades into insignificance because the protagonist undertakes his own personal crusade. His sojourn of 24 years in Egypt, Damascus, Jerusalem, Gaza, Alexandretta, and Tripoli, motivated by his promise to the sultan, nevertheless make him a paladin of the Christian faith, true to his word.

The dangers of apostasy, betrayal, false truths, dissemblance, and calumny are the trials that have to be overcome by the protagonists of the story, who in the end will find rest beside one other in Europe, inside a funeral monument in a Christian abbey.

Conclusion

In the *Roman de Gillion*, the narration of otherness is interwoven with political interests, as it is with *topoi* and stereotypes of medieval European literature. We find connections with ideologies, translated into texts and illuminated scenes, suitable for promoting a crusade against the infidel. At the same time the text attracts our attention for the key role given to Gracienne, who makes a very real transition, from the East to Europe, and from her Muslim father's religion to the Christianity of her beloved Gillion.

If through baptism Floripas's Saracen nature – mannish, impetuous, potentially violent – is tamed, then the integration of the milder but no less enterprising Gracienne into the world of Gillion saves the knight from suspicion of having converted in a foreign land, as well as from the sin of bigamy. In the mechanics of the telling, the conversion of these Muslim princesses transforms them into mediator figures, becoming, as it were, poster children for the utility and virtue of the crusading spirit and driving home not only the goal of military conquest but also the superiority of Europe and of Christianity, capable of absorbing and colonizing the East⁵².

Finally, through Gillion's deeds, the story enables us to reflect on questions of pressing urgency for the Christian West at the time, such as pilgrimage and crusade, loyalty and betrayal, and identity and conversion. These themes are represented in the book in illuminated miniatures, and so many of them depict battles and duels that we should understand the character of Gillion as a *miles christi* and the text about him as a "militant" volume. Although the whole story apparently revolves around questions of love, in reality these are without exception resolved in the hero's favor: his value as love object is such as to almost spontaneously induce the conversion of Gracienne, the Muslim princess, and cements her moral communion with Gillion's first wife, Marie.

We can say, therefore, that the volume was intended as a handbook for the pious knight (and also for the crusader and for the noble soldier): in its pages loyalty to chivalric values is conflated with loyalty to the Christian faith. The miniature in which Gillion lies between his two loves signals a new beginning and brings with it an idealistic reconciliation of religious tensions and a resolution of the clash between civilizations. The solution to these conflicts

⁵² Akbari 2010, 105-126.

is brought about through the necessary conversion of the Other and the testing of the valor of the Christian soldier. Religious otherness, represented by Gracienne, is incorporated into a new community, while its previously alien potential is neutralized by her entering a convent.

In conclusion, through the dilemmas the protagonist confronts and the great feats he undertakes, we can glimpse a projection of the plans and ideas of the patron who commissioned the work, and also of the circle to which he belonged, the Burgundy court, and more generally of Catholic Europe immediately after the fall of Constantinople.

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This book presents instances of how the interrelations between Christians and Muslims were negotiated in the field of images and objects in the Mediterranean area during the Early Modern age. A short introductory chapter gathers reflections on the key terms of “alterity” and “image”. The first section focuses on the representations of a variety of encounters with religious otherness. The starting point is the study of a 15th-century Flemish illuminated *fabula*, followed by the analysis of a completely different narrative, directly rooted in a harsh reality, conveyed by the documents recording the Barbary corsairs’ incursions in Liguria; a third essay illustrates how the image of a Christian leader, king John V of Portugal, was shaped by his fleet’s victorious clash with the Turks. The central section of the book is dedicated to geographically diverse case studies in the circulation of Turkish artefacts in western Europe – with a focus on Genoa – and in the creation and dissemination of the Ottomans’ image. An itinerary through the rich body of textual and visual sources devoted to the Turks’ everyday life, customs and costumes, produced in the West since the 15th century, is offered, as well as in-depth studies of specific themes: the fortune of the series of paintings portraying the “Great Turks” in Lombardy, the semantic function of the Ottomans included in 16th-century Venetian artworks depicting “suppers” from the Gospels, the visual narratives provided by the xylographies illustrating the Croatian epic poem *Judith* by Marko Marulić. In the last part of the book, essays zoom in on occurrences of Ottomans’ images in connection to explicitly religious Catholic contexts. A chapter deals with ex votos with seafaring subjects, in which images of Turkish enemies loom large, while the last two contributions address themes connected to the role of the Jesuits: the iconography of Saint Francis Xavier, in which the images of the Ottomans become templates for the depiction of other non-Christians, and the description of Turks in Early Modern Chinese texts, either brought to Europe by Jesuit missionaries or produced by them for the use of the Chinese they tried to convert.

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Cover image

Alessandro Castellano, graphic reworking of a detail of
Aga Capitano generale de' Giannizzeri, from Nicolas de Nicolay,
Le Navigations et voyages, fatti nella Turchia, Venice 1580.