



The Representation of the Oriental Exotic through Multiple Races in *Kyng Alisaunder*

Kyng Alisaunder İsimli Eserde Çeşitli Irkların Üzerinden Yapılan Doğulu Egzotik Tasvir

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Abstract

Orientalism as a term defining the relationship between the East and the West had been in circulation before the seminal work of Edward Said with the same name. As Said theorized the systematic othering done by the West towards the East he touched upon multiple aspects of this approach, one of them being the representation of the exotic. Exploring the medieval romance *Kyng Alisaunder* in terms of exoticism from an orientalist perspective and reflecting upon the representations of the Eastern people is the primary aim of this article. Extrapolating information based on the representations within the romance, it becomes clear to see the West is using exoticism to other the East and the Easterners while trying to create a sense of self. The examples that the romance provides are abundant in presenting the approach of the West towards the East and they provide insight into the early stages of orientalism in the contemporary sense of the concept. This article centres on why and how these exotic representations can be realised as orientalist.

Keywords: Orientalism, exoticism, *Kyng Alisaunder*, romance, medieval literature.

Öz

Doğu ve Batı arasındaki ilişkiyi tanımlayan bir tabir olarak Şarkiyatçılık, Edward Said'in aynı ismi taşıyan önemli eserini yazmasından önce de kullanılmaktaydı. Said Batı'nın Doğu'ya karşı güttüğü sistematik ötekileştirmeyi kuramsallaştırırken bu yaklaşımın farklı yüzlerine dikkat çekti ve bunlardan biri egzotiğin temsiliydi. Bir Orta Çağ romansı olan *Kyng Alisaunder*'i şarkiyatçı bakış açısıyla egzotiklik kavramı doğrultusunda incelemek ve Doğulu insanların temsilleri üzerine yorumlarda bulunmak bu makalenin başlıca amacıdır. Romanstaki temsillerden yola çıkarak söylenecek şey, Batı'nın egzotik kavramını kullanarak Doğu ve Doğuluları ötekileştirerek kendi kimliğini yaratma denemesi yaptığıdır. Romans, Batı'nın Doğu'ya bakış açısını gösteren birçok örnek barındırmaktadır ve bu örnekler güncel anlamıyla şarkiyatçılığın erken safhalarına yönelik bir kavrayış sunmaktadır. Bu makale, belirtilen bu egzotik temsillerin neden ve nasıl şarkiyatçı olarak görülebileceğine odaklanır.

Anahtar sözcükler: Şarkiyatçılık, egzotiklik, *Kyng Alisaunder*, romans, Orta Çağ edebiyatı.

Introduction

The concept of the exotic and exoticism from the perspective of Orientalism includes the differentiation of the East from the West as awe inspiring and extraordinary – both in positive and

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negative connotations of the word exotic – and different in physical and cultural aspects. The aim of this article is to demonstrate the exotic depiction of the East and the peoples in the Middle English romance *Kyng Alisaunder* and how this exoticism is used in the representation of the other. The discussion, then, reveals the dichotomy created between the East and the West through literature. The Orient, or the East, is usually associated with “the exotic,” as it was entirely different in its vital aspects such as its conceptual “vast size,” large geographical “scale,” and cultural “multiplicity” (Said, 1979, p. 61). The manifestation of the exoticness in the medieval context reveals itself as the admixture of the known and the unknown (Strickland, 2008, p. 59). This combination forms the understanding of the East and supports the imagination of the West in the romances. The exotic within medieval romance is considered something that is either not natural or not culturally normal by Western standards. Said (1979), in his *Orientalism*, comments on the concept of exoticism stating that

[it] was ultimately a political vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, the West, “us”) and the strange (the Orient, the East, “them”). This vision in a sense created and then served the two words thus conceived. Orientals lived in their world, “we” lived in ours. The vision and material reality propped each other up, kept each other going. A certain freedom of intercourse was always the Westerner’s privilege; because his was the stronger culture, he could penetrate, he could wrestle with, he could give shape and meaning to the great Asiatic mystery. (p. 44)

The exotic representation of the East produces the East as different in climate, way of life, flora and fauna, and the people in general, thus, as the other and the enemy. According to this view, Saunders (2010) states that “[m]edieval romance does indeed present imaginary otherworlds, and engage with ideal chivalric worlds that are always already past, that are seductive in their otherness and exoticism, and that promise what reality cannot” (p. 2). However, in *Kyng Alisaunder* the exotic is not always the ideal. On the contrary, through the complete alienation of the Eastern culture from the Western culture exotic descriptions of the East provide a sense of defamiliarization, and difference. Accordingly, the exotic in this article is the alluring, not always the enemy but sometimes the envied, the distant unaccustomed lands and people, which are represented in the romance that will be discussed.

Romance, being one of the most important forms of literature in the Middle Ages, represents the East through the gaze of the West. As Strickland (2008) argues in romances

[c]ertain common exotic features, such as extraordinary physical form, sumptuousness, ugliness, or beauty, may be most vividly particularized in a pictorial image. However, other aspects of exoticism, such as vast size, scale, multiplicity, or distance, might be more effectively expressed with language. In practice, throughout the Middle Ages both words and pictures worked together to identify and to define the exotic both within and out with the observer’s cultural world. The exotic, then, was read as well as seen. (p. 61)

Along with the descriptive pictures, images drawn on manuscripts to express the exotic in ugliness, beauty or extraordinary physical form, other features of the exotic such as size, scale or multiplicity are expressed through verbal representation. Thus, the cultural traits of the romance preserving the continental concepts and immersing these concepts into those of the English court, which began to differ from its French counterpart, acted as a stimulus for the English society to define itself as a group, drawing a line between themselves and others. French feudalism with the Norman Conquest brought the traditions of the French court and tastes to England. It took a certain period of time and political conflict with the continental connections of the Normans in England to isolate themselves and develop an identity blending with their newly conquered land. Normans, after the Conquest, to transfer their culture, used romances to reflect the presumed identities of the East and the Easterners, and the remnants of the confrontation between the Crusaders and Saracens.

The exotic, as a concept, refers to different aspects that are attributed to non-native people - that is foreigner or stranger to one's own society -, objects or traditions (Strickland 2008, p.59). The idea of the foreign not only means distant or far away from the self, but also different from and unlike the self. At this point, exoticism becomes the source of information for the West through literary representations. In this respect, Huggan (1994) states, "[e]xoticism relieves its practitioners [...] from the burdensome task of actually learning about 'other' cultures" (p. 26). Hence, exoticism and reflections of the East in the Middle English romances, are "[t]he best candidates for the exotic label," says Todorov, as these "people and cultures [...] are most remote and least known to us" (as cited in Huggan, 1994, p. 26).

The exotic represented through the geographical and physical aspects in the Middle English romances is the main force to activate the self-identity formation process of the West. Physical and traditional aspects of the people of the East need to be studied together as most of the traditional qualities overlap with physical ones. Geographical aspects will be studied for their different and exotic nature when compared with the climactic and topographical conditions of the West, especially the northern countries. These traits are physical qualities, cultural practices uncommon or non-existent in the Western sphere represented in the romance *Kyng Alisaunder*. The Orient with its different skin colour, different geography, and different customs provoked the Western imagination to represent the East as alluring and desirable in some cases. Furthermore, this imagination also produced the East as the alien and the enemy. Regarding these points, Strickland (2008) states

[i]n a medieval context, I define 'the exotic' as alien creatures, groups, cultural practices, or accoutrements perceived by Western Christians as either geographically distant or consciously imported into their own society from the outside. Always constructed, medieval exoticism might be informed partly by physiognomical and cultural characteristics of actual contemporary groups such as Arabs, Mongols, or Black Africans. (p. 59)

The West encountered multiple groups that were from either the East or somewhere that is not the West and used these encounters to support the imagination that produced the literature and the information about the East. Hence, the real encounters ended up being the source of the Western imagination of the East, different and alien.

Giving shape and meaning to the mysterious or the exotic, the East became a strong point for the West to define its own norms and social standards. The main problem with the concept of identifying the East as the "exotic" is that exoticism also connotes a negative image. Said (1979) asserts that the "[f]ifteenth and sixteenth-century European ventures to Asia, America and Africa were not the first encounters between Europeans and non-Europeans but writings of this period do mark a new way in thinking about, indeed producing, these two categories of people as binary opposites" (p. 53). Said claims that the Renaissance was the period that this binary opposition was set between the West and the East. Still, this dichotomy can be traced back to the Middle Ages. As Strickland (2008), in parallel with the discussion of the binary opposition which is based on the discussion of the "exotic nature" of the East, asserts

[r]eview of recent literature concerned with late medieval exoticism and related theoretical problems [shows], the medieval exotic emerges as an aspect of wonder that evoked contemporary responses of a profoundly ambivalent and binary order. To contemporary readers and viewers, the exotic was either by turns or simultaneously desirable/dangerous, beautiful/hideous, godless/pious, and strange/familiar. (p. 69)

Furthermore, defining the East as exotic, in an attempt to create a negative other or reflect themselves through affirmative auto-occidentalism, a term that Sinan Akıllı (2013) defines as "the discourse which essentializes the West positively, and – in dialectical process – the East negatively, through the construction of stereotypes and/or images of the West by Western agents", the West aims to create the norm that the Western culture sustains (p. 29). Said (1979) discusses the constructed concepts of

the East and West by stating “that neither the term Orient nor the concept of the West has any ontological stability; each is made up of human effort, partly affirmation, partly identification of the Other” (p. xii). Discussing the ontological instability, Said indicates that both the East and the West are interdependent. In relation to this, Corinne Saunders (2010) argues that “[r]omance creates possible worlds that are exotic, magical and wondrous, whether in terms of adventure, love or vision” (p. 2). As Saunders indicates, exotic definitions are almost always a part of the romance narrative in general. However, this definitely does not mean that it is not related to the concept of identity creation. As Said (1979) argues,

[r]ather than listing all the figures of speech associated with the Orient – its strangeness, its difference, its exotic sensuousness, and so forth – we can generalize about them as they were handed down through the Renaissance. They are all declarative and self-evident, the tense they employ is the timeless eternal; they convey an impression of repetition and strength; they are always symmetrical to, and yet diametrically inferior to, a European equivalent, which is sometimes specified, sometimes not. (p. 72)

As a part of Orientalism, exoticism acts on binary ideas. The descriptions of the East that the romances have to offer present the reflections of the East in such ways that the West is placed directly opposite to the East. Although there are some correct or at least valid representations, the moments in the romances which describe the Easterners as superior to the West in any sense directly refer to two occasions, either to magnify the victory over the East or to make a more interesting presentation of the East as fabulous and awe-inspiring.

Romance deals with supernatural incidents and heroes, fabulous settings, extraordinary encounters; thus, it is suitable to embody the exotic charm of the Orient, presenting the riches and glamour of the East. The romances include “prowess [...], love [...], marvels” (Barber, 2005, p. 45). The marvels in the romance are shaped by the beliefs and understandings of the medieval people. Hence, their definitions and ideas about the East also helped shape the plots and the representation of the exotic in romance. Enriching the plots of the medieval narratives, “the embrace of the exotic (the oriental) had the effect of superimposing European values over these other cultures, creating a distorted picture that conformed more with the expectations and fears of Europeans than with reality” (Colmeiro, 2002, pp. 128-129).

The authors and the literary works that Said talks about touch on the different aspects of the Orient, not as the enemy but as the exotic. These different representations and their reflections within the literary works seem to provide a wider perspective of the East; however, these various references lead to a concept of the East which is “fabulous” yet strange and sometimes insultingly sometimes inspiringly different. The exotic in romance, in this sense, owes its existence to the encounter of the East and the West as it reflects the Orient in both positive and negative way. However, romance deals with supernatural incidents and heroes, fabulous settings, extraordinary encounters, thus, it is suitable to embody the exotic charm of the Orient, presenting the riches and glamour of the East.

Kyng Alisaunder's Exotic Nature

The representation of the East in *Kyng Alisaunder*, which, in detail, narrates the conquest of King Alexander, shows the East and the Easterners before the rise of Christianity. Alexander the Great, the hero of this romance, was born in 356 BCE and succeeded his father Philip of Macedonia to the throne in 356 BCE and henceforth began his continuous conquest of the East until his death in 323 BCE (Green, 1991, pp. xlv-xlix). The romance of Alexander the Great, *Kyng Alisaunder* (c.1200) draws its contents from various sources such as the Iranian accounts of Alexander's exploits and Antisthenes' account of Alexander's life, and most importantly from Simeon Seth's eleventh-century translation from a Persian poet named Arrian (Webber, 1810, p. xx-xxii). Furthermore, as Rosalind Field (2010) states “*Kyng Alisaunder* is a translation of the Anglo-Norman *Roman de toute chevalerie* of Thomas of Kent” (p. 77). This particular aspect of the romance explains the representation of the expansionist idea of Alexander the Great. While exploring the conquests of Alexander the Great, the poem goes into detail and delivers an

incredulous account of Alexander's exploits. *Kyng Alisaunder* describes different characteristics, such as distorted physical traits, or cultural traits which are alien to Western traditions, even predating the descriptions of Sir John Mandeville, and reflects an understanding of the East and Eastern races, that is, the distorted reflections of the Easterners as the representation of the opposite of the West. As Sir John Mandeville (1900), in his *The Travels*, gives detailed descriptions of the Easterners, the romance of *Kyng Alisaunder* acts as a catalogue of the Eastern peoples with exotic characteristics.

In the romance of *Kyng Alisaunder* important forms of exoticism are related to the topics of race and location. Since geography and race are usually thought together, the exotic representation of race and geography is combined. The question of race refers to the particular identifications of the people of the East, attributing different qualities – such as different bodily representations, eating habits and clothing culture, and contrasting them with their Western counterparts as in the example of *Kyng Alisaunder*. These traits were used in the romances to present a view of the East to reflect the way the West constructs the East as different and inferior. Said (1979) claims “European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient, as a sort of surrogate and even underground” (p. 3). The East was the opposition of the West, which created a disparity in various forms such as geography, physiology, and culture. The hostile environment of the East, the deserts or the jungle-like forests with wild animals as represented in *Kyng Alisaunder* (1810, ll. 4916-5100) and as the Westerners experienced during the Crusades illustrates the way the West exoticized the East. By constructing an opposition, the West tries to justify its claims to subdue the East by attributing abnormalities to it, which are not based on facts but mythical reflections, and tries to dominate and civilise the Easterners. Stereotyping the East and the Easterners, the West limits the scope of its attention to constructed aspects of the East. Furthermore, as the West stereotypes the East it creates a reason for its own existence. As Dagenais and Greer (2000) claim, “stereotyping permits the maintenance of contradictory beliefs regarding the colonized, which are necessary to justify conquest and continuing surveillance of the conquered” (p. 441). This domination not only manifests itself as material gains but also political power and cultural supremacy to create a negative image of the East, that is the stereotyping, exoticizing and limiting it through which the West can see and define itself.

To produce the Western “norms” this romance provides grotesque pictures such as one eyed or headless men and alien landscapes such as the end of the world, which are depicted in detail. The discussion of numerous different tribes of “people” leads to a stereotypical point of view. As Akbari (2009) suggests “the bodies of the inhabitants of such eastern regions were marked by the sun not only in the colour of their skin and anatomy, but also in their physiology; these corporeal differences were consequently manifested in their behaviours, emotions and intellectual capacity” (p. 3). In the romance of *Kyng Alisaunder* a series of lands are described; Alexander the Great marches through Anatolia, Babylon, Arabia, through deserts and jungles to India. His conquest takes him to the end of the world to the East, to the Garden of Eden and further to Caspian mountains, to fight the monstrous race of Gog Magog. In these lands a number of people are depicted with different physiological and cultural traits. *Kyng Alisaunder* tells the tale of the conquest of Alexander the Great and starting from his birth, in the romance, he is claimed to be fathered by an Egyptian magician, and during his reign his bravery and military conquests are given in detail. Barron (1987) states that

[t]he nature and balance of elements in *Kyng Alisaunder* remain [the same with Roman de Tute de Chevalrie] the bulk of 8000 lines dealing with the Persian Wars and the India campaign, combining martial action and exotic wonders, comparatively limited sections at beginning and end with Alexander's mysterious birth and with his seduction by Candace and his death. The poet views them all with the same candid eye, describes everything with the same unblinking realism. (p. 125)

After Alexander defeated Darius and conquered Persia, he proceeded into the Indian subcontinent, to conquer the wild lands and exotic people living in these lands. The first country described is “Pandea” which “is a land fast there beside. Alle hy ben maydens that thereinne woneth;/ Mannes compaignye certes

hy shoneth” (1810, ll. 4916-19). In this land, the representation of the people is reminiscent of the Amazons, the famed female fighters of ancient times, who challenge the male dominant societies. As these lines refer to representation of women, with no male figures in their society, this particular example displays a different practice of gender roles as the West was highly patriarchal in the Middle Ages. Hence, this Amazonian representation of the people of “Pandea” is exotic for the West because the norms of Western society did not promote females in any way. Dominant patriarchal discourse of the Middle Ages is the reason why female warriors are exotic and different. The armies and fighting forces of the Middle Ages were primarily male, hence the concept of the female warrior contrasts with the existing social conditions. This privileged group of women enjoyed the rights and power that European women did not have, since the two social constructions of identity were attached to being a woman. Being as pure and good as the Virgin Mary would require a woman to be meek, obedient, and subservient to the male hegemony. On the other hand, being as wicked and cursed as Eve who brought disrespect and punishment to womankind was an example of evil for the women. Jennifer Ward (2007) discusses the condition of women in the Middle Ages by stating that

[i]t was taken for granted that women were weaker than men and subordinate to them. [...] Women were regarded as weak, irrational and subject to temptation just as Eve in the Garden of Eden succumbed to the serpent’s wiles, picked the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil and gave it to her husband to eat. [...] Because Jesus Christ was born of the Virgin Mary to redeem mankind, Mary could be taken to show a different side of womanhood. For medieval woman [...] the Virgin Mary was an ideal to aspire to. (pp. 2-3)

As it is discussed above, these two figures of religion, as they are figures from the Bible, with the help of the Catholic Church, became the epitome of womanhood in Europe during the Middle Ages. However, in the romance, a third way of representation is pictured. The masculine females of Pandea act as a curiosity for the Western audience, as this female-dominated culture is strange and alluring to them because of its difference. In the romance, the next encounter, as Alexander the Great ventures deeper into the unknown land, with a different group of people is “[a] folk [...] cleped Farangos,/ [...] flesshe hy eten raw and hoot” (1810, ll. 4928 -32). The “folk” called Farangos are depicted as raw meat eaters. By not going into detail about the Farangos people, the poet directs the attention of its audience to a disparate aspect. The eating habits of the Farangos are described, which are primitive and closer to a wild animal’s eating habits, which creates a cultural dichotomy between the East and the West as it can be extrapolated from the fact that the East is represented as uncivilised and feral, hence, the West is civilised and developed. The way the traditions and characteristics of the Farangos people are depicted constructs a vision of the other for the West. In the Western tradition “[v]enison was usually roasted, or chopped up and surrounded with pastry to form venison pasties” (Adamson, 1995, 36). The forms and the variety of cooking mean that the culture who uses different ways of cooking or preparing its food is more developed and civilised than the ones who have no way of cooking or preparing their food. The next group of people, which presents a similiar condition as the Farangos people is “[a]nother folk [...] y-hoyen Maritiny/ [...] libben all by fysshynge /[...] eteth it thanne withouthen fyre, withouten panne” (1810, ll. 4934-39). The Maritiny people’s diet is comprised of only raw fish, uncooked, with no other processes to prepare it for consumption. This eating habit is not usual for the Europeans as the “[f]ish appeared on the medieval table prepared in a variety of ways: it was roasted, fried, boiled, baked, encased in a pie shell, or in jelly, to name just some of the methods of preparation” (Adamson, 1995, 39). The use of fire is one of the major characteristics of the civilised societies, Pyne (2016) states the possession of the fire was unique - these humans knew at their origins; since more than anything else, fire defined them and segregated them from the rest of creation; myths that depict the origin of fire account equally for the origins of humans because the latter depended on the former (p. 2). Cooking can be assumed as a distinctive characteristic distinguishing the civil and cultured from the barbaric and uncultured. Hence, presenting this group of Eastern people without fire suggests that they are to be received as inferior by the audience of these

romances. These aspects provide a sharp contrast to European traditions, producing a distinction between the East and the West.

The third group of Eastern people that Alexander the Great encounters during his conquest shows that there are different portrayals of the Easterners in the romance. The representation of “[a]nother folk there is next,/as hogges crepth, after crabben and airen hy skippen and lepeth;/ of thornes and bussches ben her garnament” (1810, ll. 4942-44). These lines describe a group of people who go after the crabs and fruits like pigs, creeping and jumping around. These people wear thorns and bushes for garments, which provides another context for the dichotomy between the East and the West. This nameless tribe of people, whose outfit drastically differs from Western costumes, provides an insight into the vision of the West of the East; how it perceives the East and Easterners and promotes a view of the East as uncivilised. This representation is aimed at the clothing habits of (an-redundant) anonymous people, providing another aspect to Other the East by not even giving them a name and amassing them into a singularity. It can be observed that, their clothing - or lack of clothing - compared to the fabrics and materials used in Western attires in the Middle Ages, which “ranged from the opulence of gold racamaz of Lucca and cloth of gold baldekyn d’outremer, through to russet (a grey or brown woollen cloth) and the more utilitarian worsted (smooth wool cloth distinguished commercially from the more expensive woollens)” creates a contrast with the Western idea of fashion and clothing (Owen-Crocker, Gale, Chambers & Sylvester, 2014, p. 1). Clothes and clothing symbolise refinement, artistry and social classes during the Middle Ages as can be observed in the Sumptuary Laws as well. Monica Wright (2008) states that the “[r]emoval of his [Yvain in this case] garments, also signifies the removal of his social status – to an extent that it is nearly impossible for two maidens who know Yvain from the court to recognize the unclothed, compromised man the encounter one day in the forest. The text makes clear, however, that they would have recognized him immediately if he had been dressed appropriately” (p. 3). By giving the example of Yvain, Wright emphasises the symbolic importance of clothing during the Middle Ages. Thus, the people of the East who are represented as uncivilised, inferior unlike the civilised Europeans who had a sense of fashion and clothing. As Owen-Crocker et al. (2014) states, “[i]n the Middle Ages, very much more than today, dress was an identifier of occupation, status, wealth, gender and ethnicity” (p. 1). Since clothing is a signifier of class and status, having next to no clothes by the Western standards becomes a topic of curiosity, also the unrefined, coarse and uncivilised clothing becomes the strange and the different, which might be classified as exotic. The tradition of representing the people in their cultural standards in *Kyng Alisaunder* continues with the description of cannibalistic tendencies with different motives to justify them;

Another folk woneth there biside;
Orphani hy hatteth wide.
When her elderynges beth elde,
And ne mowen hem seluen welde,
Hy hem sleeth, and bidelue,
And the guttes hy eteth hem selue;
The guttes hy eten, for loue fyne,
And for penance and for discipline. (1810, ll. 4946-53)

These lines describe the tradition of the Orphani people, who eat the guts of their dead elderly out of love, penance and discipline. Cannibalism was not something unknown for the Europeans, as they attended the Eucharistic rituals (Price, 2014, p. 27) or had committed acts of “cannibalism” which “attended famine in England in 1005 and 1069” (Heng, 1998, p.108). However, it should be noted that the practice of the Eucharistic rituals, assume the consumption of human flesh, as sacrament, this consumption of the flesh is on the metaphorical level only. Anthropophagy is a topic that is not open to discussion in the Western culture (McDonald, 2014, p. 124). However, consuming the elders as a sign of respect in the romance is an exotic representation, both different enough to be interesting and grotesque enough to create disgust. Although this cannibalistic ritual has a noble purpose, it is simply not sufficient to make it tolerated or praised. The description of this practice presents a picture of the East as uncivilised

and untamed. It can be claimed that this representation, which is Orientalist, creates a self-sustaining appreciation of Western norms. Furthermore, as Ania Loomba (1998) states that

[i]t is important to remember that images of Africans, Turks, Muslims, barbarians, anthropophagi, ‘men of Inde’ and other outsiders had circulated within Europe for a long time before colonialism. These images often appear to coincide with the constructions of the ‘other’ in colonialist discourse. For example, the twelfth- and thirteenth- century image of Muslims as barbaric, degenerate, tyrannical and promiscuous seems identical with the Orientalist images Said identifies in *Orientalism*. (p. 54)

Hence, the discourse of Orientalism is not exactly defined or named in the Middle Ages, yet the practices that define Orientalism were present and these traditions were carried on to the later periods of colonialism. Since the awareness of the differences between groups of people or “races,” is a part of Orientalism, the discussion of the representation of racial features and differences in the romance refers to the existence of Orientalism in the Middle Ages. Instead of representing different cultures as in the romance of *Kyng Alisaunder*, this romance presents an unconventional culinary practice, human meat cooking. The eating habits of some of the different races of the oriental people depicted in *Kyng Alisaunder* create contrasts with the existing Western traditions. Dehumanisation of the Easterner not only adds to the superior image of the Westerner in this binary opposition, but also stereotypes the enemy and removes the individuality of the Easterners.

The East is a rich source for the Western imagination, which results in such reflections. Since there are multiple representations of the exotic, alongside food and costume, grouping these aspects under the same sections regardless of any particular romance will help to clarify and expand the argument of the portrayal of Orientalist exoticism. As different from the West, the Eastern people do not look for a cure in a situation of sickness. To practice medicine also implies the development of a particular culture. In the romance *Kyng Alisaunder*, the absence of medical care and the search for a cure and the inevitable results of these absences are given as characteristics of the Orient:

Another folk there is acost,
 Stille men, withouten bost ;
 Whan hy seen seek her vryne,
 Hy nylleth seche no medecyne ;
 Ac from her frendes hy stelen
 And gon to wode and maken hem helen,
 And crepen thereinne, and steruen so,
 Ne ben hy founden never mo. (1810, ll. 4954-4959)

This nameless group of people’s tradition is that they do not seek a cure when they are in need of one. They isolate themselves, crawl into a hole as if to quarantine themselves and die there. As a wild animal, which hides when injured or sick to protect itself from predators, these people unlike civilised communities who care about their sick and vulnerable, give in to their basic instincts. The healing and practices of medicine, and also caring about other members of the community create strong bonds between the members of the community, which help to develop a healthy, organised and civilised community. Peregrin Horden (2014) states that “[d]emographers, sociologists, and social historians are now more or less unanimous in their opinion that kinds of small household, precarious network and mixed economy of welfare that we have been reviewing are evident in the Middle Ages” (p. 53). Taking care of the others in the society is an act of goodness. By not practicing medicine or showing compassion to the members of their family or tribe, these people are represented as different and exotic examples, and they are differentiated from the people of the West.

The positive aspect of the exotic is also alluring for the West as it reflects the desires of the West for the rare and unique. The goods that were produced only in the East fascinated the West and through trade

they obtained the exotic products of the East. These luxurious items which are imported from the East show that the fabulous fantasies and alluring side of the East are based on some degree of observation. To clarify the importance and worth of these goods Krebs (2014) states “[t]he most prized spice, pepper, was sold by each individual peppercorn and was worth more, by weight, than gold. During the 11th and 12th centuries local city taxes and rents could be paid in spices, particularly pepper, when a small bag of this spice was worth more than a person’s life” (p. 40). These precious commodities, which were presented to the West by the East, triggered the imagination of the West. The depictions of a group of people that is not physically distorted or do not possess a behavioural abnormality from the point of view of the West reflect a different, positive perspective of the exotic. The positive representations focus on the fabled wealth of the East and the Easterners. Fabled riches of the East represented in contrast to the other exotic representations reflected the “assumed” derogatory aspects of the East in the romance of *Kyng Alisaunder*. The people of this Eastern land who have and use gold, silver and luxurious clothing, compared to the ones who are only wearing thorns and bushes as garments are dressed like royalty. Hence, the richness and wealth as well as the “proper” attire and appealing physical features are represented in the romance as follows;

On the sonth side, there Ynde maketh ende,
Woneth a folk wise and hende:
Hy clothen hem with grys and ermyne
With golde and siluer and skarlet pers fyne;
Faire vesage, and of face bolde;
Here hy habben yelewe so golde.
Cites hy habben and castels plente.
And eten and drynken of grete deyt;
None men in the londe of Ynde
Ne fareth so wel als ich fynde. (1810, ll. 4984-4992)

This group of people are wise and brave, they are represented as a civilised society, on par with Western standards living on the borders of India. Furthermore, they wear grey fur and ermine fur, which are two indicators of wealth and nobility in medieval Europe. Paul B. Newman (2007), while describing the wedding dress of Princess Philippa, daughter of Henry IV, states “the dress and its sleeves are edged with dark ermine fur” (p. 264). Hence, these people can be compared to the royalty of Europe. Also, in this section of the poem, the climate of south India is not even in question, as the furs were mainly worn in northern Europe to keep the wearer warm, in a humid and hot environment, there would not be a need for such a dress. This particular representation emphasises the richness of this mentioned people despite climactic differences. Furthermore, the scarlet, as a material, is “the most expensive woollen cloth, often dyed with kermes (the most expensive dye, made from crushed insects that lived on oak trees; produced the colour crimson the most expensive dye)” (Scott, 2009, pp. 203-204). Their fair skin colour, similar to the Europeans, and blonde hair represent a connection to the concept of beauty in accordance with the European standards, the standards were described regarding the age as follows; “at this [the Middle Ages] time esteemed a beauty, and saffron was used by the ladies to dye it of a colour ‘odious’ by modern ladies. Elizabeth [I] also made yellow hair fashionable, as hers was of the same tint” (Fairholt, 1885, pp. 128-129). In addition to their attire and physical features, these people have gold, their richness becomes the central theme of the passage. The East, in this respect, is defined with its gold, hence it has been commodified by the West. In addition to the gold and other riches they have, their castles and cities, which are more known concepts of the people of the Middle Ages as the economic system of the age - feudalism – was based on land. They are, by far, the best faring people in India.

The language that is used to represent the rich people when compared to the other representations is neutral, even positive. That is, various representations of the different people with different words, which are mostly negative such as “raw meat eaters, pitch blak,” or people who eat “the flesh of their dead elders,” and these rich people with positive connotations such as “faire visaged, face bolde,” present a

wide range of people, increasing the diversity of the encounters with the Easterners (1810). These descriptions not only depict the romance motifs but also reflect the idea of the East according to the Western mind. Through this reflection of characteristics which are both positive and negative in the use of the exotic, the West limited the depiction of the East with certain representations attributing deformed physical qualities or focusing on the richness of the East. In parallel with the West's reflection of the Eastern exotic, Strickland (2008) states "we can observe that medieval engagement with the exotic as a constructed idea facilitated self-identity, controlled cultural fears, aided the process of colonization, normalized the strange (to conceptualize the unfamiliar), and problematized the familiar (to critique or question received Christian practices)" (p. 69) According to this statement, controlling what is exotic and fashioning the identity in accordance with the controlled exoticism is exercising power over the controlled exotic. Furthermore, narrating these aspects of the exotic in these romances makes it a statement of the West which means to have authority and control over the East since the articulation of a subject and producing the discourse provide control over the other. The descriptions of different races or groups of people from the East in *Kyng Alisaunder* can be argued to be undertaken in two ways. First, these descriptions function as a narrative pattern, which is a repetitive motif throughout a single episode of the romance that goes on for more than a hundred lines, to present the diverse and exotic nature of the people of the East. The second way is to produce the discourse about the East, since "[d]iscourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it" (Foucault, 1998, p. 101). Hence, the production of discourse through these romances functions both as the reproduction and exercise of power.

Different physical aspects and semi-human bodily representations provide a deeper perspective on the differences between the East and the West than the habitual or behavioural ones. The people are depicted with semi-human physical features, and this is also a way to further establish the difference between the West and the East. Such a description is in *Kyng Alisaunder*:

Another folk there is biside;
 Houndynges men clepeth hem wide.
 From the brest to the grounde
 Men hy ben, abouen houndes.
 Berkyng of houndes hy habbe.
 Her honden, withouten gabbe,
 Ben y-shuldred as a fysshe.
 And clawed after hound, i-wisse. (1810, ll. 4962-4969)

The striking features of these people, primarily having the head of a hound, and barking instead of talking provide an extraordinary representation of exoticism. Although they have the body of a human being, they possess the aspects of other animals alongside human features such as the shoulders of a fish and claws of a hound. However, the most prominent non-human feature that these people present is their voice. Their medium of expression is barking, yet they are still called as a tribe of people. The Western perspective provides a distorted image to support its unmentioned normality. The representation of the abnormal, especially the depiction of the part animal, part human Easterners, should also be studied with the Western concept of the Order of Beings. In his seminal book *The Great Chain of Being* Arthur O. Lovejoy discusses how the idea of The Chain of Being is formed. He starts from the Platonic philosophy and continues with Neoplatonism and Scholastic form of thought. Referring to St. Thomas Aquinas, Lovejoy formulates his argument that the universe is a great chain and only through the representation of absence of it can be perfect. Defining the position of mankind in the middle of the chain, this idea articulates that God is at the top of the chain followed by angelic beings who are representatives of the soul or the essence. Mankind, being in the middle, possesses both soul and body. Animals, which are followed by plants, represent only the body and the basic instincts (Lovejoy, 2001, pp.78-84). Creating the combination of man and animal, the romance ramifies the concept of being. Exotic depiction of the half animal, half man innately places this creature lower on the scale of the Chain. The general view in *The*

Great Chain of Being is that the universal truth and goodness need their oppositions to perceive the perfectness of the supreme essence of being.

The romance *Kyng Alisaunder* not only describes the differences in human anatomy, but also gives the depictions of the processes of aging. The concept of aging itself is a part of human anatomy and has different indications. One of the most common and well-known indicators is the greying of hair. Unless there is a health problem or different genetic heritage, the normal process of greying follows the age. However, in *Kyng Alisaunder*, the hair of the people and the changing colour of the hair present an almost reverse representation of the aging process as the colour of their hair turns into brown, not grey as they age. Although it is not natural for the East as well, since aging is a universal process, this reverse aging, according to the romance, is an exotic point for the European audience, as this change of colour can portray an unfamiliar aspect of the represented East, which is unnatural and exotic to the West:

[a]nother folk woneth hem bisyde,
A riche folk of mychel pride:
Of nynetene wyntres and an half,
Hy ben hore al so a wolf;
And when hy ben of thritty yaar,
Hy ben broun of hare, as hy weren aar;
And so ay, by the ten yere,
The coloure chaunges of her here.
None men so longe libbe
As don hy and her sibbe. (1810, ll. 5028-38)

These rich and proud people experience a metamorphosis as they get old. Having grey hair at the age of nineteen and a half, these people enter another phase in their life. For the remaining days of their life, they have a change of colour in their hair every ten years. Furthermore, it should be noted that, the changing colour of the hair is usually associated with old age and wisdom, especially when it is turning grey or white. However, this representation of the early age with grey hair completely juxtaposes the Western norms of aging and wisdom with a different image. To construct an identity, the self, in this case the West, as well as the opposite -the East- must be identified clearly and the borders between the self and the other should be clearly defined. Loomba (1998) states that “[i]n medieval and early modern Europe, Christian identities were constructed in opposition to Islam, Judaism, or heathenism (which loosely incorporated all other religions, nature worship, paganism and animism)” (p. 106). Hence, the text represents grey haired teenagers and brown-haired adults. Likewise, the life span of the mentioned people is longer than everyone, as stated in the romance, adding to the exotic identity of the other. The extraordinary physical representation of Eastern people is not only limited to unusual anthropomorphic figures like hound headed people in the lines 4964-4965 of *Kyng Alisaunder*. Also, the depiction of people as disfigured or lacking certain organs or limbs builds up the image of the East as the monstrous, less than human, and extraordinary, which contributes to their construction as the other. Hence, another tribe of people in *Kyng Alisaunder* shows that physical descriptions also enhance a sense of wholeness and completeness of the West. It is stated that

Another folk there is ferliche,
Also blak so any pycche;
An eighe hy habbeth and no mo,
And a foot on to goo.
With his foot whan hyt ryneth
He wrieth his body, and wanne it shineth;
For his foot so mychel is,
It may his body wryen, i-wiss. (1810, ll. 4972-4976)

These people lack one foot and as the one-foot people they differ from the Western people. Contrary to the natural physical representation, these people display particular characteristics which lead to an idea of incompleteness when compared to the man of the West, who have two feet. Despite the fact that they have one foot, its size is so great that it can protect their body when it rains, or they can cover their body with it when the sun shines. These descriptions lead to the idea that the people of the East have different bodies and bodily features, they have distinctive body functions or physical characteristics when compared to the European people. Skin colour, also, is used as a bodily feature to discriminate people. However, the physical difference and the skin colour, push the negative aspects of these people even further. This example might be seen as an extreme one, yet it should be noted that “[i]n the early Middle Ages, the dominant literate culture – male, European, and Christian – often represented itself through its comparison to exotic, fantastic beings, monsters, and monstrous humans” (Mittman and, Kim, 2009, p. 332). As Mittman and Kim support the kind of comparison used in the romance *Kyng Alisaunder*, as the romance states and gives details about the fantastic and exotic, and leaves the Western side out of the picture to arouse curiosity in the Western audience about the exotic East and thus it emphasises the exotic differences of the East. The romance of *Kyng Alisaunder* provides multiple aspects while representing the Eastern people. Neutral representations, with nothing extraordinary either in the positive or negative sense, address both physical and behavioural aspects of different people or provide a wider perspective for the exotic. Hence, these varying representations do not necessarily create a cohesion between physical and behavioural depictions. However, even if these physical and behavioural representations do not correlate, they still provide clues about the cultural practices of the East as seen by the West:

Another folk there is bisyde
 That habbeth furchures swithe wide;
 Eighttenc fete hy ben longe,
 Swithe lighth, and swithe stronge.
 In the londe, by the forest,
 There hem liketh wonyiig best. (1810, ll. 4993-4998)

The people described here have long legs, they are fast and strong, furthermore, their size is extraordinary—eighteen feet, or roughly 5.5 meters—which makes them physically outside the norms that the reader is accustomed to. These physical aspects of these people, which basically depict them as giants, do not have any implications which are not associated with the fact that they live near the forest or the habits described in the following lines:

Barefoot hy gon withouten shoou,
 Michel wightnesse hy mowen don.
 Every wilde dere astore,
 Hy mowen by cours ernen tofore.
 Wymmen there ben mychel and belde;
 Whenne hy habbeth ben of fiftene wyntre elde,
 Children hy beren verrayment;
 That ben of body fair and gent:
 Ac no womman of that contrey
 Ne lyueth no lenger, par mafey,
 Then she be of twenty wyntres age,
 For than she gooth to dethes cage. (1810, ll. 4999-5011)

These people are barefooted, which again implies that they are a backward society in the eyes of the West when compared to the Western codes of dress which requires and symbolises various levels according to attire as mentioned above. In addition to their physical strength, the description of the women of these people, who reproduce at the age of fifteen, giving birth to many children, illustrates the reproductive

capabilities of these people. This depiction shows that they have only been described on the basis of their breeding capacities, and it is one of the few representations of the women in the romance. The way these women are represented is important. First the Amazons, and, at the other end of the scale, these women whose lifespan is just twenty years, are presented. This shows the large variety of beings that can be found in the exotic East. Yet, the striking point about these people is how the women of the tribe die at the age of twenty. Considering the condition of women and the general life expectancy of the Middle Ages twenty years was not that drastic, still it is far less than the European ones. Shahar (2004) states that “[a]n analysis of the ducal families in England between 1330 and 1475 showed that at 20 the life expectation of men was 31.5 more years and for women 31.1 more years” (p. 34). Thus, the description, which includes both physical and cultural aspects of these people, delivers an ambiguous image as it discusses the bodily aspects and the conditions of women.

Regarding the same duality between cultural and physical attributes which are reflected in *Kyng Alisaunder*, the poet furthers the exotic descriptions with another ambiguous presentation of a group of people. Edward Said (1979), in order to clarify how the Europeans used non-Europeans to define their own superiority, states that Orientalism is never far from what Denys Hay has called the idea of Europe, a collective notion identifying “us” Europeans as against all “those” non-Europeans, and indeed it can be argued that the major component in European culture is precisely what made that culture hegemonic both in and outside Europe: the idea of European identity as a superior one in comparison with all the non-European identity as a superior one in comparison with all the non-European people and cultures. (p.7) Hence, to identify “us” the West first identifies an ambiguous East, as in the following extract:

There biside is a folk ful wys,
And proude men of mychel prys.
Hy connen hem shilde from al sorough;
For hy arisen erly amorwe,
And gon to the sees stronde;
(On on foot al day hy stonde,)
By the wawen, and by the sterren,
Hy juggen thanne alle werren;
And hy connen by swiche boke,
From euery contek her londe loke.
Thise men han selkouthe wyues. (1810, ll. 5011-5021)

These people, again as the previous group, are defined by their pride and worth which can shield them from all sorrow. Furthermore, the romance represents these people to show their customs such as reading the stars or watching the waves to read their fortunes. All of these descriptions, which are not extraordinary so far, are followed by a biblical trait, which is the mention of talking or hairy babies;

And childem bot ones in al her lyues.
Alsone as that childe y-borne is
It hath wytt or har I wys,
And may speken to his dame:
Now is this a selkouthe game. (1810, ll. 5022-5026)

Religion, in particular Christianity, is one of the primary sources behind the romance genre. The effect of the Church as an institution and Christianity as a religion over the social and cultural life of the West can also be observed in this romance as in the form of the miraculous speech of baby Christ while He was in his cradle.

In the particular part of the romance where Alexander the Great and his conquering army meet the exotic tribes of people exposition of the aspects of these people through a Eurocentric perspective is used to formulate a general idea about the so-called unknown lands. Going through an inventory of tribes, the

romance creates contrast between the dominant cultural standards of its day and the described groups of people. From dressing codes to physical attributes, each detail is meticulously given and described, leaving almost no room for secondary opinions. In the process of differentiating itself from the East, this approach of the West helped creating an identity for itself. This sharp binary opposition becomes the root for the colonial activities of the West towards other civilisations in the later periods of history.

Conclusion

The exotic depictions in *Kyng Alisaunder* show that the aspects of extraordinary bodily representations and different cultural practices act as a negative representation of the East and provide support for the West to perform affirmative Occidentalism. The West uses this to produce its own image. Thus, the exotic plays a crucial role in the formation of Western identity. As Barron (1987) argues “[t]he scanty records of civilization suggest that Man has told himself stories from the beginning of time, partly for the simple pleasure of it, partly in order to understand himself and the world about him” (p. 6). Similarly, the description of the East and Easterners through an orientalist perspective in romances creates an understanding of the Western world and its place compared to the East. It further leads to “knowledge that is part of an overall campaign of self-affirmation, belligerency and outright war” (Said, 1979, p. xiv). Said’s conviction about the self-acclaimed central position of the West provides the necessary excuse for forced domination of the other. In conclusion, *Kyng Alisaunder* with its wide range of representations provides a good sample for the discussion of the idea of exoticism in the physical representations of the Easterners and the idea of exoticism in the representation of the geographical aspects creates the binary opposition of the Western norms. Physiologically, the deformed or different representations of the Eastern bodies, focusing on the particularities as referred to within the romance, become a cornerstone for Western normality. The dichotomy between these representations of the deformed and malfunctioning bodies of the East, and the Western representation of the knights, and westerners in general, provides the necessary reason and drive to defend the identity of the West. Furthermore, the presentation of the unnatural, mythical and exotic landscapes and geography of the East with varying climates, structures and riches stimulates the West to discover and plunder the East. The romance shows scenes and people that are alien to the West while justifying Alexander the Great’s conquest of these unknown, uncivilised – by Western standards – , and exotic lands and people. The drive of the self-claimed representation of the superiority over the East, is supported by the romance as the West defines and dominates the East.

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