



"The King of Tars | Be king of Tars"

Text Information

Author | Anonymous

Language | English

Period | 14th Century

Genre | Narrative Poetry

Source | The Auchinleck Manuscript, eds David Burnley and Alison Wiggins. The National Library of Scotland. 5 July 2003.

Collection | Cross-Cultural Encounters in the Premodern World. Gender, Sex and Sensuality: Writings on Women, Men and Desire

URL | sourcebook.stanford.edu/text/king_tars/

Translation and introduction by Blake Hahn.

Introduction to the Text

The King of Tars is one of the finest narrative poems written in the Middle English language, composed ca. 1330 in approximately 1,250 lines of tail-rhyme verse. Its author is unknown, and the poem exists in three medieval manuscripts, the most complete of which was copied in London. It is a chivalric romance and tells a moral story through deeds of Christian valor.

The chivalric romance genre was a product of the Crusades, and religious conflict between the fictional Christian kingdom of Tars and the real-world Islamic sultanate of Damascus is the overall theme of this text. The plot develops around the daughter of the eponymous King of Tars who, initially in a position of little political power and even less bodily autonomy, wields incredible influence over both her father and the antagonist Sultan of Damascus: by volunteering to marry the sultan, she saves her father's kingdom from destruction by the sultan's armies which had been making war upon her father following his rejection of the sultan's pledge of betrothal on account of the sultan's Islamic faith. This religious conflict extends into the marriage of the daughter and the sultan: because of the sultan's strict Islamic faith, the daughter of Tars must outwardly reject her Christianity while inwardly trusting in God for her deliverance. A racial conflict is introduced when their mixed-descent child is born without a face or limbs. Unable to be saved by the sultan's prayers, the daughter of Tars has him baptized by a priest, and the child is cured by (the Christian) God. The sultan then converts to Christianity and is baptized, whereupon his skin transforms from "black" to "white." The Damascene court is ordered to reject Islam, and those who refuse Christianity are slain. The sultan reunites with the king of Tars—now as an ally rather than a mortal enemy—and the two crusade against the sultan's lesser lords who have continued to reject Christianity, killing them all. The narrative closes with peace between the kingdoms of Tars and Damascus and a prayer to (the Christian) God.

In terms of gender and sexuality, the daughter of Tars is a transcendent figure. Her maidenhood is central to the narrative's conflict, and her motherhood is crucial to its resolution. As a young woman, she saves the lives of her parents and their nobility, and through her self-sacrificing marriage, she saves the lives of her son and her husband the sultan. In terms of race and culture, she is a domesticating figure who prompts the transformation of a black Muslim into a white Christian, thereby acting as the medium through which the Islamic sultanate converts to Christianity. In effect, she renders docile the Oriental "other": those cultures and religions which differ from Latin Christianity. **The King of Tars** is also a striking example of the longstanding association of whiteness with beauty, cleanliness, and purity, and of blackness with ugliness, sinfulness, and debasement. Such associations in pre-colonial times underpin current racist ideologies. Interestingly, although this text was written a continent away from its Middle Eastern setting and almost certainly by Christian author, the narrative reveals familiarity with Islamic hadith and tradition (however, it conflates Islam with the polytheism of the ancient Middle East and the paganism of the classical Roman Republic).

The King of Tars has become increasingly relevant in our times. Contemporary readers will identify themes of violent religious sectionalism, ethnic violence and racial purity, and the broad cultural reach of medieval literature. This romance has risen from obscurity to become a critical text for the study of medieval intersectionality, for which this translation has been mindfully prepared.



Introduction to the Source

The King of Tars survives most completely in the Auchinleck manuscript, which is the chief textual witness to the poem. This manuscript originally contained forty-three separate works of literature, of which our poem is the third. This manuscript is itself an important document in the study of both late medieval manuscript production and in later Middle English linguistics. Paleographical analysis suggests that the manuscript was copied by several professional scribes, presumably by collaboration in a secular bookshop. The possession of the manuscript, and by extension its location, is unknown before at least 1740 despite the presence of names which suggest ownership. Its preeminent owner, Alexander Boswell, Lord Auchinleck, donated it to the Advocate's Library in 1744. It is now in the possession of the National Library of Scotland, which now hosts online electronic transcriptions and scholarly information on the manuscript and its contents.

About this Edition

The primary textual witness, the Auchinleck manuscript, is curated by the National Library of Scotland and has been transcribed on their website. This edition was the source text of my translation, and the Middle English text is reproduced with permission. A critical edition of the Middle English text edited by John H. Chandler has been recently published which includes textual material supplemented from the Vernon (or Bodleian) manuscript, an alternate textual witness. The Vernon text makes up the final twelve lines of the poem in this translation. I have noted in the translation which text has been transcribed from the Auchinleck Manuscript as provided by Burnley and Wiggins, and I have transcribed the Middle English text from the Vernon Manuscript according to literal spelling and punctuation. Abbreviations in Middle English are not abbreviated in the translation, and punctuation in the literal translation follows the general punctuation of the Auchinleck text, with adjustment made for modern English syntax. "Muslim" and "pagan" are the preferred translations of the pejorative "Saracen (sarrazin)" and "heathen," respectively. "Muhammad" is always preferred for the pejorative "Mahoun." "Ternagaunt" is unique to the Auchinleck MS and is translated literally, but denotes the more familiar "Termagant" (see *The Song of Roland* et al). Place names "Damas" and "Tabarie" are given according to contemporary English; do not confuse "Tars" for "Tours." Titles are given according to the Middle English, as with "sire" and "dame." The English verb "did" usually takes the place of the Middle English "(bi)gan." Where syntactic understanding demands, lines have been translated out of order for ease of comprehension. These discrepancies will be noted in the translation. My completed translation is the first to appear in contemporary English, and is presented as a literal prose translation of the original text.

Further Reading

The Auchinleck Manuscript, eds David Burnley and Alison Wiggins. The National Library of Scotland. 5 July 2003. Accessed 5 March 2021. Version 1.1 <https://auchinleck.nls.uk/>

- *Source text of The King of Tars and literal translation.*

Chandler, John H., editor. *The King of Tars*. Medieval Institute Publications, 2015.

- *Critical text of The King of Tars in Middle English with modern orthography and gloss.*

Hornstein, Lillian Herlands. "The Historical Background of the King of Tars." *Speculum*, vol. 16, no. 4, 1941, pp. 404–414.

- *Emphasizes The King of Tars as evidence of "broad contacts and cultural currents of the Middle Ages."*

Said, Edward. "Imaginative Geography and Its Representations: Orientalizing the Oriental." Essay. In *Orientalism*, First Vintage Books ed., 49–73. Vintage Books, 1979.

- *Argues how representations of the Middle East in European literature confine and recontextualize the Middle East and Middle Eastern people, with emphasis on Christianity and Islam*

Rajabzadeh, Shokoofeh. "The Depoliticized Saracen and Muslim Erasure." *Literature Compass*, vol. 16, no. 9-10, 2019, doi:10.1111/lic3.12548.

- *Emphasizes the vulgarity and offensiveness of the term "Saracen" in contemporary translation and usage.*



"The King of Tars | þe king of Tars"

Herkneb to me boþe eld & ȝing,
For Maries loue þat swete þing,
Al hou a wer bigan
Bitvene a trewe Cristen king
& an heþen heye lording,
Of Dames þe soudan.
þe king of Tars hadde a wiue,
Feirer miȝt non ben oliue
þat ani wiȝt telle can.
A douhter þai hadde hem bitven,
Non feirer woman miȝt ben,
As white as feþer of swan.

þe meiden was schast & bliþe of chere,
Wiþ rode red so bloſme on brere,
& eyȝen stepe & gray;
Wiþ lowe ſcholders & white ſwere,
Hir forto ſen was gret preier
Of princes proud in play.
þe loſ of hir gan ſpring wide
In oþer londes bi ich a ſide;
So þe soudan herd it ſay.
Him þouȝt his hert it braſt o fiue
Bot ȝif he miȝt haue hir to wiue
þat was ſo feir a may.

His meſſengers he gan calle,
& bad hem wiȝtly wenden alle
To hir fader, þe king;
& ſeyd he wald, houso it bifalle,
His douhter cloþe in riche palle,
& ſpouſe hir wiþ his ring.
& ȝif he nold, wiþouten feyl,
He wald hir win in batayl
Wiþ mani an heye lording.
þe meſſengers forþ þai went

Listen to me, both old and young,
For the love of Mary, that precious woman,
About how a war began
Between a true, Christian king
5 And a pagan high lord,
The sultan of Damascus.
The King of Tars had [married] a wife,
Of whom any man could say
A lovelier woman had never lived.
10 Between them they bore a daughter,
Than whom no woman might be lovelier,
As white as the feather of a swan.

The maiden was chaste and happy in appearance,
With cheeks as red as a flower on a bush,
15 And bright grey eyes;
With low shoulders and a white neck,
To court her was the wish
Of proud and youthful princes.
The talk of her did spread about
20 In other countries on every side;
So the sultan heard it spoken.
He thought his heart would break in five pieces
Unless he could have her as his wife,
Who was so lovely a maiden.

25 He did summon all his messengers,
And ordered them all to go quickly
To her father, the king;
He said whatever it takes, he would
Dress his daughter in royal robes
30 And wed her with his ring.
If he would not, then without fail,
He would win her in battle
With many a high lord.
The messengers set out



To don þe soudans comandment
Wiþouten ani duelling.

þan þe king of Tars þis vnderstode,
Almost for wretþe he wex ner wode,
& seyð þus in sawe,
'Bi him þat dyed on þe rode,
Ich wald arst spille min hert-blode
In bateyl to ben yslawe.
Y nold hir ȝiue a Sarazin
For alle þe lond þat is mine;
þe deuel him arst todrawe.
Bot sche wil wiþ hir gode wille
Be wedded to him hirsclue to spille;
Hir þouȝtes nouȝt y no knawe,

Ac y schal wite ar þan ȝe pas.'
His douhter anon was brouȝt in plas,
& he axed hir biliue,
'Douhter, þe soudan of Damas
ȝernes forto se þi fas,
& wald þe haue to wiue.
Waldestow, douhter, for tresour,
Forsake Ihesus our saueour,
þat suffred woundes fieu?'
þe maiden answerd wiþ mild mod
Biforn hir fader þer sche stode,
'Nay lord, so mot y þriue.

Ihesu, mi Lord in trinite,
Lat me neuer þat day yse
A tirant forto take.
O God & persones þre
For Marie loue, þi moder fre,
ȝif him arst tene & wrake.'
þe king seyð 'douhter, be stille.
þou schalt neuer be wedded him tille,
For no bost he can make.

35 To obey the sultan's command
Without any delay.

Once the King of Tars learned this,
He almost nearly grew mad out of anger
by his words said this:
40 "By He who died on the cross,
I would sooner shed my heart's blood
And be killed in battle.
I will never give her to a Muslim
For all the land I rule,
45 Let the devil sooner hang him!
Unless, with her consent, she will
married to him and spoil herself.
I ought not to know her thoughts,

"But I shall learn them before anything happens."
50 His daughter was brought before him at once,
And he asked her immediately:
"Daughter, the sultan of Damascus
Longs to see your face
And would take you as his wife.
55 Daughter, would you for his riches
Turn back on Jesus, our saviour,
Who suffered five wounds?"
The maiden made humble reply
From where she stood before her father:
60 "Never, lord, so let me live!

"Jesus, my Lord in trinity,
Let me never see the day
I marry a tyrant.
One [Almighty] God, [who is in] three persons,
65 For the love of Mary, Your queenly mother,
Sooner give him pain and retribution."
The king said: "Daughter, be at ease.
You shall never be married to him,
No matter what threats he makes.



Y schal him sende word oȝein
þat alle his þouȝtes ben in vein,
For þou hast him forsake.'

Riȝt be þe self messengers
þat com fro þe soudan fers,
þis wordes he him sent,
þat sche leued nouȝt on his maners;
Sche nold nouȝt leten hir preiers
To God omnipotent.
He bad him tak anoþer thouȝt,
For of his douhter no tit him nouȝt
For tresore no for rent.
þe messengers herd him þus seyn,
Wiþ þat word þai turned oȝain
& to þe soudan þai went.

As þe soudan sat at his des,
Yserued of þe first mes,
þai com into þe halle.
Bifor þo princes prout in pres
Her tale to telle wiþouten les
On knes þai gun doun falle.
þai seyð 'sir, þe king of Tars
Of wicked wordes is nouȝt scars;
Heþen hounde he gan þe calle,
& ar he ȝiue his douhter þe t[i]lle
þine hert-blod he will sp[i]lle,
& þine barouns alle.'

When þe soudan þis wordes herd,
Also a wilde bore he ferd;
His robe he rent adoun,
His here he rent of heued & berd.
He schuld venge him wiþ his swerd,
He swore bi seyn Mahoun.
þe table so heteliche he smot
It fel into þe flore fot-hot,

70 I shall send him reply
That all his advances are in vain,
Because you have rejected him."

By the same messengers
75 That came from the wicked sultan,
He [the king] sent him back these words:
That she did not believe in his principles,
And she would never cease her prayers
To God omnipotent.
He suggested that he reconsider,
80 Because he was not entitled to his daughter
Neither for his riches nor for purchase.
So the messengers heard him say,
And with that word they turned back
And returned to the sultan.

85 They came into the hall (87)
As the sultan sat upon his throne, (85)
Having eaten the morning meal. (86)
Before the battle-hardened princes
They fell down upon their knees (90)
90 To tell their tale, without any deceit. (89)
They said: "Sire, the King of Tars
Is not wanting of wicked words.
'Pagan hound' he did call you,
And that before he his gives his daughter up to you
95 He will shed your heart's blood,
And [the blood] of all your barons."

When the sultan heard these words,
He acted like a wild boar.
He tore apart his robes,
100 And he pulled the hair from his head and beard.
He swore on Saint [Prophet] Muhammad (102)
That he should avenge himself with his sword. (101)
He struck the table so hatefully
That it crashed down to the floor,



& [he] loked as a lyoun.

Al þat he rauȝt he smot doun riȝt:
Seriaunt, squier, clerk & kniȝt,
Boþe erl & baroun.

Al þus þe soudan ferd, y pliȝt,
Al þat day & alle þat niȝt;
Noman miȝt him schast.
Amorwe, when it was liȝt,
His messangers he sent ful riȝt
For his barouns wel fast
þat þai com to his parlement
For to heren his iugement,
Boþe lest & mast.
When þe parlement was pleyner,
þo bispac þe soudan fer,
& seyð to hem in hast:

'Lordinges' he seyð 'what to red?'
Me haþ ben don a gret misdede
Of Tars, þe Cristen king
Y bede him boþe lond & lede
For his douhter, worþliche in wede,
To han wed hir wiþ ring.
& he me sent word oȝain
In bateyl y schuld arst be sleyn
& mani an heye lording.
& certes he schal be forsworn -
Wroþerhele þan was he born -
Bot y þerto it bring.

& þerfore ich haue after ȝou sent,
& asembled here þis parlement,
To wite ȝour conseyle.'
& alle þai seyð wiþ gode entent
þai were at his comandment,
Certeyn, wiþouten feile.
Riȝt bi þat day a fourtenniȝt

105 And [he] looked like a lion.

Everything that he touched, he struck down:
Sergeant, squire, clerk, and knight,
Both earl and baron.

Indeed, the sultan acted thusly
110 All the day and all the night;
Not a man could handle him.
In the morning, when it was light,
Right away he sent his messengers
Posthaste to his barons
115 So that they meet in his war-room
To hear his plan,
Both the least and the greatest.
When the council of war was assembled
The mighty sultan spoke,
120 And said to them in haste:

"Lords," he said, "give me your advice.
I have been terribly insulted
By the Christian King of Tars!
I offered to him both [my] land and [my] subjects
125 For his daughter, desirable in marriage,
To have married her with my ring.
He has sent me reply
That I should sooner be slain in battle
And with many a high lord.
130 Indeed, he shall be destroyed -
Rather he was born into misfortune -
Than to [the destruction] I will bring.

"That is why I have sent for you
And here assembled this council of war,
135 To seek your advice."
They all said, in good faith,
That they awaited his command,
Surely, and without doubt:
Within fourteen days of that meeting



þai schul ben alle redi diȝt
Wiþ helme [&] hauberk of meile.
& whan þai were so at his hest,
þe soudan made a riche fest
For loue of his bateyle.

þe soudan gaderd a rout vnride
Of Sarrazins of michel pride
Opon þe king to (to) wende.
þe king of Tars herd sey þat tide,
He gadred his ost bi ich a side,
Al þat he miȝt ofsende.
þan bigan wretþe to wake,
For þat mariage miȝt nouȝt take
Of þat maiden hende.
Of bateyl þai gun sett a day,
Of seynt Eline, þe þridde in May.
No lenger no wald þai lende.

þe soudan com wiþ his pouwer,
Wiþ briȝt armour & brod baner
Into þe feld to fiȝt
Wiþ sexti þousend Sarrazins fer,
þat alle þe feldes fer & ner
Wiþ helmes lemed liȝt.
þe king of Tars com wiþ his ost,
Wiþ gret pride & michel bost,
iþ mani an hardi kniȝt.
& aiþer ost gan oþer aseyle;
þer miȝt men se a strong bateyle
þat grimli was of siȝt.
þer hewe houndes on Cristenmen
& feld hem down bi niȝen & ten.
So wilde þai were & wode
þat men miȝt sen alle þe fen
Of Cristen boþe fremd & ken;
þe valays ren on blod.
þe soudan & his folk þat stounde

140 They should all be made ready
With helms [and] coats of mail.
When they were thus at his command,
The sultan prepared a sumptuous feast
To celebrate the campaign.

145 The sultan mustered up a massive force
Of Muslims in great pride
To sally against the king.
The King of Tars heard rumors of war;
He massed his army on every side,

150 All whom he could summon.
Then they began to grow angry,
So that marriage might not take away
That gentle maiden.
They did prepare a day for the battle,
155 [The day] of Saint Helen, the third of May.
They would permit no delay.

The sultan came with his forces
To fight upon the field, (172)
With sixty-thousand fearsome Muslims (173)
160 160 With bright armor and lofty banners, (171)

So that all the fields near and fear
Gleamed with the light from their helms.
The King of Tars came with his army,
With great pride and taunting loudly,
165 And with many a manly knight.
Either army did close with the other;
There men might see a battle
Which was gruesome to look upon.
There the [pagan] hounds hacked at the Christian men
170 And cut them down [thinned their ranks] by nines and tens.
So frenzied and angry were they
That men might see [lying] upon the ground
Christian men both stranger and family;
The valleys ran wet with blood.
175 That moment, the sultan and his men



Hewe adoun wiþ grimli wounde
Mani a frely fode.
Allas, to wele sped Mahoun.
þe Cristenmen ȝede al adoun;
Was nouȝt þat hem wiþstode.

þe king of Tars seye þat siȝt,
For wretþe he was neye wode, apliȝt.
He hent in hond a spere,
& to þe soudan he rode ful riȝt,
Wiþ a stroke o[f] michel miȝt
To grounde he gan him bere.
þer he hadde þe soudan slawe,
Ac ten þousend of heþen lawe
Sauded him in þat were.
þai sett him on a ful gode stede
þat was so gode at eueri nede
þat noman miȝt him dere.

& when he was opou his stede,
Him þouȝt he brend so spark on glede
For ire & for envie.
He fauȝt so he wald wede;
Alle þat he hit he maked blede.
'Help, Mahoun' he gan crie.
Mani helme þer was ofweued,
& mani bacinete tocleued,
& saddles fel emtye.
Mani swerd & mani scheld
& mani kniȝt lay in þe feld
Of Cristen compeynie.

þe king of Tars seye him so ride;
He fleye, & durst nouȝt abide,
Homward to his cite.
þe Sarrazins folwed in þat tide,
& slouȝ adoun bi ich a side
þat Cristen folk so fre.

Repulsed with gruesome wounds
Many a valiant assault.
Alas! Muhammad sped to victory.
The Christian men suffered such a defeat,
180 That there was no one who withstood [the enemy].

The King of Tars saw the sight;
Indeed, he had nearly gone mad with anger.
He hefted a spear in his hand,
And he rode hard upon the sultan.
185 He took him to the ground (186)
With a stroke of mighty power (185).
There he would have killed the sultan,
But ten-thousand of the pagan faith
Saved him from that danger.
190 They set him on a freshened horse
Which was so responsive to every command
That no man could contest him.

When [the sultan] sat upon his horse,
They imagined he burned like an ember on a coal
195 Out of anger and contempt.
He fought as if he was berserk;
All that he struck, he made it bleed.
"Help, Muhammad!" he did shout.
There were many helms struck off,
200 Many visors sliced in half,
And saddles fallen empty.
Many swords and many shields
And many knights lay [dead] on the field
Among the Christian army.

205 The King of Tars saw him riding thusly;
He fled, and dared not linger,
Back home to his keep.
The Muslims harassed the retreat
And struck down on every side
215 The noble, Christian people.



Britti þousend þer were yslawe
Of kniȝtes of Cristen lawe,
& þat was gret pite.
Amorwe, for her boþer sake,
Trewes þai gun bitven hem take,
A moneþ & dayes þre.

On a day þe king sat in his halle,
& made grete diol wiþalle,
For his folk were forlore.
His douhter com clad in palle,
Adoun on knes sche gan to falle,
& seyd wiþ sikeing sore,
'Sir, lete me be þe soudans wiif,
& rere namore cuntek no striif
As haþ ben here bifore.
For me haþ mani man ben schent,
Cites nomen & tounes brent.
Allas, þat ich was bore.

Fader, y wil serue at wille
þe soudan boþe loude & stille,
& leue on God almiȝt.
Bot it so be, he schal þe spille,
& alle þi lond take him tille,
Wiþ bateyle & wiþ fiȝt.
Certes y nil no lenger dreye
þat Cristen folk for me dye;
It were a diolful siȝt.'
þe king of Tars answerd þo,
As man þat was in sorwe & wo,
Vnto þat bird briȝt

'Now douhter, bliscd mot þou be
Of Ihesu Crist in trinite
þe time þat þou were bore;
For þou wilt saue þi moder & me
Al þi preier graunt y þe

There were slain thirty-thousand
Knights of the Christian faith,
And such a shame it was!
In the morning, for both of their benefit,
215 They did make a truce between them,
For one month and three days [in duration].

One day, the king sat in his hall **A**
nd became utterly lost in sorrow,
For his people were hopeless.
220 His daughter came wearing robes,
And she did fall on her knees,
And said with deep sighing:
"Sire, let me be the sultan's wife,
And cause neither calamity nor strife
225 As there has been here since.
Many a man has been slain for me;
Cities [have been] captured and towns [have been] burnt.
Alas, that I was ever born!

"Father, I will willingly serve
230 The sultan, both loud and soft [no matter the conditions],
And trust in the almighty God.
Or else, he shall kill you,
And take all of your land for himself,
In battle and with war.
235 Surely I will no longer bear
A Christian people to die for me;
It is so sorrowful a sight."
Then the King of Tars answered,
A man who was in sorrow and woe,
240 To that lovely lady:

"Now, daughter, may you be blessed
By Jesus Christ in trinity
From the hour that you were born.
Because you will save your mother and me,
245 I [will] allow everything for which you have asked,



Astow hast seyð bifore.
'F[a]der' sche seyð 'wipouten duelling,
For Ihesus loue, heuen-king,
ȝif it þi wille wore,
250 Do now swiþe þat y war þere
Ar ani more sorwe arere
þat ȝe be nouȝt forlore.'

þe king of Tars, wiþ gode entent,
Hastilich after his wiif he sent,
255 þat leuedi þat was so hende.
When sche was comen in present
He seyð 'dame, our douhter haþ ment
To þe soudan to wende.
Do loke what rede is now at þe,
260 For now er here bot we þre,
To saue Cristen kende.'
þe quene answerd wiþouten feile,
'Y no schal neuer þerto conseyle
Our douhter forto schende.'
265 þe maiden was ful of sorwe & wo.
'Merci' sche crid hir moder þo
Wiþ a wel reweful steuen.
'Moder, it is nouȝt long ago
For me were slawe kniȝtes þro,
270 þritti þousende & seuen.
Forþi y wil suffre no lenger þrawe þat
Cristen folk be for me slawe,
Wiþ þe grace of God in heuen.'
þus þe maiden wiþ wordes stille
275 Brouȝt hem boþe in better wille
Wiþ resoun riȝt & euen.

& when þai were þus at on,
Messangers þai sent anon
Vnto þat riche soudan.
280 To make his frende þat were his fon,
& for he schuld his men nouȝt slon

Just as you have said before."
"Father," she said, "without delay,
the love of Jesus, heaven's king,
If it were your will,
250 Act now, that I will be there
Before any more sorrow arises,
So that you will not be hopeless."

The King of Tars, with good intent,
Called for his wife immediately,
255 The lady who was so gentle.
When she had arrived in [his] presence
He said: "Dame, our daughter has decided
To go over to the sultan.
See if there is any advice you have [to give],
260 Since there are only us three
To save the Christian people."
The queen answered without doubt:
"No, I shall never suggest that
Our daughter be put to shame."
265 The maiden was full of sorrow and woe.
"Have mercy," she cried to her mother then
With such a pitiful voice.
"Mother, it was not long ago
That valiant knights were slain for me,
270 Thirty-thousand and seven [of them].
Therefore, I will no longer endure
Christian men to be slain for me,
By the grace of God in heaven."
Thus, with gentle words the maiden
275 Led them both to better understanding
By her honest and impartial reasoning.

When they were agreed,
They at once sent messengers
To the wealthy sultan.
280 To make [themselves] his friends that were his enemies,
And so that he should not slay his men,



His douhter he graunt him þan.
þe messangers nold no leng abide;
To þe soudan þai went þat tide,
& þus þai tel him gan.
When þo letters weren yradde
þe soudan was boþe bliþe & glad,
& so was mani a man.

So glad he was in al maners
He cleped to him of his pers,
Doukes, princes & kinges.
Into a chaumber þai went yfers
To diȝt vnto þe messangers
Gode stones & riche ringes.
Bi conseyl of þe lordinges alle
þe soudan dede bring into þe halle
ȝiftes & riche þinges,
& ȝaf to hem gret plente,
To þe messangers wiþ hert fre,
& þonked hem her tidinges
& seyð he was alle at his wille,
Arliche & late, loude & stille,
To help him at his nede;
No more folk nold he spille.
þe messangers went þe king tille
& told him of þat dede.
þe king & þe quene also
Boþen hem was wele & wo,
In rime also we rede.
Gret ioie þai hadde, wiþouten les,
For þat þe soudan wald haue pes
On Cristen felawerede.

þe first day of Iulii tide,
þe soudan nold no leng abide,
To þe king of Tars he sent
Kniztes fele & michel pride
& riche iewels, is nouȝt to hide,

He then gave to him his daughter.
The messengers would no longer wait;
They went to the sultan that moment,
285 And thus they did tell him.
Then when the letters were read
The sultan was both happy and glad,
And so were many men.

He was so pleased in every way that
290 He summoned to himself from his councilors
Dukes, princes, and kings.
Together they went into a store-room
To make ready for the messengers
Precious gems and expensive rings.
295 By the council of all his lords,
The sultan did bring into the hall
Gifts and lavish trinkets,
And gave to them a great abundance,
To the messengers, out of his noble heart,
300 And thanked them for their news.
He said he was in full agreement,
Whether early or late [no matter the time], loud or soft,
To help him with his request;
He would not kill any more people.
305 The messengers went to the king
And told him of that deed [the sultan's response].
The king and the queen as well
Were both of them happy and sad,
In the verses which we read.
310 They were greatly relieved, without deceit,
Because the sultan would have peace
With Christian fellowship.

On the first day of July,
The sultan would no longer wait.
315 He sent to the King of Tars
Many knights of great strength
And jewels too precious to keep hidden away,



To ȝif to his present.

þe messangers, wiþouten duelling,

Com to Tars, bifor þe king,

To haue his douhter gent.

þai welcomed hem wiþ glad chere.

Of gret pite, now may ȝe here,

To chaumber when þai went.

þai maden cri & michel wo

For þai schuld her douhter forgo

& to þe soudan hir sende.

þe maiden preyd hem boþe þo

þat þai schuld bi her conseyl do

To sauē Cristen kende.

'For y wil suffre no lenger þrawe þat

Cristen folk be for me slawe.'

To halle þai gun wende,

& welcomed þo messangers

þat com from þe soudan fers

Wiþ wordes fre & hende.

þan seyde þe quen to hem þan

'Hou fareþ ȝour lord, þe soudan,

þat is so noble a kniȝt?'

þe messangers answerē gan,

'He farþ as wele as ani man,

& is ȝour frende, apliȝt.'

þe quen seyde, wiþ milde chere,

'Wele better þei mi douhter were,

Bi Ihesu ful of miȝt,

Mi douhter is nouȝt to him to gode;

Y vouchesaue on him mi blode,

þei sche were ten so briȝt.'

þe messangers diȝt hem swiþe

Wiþ kniȝtes fele & stedes stiþe

& brouȝt hir into chare.

þe king & þe quen were vnblīþe;

To give as his bride-price.

The messengers, without delay,

320 Came before the King of Tars

To receive his gentle daughter.

They welcomed them with pleasant demeanor,

[But they were] deeply grieved, now you may hear,

When they went into the bedroom.

325 They wept and grieved sorely

Because they should give up their daughter

And send her to the sultan.

Then the maiden begged both of them

That they should act on her advice

330 To save the Christian people:

"For I will no longer endure

Christian people to be slain for me."

They did return to the hall

And welcomed those messengers

335 That came from the wicked sultan

With noble and pleasing words.

Then the queen said to them:

"How is your lord the sultan,

Who is so noble a knight?"

340 The messengers did answer:

"He is as well as any man,

And is your friend, indeed."

The queen said, in a humble manner:

"He will be all the better because of my daughter,

345 By Jesus [who is] full of might.

My daughter is not too good for him,

On my life, I promise him,

Even if she were ten times as lovely."

The messengers readied themselves immediately

350 With many knights and hardy horses

And brought her into a chariot.

The king and queen were so unhappy;



Her sorwe coupe þai noman kipe,
When þai seye hir forþ fare.
[þai seye it miȝt non oþer go;
Bitauȝten hir God for euermo
& kist her douhter þare.]
Into chaumber þai went þo.
When þai were togider boþe to,
þan wakened alle her care.

þe king was in sorwe bounde,
þe quen swoned mani a stounde,
For her douhter dere.
Kniztes & leuedis þer hem founde,
& tok hem vp hole & sounde,
& comfort hem in fere.
þus þe quen & þe king
Liued in sorwe & care morning;
Gret diol it was to here.
Her care was euer aliche newe;
Hem chaunged boþe hide & hewe
For sorwe & reweli chere.

Nov late we ben alle her morning,
& telle we of þat maiden zing
þat to þe soudan is fare.
He com wiþ mani gret lording
For to welcome þat swete þing
When sche was brouȝt in chare.
He kist hir wel mani a sipe;
His ioie coupe he noman kipe,
Oway was alle his care.
Into chaumber sche was ladde,
& richeliche sche was cladde
As heþ(b)en wiman were.
Whan sche was cladde in riche palle,
þe soudan dede his kniztes calle,
& badde þat maiden forþ fett.
& when sche com into þe halle

To no one could they express their sorrow
When they saw her going away.
355 [They saw that (the chariot) might not ever return;
They gave her up to God forevermore
And kissed their daughter there].
Then they went into the bedroom.
When they two were both together,
360 Then all of their grief was loosed.

The king was bound by his sorrow;
The queen fainted many times
For their beloved daughter.
The knights and ladies found them there
365 And kept them safe and sound,
And comforted them with their company.
Thus the queen and the king
Lived in sorrow and grief, mourning;
Such a pity it was to hear!
370 Their grief was always renewed;
It changed their color and their appearance
Through [their] sorrow and guilt.

Now, let us leave behind all of their mourning,
And let us tell of that young maiden
375 Who has gone to the sultan.
He came with many mighty lords
To welcome that precious woman
When she was brought in her chariot.
He kissed her many times;
380 No one could comprehend his joy.
All his manners were forgotten.
She was led into her bedroom,
And she was ornately robed
Like pagan women are [veiled].
385 When she was dressed in royal garments,
The sultan did summon his knights
And ordered them to receive the maiden.
When she came into the hall



Bifor þe heyȝe lordinges alle,
Toforn þe soudan þai hir sett.
Gret diol it was for to se
þe bird þat was so briȝt on ble
To haue so foule a mett.
þei þat sche made gret solas,
þe sorwe þat at hir hert was
No miȝt it noman lett.

& whan it was comen to niȝt
þe leuedi, þat was so feir & briȝt,
To chaumber sche gan wende.
& þerin anon, y ȝou pliȝt,
A riche bed þer was ydiȝt
Vnto þat leuedi hende.
þe leuedi was to bed ybrouȝt;
þe soudan wild com þerin nouȝt,
Noiþer for fo no fre[n]de
For noþing wold he neyȝe þat may
Til þat sche leued opon his lay,
þat was of Cristen kende.

Wel lope war a Cristen man
To wedde an heȝen woman
þat leued on fals lawe;
Als loþ was þat soudan
To wed a Cristen woman,
As y finde in mi sawe.
þe soudan ȝede to bed al prest,
Kniztes & leuedis ȝede to rest,
þe pople hem gan wiȝdrawe.
þat miri maiden litel slepe,
Bot al niȝt wel sore sche wepe
Til þe day gan dawe.

& als sche fel on slepe þore
Her þouȝt þer stode hir bifore
An hundred houndes blake,

Before all of the high lords,
390 They seated her before the sultan.
Such a pity it was to see
The lady who was so beautiful of complexion
To have so hideous a husband!
Although she seemed to be at ease,
395 No man could take away (396)
The sorrow that was on her heart. (395)

When nighttime had fallen,
The lady who was so fair and lovely
Did retire herself to her bedroom.
400 Indeed within, I tell you truly,
There a lavish bed was spread
For that pleasant lady.
The lady was brought to bed;
The sultan would not enter into there
405 Because he would draw near the maiden for nothing, (406)
Neither as an enemy nor as a companion, (405)
Until she believed in his faith,
She who was of the Christian people.

A Christian man would be loathe
410 To marry a pagan woman
That believed in false idols;
So too was the sultan loathe
To marry a Christian woman,
As I find in my story.
415 The sultan went right away to bed;
Knights and ladies lay to rest,
The people did excuse themselves.
The admirable maiden hardly slept,
But all night long she wept sorely
420 Until the dawn of day did rise.

There as she fell to sleep
She dreamed there stood before her
A hundred black hounds,



& bark on hir, lasse & more.
 & on þer was þat greued hir sore,
 Oway þat wald hir take;
 & sche no durst him nouȝt smite
 For drede þat he wald hir bite,
 Swiche maistri he gan to make.
 & as sche wald fram hem fle,
 Sche seye þer stond deuelen þre,
 & ich brent as a drake.

So loþliche þai were al ywrouȝt
 & ich in hond a gleiue brouȝt,
 Sche was aferd ful sore.
 On Ihesu Crist was alle hir þouȝt,
 þerfore þe fendes derd hir nouȝt,
 Noiþer lesse no more.
 Fro þe fendes sche passed sounde,
 & afterward þer com an hounde
 Wiþ browes brod & hore;
 Almost he hadde hir drawn adoun,
 Ac þurth Ihesus Cristes passioun
 Sche was ysaued þore.

ȝete hir þouȝt, wiþouten lesing,
 Als sche lay in hir sweuening,
 þat selcouþe was to rede,
 þat blac hounde hir was folweing
 þurth miȝt of Ihesu, heuen-king,
 Spac to hir in manhede,
 In white cloþes, als a kniȝt,
 & seyde to hir 'mi swete wiȝt,
 No þarf be noþing drede,
 Of Teruagaunt no of Mahoun.
 Þi lord þat suffred passioun
 Schal help þe at þi nede.'
 & when þe maiden was awaked,
 For drede of þat wel sore sche quaked
 For loue of her sweuening.

And they bayed at her unceasingly.
 425 There was one which deeply troubled her,
 Which would snatch her away;
 She dared not to strike him
 Out of fear that he would bite her,
 So savagely did he act.
 430 As she would flee from them,
 She saw that three devils stood there,
 And each smouldered like a dragon.

They were all so hideously formed,
 And each wielded a glaive in its hand,
 435 So she was sorely afraid.
 All of her hope was on Jesus Christ;
 Therefore the fiends did not offend her,
 Not in any way.
 She escaped safely from the fiends,
 440 And there a hound ran up behind her
 With wide, grey brows.
 He had almost dragged her down,
 But through the grace of Jesus Christ
 She was saved from there.

445 Yet she believed, without deceit,
 As she lay tossing and turning,
 So terrible it is to tell,
 The black hound was following her.
 Then a knight in white clothing (451)
 450 Spoke to her in his valor (450)
 Through the might of Jesus, heaven's king, (449)
 And said to her: "My precious lady,
 There is nothing for you to be afraid of,
 [Neither] of Ternagaunt [deity ascribed to Islam] nor of Muhammad.
 455 Your Lord who suffered crucifixion
 Shall help you in your peril."
 When the maiden awoke [from her dream],
 She trembled violently out of fear
 And dread of her nightmare.



On hir bed sche sat al naked,
To Ihesu hir preier sche maked,
Al miȝtful heuen-king.
As wis as he hir dere bouȝt
Of þat sweuening, in slepe sche þouȝt,
Schuld turn to gode ending.
& when þe maiden risen was,
þe riche soudan of Damas
To his temple he gan hir bring.

þan seyð þe soudan to þat may,
'þou most bileue opon mi lay
& knele now here adoun;
& forsake þi fals lay
þat þou hast leued on mani a day,
& anour seyn Mahoun.
& certes, bot þou wilt anon,
þi fader y schal wiþ wer slon.
Bi louin & Plotoun,
& bi Mahoun & Teruagant
þer schal noman ben his waraunt,
Emperour, no king wiþ croun.'

þe maiden answerd wiþ mild chere
To þe soudan, as ȝe may here,
'Sir, y nil þe nouȝt greue.
Teche me now & lat me here
Hou y schal make mi preiere
When ich on hem bileue.
To Mahoun ichil me take,
& Ihesu Crist, mi Lord, forsake,
þat made Adam & Eue.
& seþþen serue þe at wille,
Arliche & lat, loude & stille,
Amorwe & an eue.'

þan was þe soudan glad & bliþe,
& þanked Mahoun mani siþe

460 She sat disrobed on her bed,
And she said her prayers to Jesus Christ,
Almighty heaven's king.
As surely as He had dearly redeemed her,
[She believed] the nightmare that she dreamed in her sleep
465 Should close upon a happy ending.
When the maiden had risen [from her bed],
The wealthy sultan of Damascus
Did bring her to his temple.

Then the sultan said to the maiden:
470 "You must believe in my faith
And now kneel down here,
And renounce your false beliefs
Which you have believed in for so long,
And worship Saint [Prophet] Muhammad.
475 Surely, unless you will do this soon,
You father shall be slain in battle.
By Jupiter and Pluto,
And by Muhammad and Ternagaunt,
No man shall be his protector,
480 [Neither any] emperor, nor crowned king."

The maiden made humble answer
To the sultan, as you may hear:
"Sire, I will do nothing to offend you.
Teach me now, and let me hear
485 How I should say my prayer
When I believe in them.
I will devote myself to Muhammad
And give up my Lord Jesus Christ
Who made Adam and Eve.
490 Thereafter will I serve you in all things,
Early or late, loud or soft,
In the morning and at dusk."

Then the sultan was glad and happy,
And thanked Muhammad over and over



þat sche was so biknawe;
His ioie couþe he noman kipe.
He bad hir gon & kis swiþe
'Alle þine godes on rawe.'
Sche kist Mahoun & Apolin,
Astirot, & sir louin,
Ishtar, and Lord Jove
& while sche was in þe temple [þer]
Of Teruagant & lubiter
Sche lerd þe heþen lawe.

& þei sche al þe lawes couþe,
& seyd hem openliche wiþ hir mouþe,
Ihesu forȝat sche nouȝt.
Wher þat sche was, bi norþe or souþe,
No minstral wiþ harp no crouþe
No miȝt chaunge hir þouȝt.
þe soudan wende niȝt & day
þat sche hadde leued opon his lay,
Bot al he was bicouȝt.
For when sche was bi hirselu on
To Ihesu sche made hir mon,
þat alle þis world haþ wrouȝt.
þe soudan dede cri þat tide
Oueral, bi ich aside,
A turnament to take;
& duhti men on hors to ride,
& dubbed hem in þat tide,
& kniȝtes gan he make.
Be trumpes gun forto blowe;
Kniȝtes priked out o rouwe
On stedes white & blake.
þer miȝt men se sone & swiþe
Strong men her strengþe kipe
For þat maiden sake.

þe Cristen maiden & þe soudan
In þe castel leyen þan,

495 Since she was converted;
To nobody could he express his joy
He ordered her to go and kiss at once
"All of your gods, one after the other."
She kissed Muhammad and Apollo,
500 Ishtar, and Lord Jupiter
Out of fear of his terrible threats.
While she stayed in the temple
Of Ternagaunt and Jupiter,
She learned the pagan faith.

505 Although she understood all of the tenets
And professed them outwardly with her mouth,
She had not forgotten Jesus.
Wherever she was, be it north or south [no matter the location],
No performer playing the harp or rote
510 Could ever change her conviction.
Night and day, the sultan was convinced
That she had believed in his faith,
But he was none the wiser,
Because when she was alone by herself,
515 She said her prayer to Jesus
Who has created the entire world.
At that time, the sultan did announce
To every corner of his kingdom
[That he wished] to hold a tournament;
520 [He called for] mighty men to ride out on their horses
And he enfeoffed them at that time,
And did make them knights.
The trumpets sounded forth;
Knights spurred out of dress
525 On white and black horses.
Men could watch then and there
Strong men show off their strength
For the maiden's sake.

The Christian maiden and the sultan
530 Remained within the castle



þe turnament to bihold.
& þo þe turnament bigan
þer was samned mani a man
Of Sarrazins stout & bold.
To sen þer was a semly siȝt,
Of þritti þousend of helmes briȝt,
In gest as it is told.
þai leyden on as þai were wroþe
Wiþ swerdes & wiþ maces boþe,
Kniztes boþe ȝong & old.

Wel mani helme þer was ofweued,
& mani bacinet tocleued,
& kniztes driuen to grounde.
Sum þer fel down on her heued,
& sum in þe dicke lay todreued,
& siked sore vnsounde.
þe turnament last þo, y plizt,
Fram þe morwe to þe nizt,
Of men of michel mounde.
Amorwe þe soudan wedded þat may
In þe maner of his lay,
In gest as it is founde.

Atte his bridale was noble fest,
Riche, real, & onest;
Doukes [&] kinges wiþ croun.
For þer was melodi wiþ þe mest
Of harp & fi þel & of gest
To lordinges of renoun.
þer was ȝeuen to þe menstrels
Robes riche & mani iuweles
Of erl & of baroun.
þe fest lasted fourtenizt,
Wiþ mete & drink anouȝ, aplizt,
Plente & gret fousoun.

þat leuedi, so feir & so fre,

495 To view the tournament.
When the tournament had begun,
There were gathered many men
Of Muslims strong and bold.
535 There was a wonderful sight to see
Of thirty-thousand shining helmets,
As it is told in the legend.
They contended as if they were mad
With both swords and with maces,
540 Knights both young and old.

So many helmets were struck off,
Many visors split in half,
And knights driven to the ground.
There some fell down on their heads,
545 And some lay fallen in the ditch,
And cried out, badly wounded.
Indeed, the tournament lasted this long,
From dawn to dusk,
Of men of abounding power.
550 The next morning, the sultan married the maiden
According to the customs of his faith,
As it is found in the legend.

At the reception was a noble feast,
Sumptuous, fit for a king, and formal;
555 [There were] dukes [and] crowned kings.
There was the finest song
Of harps and fiddles, and legends sung
Of celebrated heroes.
There were given to the performers
560 Royal robes and many precious gems
[Befitting] of earls and barons.
The feast lasted fourteen days,
With enough of meat and drink, indeed,
Plentiful and great in store.

565 The lady so lovely and so noble



Was wiþ hir lord bot moneþes þre
 þan he gat hir wiþ childe.
 When it was geten sche chaunged ble;
 þe soudan himself þat gan se,
 lolif he was & wilde.
 þerwhile sche was wiþ child, apliȝt,
 Sche bad to Ihesu ful of miȝt
 Fram schame he schuld hir schilde.
 Atte fourti woukes ende
 þe leuedi was deliuerd o[f] bende
 þurth help of Mari milde.

& when þe child was ybore
 Wel sori wimen were þerfore,
 For lim no hadde it non.
 Bot as a rond of flesche yschore
 In chaumber it lay hem bifore
 Wiþouten blod & bon.
 For sorwe þe leuedi wald dye
 For it hadde noiþer nose no eye,
 Bot lay ded as þe ston.
 þe soudan com to chaumber þat tide,
 & wiþ his wiif he gan to chide
 þat wo was hir bigon.

'O Dame' he seyde biforn,
 'Oȝain mi godes þou art forsworn,
 Wiþ riȝt resoun y preue:
 þe childe þat is here of þe born
 Boþe lim & liþ it is forlorn
 Alle þurth þi fals bileue.
 þou leuest nouȝt wele afine
 On lubiter no on Apoline
 Amorwe na an eue;
 No in Mahoun no in Teruagant,
 þerfore is lorn þis litel faunt,
 No wonder þei me greue.'

Was with her husband for but three months
 Before he had made her pregnant.
 When she became pregnant, she changed in appearance.
 The sultan himself did see it;
 570 He was excited and joyful.
 Indeed, while she was pregnant,
 She begged of Jesus, full of might,
 That he should defend her from shame.
 At the end of forty weeks
 575 The lady was brought out of labor
 Through the help of mild Mary.

When the child was delivered,
 The women were appalled thereby
 Because [the baby] had no limbs.
 580 But like a lump of butchered flesh
 It lay before them in the bedroom,
 Lacking blood and bones.
 The lady wished to die of grief
 Because it had not either a nose or eyes,
 585 But lay as dead as a stone.
 The sultan entered the bedroom at that moment
 And began to blame his wife
 For the trouble that had come of her:

"Oh dame," he said before her,
 590 "You are cursed by my gods,
 I prove with rightful judgment:
 The child which is born of you here
 Is deprived of both life and limb
 All because of your false belief.
 595 You do not believe truly
 On Jupiter or on Apollo,
 [And pray] neither in the morning nor in the evening,
 Not to Muhammad nor to Ternagaunt.
 That is why this little child is hopeless,
 600 No wonder the gods disturb me!"



þe leuedi answerd & seyð þo,
þer sche lay in care & wo,
'Leue sir, lat be þat þouȝt.
þe child was ȝeten bitven ous to;
For þi bileue it farþ so
Bi him þat ous haþ wrouȝt.
Take now þis flesche & bere it anon
Bifor þine godes euerichon,
þat þou no lete it nouȝt.
& pray þine godes al yfere,
Astow art hem leue & dere,
To liue þat it be brouȝt.

& if Mahoun & louin can
Make it fourmed after a man
Wiþ liif & limes ariȝt,
Bi Ihesu Crist, þat þis world wan,
Y schal leue þe better þan
þat þai ar ful of miȝt.
& bot þai it to liue bring
Y nil leuen on hem noping
Noiþer bi day no niȝt.'
þe soudan toke þat flesche anon;
Into his temple he gan to gon
þer his godes were diȝt.

Biforn his goddes he gan it leyn,
& held vp his honden tvein
While men miȝt go fiue mile.
'A miȝtful Mahoun' he gan to seyn,
'& Teruagaunt of michel meyn,
In ȝou was neuer no gile.
Seyn Iubiter & Apolin,
Astirot & seyn louin,
Help now in þis perile.'
Oft he kneled & oft he ros,
& crid so long til he was hos;
& al he tint his while.

hen the lady answered and said,
There where she lay in grief and woe:
"Dear sire, let be that thought;
The child was gotten between us both.
605 Because you believe this so happens
By He who has created us,
Take this flesh, and bring it at once
Before every one of your gods,
So that you spare it nothing.
610 Pray to all of your gods together,
As you are loved and dear to them,
That it be brought to life.

"If Muhammad and Jupiter can
Have it fashioned like a man
615 With life and healthy limbs,
By Jesus Christ who has redeemed this world,
I shall love you better than
They do, who are full of might.
Unless they bring it to life,
620 For nothing will I rely on them,
Neither by day nor by night."
The sultan took the flesh at once;
He did enter into his temple
Where his gods were installed.

625 He offered it up before his gods,
And held up both of his hands
For as much time as a man could walk five miles.
"Ah, mighty Muhammad," he began to say,
"And Ternagaunt of so much power,
630 There was never deceit among you.
Saint Jupiter and Apollo,
Ishtar and Lord Jupiter,
Help me now in this peril."
Often he kneeled and often he stood,
635 And shouted so long that he lost his voice,
But all of his effort he wasted.



& when he hadde al ypreyd,
& alle þat euer he couþe he seyð,
þe flesche lay stille as ston.
Anon he stirt vp at a breyd,
& in his hert he was atreyd
For lim no hadde it non.
He biheld on his godes alle
& seye þer miȝt no bot bifalle;
Wel wo was him bigon.
'O sir Mahoun' he gan to grede,
'Wil ȝe nouȝt helpe me at þis nede?
þe deuel ȝou brenne ichon.'

He hent a staf wiþ grete hete,
& stirt anon his godes to bete,
& drouȝ hem alle adoun.
& leyð on til he gan to swete,
& ȝaf hem strokes gode & gret
Boþe louine & Plotoun.
& alderbest he bete afin lubiter & Apolin,
& brac hem arm & croun.
& Teruagaunt, þat was her broþer,
He no lete neuer a lime wiþ oper,
No of his god Mahoun.

& when he hadde beten hem gode won,
ȝete lay þe flesche stille so ston
An heye on his auter.
He tok it in his hond anon,
& into chaumber he gan gon,
& seyð 'lo, haue it here.
Ich haue don al þat y can
To make it fourmed after a man
Wiþ kneleing & preier.
& for alle þat ichaue hem bisouȝt
Mine godes no may help me nouȝt,
þe deuel hem sett afere.'

When he had finished praying
All that he had ever learned to say,
The flesh lay as still as a stone.
640 Suddenly, he stood upright,
And in his heart he was torn
Because it [still] had no limbs.
He looked on each of his gods
And saw that there was no help to come;
645 He became despondent.
"Oh sire Muhammad," he began to groan,
"Will you not help me in this peril?
Let the devil burn each one of you!"

With profound hatred he raised a staff
650 And started at once to beat his gods,
And to drive them all down.
He lashed until he began to sweat,
And gave them beatings hard and heavy
Both Jupiter and Pluto.
655 Even harder did he pummel Jupiter and Apollo,
And broke their arms and crowns.
On Ternagaunt which was their brother,
He left not a limb with its opposite,
660 Neither on his god Muhammad.

When he had thoroughly beaten each one of them,
The flesh lay still as a stone
And high upon his altar.
He took it in his hands at once;
665 He entered into the bedroom,
And said: "Here, take it from me.
I have done all that I can do
To make it fashioned like a man
By kneeling and praying.
670 For all that I have propitiated them,
My gods cannot help me at all.
Let the devil set them aflame!"



& þan answerd þat gode wiman
Wel hendeliche to þat soudan,
'Leue sir, here mi speche.
þe best rede þat y can,
Bi Ihesu Crist, þat made man,
Now ichil 3ou teche.
Now þou hast proued god þine
3if me leue to asay mine,
Wheþer is better leche.
& leue sir, [y] prey þe þis:
Leue on hem þat stronger is,
For doute of more wreche.'

þe soudan answerd hir þore -
In hert he was agreued sore
To sen þat selcouþe siȝt -
'Now, dame, ichil do bi þi lore,
3if þat y may se bifore
þi God is of swiche miȝt,
Wiþ ani vertu þat he can,
Make it fourmed after a man
Wiþ liif & limes ariȝt.
Alle mi godes ichil forsake,
& to Ihesu, þi Lord, me take,
As ich am gentil kniȝt.'

Wel bliþe was þe leuedi þan
For þat hir lord, þe riche soudan,
Hadde graunted hir preier.
For hope he schuld be Cristen man
Sche þonked him þat þis world wan,
& Mari his moder dere.
Now ginneþ here a miri pas,
Hou þat child ycrisned was
Wiþ limes al hole & fere,
& hou þe soudan of Damas
Was cristned for þat ich cas,
Now herken, & 3e may here.

Then the good woman answered
Graciously to the sultan:
675 "Beloved sire, hear me speak.
[It is] the best advice that I know,
By Jesus Christ who made man.
Now I will teach you myself.
Now that you have tested your gods,
680 Give me permission to challenge mine,
[To learn] which one is the better cure.
And, beloved sire, [I] ask this of you:
Believe on Him that is the stronger,
For fear of further trouble."

685 There the sultan answered her -
[He] was deeply grieved within his heart
To see that terrible sight -
"Now lady, I myself will act according to your judgment,
So that I may see before [my very eyes]
690 [If] Your God is of such might
[That] with any power that he wields,
[He can] make it fashioned like a man
With life and healthy limbs.
I myself will denounce each of my gods
695 And give myself to your Lord Jesus,
[On my] oath as I am an honorable knight."

Then the lady was elated
Because her husband the wealthy sultan
Had granted to her her request.
700 Hoping that he should become a Christian man,
[She] thanked Him who has redeemed this world,
And Mary His exalted mother.
Now here begins the delightful story
Of how that child was christened
705 With whole and healthy limbs,
[And] how the sultan of Damascus
Was christened for that same reason.
Now listen and you may hear.



þan seyð þe leuedi in þat stounde,
'þou hast in þi prisoun bounde
Mani a Cristenman.
Do seche oueralle bi loft & grounde,
ȝif ani Cristen prest be founde
Bring him bifor me þan.
& y schal, ar tomorwe at none
Wite what Ihesu Crist can done
More þan þine maumettes can.
Anon þe prisouns weren ysouȝt,
þai founden a prest & forþ him brouȝt
Bi hest of þat soudan.

He com bifor þat leuedi fre,
& gret hir feir opon his kne,
& seyð wiþ sikeing sore,
'Madame, ybliscd mot þou be
Of Ihesu Crist in trinite,
þat of Mari was bore.'
þe leuedi seyð 'art[o]w a prest?
Tel me soþe ȝif þat tow best.
Canstow of Cristen lore?'
'Madame' seyð þe prest anon,
'In verbo Dei, ich was on
Tventi winter gon & more.

'Ac Dame' he seyð 'bi seyn lon,
Ten winter song y masse non,
& þat me likeþ ille.
For so long it is now gon
Ichaue ben in prisoun of ston
Wiþ wrong & gret vnskillе.'
þe leuedi seyð 'Lat be þi fare.
þou schalt be brouȝt out of þi care,
& tow wilt held þe stille.
For þurth þine help in þis stounde[s],
We schul make Cristen men of houndes.
God graunt it, ȝif it be his wille.'

Then the lady said in that instance:
710 "You have shut up in your prison
Many a Christian man.
Do search it thoroughly, from top to bottom,
And if any Christian priest is found,
Bring him before me then.
715 Before tomorrow noon, I shall
Demonstrate what Jesus Christ can do
Better than your false gods can."
At once the prisons were searched;
They found a priest, and brought him forward
720 By the order of the sultan.

He came before that noble lady
And greeted her falling down on his knee,
And said with deep sighing:
"Madame, may you be blessed
725 By Jesus Christ in trinity,
Who was born of Mary."
The lady said, "Are you a priest?
Tell me truly, if that is what you are.
Are you learned in Christrian doctrine?"
730 "Madame," said the priest at once,
"[I was ordained a priest] in the word of God
Twenty winters ago or more.

"But dame," he said, "by Saint John,
I have sung no masses for ten winters,
735 And I have been at pains for it.
For it has gone on for so long now
That I have been in this prison of stone,
With great wrong and injustice."
The lady said, "Let that be gone from you.
740 You shall be brought out of your grief
If you will keep yourself silent.
Through your help in this instance,
We shall make Chrsitian men of [pagan] hounds.
God allow it, if it is His will."



þan seyð þe soudans wiif,
'þou most do stille, wiþouten striif,
A wel gret priuete.
[Her is a child selcoupe discriif.
It haþ noip̃er lim, no liif,
No eyzen forto se.]
Hali water þou most make,
& þis ich flesche take,
Al for þe loue of me.
& cristen it, wiþouten blame,
In þe worpschipe of þe Faders name,
þat sitt in Trinite.

For in him is mine hope, apliȝt;
þe Fader, þat is ful of miȝt,
Mi sorwe schal me slake.
ȝif it were cristned ariȝt
It schuld haue fourme to se bi siȝ
t Wiþ lim & liif to wake.'
þat leuedi comand anon
Hir maidens out of chaumber gon
For drede of wraying sake.
þe prest no leng nold abide;
A feir vessel he tok þat tide,
& hali water he gan make.

At missomer tide þat ded was don
þurth help of God þat sitt in trone,
As y ȝou tel may.
þe prest toke þe flesche anon,
& cleped it þe name of Ion
In worpschip of þe day;
& when þat it cristned was
It hadde liif & lim & fas,
& crid wiþ gret deray.
& hadde hide & flesche & fel,
& alle þat euer þerto bifel,
In gest as y ȝou say.

745 Then the sultan's wife said:
"You must act quietly, without [causing] trouble,
And in the utmost secrecy.
[There is a child terrible in description.
It has neither life, nor limbs,
750 Nor eyes with which to see.]
You must blend holy water,
And take this very flesh
All for my own sake.
Christen it against sin
755 In worship of the Father's name,
Who sits in trinity.

"Indeed, my hope is in Him;
The Father, who is full of might,
Shall rid me of my sorrow.
760 If it were properly christened,
It should have the faculties to see by sight
And to move with life and limb."
The lady ordered at once
Her maidens to go out of the bedroom,
765 Out of fear of treason.
The priest would wait no longer;
He chose a lovely vessel at that moment
And began to blend holy water.

On midsummer's day, the deed was done
770 Through the help of God who sits enthroned,
As I may tell you.
The priest took up the flesh at once
And called it by the name of John [the Baptist]
In observance of the day,
775 And just as it was christened,
It had life and limbs and a face,
And cried with great fervor.
It had hair and flesh and skin,
And [to him] all of this occurred,
780 In the legend as I tell you.



Feirer child miȝt non be bore;
It no hadde neuer a lime forlore;
Wele schapen it was wiþalle.
þe prest no lenge duelled þore,
& ȝede & teld þe soudan fore
þer he was in þe halle.
þat leuedi, þer sche lay in bed,
þat richeliche was bischred
Wiþ gold & purpel palle,
þe child sche toke to hir blieue,
& þonked our Leuedi ioies fiue
þe feir grace þer was bifalle.

& seyð 'lord, ich pray þe,
Almiȝti God in Trinite,
So ȝiue me miȝt & space
þat y may þat day yse
Mi lord wald ycristned be,
þe soudan of Damas.'
þan cam þe soudan, þat was blac;
Sche schewed him þe child & spac,
Wiþ liif & limes & face.
Sche seyð 'Mahoun no Apolin
Is nouȝt worþ þe brostle of a swin
Oȝain mi Lordes grace.'

þe soudan seyð 'leman min,
Ywis, ich am glad afin
Of þis child þat y se.'
'ȝa, sir, bi seyn Martin,
ȝif þe haluendel wer þin
Wel glad miȝt þou be.'
'O dame' he seyð 'hou is þat?
Is it nouȝt min þat y biȝat?'
'No sir' þan seyð sche,
'Bot þou were cristned so it is
þou no hast no part þeron, ywis,
Noiþer of þe child ne of me.

A more lovely child might never be born.
Altogether, it was so well shaped (783)
[As if] it had never lacked a limb before. (782)
The priest lingered there no longer,
785 But stepped out to tell the sultan
Where he was in the hall.
Where the lady lay in her bed
That was ornately spread
With gold and purple cloths,
790 She held the child quickly to herself,
And thanked our Lady [Mary] with five exhortations
For the fair grace which had happened there.

She said: "Lord I pray You,
Almighty God in trinity,
795 To give me the strength and patience
That I might see the day
My husband would be christened,
The sultan of Damascus."
Then came the sultan, who[se skin] was black;
800 She showed him the child, and it babbled,
With life and limbs and face.
She said, "[Neither] Muhammad nor Apollo
Is worth even the bristle of a pig
Against the grace of my Lord."

805 The sultan said: "My beloved,
Indeed I am wholly glad
By this child that I see."
"Yes sire, by Saint Martin,
If the half of him were yours
810 You might be rightly glad."
"Oh dame," he said, "What do you mean?
Is it not mine that I have begotten?"
Then she said, "No sire,
Unless you are christened like [the child] is,
815 You have not a part in him, indeed,
Neither of the child nor of me.



& bot þou wilt Mahoun forsake,
& to Ihesu, mi Lord, þe take,
þat þoled woundes fiue,
[&] anon þou do þe Cristen make,
þou miȝt be ferd for sorwe & wrake
While þat þou art oliue.
& ȝif þou were a Cristen man
Boþe were þine' sche seyd þan,
'þi childe & eke þi wiue.
When þou art dede þou schalt wende
Into blis wiþouten ende;
þi ioie may noman kipe.'

þe soudan seye wele bi siȝt
þat Ihesu was of more miȝt
þan was his fals lawe.
He seyd 'dame, anonriȝt,
Ichil forsake mi god, apliȝt;
þai schal be brent & drawe.
Ac telle me now, par charite,
& for þe loue þou has[t] to me,
What schal y seyn in sawe?
Now ichaue forsaken mi lay,
Tel me now what is ȝour fay,
& ichil lere wel fawe.'

þan seyd þat leuedi, hende & fre,
'Vnderstond, sir, par charite,
On Ihesu Cristes lay.
Hou he was & euer schal be
O God & persones þre,
& liȝt in Mari, þat may,
& in hir bodi nam flesche & bl[o]d,
& hou he bouȝt ous on þe rode
Opon þe Gode Friday,
& hou his gost went to helle
Satanas pouste forto felle,
& brouȝt mankin oway.

"Unless you will renounce Muhammad,
And give yourself to my Lord Jesus
Who suffered five wounds
820 And you make yourself a Christian at once,
You might be in fear of grief and pain
So long as you are alive.
But if you were a Christian man,
Both [of us] would be yours," she said then,
825 "The child as well as your wife.
When you have died, your soul shall depart
Into unending happiness;
Then no man may comprehend your joy."

The sultan saw clearly with his own eyes
830 That Jesus was of greater might
Than was his false belief.
He said, "Dame, right away
I myself will renounce my [gods], indeed;
They shall be burnt and scattered.
835 But for the love of God, tell me now,
And for the love you have for me,
What shall I say with my words?
Now that I have recanted my religion,
Tell me now what is your faith,
840 And I will gladly learn it."

Then that kind and noble lady said:
"Understand sire, for the love of God,
The nature of Jesus Christ.
How He was and ever shall be
845 One God in three persons,
Incarnate in the virgin Mary,
And in her body took on flesh and blood;
And how He redeemed us on the cross
On the Good Friday,
850 And how His spirit descended into hell
To overthrow Satan's dominion,
And ransomed humankind.



þe þridde day, in þe morning,
To liue he ros, wiþouten lesing,
As he com of þe rode,
& ȝaf his frendes comforting,
& steȝe to heuen as miȝtful king
Boþe wiþ flesche & blod.
As it is founden in holy writ
On his Fader riȝt hond he sitt,
& is wel mild of mode.
As it is writen in þe crede
He demeþ boþe þe quic & ded,
þe feble & eke þe gode.

& al þis world schal todriue,
& man arise fram ded to liue
Riȝt dome to vnderstond.
þan schal Ihesu, wiþouten striue,
Schewe his blodig woundes fiue,
þat he for ous gan fond.
& þan schal he, wiþouten mis,
Deme ich man after he is,
Erl, baroun & bond.
Leue heron' sche seyð þan,
'& do þe make a Cristen man,
For noþing þou no wond.'

þan seyð þe soudan 'dame, be stille.
Y schal be cristned þurth Godes wille
Ar þan þe þridde day.
Loþ me were mi soule to spille;
Preȝe now þe prest he com ous tille
& teche me Cristen lay,
As priueliche as it may be,
þat noman wite bot we þre,
Als forþ as ȝe may.
& ani it wist, heȝe or lowe,
þou schalt be brent & y todrawe,
& we forsoke our fay.'

"On the morning of the third day,
He rose to life, without deceit,
855 After He came off the cross;
And [He] gave comfort to His friends,
And ascended into heaven as a mighty king
In both His flesh and blood,
According to the Holy Scriptures,
860 He sits at the right hand of His Father,
And is mild in manner.
As it is written in [the Apostle's] Creed,
He judges the living and the dead,
The sick as well as the strong.

865 "He shall scatter all this world,
And men will rise from death to life
To receive the proper judgement [of their sins].
Then shall Jesus, without strife,
Reveal His five bloody wounds
870 Which He did suffer for us.
Then He shall, without mistake,
Judge each man according to his character,
[Whether] earl, or baron, or serf.
Believe on this," she said then,
875 "And do make yourself a Christian man.
For nothing should you wait."

Then the sultan said: "Dame, be at peace.
I shall be christened according to God's will
Before the third day [from now].
880 I would be loathe to waste my soul;
Ask the priest to present himself to us
And teach me the Christian faith
As secretly as it may be [done],
So that nobody knows except us three
885 To the best that you can.
If anyone finds out, noble or peasant,
You shall be burnt and I hanged
If we recant our faith."



Anon þe prest answerd þan
Hendeliche to þat soudan,
'Sir, ich am redi here
Wiþ alle þe pouwer þat y can
Forto make þe Cristen man
& Godes lay to lere.'
His hond opon his brest he leyde;
'In verbo Dei' he swore & seyde
'Vnto þou boþe yfere,
Wel trewe & trusti schal y be
Wiþ alle þat euer falleþ to me
To help wiþ mi pouwere.'

Amorwe when þe prest gan wake,
A wel feir fessel he gan take
Wiþ water clere & cold;
& halwed it for þe soudan sake,
& his preier he gan make
To Ihesu, þat Iudas sold,
& to Marie his moder dere,
þo þat þe soudan cristned were,
þat was so stout & bold,
He schuld gif him miȝt & space
þurth his vertu & his grace
His Cristendom wele to hold.

& when it was lizt of day
þe riche soudan, þer he lay,
Vp bigan to arise.
To þe prest he went his way,
& halp him alle þat he may
þat fel to his seruise.
& when þe prest hadde þo
Diȝt redi þat fel þerto
In al maner wise,
þe soudan, wiþ gode wille anon,
Dede of his cloþes euerichon
To reseyue his baptize.

Then at once the priest answered
890 Obediently to the sultan:
"Sire, I am here prepared
With all the power that I have
To make you a Christian man,
And to learn the law of God."
895 He laid his hand upon his breast;
"In the word of God," he swore and said,
"To the both of you together,
Honest and faithful shall I be
In all that was ever entrusted to me
900 To help by my authority."

In the morning, when the priest awoke,
He did take a lovely vessel
[And filled it] with crisp, clear water;
He consecrated it for the sultan's sake
905 And began to make his prayers
To Jesus, whom Judas sold,
And to Mary His beloved mother,
So that when the sultan would be christened,
Who was so strong and bold,
910 He should give him strength and patience
To justly rule his kingdom (912)
By his virtue and his grace. (911)

When it was the light of day,
The wealthy sultan, from where he slept,
915 Began to stir awake.
He made his way to the priest
To help him in all that he could
According to his ability.
Then when the priest had
920 Made ready everything that was necessary
In every which way,
The sultan, by his own will at once
Put off every thread of his clothing
To receive his baptism.



þe Cristen prest hiȝt Cleophas;
He cleped þe soudan of Damas
After his owen name.
His hide, þat blac & loþely was,
Al white bicom, þurth Godes gras,
& clere wiþouten blame.
& when þe soudan seye þat siȝt
þan leued he wele on God almiȝt;
His care went to game.
& when þe prest hadde alle yseyd,
& haly water on him leyd,
To chaumber þai went ysame.

When he com þer þe leuedi lay,
'Lo, dame' he gan to say,
'Certeýne, þi God is trewe.'
þe leuedi þonked God þat day,
For ioie sche wepe wiþ eyȝen gray;
Vnneþe hir lord sche knewe.
þan wist sche wele in hir þouȝt
þat on Mahoun leued he nouȝt
For chaunged was his hewe.
For þat hir lord was cristned so
Oway was went al hir wo,
Hir ioie gan wax al newe.
'Mi lord' sche seyde wiþ hert fre,
'Sende now þis prest in priuete
To mi fader þe king.
& pray him, for þe loue of me,
þat he com swiþe hider to þe
Wiþ alle þat he may bring.
& when mi fader is to þe come
Do cristen þi lond, alle & some,
Boþe eld & ȝing.
& he þat wil be cristned nouȝt,
Loke to þe deþ þat he be brouȝt,
Wiþouten ani duelleing.'

925 The Christian priest was named Cleophas;
He christened the sultan of Damascus
After his own name.
His skin, which was black and ugly,
Became completely white by the grace of God,
930 Clear and without blemish.
When the sultan saw that sight,
Then he believed fully on the Almighty God;
His sorrow turned to joy.
When the priest had said everything
935 And anointed him with holy water,
They went together to the bedroom.

When he came to where the lady lay,
"Look, dame," he began to say,
"Certainly, your God is true."
940 The lady praised God that day.
For joy, she wept with her grey eyes;
Unmistakably she recognized her husband.
Then she knew fully in her mind
That he believed not on Muhammad,
945 Because his skin color had changed.
Because her husband was thusly christened,
Her sorrow was all forgotten
And her joy rose up anew.
"My husband," she said with noble heart,
950 "Now send this priest in secrecy
To my father the king.
And seek him, for the love of me,
That he comes here to you quickly
With all that he can carry.
955 When my father has come [to meet with] you,
Do convert every which one of your subjects,
Both the old and the young.
Whoever will not be christened,
See that he is put to death
960 Without any delay."



þe soudan tok þe prest bi hond,
& bad him wende & nouȝt no wond
To þe king of Tars ful ȝare;
& do him al to vnderstond
Hou Ihesu Crist þurth his sond,
Haþ brouȝt hem out of care.
& bid him bring wiþ him his ost,
Priueliche, wiþouten bost,
For noþing he no spare.
& Cleophas wiþ gode entent,
To do þe soudans comandment,
To Tars he gan fare.

& when þe prest sir Cleophas,
Com to þe court þurth Godes grace
Wiþouten ani duelling,
He teld þe king alle þat cas
Hou þe child ded born was
A misforschapen þing;
& þurth þe preier of his wiif
Hou God hadde sent it leme & liif
In water ate cristening;
& hou þat heþen soudan
Was bicom a Cristen man
Þurth þe miȝt of heuen-king.

He radde þe letter þat he brouȝt,
& in þe letter he fond ywrouȝt,
In gest as y ȝou say,
Hou þat þe soudan him bisouȝt
To com to him & lat it nouȝt
Opon a certeyne day.
& bring wiþ him alle his ost
To take his lond bi euerich cost,
& serche in his cunray;
Who þat wold nouȝt cristned be
He schuld be honged opon a tre,
Wiþouten ani delay.

The sultan took the priest by the hand,
And ordered him to go and not delay
To the King of Tars posthaste,
To do everything to make him understand
965 How through the Gospel of Jesus Christ
They had been delivered from their sorrow.
He requested [that the king] bring his armies with him,
Secretly, and without show of force,
Because he would not spare anything.
970 Cleophas, with good intent,
Started off for Tars (972)
To obey the sultan's command. (971)

When the priest Sir Cleophas
Arrived at the court by the grace of God
975 Without any delay,
He told the entire story to the king:
How the child was delivered stillborn
As a deformed creature,
And through the prayers of his wife
980 How God had given it limb and life
[When immersed] in the water at its christening;
And how the pagan sultan
Had become a Christian man
Through the might of heaven's king.

985 He read the letter which he brought;
And in the letter he read,
Just as I tell you in the legend,
How the sultan requested him
To meet with him, and not delay,
990 On a specified day.
[And he read] to bring with him all of his armies
To take his subjects from every corner [of the kingdom],
And search throughout his country;
Whoever would not be christened
995 Should be hanged upon a tree,
Without any delay.



Blip̃er miȝt noman ben.
He cleped his barouns & þe quen,
& told hem þus in sawe,
Hou þe soudan, stout & kene,
Was cristned wiþouten wene,
& leued on Cristes lawe.
'& þerfore he haþ don sent me bi sond
He wil do cristen alle his lond,
ȝif þat he mit wel fawe.
& he þat wil nouȝt take cristening,
No be he neuer so heye lording,
He schal [don] hong & drawe.

& þerfore y pray ȝou now riȝt,
Erl, baroun, douk, & kniȝt,
Do alle ȝour folk bede
Wiþ helme on heued & brini briȝt
þat ȝe ben alle redi diȝt
To help me at þis nede.'
þai sent oueral, bi ich a side,
For mani Cristen men þat tide,
þat duhti were of dede.
þe king him diȝt forto wende
Wiþ sexti þousende kniȝtes hende;
þat was a feir ferred.

þe king com wiþouten lett
þe selue day þat him was sett
To þe soudan wel ȝare.
& when þai were togider mett
A miri greteing þer was gret
Wiþ lordinges lasse & mare.
þer was rewþe for to sen
Hou þe leuedi fel on knen
Biforn hir fader þare.
þer was ioie & mirþe also
To here hem speken of wele & wo,
Her auentours als þai were.

No man could have been happier.
He summoned his barons and the queen,
And told them this with his words
1000 How the sultan, strong and brave,
Was christened without a doubt
And believed in the Christian faith.
"Therefore, he has sent me by his messenger
That he will christen each of his subjects,
1005 If any of them will eagerly accept [the baptism].
And whoever will not take the christening,
Even if he is his highest lord,
He shall be hanged and drawn.

"Therefore I ask you at once,
1010 Earl, baron, duke, and knight,
Do order all of your men
That you be made ready (1013)
With helms on heads and bright coats of mail (1012)
To help me at this need."
1015 They sent throughout every corner [of the kingdom]
After many Christian men at that time,
Who were capable of in action.
The king prepared himself to go
With sixty-thousand manly knights;
1020 That was a glorious company!

The king arrived without delay
On the very day he was scheduled
To venture to the sultan.
When they had met together,
1025 They were received with a happy welcome
By noblemen of every rank.
Sorrowful it was to see
How the lady fell on her knees
Before her father there.
1030 There was joy and laughter as well
To hear them speak of woe and weal,
As well of their adventures.



Be soudan dede his barouns calle,
& sebben anon his kniȝtes alle,
& after, alle his meyne.
& when þai come into þe halle
He seyð 'houso it bifalle,
ȝe mot ycristned be.
Miseluen, ich haue Mahoun forsake
& Cristendom ich haue ytake,
& certes, so mot ȝe,
& hye þat wil nouȝt so anon
þai schul be heueded [euerichon],
Bi him þat dyed on tre.'

When he hadde þus ytold,
Mani Sarrazin stout & bold
þat in his court were,
Mani seyð þat þai wold,
& mani seyð þat þai nold
Be cristned in non maner.
þo þat Mahoun wald forsake
Cristen men he lete hem make,
& were him lef & dere.
& he þat dede nouȝt bi his rede,
Anon he dede strike of his hed,
Riȝt fast bi þe swere.

Be soudan had in prisoun diȝt
Ten þousend Cristen men, y plizt,
Of mani vncoupe þede.
He dede hem liuer anonriȝt,
& þo þat were strong & wiȝt
He ȝaf hem armour & stede.
& þo he seye þat miȝt nouȝt so
He ȝaf hem mete & drink þerto,
& alle þat hem was nede.
þer miȝt men se wiþ þat soudan
Mani bliþe Cristen man,
In gest as-so we rede.

The sultan did summon his barons,
And soon he called his knights at once,
1035 And after them, [he called] all of his train.
When they came into the hall,
He said: "However it occurs,
You must be baptized.
I myself have renounced Muhammad
1040 And have accepted Christianity.
Indeed, so must you,
And they that will not [be baptized] at once,
[Every one of them] should be beheaded,
By He who died on the cross."

1045 When he had thus told
The many Muslims strong and bold
Who were in his court,
Many said that they would [be baptized],
And many said that they would not
1050 Be baptized in any way.
He let them become Christian men, (1051)
Those who would reject Muhammad, (1052)
And they were beloved and dear to him.
And of those that did not take his advice,
1055 He struck off their heads at once,
Swiftly with his sword.

The sultan had shut up in prison
Ten-thousand Christian men, indeed,
Of many unknown peoples.
1060 He did release them at once,
And to those who were strong and able
He gave them arms and mounts.
To those he saw that were not fit,
He gave them food and plenty of drink
1065 And everything that they needed.
There men might see with the sultan
Many happy Christian men,
In the legend just as we read it.



When he hadde don þus þat tide,
Oueral his lond, bi ich a side,
þe word wel wide sprong.
Fiue heþen kinges þat tide,
& mani heþen douke vnride,
Wiþ pople gret & strong,
þai sent about ner & fer
Opon þat soudan forto wer;
& seyð, for þat wrong,
Bi Mahoun & Teruagaunt,
þer schuld nouȝt ben his warant,
Bot ben drawe & hong.

þo fif kinges of prout parayle
Diȝt hem redi to þat batayle;
Wel stout & strong þai were.
Hou þe soudan gan hem aseyle,
& what þai hete, wiþouten feile,
Now herken & ȝe may here.
King Canadok, & king Lesias,
King Carmel, & king Clamadas,
& king Memarok her fere,
Opon þe soudan wiþ wer þai went.
His men þai slouȝ, his tounes brent,
Wiþ strengþe & gret pouver.

þe king of Tars & þe soudan
Day of bateyle þai gun tan
Oȝain þo kinges fiue.
Ac euer oȝein a Cristen man
Ten heþen houndes wer þan
Of Sarrazins stout & stiþe.
Now herkenþ to me boþe eld & ȝing
Hou þe soudan & þe king
Amonges hem gun driue,
& hou þe Sarrazins þat day
Opped heuedles for her pay;
Now listen & ȝe may liþe.

When he had done thusly at that time,
1070 The rumor spread about (1071)
Among all of his subjects, by every corner [of the kingdom]. (1070)
At that time, five pagan kings
And many wicked, pagan dukes
With many people great and strong
1075 Were searching about near and far
To make war against the sultan;
They said, for his treachery,
That by Muhammad and Ternagaunt,
No one should be his defender,
1080 But [he should be] hanged and drawn.

Those five kings of apparent valor
Prepared themselves for battle,
So bold and strong were they.
Now listen, and you may hear (1086)
1085 How the sultan did confront them, (1084)
And [hear] how they were named, without fail: (1085).
King Canadok, and King Lesias,
King Carmel, and King Clamadas,
And King Memarok their companion.
1090 They moved with war against the sultan;
They killed his subjects [and] they burnt his towns
With strength and awesome power.

The King of Tars and the sultan
Did set a day for battle
1095 Against those five kings.
Against a single Christian man
There were more than ten pagan hounds
Of Muslims strong and sturdy.
Now listen to me, both old and young,
1100 How the sultan and the king
Did drive among them,
And how that day, the Muslims
Hopped around headless for their audacity;
Now listen and you may hear.



þe Cristen soudan þat tide,
Tok a spere & gan to ride
To Canadok þat was kene.
& Canadok wiþ gret pride,
Wiþ a spere gan him abide
To wite & nouȝt at wene.
So hard þai driuen togider þere
þat her launces boþ yfere
Brosten hem bitvene.
þe soudan drouȝ his fauchoun gode,
þe kinges heued wiþ alle þe hode
He strok of quite and clene.

King Lesias of Tabarie
To þe soudan he gan heyne,
For Canadok his felawe;
Wiþ a spere þat was trusti
He rode to þe soudan wel an hey,
& þouȝt him haue yslawe.
þe king of Tars bitven hem rod,
& Lessias strok he abod,
As y finde in mi sawe.
& smot him so on þe scheld
þat, topseyl in þe feld,
He made him ouerprawe.

He lepe on hors & gan to ride,
& slouȝ adoun bi ich a side
þat he bifor him founde.
Wham þat Lesias hit in þat tide,
Were he douk or prince o pride
He ȝaf him dedly wounde.
þe king of Tars com wiþ a spere
& þurth his sides he gan it bere
þat ded he fel to grounde.
þan sett þe Sarrazins vp a cri,
'A Mahoun, ful of meistri,
Help ous in þis stound.'

1105 At that moment, the Christian sultan
Equipped a spear and began to ride
Upon Canadok, who was brave.
But Canadok, with great confidence,
Anticipated him with a spear
1110 To counter him, and not at distance.
There they closed at arms so strongly
That both of their lances [locked] together
And shattered between them.
The sultan drew his finest falchion;
1115 He struck off quick and clean (1116)
The king's head, still within the hood. (1115)

King Lesias of Tiberias [a town in Judaea]
Did hasten toward the sultan
To avenge his friend Canadok;
1120 With a steadfast spear
He rode in haste upon the sultan,
Intending to have him killed.
The King of Tars rode between them
And he suffered King Lesias's blow,
1125 As I read in my story.
But he struck [King Lesias] so hard on his shield
That he tumbled to the ground
And had unhorsed him.

He vaulted on another horse and did ride
1130 And strike down on every side
Whomever he found before him.
Whomever Lesias hit in that instance,
Whether he was a duke or a valiant prince,
He dealt him a deadly wound.
1135 The King of Tars came with a spear
And did drive it through his side
So that he fell dead on the ground.
Then the Muslims raised up a cry,
"Ah, Muhammad, most masterful,
1140 Help us in this peril."



When king Carmel herd þat, him was wo -
[To fi 3t anon he was ful þro] -
A spere an hond he hent.
He priked his stede & dede him go;
He þou3t þe king of Tars to slo
Er he þennes went.
He smot þe king of Tars þat tide
þurth his hauberk a wounde wide
þat neize he hadde him schent.
þe king out of his sadel fel,
þe blod out of his wounde gan wel,
þat mani men him biment.

For sorwe þe soudan wald wede
When he sei3e his woundes blede;
He rode to him wiþ mayn.
He and þe Cristen ferred
Brou3t þe king of Tars his stede,
& sett him vp ogayn.
& when he was on hors brau3t
Alle þat euer he arau3t
He clef him to þe brayn.
King Carmel þo to him went
& 3af him swiche anoþer dent
þat ner he hadde him sleyn.

& when þe soudan þat ysei3e
Al wode he wex for wreþe neye.
He rode to king Carmele.
He smot him on þe helme an hei3e
þat þurth þe breyn it fl ei3e
þat no leche mi3t him hele.
King Clamadas com rideing þan
Wiþ a glaive to þe soudan,
& þou3t wiþ him to dele.
& smot him obouen þe scheld
þat neize he feld him in þe feld
Among þo houndes fele.

King Carmel was stricken when he heard that -
[He had been eager to fight at once] -
He hefted a spear in his hand.
He spurred his steed and made it run;
1145 He intended to kill the King [of] Tars
Before he disengaged.
That moment, he struck the King of Tars
With a deep wound through his coat of mail
That nearly had him killed.
1150 The King fell out of his saddle;
The blood gushed from his wound,
So that many men bemoaned him.

The sultan would grow mad out of grief
When he saw his wound bleed;
1155 He rode to him with his lieutenants.
He and the Christian company
Brought the King of Tars his horse
And sat him up again.
When he was brought upon his horse,
1160 Whomever that he reached,
He cleaved him to the brain.
Then King Carmel closed with him
And dealt him such another wound
That he had nearly killed him.

1165 When the sultan had seen that,
He grew utterly near mad out of anger.
He rode upon King Carmel;
He stuck him high upon his helm
So that [his falchion] sliced through his brain
1170 Such that no medic could heal him.
Then King Clamadas came riding
Upon the sultan with a glaive,
And intended to deal with him.
He struck him upon his shield
1175 So that he nearly tumbled to the field
To crawl among the hounds.



þe king of Tars in þat stounde
Hadde spite of þat heþen hounde
þat was so stout & beld.
He swore bi him þat þoled wounde,
'þe dogge schal adoun to grounde
þat fi ȝtes þus in feld.'
He rode to him anonriȝt
& smot to him a strok of miȝt;
Atvo he clef his scheld.
& þurth his hert þe swerd gan glide,
þe blod ran out bi ich a side,
& so he him aqueld.

þan was king Memaroc in gret peyn
For his four felawes were sleyn
& in þe feld todreued.
He priked his stede opoþ þe pleyn
& flewe oway wiþ miȝt & mayn
For dred to hide his heued.
þe soudan seyȝe him oway ride,
He priked after him in þat tide,
For noþing he it bileued.
& smot him so aboue þe scheld
þat helme & heued in þe feld
Ful wiȝtlike of it weued.

When þe Sarrazins seyȝen alle
þat Memarok was to grounde yfalle
& namore vp arise,
'Allas, Mahoun' þai gan to calle,
'Whi latestow Cristen hewe ous smale?
Wicke is þi seruise.'
þai fl eyȝe for dred alle yfere,
& dreynt hem in o riuier,
So sore hem gan agrise.

þe bateyle last swiþe long,
Til it were time of euensong,

At that moment, the King of Tars
Held hatred for that pagan hound
Who was so strong and bold.
1180 He swore by He who suffered wounds:
"The mongrel shall fall down on the ground
Who fights thusly in the field."
He rode upon him at once
And dealt to him a mighty stroke;
1185 He cleaved his shield in two.
The sword pierced through his heart;
The blood flowed out on both sides,
And so he killed him.

Then King Memaroc was sorely afraid,
1190 Because his four companions were slain
And driven into the field.
He spurred his horse across the plain
And fled away with ranks and train,
Out of fear to save his head.
1195 The sultan saw him riding away;
He spurred after him at that moment,
As if he wanted for nothing else.
He struck him above the shield so that
The helm and the head flew across the field,
1200 So forcefully was it severed.

When all of the Muslims saw
That Memarok had fallen to the ground
And never to rise again,
"Alas, Muhammad," they began to shout,
1205 "Why do you allow the Christian men to cut us down?
Your worship is in vain."
They all fled together out of fear
And drowned themselves in a river,
So sorely were they afraid.

1210 The battle lasted so long,
That it was until the time of the evening mass



Er þai miȝt win þe prise.

þe Sarrazins flowe bi ich a side;
þe Cristen folk after gan ride,
& schadde hem breyn & blod.
þer was non þat miȝt him hide
þat he nas sleyn in þat tide,
Wiþ fi ȝt oȝeyn hem stode.
& þo þat ȝold hem to þe pes
þe soudan swore, wiþouten les,
Bi him þat dyed on rode,
He þat nold nouȝt forsake his lay
He schuld forles(s)e þat ich day,
þe bal vp in þe hode.

Þritti þousende þer wer take
Of Sarra[ȝ]ins boþe blo & blac,
& don in his prisoun.
& he þat wald his lay forsake
Cristenmen he lete him make
Wiþ gret devocioun;
& þai þat wald be cristned nouȝt
Into a stede þai were(e)n ybrouȝt
A mile wiþouten þe toun,
& Cristen men, wiþouten wene,
Striken of her heuedes al bidene.

þus þe ladi wiþ hire lore
Brouȝte hire frendes out of sore,
þorw Jhesu Cristes grace.
Al þe while þat þei weore þare,
þe joye þat was among hem ȝare,
No mon may telle þe space.
Whon þei weore out of world i-went
Before God Omnipotent,
Hem was diht a place.
Now Jhesu, þat is ful of miht
Graunt us alle, in heuenes liht

Before they could achieve victory.

The Muslims fled on every side;
The Christian people did ride after them
1215 And spilled their brains and blood.
There was no one who could hide himself
So that he was not slain in that instance,
Who stood against them in the fight.
To those that surrendered themselves
1220 The sultan swore, without deceit,
By He who died upon the cross,
He who would not renounce his faith,
He should forfeit that same day
The ball inside his hood [the head].

1225 There were captured thirty-thousand
Muslims both dark and black
And shut up in his prison.
They who would renounce his faith,
He let them become Christian men
1230 With pious devotion;
They who would not be baptized
Were brought to a station
A mile outside of the town,
And Chrisitan men, without delay,
1235 Struck off every one of their heads.¹

Thus the lady, with her wisdom,
Brought her family out of sorrow
Through the grace of Jesus Christ.
No man could judge the depth (1241)
1240 Of the joy that was among them there (1240)
All the while that they lived. (1239)
When they were gone out of this world
[To be] before God omnipotent,
A place was prepared for them.
1245 Now Jesus, who is full of might,
Grant us all, in Heaven's light,



To seo þi swete face. AMEN.

To see Your precious face. AMEN.²

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Critical Notes

Translation

1. Line 1235

Note: National Library of Scotland Advocates MS 19.2.1 ff.7ra-13vb

2. Line 1247

Note: Bodleian Library MS. Eng. poet. a. 1 fol. 307ra