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TURK AS A FOE OR A COMRADE? MEDIEVAL ANGLO-TURKISH INTERPLAYS IN AN ARTHURIAN ROMANCE: *THE TURKE AND SIR GAWAIN*

ABSTRACT

This article examines *The Turke and Sir Gawain* (c.1500), a lesser-known Arthurian romance that reflects the medieval West's growing anxiety over the rising power of the Ottoman Turks in the late fifteenth century. By replacing the Green Knight with a character named Turke, this narrative reimagines Sir Gawain's chivalric journey, with the Turke acting as a mentor and guide, ultimately culminating in the Turke's conversion to Christianity and transformation into Sir Gromer. Through the lens of medieval European encounters with the Ottoman Empire, this story can be interpreted as both a conversion fantasy and a commentary on the cultural and religious tensions between the Christian West and the Muslim East. While exploring camaraderie between Gawain and the Turke, the narrative reveals how their alliance depends on Christian dominance and demands religious assimilation. The conversion of the Turke becomes a diplomatic gesture to mitigate the Ottoman threat by reimagining the Turk from a foe into a potential Christian ally. Furthermore, the analysis provides insights into how medieval reflections on solidarity offer a framework for understanding contemporary efforts to bridge cultural and religious divides. Through a detailed plot summary, textual excerpts, and historical contextualization, this article highlights the ways in which this underappreciated Arthurian tale engages with themes of conversion, camaraderie, and the politics of cultural assimilation.

Keywords: Arthurian romance, Camaraderie, Ottoman Turks, Religious conversion, Solidarity, *The Turke and Sir Gawain*

TÜRK BİR DÜŞMAN MI YOKSA YOLDAŞ MI? BİR ARTHUR ROMANSINDA ORTAÇAĞ ANGLO-TÜRK ETKİLEŞİMLERİ: *THE TURKE AND SIR GAWAIN*

ÖZET

Bu makale, geç 15. yüzyılda Osmanlı Türklerinin yükselen gücüne karşı Ortaçağ Batısı'nda artan kaygıları yansıtan, az bilinen bir Arthur romansı olan *The Turke and Sir Gawain*'i (1500) incelemektedir. Yeşil Şövalye'nin yerine "Turke" adlı bir karakterin geçirilmesiyle bu anlatı, Sir Gawain'in şövalyelik yolculuğunu yeniden tasavvur eder; Turke, burada bir akıl hocası ve rehber rolünü üstlenir ve nihayetinde anlatı Turke'ün Hristiyan olması ve İngiliz şövalye Sir Gromer'e dönüşmesiyle sonuçlanır. Orta Çağ Avrupa'sının Osmanlı İmparatorluğu ile karşılaşmaları merceğinden bakıldığında, bu hikâye hem bir din değiştirme fantezisi hem de Hristiyan Batı ile Müslüman Doğu arasındaki kültürel ve dini gerilimler üzerine bir yorum olarak okunabilir. Anlatı, Hristiyan değerlerinin üstünlüğü ve din değiştirme önkoşulu tarafından şekillendirilmiştir. Turke'ün Hristiyanlığa geçişi yalnızca bir dayanışma kurma yolu değil, aynı zamanda Türk'ü bir düşmandan, potansiyel bir Hristiyan müttefiğe dönüştürerek Osmanlı tehdidini hafifletmeye yönelik diplomatik bir hamle hâline gelir. Makalede bu anlatının dini asimilasyon ve Ortaçağ kültürel etkileşimlerindeki güç dinamikleri tarafından koşullanan bir pratik olarak dayanışmayı nasıl yansıttığı incelenmektedir. Ayrıca analiz, Ortaçağ'daki dayanışma düşüncelerinin, günümüzde kültürel ve dini ayrılıkları aşmaya yönelik çabaları anlamak için nasıl bir çerçeve sunduğuna dair içgörüler sağlar. Ayrıntılı olay örgüsü özeti, metin alıntıları ve tarihsel bağlamlandırma yoluyla, bu makale pek de bilinmeyen bu Arthur romansında, din değiştirme, yoldaşlık ve kültürel asimilasyon siyaseti temalarının nasıl işlendiğini incelemektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Arthur romansları, Yoldaşlık, Osmanlı Türkleri, Din değiştirme, Dayanışma, *The Turke and Sir Gawain*

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Introduction

The Turke and Sir Gawain (c.1500) is a lesser-known version of the Arthurian romance tradition which draws on the Medieval West's anxious preoccupation with the ever-growing Ottoman Turkish power in the latter half of the fifteenth century. Featuring a character named Turke, in replacement of the Green Knight, the tale follows the adventures of Sir Gawain, which tests his worth according to the chivalric codes. Escorted by the mysterious Turke who has challenged him in the grand hall of King Arthur's court, Sir Gawain journeys northward. Along the way, the pair faces harsh weather, hunger, and supernatural trials, including a fierce battle with a horde of giants guarding the castle of the 'heathen soldan' on the Isle of Man. With the Turke's invaluable martial help and strategic mentorship, Gawain navigates a series of contests and proves his valor. Only after the Turke's religious conversion, bathing in a basin of blood, and his miraculous transformation into a Christian knight named Sir Gromer, following a self-initiated decapitation by Sir Gawain, does the pair return to a joyous welcome to Arthur's court. In the first half of the story, the Turke largely serves as a mentor and a trainer to Sir Gawain, testing his endurance in suffering hunger and the dangers of the wild. In the second half, in the castle of the Isle of Man, the Turke, condescendingly referred as "Gawain boy" mainly functions as the main fighter, rescuing his "master" Gawain from difficult situations and possible death.

Considering the historical context of medieval Europe's primarily bellicose encounters with the Ottoman Turks, my argument is that this version of the Arthurian tales can be interpreted both as a conversion fantasy—a wishful call for the Muslim Turks' conversion to Christianity—and as a literary reflection on addressing the Turkish threat of the time through the lens of solidarity and camaraderie, albeit a conditional one shaped by the dominance of Christian cultural values. The narrative frames solidarity through the formation of camaraderie and shared purpose, but only under the terms of the dominant Christian cultural order. This conditional alliance invites a closer examination of how solidarity, shaped by the power dynamics of religious conversion, serves as both a diplomatic gesture to mitigate the Turkish military threat and an attempt to establish a spirit of friendship across cultural divides. Within this dynamic, the Turke plays the role of both comrade and mentor, offering martial guidance and support to a British knight of Arthur's Round Table. The tale thus situates solidarity within the tension between transformative collaboration and the assimilation required to bridge cultural and religious differences. Overall, my final contention is that solidarity in *The Turke and Sir Gawain* operates as a conditional political strategy rather than a genuine ethical reconciliation, revealing the limits of medieval romance in imagining cross-cultural alliance.

Although *The Turke and Sir Gawain* has historically received far less sustained critical attention than *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, a growing body of scholarship positions it in productive dialogue with the more canonical romance. Belenli (2021) argues that the character of the Turke functions as a culturally specific analogue to the Green Knight, paralleling the latter's supernatural otherness with a medieval English construction of the Turk as alien and martial, while also ultimately recasting the Turke as a loyal companion to Gawain—thus complicating simplistic dichotomies of Christian/outsider identity. This comparative reading is supported by analyses that note shared narrative motifs such as beheading challenges and tests of knightly virtue, even as the *Turke* text reframes these elements within the geopolitical anxieties of late medieval England rather than the courtly ethos foregrounded in the earlier poem (*Turke and Sir Gawain*, c. 1500). Moreover, pedagogical treatments of the *Turke* highlight its explicit meditation on religious

conversion and the consolidation of Christian chivalric norms, themes that resonate with broader medieval romance conventions as found in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (Ambrisco, 2015).

Building on existing scholarship that reads *The Turke and Sir Gawain* through the lenses of otherness, conversion, and romance convention, this article advances a different critical emphasis by foregrounding solidarity as a historically contingent and politically charged narrative strategy rather than a simple ideological resolution. While critics have noted the Turke's function as an analogue to the Green Knight or as a vehicle for Christian conversion fantasy (Belenli, 2021; Ambrisco, 2015), less attention has been paid to how the text imagines camaraderie as a form of conditional alliance shaped by asymmetrical power relations. I argue that the romance stages solidarity not as mutual recognition but as a negotiated accommodation in which collaboration is made possible only through religious assimilation and cultural subordination. By examining the Turke's dual role as both comrade and mentor, this reading reveals the tension between dependence on Islamic martial expertise and the narrative impulse to contain that expertise within a dominant Christian framework. In doing so, the article reframes conversion not as the triumph of belief but as a narrative mechanism that stabilizes cross-cultural alliance without fully resolving the ideological anxieties it exposes.

This interplay between conversion, camaraderie, and power dynamics sets the stage for examining how *The Turke and Sir Gawain* portrays solidarity as both a strategic necessity and a site of cultural negotiation. The concept of solidarity resonates throughout the narrative of *The Turke and Sir Gawain*, particularly as it explores the alliance and camaraderie that develop between Sir Gawain and the Turke. However, this solidarity is predicated on the religious conversion of the Turk, reflecting the medieval context in which interfaith and intercultural alliances were often contingent upon assimilation into dominant religious and cultural norms. This conditional bond invites reflection on the complexities of solidarity, as it underscores both the transformative potential and the inherent limitations of alliances shaped by such demands. In this way, this lesser-known medieval romance helps us investigate solidarity as both a practice and a concept, examining the tensions and possibilities that arise in attempts to bridge profound cultural and religious differences. Furthermore, the narrative invites modern readers to consider how historical literary reflections on solidarity can inform contemporary efforts to foster genuine collaboration and understanding between diverse cultures. Rather than reading conversion as ideological closure, this article shows how the romance relies on conditional camaraderie to manage the perceived Turkish threat while maintaining Christian dominance.

In this article, my first goal is to situate *The Turke*, in the Arthurian romance traditions with specific comparisons to *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Secondly, because this is a lesser-known and scarcely read tale, to facilitate familiarity with the text, I will include a rather detailed plot summary with excerpts from the tale. Thirdly, upon explaining the historical context of the time, I will continue with my interpretation of this understudied version of the Arthurian romance tradition in line with my argument with particular emphasis on the themes of solidarity, religious conversion and camaraderie.

Comparison of Themes, Characters, and Symbols in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and *The Turke and Sir Gawain*

Missing several pages[1], the original text of *The Turke and Sir Gawain* tale is in the manuscript titled MS Additional 27879 also known as Percy Folio in the British Library, dated c. 1650 with some of its content dating back to the twelfth century. The seventeenth century manuscript, compiled by Thomas Percy and half of it is now lost, includes English ballads (including Robin Hood ballads) and several Arthurian tales/romances such as *King Arthur and King Cornwall, Sir Lancelott of Dulake, The Marriage of Sir Gawain, Merline, The Carle of Carlisle, The Greene Knight, The Boy and the Mantle and The Turke and Gowin*/*Gawain.*[2]

Emerging in the twelfth century, Arthurian romance developed as a dominant medieval literary mode that combined chivalric adventure, courtly ethics, and moral testing within an idealized Arthurian court (Barron, 1987). Central motifs such as the testing of knightly virtue, encounters with the marvellous or the Other, and the reinforcement—or destabilization—of social and ethical norms structure romances like *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and *The Turke and Sir Gawain* (Barron, 1987). Situating these works within this tradition highlights how each text both draws upon and adapts established romance conventions to address distinct cultural and ideological concerns.

Because *The Turke* is a lesser-known and rarely studied text in the tradition of the Arthurian romances, it would be beneficial if a brief comparison is provided with the most popular *The Green Knight*. Given its composition date falling into 1500, *The Turke* is an obvious continuation of the quintessential *The Green Knight* of the late fourteenth century. Despite the time lapse, both texts emphasize the ideals of chivalry, honor, and bravery. While the mysterious figure of the Green Knight is replaced with another curious character of the Turke, in both texts Sir Gawain, the most noble and valued knight of the Arthur's court, accepts the medieval buffet of the beheading game and subsequent challenges to prove his worth. As such, both versions build on the themes of chivalry and code of honor. However, in *The Turke*, the narrative describing Green Knight's magical survival of a strike to his head and leaving the court on horseback holding his head to everybody's horror is omitted. Despite the continuous mention of a return blow that Gawain owes to the Turke, no such occasion happens to warrant this return buffet. Rather, *The Turke* turns into a narrative which starts with the challenge of a militarily able mentor to a novice knight to an adventure that will offer him training. So, in *The Green Knight*, Gawain's honor and courage is put to test when he faces the daunting task of confronting the Green Knight a year later. In *The Turke*, Gawain's honor and courage is tested when he accepts the West's formidable enemy of an exotic Turk as a traveling partner to an unknown adventure.

[1] Thomas Hahn explains the poor condition of the manuscript of *The Turke and Sir Gawain* as such: "[It] occurs in the Percy Folio Manuscript, pp. 38-46. The text of the present edition reflects the dilapidated state of the MS; half of each page on which *The Greene Knight* was written was ripped out of the volume to start fires, and the ill treatment it received before Bishop Percy rescued it has left pages blotted and stained from damp. All of this has made the forms of the cramped scribal hand at points ambiguous or illegible" (Hahn, 1995, p.338).

[2] The Manuscript is located in London's the British Library, MS Additional 27879 (Percy Folio). See also modern studies of it such as Thomas Hahn, ed. Sir Gawain: *Eleven Romances and Tales*. Kalamazoo, Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000; Jeanne Myrle Wilson Williams, ed., "A Critical Edition of The Turke & Gowin" (University of Southern Mississippi Dissertation, 1988). In this article, I used the text provided in Hahn's book, later made available online: https://metseditions.org/texts/L0BRk17Ei9arZTA2AIjaDBTbPbl7K5pm

Despite the differences in nature of challenges, in both tales, moral integrity, honor, bravery and loyalty of Gawain is tested. While the Turke's challenges are more physical in nature and action oriented such as braving the dangers of a devastating storm and enduring the pains of hunger as well as playing tennis with the giants and lifting immensely heavy chimneys, *The Green Knight*'s tests are more psychological and ethical and geared toward moral integrity such as resisting the temptations of Lady Bertilak, accepting the green sash, and maintaining manly loyalty to Lord Bertilak. Another important point is that Gawain of *The Turke* is more hesitant to continue with the adventure because of formidable physical contests and thus offers to end the bargain by receiving the return blow at once, Gawain of *The Green Knight* extends his stay in the castle, seemingly enjoying the courting of Lady Bertilak and postponing his possible death at the hands of the Green Knight.

In both stories, Gawain seems to have failed the tests in show of bravery and honesty but still bountifully rewarded in the end. In both narratives, Gawain's actions serve as an affront to chivalric ideals he vowed to follow. In *The Green Knight*, for fear of his life Gawain accepts (and conceals it from the husband) the green sash from Lady Bertilak for its magical power against the Green Knight. In *The Turke*, Gawain, despite his initial acceptance to take on the challenges, calls on and or willingly lets the Turk to finish the daring tasks in beating the giants at the castle of the Isle of Man, the heathen soldan. Despite these apparent shortcomings in Gawain's character, in *The Green Knight*, Gawain is excused by the Green Knight/Lord Bertilak; they part in friendship and he eventually returns to the warm welcome of the Arthur's court where the knights embrace him and even honor him for his bravery in facing the Green Knight, adopting the sash as a symbol of honor. In *The Turke*, Gawain enjoys the subservience of the Turk as his master and returns to a hero's welcome at Arthur's court where he is offered to be the king of the Isle of Man.

Both stories feature journeys and magical/supernatural bodily transformations as narrative devices. While in *The Green Knight*, Gawain embarks on a solitary journey to find the Green Knight, in *The Turke* Gawain is accompanied by the Turke in every stage of his north-bound voyage. Also, both tales feature magical physical transformations. In *The Green Knight*, after Gawain beheads the Green Knight, the enigmatic figure picks up his own head and reveals that he is actually Bertilak, the lord of the castle where Gawain stayed. In *The Turke*, after his beheading by Gawain, the Turke transforms into a Christian knight named Sir Gromer. While the focus of personal character transformation and development in *The Green Knight* is on Gawain (how he undergoes personal growth and learns humility) in *The Turke*, the focus is on the Turke's religious and civilizational transformation from the threatening "other" figure into a Cristian knight of the English kingdom.

The symbolism and imagery are other points of contrasts in both Arthurian tales. The Green Knight himself symbolizes nature, the supernatural, and the moral tests of humanity and the color green often represents the natural world and the duality of human nature. So, the tests he orchestrates are drawing from inner moral dilemmas and human weaknesses such as fear of death and sexual temptation. Symbolically, the Turke embodies the exotic and the "Other," representing not only a cultural difference but also the potential for misunderstanding, fear and conflict. Initially, he challenges Gawain in a manner that evokes suspicion and hostility. However, as the narrative unfolds, this initial nervous confrontation leads to a deeper understanding and camaraderie between Gawain and the Turke. The Turke's character with its exotic otherness, drawing on the popularity of the Turks as formidable enemies and valiant fighters, represents the

material obstacles and bodily might. So, the Turke can be seen as a symbol of the external challenges knights face, representing both a physical adversary and a moral one, testing Gawain's values and commitments. While the sash represents moral weakness and subsequent repentance for Gawain, in *The Turke* meat and feasting serve as important symbols of comradeship and social bonding.

Here I would like to open a parenthesis for the discussion of issues of hunger and feasting with a specific attention to meat as the primary food item. The story opens up with King Arthur and his entourage feasting on a table where meat is served. The social bonding created through sharing of food, especially meat, is disrupted with the appearance of a stranger, the Turk. In medieval times, meat as a scarce and valuable food signified status and wealth so in feastings to celebrate victories or special occasions, wealthy kings and lords would serve meat to reinforce the loyalty of their followers. Also, eating and sharing meat as a communal activity served to strengthen alliances among warriors, fostering kinship and camaraderie. So the tests involving suffering from hunger and restraining the drive to indulge in (suspicious) food and Turk's avoiding to eat meat on the same table with Gawain until he is transformed into Sir Gromer, signifies role of meat eating and sharing as a form of comradeship for the medieval warriors. As the story unfolds, as Gawain and Turk travel north into wilderness, Gawain not only feels isolated from the comforts and bounty of the court but also suffers from hunger, which becomes a point of reprimand for the Turk: "They rode northwards two dayes and more./By then Sir Gawaine hungred sore;/Of meate and drinke he had great need./The Turke wist Gawaine had need of meate,/And spake to him with words great,/Hawtinge uppon hee;/Says "Gawaine, where is all thy plenty?/Yesterday thou wast served with dainty," (Hahn, 1995, p. 341, ll. 51–58). The physical test the Turk puts Gawain through not only involves endurance to hunger but also psychological isolation from the familiar and brotherly support.

The second test involves the temptations of an extravagant table set in a mysterious castle where there is no one around: "There they found chamber, bower, and hall, /richly rayled about with pale, /Seemly to look uppon. /A bord was spred within that place:/All manner of meates and drinkes there was/For groomes that might it againe" (Hahn, 1995, p. 342, ll. 80–85). In this highly suspicious situation, Gawain, unable to control his hunger any further, wants to indulge in the meat served at the table: "I had lever now att mine owne will/Of this fayre meate to eate my fill/Then all the gold in Christenty" (Hahn, 1995, p. 343, ll. 95–97). However, the Turke asks for caution and handpicks the meat and other food for Gawain's consumption: "Sir Gawaine wold have fallen to that fare, / The Turke bad him leave for care; / Then waxt he unfaine… The Turke went forth, and tarryed nought; /Meate and drinke he forth brought, / Was seemly for to see. /He said, "Eate, Gawaine, and make thee yare" (Hahn, 1995, p. 342-43, ll. 86–88, 98-101). This episode highlights the Turke's role as both mentor and comrade, guiding Gawain through a perilous test with wisdom and care.

Finally, at the resolution of the narrative, we see the Turke eating meat for the first time, sharing the food with Gawain and others as a communal bonding activity: "He said, "Sir Gawaine, withouten threat/Sitt downe boldly at thy meate,/And I will eate with thee" (Hahn, 1995, p. 350 , ll. 301–303). In conclusion, the journey of Gawain and the Turke not only highlights the significance of meat as a symbol of status and camaraderie in medieval society, but also underscores the transformative power of shared meals in fostering connections and overcoming

barriers, ultimately culminating in a moment of unity and solidarity that reflects the deeper bonds forged through the communal act of eating.

Perhaps the most important comparison point in these two Arthurian tales is rooted in differences in cultural and historical contexts. *The Green Knight* written in the late fourteenth century, reflective of medieval England's cultural values and social structures such as feudal relationships between lords and vassals as well as allegiance to a king, builds on moral dilemmas faced by knights**.** It is also steeped in the traditional Arthurian romance tradition with its emphasis on the concept of Chivalric Codes including bravery, honor, loyalty, but most glaringly courtly love. So while *The Green Knight* is categorized as a romance featuring courtly love, (with themes of loyalty, honesty and temptation), *The Turke* is an adventure tale without any important female presence, and therefore the tropes of the courtly love is nonexistent in this version, except the rescue of imprisoned wives of knights from the heathen soldan's castle at the conclusion—reminiscent of the Orientalist rescue narratives from the Ottoman harem. *The Turke*, also features an exotic "Saracen" figure outside the confines of Christendom, reflecting late medieval anxieties about the "Other" and cultural encounters. This change mainly stems from the historical context of the late fourteenth century up to 1500 which witnessed the growing strength of Ottoman Turkey as a formidable political and military power, with their unstoppable advance into the Eastern Europe and cathartic capture of Constantinople in 1453.

So for the late medieval Europeans the Turks were a military threat to reckon with. To thwart a potential Turkish invasion and conquest, the Europeans generally considered the Turks as a foe to engage in direct military confrontations with; and seldom a potential ally to form strategic alliances. The bond between Gawain and the Turke emphasizes camaraderie and mutual respect, showcasing how alliances can shape the outcome of challenges. *The Turke* is then a rare instance in its suggestion of a Turkish-Anglo alliance, despite its stipulation of religious conversion. From a religious viewpoint, while *The Green Knight* is more introspective and spiritual with its emphasis on medieval Christianity's concerns such as sin, redemption, and the quest for virtue; *The Turke* responds to the worldly power dynamics in the late medieval period with its deliberate focus on bodily strength and military prowess as well as strategic alliances and camaraderie to initiate solidarity with the potential enemy. In other words, while *The Green Knight* is concerned about a knight's moral/individual transformation, *The Turke*'s emphasis is on the religious conversion from Islam to Christianity as a solution to the growing Turkish threat in Europe.

Despite these thematic differences, both *The Turke* and *The Green Knight* showcase the heroism and complexity of Gawain as a knight, albeit through different lenses. The former emphasizes physical strength and loyalty, while the latter delves into the deeper psychological and ethical implications of knighthood. Together, these texts offer rich explorations of chivalric ideals, each contributing to the larger tapestry of Arthurian literature.

Plot Summary of *The Turke and Sir Gawain* (with Extended Excerpts)

The story opens with the traditional feasting activities in Arthur's court. A curious figure resembling a Turk enters in the grand hall, "Into the hall a burne there came. / He was not hye, but he was broad, / And like a Turke he was made/Both legg and thye;" and then challenges the knights to a contest of strength. He boldly calls out on the knights to trade blows, "Is there any will, as a brother, / To give a buffett and take another?" (Hahn, 1995, p. 340, ll. 12–17). This provocation stirs the knights, and Sir Kay, known for his bravado, scoffs at the Turke, and belittles his

capabilities, declaring, “Man, thou seemest not soe wight, /If thou be not adread. /For there be knights within this hall / With a buffett will garr thee fall. /And grope thee to the ground” (Hahn, 1995, p. 340, ll. 20-24). However, Sir Gawain, known for his valor and sense of honor, intervenes, chastising Kay for his dismissive attitude towards the stranger. He sees the value in the Turke’s challenge and interjects, “Cozen Kay, thou speakest not right - / Lewd is thy answere!” (Hahn, 1995, p. 340, ll. 29-30). Gawain’s sense of honor leads him to accept the challenge, pledging, “I will never flee from noe adventure, / Justing, nor noe other turnament, / Whilest I may live on lee” (Hahn, 1995, p. 341, ll. 45-47). By this Gawain declares his readiness for adventure and promises never to flee from any combat. With this bold agreement, Gawain prepares for a journey that will test his strength and resolve. As they prepare to leave Arthur’s court, Gawain dons his armor and mounts his steed, ready for the journey ahead.

As they journey to the north[3], “They rode northwards two dayes and more,” (p.341, ll. 51) Gawain quickly grows weary and hungry. This long journey also serves as a test to try Gawain’s endurance in face of primary bodily deprivations such as hunger and lack of courtly comforts. The Turke, sensing Gawain's needs, reprimands him for his weakness to resist hunger and taunts him about his earlier abundance of food back at Arthur’s court, saying, “Gawaine, where is all thy plenty? / Yesterday thou wast served with dainty” (Hahn, 1995, p. 341, ll. 58-59). Despite his discomfort, Gawain maintains his determination and presses onward, curious about the adventures that await him. The first test is against the destructive forces of wild nature. So the Turke leads him to a desolate hill where the earth opens up, engulfing them in a storm filled with thunder and lightning. “Then Gawaine was adread. /The merke was comen, and the light is gone:/Thundering, lightning, snow, and raine, /Therof enough they had. /Then spake Sir Gawaine and sighed sore:/ "Such wether saw I never afore/In noe stead there I have beene stood” (Hahn, 1995, p. 342, ll. 68-74). Despite the chaos of the bad weather and dread of the unfamiliar places, Gawain maintains his courage.

On their way to the Isle of Man, they stop at a mysterious castle “To the Castle they then yode./Sir Gawaine light beside his steed,/For horsse the Turke had none” (p. 342, ll. 77-79) where they stumble upon a deserted banquet table that is set up at a chamber of this luxurious place “There they found chamber, bower, and hall,/Richly rayled about with pale,/Seemly to look uppon./A bord was spred within that place:/ All manner of meates and drinkes there was/For groomes that might it againe” (Hahn, 1995, p. 342, ll. 80-85). The Turke, suspicious of the strangeness of the situation, first tells Gawain to refrain from indulging in the food “Sir Gawaine wold have fallen to that fare, /The Turke bad him leave for care;/Then waxt he unfaine” (Hahn, 1995, p. 343, ll. 86-88). Gawain, who can no longer suppress his hunger, is upset about the whole situation because despite lavishness of the feast, there is an eerie solitude. It is only after Gawain accepts the warning of the Turke and stays off the food "I had lever now att mine owne will/ Of this fayre meate to eate my fill/Then all the gold in Christenty", (p.343, ll. 95-97) he is allowed to

[3] Their journey, within the context of Arthurian legends, is to the nothern parts of the British Isles because it reflects historical conflicts with the warriors coming from the North such as the Viking between the eighth and eleventh centuries. After the first recorded Viking raid in Britain was in 793 AD when they attacked the monastery at Lindisfarne, off the northeast coast of England, the area became a Norse settlement by the ninth century. They mingled with the local Celtic populations who were also pagan. So the religious conflict in the tale refers to the English’s attempt at conversion of the pagan populations to the north of the island. Situated between modern-day Great Britain and Ireland, The Isle of Man, located in the Irish Sea, has been an area of conflict between the Christian Anglo-Saxon English and the pagan Norsemen.

eat. The Turke brings the food to him and instructs Gawain to eat as much as possible to gain strength for what is ahead: “The Turke went forth, and tarryed nought;/Meate and drinke he forth brought,/Was seemly for to see./He said, "Eate, Gawaine, and make thee yare./In faith, or thou gett victalls more/Thou shalt both swinke and sweate./Eate, Gawaine, and spare thee nought!" (Hahn, 1995, p. 343, ll. 98-104). Spooked by the strangeness of his experiences and reluctant to press forward, Gawain demands to receive the return blow by the Turke according to their bargain. The Turke refuses to allow Gawain to conclude the bargain, instead he asks that Gawain accompany him to the Isle of Man: “The Turke said to Sir Gawaine/"Yonder dwells the King of Man, /A heathen soldan is hee” (Hahn, 1995, p. 344, ll. 128-130).

They continue their journey toward the Isle of Man, and arrive at a magnificent castle ruled by a pagan king, “heathen soldan”, known as the King of Man. The Turk warns Gawain about the dangers that await, stating, “With him he hath a hideous rout / Of giants strong and stout. /Whosoever had sought farr and neere/As wide as the world were, /Such a companye he cold find none” (Hahn, 1995, p. 344, ll. 131-136). Turke tells Gawain to be ready for the never seen challenges in the castle of Isle of Man: "Many aventures thou shalt see there,/Such as thou never saw yare/In all the world about./Thou shalt see a tenisse ball/That never knight in Arthurs hall/Is able to give it a lout./And other adventures there are moe./ Wee shall be assayled ere we goe,” (Hahn, 1995, p. 344, ll. 137-144). However, The Turke also assures Gawain that he will help him in his struggles and they will be victorious if they work together: "But and yee will take to me good heed,/I shall helpe you in time of need./For ought I can see/There shall be none soe strong in stower/But I shall bring thee againe to hi” (Hahn, 1995, p. 345-346, ll. 146-150).

Inside the castle, the atmosphere is tense; Gawain enters into the pagan King’s intimidating presence and is confronted with his insults. Gawain is greeted with disdain by the king and his monstrous entourage. The pagan king is especially upset about evangelizing activities of the English and specifically targets a monk who wants to convert his people to Christianity, establishing monasteries in his territories: "Sir Gawaine stiffe and stowre,/How fareth thy unckle King Arthur,/And all his company?/And that Bishopp Sir Bodwine/That will not let my goods alone, (Hahn, 1995, p. 345, ll. 149–155). Through the King’s critique of clergy (preaching a life of suffering and sacrifice while living in luxury) there is a reference to the time period’s corruption and the hypocrisy of the church: "He preached much of a Crowne of Thorne;/He shall ban the time that he was borne/And ever I catch him may./I anger more att the spiritually/In England, not att the temporaltie,/They goe soe in theire array./And I purpose in full great ire/To brenn their clergy in a fire/And punish them to my pay (Hahn, 1995, p. 345, ll. 157-162). Then the King challenges Gawain to a series of contests, beginning with a game of tennis against the giants.

The Turke supports Gawain during the match, advising him strategically. Gawain rises to the occasion, proclaiming, “I will be att thy bidding baine / Without bost or threat” (Hahn, 1995, p. 343, ll. 108-109). The following excerpt showcases the difficulty and novelty of the feat: “There were seventeen giants bold of blood, /And all thought Gawaine but litle good./When they thought with him to play./All the giants thoughten then/To have strucke out Sir Gawaines braine./Help him God that best may!/The ball of brasse was made for the giants hand;/There was noe man in all England/Were able to carry it” (Hahn, 1995, p. 346, ll. 181-189). With the Turke’s assistance, Gawain, who dreads the challenge, outplays the giants. To the fury of the king, the Turke kills one of the giants: “and sticked a giant in the hall/That grysly can hee grone. /The King sayd, "Bray away this axeltree, /For such a boy I never see. /Yett he shal be assayed better ere he goe” Gawain

insists that he cannot take any more challenges: “With the three adventure, and then no more/Befor me at this tide" (Hahn, 1995, p. 346, ll. 190-197).

However, the King, aware of the Turke’s role in defeating the giants is still unsatisfied and devises more strenuous challenges for Gawain, including a test of strength involving a heavy chimney. This second test involves Gawain lifting a heavy chimney, a feat he approaches with trepidation. He again calls upon the Turke for help, and in a moment of great tension, Gawain gathers his strength. “Sir Gawaine was never soe adread/Sith he was man on midle earth, / And cryd on God in his thought. /Gawaine unto his boy can say/Lift this chimney - if you may - /That is soe worthily wrought,” (Hahn, 1995, p. 347, ll. 213-218). Complaining about the difficulty of the feat, Gawain once more urges his companion to take up the challenge in his stead. The Turke again comes to the aid of Gawain and victoriously hurls the heavy chimney above his head, sending sparks of fire around: “Gawaines boy to it did leape,/And gatt itt by the bowles great,/And about his head he it flang./Thris about his head he it swang/That the coals and the red brands” (Hahn, 1995, p. 347, ll. 219-224).

In the third feat, the King, still dismayed about Gawain’s individual lack of achievements without the help of the Turke, personally accompanies Gawain to the location of the final challenge, "Here is none but wee tow;/Let see how best may bee” (Hahn, 1995, p. 348, ll. 248-249). Here they face a giant, holding iron forks, wields a scalding pot of lead: “Then he led him into steddie/Werhas was a boyling leade,/And welling uppon hie:/And before it a giant did stand/With an iron forke in his hand,/That hideous was to see” (Hahn, 1995, p. 348, ll. 238-243). In addition to the horrors of the scene, Gawain is confronted by the giant who threatens to kill him instantly. The giant boasts, “I have slaine them thorrow my mastery, / And now, Gawaine, I will slay thee” (Hahn, 1995, p. 347, ll. 226-227). The Turke, in the meantime, clothes himself in a garment of invisibility and runs to the rescue of Gawain showcasing the power of their partnership. In a thrilling confrontation with the giant who immediately realizes that the Turke is still assisting Gawain, the Turke hurls the giant into the boiling cauldron without letting him harm Gawain: “When the giant saw Gawaines boy there was,/ He leapt and threw, and cryed "Alas,/That he came in that stead!"/Sir Gawaines boy to him lept,/And with strenght up him gett,/And cast him in the lead./With an iron forke made of steele/He held him downe wondorous weele,/Till he was scalded to the dead” (Hahn, 1995, p. 348, ll. 250-258).

Despite his active involvement in the giant’s defeat as a fighter, Gawain capitalizing on this final victory against the pagan king’s entourage, demands that he converts to Christianity or face death: "Without thou wilt agree unto our law, /Eatein is all thy bread" (Hahn, 1995, p. 348, ll. 260-261). The king furiously rejects the religious conversion and spits at Gawain in disdain. Enraged by this lowly treatment of his “master”, the Turke, referred as “Gawain boy” makes sure the blasphemous king is punished for transgression: “The King spitt on Gawaine the knight./With that the Turke hent him upright/And into the fyer him flang,/And saide to Sir Gawaine at the last,/"Noe force, Master, all the perill is past!/Thinke not we tarrie too longe” (Hahn, 1995, p. 348, ll. 262-267).

With the giants defeated, and the pagan king killed, Gawain and the Turke move onto another part of the castle where the captured wives of the knights are imprisoned. In the missing parts of the text, most probably the Turke reveals that he has been cursed, and in order to break the spell and free the captured knights and ladies, he must sacrifice himself. Instead of delivering the return

blow to Gawain, as per the bargain at Arthur's table, Turke asks Gawain to behead him to break the curse: "Take here this sword of steele / That in battell will bite weele, / Therwith strike of my head," Gawain, though heartbroken, complies, saying, "That I forefend! / For I wold not have thee slaine / For all the gold soe red" (Hahn, 1995, p. 349, ll. 274-279). But the Turke reassures him, urging him to act decisively because he will sure to encounter some miracles: "But in this bason let me bleed,/That standeth here in this steed,/"And thou shalt see a new play,/With helpe of Mary that mild mayd/That saved us from all dread" (Hahn, 1995, p. 349, ll. 281-285).

In this final climactic bloody scene, Gawain wields a magical sword provided by the Turke and beheads him. After Gawain strikes, the Turke bleeds in a golden basin, reminiscent of Catholic baptism, and then miraculously resurrects, transformed into a valiant knight, named Sir Gromer: "And when the blood in the bason light, /He stood up a stalwortht Knight" (Hahn, 1995, p. 349, ll. 289-290). As a Christian knight Turk sings a hymn in reverence of Jesus: "That day, I undertake, /And song "'Te Deum Laudamus' /Worshipp be to our Lord Jesus/That saved us from all wracke!" and then repeats his allicaince to Sir Gawain: "Blessed thou be! / For all the service I have don thee," (Hahn, 1995, p. 349, ll. 291-296).

After the Turke's conversion and transformation, together, they hasten to liberate the female captives held within the castle, somewhat as a precursor to "the rescue from the harem" narratives which would be popularized sixteenth century onwards: "Thus we have brought seventeen ladys cleere/That there were left in great danger,/And we have brought them out" (Hahn, 1995, p. 350, ll. 311-313). With the freed captives attending, they have a feast for celebration. This is the first time we see the Turk sitting at a table with Gawain and eating the food/meat: "Sir Gawaine, withouten threat/Sitt downe boldly at thy meate, /And I will eate with thee. /Ladyes all, be of good cheere:/Eche ane shall wend to his owne deer/In all hast that may be" (Hahn, 1995, p. 350, ll. 301-306).

Having freed the captives, Gawain and the Turk return to King Arthur's court, where they are met with jubilation. As a reward, Sir Gromer/Turk asks Arthur to grant Gawain the seat of the Isle of Man. Gawain's humility prevents him from accepting any honors or a crown, "For I never purposed to be noe King" insisting that the glory belongs to the Turk: ""Sir Gromer, take it thee,/For Gawaine will never King bee/For no craft that I can" (Hahn, 1995, p. 350, ll. 329-331). The story concludes with Gawain and the Turke celebrated as heroes, embodying the ideals of chivalry, loyalty, and selflessness, as they return to the fellowship of Arthur's Round Table: "Thus endeth the tale that I of meane,/Of Arthur and his knightes keene/That hardy were and free./God give them good life far and neere/That such talking loves to heere!/Amen for Charity!" (Hahn, 1995, p. 351, ll. 332-337).

Turks as Foes or Allies? Conversion, Conflict, and Alliance in *The Turke*

We might start our discussion with a simple and obvious question: Why does a version of Arthurian tales exist where the Green Knight is replaced with the Turke? To answer this question and better understand this version of the Arthurian romance, we need to know the Eurasian historical context of the time of its composition. Written by an anonymous author circa 1500, a transformational time period in East-West relations which marked the emergence and steady growth of the Ottoman Empire (1299) as a political power in the Balkans and Anatolia, the tale clearly reflects the anxieties and insecurities posed by the Turks for the West especially after the defeat of the Europe's best knights in the Crusader army led by Sigismund of Luxembourg at the

Battle of Nicopolis (Niğbolu) by Beyazıt I in 1396 and Mehmed II's conquest of Constantinople in 1453, ending the Byzantine Empire, and contributing to the expansion of Ottoman power in Europe.[4]

By the beginning of the sixteenth century, corresponding to the tale's composition, Ottoman Turks had well advanced into eastern Europe, defeating Christian kings, be it Serbian, Venetian, Bulgarian, Hungarian or Greek, and the Crusading armies alike. In fact, since the first Crusading army that was launched by Pope Urban II in 1095, both to rid the Turks of Anatolia to help the Byzantines and recapture Jerusalem from the Muslims, Turks had been the military target of the knights, shaping the bellicose nature of encounters. These generally antagonistic relations continued as such and even strained further as the West suffered from subsequent defeats by the invisible Turkish janissaries between 1300 and 1500. Even though, England was situated far away from the Turkish territorial expansion and did not engage in any direct military confrontations with the Ottomans by or afterwards 1500, the presence of a "Turk" as an enigmatic and threatening other in this tale surely alludes to real historical conflicts between Christian Europeans and Muslim Turks, emphasizing both themes of religious conversion and political alliances in the form of camaraderie.

In view of this observation, my contention is that *The Turke* responds to the West/English's ever-growing anxiety caused by the military prowess of the Turkish armies from thirteenth century onward. The Turkish character's appearance at Arthur's court in the heart of England first as a threatening figure challenging the Knights of the Round Table as well as his showcase of military and strategic skills, corresponds to the time's recognition of Turks as formidable and fearful fighters. Therefore, the positioning of the Turke as a military mentor and guide to Gawain in the first half of the narrative most probably results from this general acknowledgment of Turks' military discipline and valor. The final transformation of the Turke into Sir Gromer and the strengthened camaraderie between Sir Gawain and the Turke can be read as medieval West's strategic solution to the problem of the Turk as the foe.

The date of this version's composition is also significant as it aligns with a pivotal historical and cultural shift. The narrative poem falls into a transitional time period that witnessed a move away from the medieval concept of knighthood of the 1200-1400s, with its ideals of chivalry celebrated in literature, particularly in the Arthurian legends, to the end of the culture of Arthurian chivalry. This shift was marked by the Renaissance's focus on classical and secular themes (rise of humanism), the decline of the feudal system (end of lord-vassal relationships), and the Ottomans' elimination of the Crusading spirit (defeat of the Christian knights by the Turks). So, in itself, this version, which includes a Turk as a character, signifies the end of traditional Arthurian narratives from the Middle Ages and the decline of the chivalric spirit, reflecting the relentless military advances of the Ottoman Turks into the heart of Christendom.

[4] Other such important victories and military encounters between the West and the Ottoman Turks: Battle of Bapheus (1302) marking the beginning of Ottoman expansion into Byzantine territory; Siege of Constantinople (1422) the Ottoman forces under Murad II successfully besieged Constantinople, showcasing their strength against the Byzantine Empire; Battle of Varna (1444) and Battle of Kosovo (1448), Ottomans, led by Murad II, achieved a significant victory over the forces of a Crusade, including Polish and Hungarian troops led by Hunyadi further cementing their power in the region; Battle of Otranto (1480) where Ottoman armies led by Mehmed II captured the Italian city of Otranto, marking a significant incursion into European territory and demonstrating their naval capabilities.

The Turke and Sir Gawain is set against this historical backdrop that merges waning English chivalric tradition with broader Eurasian political context witnessing the Ottoman Turks emergence as fearful enemies. To tackle with the Turkish threat, at least in the literary realm, the tale offers two main routes of action: political alliance with the Turks resulting in camaraderie, a knightly brotherhood, and or religious conversion of the Turks to Christianity. One important point, however, is that in both situations Christianity as a religious and Englishness as a civilizational identity is positioned as superior, requiring the conversion and transformation of the Muslim Turk. As such, this version of the Arthurian tale can be read as both a conversion fantasy and a call for English cooperation with the Ottoman Turks.[5]

Camaraderie as a Response to the Turkish Threat

Firstly, in the tale of *The Turke and Sir Gawain*, the theme of the Anglo-Turkish alliance is significant. The Turk initially appears as a threatening stranger, but he gradually transforms into a military advisor and ultimately a subservient fighter, just to emerge as the familiar knight. This evolution highlights the contrast between the Turk, representing a Muslim character, and Gawain, who embodies a Christian identity. Their initial conflict gives way to cooperation, suggesting camaraderie and reflecting the political aspirations of England at the time regarding the Turks as potential allies against a common enemy—the pagan Soldan. In much of the narrative the Turk is a mentor and comrade, offering his support and assistance. For instance, on their way to the castle of Isle of Man, Turk tells Gawain to be ready for the never seen challenges while reassuring Gawain that he will help him in his struggles and bring him to safety: “But and yee will take to me good heed,/I shall helpe you in time of need./For ought I can see/There shall be none soe strong in stower/But I shall bring thee againe to hi” (Hahn, 1995, p. 344, ll.146-150).

After the traveling partners’ arrival at the pagan sultan’s castle, The Turke’s assistance to Gawain indeed continues by turning into a show of his bodily strength, skillful use of strategy and military prowess, reflecting the contemporary perception of the Turks as able warriors. In the tennis match with the giants, the Turke provides crucial support to Gawain, offering strategic advice as the stakes rise. Gawain happily and humbly accepts the Turke’s assistance declaring, “I will be att thy bidding baine / Without bost or threat” (Hahn, 1995, p. 343, ll. 108-109). Gawain’s embrace of Turke’s mentorship in the tennis match against the giants results from the formidable nature of the challenge, featuring big balls fit for giants’ hands, and the condescending views of the giants regarding Gawain’s capabilities: “There were seventeen giants bold of blood, / And all thought Gawaine but litle good. /When they thought with him to play. /All the giants thoughten then /To have strucke out Sir Gawaines braine. /Help him God that best may! /The ball of brasse was made for the giants hand; /There was noe man in all England /Were able to carry it” (Hahn, 1995, p. 346, ll. 181-189). Despite his initial dread, Gawain, with the Turk's assistance, manages to outplay the giants. In a dramatic turn, the Turk kills one of the giants, much to the king's fury: “and sticked a giant in the hall / That grysly can hee grone. / The King sayd, ‘Bray away this axeltree, / For such a boy I never see. / Yett he shal be assayed better ere he goe.’” (Hahn, 1995,

[5] In fact, in eighty-years time, the history witnessed the establishment of Anglo-Ottoman alliances. Elizabeth II sought after the diplomatic and commercial alliance of the powerful Ottoman Empire so in 1583, diplomat William Harborne established the first English embassy in Istanbul and Elizabeth exchanged letters with the Ottoman Sultan Murat III, seeking the Ottoman military help against the Spanish. As such this Arthuran tale would be read as a predictor of future Anglo-Ottoman alliances, obviously without the religious conversion.

p. 346, ll. 190-194). Gawain, feeling the weight of the challenges, insists, “With the three adventure, and then no more / Befor me at this tide” (Hahn, 1995, p. 346, ll. 196-197).

When the King of the Isle of Man, frustrated that the feat isn’t accomplished solely by Gawain, demands that he lift an incredibly heavy chimney, Gawain, feeling daunted by the challenge, experiences a moment of fear. He invokes God’s help and once again turns to the Turk for assistance, acknowledging the formidable nature of the task ahead: “Sir Gawaine was never soe adread/Sith he was man on midle earth,/And cryd on God in his thought./Gawaine unto his boy can say/"Lift this chimney - if you may -/That is soe worthily wrought” (Hahn, 1995, p. 347, ll. 213-218). In this passage, a key detail is the term used to refer to the Turk: “Gawain’s boy.” This belittling label serves two purposes. First, it emphasizes the Turk’s subservient position in relation to Gawain, despite his impressive physical feats, highlighting the hierarchical dynamics within a potential Turkish-Anglo alliance. Second, it prevents the Turk from being portrayed as a hero, thereby protecting Gawain’s image, especially given his evident lack of bravery and competence. Echoing the medieval lord-vassal relationship, Gawain’s boy obediently lifts the heavy chimney and swings it above his head like a makeshift weapon: “Gawaines boy to it did leape, / And gatt itt by the bowles great, / And about his head he it flang. / Thris about his head he it swang / That the coals and the red brands” (Hahn, 1995, p. 347, ll. 219-223).

The king, still unsatisfied with Gawain’s competence without the assistance of the Turke, personally leads him to the final challenge of a fight against the giants over a hot cauldron full of molten lead: “The King saide to the giant thoe,/"Here is none but wee tow;/ Let see how best may bee” (Hahn, 1995, p. 348, ll. 247-249). However, the worried Turke for the safety of Gawain, accompanies Gawain, made invisible by a magical cloak to the horror of the giant who exclaims: “When the giant saw Gawaines boy there was, /He leapt and threw, and cryed "Alas, /That he came in that stead!” (Hahn, 1995, p. 348, ll. 250-252). As a swift response to the objection of the giant for the Turke’s involvement in the game, the Turke engages in a brutal fight with the giant and snapping the iron fork from giant’s grasp, hurls him into the boiling cauldron and makes sure he stays there until completely scalded: “Sir Gawaines boy to him lept,/And with strenght up him gett,/And cast him in the lead./With an iron forke made of steele/He held him downe wondorous weele,/Till he was scalded to the dead” (Hahn, 1995, p. 348, ll. 253-258). This climactic final triumph of the Turke finally grants Gawain to dictate his demands to the King of the Isle of Man, ordering his conversion to Christianity or face death: “Then Sir Gawaine unto the King can say,/"Without thou wilt agree unto our law,/Eatein is all thy bread” (Hahn, 1995, p. 348, ll. 259-261).

An interesting parenthesis should be indicated here: The gruesome narrative of the scalding of a defeated “infidel” king in a boiling cauldron full of lead as a punishment for his refusal to convert to Christianity appears in *The Famous History of the Seven Champions of Christendom* (1596) by Richard Johnson as well. The story, though anachronistic, narrates the military exploits of the fourth-century St. George in the Holy Lands and North Africa, including Morocco, most probably in reference to the Reconquista, specifically Battle of Melilla (1497), in which Moroccans were defeated by Western powers led by Spain. The Muslim Moroccan sultan, referred to as Almidor “black king of Morocco,” given the historical facts, is most probably King Muhammad XII, also known as Muhammad al-Shaykh. The book which valorizes the victories of the Christian champions against the infidels and pagans, including the Muslims, valorizes the disturbing act of brutal execution of the Moroccan king by St. George, recalling the punishment

of the "heathen soldan," the pagan king of the Isle of Man for his refusal to convert in *The Turke and Sir Gawain.* St. George as the leader of the Christian armies confronts the weakened forces of Almidor, the black King of Morocco. After a fierce battle, St. George captures Almidor and prepares to execute him in a cauldron of boiling lead and brimstone as retribution for his treachery:

> The English Champion, in Revenge of his former proffered Injuries by the Morocco King, gave this severe Sentence of Death. First, He commanded a brazen Cauldron to be filled with boiling Lead and Brimstone: Then Almidor to be brought to the place of Death by twelve of the Noblest Peers in Barbary, therein to be consumed, Flesh, Blood, and Bones: which was duly performed within seven days following. The brazen Cauldron was erected by the appointment of St. George, directly in the middle of the chiefest Market-place, under which a mighty hot fire continually burned, for the space of eight and forty hours: whereby the boiling Lead and Brimstone seemed to sparkle like fiery Furnaces in Hell, and the heat to exceed the burning Oven at Babylon. Now all things being thus prepared in readiness, and the Christian Champions present to behold the woeful spectacle, the Condemned Blackmoor King came to the place of Execution in a shirt of fine Indian Silk, his hands pinioned together with a Chain of Gold, and his face covered with a Damask Scarf. (Johnson, 1596)

Almidor, refusing to abandon his faith, curses St. George and his followers and accepts death. In a display of Christian triumph, Almidor is ultimately boiled to death, and St. George's victory is celebrated, symbolizing the defense of Christendom against "paganism." Almidor and St. George's tale concludes with the joyful festivities of the champions and the liberation of Barbary from Moorish Muslim "tyranny" like *The Turke* ends with the triumph of Gawain when the Turk throws the pagan king of the Isle of Man to his gruesome death in a cauldron.

The violent resolution of Almidor and St. George's tale mirrors the dramatic conclusion of *The Turke* with its vivid imagery of triumph over pagan forces, yet the latter introduces a more nuanced narrative, suggesting a fleeting alliance between Christianity and Islam in the face of a common enemy. Interpreting *The Turke and Sir Gawain* as a narrative of Christian-Muslim cooperation against pagan threats offers a rich commentary on unity and solidarity within the medieval context. The King of the Isle of Man and his vast entourage represent paganism and heathenry, while the alliance between Gawain and the Turke embodies a united front of Christianity and Islam. This partnership, however, is ultimately predicated on the supremacy of the Christian faith over Islam. Because only after the Turke is transformed into a familiar Arthurian Christian Knight, Sir Gromer, he is welcome in the knightly brotherhood as a brethren warrior. This point is also stressed by Thomas Hahn, the editor of the collections of Arthurian tales, when he says:

> *The Turke* ends on a note common to the popular chivalric romances, and to romance in general. The "Turk," restored to his proper knightly identity as Sir Gromer (a figure who turns up in Ragnelle and in Malory), is brought into the fold of Arthurian chivalry and Arthurian political fealty. Sir Gromer's installation as the new and proper King of the Isle of Man not only converts the alien figure - the "Turk" - to familiar Christian knighthood, but presumably it demystifies the Isle of Man, changing it from a magic kingdom into a recognizable and accessible feature of the Arthurian (and contemporary) landscape. (1995, p. 338)

Gawain's collaboration with the Turke against the heathen Soldan can also be interpreted as a symbolic alliance against England's ongoing conflicts with the Scots, who were often viewed as akin to the Vikings due to their Norse ancestry. At around the time of the tale's composition in late medieval time period, the notorious Viking raids in the eight and tenth centuries, had given way to on-and off Scottish-English conflicts in the north of the British Isles, specifically centered on the Isle of Man. The island's status was a point of contention between the English and Scottish

kingdoms. In the late fifteenth century, James III of Scotland, who was granted the title of Lord of the Isle of Man after the death of the previous lord, Henry, Earl of Derby, in 1455, for instance ruled the island. So the Turkish-English alliance against the Isle of Man can be interpreted as a call for a united front against Scottish threats on the English kingdom. The geographical context further enriches this interpretation, as it involves the northern regions of Britain, including the Isle of Man, a historically significant site of Viking and Scottish influence. Therefore, Gawain's travel to the north, accompanied with the Turke, into wilder, untamed territories reminiscent of those inhabited by Vikings or other northern tribes, suggests a call for Anglo-Ottoman alliance against a common adversary. Overall, the Turke's transformation from a barbarian challenger to noble ally mirrors themes of conversion and alliance.

Conversion Fantasy: The Turke's Redemptive Religious Transformation

Another important theme in *The Turke* is religious conversion, or rather as I would call it: conversion fantasy**.** At the end of the narrative, The Turke goes through both a physical and religious transformation; after his decapitation by Gawain, he resurrects as a Christian English knight of the Round Table, Lord Gromer. This religious resurrection and redemption through conversion recalls the medieval concepts of the embrace of the true faith of Christianity, championed by Crusading knights and the Church alike. At the time, religious conversion was seen as a useful tool to form political alliances and deter possible military threats. Therefore, faced with the unstoppable Ottoman military power, Christian Europe considered Muslim Turks' conversion to Christianity as a solution to the Turkish threat. During that time, such sentiments, or conversion fantasies, had been shared and communicated by the clergy, the learned and the common folk alike. As such we can interpret the theme of Turke's conversion to Christianity in the tale as an extension and reflection of the time's religious discourse on the Turks, namely promotion of Turks' conversion as part of Europe's broader efforts to resist Ottoman expansion especially after 1453.

Even before that fateful date, such sentiments fantasizing about the Turks or Muslims' conversion to Christianity was communicated in literature. For instance, in *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville* (1356), the English aristocratic traveler describing his journeys through various lands, including Anatolia and the Middle East, hopes for an eventual conversion of the Muslim/Turks to Christianity, based on his observations of some similarities between the two religions, especially recognition of Jesus as prophet and reverence of Mary as his mother in Islam:

> For they knowledge well, that the works of Jesus Christ be good, and his words and his deeds and his doctrine by his gospels were true, and his miracles also true; and the blessed Virgin Mary is good, and holy maiden before and after the birth of Jesus Christ; and that all those that believe perfectly in God shall be saved. And because that they so nigh our faith, they may be lightly converted to Christianity when men preach them and shew them distinctly the law of Jesus Christ, and when they tell them of the prophesies. (qtd. in Barın Akman, 2023, p. 241)

Most glaringly, however, in the aftermath of Mehmet II's conquest of Constantinople in 1453, such calls on the Turks for religious conversion took on a more official status. For instance, the Catholic Church is known to have made calls on the Turkish sultan for his conversion to Christianity, and in return, to be embraced as the Holy Roman Catholic Emperor of the Orient. One notable figure who relentlessly advocated for crusades against the Ottoman Turks was Pope

Pius II, who also called for the conversion of Turks. To this end, he authored a letter[6] in 1461 addressed to the Sultan, inviting him to Christianity for the sake of peace and salvation. As the Turke is baptized in a golden basin full of blood in *The Turke and Gawain* to complete the process, the Pope asks the Turkish sultan to submerge in "aquae pauxillum" to initiate the religious conversion:

> An insignificant trifle can make you the greatest, the most powerful, the most famous of living mortals…You ask what it is.... a little water with which to be baptized, to be converted to Christianity, and to accept the faith of the Gospel. Once you have done this there will be no prince on the whole earth to outdo you in fame or equal you in power. We shall appoint you Emperor of the Greeks and the Orient, and what you have now obtained by violence, and hold unjustly, will be your possession by right. All Christians will honor you and make you arbiter of their quarrels. All the oppressed will take refuge in you as their common protector; men will turn to you from nearly all the countries on earth. (qtd. in Barın Akman, 2023, p.227)

As a Greek Orthodox contemporary of the Catholic Pope, the humanist scholar George of Trebizond was also among the religious authority who wrote to Sultan Mehmed, inviting him to convert to Christianity. As Pope Pius II designated the Turkish sultan as the "Catholic Emperor of the Orient" after his conversion, George envisions him, after adopting the biblical name of Manuel, as the Emperor of Pax Christiana, the last Christian ruler before the end of times. In his pamphlet titled *On the Divinity of Manuel*, in his address to Mehmet, he extols the greatness of the Turkish sultan, designating him as the sole ruler of the whole world: "Neither Cyrus not Alexander nor Cesar nor Constantine were given as much. I arrived this opinion immediately after I heard how God bestowed Constantinople on you" (Barın Akman, 2023, p. 232). In his another pamphlet titled *On the Eternal Glory*, George clearly articulates that after his conversion Mehmet will become the true Christian king of the whole world: "If the Conqueror [Mehmet II] strives for the unity of the faith and of the Church, and he demonstrates his zeal by deeds and not merely by words then through him God will destroy Mahometh's creed and make the conqueror and his descendants lords of the whole world…" (p. 232).

Another important figure who extended invitations to Mehmet II to convert to Christianity was the renowned Greek humanist scholar Francesco Filelfo, a close friend and mentor to Pope Pius II. Although Filelfo was a fierce critic of the Turks and the Turkish sultan and actively supported organizing Crusades against the Ottomans alongside Pius II, he also addressed a letter to Mehmed II in 1454. This letter included a request for the release of his mother-in-law and daughters, who had been taken hostage during the siege. Alongside the letter, Filelfo composed a short poem which glorified the Turkish sultan: "To Mehmet/ The great lord and great Prince of the Turks/ God, the King of Kings, /May He make you the victorious in this bright world. /And grant you a longer life than Nestor lived, Amy He bless you to live a glorious life/ O light of all kings" (Barın Akman, 2023, p. 213-214). After emphasizing that everything occurs according to God's will and design, Filelfo concludes his poem by urging Mehmet II to embrace the true faith of God. He writes: "O Emir, indeed increasing your fame is in your hands/O Mehmet, may God the Father and His Holy Jesus, Son of the great God, great like you, /may bestow the eyes of His religion on a king like yourself, /because then you will become the king of the whole world. / Then I myself shall not hesitate to come/from the lands of Italy to the edges of Thrace" (p. 213-214).

[6] For an indepth examination of this letter see: Bisaha, Nancy. "Pope Pius II's Letter to Sultan Mehmed II: A Reexamination." *Crusades*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2002, pp. 183–200. [https://doi.org/10.1080/28327861.2002.12220538] (https://doi.org/10.1080/28327861.2002.12220538).

This appeal, as a precursor *Turke and Sir Gawain*, combines religious fervor with a personal pledge of allegiance, reflecting the hope of uniting East and West through Mehmet's conversion.

The sixteenth-century Humanist scholar Erasmus, in *The Handbook of a Christian Knight* (1501), made similar appeals for the religious conversion of the Turks. He emphasized the need for moral and spiritual reform within Christianity, urging Christians to serve as true role models in line with their faith. Erasmus wrote:

> Preparation and ordinance is made now for war to be made against the Turks…but what do you think would come of it?... I do not suppose that they shall all be killed with weapons….The best way and most effectual to overcome and win the Turks would be if they shall perceive that what Christ taught and expressed in His living shone in us, if they shall perceive that we do not highly gape for their empires, do not desire their gold and goods, do not covet their possessions, but that we seek nothing else but only their souls' health and glory. (qtd. in Barın Akman, 2023, p.223-224)

Erasmus, echoing the theme of camaraderie based on the religious conversion of the Turke as depicted in *Turke and Sir Gawain*, argues that instead of waging war against the Turks, Christians should focus on converting them by exemplifying Christ's teachings and demonstrating that their goal is not wealth or power but the spiritual salvation and incorporation of the Turks into the Christian faith.

Examining these significant medieval figures and their arguments for the Turks' conversion offers valuable insight into the historical context of this version of the Arthurian tale, particularly regarding the themes of conversion fantasy and camaraderie. For instance, as an extension of broader public rhetoric surrounding the Turks and their potential conversion, the transformation scene in *The Turke and Gawain* can be interpreted as a reflection of this medieval cultural consensus. In the story's final episode, conversion fantasy takes center stage. The Turke, having passed all the trials victoriously, faces a final challenge in which he demonstrates his loyalty to Sir Gawain and his religion. When Sir Gawain demands the pagan king's conversion to Christianity, the Turk proves his allegiance by killing the defiant king who had humiliated Gawain and refused conversion: "Then Sir Gawaine unto the King can say, / 'Without thou wilt agree unto our law, Eatein is all thy bread.'" (Hahn, 1995, p. 348, ll. 260-261). When the furious king spits at Sir Gawain in protest, "The King spitt on Gawaine the knight," (262) the Turke, now reduced to calling "Gawain boy" at this point in the narrative, rises in defense of his "master" and hurls the pagan king into the boiling cauldron: "With that the Turke sent him upright / And into the fyer him flang" (Hahn, 1995, p. 348, ll. 263-264). After killing the heathen soldan, the Turke cries out in joy for having served the cause of his Christian master: "And saide to Sir Gawaine at the last, / 'Noe force, Master, all the perill is past! / Thinke not we tarrie too longe.'" (Hahn, 1995, p. 348, ll. 265-267).

After this climactic feat, the Turke, having proven himself worthy of religious transformation, draws a sword and asks Sir Gawain to behead him, invoking Biblical and Christian imagery of the Crucifixion and the holy blood. The Turke's request for Gawain to strike off his head, followed by his miraculous resurrection, echoes themes of sacrifice and resurrection, reminiscent of the Passion of Christ: "He tooke a sword of mettle free, / Saies 'If ever I did any thing for thee, / Doe for me in this stead: / Take here this sword of steele / That in battell will bite weele, / Therwith strike of my head.'" (Hahn, 1995, p. 349, ll. 268-276). Sir Gawain hesitates, but the Turke reassures him: "Have done, Sir Gawaine! I have no dread. / But in this bason let me bleed, / That standeth here in this steed, / And thou shalt see a new play, / With helpe of Mary that

mild mayd / That saved us from all dread" (Hahn, 1995, p. 349, ll. 280-285). In a rather gruesome manner, the decapitated Turk bathes in his blood, only to emerge miraculously as Sir Gromer, a Christian knight who is later declared ruler of the Isle of Man: "And when the blood in the bason light, / He stood up a stalworth Knight / That day, I undertake, / And song 'Te Deum Laudamus' – / Worship be to our Lord Jesus / That saved us from all wracke!" (Hahn, 1995, p. 349, ll. 289-294). The blood collected in a golden basin evokes the Holy Grail motif in Arthurian romances, believed to have been used to catch Jesus' blood on the cross.

As seen at the end of the narrative, the Turke not only emerges as a capable ally—albeit in a somewhat condescending role as a feudal foot soldier—but also as the protector and defender of the Christian faith. Furthermore, at the conclusion of the challenges, the Turke expresses heartfelt gratitude to Sir Gawain, calling him "blessed" for enabling his religious and cultural transformation in response to his assistance: "A! Sir Gawaine! Blessed thou be! / For all the service I have don thee, / Thou hast well quitt it me" (Hahn, 1995, p. 349, ll. 295-297). Because the Turke rises as a Christian knight after his beheading, this version of the Arthurian tale becomes a conversion fantasy, envisioning the Turks as fellow Christians, mirroring the medieval religious rhetoric surrounding the conversion of Muslim Turks.

Overall, *The Turke and Gawain* narrative not only represents a conversion fantasy but also functions as wishful fiction, where roles are reversed and the Ottoman Turk is rendered subservient to the English Gawain. This hierarchical relationship responds to the ongoing Ottoman-Turkish power dynamics, with the Muslim Turk using his power and strength not to destroy a Christian but to protect and glorify him. This transformation underscores the theme of Anglo-Turkish political alliances and their literary reflection in the Arthurian saga, where the Muslim Turk ceases to be a threat to Christian Europe, shifting from a foe into a brother. This shift highlights the theme of religious conversion as a means to achieve camaraderie and political solidarity, despite its problematic implications from modern standards.

Conclusion

As a sequential story imitating the original *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* romance, the fifteenth-century *The Turke and Gawain* can be viewed as a literary text that highlights the growing influence of the Turks in the West as both political and religious actors. In this version, the mysterious Green Knight is replaced by the enigmatic Turke, who enters Arthur's court uninvited and challenges the English king's knights to a buffet. Sir Gawain dutifully accepts the challenge, and, unlike in the earlier narrative, they both embark on a journey to the heathen sultan's castle to prove their valor. Confronted by several challenges devised by this pagan sultan, the Turke—demeaned and referred to as "the Gawain boy"—rises to the occasion and ultimately triumphs over all obstacles in Gawain's stead and in his master's name. Throughout the trials at the heathen sultan's castle, the Turke acts not only as a mentor and loyal ally to Gawain but also uses his military strategies, wisdom, and fighting skills to aid the struggling novice Gawain. In every instance, Gawain takes credit for the Turke's bravery and valor. In stark contrast to the original story, at the final episode of the narrative, the Turke asks Sir Gawain to behead him instead of receiving the buffeting blow. Despite his victory, the Turke requests Gawain to strike him down, only to return as a Christian knight, singing a hymn in praise of Jesus. The Turke, now transformed into Sir Gromer, and Sir Gawain then return to a joyous welcome at Arthur's court.

The Turke and Sir Gawain (c. 1500) is a lesser-known but intriguing version of the Arthurian romance tradition that reflects the medieval West's growing anxiety over the rising power of the Ottoman Turks in the late fifteenth century. By replacing the mysterious Green Knight with the enigmatic Turke, the story follows Sir Gawain's journey, guided by his mentor, the Turke, through trials that test his chivalric virtues. Along the way, Gawain proves his valor with the Turke's strategic guidance, culminating in the Turk's religious conversion and transformation into a Christian knight. This narrative can be interpreted as both a conversion fantasy and a response to the Ottoman threat, where solidarity and camaraderie are formed through shared purpose, yet only under the influence of Christian cultural dominance. In this context, the story reflects on the possibility of bridging cultural and religious divides, even as it envisions the assimilation of the Muslim Turk into the Christian fold, using the conversion as a means and tool for the West to deal with the Turkish "problem" by reimagining the Turk not as a threat but as a potential ally within a Christian framework and using religious transformation to mitigate the perceived dangers of Ottoman expansion.[7]

In *The Turke and Sir Gawain*, the narrative underscores how medieval alliances required the Oriental other's cultural and religious transformation, preferably establishing English-Western superiority through the assimilation of the Turke into the Christian fold. The evolving relationship between Gawain and the Turke therefore illustrates how solidarity in the medieval period was often predicated on assimilation, highlighting the tensions between transformative religious and cultural connections and the reversal of then existing power structures. By engaging with these complexities, the romance invites modern readers to critically examine how acts of medieval solidarity—while powerful in the modern perceptions—functioned differently and carried implicit expectations that shaped their outcomes in the Medieval world.

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[7] For a detailed discussion and overview of the Turkish image as constructed in the canonical works and writers of the West—examining six centuries of Western perceptions of Turks and Islam through a balanced, scholarly perspective that highlights both Orientalist bias and positive portrayals—see Beyazıt Akman and Filiz Barın Akman's *Literatürk: Batı Kanonu & Türkler I–II*, İstanbul: Kopernik Kitap, 2024.

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