



Exemplaria

Medieval, Early Modern, Theory

ISSN: 1041-2573 (Print) 1753-3074 (Online) Journal homepage: <https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/yexm20>

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To cite this article: Sierra LomutoSIERRA LOMUTO (2019) The Mongol Princess of Tars: Global Relations and Racial Formation in *The King of Tars* (c. 1330), *Exemplaria*, 31:3, 171-192, DOI: [10.1080/10412573.2019.1642608](https://doi.org/10.1080/10412573.2019.1642608)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10412573.2019.1642608>



Published online: 27 Sep 2019.



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The Mongol Princess of Tars: Global Relations and Racial Formation in *The King of Tars* (c. 1330)

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ABSTRACT

This essay examines the racial formation of Mongols in *The King of Tars*, a fourteenth-century Middle English romance, in relation to the Syrian geopolitics and Latin European historiographical records that inspired its composition. Because the romance features overt instances of racialized physiognomy, such as skin color changing across confessional lines and the normalization of whiteness for the Christian body, scholars have overlooked how race operates in the text in less visible ways. Critical interest has largely focused on the familiar, oppositional binary of Christendom versus Islam that characterizes the crusade romance genre, thus emphasizing how the text demonstrates a racialization of religion in the period. However, by analyzing the romance in relation to its historiographical source material, this essay reveals how the less visible, yet still present, Mongol figure — represented principally through the Princess of Tars — operates within a nexus of eastern alterity that drives the colonialist fantasy of Muslim conversion and genocide. The essay coins the term “exotic ally” to describe this particular racial construction of Mongols and capture how a romance that is often read through a white-black and Christian-Muslim binary of racial-religious conflict is engaged in a much more complex process of racial thinking.

KEYWORDS

Mongols; romance; historiography; race; gender; conversion; conquest

On September 22, 1331, a royal procession in the middle of Cheapside commenced Edward III's first tournament in London.¹ Its location in the center of England's civic and mercantile life brought the aristocracy and the wealthy urban elites together in a shared event, increasing the visibility of the crown and asserting royal power through a theatrical display of chivalry. This genre of tournament, in which martial combat was expressed through the spectacle of the pageant, became an integral part of England's social culture under Edward's reign, specifically after his execution of Roger Mortimer in November of 1330 (Barber 2013).² William Montagu, the captain of the Cheapside tournament and the king's most intimate friend, had been the leader of the coup against Mortimer, which successfully stabilized Edward's kingship. A sentiment of royal triumph thus contextualized the procession through Cheapside, and it did so with the performative accoutrements of Mongol terror.

The knights displayed their chivalric prowess specifically through their impersonation of Mongols, pointing not only to how pageantry could facilitate racialized performances, but

also to how racial formations operated within the socio-political landscape of medieval England. In the chronicle record of the event, the compiler describes the spectacular procession headed by William Montagu:

Willelmus, qui erat capitaneus illius sollempnitatis, una cum rege et aliis militibus electis, omnes splendido apparatu vestiti et ad similitudinem Tartarorum larvati; venerunt etiam cum eis et tot dominae de nobilioribus et pulcrioribus regni, quae omnes indutae fuerunt tunicis de rubeo velveto et capis de camelino albo; et habebat unusquisque miles a dextris unam dominam cum cathena argentea eam ducendo. (Stubbs 1882, 354)

William, who was the captain of this solemn occasion, together with the king and other chosen knights, were all clothed in splendid attire and masked in the likeness of Tartars; and further, there came with them as many noble and beautiful ladies, all of whom were dressed in tunics of red velvet and capes of white cameline; and on his right side, each knight had a lady, leading her with a chain made of silver. (author's translation)

The procession announces royal power through its expression of martial indomitability, and it relies on a particular racialized perception of Mongols to do so. *Larvati*, the Latin word used here for masks, were not of neutral aspect, but of something frightening, terrible, and ferocious. At the same time, the adjective “splendid” to describe the attire signals the alluring seduction of the masked impersonation. As the knights and the king parade through the streets of London “ad similitudinem Tartarorum larvati” (masked in the likeness of Tartars) while leading noblewomen by chains made of silver, they embody a fantasy of the Mongol figure in which both terror and desire cohere. Further, the spectacularized domination of the noblewomen, whose restrained and controlled bodies become captive property for all of London to witness, leverages the sexual overtones of barbarity in order to assert the chivalric prowess of the knights and their king. In other words, the knights’ adoption of Mongol alterity mobilizes a masculine assertion of kingship that specifically hinges on the control and sexual domination of noblewomen. The legitimation of royal governance is thus demonstrated through the imbrication and relationality of gender, sexuality, and race.

Around the same time as the Cheapside tournament, and also in London, the Auchinleck manuscript was produced (c. 1330), in which the compiler transcribed a Middle English romance featuring the mass conversion and genocide of Saracens by Christian Mongols.³ There are two other extant manuscripts of this romance, but the Auchinleck is the earliest.⁴ Scholarship on *The King of Tars* has largely skimmed over the Mongols and has not, to any great extent, examined how their presence might function, however invisibly, as a driving force behind the world it constructs. Because the romance features overt instances of racialized physiognomy, such as skin color changing across confessional lines and the normalization of whiteness for the Christian body, scholars have overlooked how race operates in the text in less visible ways. Racial ideologies inform our perspectives even when, and perhaps most effectively when, we do not realize they are doing so. They do not need to be intentionally present in order for us to recognize that they are indeed at play. In fact, we can deepen our critical study of race in the Middle Ages by noticing the subtlety of these ideologies and the persistence of racial formations in a text like *Tars*, which has served as a central site for theorizing race in medieval English literature. With this aim, my analysis of *Tars*

focuses on how the less visible, yet still present, racial formation of the Mongol figure drives the colonialist fantasy at the core of the romance.

The King of Tars offers a fantasy space in which readers can imagine the kind of colonial dominance that was not possible in fourteenth-century England, with the 1291 fall of Acre an increasingly distant memory. Geraldine Heng (2003) has shown how in romances like *Tars*, empire is articulated through the cultural conquest that religious conversion enables.⁵ The failure of a military, masculine ambition of territorial dominance in the Latin East is recovered through a cultural mode of colonial dominance. This cultural imperialism is driven by what Heng calls an “erotics of conversion” in which the intimacy of feminine desirability and sexual martyrdom “lubricates, and is intrinsic to, the modalities of power that bind large communal groups into mutual relationship, especially where the unequal possession of power constitutes the organizing principle of relation” (187). Here, Heng delineates the mechanisms by which structural power is produced and sustained, pointing to the process that forms racial ideologies: as the relational organization of “communal groups” distributes power within a hierarchal system, race materializes as an ideological formation to support that system. Race is a tool of differentiation constructed specifically to serve a system of power. Further, the racial formations that emerge through these ideological processes are secured and mobilized by a patriarchal control over female sexuality. For example, the performance of the English knights at Cheapside articulates Mongol alterity not only through their masks and clothing, but also through the display of the noblewomen’s captured bodies. In *The King of Tars*, the coerced complicity of the Princess’s sexualized body activates the romance’s colonial enterprise, which itself hinges on the organizing force of racial formations.

A theory of racial formation is necessary for interpreting the dynamics of colonialist fantasy at play in the romance. Mark Jerng’s (2018) concept of the “salience of race” in *Racial Worldmaking* offers a productive starting point, particularly as it develops from and revises Omi and Winant’s sociological theory of racial formation ([1986] 2015). In Omi and Winant’s now canonical theory, race is produced through a linkage between structure and signification. They write, “race can never be merely a concept or idea, a representation or signification alone. Indeed race cannot be discussed, cannot even be *noticed*, without reference — however explicit or implicit — to social structure” ([1986] 2015, 125). Omi and Winant’s theory demonstrates how race operates as a functional category, not a descriptive one, within hierarchal social structures. But, as Jerng argues, central to their theory is “the primacy of the already given visibility of race as bodily difference . . . [which leaves] no room for thinking beyond the priority of the already visualized body” (Jerng 2018, 6). Following the work of Osagie Obasogie (2013), Jerng argues that:

... what is outside their framework (and the framework of the generation of social constructionist writing on race that followed Omi and Winant’s thesis) is the way we are trained discursively to see the visual salience of race. In other words, contrary to most social constructionist theorizations, the visibility of race is not “anterior to” the social process. Rather, the assumed visibility of racial difference on the body is itself something that is *rendered* visible and *made* salient through a set of social practices. (6)

The visibility of race follows from the social processes that create it: a way of seeing the body must first be invented, rather than taken as self-evident. Jerng thus revises Omi and Winant’s racial formation theory by arguing that the “modes of perception”

embedded within that theory must “be supplemented by attending to the often non-visual ways in which race is ‘noticed’” (7).

This revision of racial formation theory enables us to shift our analysis of race away from the point at which it is already visible, and towards the conditions of its production. Analyzing how the “salience of race” is produced, Jerng poses that “we can show the ways in which we are taught to notice race not just on bodies but as social facts embedded in our temporal organization of experience” (9). For Jerng, “race becomes a concept with ‘structural potential’ that organizes our grasping of the world” (46). His theory resonates with Heng’s work in medieval race criticism. In *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* (2018), she offers us a working definition of race that captures a similar attention as Jerng to the non-visible yet salient organizing principle of race. She poses that race is:

... attached to a repeating tendency, of the gravest import, to demarcate human beings through differences among humans that are selectively essentialized as absolute and fundamental, in order to distribute positions and powers differentially to human groups. ... race is a structural relationship for the articulation and management of human differences, rather than a substantive content. (3)⁶

Drawing on these formulations of race and its relation to social structure and experience, I understand a racial formation to be a set of perceptions and conditions through which human differences are deployed, variously and in shifting ways, within structures of power. A racial formation is the result of an ideological process in which differences across human groups coalesce into an organizing force through which the world is seen and apprehended.

At the Cheapside processional, as in *The King of Tars*, at play in the ideological framework of the staged fantasy is a racial formation that I have termed the “exotic ally” (Lomuto 2018). The exotic ally is a lionized figure of alterity characterized by the consolidation of fear, desire, and control. The “exotic” houses both negative and positive connotations that do not compete, but rather coincide and reinforce one another, capturing the ambivalence and contradictions that cohere within processes of racial formations. Debra Higgs Strickland has characterized the medieval exotic as a quality “that just as often carried positive connotations as negative ones. In later medieval art and literature, exotic persons or creatures are now fearful and repulsive, now intriguing and desirable. As a particularized brand of alterity, the exotic exuded ambivalence” (2008, 60). Alterity is the construction of difference into something that relationally defines the norm, and exoticism is a form of alterity that joins both desire and fear. What is frightening is precisely what is desired, but specifically desired within a context of control: the terror that this alterity evinces must be harnessed in service of the dominating body. Mongols became racialized as exotic allies in medieval discourse, beginning in the crusades specifically as allies against Muslims in the Holy Land. I argue that this particular racialization of Mongols, formed through and embedded within the romance’s colonialist fantasy, shapes the romance’s assertions of Latin Christian dominance in the east.

Mongol conversion and the Ilkhanate of Persia

Early scholarship on the *The King of Tars*, specifically the work of Lillian Herlands Hornstein in the first half of the twentieth century, focused primarily on its historical and material connections to the global relations that inspired its composition. Hornstein's work on *Tars* includes a survey of the text's analogues in European chronicles of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries (1941b) and a study of Ilkhan Ghazan, one of the historical referents for the king of Tars (1941a). Recent articles have also included analyses that account for the romance's Mongol and Armenian contexts (Friedman 2015; Boyadjian 2011). However, the majority of the criticism has tended to focus on the symbolic implications of the romance's most striking features, such as a Sultan whose skin changes from black to white upon conversion or a lump-baby who acquires form after baptism. These features have offered scholars a productive source for investigating matters having to do with theology, conversion, and the racialization of religion (Heng 2003; Lampert-Weissig 2004; Gilbert 2004; Calkin 2005a, 2005b; Whitaker 2013).

For example, Geraldine Heng (2003) and Lisa Lampert-Weissig (2004) both devise a theoretical reading about the racialization of religious difference in *Tars*, focusing specifically on skin color as a racial marker and how it comes to signify a delimiting line between Saracen and Christian identities. Heng argues:

On becoming a Christian, the Sultan's bodily transformation describes his admission into another cultural-biological formation, European Christianity, by performing (and requiring) a change of biological essence, a change that ceremonially enacts his entrance into another race, the Christian-European race, defined as humans who possess a white skin. (2003, 234)

Lampert-Weissig makes a similar argument, suggesting that the romance stages “a clear-cut battle between Christianity and Islam [that] is sharpened through its deployment of white and black to mark the two opposing faiths” (2004, 406). Following from the earlier work of Judith Perryman (1980), Lampert-Weissig suggests that even though it is based on historical events, “*The King of Tars* moves away from historical complications to work on a symbolic level, in which an unequivocally Christian king is threatened by a Muslim sultan” (406).⁷ She argues that because the text's historical framework is sublimated within the romance, it no longer informs the revitalized story. Heng and Lampert-Weissig's analyses both intentionally set aside the text's historical framework; however, I argue that this history is critical for elucidating how race emerges in the romance in relation to religion, and particularly how its central theme of conversion operates across an imbricated system of racial and religious representations.

The geopolitical relations between Latin Europe, the Islamic Mamluk Sultanate in Syria, and the Mongol Ilkhanate of Persia from the 1260s to 1290s — along with their representation within Latin Christian historiography — provide the romance with a rich historical context that informs its racial and colonialist implications.⁸ This period in the history of the Ilkhanate of Persia was marked by conflict with the Mamluk Sultanate as well as diplomacy with Latin Europe.⁹ The Ilkhanate was founded in 1256 by Hulegu, Chinggis Khan's grandson, when he took control of northern Persia from the Assassins. By 1260 he had seized Baghdad from the Abbasid Caliph as well as Aleppo and Damascus from the Ayyubids. He intended to expand across Syria into

Egypt, but the Battle of Ayn Jalut in 1260 abruptly halted his plans. At Ayn Jalut, the Muslim Mamluks of Egypt not only succeeded in defeating Hulegu's advance into Egypt, but also in pushing the Mongols from Syria and establishing Mamluk power there instead. Hulegu's invasion of Syria, while ultimately a failure for the Ilkhanate, changed the political landscape of the region because it effected a transfer of power from the Ayyubids to the Mamluks. Regaining control over Syria became a priority for Hulegu and his successors, including Abaqa and Ghazan, and the war between the Ilkhanid Mongols and the Mamluks persisted until Ilkhan Abu Sa'id brokered a peace agreement in 1323.

During this period, beginning in 1262, the Ilkhans opened and maintained fairly consistent diplomatic contact with the Latin popes, English and French kings, and to a lesser extent the kings of Aragon and Sicily, in their campaigns against the Mamluks (Jackson 2005, 118–19, 165–95; Boyle 1976; Meyvaert 1980; Paviot 2000). Despite the geographic distance, Latin Europe seemed the most promising ally because by the 1260s the neighboring Kipchak Khanate (Golden Horde), though Mongol, was in conflict with the Ilkhanate; in fact, it had formed an alliance with the Mamluks (Jackson 2005, 124–8). Desirous of reconquering Jerusalem, Latin Europe reciprocated this extension of diplomacy, which also played into a prevailing perception of Mongols as Christian allies in the Levantine east.

At the center of the diplomacy between Latin Europe and the Ilkhanate was a promise of Mongol conversion to Christianity. At the Second Council of Lyon, summoned by Pope Gregory X and held on May 7, 1274, members of a Mongol delegation publicly converted and were baptized, which the compiler of the *Flores Historiarum* notes was motivated not by faith but by diplomatic political aims (Paviot 2000, 310). The compiler writes:

Vener[un]t [...] sexdecim Tartari, qui Moalli, cum littera regis sui, in concilio publicantes verbis pomposis potentiam Moallorum. Hi non pro fide, sed ut confoederationem haberent cum Christianis, venerunt. Hos Papa benigne suscipiens, donis et honoribus ampliavit, et ad petitionem ipsorum, non baptizatos fecit honorifice baptizari. (Luard 1890, 43)

Sixteen Tartars, who are Mongols, arrived with letters from their king, announcing with grand language, before the council, the power of the Mongols. These men came not for faith, but so that they might make an agreement with the Christians. Honoring them well, the Pope ennobled them with gifts and honors, and by their own request made those who were not baptized to be honorably baptized. (author's translation)

It is unclear what religion the Mongols were converted from, but it's important not to assume that they were Muslim, as this event predates, by two decades, the official conversion of the Ilkhanate to Islam in 1295. The delegation may have consisted of Mongols of diverse faiths; and indeed, the description in the *Flores* suggests that at least some of them were already Christian, as only those who were not baptized are said to have been baptized by Pope Gregory. Ilkhan Abaqa, who had sent this embassy to the Council, was himself Buddhist and had Nestorian and Byzantine Christian wives, including Maria Palaiologina, the illegitimate daughter of Emperor Michael VIII Palaeologus (Ryan 1998, 416; Runciman 1987, 320, 331–32; Richard 1977, 102).¹⁰

Mongols were religiously diverse, and conversion was often used as a political tool for forging alliances. It is worth noting that, in the *Flores Historiarum*, this episode

immediately follows the account of the Byzantine conversions at the Council and Byzantine Emperor Michael VIII's promise to unite with the Latin Church, suggesting that the compiler at least somewhat understood the Mongols' conversion as related to that of the Byzantines; that is, conversion here is a method of diplomacy. At the Council, Mongol conversion served as a symbol of political allegiance, which Abaqa hoped to leverage for his campaign against the Mamluks in Syria. His Latin secretary Richardus delivered a report outlining the Ilkhan's victories, and those of his father Hulegu before him, as well as their favorable relations with Europe and continued intentions of war against the Mamluks (Jackson 2005, 168; Lupprian 1981, 229–30). The report specifically credited Hulegu's diplomatic outreach in Europe to an embassy that arrived at his court from Jerusalem years earlier, in 1260.

The embassy of 1260 was headed by an Englishman, Dominican friar David of Ashby, who went on to live at the Mongol court and was also present at the 1274 Council as one of Abaqa's envoys (Boyle 1976, 28; Meyvaert 1980, 250).¹¹ In fact, Friar David delivered Abaqa's report directly to Edward I, which was addressed to Christian kings in addition to the Pope, when he traveled back to England after the Council (Boyle 1976, 30). Friar David's delivery of Abaqa's report to King Edward I revealed to an English audience the capacity for Mongols to convert to Christianity, and situates that conversion within a context of anti-Muslim sentiment. But it wasn't the first time this kind of sentiment was raised between England and the Ilkhanate. Only a few years had passed since their joint, yet brief, crusading campaign of 1271. When Edward I, then Prince Edward, arrived in Acre on May 9, 1271, he requested and received an army from Abaqa. Although the campaign was a military failure for Edward, who departed Acre on September 24, 1272, it serves as a strong example of Mongol-English alliance in the Syro-Palestine region in the late-thirteenth century. The delegation at the 1274 Council demonstrates Abaqa's continued interest in diplomacy with Latin Christendom, and particularly his commitment to re-establish a joint military campaign in Syria.

Abaqa's appeal to Mongol conversion as a diplomatic strategy would have held particular weight within an anti-Muslim context. The perception that Christian Mongols could serve as strong allies against Islam was rooted in a literary invention from twelfth-century crusading lore: the legend of Prester John. As the legend went, a mighty priest-king would come from an imagined far eastern and luxurious kingdom to help beleaguered crusaders reconquer the Holy Land. Prester John's kingdom represented Christian alliance beyond Muslim lands, as well as a promise of future global Christian dominance. The legend became a defining frame of reference through which the Mongols were introduced to Latin Europe during the Fifth Crusade (1217–1221) when Chinggis Khan and his army swept through Central Asia. Although he had nothing to do with the crusaders in Damietta, Chinggis Khan was represented as Prester John (or his descendent) on his way to offer them aid against the Ayyubid Caliphate in Egypt. The letters of Jacques de Vitry, and other prominent leaders of the crusade, demonstrate how the Mongols became absorbed into a narrative of crusade ideology that promoted Latin Christian supremacy over Islam.

The link between Prester John and the Mongols persisted from this historical moment throughout the Middle Ages, even as new geopolitical events, such as the invasions of Hungary and Poland at the end of the next decade, engendered new narratives that were folded into the construction of the Mongol race (Papp 2005). The Latin records about

Ilkhan Ghazan's brief reconquering of Syria at the end of 1299 offers us clear insight into this Latin European investment in the concept of a Mongol Christian savior. Sylvia Schein (1979) has argued that "narrative accounts as well as numerous letters prove that between February 1300 and September 1300, many Christians in the West laboured under the impression that the Holy Land, including Jerusalem with the Holy Sepulchre, were conquered by the Mongol khan Ghazan from the Moslems and handed over to Christians" (805). In reality, the Ilkhanate had officially converted to Islam in 1295, and not only was Ilkhan Ghazan's 1299 military victory over Syria, not Jerusalem, it was also unrelated to Latin Christendom. The false reports disseminated a remarkable misrepresentation of real events, but accomplished their aim of perpetuating a particular view of Mongols that was no longer supportable by facts.

The Latin records purposefully interpreted factual details in order to hold onto their perception of the Ilkhanid Mongols as Christian allies, including the primary fact that the Christian hero of the story was really Muslim. In her discussion of Ghazan, Hornstein (1941a) explains:

In the proclamation which he [Ghazan] issued December 30, 1299, after the capture of Damascus, he forbade his troops "to molest those of other faiths — Jews, Christians, or Sabaeans." In addition, his alliance with two notable Christian rulers, the Kings of Armenia and Georgia, led Westerners to suppose he had joined with them in baptism. Finally, Ghazan's appeals to the European rulers for military aid were accompanied, like those of his father [Arghun], by statements of his willingness to embrace Christianity, and to turn over to the Christians such lands as he conquered in Palestine. His emissaries doubtless stressed Ghazan's Christian sympathies. (409–10)

Latin Christians navigated around the problem posed by Ghazan's Muslim conversion by focusing elsewhere: on his "Christian sympathies." Doing so enabled them to maintain their perception of Mongols as allies *against* Islam. The desire for a Christian savior in the Holy Land overpowered any contradictory realities, and a preoccupation with Mongol Christianity and conversion persisted.

In the *Flores Historiarum*, the Christian conversion of the Mongols is attributed to a miracle that was bestowed on Ghazan's pagan brother ("frater paganus") and his child (Luard 1890, 107).¹² *The King of Tars* is a retelling and highly embellished version of this story, which circulated in several chronicles across Latin Europe, six of which predate the Auchinleck manuscript (Pertz et al. 1851, 806; Ottokar 1890, 253–6; Luard 1890, 107–8; Rishanger 1865, 189–90; Villani 1802; Finke 1908–22, 747). These historiographical sources, including the *Flores Historiarum*, recount the birth of a monstrous baby who is born to an Armenian Christian princess and a pagan Mongol (sometimes the king himself). While the versions vary slightly, consistent among them is that the baby miraculously transforms in the baptismal font, which promptly inspires his father to convert to Christianity and then fight the Saracens and reconquer Jerusalem for Latin Christendom. In the sources, the event is recorded in the annals of 1280 or 1299, which corresponds to the reigns of Ilkhan Abaqa (1265–1282) and Ilkhan Ghazan (1295–1304), two Ilkhanid rulers whose connection to Latin Europe was marked, in different yet consistent ways, by the conversion of Mongols and the conquest of the east. Mongol conversion was a central component of the historical relations between Europe and the Ilkhanate of Persia, undergirding the ideologies reflected in the source material and becoming a pivotal premise in the romance.

Christian Mongols of Tars

The romance version in *The King of Tars* significantly alters the racial identities of its principal characters. The husband whose child is born monstrous and who converts is no longer a pagan Mongol, but rather a Saracen Sultan. While the Christian Princess whom he marries in the source material was Armenian, she becomes a Mongol woman in the romance. The Mongol ruler (previously in the Sultan's role) is now the Mongol Princess's father, already a Christian at the start of the narrative. His land of rule is "Tars," a term generally understood to be shorthand for Tartary, European nomenclature for Mongol territory (Connell 1973). Judith Perryman, in her authoritative edition of the romance, has argued that while the term "Tars" may signify Tarsus (Tabriz) or Tharsia, rather than Tartary, both of these "geographical areas were under Mongol domination at the time of the poem's conception. So from a historical viewpoint 'king of Tartars' is a fair gloss for *king of Tars*" (1980, 48).¹³ Perryman's assertion follows from the earlier work of Hornstein (1941a, 405–6) and reflects the scholarly consensus on the meaning of "Tars" in the romance.

Therefore, we see how in *The King of Tars*, the Mongols are the existing, not the converting, Christians of the story. It is no longer a story about Mongols converting to Christianity, but rather one about how a marriage between a Mongol Princess and a Saracen Sultan mobilizes the conversion and genocide of the Saracens, and ushers in a global world under Christian rule. The Mongol king of Tars stabilizes Mongol conversion within this paradigm; his Christian identity is presented as an irrefutable fact, protected from the historical realities that the fantasy space of romance contravenes. He becomes the Christian king who, in crusade romances, is the opposing image of the Saracen Sultan. He occupies the role conventionally held by Charlemagne, the Christian hero who is true to his faith and set up to be the savior of Christendom. Although the king is "of Tars," readers are quickly assured of his faith as a Christian. In the opening lines of the narrative, the author offers an immediate assertion as to the king's loyalty to Christianity. He asks readers to listen to a story about how a war began

Bituene a trewe Cristen king
And an hethen heye lording,
Of Dames the soudan.
The king of Tars hadde a wive,
Feirer might non ben olive —
That ani wight telle can.
A douhter thai hadde hem bituen. (4–10)¹⁴

"Trewē" means faithful, loyal, and, in the specific context of religion, spiritually correct and steadfast.¹⁵ Its use here signals to readers that the king is a Latin Christian, rather than Nestorian, Jacobite, Syrian, or Armenian Christian, all sects that one would have certainly found in this region but that were considered heresies. Although the romance's invisible history reminds us that this "Cristen king" was formerly a "hethen" himself, the romance erases that subtext by beginning with an assertion of his already established Christian *trouthe*. His identity as a ruler is marked here by two defining features: that he is a "trewe Cristen" and that he is "of Tars" (4, 7). In a story that offers very little by way of identifying markers — the characters are given no names — his attachment to his locale of rule stands out as integral to who he is, and particularly as it

is paired with his Christian loyalty and juxtaposed with the heathen Sultan's domain "of Dames" (6). Prester John seems to hover here as well, signaling to readers the particular fantasy of a global Latin Christendom in which Islam is destroyed or converted.¹⁶ Indeed, the fantasy this romance stages is one in which the army of this "trew Cristen king ... of Tars" wipes out a coalition of armies from across five Saracen kingdoms.

The stability of the Princess's Christian identity is also an important point the narrative carefully affirms. Siobhan Bly Calkin (2005a) has argued that the narrative raises anxieties about the impact the Princess's public conversion to the Saracen religion has on her identity. The Princess lives as a Saracen woman after she converts, and it is not until the birth of her child that she publicly announces her continued loyalty to Christianity (although readers do witness her private devotion). Reminding us that external aspect and internal character were co-constitutive for medieval audiences, Calkin cautions:

... it is no small matter that the princess takes on the appearance of a Saracen. One crusade chronicle, for example, claims that "appearance is governed by character. Whatever sort of character the ruler has, it is naturally reflected in outer appearance." For this medieval writer, internal "character" and external "appearance" are not as separable as *The King of Tars* might have us believe. (223)¹⁷

Modern readers are certainly wise to remember that the Princess's adoption of a public Saracen identity isn't so easily disambiguated from *who she truly is*. Nonetheless, this confounding of her public and private selves evinces her proximity to the romance trope of the Saracen Princess, discussed below, in fact placing her within a long literary tradition wherein she is characterized precisely by her loyalty to Christianity.

Further, there is one important scene before her child's birth that assures readers that her conversion is false and her Christian identity stable. On the eve of the Princess's conversion ceremony, she has a dream-vision that offers her comfort. In her dream, the Princess sees "an hundred houndes blake" (420), all barking at her, one of whom particularly "greved hir sore" (422) because she feared that he wanted to take her away. This hound soon transforms, however, into a knight who delivers a divine message to the Princess, telling her not to fear what is to come. This dream has received relatively little scholarly attention, and has been read as foreshadowing the physiognomic transformation that the Sultan undergoes when his skin turns from black to white upon his baptism (Whitaker 2013, 183–87). While the dream may indeed foreshadow the conversion of the Sultan, I argue that it is also an important scene for the Princess, wherein the racial formation of the Mongol emerges to stabilize her identity as a Christian. The hound is often read as representative of the Sultan because of the association of "hound" as an epithet for Muslims. However, Mongols were also regularly referred to as hounds in Latin discourse.¹⁸ Even when the Mongols were represented as figures of admiration, more sinister referents persisted. In fact, the potency of the *exotic ally* is precisely its ability to harness a threat into a controlled force, as we saw at the Cheapside tournament of 1331.

The Princess's dream-vision demonstrates how race becomes *salient*, as Jerng argues, through its apprehension and organization of experience. The interaction between the hound and the Princess reveals the invisible way in which race makes and conveys meaning: the hound is characterized through the racial formation of the exotic ally, which sets him up to assuage the Princess's anxiety and assure readers of the constancy

of her faith despite the conversion ceremony. The hound's threat to the Princess is never direct, but is instead ambiguous before it completely disappears and is replaced by his role as a savior. She is clearly terrified of him, but whether he is actually threatening her remains unclear:

And sche no durst him nought smite
 For drede that he wald hir bite,
 Swiche maistri he gan to make.
 And as sche wald fram hem fle,
 Sche seye ther stond develen thre
 And ich brent as a drake. (424–29)

We know that the Princess fears the hound will bite her, but the sentence's syntactical structure leaves the intended object of the hound's threatening behavior ambiguous. The presence of three devils, burning like dragons and brandishing spears, may point to *them*, not the Princess, as the object to whom the hound directs his "maistri." *Maistri* also connotes skill or mastery, suggesting that the hound's behavior is conducted with purpose and control. His "maistri" works here not against the Princess, but on her behalf, to protect her from the devils that surround her (both in the dream and at the Sultan's court).

In his next appearance, the hound's malevolence is also painted in vague terms. He is described "with browes brod and hore" (438), which combines a facial feature meant to signal a menacing character (wide eyebrows/forehead) with that which marks old age and the wisdom it brings (gray hair). In the next line, he tries to "drawen adoun" the Princess, but it is at this very moment that he begins to speak to her and transforms into a friendly figure offering comfort. Through his own menacing attributes, he has protected the Princess from the threatening forces that surrounded her and emerges a messenger of Christ, "in white clothes als a knight," telling her she need not fear the Saracen gods, for "Thi Lord that suffred passioun / Schal help thee at thi nede" (448, 452–53).

His occupation in the dream as both a possible yet unclear threat and a savior is akin to how Mongols were imagined in the Latin west (Papp 2005). Not only did the Mongols have an existing association with the Christian savior from the east, Prester John, but so too did the specific Mongol whom the Princess's father and the Sultan are modelled after: Ilkhan Ghazan. As discussed above, Ghazan was imagined as fulfilling the promise of Prester John when he briefly conquered Syria in 1299. The idea of a Christian savior among the Mongols is thus conceivably witnessed in the hound of the Princess's dream-vision. Even if we retain the hound's Saracen association, he can at the same time hold ties to the Ilkhanid Mongols, for he drives away the non-Christian threat just as Ghazan, a Muslim convert, was imagined to have done in Syria and Jerusalem. Through the hound, this scene embeds the racial formation of the Mongol as a point through which readers may make sense of the Princess's dream-vision. Constructed as an exotic ally, the hound is not a threat to the Princess, but a helpful guide, whose terrorizing aspect becomes the very thing that transforms him into a savior figure. By noticing the "salience of race" in the Princess's dream-vision — that is, how race structures both her and the reader's experience of this scene — we can see that the Princess's Christian faith is not only never in question, but has always been guaranteed. As the hound signals to the Princess, as well as to readers, that she will

remain a true Christian (like her father), he likewise signals the role she will play not just in the Sultan's conversion, but in the Christian take-over of the Saracen world.

The Mongol Princess: romance heroine

The same racial formation that structures and conveys meaning within the dream-vision also scripts the Princess. Speaking specifically about his popular fiction archive, but offering an analysis that elucidates the relation between race and genre more broadly, Mark Jerng writes, "It is in understanding yellow peril as genre that we can see a longer history of instructing readers to notice race in ways that supplement the limitations of scientific racism's attention to the body or social Darwinism's attention to civilization" (2018, 41). I argue that it is the genre of the romance that offers a discursive apparatus through which readers notice the racialized characterization of the Princess, and thereby anticipate how she will function in the romance.

The conventions of medieval romance construct the Mongol Princess into a familiar romance heroine while at the same time rendering noticeable her significant departure from these conventions. She belongs to two different but related romance traditions: the first is the crusading romance in which a Saracen Princess betrays her father to help the Christian knights defeat him, then goes on to marry one of the knights. The Saracen Princess is essentially "always already" a Christian, and primed to become the heroic protagonist's wife from the beginning. Through conversion and marriage, she demonstrates the simultaneous eradication of a threatening religious alterity and its safe incorporation into Christian society through the marriage bond. The Mongol Princess is also part of a romance tradition in which a pious Christian woman marries and converts British pagans. As many scholars have noted, *The King of Tars* belongs to a cluster of narratives known as the Constance-cycle, which includes Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale*, Book Two in Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, and Nicholas Trivet's account in his Anglo-Norman chronicle. In these stories, a Christian heroine travels away from her home to a foreign land, marries a Pagan king with whom she has a baby son, and facilitates both her husband's conversion and the mass conversion of his people.

Importantly, Constance converts pagans, not Saracens. For example, in Chaucer's version, she fails to convert the Saracens of Syria, a plot point that precipitates her journey to pagan Britain, where she does find success. But in Syria, her betrothed Saracen husband and his people who have promised to convert are all slaughtered by the Sultan's mother, a Saracen Queen. The Saracen Queen's insider position affords her a vantage point from which she can wield the kind of influence needed for cultural dominance. When she realizes that her son intends to convert and have all of his people do so as well, she sends for her private council to devise a plan that will stop him. Exclaiming that she would die before she lets "Makometes lawe out of myn herte," the Saracen Queen secures the allegiance of her council (Chaucer 1987, II.336).¹⁹ Every one of her lords swears to stand by her side, and to persuade his friends to do so as well (II.344–47). She is granted their loyalty precisely because she is their queen, one of their own, someone who intends to fight for them against the threat of an outsider from Rome. Of course the point of her resistance here is to stop mass conversion, not facilitate it, but she does orchestrate a mass slaughter of Saracens in order to regain control over the religious assignation of Syria.

The power of an insider position is deployed in the Mongol Princess when she publicly converts to the Saracen religion, something that significantly sets her apart from Constance, and that moves her closer to the role of the Saracen Princess. Prior to her marriage to the Sultan, the Princess partakes in a ceremony of conversion wherein she vocalizes her voluntary adoption of the Saracen religion and willingness to learn how to pray to the Saracen gods (II.478–89). After this declaration, she then “kist Mahoun and Apolin, / Astirot and Sir Jovin” (II.496–97) — all the Saracen gods — and went on to “lerd the hethen lawe” (II.501). Readers are told that the Princess eventually learns all the Saracen rites and prayers, and openly practices accordingly. By all outward appearances, she has become a Saracen; however, the narrator offers details of her inner life to assure readers that her public and vocal expression of the Saracen religion is only for show, and that she has in fact remained a Christian at heart. Her private prayers to Jesus, when she is “bi herselfeon,” evidence her true and continued Christian faith (II.502–13). The Princess’s occupation of a public Saracen self and a continued private identification with Christianity are both integral to the narrative’s progression. If not for her public conversion and adoption of Saracen law, she would not be able to marry the Sultan and consummate the relationship. At the same time, if the Princess had not privately retained her Christianity she would not be able to facilitate her child’s conversion, which precipitates the resolution of the romance.

When discussing the Mongol Princess, many scholars erase her Mongol identity from her characterization because she appears, physically, to be a Latin European heroine. When the narrator introduces the Princess, there is nothing indicating that she is Mongol:

Non feirer woman might ben —
 As white as fether of swan.
 The meiden was schast and blithe of chere
 With rode red so blosme on brere
 And eyghen stepe and gray.
 With lowe scholders and white swere
 Hir for to sen was gret preier
 Of princes proud and play. (Chandler 2015, 11–18)

She is the most beautiful woman, as white as the feather of a swan, chaste, joyful in her demeanor and appearance, possessing a rosy complexion and glistening gray eyes, low shoulders and a white neck. Her appearance is by all accounts that of a stock Latin European heroine. Heng (2003) and Lampert-Weissig (2004) have argued that this appearance effectively erases any semblance of an eastern identity that her association with Tars would have otherwise designated. Heng (2003) argues that the whiteness of the Princess and the transformation of the Sultan — whose skin changes from black to white when he converts — work together to cement a normativity of whiteness for Latin Christianity.²⁰ I argue, however, that while her physical features certainly normalize whiteness for the Latin Christian body, it does not overwrite the racial formation that characterizes her. The Princess’s embodiment of whiteness emerges *through* this formation, rather than evidencing its erasure. Racial formations are necessarily linked to social structures, but not necessarily rendered visible through the body. The extent to which they operate within the worlds they construct and organize exceeds that which is visibly recognized. As Jerng argues, the “salience of race” can reside in a set of

conditions, expectations, and experiences even when we do not see it with our eyes. The physical white washing of a Princess who explicitly hails from Tars, whose father is a Mongol ruler, performs ideological work here, but it is not the erasure of her Mongol identity. Rather, this maneuver enrolls her racial alterity into the project of producing a normalized Christian body.

The racial formation of the exotic ally that scripts the Princess's characterization enables the success of the romance's colonialist fantasy: the dominance of a white, Christian world. Her orchestration of all of the baptisms and conversions that occur in the narrative can be read through the conventions of the romance tradition, but because she is neither Saracen nor European, readers also view her through the set of perceptions and conditions that her Mongol race inflects into her characterization. As a Mongol Princess, her role as an agent of conversion is also informed by the European perception of Ilkhanid Christian wives as holding influence over their husbands and wielding potential power to inspire their conversion. Ilkhanid Mongol women were known to be spiritual leaders. In fact, noblewomen across the Mongol Empire often held influential positions in the political affairs of Mongol courts. John of Plano Carpini, one of the earliest travelers to Mongol territory, described how one of the wives of Jochi — son of Chinggis Khan and father of Batu, founder of the Kipchak Khanate — ruled his *ordo* (camp) after his death, something he notes was customary (Dawson 1955, 60). Ibn Battutah also wrote about the relatively high status of Mongol women (Mackintosh-Smith 2003). As Yoni Brack (2011) has argued, Mamluk sultans and nobles often sought marriages to Ilkhanid princesses because these brides would bring them great prestige. While they did marry Ilkhanid women, they were usually the daughters of military officers, not princesses whose bloodlines traced back to Chinggis Khan (343–44).

Some of the most influential women of the Ilkhanate were Christians, beginning with Hulegu's mother, Sorqaqtani Beki, who was also the mother of the Great Khans Mongke and Kubilai.²¹ Hulegu's father Tolui also married another Nestorian Christian, Doqz Khatun, of the same line as his mother, who later became Hulegu's chief wife upon his father's death. According to the Persian statesmen and chronicler, Rashid al-Din (d. 1318), Doqz Khatun:

... commanded great respect and possessed absolute authority. Since the tribe of the Kerait adhered to the Christian faith, she strongly supported the Christians, so that under her protection this 'nation' had great influence. In order to please her, Hulagu supported and promoted this community, so that it was able to build new churches everywhere. Near Doqz Khatun's tent, there was always set up a [portable] chapel, where bells were rung. (Spuler 1972, 121)²²

Doqz Khatun and Sorqaqtani Beki were both mentioned in the report delivered at the 1274 Council of Lyon on behalf of Khan Abaqa, in which they were said to be daughters of Prester John and employed as examples of the Ilkhanid Mongols' fellowship with the Latin Christians (Jackson 2005, 175; Lupprian 1981, 229). To represent these influential Mongol women as belonging to the filial line of Prester John sent the message that Mongol Christianity was in league with Latin Christendom in the way that Prester John was imagined to be. This representation of Mongol Christian alliance hinges on a narrative that casts Mongol women as Christians with the power to facilitate conversion.

James D. Ryan (1998) has noted that Pope Nicholas IV began addressing letters to the Christian women at Ilkhan Arghun's court, urging them to spread their faith to their

husbands. In one letter of 1291, for example, the pope addressed two Mongol queens, one of whom was the third wife of Arghun and mother of the future Ilkhan Oljeitu (r. 1304–16). According to Ryan, “the pope complimented both women on having accepted Christianity, and urged them to uphold it and to encourage other princes to embrace the true faith” (418).²³ Ryan describes another letter, dated April 2, 1288 and addressed to one of Abaqa’s Christian widows, Nukdan: “The pope (calling her a shining example) congratulated her on her faith, but reminded her that one must also excite others to convert” (417). These letters evidence the way in which Mongol women were included in the European tradition of casting Christian women as agents of their sons and husbands’ conversion — such as in the case of Clothild who helped move Clovis and the Franks to conversion in the fifth century (411–12, 417). A similar conception circulated about Anglo-Saxon queens in pagan Britain, offering us an even tighter link here to Constance.

The Mongol Princess’s place within this narrative is distinct because of her non-European racialization. She has the capacity to bring Latin Christianity to spaces beyond Europe, specifically to eastern regions dominated by Muslim kingdoms. When the Princess facilitates conversion in *The King of Tars*, she expands the parameters of the conventional romance heroine to include perceptions of the Mongol wife and mother. Her race appears in the romance not as a visible representation inscribed through her physiognomy, but as — to return to Jerng — “something around which a scene or situation can cohere” (2018, 8). The Princess is the agent of her child’s baptism, the Sultan’s conversion, the mass conversion of Syria, and the slaughter of five Saracen armies whose coalition represents a coming together of an expansive Saracen east precisely to showcase its destruction. At the romance’s conclusion, readers are left with an eastern landscape entirely under the domain of Christendom: five Saracen kingdoms are conquered through the alliance between the king of Tars and the newly Christian Sultan of Damascus, whose enmity had opened the romance.

These actions all cohere around the Princess’s racial formation, a central catalyst for the narrative’s realization of this colonialist fantasy. After her baby is born a formless lump “withouten blod and bon” and with “noither nose no eye” (Chandler 2015, 579, 581), the Sultan accuses her of believing falsely in his gods. These circumstances prompt the Princess to negotiate a deal with her husband that if he prays to his gods and they can bring the baby to life, then she will believe in his gods; but if they can’t bring the baby to life, then she will not (598–618). The Sultan goes to his temple, but despite his prayers, the baby’s “flesche lay stille as ston” (636); and when he realizes that his gods won’t help, he curses them:

“O Sir Mahoun,” he gan to grede,
 “Wil ye nought helpe me at this nede?
 The devel you brenne ichon!” (643–45)

He violently tears down their effigies, breaking them apart — “And brac hem arm and croun” (654) — and continues to curse them before finally admitting defeat to the Princess: “Mine godes no may help me nought. / The devel hem sett afere!” (668–69). The Princess’s response positions her as a spiritual leader who will guide the Sultan into Christianity while at the same time facilitate her baby’s baptism:

“Leve sir, here mi speche.
 The best rede that Y can,
 Bi Jhesu Crist that made man,
 Now ichil you teche.” (672–75)

She instructs the Sultan to listen to her advice, for now she is going to teach him about Jesus Christ. The Princess fulfills the role imagined by Nicholas IV of Ilkhanid wives who would urge the conversion of their husbands. And the Sultan agrees to let the Princess teach him, replying “Now, dame, ichil do bi thi lore” (685). She instructs him to find a priest among the many Christian prisoners he has, and says she will show him what she knows Jesus can do that the Sultan’s “maumettes” (idols) could not (714).

After testing the priest that is brought to her, the Princess tells him “We schul make Cristen men of houndes,” thereby asserting her role in the conversions to follow (740). In fact, even though the priest performs the baptism, the Princess is behind its orchestration, instructing the priest on what precisely he must do:

Than seyð the soudan’s wiif,
 “Thou most do stille withouten striif
 A wel gret priveté.
 Hali water thou most make,
 And this ich flesche thou take,
 Al for the love of me,
 And cristen it withouten blame
 In the worthschipe of the Fader’s name
 That sitt in Trinité.” (742–50)

The priest would not have known what to do if not for the Princess, for he has been imprisoned for twenty years and is out of practice. So even though he performs the ceremony, she emerges here as the powerful spiritual leader with both the foresight and knowledge to save her baby. Her instructions for the baptism are successfully carried out, “And when that it cristned was / It hadde liif and lim and fas” (769–70). Upon the baby’s baptism, he is given life, and limbs, and a face. In fact, the baby becomes so beautiful that all trace of his previous state is completely erased:

Feirer child might non be bore —
 It no hadde never a lime forlore,
 Wele schapen it was, withalle. (775–77)

This miracle becomes evidence for Christ’s might over the Sultan’s gods, and the Princess uses it to then push the Sultan toward baptism as well, forcefully threatening him that he will have no part of her or the child if he does not convert:

“Bot thou were cristned so it is —
 Thou no hast no part theron ywis,
 Noither of the child ne of me.” (808–10)

She goes on to say that he must forsake his gods and make himself a Christian, otherwise he should be scared that he will be harmed. As a Christian, however, both she and the baby will be his, and he will go to heaven.

Her words in this entire section, and her instructions to the priest, characterize her as spiritually powerful; she directs the situation, teaches the Sultan Christian doctrine, and becomes the agent of the Sultan’s conversion. We might expect the priest to serve this function, but he merely follows her instructions.²⁴ It is also her idea to convert all the Saracen people, and she directly influences the strategy for a military campaign that will enable them to do so. She instructs the Sultan,

“Mi lord,” sche seyde with hert fre,
 “Sende now this prest in priveté
 To mi fader the king,
 And pray him for the love of me
 That he com swithe hider to thee
 With alle that he may bring
 And when mi fader is to thee come,
 Do cristen thi lond alle and some,
 Bothe eld and ying.
 And he that wil be cristned nought,
 Loke to the deth that he be brought,
 Withouten ani duelleing.” (943–54)

She assumes a position of power here not only as an agent of her child and husband’s individual baptisms, but also of the mass conversion of an entire Saracen population. The historical Ilkhanid women buttress her representation here.

The Mongol Princess is not merely a Latin European heroine, like Constance, who brings Christianity to a pagan, but specifically not Saracen, world; nor is she like the Saracen Princess who serves Latin Christendom by betraying her father and Saracen people. She emerges at the intersection of these conventional romance heroines. The assumptions and expectations that cohere around them are inscribed in her, but the inherent contradiction of this intersection enables her to exceed their limitations and bring into being what neither could. The Mongol Princess converts the Saracens without betrayal, and offers Latin Christendom a global future through the symbol of her child.

Conclusion

As the formless and lifeless progeny of a Christian mother and Saracen father, the baby intuitively represents the unintelligibility of interfaith miscegenation and the necessity of immediate correction for the future of Christendom. His transformation into a beautiful baby boy upon baptism inspires his father to convert, which ultimately leads to the narrative’s resolution of Saracen genocide and mass conversion. Thus not only does the child represent the illegibility of hybrid bodies prior to his baptism; he also represents the way in which the transformation of hybrid bodies into actors of colonialist domination secures dominant ideologies. The implication of the baby’s transformation is a critical point of the romance: the child of a Saracen and Christian is granted the right to life specifically through the erasure of his mixed heritage, a transformation that effectively secures Christian rule over the east.

Christian futurity in the romance, imagined as the conquest and domination of the east, is made possible through the sexual desirability of the Mongol Princess, and specifically its mobilization of her racial alterity. Her agency within a project of Latin Christian supremacy and Muslim subjugation pulls the entirety of the imagined East into the cultural domain of Latin Christendom. *The King of Tars* reveals to us how racial formations operate beyond epistemologies of physiognomic differences. Noticing the racial formation of the exotic ally in the Princess’s characterization also helps us to see how a romance that is often read through a white-black and Christian–Muslim binary of racial-religious conflict, is in fact engaged in a much more complex process of

racial thinking. Mongol alterity was constructed precisely to harness an eastern ferocity for Latin Christian efforts against the perceived threat of Islam; and it becomes a useful ideological tool for England in the 1330s, when it enters the political and cultural landscape through the modes of fantasy that royal tournaments and romance literature enabled.

Notes

1. This tournament, which lasted three days, was one of the earliest to be cast as a royal pageant. For a discussion on the association between tournaments and disguising, and how the tournament became framed as a chivalric pageant beginning in the thirteenth century, see Barber (2013) and Twycross and Carpenter (2002); and on tournaments in England becoming spectacles, see Barker (1986, 84–111, 98).
2. Between 1331 and 1343, Edward hosted at least thirty tournaments (Ormond 2011, 143).
3. Saracen is the term used for Muslims in medieval Europe and I use it here instead of Muslim because it more accurately reflects the misrepresentation of Islam in the narrative. The religion of the Sultan and people of Damascus in the romance is a fictionalized and racist depiction of Islam that bears little to no resemblance to reality, although it is meant to represent the historical religion and its adherents. The misrepresentation of Muslims in medieval romance is well studied. See Dorothee Metlitzki (1977) and Suzanne Conklin Akbari (2009).
4. *The King of Tars* is extant in three manuscripts: Auchinleck (c. 1330), NLS Advocates MS 19.2.1.; Vernon (c. 1390), Bodleian Library, MS Eng. poet. A. 1; Simeon (c. 1400), British Library Additional MS 22283. Simeon is considered a copy of the Vernon because they are nearly identical. For a facsimile of the Auchinleck, see Pearsall and Cunningham (1977); for a facsimile of the Vernon, see Doyle (1987). For an analysis of the transmission of *The King of Tars* from the Auchinleck to the Vernon/Simeon, see Reichl (1990). For a study on the relationship between the Vernon and Simeon, see Doyle (1990). A note on the genre: *Tars* is not grouped with the romances in the Auchinleck, but instead is included among the religious texts; it follows the *Legend of Pope Gregory* and precedes the *Life of Adam and Eve* (Pearsall and Cunningham 1977). This placement as well as its inclusion in the Vernon and the Simeon, two religious manuscripts intended for pious readers, have led some scholars to nuance its generic classification as a romance. However, its narrative structure and themes are unmistakably of the medieval romance genre.
5. For a discussion of the cultural implications of conversion within the contexts of colonialism and community formation, see Viswanathan (1998).
6. First formulated in Heng (2011).
7. For Perryman's argument that Lampert-Weissig draws from here, see Perryman (1980, 44–49).
8. The Ilkhanate, or sub-khanate, was the Mongol suzerainty in the Persian region that remained loyal to the Great Khan.
9. Ironically, the success of the Mongol invasions of the 1220s inadvertently led to the rise of the Mamluk Sultanate and thus the end of Mongol expansion. The Mamluks descended from the Kipchak Turks, who had been displaced into slavery after their lands were devastated by the Mongols. Many of them were sold into slavery in Cairo, where the Ayyubid Sultan al-Salih Ayyub put them to work in his army; these Mamluks eventually took control from the Ayyubids and founded the Mamluk Sultanate (see Cobb 2014, 220).
10. Maria was betrothed to Hulegu, but when she arrived in Tabriz, the Ilkhan had already died so she married Abaqa, his son and successor. Maria succeeded Doquz Khatun as the spiritual leader of the Ilkhanid Mongols and was known as Despina Khatun.
11. Friar David wrote *Les Fais des Tartars* for the council, a treatise on the Mongols, but no surviving manuscript exists. The only known copy was in a manuscript at Turin, and was destroyed by a fire in 1904. A description of the manuscript survives in the library

- catalogue, published in 1867 with one chapter transcribed along with it, discussing Mongol methods of war (see Scheler 1867, 26–28).
12. Ghazan is named, in the form “Cassanus,” as the Mongol king in the *Flores Historiarum* and the *Istorie Fiorentine*. The Mongol ruler is not named in the other four sources.
 13. Tabriz was an important Mongol city in Persia, and a commercial and cultural center in the region. Tharsia, according to the *MED*, was a kingdom bordering the west of China (s.v. “Thars[e]”).
 14. All quotations from *The King of Tars* are taken from Chandler (2015) and cited by line number.
 15. *MED* s.v. “treu(e)”: 1a. (a) Steadfast in fidelity to friends, kin, country, etc., loyal; also, inseparable. 5(a) Of a person’s heart, mind, etc.: faithful to principle, having integrity; rightly motivated, capable or possessed of proper feeling; also, pure in motive. 6(a) Steadfast in devotion to God. 7(a) Religiously orthodox, spiritually correct.
 16. The king’s link to Prester John is further supported by the earliest version of the sources, the German-Latin *Annales S. Rudberti Salisburgenses*, in which he is Prester John. This version indicates that the Christian wife/mother is the daughter of Prester John. She becomes the daughter of the Armenian king in all subsequent versions of the sources.
 17. Calkin (2005a, 223–24) goes on to use *Roman de Silence* as a literary example of this point. For the chronicle she cites here, see Nicholson (1997, 156): “Porro modus habitudinis formam trahit ex animo praesidentis; talis nimirum erit forma praedicati, qualem permiserit natura subjecti.”
 18. In the *Chronica Majora*, Matthew Paris records an exchange between Peter de Roches, Bishop of Winchester, and Henry III in which Peter collapses both Mongol and Muslim into the same debased category of inhuman bestiality. Advising the king about how to respond to a Muslim envoy requesting aid against the Mongols, Peter says, “Let us leave these dogs to devour one another so that they all perish” (Sinamus canes hos illos devorare ad invicem, ut consumpti pereant; see Luard 1876, 489).
 19. All quotations from the *Canterbury Tales* are taken from Chaucer (1987) and cited by fragment and line number.
 20. Cord Whitaker (2013) makes a compelling case against readings that interpret the Sultan’s physiognomic change into whiteness as a consolidation of racial and religious identities. Whitaker’s contention is that the Sultan actually turns white after, not at the precise moment of, his conversion and thus he exists as both black *and* Christian for a period of time. He argues that neither his blackness — notably, only mentioned when he converts — nor his whiteness are mapped along a Saracen-Christian divide, but are rather symbolic of his Christian sin and path towards redemption.
 21. Sorqaqtani Beki was the daughter of Ong Khan of the Kerait tribe, which converted to Nestorian Christianity around the beginning of the eleventh century. She is considered one of the most influential women in the empire for her role in her sons’ ascension to power.
 22. See also James D. Ryan, who changes “this nation” to “they” (1998, 416).
 23. For a reproduction of the text, see Chabot (1894, 623–24).
 24. The Vernon manuscript omits some of this section where the Princess teaches him about Christian doctrine (see Gilbert 2004, 122n31).

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